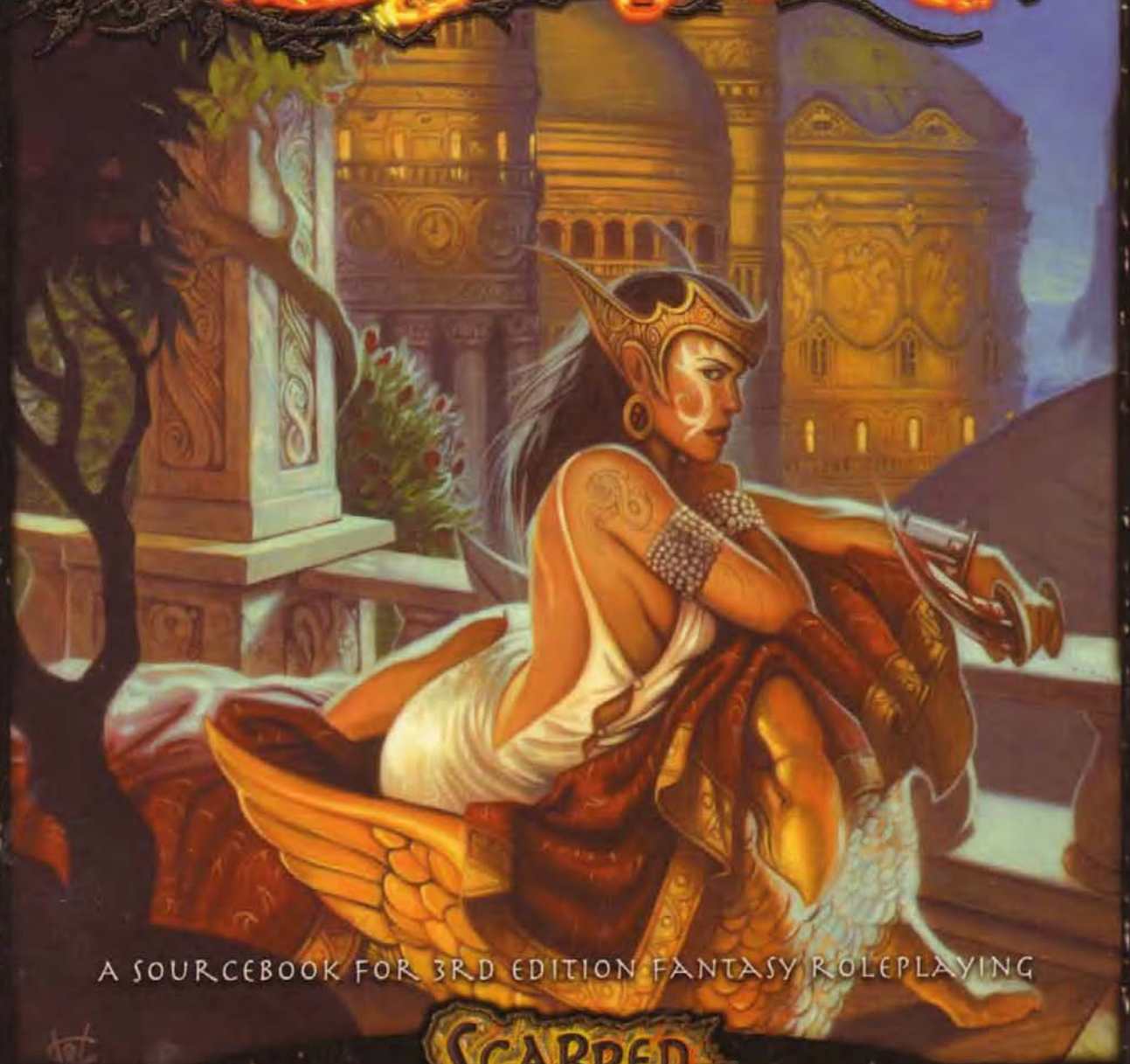


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Shelzar: City of Sins



A SOURCEBOOK FOR 3RD EDITION FANTASY ROLEPLAYING

SCARRED
LANDS

Shelzar

City of Sins

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Introduction

When I first started working in the roleplaying industry — some time between the old and new stone ages — we were very aware of the fact that our audience was young and impressionable. All the bad press that roleplaying games received (remember that?) made many of us quite nervous and careful about what we wrote. Time passed, and it became apparent to me that gamers were growing older, and that games were maturing along with them. Our own parent company, those fun-loving folks at White Wolf, had a lot to do with helping the gaming industry to grow up.

I like to think that the Scarred Lands is an attempt to bring some of White Wolf's sensibilities to the world of d20 gaming, infusing the darkness of their other settings with the mythic heroism of traditional fantasy. We haven't shied away from more mature-oriented material, and I believe that, in doing so, we have shown taste and decorum. At the same time, this material is part of the whole, and doesn't overwhelm all the other exciting elements of the Scarred Lands setting.

Shelzar: City of Sins may be a good case in point. While it's far from explicit (and, frankly, you can find far more racy stuff on any late-night cable channel), **Shelzar** nevertheless includes a lot of elements that would have been anathema to a fantasy setting just a few short years ago. Sex, drugs, violence, and perversity may not be appropriate to family viewing hours, but they can certainly add spice to mature fantasy roleplaying.

Both James and Dave have labored hard, and in close cooperation, to make a city that embodies the chaotic nature of its citizens, incorporates the many conflicts and challenges of the Scarred Land setting, and gives both players and game masters a wealth of roleplaying options. For jaded adventurers, especially those in the grim and often morally-ambiguous world of the Scarred Lands, **Shelzar** is a great place to adventure. With foes like Mazat, House Asuras, and Talina Som to contend with, the player characters should take care that they don't lose track of their weapons when relaxing at Belsameth's Bliss....

Anthony Pryor, Developer
Sword and Sorcery Studio



Chapter One: The City of Sin

*Great spires of
jade and ivory, of
stone cut and carried
from the halls of
Burok Torn: a
place where merchant's
rule and peoples of all
lands live and work
together.*

— From the anonymous work
The Sundered Realm, c. 3402 O.C.

a festering pit, a rat's-maze of alleys and dead ends, a place where death can come at any time and no man who lives long there does so but with his eyes open while he takes his rest.

—From the Darakeene bard Dafyd abFenwyr's seminal post-war travelogue *Travels & Travails: A Grand Tour of the Scarred Lands of Ghelspad*

Shelzar is a place of variety and extremes. The wealthy live and work in buildings of gilt-roofed marble, eating the finest food from across the world and reveling in all manner of pleasurable distraction. The poor endure lives of squalor rare anywhere else on Ghelspad, conditions so filthy and fetid that few would wish such a life on an animal.

It is said that any pleasure and indulgence is available in Shelzar, for a price; those who come here often discover that while this is true, the price is often far too high.

Shelzar at a Glance

The city of Shelzar is perched on a fertile peninsula jutting out into the Blossoming Sea, one of the few locations along the southern coast of Ghelspad that isn't too rocky to land a ship. The shoreline lies at sea level, rising slightly towards the middle of the promontory. The Fortress, home to Shelzar's relatively small armed forces, sits at the highest point in the city.

Shelzar is the best surviving example of the Elzan style of architecture. Palaces of dwarven-quarried stone and fine colored marble, gilt domes and elegant spires make Shelzar one of the most beautiful cities of Ghelspad. Most Shelzari houses are built in the form of a simple, square building centered around an open courtyard and bounded on all sides by streets or alleys.



Even the poorest areas of Shelzar have paved streets, as an ancient law requires all building owners to construct and maintain any streets to which their buildings adjoin. Since Shelzar's early days, street paving has been the province of the Brunwyn Craft Guild, a collective of dwarven stonemasons specializing in masonry of all sorts.

The city is broadly divided into ten districts or "quarters" — a term held over from the early days of the city when it indeed had only four districts.

Old Town: It was on this green and sheltered stretch of coastline that the original Hazari settlers made landfall and founded the city of Shelzar. Old Town is home to Shalamar, the Shelzari seat of government and home of High Minister Fratreli. The docks in this area are the oldest in the city and now serve only as mooring places for the pleasure craft of Shelzar's wealthy and powerful.

Merchant's Quarter: "Merchant (or Merchant's) Quarter" is something of a joke, as trade occurs in every corner of modern-day Shelzar, but many centuries ago trade in the city was strictly regulated and mercantile activities were permitted only in this district. Most of the powerful merchant houses still maintain headquarters, offices, and high-security warehouses here.

Foreign Quarter: In the early days of Shelzar, all foreign visitors to the city were obliged to make their lodgings in this quarter and required by curfew to remain within its boundaries from sunset to sunrise each night. Though foreigners are no longer restricted to this single district, it remains the center of black market and illicit dealing and trade in Shelzar.

North Docks: The original port for official business to the city, this quarter now mostly services small cargo ships, passenger vessels, and the pleasure-barges of the wealthy. It is also home to numerous expensive restaurants, theatres, art galleries, and tea (or, more recently, coffee) houses. The more sordid vices common to Shelzar are not absent from this quarter, but here they are much more discreet, tasteful, and expensive.

South Docks: Shelzar's South Docks are nearly indistinguishable from the waterfront regions in other port cities. Hardy seamen stalk the streets, determined to wring every last drop of coarse enjoyment from their limited time on land. Dozens of taverns, tattoo shops, sordid brothels, and flophouses dot its every street.

Shahdi: The sprawling Shahdi district is home to Shelzar's working poor. The houses here are the remnants of the rundown shacks that once housed slave workers centuries ago. Over the years, they have been added to, joined together, and split apart with little regard for planning or

The Walls

Shelzar is surrounded by a 30-foot stone wall, pierced along its length by seven huge gates. The walls are designed primarily not to defend the city from attack, but rather to shelter it from the occasional storms that sweep in from the sweltering plains, as well as to demarcate the city clearly from the rest of Ghelspad. A sizable shanty-town has grown up outside the walls in recent years, centered around Beggar's Gate.

The old city of Shelzar was once much smaller, encompassing North Dock, Old Town, the Foreign Quarter, and the Merchant's Quarters, as well as the north end of the Maze and the Souk. That wall is now virtually nonexistent, pierced by a hundred roads and integrated into the structure of many of the city's buildings. The only visible reminders of the old wall are the numerous arches from the old gates, spanning the road between close-set buildings, and two free-standing sections of wall; the first attached to the bulk of the Fortress and a tiny section separating the North and South Docks. Still, the Old Wall is a potent psychological barrier that separates the old and new sections of the city. Even though some of the Old City is relatively run-down — in particular the northern spur of the Maze — there is still a perceptible prestige attached to the area north of the Old Wall, which remains the borough of the wealthy and powerful. Even the Asuras family, whose estate lies on the single most valuable and prominent piece of land in the Pezwahri District, also maintains a large townhouse in Old Town as well as offices in the Merchant Quarter.

Getting Around

Most local trade and fishing is conducted by the ubiquitous Shelzari dhow, a small but versatile coastal ship. The majority of travel within the city itself is conducted by foot or sedan chair, as the streets are generally too crowded and narrow to use carts save for the large-scale transportation of goods and cargo. Sedan chairs can carry up to two roughly human-sized passengers and may be hired for only 3 ouda (cp) per quarter-mile (minimum fare 5 ouda).

efficiency; the resulting civic sprawl often requires one to travel through several people's courtyards to reach her own front door from the street. A few years ago, in an effort to improve the appearance of the city in anticipation of a visit from king Virduk of Calastia, the city painted the hovels of the Shahdi in bright, cheery colors, granting a strange, rather pathetic splendor to the otherwise dilapidated neighborhood.

Adazi District: The Adazi is the home of the vast majority of Shelzar's lesser merchants and the preferred home of the many foreign expatriates and ex-adventurers who choose to settle in the city permanently.

The Souk: The majority trade in Shelzar is conducted in the Souk, the vast open-air market where literally thousands of vendors hawk wares from every corner of Ghelspad.

The Maze (a.k.a. the Seven Sins): This is the most stereotypically "Shelzari" district of the city. Whores advertise themselves openly — and often perform their services similarly openly, in

alleyways and even on the street. Gambling houses and drug dens outnumber common taverns, and a raucous noise fills the district from dusk till dawn. Years of unplanned growth and development have twisted this district into a virtual labyrinth.

The Pezwahri: The enclave of the rich and powerful. Virtually all of Shelzar's major figures — mercantile, political, and otherwise — make their homes here. Although all manner of decadent pleasures go on behind the high walls of the Pezwahri estates, the area is virtually absent of the dens of sin so common elsewhere in the city. The Pezwahri is the embodiment of the old axiom "don't shit where you eat."

Coinage and Finances

Of course, as a city of commerce, Shelzar is happy to accept coins from all lands. Only rarely, however, will a Shelzari merchant accept foreign coin at face-value: visitors should expect their coins to be weighed and tested for purity to assess their true trade value. It is thus of paramount importance that the scales and weights of Shelzari

The Underground

Beneath the streets of Shelzar exists another city virtually separate unto itself. Long forgotten crypts, tunnels, catacombs, and cellars form a vast subterranean network. All manner of dangers exist there, both mundane and monstrous, from human assassins and thieves to rats, carrion crawlers, oozes and jellies, and all manner of undead creatures.

Despite the presence of undead and other monsters, however, the most dangerous element in the tunnels beneath Shelzar is without doubt the ubiquitous Cult of Ancients. This assassins' guild is headquartered in the Temple of Shadows, a sprawling and surprisingly opulent complex beneath the streets. The main entrance to the Temple of Shadows is the brothel known as Belsameth's Bliss.

Not everyone who walks the tunnels is dangerous, though. Some of the homeless of the city have carved out a tiny niche in the city's most modern sewers, living off the coins and scraps that sift their way through the old sewer grates. Also, there are a number of underground dens owned and maintained to provide for the sickest and most debased pleasures of the more "discriminating" (read: deviant) seeker of pleasure. Such pleasures may not necessarily be illegal, but they would no doubt sour the city's reputation in the eyes of foreign visitors and merchants. Even so, some of the entertainments such as the skin dens and the knife pits are frowned upon by the City Council, at least officially. In truth, many of the councilors can be found almost nightly wagering in said pits and dens, savoring all the vices that Shelzar has to offer.

Not all the dangers of the subterranean realm are reserved for those who venture beneath the surface. Undead creatures, clad in the rotten and tattered remnants of priests' garb, have been appearing in the alleys and cellars surrounding the Temple of Enkili. And of course the Cult of Ancients use the tunnel network to travel to all corners of the city unseen. There is even some evidence that the tunnel network extends out under the city wall, allowing the Cult of Ancients, and indeed anyone who knows the secret entrances and is willing to risk the dangers of the tunnels, a means of entering and exiting the city unobserved.

Further, there has been something of a minor war going on of late beneath the streets of the city, as the Sa'an crime guild's efforts to find a tunnel connecting with the Asuras estate has brought them in direct conflict with the Cult of Ancients.

Even those who know of the subterranean network beneath the streets have yet to explore it fully. Miles of ancient tunnels and chambers remain blocked off or even undiscovered. Shelzar is a city of secrets, and no small number of its secrets lay buried or forgotten beneath the city's streets.

merchants be fair and true, and to ensure this there exists the Master of Measures, a highly powerful and respected position in Shelzar. In true Shelzari style, however, even an individual charged with keeping the city's merchants honest and true is not himself beyond corruption. The current Master of Measures is Mykal H'aras (*male human, Ari4/Exp2, NE*), a man known to be rather less than scrupulous in reporting short weights and loaded scales — in return for a small but regular contribution to his own purse.

Shelzari coins are minted by a local merchant house that is contracted to do so under every seven years. The reverse side of any Shelzari coin bears the seal of the merchant house that minted the coin. These contracts are incredibly lucrative, and there is much graft, politicking, and corruption around the time that the contract is granted. House Asuras has held this contract for the last four terms, but it is soon coming up for negotiation again, and many rival merchant houses are determined, after nearly three decades, to win the contract away from Asuras by any means necessary. The Asuras are equally determined to keep it, however.

The city of Shelzar mints six different coins: platinum ayam-kebir (1 pp); platinum kebir (5 gp); gold ordu (1 gp); gold argenti (5 sp; originally minted as a large silver coin, but House Asuras began minting it as a smaller gold coin almost twenty years ago); silver sayar-argenti (1 sp); and copper ouda (1 cp). For the sake of simplicity, these are normally referred to as *ayam*, *kebir*, *ordu*, *argenti*, *sayar*, and *ouda*, respectively.

Regional Overview

The area surrounding Shelzar is dominated by several major geographical features. To the north and west lie the scorching badlands of the Sweltering Plains, a region of unnatural heat populated with all manner of fierce and deadly beasts. Further west lies the inhospitable expanse of the Kan Thet swamps, inhabited by the reptilian *asaatthi*.

To the south and east lies the Blossoming Sea. Generally pleasant — at least compared to the nightmare realm that is the Blood Sea — it is nonetheless not without its own perils, from pisceans, kraken, and other monsters to sudden storms, perilous weather, and hidden reefs.

There are only three settlements within a few days' journey of Shelzar: the Zathiskan capitol, Quelsk, is some 150 miles north-east along the coast; about halfway between Shelzar and Quelsk is Fort Ire, a former Elzan stronghold that now exists solely as a safe stopping point for caravans

between the two cities; and the town of Sandoval, another former Elzan stronghold, is situated on an island south-east of the city.

Sweltering Plains

An arid, broken, rocky wasteland giving way to sandy desert in the south, the Plains are one of the least hospitable environments on the planet. Temperatures here soar to well over a hundred degrees every day, and its temperatures remain scorching even at night: Rarely does it ever drop below 80 degrees, save for along the coast (see **Scarred Lands Campaign Setting: Ghelspad**, Chapter 5).

The Urkhadi

The Urkhadi are a unique people — a race of half-orcs who bred true and have now become a distinct racial group. The Urkhadi inhabit a deep and plentiful valley known as the Scar in the middle of the Sweltering Plains. For many years, they were thought to be a myth, but over the past few decades their numbers have increased dramatically and many Urkhadi have begun to venture beyond their valley. Almost two-thirds of the half-orcs currently in Shelzar — some 2,000 or so individuals — are in fact Urkhadi or of Urkhadi descent.

The end of the Urkhadis' isolationism has opened a door to new trade for Shelzar. The Shelzari are equally as desirous to purchase intricate Urkhadi artworks, textiles, and crafts as the Urkhadi are to acquire household goods, arms, and precious metals.

Urkhadi Racial Abilities

Make the following adjustments to the half-orc racial traits found in the **DM Screen Companion** (p. 15):

In place of the +2 racial bonus to Bluff checks common to half-orcs of the Scarred Lands, Urkhadi receive a +2 racial bonus to Fortitude saving throws against natural extremes of heat (see **DMG**, Chapter 3, "Weather "Hazards"); this does not confer any benefit against magical heat or against fire attacks. Urkhadi still have the usual +2 racial bonus to Intimidate and Sense Motive checks, as other half-orcs.

The Golden Triangle

The area immediately surrounding the city is truly a wonder to behold. Utilizing a series of walls to block the sand and heat, an intricate network of irrigation canals (and a dab of magic



Firestorms

Frequency: On average less than once a year. Roll 1d20 once per month: on a roll of 20, a firestorm occurs that month.

Description: A Sweltering Plains firestorm is perhaps the single most deadly weather phenomenon of the Scarred Lands. Incredible winds blast their way across the Plains, carrying an insufferable heat and driving a devastating gout of scouring sand ahead of it. The sand alone is powerful enough to scour flesh from bone, but coupled with winds often in excess of 150 miles per hour and a heat so intense that it can set flammable objects ablaze, few can survive such a storm without shelter — and sometimes even not then. Some five years ago a firestorm blew so powerfully that it reached Shelzar with enough force left to completely destroy a section of the city's outer walls. Luckily, the storms are typically driven by such strong winds that they rarely cover a single area for more than a few minutes and normally blow themselves out completely in a matter of hours.

Effects: A firestorm normally lasts for 3d4 minutes. Each minute, every exposed creature and object in a firestorm takes 1d6 points of damage from scouring sand; as well, each round unprotected creatures and objects take 1d6 points of fire damage from the intense heat. A successful Fortitude save (DC 20) each minute halves the sand damage, and a separate Fortitude save (DC 15, +1 per previous check) each round halves the heat damage. Successful Wilderness Lore checks can grant the usual Fortitude saving throw bonuses against severe weather, but the DC for such checks is 20, rather than the usual 15, and a character can only affect one additional person for every 2 points by which her checks exceeds 20. Any creature or object that takes 4 or more points of fire damage in a given round must also make a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid catching on fire (see DMG, Chapter 3, sidebar: "Catching on Fire"). Metallic items or armor take no heat damage, but are affected as if by a *heat metal* spell; for the first minute of the storm, such items are warm (no damage), becoming hot (1d4 points of fire damage) for the remainder of the firestorm.

Wind effects: Wind speeds in a firestorm are generally of hurricane force, averaging between 140 and 170 miles per hour. Huge or smaller creatures must make a Fortitude save (DC 25) or be affected by these winds: Medium-size or smaller creatures are *blown away*; Large creatures are *knocked down*; and Huge creature are *checked* (see DMG, Chapter 3, "Condition Summary" for details). Note that any flying creatures are treated as being one size smaller for this purpose. The winds automatically extinguish small, unprotected flames such as torches, and have a 75% chance of blowing out protected flames, such as those of lanterns. Listen and Spot checks are impossible, as the sound of the roaring wind drowns out all other sounds and the biting sand obscures all vision.

Sand effects: The blowing sand carried by a firestorm causes any unprotected creature to choke and asphyxiate (see DMG, Chapter 3, sidebar: "Suffocation"). A character with a scarf or similar protection over her nose and mouth does not begin to choke in this way until after a number of rounds equal to 5 times her Constitution score. Typical firestorms leave 1d4 feet of fine, burning-hot sand in their wake, which might conceivably also pose drowning dangers.

Combat: All ranged combat during a firestorm is impossible, and all melee attacks suffer a -12 circumstance penalty due to buffeting winds, blinding dust, and disorientation. In fact, virtually all activities are extremely difficult if not virtually impossible during a firestorm: All creatures suffer a -20 circumstance penalty on Strength and Dexterity checks or skill checks that use either of these stats as their key ability, and on Reflex saves; and a -10 circumstance penalty on all skill checks that use Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma (including Wilderness Lore checks). A creature attempting to cast a spell in a firestorm must first make a successful Concentration check (DC 20 + any fire damage taken during that round + spell level).

Spotting the storm: Starting 30 minutes before a firestorm strikes, and every 5 minutes thereafter, the GM should roll a Wisdom, Wilderness Lore, or Knowledge (nature) check (DC 20, -2 for each previous check) for each character. A successful check indicates that the character has noticed or sensed the approach of the firestorm, and thus may take whatever action are necessary (or available) to prepare — the best option being spells like *rope trick*, *teleport*, or the like, which simply remove the characters from the path of the storm. Spells like *wall of stone* or *wall of force* might also, at the GM's discretion, be used in creative ways to alleviate or at least lessen the danger of the storm.

here and there), the people of Shelzar have created a verdant paradise in the midst of one of the harshest environments in all Ghelspad. League upon league of fruit trees, melon fields, and croplands, all interspersed with a handful of natural oases, are crisscrossed with a well-planned road network to move harvested goods to market as quickly as possible.

The Golden Triangle is the life's-blood of Shelzar. Without the food grown here, the city would surely perish. There are more than 2,000 highly paid mercenaries — more than comprise the city guard itself! — who guard the fields ceaselessly, day and night.

Interestingly, the land of the Triangle is not owned by the city itself but is held in private hands. In the days before the Divine War, verdant lands were plentiful in the area, but with the creation of the Sweltering Plains, fertile land came to be at a premium and what remained was quickly acquired by a handful of Shelzar's wealthiest citizens. Coupled with the codicil in Shelzar law that requires all persons elected to the City Council to possess at least 10 acres of arable land, this ensures that those who are elected to run the city also have a monopoly on Shelzar's food supply.

Fort Ire

Once among of the most important outposts of the Elzan empire, Fort Ire was abandoned in the aftermath of the Divine War and lay in ruins for several decades. During the Druid War, the fort was rebuilt by dwarven craftsmen from Shelzar

and served as a stopping point for refugees. After the war, some of the dwarves stayed on, eventually purchasing the fort from Shelzar and turning it into a safe-haven for travelers and caravans along the trade road from Quelsk.

No more than 80 people call Fort Ire home, and the settlement has yet to grow beyond the walls of the original keep. Apart from the stronghold itself, which now functions as a tavern and inn, there are 20 or so small dwellings, a smithy, a stable, and a general store. The small population means that sufficient food can be grown here to supply the settlement, making it almost entirely self-sufficient.

The rocky shore at the fort means that there is no harbor or mooring place for ships, but Durghi Ironfounder (*male dwarf, Exp12/War 7, NG*), master of the town and the last of the dwarves who founded the settlement, has plans to build a mile-long stone jetty out into the sea to allow ships to dock and thus to trade at the fort.

Vanishing River

In the days before the divine war, this was known as the Amwari River, a deep and slow-flowing waterway that provided ship access to the interior of the Elzan Empire. Since the Divine War and the creation of the Sweltering Plains, however, the Amwari has all but vanished. Its course is erratic, sometimes following its old course, sometimes swinging as far as 50 miles to the north, and sometimes forking and flowing down both paths. There is no true headwater to the



river; it bubbles up from the sands and rocks of the plains — rarely in the same location twice — and often disappears entirely for weeks or even months at a time.

Trade Routes

The only major land-route into Shelzar is the Coast Road that leads to Quelsk. Over the past few years, a rough trail known as the Urkhadi Trade Path has been worn to the north as traders bring goods both to and from the isolated tribes of the Sweltering Plains.

The Blossoming Sea

Teeming with fish and untainted by the blood of Kadum, the Blossoming Sea is in many ways the better half of the Blood Sea. However, it is not without its own dangers: Monsters and titanspawn still dwell beneath the waves, and all manner of mundane threats, from extreme weather to hidden reefs to pirates, await the unwary traveler (see **Scarred Lands Campaign Setting: Ghelspad**, Chapter 5).

The City Beneath the Sea

A mile or so due south of Shelzar lies a mystery hidden beneath the waves. When the sea is stormy and rough, fisherman and sailors can hear bells ringing from far beneath the surface, it is said, and occasionally fisherman in the area find ancient artifacts or pots of coins tangled in their nets.

Most scholars surmise that beneath the waves lie the ruins of a city, perhaps even that same city of which Shelzar's "Old Gate" was once a part. Only a handful of souls have been adventurous enough to investigate the area, and to date none have succeeded in solving the mystery, but based on the value of the artifacts that have so far been found there, it might be well worth the effort to try.

Sandoval

Like Fort Ire, Sandoval was once a fortified Elzan outpost. Unlike Fort Ire, however, Sandoval has grown beyond the walls of the original keep and has become a thriving town. The primary reason for this is that Sandoval is a free port: No laws exist there save for the laws of Sandoval itself. Everyone who enters the town must agree to leave his or her gripes behind. So pirates, thieves, mercenaries, rogues — even, though rare, some titanspawn — walk the streets openly, safe from any foreign powers which are hunting them.

The ruler of Sandoval is Harbormaster Finas Theyn (*male human, Exp9/War4, LN*), a handsome, blonde-haired Darakeene expatriate. Theyn keeps a tight rein on the goings-on in the town ensuring the rules are observed by all, residents and visitors alike. Strangely, he has found that it is rarely the pirates and other rogues who cause troubles (they seem to be as glad of a place where they can relax and feel welcome as any other traveler), but rather it is vigilantes, paladins, bounty hunters, adventurers, and other "self-respecting" types, who seem to feel it is their right to take advantage of their targets' lowered defenses to make their move. Anyone who violates the charter of the free city is banished from Sandoval for a year and a day.

Owing to the rough and dangerous people who frequent the city, fully every third shop in the town produces either weapons or armor. Consequently, these items may be purchased here for 10% to 15% less than the price listed in the *PHB*, though masterwork and magic items are extremely rare. The arms and armor of Sandoval tend to be serviceable rather than beautiful.

Save for fish, which forms the majority of the Sandovalian diet, foodstuffs must be imported to the city. The majority of this food is imported from Shelzar, with which Sandoval maintains a "cautiously friendly" relationship. The fact that Sandoval allows pirates to harbor there angers many Shelzari merchants, who label the town a simply a lawless pirate haven. Sandoval has a population of almost 500 permanent residents from all corners of Ghelspad, although at any given time there can be almost three times that many people in the town.

Kath Bay

Bordered to the north by Sweltering Plains, to the west by the Swamps of Kan Thet, to the south by a rocky and inhospitable archipelago, and to the east by a network of treacherous hidden reefs, Kath Bay is highly isolated and dangerous, useless for the construction of a port city. It is this very isolation, coupled with the natural protection and numerous caves and hidden coves and the bay offers, that makes it a favored spot for pirate safe-harbors and strongholds.

Were it not for the tremendous bounty of fish to be had there, none of the locals would risk traversing the Wrecker's Reef. Hundreds of deep-sea fish species normally unknown in these waters are tossed into Kath Bay by the powerful storms that sometimes strike the Blossoming Sea in this area; they are then prevented from escaping by the reef itself. Following the storms, hundreds of Shelzari dhows set forth to harvest Manawe's

bounty, although occasionally some never return. Many of these are wrecked on the treacherous reef, but some also fall prey to things far more dangerous than fish that have also been trapped in the bay by the fierce tempests.

Thunder Coast

Save for the peninsula on which Shelzar rests, the entire southern coastline of Ghelspad — from Quelsk to Fangsfall — is either rocky or swampy, entirely unsuitable for landing a merchant ship. Nowhere is this more evident than on the Thunder Coast. The turbulent waters of Kath Bay hammer against this jagged coastline, creating a constant thunderous roar. It is said that when the winds are right the dashing of the waves here can be heard as far away as Shelzar. Many a ship has avoided running aground in the fog on Wrecker's Reef by changing her heading on hearing the din of Thunder Coast.

Wrecker's Reef

The most northerly of the chain of hidden reefs that border Kath Bay, Wrecker's Reef is almost constantly wreathed in thick fog, formed when the warm water of the Blossoming Sea meets the cold waters of the Kath Bay. While not nearly so notorious as the Devouring Reef, Wrecker's Reef is a far greater hazard given the ever-present fog and the nearness to Ghelspad's premiere port city. In the 150 years since the Divine War alone, it is estimated that nearly 1000 ships traveling to or from the city have gone down on the reef, as well as an untold number of local dhow fishing vessels.

Harbormaster Finas Theyn of Sandoval has commissioned renowned dwarven architect and engineer Berri Burrisdottir (*female dwarf, Exp17, LN*) to design and construct a lighthouse fully 50 feet taller than the one in Shelzar. So far, the structure has collapsed three times since construction began, inciting Theyn to level accusations of sabotage against both Shelzar and House Asuras.

Merrow Point

As the name suggests, the waters of the point are thick with merrow (aquatic trolls). Even the pirates who take shelter in the bay refuse to sail within 50 miles of the point. The peninsula itself is also crawling with normal land-dwelling trolls. Whether this is a strange coincidence, a natural occurrence, or the sign of something sinister is unknown. What is known is that no one who has ever ventured there has been known to have returned.

Life in Shelzar

A visitor's first impression of Shelzar depends entirely upon how he arrives. Those who enter by land must pass through one of the city's gates, all of which lead first to the tight, dark streets and poverty of the Shadhi district, before eventually making their way to the core of the city. The lone exception is Newgate: visitors who enter through Newgate find themselves on the Grand Boulevard, the most beautiful street in the city. However, no mercantile traffic is permitted to enter the Newgate or travel the Grand Boulevard.

Those who arrive by sea witness an entirely different city. While the docks themselves are crowded, dirty, and noisy, like those of virtually every city in Ghelspad, the sea traveler has an unparalleled view of the towering gold and ivory spires of the city proper, a breathtaking vision of beauty and wealth.

Carrying weapons is outlawed in Shelzar, and all who enter the city are immediately and scrupulously checked for weapons. Anyone bringing weapons into the city must either surrender them to a guard station for the duration of their visit or have their weapons peace-bound (fixed into the scabbard with a piece of wire and sealed with a copper seal marked with the city arms). There is a small forge at each guard post and gate to perform this service. The exception to this law is the dagger: every citizen and visitor is permitted to own and carry daggers openly. Citizens and visitors alike may apply for a special dispensation to own and carry arms in the city, however. These permits cost 100 ordu (gp) per weapon and generally take many weeks to process, which generally ensures that generally only citizens, and usually only the wealthy and/or criminal ones, are armed — legally, at least. There is, naturally, a thriving trade in cheap black-market weapons in the city for those who cannot afford permits.

Storing one's weapons with the city guard incurs a charge of 1 ordu per item per week; a receipt is issued for each weapon and the weapons will be returned only with a valid receipt. Peace-bonding costs 10 ordu per weapon, flat rate, and the weapon must be presented freely for inspection at any time at the request of any city guard. Of course, in Shelzar, there are more than a few ways around this. Many gate guards can be bribed to "overlook" a weapon — generally 5 to 20 ordu suffices — and several individuals within the city will replace a broken peace-bond for about 20 ordu. The dwarven smith Hugh MacHugh (*male dwarf, Ftr2/Rog6/Exp6, N*) has devised a "trick" peace-bond which allows the wielder to remove



the weapon and return it to the scabbard without breaking the seal and which is difficult to detect even under close scrutiny (Search DC 22). He charges 50 ordu for the service.

Social Divisions

The Peasantry

Most who do not belong to this social class view it as a unitary mass of unwashed layabouts little better than animals. In truth, however, the majority of the peasants are the workers who make the city run. They toil in the fields, haul goods on the docks, mend roofs, and perform any of a hundred other tasks which are essential to the running of any city. As the middle-class Adazi district has grown in the past few decades, many of the peasantry have been displaced from their homes and now live in shanty towns outside the city walls.

The Trades

This group includes not only those men and women who make their living through craft and service, but also the minor merchants who buy and sell wares within the city. In many other cities or states, this latter group might be considered far more than mere tradesmen, but in a city so dependant on trade and so clearly run by the wealthy, these minor merchants do not enjoy so elevated a status.

The Merchants

Money is the life-blood of Shelzar and it is the merchants who provide it. These wealthy individuals hold a place in Shelzari society normally held by the nobility of other lands. The merchants of Shelzar enjoy lives of gluttonous excess, savoring every pleasure and vice that life can offer. So inured are they to normal vices that a whole new array of twisted amusements has evolved to entertain them.

The Politicos

Ultimate power in the city is held by the politicians, who are invariably drawn from among the mercantile class. These individuals buy their way into power and fight tooth-and-nail to keep it. In a city of decadence and corruption, the politicians lead by example, the most decadent and corrupt of the lot. From among their number, the politics elect the High Minister as the ultimate ruler of the city.

Other Races

Halflings

Those who choose to make their living in the more respectable or legal trades find themselves relegated to positions as servants, messengers, and the like. Most, however, find careers as thieves, pimps, or prostitutes to be much more lucrative and exciting. Halfling pros-

Underground Entertainments

In the city of Shelzar, one can find any number of vices peddled openly that in other lands would be hidden away from public view: drug use, prostitution, and even public fornication are some of the most obvious. Yet even in the city of sin there are some things that remain hidden.

The most popular of these entertainments is the knife pit. Gladiatorial combat is not unknown in other parts of Ghelspad, and here in Shelzar it is perfectly legal; it is the savagery and bloodiness of the Shelzari knife pit that forces its venues to remain secret. The Shelzari appetite is to see men slice each other apart ever-so-slowly, dragging out the fight for as long as possible. Accomplished knife fighters, easily recognizable by the webs of scars that cover their bodies, enjoy a certain degree of celebrity in the city.

A far more dark and gruesome amusement is the skin den, where the most depraved and self-indulgent of Shelzar society gather to watch creatures being skinned alive. Not every living thing that meets its end here is a mere animal. Sentient creatures, both titanspawn and divine races, are some of the most popular attractions. A skilled den-master can keep a single person screaming for hours as the spectators sip wine and wager on how long the poor unfortunate can remain alive. As an added attraction, while the den is cleaned between victims, the audience is treated to such diversions as people being eaten alive by animals or burned alive, or perhaps men and/or women coupling with animals, monsters and titanspawn, often against their will and just as often with fatal results.

titutes — or “whorelings” as they are often called in colloquial parlance — are in surprisingly high demand. Many folk outside of Shelzar might find the thought of a halfling thug, crime boss, or pimp to be laughable, but no one in Shelzar laughs at such individuals... at least not for long. Halflings are the most populous race in Shelzar aside from humans.

Dwarves

Most Shelzari dwarves are descended from dwarves who were brought to the city as slaves. Slavery was officially banned in Shelzar many centuries ago, and the dwarves have since worked as free Shelzari citizens. Most Shelzari dwarves wear ornamental iron collars and/or bracers as a re-

minder of their slave ancestry. Virtually all Shelzari dwarves are craftsmen of some sort, and fully 90% of them are part of the Brunwyn Craft Guild.

Elves and Half-Elves

The majority of elves and half-elves in the city are transients residents, refugees from the shores of distant Termana. In recent years, the number of such travelers has increased substantially, with these folk being engaged in pilgrimages to reach Darakeene where the worship of their nameless god is enjoying a renaissance.

Half-Orcs

The few half-orcs that call Shelzar home are mostly Urkhadi tribesmen, whose presence here in the past few years has seen a marked increase as many move here from their traditional home in the Sweltering Plains. The remainder are Zathiskan expatriates. Most half-orcs make their living as mercenaries, guardsmen, or criminal enforcers, though a few have found honest work as tradesmen or laborers.

Other

There are a (very) few representatives of other races in the city, including a couple of strange, minuscule barbarians called “gnomes” who came to Shelzar aboard one of the elven ships from Termana. Other folk than can be seen in Shelzar’s streets include orcs, sutak, vertigen, proud, heron priests, and slitheren. With a few notable exceptions such as the heron priest ambassador of the Jack of Tears, all of these individuals make their living as either exotic prostitutes, status-symbol bodyguards, or knife-fighters. Of particular note is the phenomenally successful sutak knife fighter Ebalo (see Chapter 4), who is something of a celebrity about town.

Culture and Entertainment

Food and Drink

The Shelzari enjoy spicy food to a degree rivaled only by the fiery cuisine of Zathiske. For this reason, Shelzar is a major destination for exotic spice shipments. There is a currently growing trend toward food from other lands, particularly in dockside cafés and upper-class restaurants. The most famous Shelzari dish is *zatai*, consisting of skewers of marinated goat or lamb. *Zatai* can be bought from any of a thousand vendors in the streets of the Shelzar for 1 *ouda* (gp) per skewer. It is normally served with *kamadhis*, a mixture of wheat grains and rice. The spice-loving Shelzari also enjoy the cuisine of the Broadreach elves, famous for its heat and savor even before the Divine War — in fact, traditional Broadreach

cuisine is now far more common in Shelzar than it is in the dark reaches of the Hornsaw Forest, the elves' old homeland.

Holidays

The entire month of Enkilot is a holy time for the people of Shelzar. During the day, shops are closed and people pray at home or in temples and shrines, fasting from sun up to sun down. The night is a different story altogether. From sun down to sun up there are raucous celebrations and feasts in all corners of the city.

There are two important holy days dedicated to Enkili in the Shelzari calendar: the first days of Enkilot and Enker, respectively. On these days, Shelzari citizens visit temples, make offerings, and renew their devotion to Enkili. These are days for family and loved-ones, and the giving of gifts and familial feasts are the order of the day.

The Night of Masks

As might be expected, the Shelzari are for the most part very open and uninhibited about sex, and it is not at all uncommon here to find people coupling in places as public as taverns, parks, or even the souk. This tendency reaches its pinnacle on the Night of Masks. The Shelzari borrowed this Hollowfaust holy day and turned it into a debauched citywide carnal festival. Citizens don masks and the city goes wild. Food, liquor, and drugs are consumed openly and in abundance, and public fornication with numerous anonymous strangers is commonplace.

There are several bastard heirs to many of Ghelspad's thrones wandering about Shelzar as a result of festivals past.

Drugs and Alcohol

For a people so open regarding their sexuality, Shelzari are surprisingly prudish when it comes to strong drink. It is technically illegal to display public drunkenness or to drink in a public place other than a restaurant or tavern, although these laws are rarely enforced save in the more upscale parts of town. This prohibition against alcohol and drunkenness does not extend to drugs and other intoxicants, which helps to explain their popularity in the city.

Games and Sport

The most popular game among the citizens of Shelzar is "Hago," a seemingly simple board game involving shifting stones around a 20 by 20 square board to conquer territory. It is said that

it takes only moments to learn Hago, but a lifetime to master the game. Invariably, every coffee house in Shelzar has a few old men huddled over a Hago board.

The Shelzari have little interest in sport. If asked, most Shelzari will reply acerbically that if a person wishes to get hot and sweaty, she should simply have sex.

Music

The Shelzari generally prefer stringed instruments and boisterous, raucous music. The rich attend opera and theatre and the more cultured entertainments of other lands. Commoners prefer traditional plays, farces, and other such simple fare — none of that fancy foreign muck.

Literature

Literacy is common among the rich, but rare among the common folk. Most educated Shelzari can read, write, and speak several tongues, usually including Zathiskan, Ledean, and Ancient Elzan.

The Shelzari tend to have little interest in histories or epic tales, preferring instead lascivious tales of love and lust, stories of tricksters, and simple adventure stories. The most popular book in Shelzar is *1001 Shelzari Nights*, the classic tale of lust and intrigue that is also the seminal textbook for sexual technique in all Ghelspad.

Love and Marriage

What surprises outsiders most is that marriage is taken very seriously among the Shelzari. Like most celebrations here, marriage ceremonies are accompanied by drink, drugs, and music in abundance. It is a common custom among upper-class Shelzari for both bride and groom to take part in a masked orgy the night before the wedding, each taking dozens of anonymous lovers in a last observance of single life.

Both men and women may charge for divorce on the grounds of infidelity, although, as with most things, this practice varies greatly. Among the wealthy and many of the common folk, it is common for both husbands and wives to take other lovers openly.

Death and Funerary Rites

Cremation is the norm in Shelzar. When possible, foreigners are returned to their home nations or, barring that, buried at sea. Shelzari funerals are rather boisterous affairs with feasting, drugs, and alcohol (and, of course, sex). They are treated as enthusiastic celebrations of life, lasting anywhere from three to seven days.

Once cremated, the ashes of the deceased are placed in clay or ceramic amphorae and interred in subterranean vaults and crypts. The poor, who

can rarely afford to inter their dead in private vaults, instead charter a dhow and spread the ashes at sea, entrusting their loved ones to Manawe's care.

Religion

All faiths are welcome in Shelzar, although some are more welcome than others: The Shelzari chafe at limitations and restrictions to their enjoyment of life, so religions that espouse such commandments are unpopular in the extreme.

Enkili

Enkili is the chief deity worshipped in Shelzar. Virtually every citizen of Shelzar, no matter his or her background or station, prays for Enkili's favor. Sailors and fishermen pray for clement weather, gamblers for good fortune, thieves for luck, and merchants for favor in business. But Enkili is a fickle patron(ess), and his/her worship seems to bring poor fortune as often as good.

Still, Enkili worship suits the people of Shelzar well. As well as the famed Temple of Enkili, there are numerous smaller shrines throughout the city, dedicated to the god(dess) in all his/her numerous forms. However, despite the massive size of the Temple of Enkili, most worship is still an individual activity, and large sermons are rare.

Idra

Shelzar is the center of worship for the Idran faith. Given the prevalence of prostitution and the carnal nature of the city, this is hardly surprising. It is said that Idra herself, along with her herald, appears in Shelzar during the Night of Masks to take part in the most unrestrained orgies. The holiest day among the Idrans in Shelzar is Ramas-Adan, the midsummer festival. On this night, all the brothels offer their services free of charge, the prostitutes' numbers bolstered by the common faithful of Idra, who spend the night servicing any patron who desires them.

Manawe

Given the city's dependence on the sea both for food and to foster trade, it is not at all surprising that the worship of Manawe is prevalent here, particularly among the common folk. While there is no proper temple devoted to Manawe in the city, there a number of well-visited shrines scattered throughout the docks. The largest of these shrines, located about a quarter-mile east of Belsameth's Bliss in the South Docks, is attended by Mari Seadaughter (*female half-elf, Clr7, CN*), the only true cleric of Manawe in the city. The remainder of the Sea Mother's few clergy in Shelzar are typically acolytes (adepts) of 1st to

5th level. Shelzari Manavians observe the same holidays common to their faith, although with less boisterousness and more solemnity than their Rahochan brethren.

Hedrada

There is a small but strong Hedradan presence in the city, mostly in the form of refugees who fled from the east in the wake of the Blood Monsoon. These Hedradans know that they are in the minority here, and they tend to worship quietly and privately. Unlike the zealous Order of Iron, the Hedradans hope to sway the Shelzari to their faith through example.

Goran

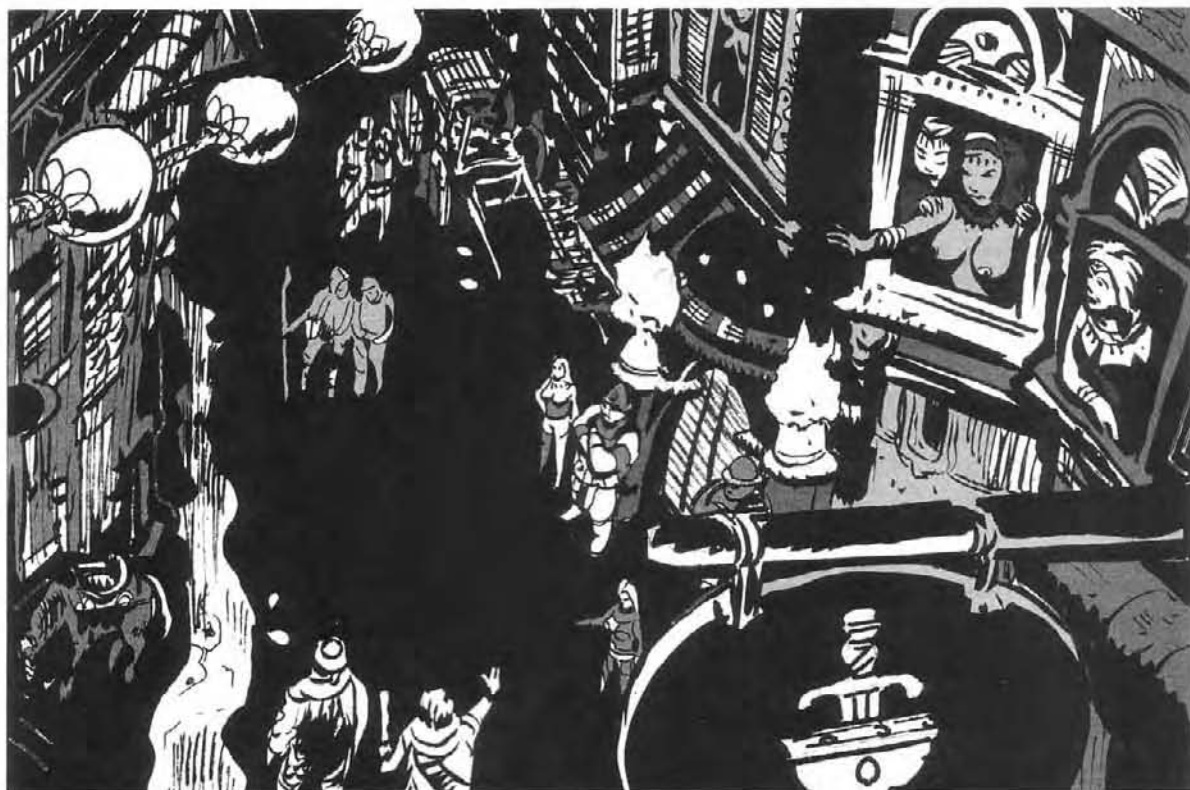
The dwarves of Shelzar maintain their faith in Goran, though centuries of a slave-heritage many thousands of miles from Burok Torn ensures that their worship bears little resemblance to that found in Burok Torn. Shelzari dwarves worship secretly, as was their way during their years of slavery. Goran's traditional holidays have been forgotten; instead the Shelzari dwarves spend all of Enkili's holidays in quiet contemplation, celebrating their own faith among friends and family.

Corean

Corean has little representation in the city, but the few of his worshippers who do live here are vocal and zealous in the extreme. The Coreanic paladins of the Order of Iron maintain a stronghold here, hoping to sway the locals from their sinful ways through force of words, but to date they have been resoundingly unsuccessful. Most of the Shelzari view the paladins with amusement, although a few citizens are quite outspoken in their detestation for such "meddlers and troublemakers"; some even go so far as to accuse the Iron Knights and their Coreanic forgemasters with supplying weapons to the peasants in preparation for a rebellion. Were it not for the Order's skill at arms and the certain retribution from Mithril were they harmed, the Knights would surely have been forcibly expelled from the city long ago. Still, these stalwart souls carry on in the face of pervasive sinfulness, confident that Corean will see them through and guide their voices in overcoming the Shelzaris' resistance.

Madriel

Strangely, the goddess Madriel enjoys a devout following in Shelzar, mostly among the peasantry and those displaced from other lands. The Redeemer is a symbol of hope to the downtrodden, hope that guides them through their days in a city rife with sin and corruption.



Chardun

The worship of Chardun has grown steadily in Shelzar over the past few years, largely as a result of an influx of Calastians in the wake of High Minister Fratrel's growing relationship with that nation. Despite his lawful alignment, Chardun's bloody nature appeals to a certain — and distressingly large — portion of the Shelzari people.

Belsameth

The worship of Belsameth is not common in Shelzar beyond the band of fanatical assassins (the Cult of Ancients) who carry out their heinous deeds in the name of their two-faced mistress. Those few Shelzari who do worship Belsameth normally do so in private, for fear of being branded a member of that infamous guild of killers-for-hire.

Government

In theory, the Shelzari system of government is a simple and equitable one: Citizens elect a council of representatives, or ministers, who in turn elect a High Minister from among their number. Practice is quite different than theory, however.

Shelzari law states that every citizen "in good standing" is allowed a vote. Modern law defines a citizen in good standing as a person "having resided in the city for no less than 7 years and who possesses no less than 10 acres of arable land and a dwelling worth no less than 1,000 ordu." Thus, voting is effectively confined to the wealthy and

the merchant upper-middle class. Coupled with the graft and bribery rampant in Shelzari government, this fact ensures that only the very wealthy ever ascend to the City Council. Additionally, there is no precept in Shelzari law specifying a term of service, virtually assuring that, once elected, most councilors serve for life.

There are always 38 ministers on the Council. Local law holds that any motion brought before the Council must be tabled by a minister who cannot then vote on it, thus precluding the chance of a split vote. Sometimes, though, a member may refuse to vote on a given issue. Therefore, in the case of a tied vote, the High Minister decides the issue.

There is no real nobility in Shelzar. Some families trace their ancestry back to the founding of the city, and sometimes even beyond, and most enjoy great status and hereditary wealth, but the true power in Shelzar lies solely with the City Council, and ultimately with High Minister Fratrel.

There has been some discontent among the Council of late. One of their number, Hamas Shedani (*male human, Ari12, LE*), has taken ill. Shedani is nearing his 80th birthday, and few expect him to see the new year. There is already much unofficial campaigning and politicking going on as prospective Ministers have begun jockeying for his position. Moreover, many of the Council are unhappy with the recent concessions Fratrel has made with Calastia, arguing

Shelzarium

In addition to the typical coin denominations minted in Shelzar, there is another form of coin sometimes encountered here, and occasionally in other areas of Ghelspad where the Shelzari trade. However, this coin is so rarely encountered that it is not included in any discussion of common Shelzari currency.

Fishermen who work a particular area a mile or so south of the city occasionally pull up ancient pots of coins struck from a strange, glowing metal that has come to be known as shelzarium. These coins are marked on one side with the image of a dragon (a true dragon, not a wrack dragon) and on the reverse with an unknown glyphic script that has so far proven untranslatable by both mundane and magical means. There is some variation in value based on the color of the coin, with two slightly different colors of coins having been found thus far: a green shelzarium coin, being the more common, is generally worth 20 ayam (pp); purple, the rarer, is typically worth 30 ayam. There is a rumor circulating among the people of Shelzar that the mighty Asuras trading house was actually founded by a lowly fisherman ancestor who found a sizeable cache of shelzarium coins. True or not, it is a rumor that the Asuras go to great lengths to curtail, and one that rival houses go to great lengths to encourage.

Shelzarium is as hard as steel but as easy to work as copper, making it quite well suited for making weapons and armor, though the cost of such items is prohibitive. While highly sought after as status items, shelzarium weapons and armor are understandably rare; most shelzarium is either used in jewelry or kept as coins and used in trade. Items crafted from shelzarium are treated as masterwork items in terms of price (also add the market price modifier from the table below), but can be created in the normal amount of time; such items do not gain masterwork enhancement bonuses. Further, the item costs an additional 200 gp per pound for green shelzarium, or 300 gp per pound for purple. Thus, a green shelzarium dagger costs 302 gp (masterwork cost) + 200 gp (1 pound weight) = 502 gp. If such an item is actually masterwork, figure the masterwork cost component twice (so a masterwork green shelzarium dagger costs 802 gp).

Shelzarium also gives off a bright glow that operates as a supernatural ability (it cannot be dispelled, although it ceases to function in an antimagic field). Shelzarium items weighing 4 pounds or less shed light in a 5-foot radius; those weighing from 5 to 10 pounds shed light in a 10-foot radius; from 11 to 30 pounds, in a 15-foot radius; and 31 or more pounds, in a 20-foot radius (the maximum).

Shelzarium has a hardness of 10 and 30 hit points per inch of thickness.

that such a demonstration of favoritism to one nation over all others is going hurt trade. This had led to speculation that Fratreli may be forced to abdicate from the Council — or, in darker rumors, perhaps even assassinated — should he refuse to curtail the Black Dragon's privileges in the city.

Trade

The common Shelzari diet consists mostly of figs, dates, goats, cheese, fish, melons, oranges, and coffee, all of which is grown in the Golden Triangle. So plentiful is this region that even in a city of more than 100,000 people there is sufficient produce to export many tons to other lands.

Beyond foodstuffs, virtually every trade good produced in Shelzar is organic: silk, satin, cotton, linen, arrows, and dye, to name a few. In Shelzar, wealth quite literally grows on trees. Apart from the Shelzari silk — which is produced in high-walled compounds in the Golden Triangle — most of the textiles are produced from fibers harvested along the verge of the Kan Thet swamps. Heavily guarded caravans of raw cotton and flax are the only overland trade to go west of the city.

Shelzar has always been known for the huge number of dyes and pigments found there. No place in Ghelspad has a wider variety of dye-producing plants, and their number has only increased given the burgeoning trade with the Urkhadi half-orcs, as a number of distinctive and colorful plant species grow in the Sweltering Plains and can only be harvested by these uniquely heat-adapted people. Consequently, Shelzar is by far the most colorful city in Ghelspad. The streets are a riot of color: pink, orange, green, magenta, red, cerulean and other such bright pigments are as common in Shelzar as the ubiquitous browns, grays, and blacks in other lands. Even peasants dress with at least a few flashes of brightly-hued garb, in particular the customary sashes and turban (a centuries-old holdover from the Hazari religious sect) still worn by many traditionally minded Shelzari.

One interesting thing to note is the while the Shelzari have no great tradition of skill at archery, they produce surprisingly high-quality arrows. The thorny jama reed which grows along the rocky shore around the city is exceedingly strong and straight, and happens to be of a perfect diameter for arrow shafts. Shelzari arrows are in great demand as far away as Vesh and Darakeene. Using a Shelzari reed-arrow grants an archer a +1 circumstance bonus on her attack roll.

Crime and Punishment

Many city-states employ banishment as a standard form of punishment, but this is not the case in Shelzar. No Shelzari merchant wants to see a potential customer, even one who is a convicted criminal, leave the city. However, this is not to say that Shelzari law is particularly forgiving.

In cases of theft, a criminal is allowed the chance to repay his victim. Should he fail to do so, his hand is cut off. For the more serious crime of grand theft, he must repay the debt and still lose a limb.

Despite the fact that the people of Shelzar are so open sexually — or perhaps *because* they are — rape is considered a serious crime and is dealt with most severely. Just as a thief loses a hand to prevent further transgressions, so too does a rapist lose the offending appendage.

The crime of blasphemy is not reserved simply to slurs against Enkili. Blasphemy is the crime of openly slandering any of the gods. Simply worshipping or preaching of any one god in preference to another is not considered blasphemy, but actively disparaging any god or goddess (or her worship) is. However, although it is treated seriously, this crime is rarely enforced save on holy days.

Crimes such as assault or even murder can be mitigated if the accused can prove that her actions were in self-defense, which includes defense of her person, immediate family, home, or assets.

In cases where a guard or other recognized official (such as a Red Sash; see the "Criminal Sentences" sidebar) has witnessed an individual in the commission of a crime, there is no investigation and judgment is passed summarily by the magistrates. However, if the guilt of the individual is in question — or if he is wealthy enough — the magistrates launch an investigation into the crime. Third-party investigators are often used to collect evidence and statements from witnesses, all of which are returned to the magistrates within a predetermined period of time so that the evidence may be assessed and judgment passed. It is an unfortunate reality in Shelzar (as in many places) that the rich are rarely punished for anything but the most serious of crimes, and quite often only when their guilt is public and indisputable — and sometimes not even then. Just as wealth is a sure route to avoid punishment for any but the most serious crimes, so too can it buy "justice" (read: vengeance) for the injured party. Not a few wealthy Shelzaris have slipped a shrewd bribe to the right people to ensure that the most severe punish-

Criminal Sentences in Shelzar

A few common crimes and their average sentences are as follows:

Theft: Remuneration or prison term and loss of a hand. Five years in prison and loss of a hand for a second offence.

Rape: Castration/loss of offending appendage.

Blasphemy: Public flogging, with the number of lashes based on the severity of the offence.

Trespass: From one to six months in prison. Five years in prison for second offence.

Weapons Possession: Variable stay in prison (one week x maximum weapon damage for first offense; one month x maximum weapon damage for second and subsequent offences).

Arson: Death by burning.

Murder: Death by beheading.

Treason: Death by quartering.

Assault: Variable stay in prison (one week per hp of damage dealt, divided by character level of the victim)

Casting Harmful Magics: Variable stay in prison (one month per total hp of damage dealt)

Casting Mind-Affecting Magics: From one to five years in prison, dependent upon the severity.

Raising or Commanding Undead: Death by quartering, and the pieces burnt.

Broken, False, or Missing Peace Bond: One month field labor per weapon.

The Red Sashes

The Red Sashes are the High Minister's private secret police and one of the most feared groups in the city. They function mostly as a private band of spies, gathering information to root out the Minister's enemies and, most importantly, seeking out any impediments to trade in the city.

Though rumor and myth populate every tavern and street corner with a dozen eavesdropping Red Sash spies, in truth there are only about a hundred of these agents in the city. Despite their name, they no longer wear a red sash, and indeed eschew any distinguishing garb or mark, preferring instead to blend in to any crowd.

Sample Shelzari Guard Patrol [EL 5]

Guards work in three daily shifts of approximately 560 soldiers each. At any given time, about half of these are traversing the streets in patrols of four, with the remainder training at the fortress or manning the smaller watch-houses and ready to respond to emergencies. In truth, many on-duty guards — both those on patrol and those ostensibly manning the watch houses — may be found in one of the city's many brothels, gambling-houses, drug-dens, or taverns.

Hashi, male human fighter 2

CR 2; SZ Medium-size humanoid (6 ft. tall); HD 2d10+2; hp 16; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 20 ft. in armor, 30 ft. base; AC 16 [flat-footed 14, touch 11] (+1 Dex, +4 armor, +1 shield); Atk +3 melee (1d3+1 subdual, unarmed), or +5 melee (1d6+1, masterwork scimitar), or +3 ranged (1d4+1, dagger); AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Languages spoken: Shelzari.

Skills: Climb +5, Handle Animal +1, Hide +2, Listen +2, Profession (officer) +5, Search +1, Spot +3.

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (scimitar).

Possessions: Scale mail, small steel shield, masterwork scimitar, 2 daggers.

Ottar, male human warrior 3

CR 2; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 8 in. tall); HD 3d8+9; hp 24; Init +0; Spd 20 ft. in armor, 30 ft. base; AC 14 [flat-footed 14, touch 10] (+4 armor); Atk +5 melee (1d3+2 subdual, unarmed), or +5 melee (1d6+2, scimitar), or +4 ranged (1d4+2, dagger); AL NG; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 14, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Languages spoken: Shelzari.

Skills: Hide +5, Intimidate +6, Jump +4, Listen +3, Spot +3, Swim +7.

Feats: Alertness, Improved Unarmed Strike, Skill Focus (Hide).

Possessions: Scale mail, scimitar, dagger.

Saarak, male Urkhadi (half-orc) warrior 2

CR 1; SZ Medium-size humanoid (6 ft., 3 in. tall); HD 2d8+2; hp 14; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 [flat-footed 13, touch 10] (+3 armor); Atk +4 melee (1d3+2 subdual, unarmed), or +5 melee (1d12+3, greataxe); SQ darkvision 60 ft., Urkhadi traits; AL CN; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 15, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 6.

Languages spoken: Urkhadi, Shelzari.

Skills: Bluff +0, Intimidate +1, Listen +2, Sense Motive +2.

Feats: Weapon Focus (greataxe).

Possessions: Studded leather armor, greataxe.

Basha, female human warrior 1

CR 1/2; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 1d8+1; hp 9; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 [flat-footed 13, touch 10] (+3 armor, +1 buckler); Atk +3 melee (1d6+2, short sword), or +1 ranged (1d4+2, dagger); AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 9.

Languages spoken: Shelzari.

Skills: Handle Animal +3, Intimidate +1, Search +2, Swim +4.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Toughness.

Possessions: Studded leather armor, buckler, short sword, dagger.

ments are brought down upon those who have done them wrong (real, imagined, or otherwise), or that someone is beaten, raped, or even killed once incarcerated. Make no mistake: Money truly is power in Shelzar.

In all cases where a criminal is to be put to death, his soul is dedicated to Enkili. Any subsequent attempts to raise or resurrect the criminal are entirely dependent upon Enkili's will to release his soul.

Armed Forces

Shelzar has no standing army, as such. There are some 1,700 or so guardsmen who patrol and protect the city, not counting the mercenaries and private guards hired many of Shelzar's wealthier citizens. During times of trouble, the city can also raise a militia. There are currently 4,812 citizens registered with the militia (including seven respected mages), and many more may be conscripted in an emergency.



All militia members receive training in arms and are permitted to own and carry weapons at all times, which is normally forbidden within the city. The city guard, laughingly known as “the army,” is headquartered at the Fortress. Though it has fallen into disrepair, the Fortress is still one of the strongest and most defensible points in the city. The watch is currently headed by Grand Commander Ismal Khemari (see Chapter 4).

Factions in the City

Minister Fratrel

High Minister Fratrel is the single most powerful individual in the city, at least in theory. He has proven to be a more able ruler with each passing year. Fratrel has recently been allowing huge concessions for the Calastians, giving them virtually free reign to move both people and cargo in and out of the city unchecked, leading to unrest among the City Council.

The City Council

The Ministers of the Council are the leaders of the city. Although High Minister Fratrel is the principal power in the Shelzari government, the Council can veto any of his edicts and decrees with a unanimous vote. The system was designed so that the High Minister and the Council are balanced, preventing either from abusing power. In truth, the Council and the High Minister

rarely have differing views, as long as each minister is able to maintain the comfort and excess to which he has grown accustomed, for all are uniformly corrupt and decadent. One notable exception is the currently ongoing disagreement over the High Minister’s dealings with Calastia. Fratrel has taken advantage of Minister Hamas Shedani’s illness — and the resultant inability of the Council to cast a unanimous vote against him in Shedani’s absence — to implement a number of laws and to waive a number of tariffs for Calastian traders.

Beneath Fratrel and the ministerial council are numerous degrees of junior councilors, bureaucrats, civil servants, and assorted quill-pushers. All told, some 2,000 people (fully 2 percent of the city’s population) are directly involved in the running of the city, most of these taking full advantage of the numerous opportunities for graft, bribery, black-marketeering, and corruption to line their own pockets.

House Asuras

The Asuras’ are the preeminent merchant house in Shelzar, and indeed in all of Ghelspad. Virtually every commodity that enters or leaves the city has passed through the Asuras’ hands at some point, and their reach extends far beyond simple commerce. House Asuras has held the contract for minting coins in the city for the past 28 years, which has

given them tremendous leverage with the City Council. In one incident some 10 years ago, the Asuras' threatened to cease production of coinage altogether unless the Council quashed a proposed tax that would have cost the Asuras dearly. The tax was annulled almost immediately and the flow of coins continued unabated.

Current rumor asserts that an Asuras is certain to become a Minister of the Council when Hamas Shedani dies, leading some to speculate that perhaps Shedani's illness is the work of an Asuras-hired assassin.

Sa'an Crime Cartel

The Sa'an Cartel is in many ways the flipside of the mercantile coin from the Asuras. Just as all legitimate trade in the city passes through Asuras hands at some point, so too does virtually all black-market and illegal trade involve the Sa'an Cartel at some point. The Cartel are involved in everything illicit: prostitution, drugs, weapons, gambling, knife pits, skin-dens, theft, smuggling, assassination — it doesn't matter so long as there is a profit to be made. In the city, the Sa'an information gathering network is second to none.

The thirteen masters of the Sa'an Cartel meet in secret, their faces cowled to protect their identity, save for the head of their guild, called Sa'an — who is in truth the skin devil Mazat (see Chapter 5). At least four members of the City Council are among of the Cartel's leaders, as well as at least one high-ranking member of the Asuras family.

The Order of Iron

The Coreanic Paladins of the Order of Iron maintain a small chapter house in the city. Despite their small numbers and the fact that their god holds little sway in Shelzar, the Order has the power of Mithril behind it, making it a surprisingly potent force in the city, particularly in religious matters. Currently, the Order is spearheading an initiative to clear the immoral elements from the Grand Temple, though their enterprise is meeting with little success. (See *Secrets & Societies*, "Coreanic Paladins.")

Cult of Ancients

Few groups are as feared across the continent as this foul cadre of assassins. No one who makes use of their services wishes to alienate Belsameth's Cult, so they rarely have trouble in getting their own way. Luckily, the Cult has no real political agenda and thus demands little of the City Council and Merchant Houses save for prompt payment for services rendered. Still, getting on the bad side of the Cult is ill advised for any number of reasons, not the least of which is the very distinct probability of one becoming a target oneself.

No member of the Cult of Ancients is permitted to kill without being paid, so the Cult itself maintains a large sum of cash to pay for "open contract" bounties that it takes out on its enemies. (See *Secrets & Societies*, "Cult of Ancients.")

Chapter Two:

The History of Shelzar

It is only fitting that a city virtually synonymous with the worship of Enkili should have a history of twists and turns, triumphs and reversals. In Shelzar, the orthodoxy of one era has often become the heresy of the next. Like the Trickster himself, Shelzar has undergone innumerable transformations over the millennia, each time shaking off the forms of the past and emerging reinvigorated. This may explain why the city has survived and prospered for longer than nearly every other city of Ghelspad. With a founding that predates the Divine War by centuries, Shelzar is at once impossibly old and thoroughly modern — a wondrous blend of old and new, sacred and profane. In its history, one can read the history of all of Ghelspad, if one only knows where to look.

Ancient of Days

Few who have walked the streets of the City of Pleasures and gazed upon its great spires of jade and ivory can doubt that it is an ancient place. Despite, or perhaps because of its air of luxuriant decadence, Shelzar bears the weight of history upon its gilt roofs. Few inhabitants (and even fewer visitors) have any idea precisely how old the city is or what its role has been in past glories and defeats. For most, it is enough to acknowledge the city's antiquity and leave it at that, for, as the saying goes, "Shelzar is eternal." To the contemporary inhabitant of the Scarred Lands, Shelzar's great age is simply a fact of life rather than a topic of serious consideration. More important is the simple fact that the city is an acknowledged haven for — depending on one's point of view — either the open-minded or the depraved.

Certainly neither of these perspectives approaches the truth. To say that Shelzar transcends these two categories (as have many pretentious loremasters and sages) is to speak in platitudes; it is, of course, neither wholly virtuous nor wholly wicked. Shelzar is a much more complicated place than either its most enthusiastic advocates or detractors claim. It is not the widely known caricature that circulates among the common folk of Ghelspad. To understand the City of Pleasures and its place in the world, one must go back to the beginning before the city was founded, many millennia before the present era when Scarn was not yet the Scarred Lands, when the gods were naught but the children of the titans. There one can first see the series of events that have created modern Shelzar and have set the city apart from all others on Ghelspad.

The Empire of Flame

After the fall of the Asaatthi Empire, a new empire arose in the region of the Sweltering Plains. To this day, no one recalls that empire's true name, for it has been lost in the mists of time. Loremasters and sages often refer to it as the "Empire of Flame" due to the legions of fire-wielding sorcerers who made up



its armies. The majority of scholars believe that humans who worshipped the titan Thulkas, the Father of Fire, ruled this empire. Of course, no one knows this for certain, and the identity of the empire's rulers is still a common bone of contention between cantankerous scholars — as with so many aspects of the Empire of Flame, there is insufficient evidence to make any definitive statement. Indeed, there are some sages who claim that the empire was rather a true successor state to the Asaatthi Empire, a fragment of that reptilian realm that survived the fall of its parent, while others claim that elves or perhaps orcs or some other titanspawn ruled the Empire.

What seems certain is that the Empire of Flame controlled the lands bordered by the Swamps of Kan Thet in the west, the Sweltering Plains in the north, the Broadreach River in the east, and the Blossoming Sea in the south. The style and form of the ruins suggest that humans or creatures of similar size and habits were its masters. The Sweltering Plains boast many examples of such ruins, the vast majority of which seem to have been military or religious in nature. Both types of ruin show a distinctive flame motif (such as crenellations along their tops whose shapes are reminiscent of billowing flames), as well as a preference for construction from sturdy granite, embellished with precious materials like jade and ivory.

Although there is little evidence that the Empire of Flame built any permanent settlements on the eventual site of Shelzar (although there is some circumstantial support for this theory), it is clear that there is at least a cultural connection between the fire-worshipping nation and the realms that later occupied this area. For one, the Empire's architectural style and construction techniques were almost certainly an inspiration for its successors. Contemporary Shelzar makes use of fiery motifs in many of its oldest buildings. These same buildings also use similar materials to their ancient antecedents, right down to the embellishments of jade and ivory.

Some sages argue, though, and not without reason, that in the area of construction materials, at least, there is no necessary connection between the Empire of Flame and modern Shelzar. The commonality is an accident of geology and nothing more — the Mounds of Man contain deposits of jade and caches of ivory from the tusks of ancient animals, as well as granite. In all likelihood, the civilizations that rose and fell in this area would all use similar materials, because that is what they had at hand. This argument is persuasive and is the one accepted among the loremasters of Lokil, many of whom are quite knowledgeable about this region.

At the same time, geology and architecture are not the only points of connection between the mysterious Empire of Flame and modern Shelzar. As noted above, the Empire's sorcerers (it seems that wizards were rare, if not nonexistent among them) used of fire and flame extensively and to good effect — a tradition continued by the cultures that grew up in its wake, including that of Shelzar. More significantly, these same sorcerers were renowned for their command of elemental spirits, particularly genies of various sorts, but most often summoning and binding efreeti as servants. In most cases, they bound the efreeti for a year and a day or even longer, after which time the spirits were allowed to return to their home in the City of Brass. In rare cases, genies were bound in perpetuity and used as the power source for strange magical engines and artifacts, only a few of which have survived the centuries. The summoning and binding of genies and other elemental spirits has remained an important part of the local culture — an indelible mark of the Empire of Flame's influence.

Like all mortal things, however, the Empire of Flame fell. Again, there is no certain explanation for its demise. One theory is that it fell before the might of the Slarecian Empire, as evidenced by the sorry state of many ruins dating from that period, which appear to have been destroyed rather than simply to have decayed with the passage of time. Other scholars agree that the Empire of Flame was overthrown in battle, but favor a renewed Asaatthi Empire as the conqueror. The existence of this "Neo-Asaatthi Empire" is conjectural at best, but that fact has not stopped its being debated hotly in halls of learning across Ghelspad.

Neither of these theses is as popular as that proposed by Oskood Maks, a loremaster of the Order of the Closed Book, who has argued quite famously that it was the Empire's utter dependence on genies that ultimately spelled its doom. According to Maks, when the genies were no longer available — either because of some magical catastrophe or trickery on their own part — it found itself unable to maintain order or to administer necessary tasks and thus quickly collapsed. Contemporary Shelzari scholar Shajida Hejan has refuted this theory, claiming that Maks anachronistically confuses later events during the Empire of Shelzar with those of the Empire of Flame. Hejan instead prefers the notion that the Empire of Flame never truly fell, but rather was absorbed by the Empire of Lede, which incorporated its lands and customs into itself. Needless to say, Maks dismisses Hejan's theory as rubbish, which has created a furor in some academies of western Ghelspad that very few others find the least bit interesting.

The Slarecian Empire

At its height, the Slarecian Empire was one of the mightiest ever to exist upon Scarn. Nearly all of Ghelspad was under its power. Its rulers were an enigmatic people whose true origins remain unknown. They may have been travelers from another plane or may have been primal forces like the titans themselves. Whatever the case, the Slarecians paid little heed to either titans or gods. Indeed, these mysterious beings were arrogant enough to wage war upon the gods — and powerful enough to succeed. They slew Hadarus, son of Belsameth, in battle, and they captured Drendari, from whom they stole the secrets of shadow magic. Their empire left an undeniably lasting mark upon the face of Scarn.

The details of the Slarecian Empire's rise and fall are the purview of only a few dedicated sages. Still, as is not the case with the Empire of Flame, there are more than enough details to piece together a history of the Slarecians' reign if one wishes to do so. These matters have little to do with the history of Shelzar and the surrounding areas, although it would be wrong to assume from this that the Slarecians had no impact in this region. Like the Empire of Flame, the Slarecian Empire exerted a powerful sway over the lands it governed, including the lands south of the Mounds of Man, then called Zathiske. However, the Slarecian influence is far subtler and less likely to be noticed than that of the Empire of Flame, except by a trained observer familiar with the history of the Slarecians.

One instance of this influence is evident in the esteem with which the peoples of this area, including contemporary Shelzar, regard sorcerers. On one hand, this attitude is simply an outgrowth of the influence of the Empire of Flame, where sorcerers were likewise held in high regard; yet on the other hand, it reflects a very real prejudice that dates back to the time of the titans when wizards were deemed "unnatural" — their powers did not stem from an inborn gift as did sorcerers'. At various times, followers of Mesos persecuted wizards and other "perverse" or "deviant" arcane magic-wielders.

That the Slarecians stole Drendari's shadow magic and thus mastered arcane magic without possessing a natural aptitude for the art only reinforced this prejudice. Ruling from their subterranean realms, the Slarecians have become bogeymen in the eyes of many inhabitants of Ghelspad, quintessential embodiments of evil. The titans certainly saw them as such, as did the gods, for these two groups cooperated to an un-

precedented degree to destroy their common foe. After the Slarecians' eventual defeat, wizardry spread, taught by the penumbral lords. In time, it was accepted in most quarters, but the old customs die hard in some places. Shelzar has held on to its ancient prejudices, and to this day sorcerers are seen as more respectable practitioners of arcane magic.

As is always the case when an evil empire rises up, there were those during the reign of the Slarecian Empire who decided that it was better to sell their souls to its leaders than to be ground beneath its boot: these turncoats, known as the *Nasirsa* (an ancient name whose meaning is unclear), became the Slarecians' chosen lieutenants. They dominated their fellows and received special treatment from their masters. It was from the *Nasirsa* that the first penumbral lords were drawn, although others soon joined that group's ranks and the penumbral lords were eventually organized into a society known as the Eyes in the Night.

When the gods and titans joined forces to overthrow the Slarecians, the *Nasirsa* went into hiding. Being survivors, they recognized that, if they remained, they would suffer greatly at the hands of those over whom they once ruled. Yet despite their flight, the *Nasirsa* never abandoned the Slarecian cause, unlike their rivals, the Eyes in the Night, who refused to aid the ancient ones during the war. Certainly the *Nasirsa* understood that it would be some time — perhaps centuries or more, if ever — before their masters could once again claim their rightful place as the rulers of Scarn. Until then, the loyal servants would use what they had been taught to pave the way for that fateful day. In remaining faithful to the Slarecians, the *Nasirsa* hoped they would gain a favored place when their masters returned.

Unfortunately, the Slarecians seemed little interested in pursuing any such return, at least in the short term. After the first few generations, the *Nasirsa* grew impatient and attempted to rouse their masters into action against their enemies. However, the Slarecians were unable or unwilling to leave their subterranean lairs to war against the gods, the titans, and their enemies' various servants. Frustrated, the *Nasirsa* broke away from the Slarecians and quickly fragmented into multiple factions, many of which worked behind the scenes for their own ends. Using the shadow magic the Slarecians had taught them, the descendants of the *Nasirsa* fanned out across Ghelspad and set themselves up in the dark corners of the continent, where they plotted and planned their own rise to power.

Over time, this process was repeated again and again, as secret societies continued to fragment and form new factions, each with a new agenda that bore only a passing resemblance to the previous ideology of the group. Naturally, many of these splinter groups became public organizations and even religions, their true origins long forgotten. In the modern day, few remember these errant children of the Nasirsa or understand their philosophies and practices. The names of the Imrin, Yaq, Bakraji, and Asiriab sects are now virtually unknown. All that is known for certain is that such groups shared a hatred for gods and titans both, rejecting them and their powers — distant echoes of the Slarecians' long-ago war.

Yet one of these secret sects did indeed survive and prosper. While the rest died out, this one flourished, finding many converts among the coastal fisher-folk of the Blossoming Sea. Known as the Hazari, these religious reformers preached an austere but simple message that would spread like wildfire within a few short years before the entire movement would collapse into a mockery of itself.

The Hazari

The Hazari were very far removed from their Nasirsa origins, so much so that even they no longer remembered the Slarecian empire or its war against the gods and titans, but the connection was apparent to those who had the eyes to see it. The Hazari were a religious reform movement that rejected both the gods and the titans — an obvious example of Slarecian influence. Similar in many ways to more primitive animistic religions, the Hazari considered all living things to be sacred. They revered the material world and saw it as the only true source of divinity. Thus, mortal beings — as well as animals, plants, and other forms of life — were superior to both titans and gods, whom they considered alien entities without any true connection to Scarn, flighty and contradictory beings, filled with unquenchable passions and given to destructive rages. The Hazari saw nothing worthy of worship in the divinities' actions. On the contrary, they saw only immorality.

The Hazari worried that if mortal beings imitated the titans and gods, they would lead ruinous lives without value or meaning. Worse still, they felt that mortals would fail to see the divinity that existed with themselves: they would never develop their souls to the fullest possible extent, and would remain fixed in a lower plane of awareness, like caterpillars that never emerged from their chrysalises — or that never spun any at all. This belief in the innate potential of mortal

beings is another echo of Slarecian influence. Although few even among the earliest Hazari possessed psionic powers, enough of them did that they were seen not as unnatural but as an example of mortals' own nascent divinity. The Hazari taught that such mental powers were the birthright of all mortal beings, if they only focused their minds and lived in accordance with virtuous teachings. To that end, the Hazari destroyed books and artifacts about the titans and gods. They defaced artwork made in their honor. They harassed bards and storytellers who told tales of these immortal beings. The Hazari did everything they could to discourage mortals from treating the titans and gods as anything but an impediment to their own spiritual awakening.

At first, there was resistance to the Hazari message. Even though people saw the destruction wrought by the titans, they were not yet ready to reject them. Out of fear as much as reverence, they saw the Hazari message as dangerous. Indeed, the first great Hazari prophet Maleeha Al-Rhud was martyred after defacing an image of the titan Kadum in the now-lost city of Nurah. Her daughter and successor, Dalayah Al-Rhud, was likewise slain, she at the hands of an angry coterie of goldsmiths who feared that her sermons against crafting images of the titans might catch on with the masses and deprive them of their livelihoods. Despite these setbacks, the Hazari pressed on and preached their message of spiritual growth, a growth free from the terror of the titans and the passions of the gods.

Yet, as is so often the case, a more pragmatic leader was needed to turn this spiritual movement into an unstoppable force. Hakhiya Aboussa was a former mercenary who had fought numerous wars and had suffered mightily in each of them. He had lost his family and bore the physical scars of his warrior's life. Hakhiya had seen firsthand the dangers the titans and gods posed, which is why he was drawn to the Hazari movement. He heard Dalayah Al-Rhud preach in a long-forgotten village where he was convalescing after one of his more serious battle wounds. Entranced by her words (and some say by her beauty as well), Hakhiya took up the Hazari cause and left his life as a mercenary behind him. He instead became Dalayah's bodyguard and devoted himself to defending her from any who might harm her.

Even though Hakhiya was unable to save Dalayah from the unruly mob that eventually killed her, his stature among the Hazari was by that time secure. The other members of the group turned to him in those dark days after the martyrdom of their second prophet. Hakhiya considered himself ill suited to lead the Hazari. He was a

soldier, not a philosopher. He hated the titans and the gods and wholeheartedly believed in the Hazari message of spiritual enlightenment. Yet he was no public speaker, no preacher. How could he lead the Hazari? How could he take up the mantle of the courageous women who had come before him?

The New Prophet

Rather than try to emulate his predecessors, Hakhiya decided to take a very different approach: He emphasized the sect's respect for the material world and all its pleasures. Despite their unrelenting drive to censor literature and destroy artwork relating to the divinities, the Hazari did not reject the world itself. In fact, they embraced it. True, they placed intellectual pleasures on a higher plane than physical ones, but they considered both to be genuine spiritual revenue. So, the Hazari enjoyed life to the fullest. They threw boisterous celebrations filled with drinking, eating, and lovemaking. They considered such acts and revels to be the birthright and the epitome of mortal existence.

The Hazari were hedonists in the truest sense of the term — they valued only pleasure. Yet, they were not ruled by it. They recognized that pleasure could lead to excess, which was the cardinal sin of titans and gods alike. Pleasure must be moderated. It must be taken in appropriate measure and kept in check by discipline. Thus the first maxim of the Hazari: *To indulge in a pleasurable act is to live as a mortal. To be ruled by it is to be no better than the gods or titans.* The Hazari walked a fine tightrope between austerity and excess, since neither extreme was conducive to the spiritual enlightenment they preached and desired.

Not surprisingly, Hakhiya's new approach started to win converts. The Hazaris' reputation as dour puritans was very quickly transformed. More and more people accepted their teachings and embraced them wholeheartedly. Admittedly, many of these new converts did so out a false belief that the Hazari led lives of debauchery, filled with wine-besotted orgies, but they were soon disappointed. While the Hazari did not shy away from indulging in pleasure, they always did so within a context of enlightened spiritual development and personal discipline. To a few, this was far worse than if the sect were actually made up of a bunch of repressed, self-flagellating ascetics. Yet the multitudes who accepted Hazari teachings saw in it a chance to free themselves from bondage to titans or gods, and to develop their own potential. In those later days before the Divine War, Hazari doctrine and practices made a heady combination.

Hakhiya also created a group of defenders for the sect. Twice the Hazari had been robbed of their prophet because they lacked the ability to protect her from harm. Hakhiya was not about to let that mistake be repeated a third time, especially now that he was the sect's prophet! Therefore, a cadre of elite warriors known as the *Haz a' Shien* or "Guardians of the Truth" was born. Trained both as traditional fighters and as masters of stealth and shadow, the *Haz a' Shien* proved more than effective in protecting Hakhiya and other important members of the Hazari. As the sect's philosophy gained more and more adherents, it met with increasing resistance from the clergy of both the titans and the gods. The priests of Mesos were especially opposed to the Hazari, with their emphasis on mortals' acquiring new abilities through discipline rather than through birth. The servants of Chardun were likewise less than enthusiastic about the Hazari and attempted to slay Hakhiya several times — but they were continually foiled by the *Haz a' Shien*.

Shai al Hazari

As the ranks of the Hazari grew, Hakhiya Aboussa realized that the time would come when they would need more than the *Haz a' Shien* to protect them from the gods and titans and their followers. So it was that the Hazari sought to create a citadel in which to reside, safe from the depredations of their many enemies. At first, Hakhiya felt that the sect could simply occupy and build up an already-existing town or fortress. However, none of the cities or towns of Zathiske contained enough Hazari followers to make this practicable. Hakhiya rejected the possibility of conquest. The *Haz a' Shien* were a relatively small and largely defensive force who attacked only when the sect or its members were threatened. They were not intended to be an army.

Therefore, Hakhiya decided instead to take the Hazari, who now numbered in the hundreds, to a virgin locale along the coast of the Blossoming Sea, just south of the mouth of the Broadreach River. The prophet of the Hazari had had great success in converting the inhabitants of the nearby towns to the sect. He reasoned that founding a new town not far from them would be a reasonable course of action. Likewise, access to the sea might one day come in handy, either as an escape route or as an avenue for sending out missionaries to other parts of Ghelspad. For now, though, such concerns were for the future. Hakhiya was more interested in surviving the war-torn present, in which the Hazari were still persecuted for their unorthodox beliefs.

The spot that Hakhiya chose for the sect's redoubt might never have been occupied by man or beast, it seemed, but for the presence of an ancient arch and an equally ancient bridge that both stood intact, apart from any other landmarks (see Chapter 3: "Old Gate" and "The Alabaster Bridge"). Taking these mysterious structures as a fortuitous sign, Hakhiya emphasized in a sermon before his assembled people that the new "fortress of the Hazari" — or *Shai al Hazari* — would mark a new beginning for the sect. No longer would they wander homeless in the world. No longer would they rely upon the good will of others to survive. No longer would they live in fear of men or the divine beings they served. Here, in this new home, the Hazari would forge their own destiny and become a shining beacon for all of Ghelspad. They would show the peoples of Scarn what mortals can achieve when they apply themselves with great discipline and an even greater love of life.

Shelzar was born.

A New Age

Shai al Hazari proved to be less successful than Hakhiya Aboussa had hoped. This is not to say the city was a failure, for it was not. In many ways, the city exceeded the expectations of its visionary founder. Within half a century, its population had grown to three times its original size, almost all of whom were devout members of the Hazari sect. The city's inhabitants followed the Hazari principles so well that the city was nothing less than the sect writ large. Constructed according to a precise plan from local deposits of granite, Shai al Hazari was neither utilitarian nor frivolous in its plan. A demonstrably "Hazarian" combination of logic and esthetics governed its architects. Even those who detested the Hazari and their bizarre philosophies could not deny the beauty of their citadel by the sea.

Yet admiration is one thing, and tolerance is another. Even as Shai al Hazari prospered, its enemies gathered. They were many. The followers of the titans, particularly Mesos, had not slackened in their hatred for the Hazari. In this they were joined by the disciples of Chardun, who likewise resented the Hazari's brazen rebellion against its betters. Several of the nearby towns had grown less fond of Shai al Hazari as the years wore on. As the city grew, so too did the trade it attracted, especially sea trade. While this helped Shai al Hazari to prosper, it became a matter of dispute among her neighbors. It was thus only a matter of time before these enemies decided, whether singly or in tandem, to attack the city and extirpate the Hazari from the face of Scarn.

Here Hakhiya Aboussa's vision, or at least that of his disciples, fell short of the mark. The original plans for the city to be an impregnable fortress had been abandoned shortly after the prophet's death. His successors saw little point in devoting so many resources to defense when they enjoyed such good relations with the nearby towns and settlements — and at that time, their reasoning was sound. Yet now that the Hazari Sultan (as the prophet had come to be called) had achieved a utopia by building Shai al Hazari, ruling thousands of men, women, and children from several races (many halflings and dwarves had joined the sect), the Hazari could not see their enemies stirring. They were fulfilling their destiny as the "Shining City" for all to see. Soon, they believed, all who saw them would reject the titans and the gods and see the immortals for the agents of destruction that they were. Truly, they believed, a Golden Age was at hand.

Not surprisingly, the Hazari did not see the attack their enemies were planning. Acting in concert, an army loyal to Mesos, allied with a force of mercenaries hired by several of the surrounding titan-friendly settlements, marched on Shai al Hazari with the intention of razing it and killing all its inhabitants. For too long the sect had been a thorn in their sides. They would no longer allow the citadel to exist unmolested, out of fear that the Hazari's vision would come to pass and that even more fools would take up their philosophy. This army, which outnumbered the inhabitants of Shai al Hazari by at least three to one, surrounded the city. Its leader, a servant and priest of Mesos called Odermar Ludnitz, demanded that all the inhabitants of the city leave its walls so that they might be slain in an orderly fashion rather than through a protracted siege. Ludnitz promised that their deaths would be quick and humane compared to the fate that was in store for them if they refused.

The leadership of the Hazari was paralyzed. They cursed themselves for being so shortsighted in having rejected Hakhiya's original vision for the city. The ranks of the Hazari had grown along with the city, but they were still too few in number, despite their formidable skills, to fight the army assembled outside the walls. Likewise, the Hazari lacked any divine spellcasters as a consequence of their philosophy. In fact, no temples of any sort existed in the city, which was one of the complaints Ludnitz made in his communications with the Sultan. He claimed that the sect had violated the natural order of the world by denying the titans (he was less interested in the gods) their rightful worship, which he said was due them by every mortal being on Scarn.

These words shocked the Hazari. Secure in their utopia, they had failed to recall how much their unusual philosophy had angered others in the past: The Hazari were a threat to the old order of the world and could not be allowed to continue. These realizations stiffened the resolve of the Hazari Sultan, who decided, with the nearly unanimous consent of the city's inhabitants, to resist the army that had come to destroy them. Inside the walls of Shai al Hazari, they prepared to wage a guerrilla war, fighting from house to house and using every wile they could muster. They understood that the odds were against them, resoundingly so. They knew that their efforts would most likely be in vain. Nevertheless, they prepared to defend themselves as best they could. The Hazari were prepared to fight — and to die — for their beliefs.

They never had the chance.

The Ledeans to the Rescue

While Shai al Hazari had been rising, thousands of leagues away on almost the other end of Ghelspad, the Empire of Lede, its capital at Aurimar, had been expanding and consolidating its power. Lede was far and away the mightiest and most prosperous state in Ghelspad. Its generals had fought under the gods against the Slarecians. They had not only witnessed great destruction, but had also been tempered in battle like few others. They knew the costs of war — but they also knew its glories. Thus, when their Emperor commanded them to bring order and rule to the continent, they were more than ready to do so.

The Ledeans forces had slowly worked their way across the continent. They fought innumerable foes and won more battles than their generals could count. Truly, the Empire of Lede was a force to be reckoned with: its armies were then without equal. In the space of just a few short years, they had conquered most of Ghelspad. Sweeping down from what is now the Perforated Plains, the Ledeans sought nothing less than universal dominion over all other nations and cities. Nothing could escape their control, for if any nation or state did so, it might become a source of instability and a haven for malcontents. The entirety of Ghelspad would be brought within the Empire — including Shai al Hazari.

The Ledeans had been making their way down the coast of western Ghelspad. Along the way they had learned of Shai al Hazari and all the other cities of the south. Their intelligence was very good. They knew of the war brewing between the cities of the Zathiske region. Following their standard military procedure, they would

allow the Zathiskans to weaken themselves through internecine squabbles until they were spent. Then, the Ledeans armies would make their way into the war-ravaged area and face little or no resistance. The seasoned generals of the Empire knew well that one of the secrets of empire-building was fighting battles only when necessary.

Yet General Cunion Duathai was the commander of the Ledeans expeditionary force that traversed the coast of the Blossoming Sea. Duathai had an impressive record of victories to his name and had impressed his superiors in Aurimar with his single-minded dedication to the Ledeans cause. He had a quick mind and also a thoughtful demeanor, being a devout follower of the god Hedrada. When Duathai's scouts returned to tell him that their intelligence was accurate and that Shai al Hazari's enemies were preparing to lay siege to it, Duathai decided to depart from standard imperial procedures. Instead of waiting for the two forces to exhaust themselves before moving in, he ordered his army to engage the titan army. He instructed his troops to destroy them and to leave the city intact if at all possible. Duathai could not allow the Hazari to be destroyed — at least not until he had discovered the truth behind the stories about the sect.

In his journey southward, Duathai had heard tales of the Hazari and their unusual philosophy, and he was intrigued: he simply he could not believe that any group calling itself enlightened would be foolish enough to deny the power of the gods and the titans. Surely the stories he had heard about the Hazari were exaggerated. Besides, the intelligence he had suggested the Hazari were incapable of mounting much of a resistance, certainly not against the entire Ledeans force under his command. If the sect failed to satisfy his intellectual curiosity, he would have all its members put to the sword and the city burned. From Duathai's perspective, it made little difference that he had deviated from the usual course of action.

As Duathai had expected, the forces arrayed against Shai al Hazari were ineffectual against his disciplined imperial troops. The Ledeans crushed the army of Mesos and scattered the other mercenary soldiers with minimal effort. The Hazari were dumbfounded. They had not anticipated that they might be saved by outsiders — let alone outsiders who served the gods. They had no idea how to react when Cunion Duathai sent a messenger into the city requesting that he be allowed to enter its walls to speak with its leaders, including the Sultan. They were, of course, ecstatic that the Ledeans did not seem bent on their destruction, but the Hazari

remained understandably skeptical of the newcomers' true intentions. With some reluctance, they allowed Duathai to enter the city, along with a handful of bodyguards and advisors.

Compromises

Akooro Ta'andi was at this time the Sultan of Shai al Hazari. Though he was not a prophet in the same sense as any of his predecessors, he had been chosen by the elders of the sect to speak and act on their behalf. It was he who greeted Cunion Duathai when he entered Shai al Hazari on that fateful day. Ta'andi did his best to be a gracious host, yet he could scarcely contain his contempt for this warrior who served the gods. By this time, the Hazari had grown arrogant and self-satisfied, sure of their own superiority and the correctness of their own perspective. (In fact, there was little wonder that the forces of Mesos and others had chosen to destroy Shai al Hazari.)

Unfortunately for Ta'andi, the Ledeian general surprised him a second time. Rather than argue with the Hazari or scold them for the foolishness of their ideology, Duathai approached them as if he were a supplicant. He beseeched Ta'andi to instruct him in Hazari ways. He explained how he had come to learn about the Hazari and had been intrigued by the tales of their beliefs; ever truthful, he openly admitted that he could find little sense in their beliefs. Nevertheless, Duathai explained, it was cardinal principle of his own faith to be open to the minds of others, for true wisdom could come only from looking at the world from as many perspectives as possible: The truly enlightened do not privilege their own experiences or give in to preconceptions.

Ta'andi had no idea what to make of this enigmatic foreign warrior and his seemingly earnest desire to serve the truth. As he prepared to give Duathai the standard catechism of Hazari beliefs, the general interrupted. He admitted that his interest in the Hazari was not merely an academic one; it was strategic. He then explained the goals of the Empire of Lede — to bring order to all of Ghelspad. He recounted that he had not hesitated to destroy cities and sell populations into slavery if they proved too intractable or too opposed to the Ledeian cause. Duathai admitted that, although he served Hedrada faithfully, his true master was his Emperor in Aurimar. That emperor wished nothing less than to rule Ghelspad, whatever the cost. As his general, Duathai had sworn a sacred vow before Hedrada to give his emperor just that or to die trying. Therefore, what he wanted to know from Ta'andi was whether the Hazari were indeed as inflexible

and narrow-minded as he had been led to believe. Did they truly reject the titans and the gods? Would they force that peculiar opinion on others who did not share it?

Ta'andi, no fool, could see where Duathai's line of questioning led. The general wished to know whether the Hazari would be willing to die for their beliefs or if there were grounds for compromise. In fact, the Ledeians had come not to liberate but to conquer. Unlike the armies they had dispersed, however, the Ledeians were willing to let the Hazari go about their ways in peace, provided the Hazari allowed others to do the same. Unless the Hazari were willing to open up their city to others yet allow them to go about their business unmolested, Duathai would have no choice but to complete the task he had interrupted. There was room for many philosophies under Ledeian rule, but there was no room for troublemakers. If the Hazari were willing to accept the Emperor in Aurimar as their ruler, Duathai would allow Shai al Hazari to stand and its inhabitants to live. Indeed, he promised that, under Ledeian administration, it would grow and prosper to an extent previously unimagined.

Akooro Ta'andi returned to the elders of the Hazari and told them of Duathai's ultimatum: either Shai al Hazari would allow the followers of the gods and the titans to walk unmolested within its walls, or it would be destroyed. Despite the portentous events of that day — or perhaps because of them — the Hazari leadership proved less willing to accept martyrdom a second time. Instead of ordering the city's inhabitants to die rather than submit, the Hazari acquiesced to the Ledeians' demands. The city would embrace its new emperor and would open its gates to others, even to those whose beliefs were opposed to their own.

Cunion Duathai's predictions came to pass. When the Hazari accepted Ledeian sovereignty, the Empire funneled extensive resources into turning Shai al Hazari into one of the brightest jewels in its crown. Within a decade, the city outgrew its walls and expanded in all directions. Shai al Hazari was no longer the sole refuge of a peculiar religious sect, but it was now one of the most important cities in all of Ghelspad, attracting merchants and travelers from all over the continent. With Ledeian protection, it had no need to worry about threatening neighbors, and the Hazari were allowed to practice their beliefs in peace, so long as they continued to acknowledge Ledeian supremacy and did not attempt to force their philosophy on those around them.

These demands were not especially difficult to meet. Though brutal in their rule elsewhere, the Ledeans applied a soft touch to Shai al Hazari, especially in the early years of their dominion. Cunion Duathai saw to this, leading by example when he became the city's first Imperial Governor. During his thirty-year reign over the Hazari, he proved as thoughtful and open-minded as he had ever been. If anything, these traits became even more pronounced in him as he aged. Duathai spent much of his time conversing with the leaders of the Hazari, with whom he enjoyed discussing philosophical matters. Legend has it that the old general even contemplated joining the sect shortly before he died, but there is little historical evidence to back up this claim. This did not stop some factions within the Hazari from claiming him as one of their own, and some say this ploy worked: shortly after Duathai's death there was a sudden increase in converts to the sect, although there is no proof of a direct correlation between the two events. Nevertheless, Cunion Duathai remained a revered figure in Shai al Hazari for generations to come. Whether or not he actually joined the Hazari does not detract from his other gifts to them, most especially his prevention of their destruction at the hands of their enemies.

Shelzar of Lede

Under Ledeans rule, Shai al Hazari underwent numerous changes, some radical but most subtle. Not all came about immediately, but many did, for the pace of change could not be slowed despite the efforts of conservative Hazari to stem the tide of "alien" ideas encroaching on their city and its people. The Ledeans were a syncretistic people. They freely mixed and matched elements of one belief system with another, creating a blend that was neither one nor the other. This outlook served the Ledeans well, for it allowed them to maintain the pragmatism that had, in part, won them greatest empire in all of Ghelspad. As more and more Ledeans came to Shai al Hazari, it was inevitable that there would be changes. Thus, the city began its remarkable transformation from Shai al Hazari, refuge of the purist Hazari, to Shelzar of Lede, the most decadent place on Scarn.

Zathiskite Province

As was their wont, the Ledeans amalgamated Shai al Hazari and several other cities and territories in the area to create the new Zathiskite Province. By all rights, Shai al Hazari should have become the capital of the new province; its remarkable growth and strategic position on the sea



made it an ideal place for the empire to place its local administration. However, the court at Aurimar did not fully trust the Hazari, despite Cunion Duathai's glowing reports and high opinion of the sect. The emperor and his advisors believed, perhaps rightly, that the Hazari were only reluctant citizens of the Empire, their loyalty bought with fear and not genuine affection. Consequently, the emperor did not feel it wise to entrust the entirety of the province's governance to people such as this.

Instead, the Ledeans opted for a novel solution to their concerns. As Duathai had recommended, the Hazari could keep their Sultan, although he would be required to make a semi-annual pilgrimage to Aurimar to make obeisance to the emperor. The Imperial Governor would be the supreme Ledeans authority in the Zathiskite Province and would oversee the bulk of its administration. Thus, Shai al Hazari, which the Ledeans (owing to their fondness for linguistic contraction) started calling Shelzar, was the administrative capital of the province. The military administration was placed elsewhere, in the city of Quelsk, further up the coast and on the other side of the Broadreach River. The Governor was still the emperor's chief lieutenant, but the Master of Arms at Quelsk, who acted as the Governor's military attaché, assisted him in those duties. The Ledeans believed that this division of authority would make it more difficult for the Hazari to seize the imperial armory and launch a rebellion against their rule.

The Empire nevertheless placed a sizable garrison in Shelzar and kept a careful eye on the Hazari. They likewise stepped up their efforts to introduce temples to the gods and titans into the city. The Ledeans were nothing if not masters of statecraft. They hoped that the presence of so many foreign temples and ideas would weaken the zeal of the Hazari and pave the way for their becoming good imperial citizens. In this hope, they were both more and less right than they knew.

Transformation

Existing only because the Ledeans chose not to crush them, the Hazari slowly sank into despair. Their ancestors had been so sure of the rightness of their philosophy. Yet, time after time, the mortal servants of the titans and gods had bullied and threatened them. In the end, only the good graces of a man devoted to one of the gods, Hedrada, had saved them and their beloved refuge by the sea. Ledeans and other subject peoples now streamed into the city. In fact, these foreigners were quickly becoming a sizable minority. The Hazari leadership, including its Sultan, who was

now little more than a figurehead spiritual leader, feared that it would only be a matter of time before the "fortress of the Hazari" was no more, with the foreign Shelzar of Lede taking its place.

There was little they could do. While some Hazari preached resistance against the Ledeans and their ways, their new masters quickly put these dissenters down. The Ledeans were a tolerant people, so long as that tolerance did not undermine their rule. It was one thing to allow a defeated city to retain its distinctive customs and traditions, but it was another to endure sedition. After a handful of incidents involving traditionalist Hazari, the Ledeans stepped in and deposed the current Sultan, Mufeer Haab, replacing him with a more malleable member of the sect, Zaa'awa Eloud.

This was a standard tactic among the Ledeans, who regularly placed their own pretenders on local thrones. Eloud was little more than a puppet of the Governor, trotted out whenever the Empire needed to ensure the compliance of the Hazari. While the intelligentsia of the sect rejected Eloud and grew to resent the Ledeans even more (it was they who defamed the memory of Akooro Ta'andi, whom they blamed for the city's predicament), the average believer accepted their new Sultan. Eloud was an excellent diplomat and speaker, and a devout member of the sect whose parables and teachings contained insights accessible to everyone, not merely to the enlightened members of the upper classes.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of the Hazari preferred their Ledeans-appointed Sultan to the dour old men of the sect's academies. Under Eloud's sultanate, the Hazari reemphasized the joys that life has to offer. They did not abandon their commitment to spiritual enlightenment free from the dominion of the gods, but they came to understand that goal as a long-term one that might take untold eons to complete: For now, the Hazari had to live in the world — one dominated by the gods' servants — so they might as well accept their fate with equanimity. There was, Eloud taught, no reason why one could not be both a good imperial subject and a good Hazari. The only incompatibility between the two, he asserted, arose in the minds of those who could not think broadly enough.

Under the guidance of Eloud and other likeminded sultans, the Hazari continued their slow transformation. Over the course of many decades, the sect placed increasingly less emphasis on its hatred of the titans and gods. Instead, the quest for personal enlightenment took center stage, albeit in a modified form. *The delights of the*

world must be sampled, the Hazari now taught, for only by knowing all pleasures can one distinguish sufficiently the good from the ill. Theoretical questions took second place to a zest for new experiences that bordered on hedonism — a betrayal of the Hazari's original teachings.

The vast majority of the Hazari accepted this transformation. Indeed, many Hazari scholars argued that this new interpretation of their teachings was in fact truer to its origins than was the more austere faith practiced in the days of the prophets. Bit by bit, the Hazari, who now called themselves the Elzan (following Ledean practice), acquiesced to the ways of their imperial overlords. With each step, their leaders and their Sultan justified these changes as being in accordance with Hazari tradition and teachings, despite ample evidence to the contrary.

The Elzan were now such enthusiastic imperial subjects that even began to forget the true history of their city and its people. The Sultan Akooro Ta'andi was rehabilitated and hailed as a hero. According to this new interpretation of history, Ta'andi had invited Cunion Duathai and the Ledean into Shelzar because he saw in the general the seeds of greatness. As this new version of the story told it, Ta'andi had learned through his command of genies (of course, the real Ta'andi had not the least bit of skill at summoning genies) that Empire of Lede was a just and righteous realm whose rulers acted in a fashion compatible with the ancient Hazari faith. Ta'andi thus reasoned that the faith — and the Elzan — would be better served by allying with the Ledean. After all, how could the Elzan philosophy spread throughout the world if its enemies destroyed it? Thus, most histories now tell that the Sultan of Shelzar voluntarily joined his lands to the mighty Empire of Lede.

The Elzan prospered under Ledean rule. The combination of their disciplined lifestyle and their acceptance of their rulers' ways created a dynamic city. Shelzar's economy thrived, eventually dominating the entire surrounding province and the lands beyond. Indeed, even the nearby Venirian Province fell under Elzan influence. The court at Aurimar took note of this and at last decided that Shelzar had proven itself a true and faithful subject of the empire. The suspicions of the past were long forgotten. Given the city's great population, its renowned centers of learning, and its mercantile muscle, the emperor ordered a full transfer of all provincial administration to Shelzar. Quelsk would retain nominal control of the military, with the Master of Arms being headquartered there, but the bulk of his forces would be stationed in Shelzar.

Upon the announcement of this newfound honor, Shelzar erupted into spontaneous celebration that quickly spread throughout the city. The old Hazari love of the pleasures of the world came out in full force, as revelers flooded the streets and wine flooded the revelers. Remembered as the "Day of Illumination," this celebration marked the coming of age of Shelzar and the beginning of its rise to prominence in the annals of history. Prior to this time, very few history books have much to say of the city beyond its association with the Hazari, a sect whose original teachings were already on their way to dissolution.

The culmination of the Day of Illumination was a tour of the Ledean temples by Sultan Jamadir Baghali, who broke with longstanding Hazari tradition in making this act of reconciliation. The Ledean governor was impressed and praised Baghali as a genuine visionary and true son of the empire. For the truly traditionalist Hazari, however, Baghali's act was a final treason. Something had to be done.

The Night of Majeel

Although it was relatively small, the diehard traditionalist faction within the Elzan (who still referred to themselves as the Hazari) still numbered in the hundreds and included numerous important and wealthy individuals. Chief among them was Ma'ed Al-Yaqa, a merchant whose family had been members of the Hazari for centuries and who had walked with Hakhiya Aboussa when he first founded Shai al Hazari. Al-Yaqa and his fellows had watched with horror as the principles and integrity of the Hazari were slowly bled away by Ledean influence. Al-Yaqa concluded that when even the Sultan himself was guilty of such a betrayal, the time had come for *majeel* — revenge.

Al-Yaqa and his allies pooled their resources and spent the next several years funding a squad of deadly warriors who would carry out their will. They called their assassins the Haz a'Shien, modeling them on that group's long-defunct predecessors. Al-Yaqa and his allies would initiate a reign of terror in Shelzar, one that would simultaneously eliminate those who had betrayed the Hazari philosophy and teach the Ledean that the spirit of the sect had not yet been crushed. The conspirators hoped that somehow they would frighten off the Ledean and encourage the Elzan to return to the purity of their Hazari faith.

On a terrible night known to history as the "Night of Majeel," dozens of these new Haz a'Shien fanned out across the city and exacted their masters' revenge. Among the casualties were Sultan Jamadir Baghali and the imperial governor

Sinnath Madaine. These deaths caught Shelzar by surprise: no one, least of all the Ledean, had expected such an attack—and certainly not from within the Elzan, who had seemed to be such model subjects of the empire.

Shelzar was thrown into chaos. Without the Sultan and the governor dead, it fell to others to restore order. In the case of the Elzan, there was no universally recognized authority who could urge calm. Baghali did not have a designated successor and the Elzan elders did not have the time to choose one. The Ledean were likewise hobbled by the fact that the city garrisons had overlapping command structures, whose new order had not yet been implemented following the emperor's recent designation of Shelzar as the capital of the Zathiskite Province. With the Master of Arms residing in Quelsk and thus unaware of the situation, the Night of Majeel proved to be especially devastating.

Ma'ed Al-Yaqa exulted in the damage he had wrought. He and his comrades expected the Elzan to see the Night of Majeel as a sign to return to the old ways. In particular, he hoped that the reappearance of the Haz a'Shien would lead to mass defections from the Ledean cause. Al-Yaqa thought that he might be chosen as the new Sultan by the elders in recognition for his "service" to the sect. From his perspective, everything was proceeding exactly as he had foreseen.

Alas (for Al-Yaqa), Shelzar was restored to order within a day of the attack. Elzan and Ledean worked side by side to undo the damage of the Night of Majeel. They sent word to Quelsk, asking the Master of Arms to enter the city and assume temporary command of its troops. By the time he did so, Shelzar had returned to some semblance of its former self. Despite Al-Yaqa's provocations and the best efforts of the Haz a'Shien, the Elzan proved themselves to be loyal subjects of the empire. In fact, it was through their efforts that the conspiracy was finally uncovered and its leaders arrested, with the exception of Al-Yaqa, who committed suicide rather than be taken captive.

Nevertheless, considerable damage had been done. The emperor rescinded his order to designate Shelzar the capital of Zathiskite Province, despite the efforts of both Elzan and Ledean subjects to convince him to do otherwise. The Night of Majeel further solidified opinion in Aurimar that the old Hazari mindset was dangerous and that the Elzan were not to be trusted. Under imperial orders, the newly appointed Governor placed Shelzar under martial law. Using every method at his disposal, including a network

of pursuivants, the governor rooted out every last vestige of the traditionalist Hazari within the city. Those who wished to avoid execution or imprisonment fled elsewhere, including into the Venirian Province. Within Shelzar, many otherwise loyal Elzan suffered because of the persecutions that followed. Ledean opinion hardened against the sect. Although not formally outlawed, its activities were severely curtailed. Any Elzan who openly admitted to being a practicing Hazari was blacklisted and excluded from imperial service.

By the time the witch-hunts ended, the Hazari had been virtually eliminated. Their membership disappeared and their influence in Shelzar was shattered. Many Elzan renounced the Hazari openly and in some cases even turned over evidence on friends and family in an effort to prove their loyalty to the Ledean Empire. Many embraced the worship of the gods or titans as a way to demonstrate their newfound change of heart. Ironically, many began to worship Mesos or joined the Coventacle of the Ancients, which enjoyed imperial support at the time. Although a few remaining Hazari stayed true to their beliefs (although even this was generally the bastardized version of that faith that Al-Yaqa had denounced), they were crushed. It would be some time before they would again have the confidence or the wherewithal to influence Shelzari life—and even then they would never do so in the same way.

Interestingly, the emperor did not transfer administration of the Zathiskite Province to Quelsk as many believed he would. Instead, he ordered the construction of a new city, to be called Elz, which would be built on a Ledean model. This new city, when completed, would be home to the provincial satrap as well as the Master of Arms. Elz's construction took nearly a decade, but when it was finished it instantly became an important part of the province, stealing away influence from Quelsk and Shelzar alike.

The Slide into Decadence

Bereft of even the small amount of political importance it once wielded and with the Hazari brought to their knees, Shelzar was thrown into uncertainty. Yet its mercantile situation remained as vibrant as ever. Daily ships from across the Empire of Lede made their way to Shelzar's ports; goods from all over the continent were bought, sold, and traded in its many marketplaces. In this respect, life went on as it did before. In fact, things were better in Shelzar than they had ever been, at least as far as trade was concerned. Many merchants considered the transfer of Ledean power to

the new city of Elz to be a blessing in disguise, for it meant that imperial scrutiny of their activities — legal and otherwise — was lessened. This proved a great encouragement to commerce. Shelzar grew in riches and was still called “the Jewel of the South” in poems and in songs.

But there was no denying that the city was not what it once had been. Even during those years when they had lost the original meaning of the Hazari philosophy, the Elzan continued to be influenced by Hazari teachings. Their faith animated their every activity, even when they did not realize it. Now, even those who still secretly professed those beliefs were often left with only the outward manifestations, without the spiritual force behind them. The Elzan were mere shadows of their former greatness. It was as if they were simply going through the motions of life, even if in much the same way as before, but not understanding why it was that they did what they did. Many outsiders noticed this change that came over the city. The imperial satrap in Elz once reportedly commented to the governor of Shelzar, “Your people appear to have suffered the worst of all possible defeats. It is one thing to crush the body of one’s enemies, but that is a fate from which a people may recover. Time and rest are all that are needed to heal bodily wounds. But crush the soul? What salve will heal such wounds? How much time is necessary? I fear, my friend, that Shelzar will never recover and that you shall soon rule over a city of the soul-dead.”

The satrap was an astute man. Shelzar indeed appeared to have no future — and it might not have had one at all, were it not for the arrival of Ghurika.

The Coming of the Trickster

Ghurika was a mysterious woman who entered Shelzar in the latter days of the Vhaerith Dynasty. No one knows her origin. She reputedly appeared to be an Elzan, but that is unlikely, for it is also said that she spoke Zathiskan with a strange accent and was unfamiliar with the Hazari and with the history of Shelzar. Of course, no one seemed to care much about the answers to these questions. Ghurika was a beautiful woman, far more beautiful than any in the Zathiskite Province in living memory. Her exotic good looks were matched by a wit and intelligence that made her the object of every man’s passion and the envy of every woman. Ghurika seemed to be a dream given form. And so she was, in a sense.

Ghurika was a devotee of Enkili, the genderless deity of storms, trickery, and chaos. She preached the word of Enkili throughout the streets of Shelzar, but her fine oratory was not



what drew people to her. It was the reckless abandon with which she led her life. She paid little heed to thoughts of any tomorrow and indulged her every desire in as many ways as possible. She visited the city's gambling halls and pleasure houses, where she lost and won fortunes in gold coins — and did it all repeatedly. Ghurika lived a wild and a charmed life. Her every action became the stuff of gossip and even of popular fiction. Poets and storytellers sang her praises and composed odes in her honor. She was like none Shelzar had seen before, and she was precisely what the downtrodden Elzan needed in their darkest hour.

Ghurika showered her affections and her passions upon many people, both men and women. She took them as lovers for a brief time and then moved on. There was little if any rhyme or reason to her actions. She did not seek out the rich or the powerful any more than the poor or the destitute, but few resisted her charms. One week she would bed a Ledean priest of Chardun, another week it would an aging beggar-woman. Speculating on the reasons for Ghurika's actions became a popular pastime in the city and the betting parlors of Shelzar placed odds on whom she would choose next. Nearly everyone believed they understood her. Many believed (or perhaps secretly wished) that she would choose them as her next paramour. Such optimistic souls realized that she would inevitably leave them for another, but they were more than willing to enjoy the brief moments of happiness she would bring in the meantime.

Ghurika never denied her devotion to the service of Enkili. Indeed, she proudly wore her piety to the Storm God/dess as a badge of honor. Her tantalizing dances in the rain became renowned throughout Shelzar. Whenever storm clouds gathered over the city, the curious would gather near her home to await her appearance, hoping to catch a glimpse of her graceful, energetic, sensuous movements as the rain poured down upon her. Not surprisingly, popular devotion to the Trickster grew in Shelzar. It was only a matter of time before there was a small temple devoted to Enkili, complete with a priest who had appeared in the city one day, even though no one had called him to the city.

Then — as mysteriously as she had arrived — Ghurika vanished. None saw her leave her home. Certainly no one saw her leave the city. All attempts to locate her proved vain. No one in Shelzar ever saw Ghurika again. This led some to believe that she was not in fact real but was rather some sort of magical creation, a construct perhaps, or a spirit sent by Enkili to spread

the faith. Some even claimed that she had been an avatar of the Trickster, who had come to bless Shelzar and consecrate its people to her. There was no way to test this theory, but it quickly proved a popular one, particularly among those who had had the pleasure of spending a night in Ghurika's bedchamber. The thought of having made love to a god appealed to their egos, so stories of Ghurika's divinity soon became commonplace. Many Shelzari songs tell of poor boys whose lives were turned upside down by being chosen as a lover of Enkili.

Whatever the truth of these speculations, there is no question that Ghurika forever changed the face of Shelzar. The faith of Enkili grew by leaps and bounds in only a brief decade. Its vibrant and unpredictable doctrines filled a void in the people's lives. They now had a replacement for their lost Hazari beliefs. Strange as it may seem, there were many points of commonality between the Hazari philosophy and Enkili's doctrines. Both lauded the pleasures of the world and saw experience as a greatest of teachers, for instance. Yet, Enkili taught that life was uncertain. No amount of preparation, let alone discipline, could protect one from the fickleness of fate. Rich man or beggar, all are helpless before the cup of fortune. The Elzan understood this well enough, as they had seen how quickly Ledean favor had evaporated after the Night of Majeel. Perhaps, they thought, the best way to avoid the disappointments and depression that arose from such reversals of fortune was to embrace them.

Perhaps that was the truth that Ghurika had come to teach them.

Enkili Takes Hold

Over the course of the next two hundred years, a strange transformation took place. The Shelzari, as they now identified themselves, drew themselves out of the darkness into which they had been flung. The accepted Enkili enthusiastically, building a vast temple in that deity's honor. They lived out Enkili's teachings in their daily lives and understood that life, by its very nature, is unpredictable. No one can control or predict its twists and turns with any reliability, so why should one try to do so? Why not simply ride the currents of fortune and enjoy experiencing it in the meantime?

Enkili's faith changed Shelzar forever. Once again, the city was alive and its people flourished. Shelzar truly was the Jewel of the South, as the bards had called it in the past. Ships and caravans from all over the empire moved through its ports and gates. They came bearing precious cargoes, as well as travelers. The debauched revels of Shelzar

were soon renowned throughout the empire. Jaded sybarites and lascivious voyeurs alike had heard the tales of the Shelzari penchant for drunken orgies and other, more exotic pleasures. Many were drawn to see if the many tales were true, or if they were merely the products of travelers' overactive imaginations. After all, was not Shelzar the home of the prudish Hazari? — that is how most Ledean knew the city.

Despite their incredulity, more travelers came. If only a tenth of what the tales said were true, they thought, Shelzar must be heaven on earth. In the end, the stories were somewhat less than accurate, for they had failed to do justice to the variety and exuberance of Shelzari debauchery. Under the influence of their newfound faith, they practiced innumerable, unnamable — and sometimes unpalatable — pleasures of the flesh. Almost nothing was beyond the bounds of reason as far as the Shelzari were concerned. The more elaborate and peculiar a vice, the better, they said. It was during this period that the famous work *1,001 Shelzari Nights* was composed. This fascinating tale, which also doubles as a manual of lovemaking, describes in excruciating detail many of the practices that had taken hold in Shelzar under the influence of Enkili. (Interestingly, the book's protagonist is actually a devotee of Idra rather than Enkili. By now, the Shelzari had come to pay respect to all the gods, and Idra was especially popular among them, for she was the patroness of the carnal arts.) It is also fascinating to note that the Shelzari had mastered considerably more than 1,001 separate techniques of physical pleasure, although the exact number is still a matter of debate; contemporary Shelzari believe that their ancestors did not pass down all their secrets to posterity. Stories of these "Lost Arts" are commonplace in the coffee houses of Shelzar, but, like so many other tales, their truth remains uncertain.

The faith of Enkili was not entirely predicated upon sex. Although fornication remained one of the things for which Shelzar was widely known, its people were more than just bawds. Their acceptance of the Jester's faith was far-reaching and profound. Shelzari were widely regarded as gamblers par excellence. This propensity for trusting fate (or randomness, depending on one's point of view) made them daring and bold. They undertook merchant expeditions that few others would try, bravely seeking out new trade routes despite the risks or costs involved. While many, perhaps most of these expeditions proved foolhardy, enough succeeded that Shelzar acquired a reputation as a city where anyone

could become wealthy if they were willing to take a chance. Likewise, Shelzari sailors were revered for their boldness. They traveled the length and breadth of Ghelspad and beyond, convinced that Enkili smiled upon them. Such men and women laid the groundwork for the next phase of Shelzar's growth, a brief and unexpected Golden Age during which the Elzan (in a different incarnation) once again took center stage.

The Sam'Marith Dynasty

By the time the Empire of Lede was five hundred years old, it had become thoroughly corrupt and internally weak. It might have collapsed long before that time had it not been for outsiders who infused new blood into its workings. As the Zathiskite Province grew more and more important (thanks in no small part to the riches of Shelzar), it became an important focus of imperial attention. The Vhaerith Dynasty outlawed god-worship within the empire, which did not endear its emperors to the people of Shelzar — or many other cities. Consequently, they engaged in small acts of rebellion against the empire as a way of showing their independence.

Such actions would never have been countenanced in the old days before the worship of Enkili. Now, though, the Shelzari were more willing to take risks, even seemingly foolhardy ones. Their experience with handling the fickle skeins of fate had made them unparalleled evaluators of the potential risk of any venture. Shelzari never called themselves prognosticators or prophets. They knew well enough that one could not predict the future with any reliability. Nevertheless, it was possible to see and to act on opportunities as, or even before they arose. The Shelzari could see that the Ledean Empire was on the verge of disaster and that it might well take their beloved city along with it. Emboldened by the rebellion of the nearby Venirian Province, Shelzar declared its independence and seceded from the empire.

The Rebirth of Shai al Hazari

The city's secession was in fact a gamble. The Shelzari leadership guessed that the Vhaerith Dynasty was not long for this world. It convinced its citizens, including the Ledean governor and military officers, that they would be in a better position to dictate terms for readmission into any newly created empire if they were outside it when the end came to the Vhaerith. They reasoned — rightly, it turned out — that the successors to the Vhaerith would need allies in the Zathiskite Province, and the Shelzari would be there to provide them when the time came.

At the same time, the Shelzari hedged their bets. They put forward an elaborate ruse by which they claimed that the Hazari had launched another coup, this time a successful one. The city was “renamed” Shai al Hazari and a “Sultan” was made the leader of the newly independent city. The Shelzari hoped that their shadow-play would work. If things did not go well and there were repercussions from the empire, they had a handy scapegoat, the already discredited Hazari. On the other hand, if everything went exactly according to plan, they could drop the pretense and negotiate with the empire on equal terms.

In the end, the gamble paid off. The reborn Shai al Hazari did not stay independent for long. The Vhaerith Dynasty was toppled and its successor, the Morian Dynasty, understood that it would have to correct the mistakes of the past if it was to retain power. The first act of the new emperor was to rescind the Vhaerith proclamation that outlawed the worship of the gods. This pleased the Shelzari, but it was not enough. The emperor needed Shelzar on his side. Its economic might and its huge population were too important to the empire. So it was that the Empire of Lede returned again to Shelzar to make a deal. This time, though, it was the Shelzari who set the terms.

In exchange for their return to the imperial fold, the Shelzari demanded a greater say in imperial administration. They asked that Shelzari ministers be appointed to the satrapy of Elz and that the empire do more to defend the Zathiskite Province. The new emperor of course agreed to these demands. In exchange, the Shelzari allowed the imperial forces garrisoned in the city to join with their comrades to put down the rebellion in the Venirian Province. These maneuverings complete, Shelzar submitted once more to imperial rule. This entire chain of events has been poorly understood by many latter-day historians, who failed to see that the “re-establishment” of Shai al Hazari was only an elaborate ploy. There was no Sultan. Unfortunately, the ploy took on a life of its own and was believed by many to have been a genuine event. Numerous Ledean histories speak of the Zathiskite Province being formed only under the Morian Dynasty, despite its existence for centuries before that point. Knowledgeable Shelzari take great pleasure in this misunderstanding, seeing it as yet another sign that the Trickster truly smiled upon them.

The Morian emperors were very grateful to the Shelzari and accorded them even more privilege than that which they had demanded. The reason for this was simple: The Morians needed Shelzar badly. The new dynasty was shaky at its

very foundations. Since they had come to power via assassination, the nobility of Aurimar was needless to say suspicious of them. Even though the Vhaerith Dynasty was unloved, the Morians could not easily shake the air of illegitimacy that clouded their rise to power. To combat this, the raised up many provincial families to ranks of imperial nobility. They believed that, by doing so, they could stack the deck in their favor. After all, these new nobles would be beholden to them for their honors and would, therefore, be loyal — a useful counterbalance to the entrenched Aurimar nobility that opposed the Morians.

The Sam'Marith family of Shelzar was one family so elevated. They were an ancient and honorable family, with many respected sorcerers in their bloodline. One of their number became the satrap of Zathiskite, as well as the Master of Arms. Thanks to the Morians, a Shelzari family had now achieved the pinnacle of power in the province. The Sam'Marith should have been grateful, but they soon proved otherwise.

The Pinnacle of Power

The Morians themselves were, it turns out, every bit as corrupt as the Vhaerith — and even more unstable. The Sam'Marith realized this and decided to take action. The Shelzari family did not wish to see their people's gamble founder on the unsteady hands of the Morians. Using their family's many sorcerers (and supported by genies of various sorts), the Sam'Marith launched yet another coup, deposing the Morians and establishing themselves as the new dynasty of the empire. Reluctantly, the nobility of Aurimar accepted the Sam'Marith as their overlords, but it was clear that they trusted them little more than they had trusted the deposed Morians.

Rather than wait for another noble family to overthrow them, the Sam'Marith, under the brilliant leadership of Sayyad Sam'Marith, returned to Zathiskite Province and set up their court in the capital of Elz. In principle, the empire was still ruled from Aurimar, but in practice it was Elz where the empire's power rested. There, the Sam'Marith emperors surrounded themselves with bodyguards and huge garrisons of troops. They were determined that no one would overthrow them as easily as they had overthrown the Morians. In this they succeeded, but in almost every other respect, the new dynasty was a disaster for the empire — and for the Shelzari.

Removed from the intrigues of Aurimar or the Enkili devotion of Shelzar, the Sam'Marith emperors quickly became decadent. They indulged their every appetite without regard for the consequences. Huge harems became the

norm, sometimes numbering hundreds of women, many of whom were mere girls who had been sold into imperial slavery to pay off their families' debts. Indeed, slavery as a practice became more widespread under this dynasty, with non-humans becoming some of the most commonly enslaved species.

Worse still, the Sam'Marith emperors indulged their personal vendettas and used imperial power to settle old scores that had very little to do with the good of the empire. Most notably, imperial legions marched on the Southern Kingdoms to the east of the Broadreach River and brought them into the Ledean fold by force of arms. These Kingdoms had long been trading rivals of the Zathiskite Province and of Shelzar in particular. Although the Sam'Marith rulers were successful in annexing these petty realms (which later became the core of the Calas Province), doing so came at a cost. For many years, partisans of the old kingdoms waged restrained insurrection against the empire: they fought a guerrilla war and targeted caravans and travelers from cities like Shelzar as a means of striking back against their oppressors. While the emperors barely took notice of this violence, it caused great disruptions to the economic life of Shelzar, which languished for many years under inflation and worse. Even more unfortunately, the seeds were sown of a rivalry between the Zathiskite and Calas Provinces, each of whom saw the other as the authors of their worst circumstances. It would be many centuries before those wounds would heal.

The Sam'Marith Dynasty was filled with mighty sorcerers and binders of genies. These abilities gave the decadent rulers the power they needed to maintain a hold over the empire. Had they lacked them, it is likely that they would have been overthrown like the Vhaerith before them. Indeed, there were attempts to destroy the dynasty, the most famous being the assassination of Jaajeem II in 601 OC by rebels from Calas. This event solidified the Ledean's hatred of the Calasite people. Jajeem's successor, Omadil, ordered a full-scale invasion of the region and deposed its puppet king, placing his own brother on the throne instead. The Calasites hated Omadil and his descendants, but were unable to overthrow them for a millennium and half, by which time the Ledean Empire was already on the verge of collapse.

The Fall of the Sam'Marith

Eventually, the noble families of Aurimar could no longer stomach the thought of their emperors being debauched foreigners who consorted with elemental spirits. Under the

Sam'Marith, the Empire had become stagnant. Except for internecine conflicts in the southern provinces, there were no longer any wars to sustain the empire's morale or keep its troops in fighting trim. That the Sam'Marith did not even pretend to be interested in events in Aurimar only made the situation worse. It was thus inevitable that a coup would be initiated against them by one of the old families of the empire — that family happened to be the Takhuul.

Under the leadership of its matriarch Baricca, the Takhuul family used its considerable military connections to attack Elz and depose the sybaritic emperor Zakiyad, whom Baricca found hiding in his harem, surrounded by hundreds of concubines of every age and race. Baricca then proclaimed herself empress and ordered the Zathiskite administration to be transferred from Elz back to Quelsk. This came as a blow to Shelzar, whose people had hoped the new rulers of the empire would again favor them. Unfortunately, the Sam'Marith had given a bad reputation to the descendants of the Elzan people, even those not associated with the deposed dynasty. In the eyes of the more stolid northern Ledean, the Shelzari were no different than the Sam'Marith — a decadent, debauched people who had brought the empire low.

For the next one hundred and fifty years, Shelzar turned in on itself. It remained an important port and economic center as always, but its people took increasingly less interest in the empire as a whole. Instead of looking for new ways to show their loyalty to the Ledean, they focused on physical pleasures and sorcerous pursuits. During this time, the Brotherhood of the Lamp arose. A society of genie-summoning spellcasters, this order quickly proved itself to be an important power group — important enough for the Coventacle of the Ancients to take notice. Within two decades of the Brotherhood's founding, it had been absorbed as part of the Seat of Thulkas. The Coventacle itself was rapidly losing its power within the empire, as the Takhuul Dynasty encouraged god-worship over the reverence of the titans. This tendency would grow throughout the Ledean dominions and set the stage for what was to come millennia later.

The End of Ledean Rule

Shelzar spent the next millennium and a half as the decadent center of the Ledean economy. Over the course of those many years, the city grew both in size and affluence. The Shelzari were among the wealthiest of all imperial subjects, even during the difficulties that had occurred in the intervening years. Shelzar had weathered

wars, insurrections, and coups with relative ease, and this was in part due to the city's insularity. It remained, as it had under the First Takhuul Dynasty, an introvert, even self-absorbed city. People busied themselves equally with commerce and the pleasures of the flesh, no longer giving much heed to imperial politics as they had in the past. The city's dubious reputation as a purveyor of "exotic entertainments" also kept it occupied with other concerns. During the Second Takhuul Dynasty, more than a few emperors paid a visit to Shelzar to partake of its many pleasures. This imperial approval cemented the city's place as the City of Pleasures in the Ledean mind. Whether that place was viewed as good or ill depended greatly on one's relative moral position.

Yet, eventually, despite their immersion in matters of the flesh, the Shelzari could no longer ignore the outside world. Even the most dedicated hedonists among them could see that the empire was finally falling apart. Trade was no longer as protected as it once was and raiders from the Great Wilds periodically attacked the Zathiskite Province. In addition, there was unrest in the nearby Calas and Gharia Provinces, which further disrupted trade — the very lifeblood of Shelzar. When the ineffectual Argent Dynasty proved that, for all its tyrannical ways, it was still unable to restore peace to the region, the Shelzari at last decided to take hold of their future.

The military, religious, and commercial leaders of Shelzar convened a meeting in the city of Elz. They concluded, after very little debate, that they were effectively independent of the empire already. Why not be so in fact? There was no reason to continue to pay taxes and tribute to Aurimar when its legions were no longer able to defend them. Moreover, the continual reversals on the status of the gods versus the titans, humans versus non-humans, and wizards versus sorcerers were starting to take their toll. The Shelzari wished to go about their business without having to contend with the vicissitudes of imperial politics. They decided to secede from the empire.

The secessionists made no formal declaration of their intentions to the Ledean. Instead, the Zathiskite satrap, who had been co-opted, simply ceased responding to orders from the capital. He failed to send off the taxes he collected, instead using them to hire mercenaries, some of them orcs and half-orcs, to defend the province's borders and to keep trade flowing. The satrap was made the figurehead Sultan, while the real power lay with a council of merchant-lords and priests of Enkili. The cities of Elz and Shelzar, along with a

few outlying towns and most of the Zathiskite lands, became known as the Empire of Elz or the Elzan Empire from that point on.

The Ledean did not realize that the Zathiskite Province had seceded for almost three years. They were too busy with other concerns. The fall of the Argent Dynasty at around the same time made it difficult for the empire to respond to this turn of events. Their successors, the Thael Dynasty, had bigger problems on their hand than the secession of the Zathiskites. Albadian barbarians were ravaging the northern reaches of the empire and took up most of their attention. During a lull in the fighting, the Thael emperor sent emissaries to Elz to demand that the Sultan declare his allegiance to Aurimar or face the consequences. The Sultan refused — and nothing occurred. Rumors of an impending assault circulated for years but never materialized. The Ledean could ill afford to send even a small expeditionary force to deal with the Zathiskites. By 2300 OC, it was clear that the Empire of Elz would retain its independence.

The Empire of Elz

While some might claim that the height of Elzan power occurred during the brief rule of the Sam'Marith Dynasty, others contend that the Empire of Elz was in fact its greatest moment in history. There is some justification for this view, since the Elzan Empire was actually a period of growth and expansion for the entire region — for the first time since the halcyon days of Shai al Hazari. With the retreat of the Ledean (and their eventual collapse), the Elzan were given a golden opportunity, which they seized with both hands. They spread out from the borders of the Zathiskite Province and beyond the Sweltering Plains and Festering Fields into what later became known as the Devil's March. The fledgling empire met little resistance as its armies secured these new lands. In fact, many cities and settlements in the area welcomed the Elzan as guarantors of security in the wake of the Ledean withdrawal.

The Zathiske Secession Wars

Ironically, it was during this time of great expansion that the people of Quelsk and Zamon across the Broadreach River took the opportunity to rebel against Elzan rule. They had no love of the Ledean, but neither did they regard the Elzan with any favor. They had long been rivals of the Elzan (especially the Quelskans) and wanted little to do with this new empire. If anything, they saw the Elzan as even worse than the Ledean, for at least the Ledean were generally upstanding in their personal virtue. The Elzan, however, were

quite the opposite — greedy, lecherous, and sensual. To the inhabitants of Quelsk and Zamon, the Elzan were abhorrent.

At first, the Elzan Sultan, who had taken to calling himself an emperor in imitation of Ledeian practice, sent his troops to quell the Zathiske Secession. Numerous battles were joined between the loyalist and rebel forces. The Elzan used their many sorcerers and summoners to good use in these early conflicts. The Quelskans rejected sorcery as surely as they rejected the hedonism of the Elzan. In another of history's great ironies, the rebels appeared to have incorporated a great deal of Hazari philosophy into their rhetoric and used it against the Elzan, touting it as evidence that their enemies had fallen away from the noble ideals of their ancient ancestors. Of course, the Zathiske rebels had no strong affinity for the Hazari. They worshipped the gods, for example, and did not privilege experience as a means of attaining knowledge. They simply used these arguments as ways to distinguish themselves from the Elzan.

The Zathiske Secession Wars lasted for nearly a decade, rising and falling in intensity according to the whims of the emperor. The Elzan leadership realized what the Ledeians had long known — ruling an empire requires ruthlessness. The Elzan were not yet cut out for such a vocation. Although they reveled in the prestige that empire brought them, they were not willing to do what was necessary to maintain it. Moreover, their lands continued to expand on their western frontiers, as they pushed deeper into the Devil's March and reached the edge of the Ukrudan Desert. Emperor Uqbaan IV decided in the end that the Zathiske territories were not worth the trouble. He negotiated a peace treaty with Quelsk and Zamon, granting them their independence in exchange for securing the empire's eastern border against Calastian and Venirian aggression. The rebels reluctantly agreed and formed their own state, called simply Zathiske. For decades the two existed side by side in relative peace, although there was no love lost between them, with Zathiske rulers and clergy regularly denouncing the Elzan as corrupt and vicious and the Elzan returning the favor by calling the Zathiske simple-minded and boorish.

The Seven Cities

Despite the loss of the Zathiske territories, the Empire of Elz grew in power under a succession of crafty emperors who slowly mastered the demands of their position. Elzan armies became well known as dangerous in battle, since they always included a contingent of sorcerers. Many

also used bound genies and other elemental spirits to sow terror among their enemies. Of course, the Elzan were even better at the arts of diplomacy and statecraft than at military matters. Elzan ambassadors were renowned for their silver tongues and their ability to ascertain (and utilize) the vices of others to manipulate matters to their own advantage. Rather than threaten potential adversaries with war, the Elzan tempted and seduced them, using their understanding of human nature to find just the weakness that would give them mastery over others. Through this cunning use of "bedroom diplomacy," the Elzan Empire held its territories and disarmed most of the would-be rivals along its borders. With the exception of periodic tensions with Zathiske, the Elzan Empire proved to be an oasis of stability amid the chaos of Ghelspad.

Secured in this way, the Elzan Emperor began a massive program of public spending, founding new cities and expanding those that already existed. By the end of this period of growth, the empire had seven major cities, each of which became associated with a particular form of excess. Elz, for example, was known for its elaborate feasts, where gluttony was given free rein, while the newly built city of Wahid was home to an athletic arena the likes of which no one had seen in the southern lands. Gladiators fought against one another, as well as exotic animals and monsters imported from halfway across Scarn. Yet none of the empire's cities, new or old, compared to Shelzar in terms of sheer decadence. Shelzar put them all to shame by having no shame of its own. Instead of specializing in a single vice, Shelzar emphasized creativity and originality. Its orgies might not be the largest or the most lavish (that honor belonged to Alkhabe), but they were the most bizarre, with humans and non-humans both participating energetically. The same held true for its gladiatorial combats, which were held in unusual surroundings, such as the catacombs beneath the city. Shelzar was thus the city where even the jaded could find their lusts sated — and then some.

The Seven Cities of Elzan cemented the empire's reputation as a hub of culture and society. The Zathiskans railed against the empire for its decadence, as did the periodic outbursts of madmen who claimed to be descended from survivors of the ancient Hazari sect. Nevertheless, these cities proved popular destinations for travelers far and wide. They made their way across Ghelspad to see and partake of the bounty that the Seven Cities had to offer. Nowhere in the world could claim to offer more exotic and satisfying pleasures than they.

The Beginning of the End

The Elzan Empire knew several hundred years of relative peace and prosperity. It survived because its emperors were crafty diplomats who employed equal parts guile and misdirection to keep their enemies off balance or at bay. Yet there can be no question that the rise of the Seven Cities had revealed the soft underbelly of the empire. The Elzan people much preferred making money and indulging their desires to guarding their borders. They certainly lacked the casual brutality that the Ledean had shown in their heyday. When rebels or rivals proved resistant to seduction or bribery, the Elzan often simply let them go. Like a frayed carpet, the empire was unraveling at a steady pace.

This fact was evident even to outsiders, who began to treat each of the Seven Cities as if they were independent entities, owing no allegiance to the emperor in Elz. In most respects, this was not far from the truth: The emperor theoretically had control over all the cities, but his actual reach extended only to the streets of Elz. Beyond them, he had to rely upon his diplomatic skills to coax the governors of the other cities (never mind the legions) to do as he commanded. Unfortunately, that task proved extraordinarily difficult. After all, how does one tempt the governor of a city like Shelzar, who can already indulge any and every vice whenever he wishes? In the end, the emperor simply stopped trying and contented himself with accepting what taxes he received and with the pomp of court life. In all but name, the Empire of Elz was dead.

The Charduni Hammerblow

The final end to any pretense that the Empire of Elz existed at all came with the invasion of the charduni. These strange dark-skinned dwarves swept down from the north and conquered almost all the lands through which they passed. As their name suggests, they served the Tyrant God Chardun and sought nothing less than to bring the Overlord's rule to Ghelspad — at any cost. In this, the charduni were quite successful. Though cruel and authoritarian, they nevertheless held chaos at an arm's length, providing an environment in which the subject nations of their empire could enjoy security and prosperity, if not justice.

Lageni quickly accepted charduni overlordship, since it already served Chardun, and Calastia managed to win its freedom through some miracle of diplomacy. This left the Elzan Empire open to attack. Zathiske had no love for the charduni, but the Zathiskans were unwilling to allow themselves to be destroyed in defending the decadent Elzan. Unsurprisingly, the emperor

of Elz accepted Charduni rule over his empire on the condition that he could keep his throne. The charduni agreed, but it made no difference. There was rioting in the streets of Elz and the emperor was overthrown by the common people, who rejected his decision to give the charduni claim to the empire's lands. In retaliation, the charduni attacked Elz, killing almost its entire population and then occupying it.

The remaining Seven Cities looked with horror upon the charduni actions. Each had to decide how it should react to the presence of the Tyrant's servants. Most accepted their lot without much trouble. A few resisted and met the same fate as Elz. Shelzar was torn internally. Its leaders were bold and wished to resist the charduni, despite the likelihood that they would be defeated. The merchants, however, appreciated what the charduni intended. They had long suffered from the Elzan emperor's inability to protect the surrounding trade routes and hoped that things might improve under the charduni. Even so, the merchants disliked the faith of Chardun and saw it as contrary to their own devotion to Enkili. In this view, they were joined by the priesthood of the Trickster, as well as, perhaps surprisingly, that of Vangal, who likewise disliked the authoritarian society the charduni offered.

The Shelzari never really had an opportunity to debate the matter properly. When Wahid was attacked for its resistance, the charduni decided that they would make no diplomatic overtures to any more cities. Instead, they would simply invade and assume control. This they did in Shelzar and they met minimal resistance from its inhabitants. The occasional anti-Chardunite incident was dealt with harshly and this discouraged others from following suit. It took only months under charduni rulership before the Shelzari acquiesced and settled down to their old ways once again.

In most respects, the charduni offered the best of both worlds. Shelzar no longer had to worry about commerce disruptions and its citizenry could immerse themselves in the usual excesses to their heart's content. The charduni did not care so long as imperial laws were obeyed and taxes were sent to the capital. It was an enviable existence, which is why the City of Pleasures once more became a favored locale for travelers and sybarites. To visit Shelzar was to visit paradise — or as close to it as one could get on Scarn. The city's population swelled, as did its wealth. Some Shelzari leaders spoke of this era as the greatest in all of history, as if they had already forgotten the glories of the Sam'Marith Dynasty or the Empire of Elz. Yet, the people seemed to agree with this assessment. Ignoring

the warnings of the priesthood of Enkili, who said that Shelzar would pay the price for submitting to the Tyrant, the Shelzari lived their lives like they had no tomorrow.

They were more right than they knew.

The Titanswar

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the Titanswar is the single most important event in the history of Scarn. Its effects are still felt now, a century and a half later. The Titanswar changed the face of Ghelspad forever. Cities and empires fell. Entire peoples were displaced. The very geography of the continent ebbed and flowed because of the battle that raged between the gods and their parents, the titans. No place escaped the ravages of the Divine War unscathed — certainly not Shelzar, which suffered greatly as a consequence.

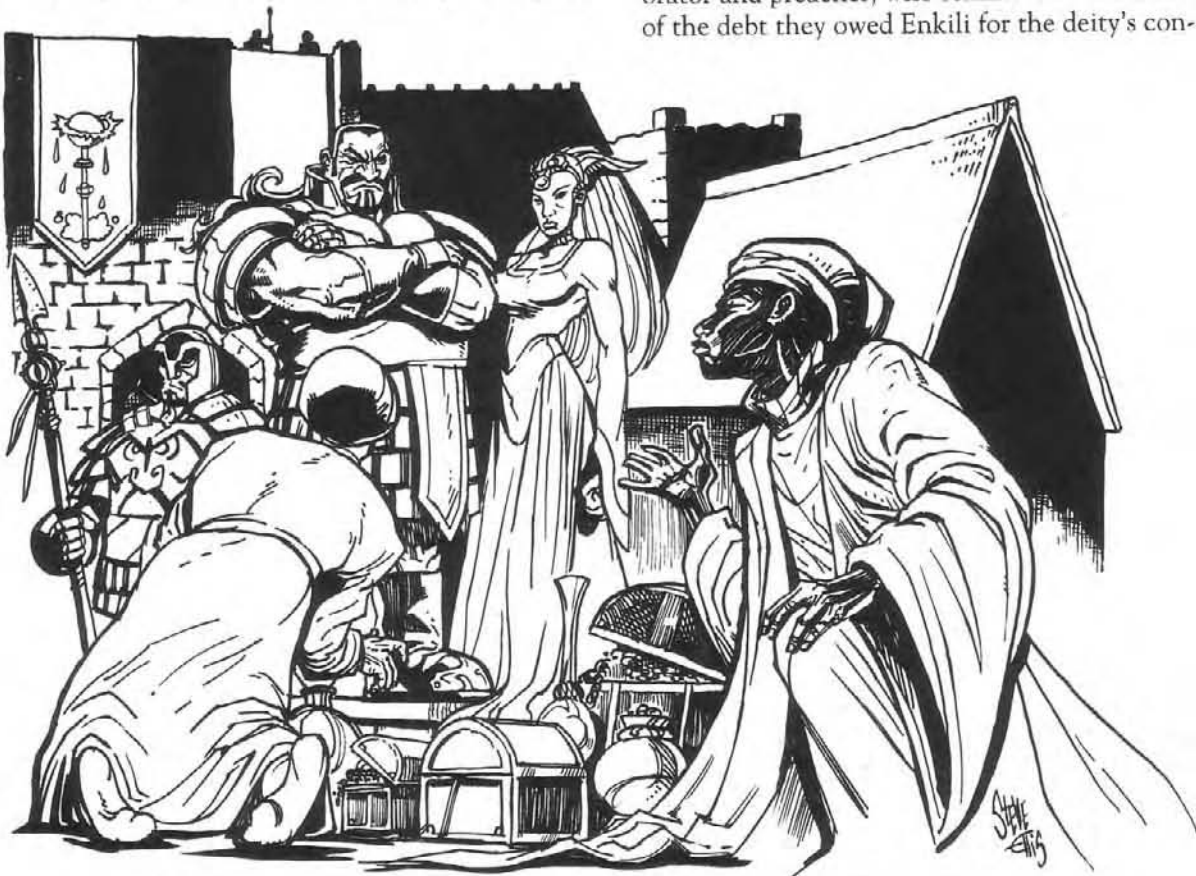
The Trickster Returns

During Ledean rule, the people of Shelzar had come to embrace the worship of Enkili with a vigor that betrayed the origins of the city as the citadel of the Hazari. Yet the Shelzari were among the most fervent of Enkili's followers and paid the Jester homage in myriad ways, not least of all by embracing the gifts of fortune. When the Divine War erupted and the gods at last declared their intention to destroy the titans,

the Shelzari were caught off guard. They had no idea what they should do beyond support their patron deity. The priesthood of Enkili had long preached against the titans and had created an atmosphere in which religious devotion to the gods necessarily included an unspoken rejection of the titans as well.

Even so, the Shelzari initially hoped that they might avoid becoming involved in the Titanswar. They convinced themselves that such conflict did not concern them and that, like so many previous wars, it would conclude and life would return to normal. This hope was in vain. The destruction of Mesos, the first titan to die in the war, had profound repercussions in Shelzar, as a great number of its many sorcerers lost control of their powers following the death of their Sire. Others found their abilities greatly increased, with the dispersal of the titan's magical energies into the ether. Clearly, events were quickly getting out of control and even the Shelzari realized how foolish it was to assume they could simply put their heads in the sand and wait for the Divine War to blow over.

It was at this time that Sanabia Eftadi appeared. Like the mysterious Ghurika centuries before, Eftadi appeared out of nowhere and had seemingly no history before she took her case to the Shelzari leadership. Unlike Ghurika, she was not a wanton libertine. She was, however, a fiery orator and preacher, who reminded the Shelzari of the debt they owed Enkili for the deity's con-



tinued patronage of the city. Eftadi made her case in the temples of the city and in its gambling halls. She did not shy away from any public gathering where her voice could be heard. Her message was simple: Take up the fight against the titans. Enkili had made common cause with Vangal and even Chardun in fighting against the eldritch evil of the titans. Could the Shelzari do any less? Eftadi emphasized that the titans had no love for mortals and that the days of their ascendancy had been filled with blood and destruction. If Shelzar hoped to survive and prosper as it had in the past, its people would have no choice but to fight. If the gods failed, then all would be lost, including Shelzar's prosperity.

Sanabia Eftadi inspired the Shelzari and turned the tide of public opinion in favor of involvement in the Divine War. Clerics of Enkili made common cause with fire-mages and genie summoners, while merchants and diplomats alike found ways to forge alliances with nearby cities that also supported the gods. For the first time since before the coming of the charduni, Shelzar raised an army, complete with sorcerous support, to field in battle on the side of Enkili and the other gods. Eftadi did not remain in Shelzar long enough to see the fruits of her labors. Like Ghurika, she disappeared into the night and was never heard from again. Naturally, this led some to speculate that she too might have been an avatar of the Trickster, sent to encourage the Shelzari in their time of need. Others claimed that she was no more than a reformed prostitute who had been filled with religious zeal. Over the centuries, numerous stories of Eftadi's true identity have been offered, but none has ever proven conclusive. All that is certain is that this woman inspired an entire city to take up arms against the monstrous titans.

The Price of Devotion

The armies of Shelzar proved less effective in battle than its people had hoped. Defeated time and again by the titanspawn and their allies, the people of the City of Pleasures were demoralized, yet they never called into question their dedication to the gods' cause. Wisely, the city's leaders emphasized the small victories in which Shelzar had participated. As the most powerful of the Seven Cities of Elz, it had kept its sister cities alive, with food and other materials that its traders provided. Indeed, Shelzar remained a key port and commercial hub for all of the southern regions of Ghelspad. Though not militarily significant, there was no question that it played a vital role in the war.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the titans realized this as well. Their forces ravaged the Seven Cities and made it certain that the Elzan Empire would never again reclaim its former glory. The Sweltering Plains grew in size and spread across the south, swallowing up entire cities in the process. The titanic forces marched steadily toward Shelzar and would soon have reached it had it not been for Nadhari Rostoud, a priestess of Enkili, whose family had long practiced sorcery and genie summoning. Communing with her god, she suggested that the elemental spirits of the City of Brass might make valuable allies in the war against the titans. Since Denev was their mother and she had sided with the gods, perhaps they too could be persuaded to take up arms against the titans.

Enkili conveyed this message to his fellow deities and they agreed to it. Denev beseeched her children to join with her against the titans. However, the genies proved obdurate, refusing to join her, arguing that the Divine War had nothing to do with them. They preferred to wait within the City of Brass for the war's inevitable conclusion. Their refusal pained Denev and angered the other gods, some of whom laid siege to and took the City of Brass, while their brothers and sisters bound the rest of genie-kind to their will. The genies were thus forced to aid the gods, but did not do so willingly. Suddenly, all the genies in the world of mortals were recalled to serve the gods as soldiers in the Titanswar, vanishing from the face of Scarn. The Seven Cities that yet stood, such as Elz, found themselves instantly bereft of the elemental servitors on whom they depended. So weakened, they fell easily before the armies of the titans. Only Shelzar escaped this disaster, for it had been less dependent on genies than its sister cities. Even so, the great city, the Jewel of the South, was weakened considerably, and its leadership feared that there would be no escape from destruction at the hands of the titans.

A New World is Born

Shelzar did not fall. By the time the gods had bound the genies, the Divine War was already turning in their favor. Although Thulkas in particular would have loved dearly to smash Shelzar, he had bigger concerns. One by one, the gods were destroying or binding the titans. Thanks to help of mortals like the Shelzari, the gods were winning — and would soon emerge victorious over their titanic parents.

The gods remade the world after the wreck of the Titanswar, shaping it as best they could to undo the damage wrought in that struggle. Although they were at times successful in their efforts, they

could not completely repair the catastrophic destruction. Scarn had become the Scarred Lands and, despite the best intentions of even the gods, not all of the damage could be undone so easily. The gods appeared to the many nations of world and told them that the old world was no more. A new one was dawning and they were invited to participate in its forging. By allying themselves to the gods, the mortal races would have the chance to influence the future. In a way that the titans never did (or could), the gods trusted and depended on mortal beings. They not only needed their worship — they needed their assistance.

Elz and Shelzar

The damage done by the Titanswar was immense. No region of Ghelspad had escaped unscathed, and no less the Seven Cities of Elz. Many of them had been destroyed outright by the war. Some had been swallowed up by the growth of the Sweltering Plains. The ruins of these once-proud and decadent cities can still be found to this day, beside the even more ancient ruins of the Empire of Flame. Now inhabited by all manner of foul beasts, they are a common destination for adventurers and treasure seekers, as well as would-be rulers, who see in these desiccated ghost towns the possibility of renewal — and the power that goes with it. To date, none have succeeded in reclaiming any of the lost cities of Elz, although as recently as a century ago a warrior from Calastia named Nils Aiman attempted to do just that. However, Aiman was never heard from again after he entered the ruins of Wahid.

Of the original Seven Cities, only Shelzar and Elz remained after the conclusion of the Divine War. Elz was a shadow of its former self. Its population had declined drastically, and it had suffered mightily from numerous invasions and assaults. Somehow it had survived, though, battered and beaten. Without the aid of the genies on which it had previously depended, the standard of living in Elz had declined considerably and its people could no longer afford to lead the lives of luxury and vice that had once been their birthright. A distant relation of the last Sultan of Elz had been acclaimed its new ruler. Named Utbasim, he promised to restore the glories of the Elzan Empire and to reassert his authority over its former territories. This boast raised the morale of the people of Elz, but it was pure fiction. The likelihood of Elz ever truly reclaiming its lost heritage was small.

Shelzar, meanwhile, had come out of the Titanswar beaten and bruised as well, but stronger for it. The city never suffered a direct attack by any of the armies of the titans. Its industries and

commerce did not depend as heavily on geniekind as had those of Elz and the other Seven Cities. Thus, while it suffered, it did so less than that of other cities in the region. Moreover, the volume of trade with the rest of Ghelspad increased during the war, as Shelzar was the only major port city on the southern coast of the continent not regularly threatened by titanic forces. In addition, the city accepted refugees from all over the south, as well as the governments-in-exile of dozens of city-states and nations. Within its sturdy walls, Shelzar could now boast that it was “host to the world.”

Rather than crumbling beneath the weight of these responsibilities, Shelzar endured. Certainly, the city had changed; there could be no way to avoid that under the circumstances. During the darkest days of the Divine War, even the Shelzari could ill afford to devote themselves to debauchery and physical pleasure. Yet they proved themselves to be not nearly as soft and ineffectual as detractors had claimed they were. Something of the old Hazari discipline still remained in these people, and they withstood the dangers of the Titanswar as well as anyone. The priesthood of Enkili certainly aided them in this, with its constant exhortations to trust in fate and to take bold action when all else seemed hopeless. If it were possible, the Shelzari became even more devoted to the Jester, whose cult had become nearly a state religion.

In time, though, Shelzar did return to its old ways. Merchants remained the single greatest body of power within the city, with the priesthood of Enkili being nearly as vital. Together, these two groups formed a new government, a council composed of members who, in principle, were elected by the upper classes of Shelzar, but who in practice generally purchased their positions with money or favors. No one minded, since the council and its leader, the High Minister of Shelzar, made every effort to spend lavishly on public works and entertainments. Spectacles of all sorts, as well as exuberant galas, marked daily life in Shelzar for years after the conclusion of the Divine War. It was for this reason that the High Minister gained the title “Most Gracious Host,” a testament to his willingness to spare no expense where pleasure was concerned.

The Final Blow

While Shelzar recovered its footing, Elz languished in despair. The Elzan people grew to resent the Shelzari and to see them as traitors for having abandoned the empire during its time of need. When the Calastians began their expansion in the first century after the Divine War, the

Elzan Sultan cultivated their friendship. He even encouraged the Calastians to set up outposts in the region, suggesting that Elz would welcome them as guarantors of stability. The Sultan even implied that Elz would aid Calastia in putting down the intermittent uprisings that occurred along its borders with Zathiske. The Zathiskans had always hated the charduni and to them the Calastians were little different, no matter what their race.

Where once the Elzan had been known for their diplomatic savvy, however, they were now the dupes. The Calastians accepted the Elzan invitation and marched into Elzan territory — and did not stop. They took both Zathiske and Elz in a single campaign. Neither of these states could offer much in the way of resistance. Both were in fact stunned that the Calastians would make a move against them. In principle, the Calastians had not conquered either state. They (and their armies) were there simply as “advisors” to the legitimate governments. The Zathiskans, naturally enough, would have no truck with such duplicity and attempted to overthrow the invaders. The Calastians responded by seizing all power in the state and incorporating Zathiske into their empire. The Sultan of Elz took note of this and accepted Calastian hegemony as the price of his folly.

Now, Elz is an unimportant provincial city that few visit, let alone speak of — the last gasp, as it were, of the formerly glorious Empire of Elz.

Calastian Interest

The Shelzari naturally assumed that the Calastians would soon turn their eyes toward the City of Pleasures, but they did not. The Calastians found Shelzar far too useful as an independent city-state. For one, even the Calastians depended on the trade generated by Shelzar. They understood enough that any attempt to conquer the city would disrupt commerce, which they could ill afford. Moreover, the Calastians feared that a move against a city as large and generally beloved as Shelzar might stir up widespread antipathy against them. With the Zathiskans already in more or less continual rebellion against them, the Calastians felt it best to leave Shelzar alone.

This caught the Shelzari by surprise, but they chose to look upon it as yet another example of Enkili's patronage of the city. The Storm Goddess had helped them so often in the past that it was easy for them to see this turn of events as a result of Enkili's intervention. Even so, Shelzar remained wary of the Calastians, especially when they expressed an interest in establishing a permanent embassy in the city. The Shelzari government rightly suspected that there were

ulterior motives behind the Calastian interest and politely refused. The Calastians did not take this refusal well, but neither did they exact revenge for the diplomatic slight. Instead, they simply turned their attentions elsewhere, for they had enemies and rivals enough all across Ghelspad who also demanded their attention.

The Modern Age

Within the last generation, a semblance of peace has settled across Ghelspad, but, of course, it is just that — a semblance. The Druid War, for example, proved that the servants of the titans were not as distant as many had convinced themselves. That war also showed the depths of depravity to which the Calastians were capable. Rather than fight against the titans for the benefit of all, King Virduk withdrew his forces to defend his empire, with dire consequences for the rest of Ghelspad. The Druid War was just a taste of things to come. Albadian barbarians and the Blood Monsoon both took their toll on the Scarred Lands. The illusion of peace into which many had bought was shattered, and the continent once again braced for changes of a violent sort.

An Uncertain Future

In the last ten years, Shelzar has enjoyed good relations with its neighbors and has continued trade with the rest of Ghelspad. The Blood Monsoon and the appearance of pirates along the southern coast have been a cause for concern, but neither has proved an insurmountable difficulty. The Shelzari have learned to trust in Enkili and that faith has given them a remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, not to mention a boldness (some would say foolhardiness) second to none in the Scarred Lands.

Nevertheless, storm clouds not of Enkili's making are on the horizon. Zathiske is once again restive and another of its periodic fits of rebellion is again taxing the Calastians. Zathiskan rebels have been operating near Shelzar, using the City of Pleasures as a base from which to get supplies and other support. Some of these rebels have gotten the ear of members of the City Council, appealing to the Shelzari's common heritage with them (while downplaying the hatred the Zathiskans have always displayed toward the “decadent” Shelzari). These diplomatic efforts have been only somewhat successful: the Calastians recently pressed their desire once again to open an embassy in the city, and the City Council has acquiesced. Their agreement has resulted in no small part to the efforts of Aysshell, High Priestess of Enkili, who lobbied (and more,

some claim) Minister Fratrel to allow the Calastians a place among the embassy of other Ghelspadian nations. Ayshella's intention in this matter remains unclear to all, including other members of her clergy. Meanwhile, Virduk of Calastia clearly does not trust Shelzar, fearing that it might make common cause with the Zathiskan rebels. For this reason, there is periodic violence between Shelzari and Calastian nationals in the city, usually during the high holy days of Enkili when rabble-rousing priests and other provocateurs remind the people of the Chardunite sympathies of Calastia. High Minister Fratrel has tried to downplay these incidents, as has Ayshella.

Beyond all this, there is recent evidence of covert unrest within the city. Remnants of the old Hazari sect persist. While their leader, who styles himself a Sultan, is little more than an affable philosopher, a certain group of hard-minded devotees are not quite so forgiving of how badly they have fared in the long centuries since Shelzar rose. These fanatics have not yet acted against the City Council or any other

prominent members of the city, but it is likely only a matter of time before they do. Likewise, titan-worshipping cults have been reported in several places, and crime syndicates use Shelzar's open-mindedness to mask criminal activities such as slavery and worse.

Despite these challenges, Shelzar yet remains the Jewel of the South — a vibrant, energetic city where anything is possible if one knows the right people, is willing to take some risk, or has the cash to afford it. While more stolid nations may disdain the Shelzari as little more than deeply debauched hedonists, they often forget the important role that the city has played throughout the history of Ghelspad. Time and again, it has shown itself to be the fulcrum of great events. On a few occasions, the Shelzari have been nothing short of heroic, providing aid and succor to their fellow beings at great cost to themselves.

The foolish man sees only what he wants to see, runs a Shelzari proverb. These words might have been spoken about the City of Pleasures itself, and they apply now more than ever.

Chapter Three: The City

To the inhabitants of the rest of the Scarred Lands, Shelzar is simply the City of Pleasures. What more need be said? Renowned for its decadence and debauchery, Shelzar is — depending on one's point of view — either a dream come true or a nightmare given form. Shelzari are certainly among the most open-minded and hedonistic people in Ghelspad, true, but that is not by any stretch the full extent of their character. Outsiders forget that Shelzari are, in their own way, as devout and pious as any stern devotee of Hedrada or upstanding minion of Corean. The worship of Enkili suffuses almost every aspect of the city's life — good, bad, and even indifferent. To forget this fact is to lose the context in which Shelzar's zest for life takes place.

Shelzar is also an ancient city: "Half as old as Scarn," so the saying goes. Its oldest buildings and structures have seen more years than many nations in the Scarred Lands. Shelzar has survived the rise and fall of empires, religious disputes, even the Divine War, and its architecture has withstood them all. Its people are not just self-absorbed sybarites (although many are that as well); they are heirs to a culture and a society whose age dwarfs that of the Calastian Hegemony or even Vesh. There are few settlements in Ghelspad that can boast of their accomplishments as loudly as Shelzar.

This chapter describes the City of Pleasures from the ground up, concentrating on the individual buildings and places that make this city the Jewel of the Scarred Lands. Far from being a one-trick pony, Shelzar reveals itself as a complex and culturally rich place, where even the pursuit of bodily pleasures is not just an end in itself but the gateway to an understanding that many thought lost millennia ago. Shelzar is a link to a time when mortals looked forward to each dawn as a harbinger of newer and more pleasurable experiences. Rather than dreading the future, the Shelzari embraced it. To enter Shelzar and explore its locales is to see the Scarred Lands from a radically different perspective. Who, in this dark time, cannot see value in that?

The Shadhi

The sprawling Shadhi district is home to the vast majority of Shelzar's poor and working-class citizens, the unfortunates who slog away every day just to make ends meet and who more often than not failing to do so. The houses here are the ancestors of the rundown shacks that once housed slave workers centuries ago. Over the years, they have been added to, joined together, and split apart with such little regard for planning or efficiency that the entire district is a labyrinth, often requiring one to travel through several people's courtyards to reach his own front door. A few years ago, in an effort to improve the appearance of the city in anticipation of a visit from King Virduk of Calastia, Minister Fratreli had the hovels painted in bright, cheery colors, granting a strange beauty to the otherwise dilapidated neighborhood.

Some of the non-player characters have levels in the Shelzari knife-fighter (knf; see Chapter 4) and the Shelzari eroticist (ser; see *Players Guide to Wizards, Bards and Sorcerers*). The eroticist levels can be ignored if the *Players Guide* is not available.





In most other cities, this district would have been cleared out many years ago, and there are many in Shelzar who are quite vocal that this should be done to make room for better housing — people who would be more than happy to see the whole place burned to the ground. So far, the residents of Shadhi have been extremely vehement in defense of their tumbledown homes, rightly fearing that without other available space in the city proper they will be forced to make their homes outside the city in the shantytowns of the destitute. There have been numerous violent incidents in the area of late. Many fear that the Shadhi situation is a disaster waiting to happen and that riots or worse are soon to come.

Brothels and Gambling Houses

1. Shifty Saed's Floating Dice Games

Shifty Saed's Floating Dice Games has no permanent location, instead setting up shop in cellars, back-rooms, stables, alleys, anywhere where a few dozen men and women can gather round a clear space on the floor and where Saed can stay one step ahead of the Sa'an Cartel. Saed's game can always be found somewhere in the Shadhi district, generally no more than a few blocks from the location indicated on the map.

Saed (*male human, Com4/Rog1/Exp1, LE*) was a member of the Sa'an Cartel until last year. He lacked the cut-throat attitude and raw talent necessary to excel in the Cartel, and he knew it. Seizing upon a rare opportunity, he killed a fellow thief and made off with a sack of booty, hoping to use the loot to escape Shelzar and live a life of luxury perhaps in Fangsfall or Rahoch — or anyplace else for that matter. Unfortunately for Saed, most of the loot turned out to be worthless, leaving him with a mark on his head and just enough cash for the stake in setting up the craps game.

Contrary to his name, Shifty Saed actually runs an honest game, at least by Shelzar standards. Any cheating is dealt with swiftly — and permanently — by Ayes (*male human, War6, LE*) and Berg (*male human, War4/Rog3, NE*), two muscle-bound thugs who rarely stray further than a few paces from Saed. However, Saed has been known to have the two thugs pay a "friendly" visit to any big winners following a game, just so they know not to come back....

Saed is trying to save up enough cash to get out of Shelzar, but expenses keep cropping up that eat away at his savings. He can feel the Cartel getting closer and is starting to get desperate.

2. Xharen's House of Pleasure and Pain

Shelzar is home to numerous brothels and has a reputation for catering to every possible perversity. Xharen's House of Pleasure and Pain is proof that this reputation is well deserved. Owned and operated by a creepy little man named Xharen (*male half-elf, Exp4/Sor4, CN*), this establishment caters to those who believe that true pleasure can only be appreciated in relation to its opposite — extreme pain.

Xharen's employees are all well versed in a number of different techniques designed to heighten the pleasure of his patrons through the appropriate application of just the right amount of pain. While the vast majority of the House's clientele are interested solely in experiences of a sexual nature, they are not the only people who patronize this business. There is a notable minority that savors other sorts of pleasures just as readily as sado-masochistic sex. For them, a fine wine or a well-cooked meal can be every bit as pleasurable as an evening of physical debauchery under the tutelage of a half-orcish dominatrix, especially when it is leavened with a little pain as well.

Xharen has made certain to provide outlets for these more refined sensibilities, keeping a full staff of cooks, a vintner, musicians, artists, and numerous other specialists. All of these individuals are trained in the same underlying techniques as the prostitutes and masseurs of the House. They offer plenty of diversions for those who, for instance, think drinking ale laced with strychnine (quickly followed by an antidote) makes ones more appreciative of the heady bouquet of a nice Calastian liqueur afterwards. Strangely, Xharen's House of Pleasure and Pain is reasonably well regarded in Shelzar. This is probably a testament to the refined status of many of its patrons. While many Shelzari personalities are rumored to partake of Xharen's more banal services, there is even better evidence that some of the city's most elevated individuals (such as Ayshellia, High Priestess of Enkili) have paid extended visits to the House to sample its unique offerings. This is understandable. Even in the City of Pleasures, there must always be room for a little pain. If that pain aids one in enjoying Shelzar's other joys, all the better.

Temples and Shrines

3. Shrine to Hedrada

There are two major sites of worship dedicated to the Lawgiver in the city. The first is the temple on Enkili Way, and the second is this small shrine built into Hedrada's Gate. This shrine is actually the main center of worship for Hedradans of the Shadhi district, who often have too much work to do to trudge all the way to the main temple.

The shrine itself is quite simple. An image of Hedrad is carved into the stone, a bronze bowl held in a single outstretched statuary arm. During services, the bowl is filled with oil and is then lit, and parishioners drop offerings to the lawgiver into the flames.

Services are rare here, however, and when they do occur they are normally presided over by a devout and learned layperson rather than an official representative of the church. Such community members receive special training from the church and are sanctioned by the priesthood before they are allowed to preside.

4. Shrine to Madriel

Through fire, famine, war, empires, invasions, and uprisings, a shrine to Madriel has stood on this site for hundreds of years. In fact, Madriel's was the first shrine built in the city after the Hazari allowed the worship of other gods and faiths than their own during the time of the Ledean Empire. Despite this history, though, the worship of Madriel has never spread beyond the common folk and peasantry.

The current shrine suffered much damage during the Divine War and is still in quite poor shape. Without the support of wealthy parishioners, repairs and maintenance to the shrine are carried out by skilled worshippers. Work on the building continues slowly, but almost continuously, day in and day out. It is not at all uncommon for services to be conducted to a chorus of hammers, workmen's shouts, and chisels.

Miramom, the priestess of Madriel (*female human, Chr6, NG*), refuses to have the door of the building replaced, maintaining that there are no barriers to the worship of Madriel. She offers her blessings and services to any and all who enter the shrine regardless of their faith, although she does require a donation for healing, a donation that tends to be a substantially larger amount for non-Madrielites than for the devout.

5. Shrine of Drendari

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Shelzar is home to innumerable thieves, bagmen, and cutpurses, in addition to even more sinister criminals. It is little wonder then that there is a shrine to the demigoddess Drendari in this district. Overseen by Ikrah Raydeer (*female human, Chr6/Rog2, CN*), the shrine is dedicated to the goddess in her aspect as the Mistress of Shadows and Patron of Thieves. Despite the relative impiety of those elements served by the shrine, its weekly rites are well attended. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the shrine is very well maintained and apportioned, thanks in no small part to the "gifts" that its supplicants leave for the priestess as a show of their devotion to Drendari. (Ikrah Raydeer also doubles as a fence for her flock.) Many of the items the local thieves steal pass through her hands



before being sold illicitly. The shrine takes a cut of the sale, which the priestess uses to improve the building's appearance, and the remainder of the money goes back to the thief who brought the stolen goods to Ikrah in the first place. This arrangement has worked very well for several years, but the local authorities have begun to suspect Raydeer's involvement. Thus far, they have not acted against her for fear of causing a religious incident, but they may soon have no choice. Should that come to pass, the priestess can rely on many local thieves to protect and support her, since they depend on her for material as well as spiritual services.

Inns, Taverns, and Restaurants

6. Ehrbar's

Officially, this tavern is known as the Laughing Djinn, but everyone just calls it Ehrbar's after its owner and host Jaman Ehrbar (*male human, War5/Exp6, NE*). Ehrbar's thick middle and bald head belie his formerly trim physique and good looks. Before an injury consigned him to the life of a tavern-keeper, he was a member of the city watch—"in the old days, before they became a laughing stock"—and was known for his rough-and-tumble approach to policing the city. He was one of the toughest to walk the beat, and in fact is immortalized in local watch lore by an exceptionally tough region of the Maze which they refer to as "Ehrbar's Patch." He is always ready to wade into an altercation with his talented fists, and he keeps his old battle-notched scimitar sharp and ready behind the bar at all times.

Ehrbar's is the wildest spot in the Shadhi, a place where the workers and common folk come to blow off steam and drink themselves stupid. Never does a night go by without several fights breaking out, and Ehrbar quite sensibly fits the place out with only the crudest, simplest, and above all cheapest furniture, such as long trestle tables and peg-fit benches. A couple of planks fastened across a pair of upturned barrels serves as the bar itself.

No matter how loud, wild, and out-of-control the place gets, the authorities rarely intervene. Ehrbar's history grants him a certain leeway with the watch, and, in any case, most reckon that it's better that the peasants waste their time and energy drinking and pounding on each other than rising up in rebellion.

7. The Golden Triangle

Named for the fertile region that provides the city's bounty, The Golden Triangle is a rather nondescript restaurant and tavern. What sets it apart from the normal run-of-the-mill tavern is that the proprietor Duncan Rego (*male halfling, Exp7/Rog2, NG*), serves no imported food whatsoever. Only food grown, caught, or harvested in Shelzar is prepared in Rego's kitchen.

Rego is a rarity in Shelzar. Although many Shelzari halfings work in restaurants and taverns, few own their own businesses. Rego runs a tight ship and is noted as something of a tyrant among his staff, but the food is good, the portions plentiful, and Rego makes it a point to visit personally with every guest. He has an incredible ear for names and a knack for recalling personal details: once someone eats at his table, Rego never forgets any personal detail they've discussed. While he isn't in the business of selling information, his jovial and outgoing nature makes it rather easy to glean information from him about guests both past and present.

8. The Serpent Pit

Despite its name, the Serpent Pit is a reasonably high-class tavern, at least by the standards of the Shahdi District. Owned and operated by an attractive middle-aged woman named Suhah Bara (*female human, Exp3, CN*), the Pit caters primarily to visitors from other realms who wish to take in a little of the local ambience without having to contend with the seedy dives that are more typical of the district. Suhah herself is a lively, jocular woman, who enjoys flirting with her customers and implying that she is a devotee of the more exotic rites of the worship of Idra. While this is not true (she in fact worships Enkili, like most Shelzari), her pose is popular with the patrons of the Serpent Pit, who flatter themselves to think they have caught the eye of the aging beauty.

The inn's name derives from its other attraction, a large open pit in the center of the dining area where numerous snakes and serpentine creatures slither and crawl over one another. The writhing, undulating mass of scales is lit only by torchlight, adding to its strangely hypnotic effect on many watchers. None of the snakes is poisonous, which is fortunate, since drunken revelers have occasionally fallen into the pit, much to their chagrin and the amusement of other patrons. Every few days, Suhah employs a snake charmer to entertain her guests. The show is usually very well attended, attracting many people from the district who otherwise cannot afford the upscale prices of the inn.

9. The Devil's Head

Themed taverns are a proud Shelzari tradition. Many of the city's inns and bars distinguish themselves from their competitors by offering something unique or unusual that others do not. If these offerings prove popular enough, the taverner might decide to expand his repertoire with more of the same, or to bring in other attractions in a similar vein. The Devil's Head is a good example of this practice. Years ago, an adventurer from outside Shelzar (no one remembers his name or his place of origin) entered this inn carrying a large leather bag. The adventurer became intoxicated and stumbled

out of the bar, leaving it behind. Since there was no way to find him again, the bartender took the bag and opened it, only to find the bloodied, decapitated head of some fiendish creature. He assumed it was a devil or demon and recoiled in horror. Tales of the devil's head quickly spread throughout the district, and the curious flocked to the inn to take a look at it. Knowing a good thing when he saw it, the inn's owner had the head stuffed and mounted above the bar, where it hangs to this day.

Although the identification of the head with a devil is still uncertain (and the head is now too far gone to identify it with certainty), the inn's name stuck. Over time, the inn started to alter its décor along a fiendish theme, with statues of devils and painted flames on its wooden walls. There is very little truly sinister about the place, however. The owner of the Devil's Head is Faahir Baaza (*male human, Exp3, N*), a worshipper of Denev and an extremely thoughtful, even gentle man. Baaza is coy in providing details about himself, though, preferring to seem mysterious in order to add to the mood of his inn.

10. The House of Isman Mamer

Coffee has become quite the rage throughout Ghelspad, flowing from Termana through trade routes maintained by House Asuras. This coffee house is a seedy little place, with very little to recommend it except the company. The coffee is generally of poor quality and the service even worse, but its patrons are among some of the most interesting and unusual in all of Shelzar. Isman Mamer (*male human, Com3/Exp2, CN*) fancies himself an intellectual, although in point of fact he is little more than a dilettante. He dabbles in philosophy, theology, history, and a dozen other subjects, none of which he knows well enough to qualify as a true expert.

What Isman lacks in his own education, though, his patrons more than make up for. His coffee house is the closest thing the Shahdi District has to a literary salon. Scholars, sages, and loremasters from across the city congregate here to talk, to debate — and to complain about the coffee. No one remembers how it was that Isman managed to turn his shabby little coffee house into a meeting-place for many of the foremost minds in Shelzar, but there is no question that this is now the place to be if one values good conversation and intellectual repartee. It also happens to be an excellent place to learn interesting rumors and tales from across Ghelspad.

Civic and Governmental

11. Shadhi District Office of Governance

The Shadhi district commissioner, "Shayk" Sala Mei (*male human, Ari2/Exp6, NE*), has the odious and virtually impossible task of keeping order in the Shadhi district, and ultimately of

clearing people out of their homes to make way for new construction within the city walls. Unfortunately for him, the people of the Shadhi, while generally poor, are quite proud and are not easily shifted from their homes. There has been much unrest in the region in the past few months.

Luckily for the folk of the Shadhi, Sala Mei is inherently lazy and shiftless. He abhors work. He rarely visits his office in person, leaving the running of affairs to his underlings who, lacking the power to enact any of the mandates of the office, take every opportunity to line their own purses and shirk what little work they are able to do. Sala Mei himself is actually rather poor by Shelzari standards, lacking even the ambition to run a profitably corrupt office. He prefers to spend his days in idle luxury, normally as someone's guest, trading on his questionable connection to ancient Elzan nobility to bolster his host's reputation.

Shayk is an ancient Elzan title somewhat analogous to duke. The shayks of Elz were the wealthiest and most powerful nobles in the Elzan Empire, second only to the Amyr himself. Sala Mei is a distant cousin of the Muhazad family, descended from the most powerful shayk in the empire. The title of shayk is now almost meaningless in Shelzar, though, and Sala Mei's claim to the title is a tenuous one, but he enjoys the small degree of respect that it grants him and so wears it with great pomposity.

12. Tax and Import Office

Compared to many cities, Shelzar has a surprisingly small government and a minimal bureaucracy. This is precisely how most Shelzari like it, especially the powerful merchant houses that control most of the commerce. Even so, there is no escaping the long arm of government, even in such a chaotic city as Shelzar. Perhaps the most dreaded branch of that government is the Tax and Import Office, placed here in the Shahdi District to keep it out of sight of the wealthier and more influential residents (who end up paying the bulk of its levies).

The Tax and Import Office, as its name suggests, oversees the taxation of all goods and imports into the city. The head of the office, Wasood Hakr (*male human, Ari2/Exp2, LN*), is very devoted to his duties. Under his regime, the office has stepped up its collection processes, hiring soldiers and local toughs to act as its minions. When an individual is overdue in paying his taxes, Hakr sends out his collection agents to remind them of their obligations to Shelzar. These agents do not hesitate to use threats, intimidation, and even physical violence in dealing with delinquent taxpayers.

Needless to say, Hakr has simultaneously earned the approbation of the City Council and the enmity of virtually everyone else. The Council does not publicly endorse Hakr's methods, but neither have

they condemned them. They cannot afford to alienate the merchant houses, so they keep their support for Hakr silent. Still, there is no denying that the office now runs more efficiently than ever and general revenues to the city's coffers have increased noticeably as a result of Wasood Hakr's "reforms" of the collection system.

Of course, Hakr has an ulterior motive in instituting these improvements at the Tax and Import Office. Shelzari take it as given that government officials will shave a percentage of all taxes off the top for themselves. This is considered neither illegal nor immoral. In fact, Shelzari consider such actions more along the lines of a "commission" for a job well done. If an official can find a way to coax more money out of the citizenry, he is performing his duties efficiently and so should be rewarded for his efforts. Hakr is no different and is enriching himself mightily. In the last few years alone, he has amassed a significant fortune, purchasing a nice home in Old Town and acquiring a wife from an old family of noble Elzan blood.

Merchants, Equipment, and Services

13. Kubisz's General Supplies

Jah Kubisz (*male human, Exp9, NG*) is a rarity in Shelzar, an honest merchant who deals fairly and openly with the people of the Shadhi. Mind you, he isn't above a little price-gouging, or even short-weighting strangers or the more successful merchants with whom he occasionally deals.

Kubisz's Supplies sells mainly the everyday tools and goods that the people of the Shadhi require, but he also deals in a wide array of magical trinkets and talismans. These latter items are almost uniformly useless, but he has unknowingly sold a few real magic items for virtually nothing. Anyone casting *detect magic* in Kubisz's shop may be in for a very pleasant surprise indeed.

14. Jamjoud's Historical Curiosities

In a city with as long and as illustrious a history as Shelzar, it is little wonder that its citizens have taken more than a passing interest in that history. Most Shelzari are at least cursorily acquainted with Shelzar's past. It is both a point of pride for them and a means of emphasizing their superiority over the poor, benighted souls from "less sophisticated" societies. Indeed, it is a common rhetorical tactic of Shelzari orators and debaters to bait their opponents by denigrating other societies as less civilized than their own. This tactic rarely succeeds in doing anything other than angering the other party involved — which is usually the intention.

Of course, Shelzari also demonstrate their love of the past in more concrete ways. One such way is through the collecting of historical curiosities of various sorts. Whether they are bits of ancient pottery, old

coins, weapons, or even the ashes of famous people (which is considered by most Shelzari to be in poor taste, although it is not technically illegal). Consequently, curiosity shops, many of which do a thriving business, are common throughout the city.

Jamjoud Taleef's curiosity shop is by far the largest in the Shahdi District. This rat-warren is in fact comprised of several small buildings joined by a series of catwalks and tunnels, and it contains innumerable pieces of old junk — the detritus of ancient civilizations — along with a handful of rare items of great value. Jamjoud (*male human, Exp7, CN*) is something of a rogue. He regularly cheats his customers by passing off worthless rubbish as historical treasures. However, he also has a genuinely deep and abiding interest in history. If he encounters someone else who seems to hold the past in the same reverence, he is less likely to cheat them, although he remains thoroughly untrustworthy in almost every other respect.

If a client is willing to pay his exorbitant fees, Jamjoud will do his best to provide her with what she wants. His shop has a little bit of everything in it, including magical items from as far back as the Empire of Flame. Most of his customers, though, are not really interested in anything more than small mementoes, which he gladly provides at a premium price.

Recently, several different groups have approached Jamjoud, each of them believing he possessed an item they called "the Iron Flask of Yazeem." These groups never identified themselves nor explained just what the item was or why it was so valuable. This has piqued Jamjoud's interest, and he is said to be looking into the matter to find a way to cash in on these unusual enquiries.

15. Banniya's Fortunes

Shelzari have an unusual attitude toward the concept of fortune telling. On the one hand, their devotion to Enkili teaches them that the future cannot be predicted: to do so is to tempt fate, and suggests that one does not trust in the providence of the Trickster, whose guiding hand is said to have steered Shelzar on the proper course at least since the time of the legendary Ghurika. Yet, there is no denying that the Shelzari, like many other peoples, nevertheless have a deep and abiding interest in prophecies and divinations. For that reason, fortunetellers can be found throughout the city. No devout follower of Enkili would suffer being seen to patronize them, of course, which is why such establishments are usually located in discreet, out of the way places, to better protect the identities of their patrons.

Banniya's Fortunes is very different. The proprietress, Banniya Jumal (*female human, Exp4, N*), is a plain woman of middle years who has proudly established her business on a main street of the district and advertises her services on a sign that hangs outside its door. Whereas other fortunetellers

cater to their clients by telling them only good fortunes, Banniya is well known as a doomsayer. Her fortunes are always black and gloomy, with a hefty dose of death, destruction, and dismemberment. They are also nearly always true — or so say her devotees, which are legion.

The irony, of course, is that Banniya is a con woman, a gifted actress and stage magician who uses her considerable skills in these areas to enter a "trance" and "predict" the future for those who pay her rather exorbitant fees. She claims to have the blessing of Enkili for her gifts, which is why her predictions are always woeful. The priesthood of Enkili does not condone her claims, yet cannot deny that there is an uncanny accuracy to her prognostications. Banniya is as baffled by this as anyone and has begun to believe her own sham prophecies, which only adds to her appeal. Daily, Shelzari who wish to know the dire events in their immediate future flock to her shop and pay for the privilege of hearing her tell them of their imminent ruin.

16. Kaziri the Poet

Alat Kaziri (*male half-elf, Brd5, CN*) is a poet for hire — but not a very good one. His relative lack of skill is precisely the reason why he has had to set himself up in the Shahdi District in the first place. He was previously employed by the City Council to write paeans to its glorious members on public occasions. His inability to do so in a fashion pleasing to the Council (or to anyone else for that matter) led to his dismissal. With that black mark on his good name, no one would hire him, at least not anyone in the more refined parts of town.

Now, Kaziri is reduced to writing bawdy drinking songs and insipid love poems for dirty old men looking to bed their neighbors' wives. The sad fact is that, as much as he hates doing so, Kaziri is much better suited to this than he was working in polite society. His vulgar songs are extremely popular and, judging from the number of divorce proceedings in recent weeks, his love poems have had their desired effect as well. Even so, Kaziri dreams of the day when he might again undertake more lofty subjects, and he will try his best to convince anyone who has connections among the upper classes of the city to let him do just that.

17. Amirani's Rugs and Carpets

The intricately woven patterns of Shelzari rugs and carpets surpass even those of Zathiskan origin, which are the only other such items to be compared with them in the Scarred Lands. What today are called "Shelzari rugs" were once more commonly known as "Hazari rugs," and some of the more conservative cultures of Ghelspad still call them such. This is because the ancient Hazari sect pioneered such rugs, whose beautiful swirling patterns were intended as an aid to meditation. The original purpose has been all

but lost, yet the art of creating the rugs has survived, becoming ever more elaborate and complex. This has only made the rugs even more valuable to collectors and connoisseurs as far away as Darakeene.

Shaz Amirani (*male human, Exp2, CG*) is the proprietor of this shop, which he inherited from his father, who inherited it from his father — and so on, for many generations. A member of his family has been weaving rugs in the traditional Hazari way for centuries. Shaz takes great pride in his work and is a reasonably wealthy man, owing to his very exclusive clientele. Despite this, he has not moved from the Shahdi District, since that would mean abandoning a shop his family has owned for as long as it has been weaving rugs. Amirani's Rugs and Carpets is a fixture of the neighborhood and it is inconceivable to imagine it anywhere else in the city.

Homes and Dwellings

18. Lateen Nu'mami's Home

Lateen Nu'mami (*female human, Ari2, NG*) is an aging beauty and the last surviving member of what was once a powerful merchant house of Shelzar. The Nu'mami were once influential enough to hold seats on the City Council, but they fell on hard times during the Divine War. Since then, they have been reduced to near-poverty (or what passes for such among the wealthy). They sold their original residence in the Old Town and bought a home here, where they slowly died out, leaving Lateen as the sole member of the clan in Shelzar.

For a woman of middle age, Lateen is very attractive. She is no match for the nubile Shelzari women one can see on every street of the city, but what she lacks in youth she more than makes up for wealth and determination. With the last remnants of her family's fortune (which is still considerable by most standards), Lateen has vowed to reclaim the Nu'mami clan's former greatness. She seeks an equally ambitious young man of similarly noble heritage to become her husband and partner, so that together they might rebuild the commercial empire that she sees as her birthright. Thus far, no one has taken Lateen up on her offer, which has raised some suspicions. After all, if a wealthy and attractive (if somewhat past her prime) woman is unable to entice a man to marry her, something must be wrong, mustn't it?

19. Najd Rajaami's Home

This rundown home is the dwelling of a dwarf called Najd Rajaami (*dwarf male, Rog8, NE*), who is known locally as "the rhaat catcher," because he has made it his personal quest to capture the young orphan children (called "rhaats" in Shelzari slang) that live — some say infest — the district. These children are more than just nuisances, since they steal and cause all sorts of mayhem, which only

adds to the reputation of the Shahdi in other parts of the city. Najd originally hails from Burok Torn, whence he journeyed over thirty years ago. He has fully integrated himself into Shelzari society, adopting a Shelzari name and dressing like a traditional member of the city's merchant class.

Najd claims that he has only the best interests of the orphan children at heart, turning them over to various charities throughout the city. The truth is quite a bit grimmer: Najd is a slaver and sells the children to whoever is willing to pay his price. A great many of them wind up as prostitutes or pleasure slaves in the homes of aristocratic Shelzari, while others are trained as knife-fighters or sailors, or in other similarly hazardous occupations. Najd has made quite a living at his questionable trade, although one would never know it by the looks of his ramshackle home. In a few more years, he plans to leave Shelzar with his wealth and return to Burok Torn, where he hopes to make a difference in that city's continual war against the dark elves.

20. Wahid Majeef's Home

The Hazari sect has been more or less extinct in Shelzar for many years. There are a number of adherents to this ancient philosophy still in the city, but they have next to no influence in the city. Even their current leader Anssara Ishani (see Chapter Four), despite his lofty title of "sultan," is little more than a curiosity in a city that long ago consigned the Hazari to the dustbin of history. Nowadays, most Shelzari are apt to believe that the Hazari were a sect of puritanical fanatics who hated pleasure and preached a soulless creed of self-denial and discipline. While far from the truth, this opinion is so widespread that to admit sympathy for — never mind membership in — the Hazari is to open oneself up to ridicule or worse.

For these reasons, the Hazari who remain in Shelzar keep to themselves and rarely admit to their affiliation. Wahid Majeef (*male human, Exp5, LN*) is one such person. He was born into a family whose connection to the Hazari dates back dozens of generations, and he has never doubted the veracity of the sect's teachings. Nevertheless, he fears that his position as an aide to the City Council would be jeopardized if his sympathies were revealed. Therefore, he keeps his connection secret and aids other Hazari who wish to do the same. Every Denday, Wahid holds a gathering of Hazari from across the city, who meet in his home to discuss their philosophy and share news of mutual interest. Only about 30 Hazari regularly attend these gatherings, but Wahid considers that a large enough number that he claims that he is conducting "Council business" on those days, a lie very few of his neighbors believe. Most are instead convinced that he belongs to a cult of some sort — which isn't really far from the truth, at least from the perspective of most Shelzari.

Places of Note

21. Old Gate

The Old Gate is, naturally, the oldest gate currently standing in the city. Its age and origin are unknown. Local legend claims that the massive gate was in fact built prior to the founding of Shai al Hazari. The legends say that when Hakhiya Aboussa and his Hazari disciples made landfall along the coast, they found the Old Gate standing there on a promontory without any indication of who had built it or why. Hakhiya looked upon the gate and then said, "This is our gateway to the future, my friends. The Hazari have found a home." Shelzar then grew up around the ancient gate, which became its first and most impressive entrance through its walls.

Whether or not this story is true, there is no question that the Old Gate is impressive to behold. Its proportions are immense — more in tune with giants than with men. Standing over 25 feet tall, it looks obviously out of place, since the wall that joins its western side is considerably shorter than the Gate itself, as if the early Hazari builders were either unable or unwilling to extend the wall to the same height. The Old Gate is the primary means of entry for visitors from Zathiske and other regions of the Calastian Hegemony. For that reason, it well patrolled by mercenary soldiers and members of the local constabulary.

22. Padaweh Gate

The old Hazari were greater lovers of learning. They believed that virtue could be taught and that it was through education that the mortal condition could be improved. Not long after the founding of Shai al Hazari, they began constructing the Padaweh, or University, which quickly distinguished itself as one of the premier institutions of learning in Ghelspad. Students at Padaweh were given instruction in mundane and magical subjects, since the Hazari recognized arcane magic as an important tool in the quest for enlightenment. At its height, the Padaweh boasted some of the finest scholars in the world. Their works and studies are still read today throughout the Scarred Lands.

During the Divine War, the trustees of the Padaweh did not believe that Shelzar was safe from the depredations of the titans and their allies. After all, Shelzar had not fortified its walls in decades and its great population and economic importance made it an obvious target for assault. Against the wishes of the City Council, the Padaweh's faculty and student body, along with the contents of the university's great library, made the overland journey to Elz, which the trustees deemed safer because of its impressive fortifications and relative political insignificance. Unfortunately for both the trustees and those who valued learning, Elz was sacked during the Titanswar

and the transplanted Padaweh along with it. Most of the faculty was killed and its collection of books, codices, and scrolls was scattered to the four winds, if not destroyed as well. To this day, rumors circulate of scholars finding a cache of books from the Padaweh in some far-off locale, but they rarely turn out to be true. There is periodically talk of refounding the Padaweh in Shelzar. So far, such talk has amounted to nothing, since the City Council has little interest in diverting the necessary funds and no private backer has yet appeared to do the same.

The Padaweh Gate is located very close to the old university. Many of the buildings that once stood in this area have since been torn down, but several remain, now occupied by the usual assortment of seedy taverns, dimly lit brothels, and unsavory businesses. The Gate itself is poorly maintained, since most traffic goes through either the Old Gate or Enkili's Gate instead. There are a handful of soldiers who guard the Gate, but their vigilance is questionable at best.

23. Enkili's Gate

Enkili's Gate was until recently the primary gate by which most visitors entered the city. With the construction of Newgate in the last five years, that role is in transition. Nevertheless, Enkili's Gate is in many ways the spiritual entrance to Shelzar, for it exemplifies the city's open-mindedness and toleration. Unlike all the other gates in the city, Enkili's Gate has no doors to close against outsiders. Instead, the gate is actually a giant archway joined to the wall that symbolically welcomes all into Shelzar, regardless of race or origin. To many, this fits Shelzar perfectly and is a fitting monument to the city's willingness to accept travelers from all over the Scarred Lands. During the Divine War, this willingness was put sorely to the test, as refugees fled from the north and swelled the population of Shelzar near to bursting. Despite this, the City Council never advocated closing Enkili's Gate and it remained open throughout the conflict.

Today, Enkili's Gate enjoys a lot of traffic, especially from the direction of the Sweltering Plains and other regions to the northwest of the city. Despite the avowed openness of the gate, both mercenaries and local troops patrol it, although there are far from enough of them to mount anything but a token defense against any serious invader. The archway is made of granite and surmounted with a carved symbol of Enkili, as if to remind visitors that the Trickster claims this city as her own.

24. Newgate

Five years ago a massive firestorm blew in from the Sweltering Plains, withering fields, killing citizens, and finally punching a hole through the city wall. The dwarves of the Brunwyn Craft Guild successfully lobbied the city to allow them craft a

new gate rather than simply patching the wall, and their work is a glory to behold. Intricate carvings cover every inch of the grand gate, relating the history of Shelzar from its founding to the present; one single slab of stone has been left bare of any carvings, commemorating the period Divine War and the break between the old and the new.

The gates themselves are cut from two solid pieces of granite shipped at the Brunwyn Guild's expense from Burok Torn. Each weighs more than 15 tons, but one man can swing them easily and silently open or closed — they are a true masterpiece and the Guild's greatest achievement to date. The price of shipping the massive slabs for the gate from Burok Torn ensured that the Guild suffered a financial loss on the project, but the quality of the final product and the subsequent increase in the Guild's trade as a result made it a worthwhile venture in their eyes.

25. Hedrada's Gate

The Hedradan church has a surprisingly devout and robust presence in the city of Shelzar, and this gate commemorates the great contribution that the Hedradans have made to the city over the years. In addition to the main Hedradan temple on Enkili's Way near Shalamar, there is a smaller shrine to Hedrad built into this gate, the favored place of worship for Hedradans living in the Shadhi district.

26. Belsameth's Gate

This gate is similar in appearance to Enkili's Gate, save that there is no real gate here at all: it is simply a wall carved to look like one. This is meant to be very symbolic, of course, but no one seems to remember of what.

Unbeknownst to most, it is possible to enter the city through Belsameth's gate. Atop the gate is a very well-hidden secret door (Search, DC 35) that opens onto a 70-foot shaft inside the city wall itself, which descends well below ground level and links up with the infamous tunnel network beneath the city. There is no ladder or handholds in the shaft, and scaling it requires a Climb check (DC 15, due to the fact that one can brace against the far wall of the shaft). This shaft is the famed secret entrance of the Cult of Ancients, who refer to it as Belsameth's Throat.

There are a number of traps both magical and mundane that protect the shaft, and four Cultists normally guard the chamber at the bottom. The traps are magically attuned to Cult of Ancients members and thus are never triggered by a Cultist.

27. Beggar's Gate

The southernmost of the city's gates, no one seems to recall the origin of its name. The Beggar's Gate is unique among all the gates in that the portal is only large enough to admit a person on foot; no horses or vehicles may pass this way.

Many peasants have been displaced from their homes in the past few years as demand for land within the city walls has increased dramatically. With no other option, a shanty town has grown up outside the walls, centered around Beggar's Gate.

28. The Lawgiver's Way

This street is actually the longest in the city, winding all the way from Hedrada's Gate in the west, through the south of the city, and finally ending at one of the city's southeastern docks. Consequently, Lawgiver's Way sees a tremendous amount of mercantile traffic to and from the South Docks. It starts out quite broad at Hedrada's Gate, almost as wide as the Grand Boulevard, but narrows substantially along its length, leading to massive bottlenecks and traffic-jams in the Maze and South Docks areas.

The irony of the name Lawgiver's Way lies of course in the fact that it is one of Shelzar's most sordid and disreputable streets. Dozens of the city's seediest taverns, drug dens, brothels, and gambling houses line it, particularly in the southern stretches, but even those few sordid businesses in the Adazi and Pezwahri cluster around "The Way."

A Note to all Ghelspadian Cartographers

Most modern maps of Shelzar are based on a single pre-war map by the famed Ankilan cartographer Jefar Yurkiw. Yurkiw's maps were works of art, meticulously detailed, but he had no gift for languages and a slightly more "creative" flair than was really useful in his field. As a result, there has been a recurring error on most subsequent maps of Shelzar, such that Hedrada's Gate and Belsameth's Gate — and, since its construction, Newgate — are often mislabeled. From north to south, the gates are Newgate, Hedrada's Gate, and Belsameth's Gate, respectively, and not the more common but quite incorrect Belsameth's Gate, Newgate, and Hedrada's Gate.

29. The Hanged Halfling (The Cutpurse Guild)

The Hanged Halfling is one of a thousand nondescript taverns in the city, which is exactly the way owner and host Silav Milanon (*male human, Rog3/Exp5, NE*) likes it. Like many other taverns, cafes, coffee houses, and restaurants in the city, it was used as an unofficial headquarters and meeting place for a band of criminals. What sets the Halfling apart is that its resident thugs, "The Cutpurse Guild," have been amazingly successful and are now currently second only to the Sa'an Crime Cartel.

The Cutpurse Guild has of course grown well beyond the walls of the Hanged Halfling's backroom, and it now maintains a number of safe-houses,

hideouts, and residences throughout the city. However, the Guildsmen have never forgotten where they come from. They still frequent the tavern, and the leaders can often be found holding secret meetings in their old backroom hangout. The Guild also offers their old friend some of the best protection in the city. Anyone who knows anything knows to leave the Halfling alone. One petty crook decided to rob Milanon last year and was found the next morning “hanging around town.”

30. Grand Boulevard

The Grand Boulevard is the second most impressive street in all of Shelzar. Only Enkili's Way surpasses it in grandeur, and there are those who prefer the more ostentatious, even gaudy ornamentation of this thoroughfare to its competitor. The Grand Boulevard is one of the oldest streets in Shelzar, having been first constructed in the days of Shai al Hazari, before the worship of the gods was known in the city. Consequently, the Boulevard has a rich history, all manner of important events having taken place along its marbled expanse. During the reign of the Empire of Elz, the Grand Boulevard hosted triumphal parades in honor of the Sultan, as well as to commemorate military victories against enemies of the Elzan people. This use of the street explains its

inordinate width: it had to be large enough to accommodate columns of troops along with their chariots and warhorses, not to mention the throngs of captives that were frequently brought in tow.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Grand Boulevard is not as well maintained as it used to be. Most of the important buildings in Shelzar are now located near Enkili's Way, which means that the City Council devotes the vast majority of its public maintenance funds toward its repair and upkeep. The Grand Boulevard is lined with many fragrant trees as well as numerous statues honoring great Hazari and Elzan figures of the past. Many of these have long since fallen into disrepair, however, with missing heads, limbs, and inscriptions. The combination of the overgrown trees (they are not as well groomed as those elsewhere in the city) and the decaying statuary lends weight to the Grand Boulevard, which is why it is referred to colloquially as “the Street of Lost Dreams,” and is perhaps why it has become so popular with bards, poets, lovers, and other tortured souls.

31. The Fountain of Hussari

Hisbah Hussari was a wealthy man who lived in Shelzar before the Titanswar. Although as devoted to a sybaritic lifestyle as any Shelzari, Hussari also possessed a strong civic-mindedness. Upon his



death, he left a sizable portion of his fortune to the City Council in order to beautify the more run-down areas of the city. Hussari spent his life surrounded by beautiful things and wanted to leave some beauty behind for his beloved city. So it was that the Council commissioned an artist to sculpt a magnificent marble statue that was a fitting memorial to Hussari, with the intention of its being the centerpiece of a large fountain to be constructed in the Shahdi District.

The artist spent a great deal of time learning about Hussari and his life. In the end, he concluded that the only possible way to do justice to the man's lifetime of self-indulgence and hedonism was to sculpt an image of Hussari himself, naked and corpulent from years of excess, engaged in sexual congress with a idealized representation Shelzar depicted as a beautiful young woman with prodigious physical attributes. The City Council was mildly disturbed by the sculpture — not because of the subject matter, but because of the uncannily accurate image of Hisbah Hussari, right down to the hirsute back and wrinkled hindquarters. Nevertheless, they allowed the sculpture to be placed in the center of the fountain, where it has become a fixture of the Shahdi District much beloved by its inhabitants. It is a popular spot for clandestine meetings between lovers, spies, and criminals, which has only added to its notoriety among the Shelzari.

The Adazi District

The Adazi district is the fastest growing quarter of the city. Something of a mixture of the Pezwhari and the Shadhi, it is the home of the vast majority of Shelzar's lesser merchants — the "honest" traders and businessmen who own and operate the city's many shops, restaurants, and services. It is also the preferred home of the many foreign expatriates and adventurers who choose to settle in the city permanently. Most Shelzari refer to both this quarter and its residents as "the Adazi."

Brothels and Gambling Houses

32. The Merry Widow

The Merry Widow is the domain of Mahati Farzod (*female human, Exp8/Wiz2/Ser3, N*). For many years she was trapped in a terrible marriage with her husband Fazeel. She could only watch silently as he squandered his inherited fortune on drink and gambling, for every word on her part was ample excuse for Fazeel to beat her. As fortune would have it, though, Enkili saw fit to set her free when Fazeel met with an unfortunate accident. Of course, everybody in the district knew that she bludgeoned the miserable old bastard to death with a frying pan and fed him to the pigs, but Fazeel was an unpopular man and was not missed.

Shortly after the old man's death, Mahati began taking on young women, giving them three meals a day and a roof over their head. "Mahati's Daughters," as they are now known, are a welcoming and convivial lot, more than happy to spend a few hours with "gentleman callers" for a few gold ordu. The whole thing is very genteel and above-board, and if things get out hand there is always Grunji (*half-orc [Urkhadi] male, Bbn7, NE*), the omnipresent wall-of-muscle who keeps the peace at any cost.

33. The Perfumed Garden

The owner of the Perfumed Garden, Stebec Faun (*male halfling, Exp8, CE*), maintains a refined and discreet façade that hides the truth of his business. In truth, patrons of the Garden can select any number of exotic sexual partners, including

Shelzari Sex Constructs

The people of Shelzar are obsessed with sex. Even the common folk copulate often and openly and partake of sex with multiple simultaneous partners, but for the moneyed and powerful, such ordinary distractions simply do not suffice. The truly discriminating Shelzari can find all manner of exotic partners in the city of sins, from other races to titanspawn to monsters — even undead — and for some, even such "mundane" distractions are not enough. As a result, some enterprising Shelzari sorcerers and wizards have devised the sex construct, a magical creature whose only reason for existing is to satisfy carnal desires.

The most common of these constructs is the sintaur, a thing similar in appearance to a centaur but formed entirely of human flesh rather than a hairy horselike coat. It has four human legs, each pair equipped with normal sexual organs, and female sintaurs have either four or six huge breasts. Each of the sintaurs legs ends not in a foot but in dexterous, long-fingered hands. Many wealthy Shelzari maintain stables of sintaurs which they bring out for parties to impress guests. On the Night of Masks, sintaurs are lavishly decorated, hung with jewels and herded through the streets in a twisted parody of a dressage parade.

One of the most popular attractions in the underground is the slaving orificer. From a distance, this creature looks like a gibbering moulder, but up close there is an obvious and disturbing difference: In place of mouths, the slaving orificer has female sex organs. Massive orgiastic spectacles sometimes take place with a hundred people or more copulating with the orificer, quite often killing the thing in the process.

even constructs and the undead. It is in fact the perfume with which the undead are covered that gives the place its name. Faun even keeps a slaving orificer (see “Shelzari Sex Constructs” sidebar) in one of the front rooms. If Faun doesn’t have what you are looking for, he guarantees that he will get it for you, and he has yet to fail to realize that claim.

None of this really sets Faun’s far apart from a number of other pleasure-houses in the city which offer similar services, but Faun’s open smile and genteel manner hide a dark truth. The halfling regularly has people kidnapped from the street, then binds them in a room in his cellar and offers them up to his “discerning clients” for a hefty price. The majority of Shelzar, even, would recoil at this sort of thing — the typically lenient and laughable Shelzari legal system would skin Faun alive if his secret ever got out — but he never wants for custom and makes enough money from this venture to justify the risk.

Inns, Taverns, and Restaurants

34. Cheny’s

Cheny’s has little going for it. The old joke, “Sure the food is bad, but at least there is lots of it,” applies doubly here. The proprietor, Cheny Duffar (*male human, Exp6, LE*), is not the friendliest sort, but he listens with a preoccupied air to whoever sits at the counter, as long as he or she has money to spend. Even though Cheny is always polishing a glass, those he serves to customers are uniformly grimy, leading many to suspect that he only actually cleans one glass over and over again and that it is nothing more than a prop.

Cheny’s is a favorite of carters, guardsmen, laborers, and dockworkers who don’t give three figs what the food tastes like as long as it fills their guts and gives them the fuel to make it through the day. The place is filled to the rafters at breakfast and lunch and nigh on empty at all other times of day, although it does attract a certain type of middle-class adolescents who enjoy “slumming it” at night.

Cheny is famous for his coffee in much the same way that Hedrad is famous for its licentiousness or Burok Torn for its love of dark elves. It has been compared — unfavorably — to axle-grease, boat-tar, and Dunahne swamp-oil. It does have one thing going for it: it indeed seems to “Put hair on yer chest,” as Cheny claims, although it appears to do so regardless of one’s race, sex, or species.

35. Orange Blossom Palace

The Orange Blossom Palace is one of the finest restaurants in the city and would not be at all out of place in North Dock, Old Town, or even the Pezwahri. It is housed in one of the oldest pre-Elzan buildings in the city, a small palace once owned by one of ancient Shelzar’s noble houses. In place of the

date-palms and shade-trees common to the rest of Shelzar, the courtyard of the Palace is filled with dozens of fragrant orange trees, all kept in a constant state of blossom by ancient magical enchantments.

The proprietress Atelena Elystyl (*female forsaken elf, Exp12, NG*) is a refugee from Virduk’s incursions into Termana. Elystyl lacks the forlorn temperament so common to her race; she is quite sociable and self-possessed. Many people have encouraged Elystyl to move the Palace to larger premises in a more upscale section of town, but she refuses, saying only, “As long as the trees remain here, so will I.”

The Palace opens for business only from dusk to dawn, when cool sea-borne breezes stir the trees and bathe the guests in the succulent, heavenly aroma of the blossoms. Despite its luxurious grounds and fine menu, the Palace is frequented by more than just the city’s wealthy: it is also a favored choice for middle-class patrons seeking an elegant dining experience. Elystyl makes all her guests feel welcome in her home (she does indeed live in a finely-appointed suite on the building’s top floor) regardless of wealth or social standing.

Merchants, Equipment, and Services

36. Abd’al Faisal, Scribe

Shelzari law holds the contracted party in any business arrangement to be financially responsible for the cost of drafting the contract. Even laborers hoping for a day’s employment in the fields must have a contract ready to sign. This is where Abd’al Faisal (*male human, Exp6, LE*) comes in. Faisal spends his days copying simple contracts for laborers who vie for jobs in the hiring-pits each morning. For a few copper ouda, they get an iron-clad contract and a chance to earn some coin.

Faisal’s has an excellent command of Shelzari mercantile law — the only law that really matters in the city — and draws up excellent contracts with few, if any loopholes. He prefers to make a steady but comfortable living selling simple contracts to laborers, but he is not above penning more “upscale” agreements now and again for the right price.

The Pezwahri

While the wealthy and powerful maintain their businesses in the Merchant’s Quarter, they reside in the Pezwahri, a district of expansive high-walled estates, gardens, parks, canals, fountains, and even a menagerie. In addition to the numerous city guards patrolling the streets here most of the residents employ private mercenary guards, the Legion of Crimson (see *Secrets & Societies*) being the most widespread. The elite enclave of Ismarhi Island is considered part of the Pezwahri district.

Many prominent Pezwahri residents and business owners have been discussing the construction of a new wall around the district, particularly in the east where this district meets up with the Maze, to keep out criminals, laborers, peasants, and other such undesirable riff-raff.

Temples and Shrines

37. Grand Temple

The Grand Temple is a labyrinth of a building. Once an elaborate shayk's palace, the building has been extensively renovated and modified over the years with hundreds of rooms and corridors added, subtracted, or moved with no overall plan of guiding vision. It is an easy thing to become hopelessly lost in the sprawling complex, a fact that many of the businesses housed within rely on for their custom.

Everywhere in the Temple can be seen the sign of the Great Wheel, a cosmological construct unique to Shelzar. The Great Wheel is formed of eight spokes, each of which bears the mark of one of the major gods. The gods are arranged around the wheel in diametrically opposed pairs based on their alignments — Corean opposite Vangal, for example — starting from lawful good in the upper left to chaotic evil on the lower right. In the center of the wheel is the symbol of Denev, the balancing force and axle upon which the wheel turns. The most beautiful and impressive of the Great Wheel designs is the carving on the Grand Temple's north wall. Fully 30 feet across, the wheel features human-sized statues of each of the eight gods and a single, massive emerald in the center representing Denev. The fact that the emerald survived the first hour after it was put in place without being stolen testifies to the powerful magic that protects it. The thief who finally does manage to make off with the emerald — and few in the city doubt that it will happen one day — will doubtless be celebrated forever in Shelzari legend.

Beyond the presence of taverns, brothels, and drug dens in the building, one of the major points of conflict between the priests in the Grand Temple and the city government is that the city charges 1 copper ouda to enter the building; the priests argue that religion should be free. The city counters that religion may be free but that civic maintenance is not, and if the clergy don't like it, they can go elsewhere. (The exact words, however, tend to be far less civil. What response the priests might make is unknown, and probably best left that way.)

Inns, Taverns, and Restaurants

38. The Epicurean Palace

The Epicurean Palace specializes in exotic dishes from all corners of Ghelspad. Always on the cutting edge, the Palace two years ago introduced the Albadian cuisine that is now so fashionable in Shelzar. An actual Broadreach elf performance chef works here, preparing the spicy fare of the Hornsaw with numerous artistic flourishes and eye-catching antics such as knife-juggling. Other elements of the menu are heavily influenced by Darakeene food, leading some of the craftier merchants to start planning increased trade voyages to that region next year in anticipation of a Darakeene cuisine fad in the city.

The owner and host of the Palace is Serena Venaecia (*female human, Exp12, CN*), a Calastian expatriate. It is rumored that Venaecia did not leave Calastia willingly, but rather fled for her life owing to some very public and unpopular views she unwisely shared regarding the monarchy (Queen Geleeda in particular).

Whatever the truth of her background, no one can deny Serena's flair for food or her influence in creating food trends in the city. Serena personally creates and perfects each dish before passing the recipe on to her cooks. The portions are small and fabulously expensive, yet the waiting list for a table is months long.

39. The Ismarhi Overlook

While the food here is not quite so fine or elaborate as at the Epicurean Palace, the Overlook is without question the most exclusive dining establishment in the city. The Overlook specializes in the most exotic foods available in Ghelspad, from rare and strange animals to monsters, creatures from Termana and beyond. Some claim that they even serve the flesh of elves, dwarves, and even humans here, if the price is right, and given the inexhaustible Shelzari appetite for any forbidden pleasure or vice, this is quite possibly true.

Eating at the Overlook is not cheap. An average meal costs in the region of 100 gold ordu per seat, and some of the more elaborate or exotic menu items can cost five times that. At such prices, it is easy to see how owner Laban al'Faruk (*male human, Exp7/Rog2, NE*) can afford to have only four tables in the place.

Aside from the dining experience itself, what patrons of the Overlook pay for is the view. The Overlook is situated on the highest point of Ismarhi Island (apart from one's standing atop the lighthouse, of course), and it offers an unrivalled vista of the Blossoming Sea, the Thunder Coast, the Golden Triangle, and the bulk of the city itself.

Civic and Governmental

40. The Fortress

Originally built to aid in the defense of the city during the Divine War, the Fortress has seen little use since that time and has fallen into disrepair. This grim and forbidding structure was built on the foundation of a much earlier citadel which was part of the city's old wall structure. The sections of wall still attached to the Fortress are some of the few places in the city where the original wall construction remains.

The Fortress is the home of the Shelzari "army," which is now little more than a city watch. These forces are led by Grand Commander Ismal Khemari (see Chapter 4), a political appointee of little real experience and even less use. The tradition of using archaic, overblown, and largely meaningless military titles for such a laughably small and largely impotent city guard is typical of Shelzar. Khemari enjoys donning his finery and is rarely seen out of dress uniform, and he takes pleasure in trotting his troops out and parading them around town like a herd of prize horses. That crime in the city doubles during these parades does little to dissuade him.

The fortress itself is a vast and cavernous building. Hundreds of rooms lie closed off and dusty, having been abandoned decades ago as

Shelzar's army shrank to the ineffectual city watch that it is now. Even when the army was still at full force, there was an entire wing of the Fortress that was sealed off and unused. During the Divine War, a clan of Syenite assassins killed hundreds of Shelzari soldiers as they slept. It was not long before people reported strange occurrences in the west wing — noises in the night, items moving of their own accord, whispers in their ears as they slept, and the overriding smell of blood. And then there were the deaths. First a servant took a tumble down a flight of stairs: unfortunate, of course, but not unheard of. Then a series of inexplicable fights broke out among soldiers, culminating in three men barracked in the west wing dying in such scuffles in one month alone. Then, when Lord General Shayk Abd'al Mahdis hanged himself in one of the rooms, the authorities had had enough. The west wing was sealed and not a living soul has entered the area in a century and a half.

41. Devan's Rest

The Fortress is situated at the highest point in the city, atop the hill known as Devan's Rest. Strangely, Devan is not a Shelzari name, nor is it of Elzan or even Ledean origin. If anything, it seems to be of Darakeene descent.

The Tale of Dahfyn Dragonslayer

The Keltai of Darakeene have a legend which recounts a time in eons past, a time before man, elf, or even god, when giants and dragons fought for control of the world. All of Scarn was gripped in the icy talons of Hoarsynfax, the great dragon of ice. The giants suffered and died terrible deaths of starvation as crops were sealed beneath a sheet of unbreakable ice and all the beasts of land, sea, and air perished in the unending winter.

Many giantish heroes sought to find the dragon and destroy it, riding to the north, east, and west, but only Dahfyn ab Fewar, later called Dragonslayer, rode to the south. For 13 years, he rode his great mount M'aDruin — the mother of all bears — stopping for neither food nor rest until he found Hoarsynfax's lair in the sacked city of Enivid, formerly one of the greatest strongholds of the giant race.

For a year and a day, Dahfyn and M'aDruin were locked in mortal combat with Hoarsynfax, axe and claw against talon and teeth. Streets were shattered, towers toppled, and much of the city was pushed into the sea, until, although M'aDruin was slain, Dahfyn finally triumphed. His conquest was short-lived, though, for the cunning ice dragon had coated his claws with potent venom. Even as the ice began to melt and the giants of the city were freed from their icy prison, Dahfyn succumbed to the poison in his blood and fell atop the body of the vanquished wyrm.

The freed giants did not know the name of their savior, nor did they know from where he had come, but they knew it was he who had saved them and their city. With great solemnity, they put Dahfyn to rest in the center of their shattered city, along with the bodies of M'aDruin and his slain foe and a kingly treasure of gold and jewels, and raised a vast mound over them both in the manner of the greatest of heroes.

There is a recorded Keltai legend known as *The Tale of Dahfyn Dragonslayer*. Many scholars believe this story to be allegorical, a tale to stir the blood of Keltai youth and to teach a moral lesson, but certain elements suggest a possible tie to Shelzar. Could the hill of Devan's Rest really be the final resting place of Dahfyn Dragonslayer, and does this have to do with the mysteries of Old Gate, the Alabaster Bridge, and the City Beneath the Sea? Is it all a coincidence or are there really a giant, a dragon, and a vast fortune buried beneath the streets of Shelzar? Fortunately, the legend of Dahfyn Dragonslayer is virtually unknown in Shelzar, or every Shelzari would be tearing the hill apart with shovel, pick, and soup spoon, seeking the mythical treasure.

One aspect of the legend that even the Keltai have forgotten is the claim that Dahfyn and the great dragon Hoarsynfax will one day rise again to continue their battle. For the sake of the city of Shelzar, one can only hope that *The Tale of Dahfyn Dragonslayer* really is just a myth. One person who does know of the story is High Minister Fratrel, who has considered mounting an archeological expedition into Shelzar's underground to see if his people can either confirm or deny the truth of the story. What he would do if it turned out to be true is uncertain.

Merchants, Equipment, and Services

42. Madame Zorah's

Many Shelzari women of means seem to feel compelled to frequent all manner of charlatan fortune tellers and mystics. One of the most popular among them is Madame Zorah (*human female, Com3/Rog3/Sor3, NE*).

Madame Zorah's place of business is precisely what one expects of a fortune teller—high-backed chairs, tapestry-draped windows, heady incense filling the air, a crystal ball, beaded curtains, and so on—but it is nothing more than an elaborate set. Her clients expect a certain something from their mystics, and Madame Zorah is more than happy to give it to them. Her customers would no doubt be shocked at how normal and mundane is the rest of her house beyond the last beaded curtain.

What is most interesting about Zorah herself is the fact that she does not realize that she isn't actually a charlatan at all, at least not wholly. While she is quite happy to fleece the well-heeled women of Shelzar out of a handful of silver with a few generic predictions and forecasts, she is often astonishingly accurate. Normally she chalks this up to luck, but the increasing frequency and exactness of her predictions is leading her to suspect that she might actually have "the Gift" after all.

43. Penrith's Jewelers

Marsten Penrith (*male human, Rog7/Exp2, NE*) claims to have trained as a jeweler in his native Darakeene, and indeed he sells a wide array of very fine and beautiful jewels in his small shop. However, despite a few things he has learned about the trade in his time in Shelzar, he has never cut a gem or made a piece of jewelry in his life. Penrith is, however, quite an accomplished thief, at least by the standards of his native Meliad, and an even more accomplished and specialized fence for stolen jewels.

Penrith does buy and sell a few honestly traded goods, and he is always willing to buy goods from patrons of his shop, but the majority of his stock is stolen goods. Thieves from many lands know Penrith's name and reputation, and many a sailor who enters the port has a pouch of stolen jewels and is acting as an intermediary for some foreign rogue. Still, most of Penrith's trade is local. Every rogue in the city knows where to go to fence stolen gems and jewels. He gives a good price and he always deals fairly.

Further, it is certainly not only rogues and ruffians who frequent Penrith's shop. His is one of the most popular places in Shelzar for the wealthy to purchase jewelry, owing in a large part to his excellent prices and to the variety of designs from foreign lands available here. He has a knack for knowing when to bring certain items out and when to keep them hidden, and he has never been caught trying to sell a jewel to its original owner, although, of course, that danger does exist. Many of his wealthy customers in fact know that Penrith's goods are stolen, but most really don't care, as long as they get a deal. Some even seek out goods stolen from a particular rival so that they might wear them to a party or ball to flaunt their acquisitions.

44. Gunig Ghellum, Merchant

Gunig Ghellum (*male human, Exp12, NE*), a Zathiskan expatriate, specializes in the design and creation of all manner of sexual aids and devices, from "standard" bondage gear to the unique and elaborate straps, harnesses, whips, and cages necessary for the most extreme sexual practices. Entering Ghellum's shop is a strange and unique experience. It is a bizarre cross between an art gallery and a torture chamber, the only difference being that every item—from bronze, silver, and ivory phallic devices to masterful and baffling creations of leather and iron—has a distinctly sexual use and bears a discreet price tag.

Ghellum guarantees discretion, but in truth he would be more than willing to hand over his entire client list and an invoice of everything they've ever

purchased for a handful of gold. A few times in the past he has accepted sizable amounts of cash to create equipment specifically designed to kill the user. Ghellum is a master craftsman in a very specialized field, but all he really cares about is money.

45. I'lam Mougy's Funerary

An unspecified incident involving the undead in the distant past of Shelzar had two major effects that are felt even to the present day. The first is that there are very serious legal repercussions for raising or commanding undead in the city, and the second is that the Shelzari always cremate their dead. As a result, there are dozens of crematoriums in the city. When a death occurs, the body must be consigned to a funerary official who files a death certificate with the city records office.

The funerary house of I'lam Mougy (*male human, Exp7, NE*) is large but otherwise unremarkable, located on the fringes of the Pezwahri. What makes Mougy's so successful among the aristocracy of the Pezwahri is his "value added" service. Given the perverse appetites and pastimes enjoyed by Shelzar's affluent, it is not surprising that people occasional die under "unfortunate" circumstances. For a sizable fee, Mougy will pick up any body and dispose of it in his furnace, no questions asked. He will even supply an official (but false) death certificate to the city records authority for a nominal additional surcharge.

Homes and Dwellings

46. House Asuras Compound

Without a doubt, the Asuras compound is the most heavily guarded and defended private residence in all Ghelspad. Of course, the Asuras have many reasons to make certain that their home is well guarded, but this practice is also bolstered by the paranoia of family patron Telos Asuras (see both Chapter 4 and *The Wise and the Wicked*).

The compound itself is made up of six mansions and almost two dozen smaller buildings, such as sheds, greenhouses, barracks, stables, smithies, and servants' structures. A few of the buildings are connected by enclosed bridges on the third or higher floors, and all six of the mansions are connected by a network of underground tunnels. The compound is surrounded by a 25-foot-high wall that rivals that of the city itself. In addition, a *wall of force* extends a further 100 feet above the top of the stone wall. Each of the six mansions is protected by various glyphs and wards that are changed every several days with no particular schedule or pattern. Telos himself actually rolls a 12-sided die each morning and has the wards changed whenever he rolls a 7.



There are 500 Crimson Legionnaires (see “Legion of Crimson” in *Secrets & Societies*) stationed on Ismarhi, almost doubling the population of the island, all of whom are in the service of the Asuras. It is almost impossible to go anywhere on Ismarhi without seeing these crimson-cloaked mercenaries. While the Legion is not generally strict about the appearance or conduct of its companies, the Asuras outfits all of these Ismarhi legionnaires with masterwork arms and armor and matching fine crimson cloaks and plumed helms while they serve on the island. The uniform of the Ismarhi Legion, as these troops are commonly known, commands a certain grudging respect in the city, for only the most skilled of the Crimson Legion are assigned to this rather coveted assignment. Nowhere else can a Legionnaire be assured of such good pay, fine equipment, and respect, and all at a low-risk posting. Legionnaires compete fiercely to be posted to the Ismarhi legion, and many who succeed are able to retire in Shelzar after their tour is served. The mercenary guards are not required to take a crystal-bound oath (see below), as are the sorcerers, since the soldiers are never privy to sensitive information or house secrets.

Four sorcerers reside permanently in the Asuras compound. They live lives of pampered luxury, wanting for nothing, with the only proviso being that they are not permitted to leave the compound while under Asuras employ. Each of them must swear a blood-oath upon an enchanted crystal, into which all of their memories of their time at the compound are stored. If they wish to leave their position they are permitted to do so — and are paid well for their tenure and loyalty — but the crystal is shattered; this completely eradicates all memories of anything that occurred while living with the Asuras. The sorcerer may make a Will save (DC 30) to try to dredge up lost memories, but even if one is successful the memory is fragmented and incomplete, rarely more than a few moments long. Still, depending on what that memory is (eg. the combination to a safe or the location of a secret passage), a single moment may suffice to the right person. The Asuras hire only sorcerers for this duty, seeming for some reason to distrust wizards and other spellcasters.

The tunnels beneath the compound meet at a junction below the central greensward. From there, a wide spiral staircase descends into the roots of the island, well below the level of the surrounding sea. At the bottom of the stairs is a huge and comfortable chamber in which Telos and the other Asuras leaders conduct their most important and secret meetings. The walls are paneled in dark oak, hiding the 5 feet of unbroken iron behind the wood. A single adamantite door as large as a house-wall

leads from there to the Asuras vault. No lock or mechanism of any sort can be seen, for the vault will open only magically, and only to someone in whom Asuras blood flows. The Brunwyn Craft Guild, who of course constructed the vault, guarantee that it is absolutely impenetrable. Whether this is true or not is unknown, for no thief has ever come even remotely close to getting into the Asuras tunnels, let alone trying to break the vault.

All of this security exists for a very good reason. The compound is the central nexus of the largest trading house on the planet. Events that transpire within these walls affect a fortune greater than that of many nations. While the Asuras maintain an opulent headquarters in Old Town, the true business of their empire is conducted from this complex. The wealth that lies in the Asuras vault is beyond imagination, said to rival the legendary hoards of the ancient true dragons.

47. The Home of High Minister Fratrel

The official residence of High Minister Fratrel (see Chapter 4) is the Shalamar palace of governance in Old Town (indeed, the title “His Most Gracious Host” is predicated upon the fact that the High Minister conducts affairs, receives visiting dignitaries and guests, and runs the city from his home), but he also maintains a private residence on Ismarhi Island. Until he was elected High Minister, Fratrel lived in the mainland portion of the Pezwahri; following his election to the leadership of the Council, the Asuras family gave him a large manor on Ismarhi’s south shore. The Asuras maintain that this was simply their civic duty a good citizens of Shelzar, and the fact that they have received numerous unique tax-breaks, civic contracts, and special trade dispensations is, of course, merely a coincidence.

While Fratrel’s home is nowhere near as large or elaborate as those within the Asuras family compound, it is still an impressive piece of architecture and one of the largest private homes in the city. Fratrel hosts many elaborate galas and receptions at his mansion. While admission to such affairs is ostensibly by invitation only, many invitations are sold to the highest bidder rather than sent to specific guests.

Places of Note

48. The Park

The Park is one of the few places where the Shelzari behave no differently than the people of other lands. Save for the wild orgiastic rites of the Night of Masks, there is little public fornication or any of the exhibitionist tendencies here that they display in normal circumstances.



Well-manicured lawns, melodious fountains, serpentine pathways, and fragrant trees create a serene and tranquil atmosphere. Here one can find young lovers strolling in the evening breezes blowing in off the sea, or lounging beneath the shade of a landra tree to watch the sunset. Bards, actors, musicians, jugglers and other street performers amuse children and entertain the passing crowds.

In addition to the dozens of varieties of local plants and trees growing in the park there is a large greenhouse with strange flora from every corner of Ghelspad, and even several unique plants from Termana. But of course the main attraction for most visitors to the park is the menagerie.

49. The Menagerie

While the Shelzar menagerie is not the largest in Ghelspad, it is also far from the smallest. It has an almost unmatched collection of rare and exotic beasts from Ghelspad, Termana, and even distant Asherak. Here may be found dozens of ordinary and dire animals including Albadian battle dogs, wolfrats, and horserats, as well as monstrous creatures such as low gorgons, sutak, proud, unitaur, and vengaurak. The highlight of the menagerie's collection is undoubtedly the young black dragon that the signs identify as Qashami (Shelzari for "Midnight"). What the creature's name is in its own language, or even whether it has a proper

name, remains a mystery. A fence keeps viewers at a safe distance from the creature, although an incident last year in which several onlookers were killed by a gout of the dragon's acidic breath forced the city to move the fence back another 20 feet to ensure the safety of spectators.

The dragon is the only known member of its species in all of Ghelspad, having been brought as an egg to Shelzar by a mariner who claimed to have purchased it from a mysterious seller in Fangsfall. The mariner, Nu'maah Elamdar by name, returned home to Shelzar and offered the egg to the City Council, who purchased it to add to the Park's collection of creatures. This was nearly five decades ago, and, in the interim, the dragon has grown larger and larger, becoming the primary attraction of the Park. The creature has been growing more restless of late and is obviously growing stronger and more cunning with each passing day. While it has never made any sort of effort to escape its captivity, there is some concern in the city that its enclosure is no longer sufficient to contain it should it attempt to break free.

It is known that King Virduk of Calastia has shown an unhealthy interest in this creature, perhaps as a result of the fact that his heraldic symbol — and his title — is, of course, the Black Dragon. What exactly he might do given custody of the creature is unknown, and perhaps unthinkable.

50. The Alabaster Bridge

One of the true wonders of the city, if not of Ghelspad, the Alabaster Bridge is a breathtaking sight. It arches gracefully from Lawgiver's Way to Ismarhi Island, but is not attached to land at either end. Rather, the entire structure is held aloft from a single delicate-looking but surprisingly robust pillar sunk into the bedrock in the center of the channel. The bridge itself is nearly 50 feet wide and its sides are guarded by railings nearly 5 feet high.

The bridge is ancient, predating even the Hazari, and is roughly contemporary to Old Gate. The entire span, including the pillar, appears to be cut from a single piece of stone, although how such a feat could be accomplished is unfathomable. The bridge shows signs of tremendous aging and weathering, but there are no cracks or structural damage of any sort. There is text carved into the ridge all along its length, but it is so weathered as to be unreadable.

Both ends of the bridge are protected by security gates manned by mercenaries from the Legion of Crimson (see *Secrets & Societies*), making it nigh unto impossible to get onto or off of the structure unnoticed.

51. Ismarhi Island

The ultimate enclave of the rich and powerful in Shelzar, Ismarhi Island is home to a handful of mansions and estates belonging to many of the wealthiest persons in all of Ghelspad.

The island is at sea level on the north shore, where it is connected to the rest of the city by the Alabaster Bridge, and rises steeply to a height of some 50 feet or so above sea level in the south, where the land drops away suddenly into a vertical cliff face. To make the island more comfortable and usable, it has been landscaped into a series of flat plateaus.

The island was once the home of dozens of Shelzari noble families, although now more than half of it is owned exclusively by the Asuras family and only eight families now reside there, including the Asuras and High Minister Fratrel.

52. The Lighthouse

Atop the cliffs along the southern edge of Ismarhi Island sits the lighthouse, a massive 150-foot tower of polished bronze that acts as a beacon to sailors at night. The lighthouse is reckoned one of the wonders of the modern world, although the tower itself actually predates the Titanswar, having been built centuries ago by the ancient Hazari.

The lighthouse sits on land belonging to the Asuras family, and it is they who maintain the lighthouse for the city (for a fee, of course). The Asuras are not at all pleased with rumors suggest-

ing that the port of Sandoval is planning to construct a lighthouse fully 50 feet taller than this one. What part, if any, the Asuras have had in the pitfalls that have befallen construction of the Sandoval lighthouse remains unclear (see Chapter 1, "Wrecker's Reef").

Having weathered the Divine War with hardly a scratch, there is obviously no small amount of magic wrapped up in the tower, but few know how much. (Knowing that magic keeps the tower aloft, the Asuras having squandered the majority of funds from the city that were earmarked for routine maintenance to the lighthouse.) The flame that lights the beacon is also magical. Each day upon the setting of the sun, a cold magical flame erupts in the center of the lamp and burns until sunrise, casting a clear, bright white light for miles around.

There are always from 4 to 6 elite Crimson Legionnaires, employed by the Asuras, stationed atop the lighthouse, watching the shore and monitoring the island. While they will report any trespasses and wrongdoings on the islands as a whole, their primary concern is always the Asuras compound and property, and they will always disregard problems elsewhere on the Ismarhi in favor of those affecting the Asuras and their interests.

The Maze (aka The Seven Sins)

This is the quarter most foreigners picture when they think of Shelzar. It is virtually impossible to take three steps in the Maze without finding a tavern, brothel, or gambling-house. While vice is common throughout the city, it is most concentrated here: it is with good reason that this district is also known as the "Seven Sins." A common joke in Shelzar is that merely setting foot in this district is enough to cost a paladin his virtue.

The entire district is a nightmarish maze of hundreds of tiny, twisting streets and alleys, most of which don't appear on any map. The Maze is home to numerous drug dens where one can find ganjas root, julka weed, green lotus, landra wood incense, and dozens of other such substances in abundance.

Unlike the traditional open-courtyard concept of most Shelzari dwellings, the vast majority of the Maze is made up of multi-story tenements and apartment blocks crowded side-by-side with little more than alleyways in between. The upper stories of these tenement buildings are often so overbuilt and shoddily constructed that they nearly meet, turning the streets and alleys of the Maze into virtual tunnels weakly lit by the narrow slivers of barely glimpsed sky far above.

The Maze follows a shallow gully, the lowest point in the city, and is sometimes subject to flooding from the brief but powerful storms which hammer the region in midsummer.

Brothels and Gambling Houses

53. Belsameth's Bliss

This is a rather nondescript pleasure house, seemingly no more remarkable than any of a hundred others in the city. It is neither too upscale nor too squalid, not too large and not too small. But it is this veneer of "normalcy" that the owners strive desperately to create and maintain, for Belsameth's Bliss is the main entrance to the Temple of Shadows, the subterranean home of the most fearsome killers in all Ghelspad — the Cult of Ancients.

Although Mistress Jasmine Shetai (see Chapter 4) runs the place for the Cult of Ancients, there is no doubt at all who is in charge in the Bliss itself. If the Cult really wants the Bliss to come off as a normal Shelzari brothel, she maintains, then by Belsameth she is going to run it like one. She demands that her girls be clean and attentive, not allowing them any drink or drugs while on duty, and puts up with absolutely no nonsense in "her" house. Anyone who breaks the rules, and especially one who gets rough with any of the girls is dealt with swiftly, brutally, and often terminally by the two hulking half-orc guards who go by the rather unlikely names of Mister Dandy and Mister Joy. While it may sound ludicrous, anyone with one whit of sense who gets rowdy in the Bliss high-tails it out the nearest window when he hears Mistress Shetai shout for Dandy and Joy.

The Cult has laid claim to a large section of subterranean tunnels and chambers below the Bliss stretching for many blocks in every direction; it is impossible to reach the inmost sections without first passing through dozens of other chambers including barracks, common rooms, guard houses, training rooms and even kitchens.

The Temple of Shadows was consciously designed as a labyrinth to confuse and disorient intruders.

The innermost room of the complex is the Chamber of Whispers, where Talina Som (see Chapter 4 and *The Wise & The Wicked*) sits on her throne communing with Belsameth and ruling her ever-expanding empire of blood. Under Som's command, the Cult has become feared, wealthy, and powerful, but not everyone is happy with this new state of affairs.

Entirely apart from the schism between the Traditionalist and the Belsamite factions within the Cult, there is growing dissent.

Many argue that Som's actions are not always in the best interests of the Cult, leading those who know of such matters to speculate that a full-blown assassins' war may soon erupt in the tunnels, streets, and rooftops of Shelzar.



54. Bones' Dicing House

There are hundreds of gambling dens in Shelzar, but Bones' is unique in that only games of chance involving dice are permitted there. No one remembers the real name of the wiry elf who owns the place, but for years he has been known simply as Bones (*male elf, Rog13, LN*). Bones is obsessed with dice, unnaturally so in fact. He abhors all other forms of gaming and gambling, claiming that only dice are truly random and free from cheating and outside influence. Bones' House is scrupulously honest, and any cheating or tinkering with the equipment is met with a swift and brutal response.

The House occupies the ground floor of an old warehouse, but the utilitarian origin of the building is hidden under acres of burgundy velvet that hang from every wall and even from the ceiling. The only light in the house comes from magically enchanted light globes hanging over each gaming table.

The place attracts a widely varied clientele, from sailors and dockworkers to laborers, merchants, and aristocrats: anyone who appreciates the true randomness of fate that dicing entails finds no better outlet for their passion than Bones' Dicing House.

Bones also manufactures and sells perfectly balanced dice of all sorts, from the common 6-sided to the rare 4-, 8-, 12-, and 20-sided from all corners of Ghelspad. All Bones' dice are of the finest quality.

55. The Split Fig

The Split Fig is everything that the Belsameth's Bliss is not. Customers and "professionals" alike are normally the worse for drink and drugs, and patrons take more than a few liberties with the women. There doesn't even seem to be anyone running the place, the duty of trying to keep some semblance of order falling to whichever of the women is sober enough to do it.

This kind of utter chaos and debauchery is extremely popular with certain types of people, and the Fig is full every night. Most of the women who work at the Fig do so because they have no other options, and most don't last more than a few weeks. The lucky ones get so sickened by what they see (and do) that they give in and find a new line of work. The less fortunate often meet their end at the hands of an over-enthusiastic or psychopathic customer.

The Split Fig is very popular with sailors, mercenaries, and aristocrats-in-disguise. Although no one seems to have ever noticed the pattern, far more girls die when servicing one of the slumming aristocrats than all the others put together.

56. Jester's Warren

The enormous Jester's Warren is the largest gambling house in all of Shelzar. Owned and operated by a man called Inigal (*male human,*

Rog12/Knf3, CN), the Warren is an expression of his devotion to the goddess Enkili. In his early days, Inigal was a student of Darakeene's Plague War College, but soon abandoned his studies to serve the Trickster by becoming a master of games. He traveled throughout Ghelspad learning the particulars of his chosen vocation before arriving in Shelzar. Immediately upon entering the City of Pleasures, Inigal knew he was home, so he set out to establish the Jester's Warren. It took him almost two decades to complete the construction and expansion of his first, more modest gambling parlor, but the Warren now stands as a fixture of Shelzar, every bit as central to its reputation as the Shalamar or the Grand Temple.

Within the Jester's Warren, almost every conceivable game is available. The house frowns upon cheating, which all good worshippers of Enkili understand to upset the natural flow of luck that the Trickster moderates. Consequently, the Warren is one of the most scrupulously honest gambling halls in the entire city — one of the most important reasons it has prospered over the years. Whereas other betting parlors are periodically hit with charges of corruption (which are invariably true, this being Shelzar), the Warren has never had such a charge laid against it in all its years of operation. Admittedly, this is mostly a point of pride for Inigal. Most of the den's patrons expect cheating on the part of the house or of their fellow gamblers: that is simply the way of things. They admire Inigal's rectitude, of course, but consider it strangely old-fashioned in a city such as Shelzar, where it is simply assumed that anyone and everyone is capable of criminal actions if given the opportunity.

Inigal offers much more than simple games, of course. He also provides a wide variety of intoxicants and narcotics to his patrons, some of which he offers for free as a gift to those who visit the Warren. This has the intentional side effect of playing havoc with many gamblers' concentration, but Inigal seems unconcerned. Strangely, he does not consider this ploy to be the same as cheating. Neither does he see anything wrong with using attractive prostitutes of both genders and many races to distract his patrons while they play at his games. To him, these things are all part of the ambience that draws customers to the Warren. They expect nothing less than total service and Inigal is happy to provide it — especially if it increases the house's odds in the process.

The Jester's Warren also has a curious relationship with the Temple of Enkili. Regularly, the High Priestess Ayshellia rents the entire Warren for use as a religious venue. She holds religious rites here along with an inner circle of faithful, chosen specifically by herself. Inigal is always among this

circle, as are a small number of other prominent Shelzari. Rumors abound as to the true nature of these rituals, but there is very little evidence that they are anything more than they seem. The rumors and innuendo continue to spread across the city, of course. Why should a lack of evidence get in the way of good gossip?

57. The Silver Twilight

The Silver Twilight is a private gambling club. Membership is available through one of three means: (i) An existing member can sponsor a new member, who, if he meets the approval of two-thirds of the other existing members, is allowed to join; (ii) One can simply purchase a membership for the exorbitant price of 1,000 gold ordu; or (iii) A would-be member can forego either of the aforementioned processes by finding one of the dozens of silver keys hidden throughout Shelzar. These keys were placed by the membership committee to be found by enterprising individuals who can unravel a series of clues. The clues are very difficult to follow and depend on an extensive knowledge of Shelzari history. To date, only a handful of members have ever acquired their places in the Silver Twilight through this method, leading many to suggest that there are no more keys hidden in the city, despite the committee's assurances to the contrary.

Unfortunately, the effort to join the Silver Twilight is hardly worth the reward. The club is not very noteworthy in almost any respect. Neither the gambling nor the intoxicants are at all unusual. Both can be had far more easily from other establishments in the city. There are no prostitutes here, either. All that is to be gained by joining is the acquaintance of other members, who are admittedly among the upper crust of Shelzari society. Most are important merchants and bureaucrats, with a smattering of scholars and sorcerers. Membership in the Silver Twilight is a sign of prestige to those unfamiliar with the cold reality of its blandness. It is also a semi-useful "old boys' network" that gives its members a connection to others of similar status. If it's good gambling you're after, though, the Jester's Warren is probably a better bet.

Temples and Shrines

58. Shrine to Goran

The Shrine of Goran in Shelzar is a strange affair. To all appearances it is not a shrine at all, but a rather average smithy. There is no priest of Goran in residence (Shelzari dwarves actually seem to resent the idea that they should need someone else to tell them how to deal with their own god), but a couple of acolytes tend the shrine and keep the forge lit day and night. For a fee, dwarven smiths may lease the use of the forge for a particularly

important work, although the price is high. Normally the forge is used to receive offerings to Goran and to destroy failed ironworks.

59. Temple of Idra

The Temple of Idra is presided over by the High Priestess Madrani (see Chapter 4). Though it is not an overly large building, the Temple of Idra is one of the most beautiful structures in the city. Every inch of the exterior is covered by life-sized statuary of women and men in various erotic poses. No two of these statues is alike, every one of them crafted with such exquisite detail that, were it not for the fact that all are cut from pale silver-gray stone, it could be mistaken for living people.

The inside of the temple lacks the elaborate statuary of the exterior, but is no less beautiful. Hundreds of silver tablets are set into the wall, detailing both images from Idran mythology and important passages from the *Thousand and One Shelzari Nights*. The highlight is a huge mosaic floor which bears a masterwork mosaic representation of Idra herself. The mosaic measures nearly 30 feet across, and not a single tile is more than a quarter of an inch square. Legend holds that the artist worked for 20 years to make the piece, and that on the night it was completed Idra herself was so overcome by its beauty that she visited him in person and bedded him, transporting him to such heights of ecstasy that he died utterly fulfilled. Whether this story is true or not, there is certainly no finer mosaic work in Shelzar, or perhaps even Ghelspad.

60. Shrine to Erias

The so-called "lotus eaters of Shelzar" are a constant feature of legends and tall tales about the City of Pleasures. According to these stories, Shelzari are very fond of intoxicants and narcotics of all sorts, which is, of course, quite true. Drug dens are a common feature of the cityscape and there is no stigma attached to partaking of such narcotics. This is especially true of the followers of the demigod Erias. They are most often branded "lotus eaters" because their religious rites include the imbibing of several drugs in order to reach an altered state of consciousness that is seen as communion with the Dreamlord.

The shrine in the Maze is overseen by Yaseel Na'ed (*male human, Clr9, CG*), a tall, thin man who looks far too old to be its chief priest. Yaseel is exactly the sort of person one would expect to find in the service to Erias: otherworldly and anemic. He spends much of his time consuming a wide variety of drugs in order, so he says, to speak directly with his master. Many of his supplicants whisper that Yaseel is not much of a priest, preferring to attend to his own spiritual quest for enlightenment than to minister to their needs.

Despite this, he is always available to speak with visitors to the shrine, although his answers are often confused and unfocused, lending credence to the tales of his addictions.

Inns, Taverns, and Restaurants

61. The Fiend's Folly

Located on a prime piece of real estate overlooking the Blossoming Sea, the Fiend's Folly is certainly one of the most infamous of all inns in Shelzar — quite an accomplishment, considering the competition. The inn's notoriety comes from two sources. The first is that the Folly (or its predecessors) has burned to the ground no fewer than five times in the last dozen years. Each time the inn burned to the ground, it reopens months later under a new owner.

The Folly's current owner, Gellorion (see Chapter 4), was a stakeholder in its previous incarnation and was left its sole owner after all the other stakeholders died in the last fire. Gellorion contends he was just lucky, but most people believe that he was somehow involved in setting the fire in the first place. True or not, Gellorion was in an ideal position to reopen the inn, having inherited sole ownership of the property and the profits deriving from it.

When he reopened the inn, Gellorion played up its sinister reputation. He has added an adjoining brothel to the inn, which has gone a long way toward expanding its clientele. Of course, the dark rumors about the Folly also help to pack in the customers. Adventurers from all over Shelzar and the surrounding settlements favor the Fiend's Folly as their watering hole of choice. Gellorion revels in the attention and the money he has generated through his savvy marketing of the place. From time to time, he jokes that it's about time for the inn to burn down, because it has already been three years since it last went up in flames, which makes the Folly the most long-lasting of all the inns to stand on this site. Unfortunately, not everyone thinks Gellorion is really joking.

62. The Palace of Illimitable Desire

Despite its name, the Palace is not a brothel but a restaurant run by two brothers, Kamil (*male human, Exp 8, N*) and Ullah Fadahir (*male human, Exp 9, N*). Although they are not twins, the Fadahir brothers look sufficiently like one another to confuse those who know them only in passing. This fact only serves to anger each of the brothers, who not only cannot understand why no one can tell them apart, but also cannot understand why their own uniquely handsome features are not singled out for special approbation. In point of fact, the Fadahir brothers are both quite plain and rather unappealing. It is more remarkable that anyone notices them at all, let alone realizes that they are two different people.

The Palace serves both Shelzari and foreign cuisines, although "foreign" largely means Zathiskan or Calastian, since the restaurant's cooks are not very skilled in the preparation of more exotic foods. However, the Palace lives up to its name, being large and spacious, with plenty of room for gatherings of many people. The Palace also lives up to its name by serving mammoth portions of food to its patrons, who rarely leave dissatisfied with their repast. Many groups and organizations within the city hold banquets at the Palace of Illimitable Desire, much to the pleasure of the Fadahir brothers, who see their success as proof that one or the other of them (depending on who is telling the story) is a business genius — while the other is nothing more than a leech. It is therefore only a matter of time before the brothers split up and the Palace closes, so visitors are advised to stop by while they still can.

Temples and Shrines

63. Temple of Enkili

The worship of Enkili far outstrips that of every other deity in Shelzar. Both by temperament and by history (both of which have of course influenced the other), Shelzari are almost the perfect worshippers of the Jester. Willful and unpredictable, Shelzari thrive in uncertain environments and more readily trust their futures to capricious fate than almost any other people in all the Scarred Lands. If such a thing is possible, the Shelzari have become even more devoted to their god in the wake of the Divine War. During that awful time, they saw that all of the old verities could be questioned. Nothing was certain except uncertainty. Scarn truly was turned upside down. In such a situation, to whom can one turn for guidance but the Trickster?

The Temple of Enkili is the largest structure in Shelzar, larger even than the so-called Grand Temple, which it dwarfs by a considerable margin. It possesses seven silver-gilt spires, each 300 feet tall, each topped by a statue of Enkili in one of her guises. Beneath the appropriate spire is a chapel dedicated to the same aspect of the god — Trickster, Jester, Storm Goddess, King of Fools, and so on. In the morning light, the spires shine with a brilliance that can be seen on the other side of Shelzar, a constant reminder of the centrality of the god's worship in the City of Pleasures.

As one might expect, the Temple possesses a large staff of clerics devoted to the service of Enkili, headed by the mercurial Ayshellia (see Chapter 4). In the past, the Temple stayed aloof from politics, at least openly, preferring instead to exert subtle influence behind the scenes. With the accession of Ayshellia to the high priesthood, this has changed. She (and the Temple along with her) has become

an outspoken supporter of various causes, pleading her case before the City Council and making personal entreaties to Minister Fratrel. Of late, Ayshella's two most significant lobbying efforts have been gaining permission for a Calastian embassy in Shelzar and the suppression of the temple of Manawe, which had been a critic of the Temple of Enkili. Ayshella was successful in the first effort but not in the second. Neither Fratrel nor the City Council had any interest in starting a full-scale religious war between the two faiths. Consequently, Ayshella is using other means to weaken the servants of Manawe, whom she sees as making too many inroads among the city's poor and downtrodden, groups that had traditionally been followers of the Trickster.

Civic and Governmental

64. South Watchtower

In the days of ancient Shelzar, the city was ringed by a number of watchtowers outside the city walls. Guards manned these towers day and night, scanning land and sea for danger. Of these towers, only two now remain: one on the point of land to the south-east of Beggar's Gate is in total disrepair and used by squatters; the other sits on a curve of land just north of the northernmost pier of South Dock. It is no longer manned at all hours of the day, and even when it is occupied, the watchmen are normally far from attentive, being more concerned with their games of dice or willing whores. The main duty of the tower guards here is to watch for storms coming in from the Blossoming Sea. There are few times when one can see the normally relaxed people of Shelzar panic as when the huge iron bell of the South Watchtower begins to ring.

Merchants, Equipment, and Services

65. Brunwyn Craft Guild

The Brunwyn Craft Guild, comprised almost entirely of Shelzari dwarves, is one of the most important organizations in the city, although its members are surprisingly unassuming about their business. The Guild's headquarters is a large stone building at the north end of the Souk, essentially a large cube set with small windows and topped by a silver dome. If it were the work of a normal (read: human) architect, the building might have become a squat, blocky eyesore, but the incredible spatial sense, eye for detail, and consummate skill of the Guildsmen somehow made this a supremely simple and elegant masterpiece. The proportions are exactly, simply "right"; the building is not in fact a perfect cube, but is designed to give that impression when seen from street level. The windows are small and narrow, but set so gracefully around the face of

the building as to break up the massive surface and draw the viewer's eye up to the top where the silver dome can just be glimpsed far overhead.

The Guild keeps little in the way of cash on hand, but their designs often involve the use of precious stones and metals including silver, gold, and even mithril and shelzarium (see sidebar, Chapter 1), all of which are stored inside.

The interior of the building is divided into six floors, each of which is essentially a large open space with no interior walls. Each floor is shorter than the one below it, so that the ceiling of the ground floor is nearly 30 feet high but the sixth floor ceiling is barely 5 feet high. Each craftsman has his or her own workbench that includes a small but secure safe, and is responsible for any valuable materials assigned for a job. The only exception takes place on large projects that require many workers: these are constructed in the large open area central to each floor, and the project head accepts responsibility for all valuable materials.

The Guild is best known for its civic works, most recently the construction of Newgate, and for the many buildings they have designed and built around the city. Still, their membership number specialists in nearly any craft who will take on any project, including jewelry, furniture, lamps, carts, ships, keeps, and castles. King Virduk of Calastia has recently contacted the Guild about the possibility of designing and building an entire city to be raised as the capital of his planned empire in Termana, as well as a series of castles to aid in his conquest of that continent.

The Guild cares little for politics, or even for money when it comes down to it. Almost to a soul, they live only for their work, seeking to create the finest items and structures regardless of type or medium.

66. Hammer & Tongs

This weapon- and armor-smith's shop is a rarity in Shelzar in that it is run by a human — and a human *woman* at that. Rasma Rimar (*female human, Exp10, CN*) is a burly middle-aged woman with powerful arms and a ready smile. Although not what one would call attractive (especially not when she is covered with soot and ashes, which is most of the time), Rasma is nonetheless a charismatic individual who commands respect from customers and her community at large. Her friendly face encourages others to talk openly with her, and such conversation is in itself widely considered to be an enjoyable way to spend an afternoon. If one earns her trust, Rasma may tell the story of her apprenticeship with dwarves from Burok Torn, who taught her everything she knows about smithing weapons and armor.

Rasma takes great pride in her work and produces nothing but top quality merchandise. All of her weapons and armor are considered masterwork weapons. Nothing less well made is available for sale. However, Rasma takes roughly 20% longer to produce her masterwork items than is usual (see "Craft," *PHB*, Chapter 4: Skills), but they cost 10% less than standard. This has given her a steady clientele of individuals who are willing to wait for the quality items she provides, especially at such relatively low prices.

67. Saman's Tattoo Emporium

The art of producing tattoos is an old and respected one in Shelzar. While the Hazari frowned upon tattoos as "self-mutilation," later inhabitants of the city have always seen it as a form of art. During the time of the Elzan Empire, tattooing was treated as high culture. Most noblemen (and noblewomen, for that matter) wore elaborate tattoos along their arms and foreheads to indicate their high station. The emperors of Elz too possessed prominent tattoos that covered their cheekbones and noses. If one goes farther back in history, there are numerous stories of the fire mages of the Empire of Flame that mention their magical tattoos, as well.

All these influences have merged to create a powerful tattooing tradition in contemporary Shelzar. Saman Ossaah (*human male Sor9/Rog2*), a talented sorcerer in his own right, sells magical as well as mundane tattoos to his many patrons. Strangely enough, his nonmagical body art is far more popular than his magical. There are probably several reasons for this, the most significant of which is that mundane tattoos leave more leeway for his remarkable artistic abilities to shine. Magical tattoos have relatively established appearances, having been perfected over centuries to the point where one might consider them rather formulaic and dull. Even so, Saman is a popular purveyor of magical tattoos, especially to adventurers, whom he regales with stories of his explorations of the ruins of the Sweltering Plains, to which he attributes the inspiration for much of his artwork.

South Docks

When people speak of "the docks" it is generally the South Docks they are talking about. Shelzar's docks are very much like those of most other cities; grimy, dirty, polluted, and overrun by brothels, dilapidated warehouses, flophouses, and taverns. The South Docks in particular are rife with crime, especially smuggling, even more so than is common in other cities. The pervasive smell of dead fish, smoke, and boat-tar hangs oppressively over the area.

Temples and Shrines

68. Shrine to Manawe

Manawe's shrine is not the finest in the city, and has fallen into disrepair in the past few decades, but Mari Seadaughter (*female half-elf, Clr7, CN*) is nonetheless an earnest shepherdess among her flock. She holds services each morning before the fishermen go out for the day and every evening when they return. She is also available for blessings throughout the day.

The Manavian Shrine is uniquely designed so that fishermen (who comprise the bulk of Manawe's followers in the city) can pull their boats into a large, partially roofed-in area at the south of the building and there observe the service without having to disembark.

Civic and Governmental

69. Harbormaster's Office

The Shelzari harbormaster Waradi (*male human, Exp3, NE*) does his best to maintain control, but he is easily bribed or intimidated. He recently took a substantial bribe to look the other way as a group of men emptied a warehouse. It wasn't until the next day that he realized that the warehouse was one belonging to House Asuras. Waradi is desperate to find the culprits and turn them in, or failing that find some way to cover up the crime to save himself.

Merchants, Equipment, and Services

70. Gimji's Tattoo Shop

As far as anyone knows, the owner of this shop is absolutely unique in Shelzar. An immigrant from distant Termana, Gimji (*male gnome, Bar4/Exp12, CN*) says he hails from a race of people known as "gnomes," although he bears only the most superficial similarity to Ghelspad's brewer gnomes. Whatever his race, Gimji is a master of the art of tattooing. Just as there are hundreds of nondescript taverns, brothels, and gambling houses in the South Docks, there are dozens of tattoo shops, with wildly varying degrees of skill, but those who know good work tend to seek out Gimji. The strange little man is himself an exotic-looking creature, covered in tattoos, with numerous bone and stone ear-, lip-, and nose-rings. Rumor has it that his early life in the jungles of Termana has given him knowledge of many virulent poisons, but this has never been confirmed.

71. Paladins of Corean

Some people wonder why the Paladins of Corean would set up a chapter house in the City of Sins, but there is no city so evil, no people so

corrupt that Corean cannot redeem them — or so runs the paladins' maxim. Further, there is a saying among them that "It makes more sense to found a hospital among the sick, not the healthy." Part of the paladins' mandate from Corean is to endure battle on his behalf, whether that battle is physical or spiritual, and there are few greater spiritual battlegrounds for a Paladin of Corean in the Scarred Lands today than in the City of Sins.

The chapter house is located in the center of South Dock, in a rather dark and forbidding structure that sharply contrasts the shining reputation of the paladins within. It is almost as if the darkness of Shelzar washes against the building and leaves it dirty and stained. The keep was designed and built by the Brunwyn Craft Guild and is one of the strongest in the city. While it appears to be quite large from without, its walls, both external and internal, are all at least 10 feet thick, which substantially reduces the amount of practical space within.

Some 40 paladins generally reside within the keeps walls; each year a few find that their faith is no longer sufficient to battle the evil of Shelzar and so leave, most often returning to Mithril to do penance and redeem themselves in Corean's eyes. Other younger or more idealistic paladins are usually willing to test themselves in this work, however, so the numbers here remain fairly constant. Duty in Shelzar is not easy for such hearty men and women; not only are they not respected by most Shelzari, they are often openly mocked or even attacked from afar by stones, rotten fruit, and horse-apples. Serving in Shelzar is one of the ultimate Coreanic tests of faith, and few measure up to it.

The Souk

Despite the mercantile nature of Shelzar, there are few permanent shops in the city proper. Instead, the vast majority of day-to-day trade among the people of the city is conducted in the Souk, the vast open-air market with literally thousands of vendors hawking wares from every corner of Ghelspad and often from beyond. Many an unwary visitor has entered the Souk secure in his bargaining skills, only to find himself wandering away confused an hour later, with a much lighter purse and an armload of useless junk.

There are only about 100 permanent stone structures in the Souk, but the space all around them is filled with thousands of temporary tents and stalls. Many merchants come and go, but there are many who have been in the same spot for decades if not centuries, their simple stalls having been handed down for generations. Many of these stalls are shut at night, but equally as many remain open at all hours. If you need something, legal or otherwise, you can pretty much be sure to find it at the Souk.



Temples and Shrines

72. Shrine to Enkili

There are many shrines to Enkili in the city, but this one is by far the most frequently visited. Nearly every merchant in the Souk stops here at least once a day to ask Enkili's blessing in her trade of the day, and many of the more pious (or superstitious) actually come here to finalize business deals and to sign contracts.

The shrine is tended by Shemyth Lythgar (*female elf, Com2/Chr1, CN*), who presides over any services held here — but these are rare — and liaises with parishioners. She is also responsible for accepting donations and offerings at the shrine and passing these along to the head of the church, although just as often she pockets the cash or gives it away to strangers, as befits a true follower of the Trickster. In fact, unbeknownst to the mortals of Shelzar, Enkili has taken a rather strong liking to this woman and is considering using Lythgar as a page should the Trickster have a need for one in the city soon.

Inns, Taverns, and Restaurants

73. Darkraven's Magical Emporium

One of the oddest businesses in the Souk is the Magical Emporium of Aramis Darkraven (*male human, Wiz16, CN*), retired adventurer and once companion of the rather infamous dwarven smith Hugh MacHugh (see #74, below). Darkraven has a bit of a theatrical streak in him (what spellcaster doesn't, really) and enjoys putting on a bit of a show for his clientele. His shop is every inch what the average person expects of a wizard's lair, from the stuffed alligator hanging from the ceiling to the worktable lit by a skull with a candle in it and covered in huge waterfalls of wax. If customers knew that the old man often has *unseen servants* carefully drip the wax down the skull to get just the right effect, they might be very disappointed indeed — but, then again, perhaps not.

Despite his great age, which he will not reveal but which some say is close to 90, Darkraven is strong and vital and his mind is as sharp as a knife. He sells a wide variety of completely useless pseudo-magical talismans, amulets, crow's-feet, four-leaf clovers, black-handled knives, mystical oils, and so forth. This useless junk keeps the punters happy and pays the rent, but Darkraven's real money comes from actual spellcasters.

Real practitioners of the Art are taken to the back room. It is here that Darkraven keeps the actual magical supplies, including material components and foci for most common and many uncommon spells, as well as *crystal balls* (which he

specializes in making) and scribed scrolls, spell inks, (blank) spellbooks, and scroll paper. Darkraven's is the only shop selling such supplies in Shelzar, and every spellcaster in need finds her way to his door eventually.

The upper floors of this short tower are Darkraven's home, and like the shop below his apartments are exactly what the average person pictures when they think of a wizard's keep: floor-to-ceiling shelves lined with books, high-backed chairs in front of tables covered with scrolls, maps and mystical texts, and even a musty old raven (Darkraven's familiar) perched on yet another skull. Most people probably wouldn't picture the basin of perpetually heated water under the bed for soaking his feet, but sometimes an old man is just an old man, even if he is a powerful wizard.

Merchants, Equipment, and Services

74. Hugh MacHugh, Weaponsmith

One of the loopholes around Shelzar's edict banning weapons in the city is trade itself: in a city ruled by merchants, there are few limits on commerce, including the trade in weapons. It is customary to deal only in large quantities of such items, of course, and indeed many merchant groups from all around Shelzar to do so. However, there is something of a "gray market" loophole that allows local weaponsmiths to sell their own creations individually, and by bribing the right officials or hiring an expert forger, one can get documents claiming that one is such a craftsman.

One such smith is Hugh MacHugh (*male dwarf, Ftr2/Rog6/Exp6, N*). Hugh was actually quite a devout follower of Goran in his youth and spent several years training to join the priesthood before a scandal forced him to flee Burok Torn in disgrace. No slouch with an axe, Hugh made his way as an adventurer for several years, wandering the length and breadth of Ghelspad with a number of shiftless adventuring groups — usually with his good friend, the now venerable wizard Aramis Darkraven (see #73, above) — before finally settling in Shelzar.

Hugh was actually quite a decent fellow before settling here, but Shelzar has a way of "getting under the skin," and, as has happened with so many others, Hugh has become nearly as dishonest and corrupt as the city itself. Despite his skill at the forge, he rarely bothers to produce quality weapons any more, preferring instead to churn out pretty but low-quality items for a quick profit. Still, Hugh remains a decent soul at heart, and given the right reasons or incentive, he can be surprisingly forthright and honest.

His shop is tiny, with shelves ranged from floor to ceiling, every inch covered in swords and axes of all types. Unlike most shops in the Souk, Hugh's is made of stone, a necessity when one works with a forge. He always works with the doors of his forge wide open, and the benches outside the entrance are something of an unofficial "town square" where old men gather to play Hago, smoke pipes of julka-weed or ganjus, and complain loudly and continuously about life in general and the state of today's youth in particular.

The majority of Hugh's trade comes not from crafting poor quality blades, however, but from an ingenious false peace-bond (see Chapter 1, "Life in Shelzar") of his own devising, which allows the wielder to draw the blade and return it to the scabbard without breaking the bond (each requires a full-round action to perform or the bond is broken). He charges 50 gold ordu for his trick-bond, about five times more than most smiths charge to affix a normal bond. His service is in high demand and he often installs several dozen of these bonds in a good week.

75. Verdana Hajisk, Merchant

One of the most famous (or infamous, depending on whom you ask) merchants in the Souk is Verdana Hajisk (*female human, Exp14, LE*). She has tended the same stall for close to 40 years and is famed for being able to acquire virtually anything a buyer might wish to acquire, given enough time.

Hajisk looks like she was carved out of an apple and left to dry in the desert. Her face is a sun-browned mask of wrinkles and laugh-lines, a result of the knowing smile that perpetually graces her face. She always wears an expression that leaves one feeling as if she knows something that one doesn't.

Hajisk's semi-permanent tent is small, cramped, and cozy, and is divided in half by a curtain, the rear half actually being where she makes her home. Customers to whom she takes a liking are often invited to the back to share stories with her over a cup of strong Shelzari coffee and a plate of honey-cakes. Technically, it is against the law to live in a tent in the Souk, but Verdana Hajisk has done so many favors for so many people that her transgression is simply "overlooked" by the authorities.

76. Bayen Iglaur the Ropemaker

Rope is an essential item in everyday life, and particularly in the mercantile shipping trade, and there is no better maker of rope, string, and twine in Shelzar than Bayen Iglaur (*male human, Exp12, N*). Bayen makes every variety: heavy hemp rope,

fine silken lines, waxed threads and twines, heavy rope with a wire core to avoid the risk of cutting or snapping, and a hundred other unique and specialized varieties.

Bayen rarely sells his wares directly to customers, however. Instead, once each month he holds a private auction, selling huge quantities to other merchants who then divide it up to sell to the public.

77. Karshi the Tailor

Certainly one of the strangest merchants in the Souk is the tailor Karshi (*male half-orc "Urkhadi", Rgr3/Exp14, LN*). Karshi is one of the Urkhadi, the half-orc people who hail from the valley known as the Scar in the Sweltering Plains. For the first twenty years of his life, Karshi was a typical Urkhadi. He hunted, fished, and fought as all his forefathers had, never giving a second thought to the world outside his own valley, but all that changed when his friend Usti returned to the village after a long absence. Usti and Karshi had grown up together, but Usti longed to see more of the world and had left several years earlier with one of the new trade caravans. It was not Usti's tales of the world outside the valley that fired Karshi's heart, however — it was his clothes: silk, satin, and velvet, in a riot of fabulous colors and exotic cuts. When Usti left the village again, Karshi went with him.

The master who agreed to train Karshi did so reluctantly, but the Urkhadi took to the trade of tailoring like no one he had ever seen. Wrapped up beneath the scarred, leather-tough hide of this massive half-orc hid the soul of a true artist. His calloused hands, long used to axes and spears, wielded the scissors with unmatched skill. Fabrics seemed to dance in his hands, vying for the pleasure of becoming part of one of his creations.

Karshi is big, even for a half-orc, and bears the scars of a hard youth. He moves with the swift, sure gait of a trained warrior, and his hard eyes enforce that appearance. Many a new customer has taken to heel and fled the shop at the sight of Karshi coming toward them with a trimming knife in his hand a mouthful of 3-inch tack pins. Yet those who see through the looming Urkhadi's threatening appearance find the best tailor in the city, able to turn his hand as easily to a simple peasant shift as an elaborate multi-layered courtly gown.

His shop is a dark, cramped jumble of rooms that can be reached only from an alleyway behind a mildly upscale but completely unremarkable Veshian restaurant. Row upon row of shelves hold thousands of bolts of fabric racked up to the ceiling. There is barely enough room to move single-file though the tight rows between shelves, mannequins, and bolts of fabric, but Karshi himself

navigates his massive bulk effortlessly through the shop as if the clutter didn't exist. Despite the apparent chaos and lack of organization, he knows where everything is and is always able to locate the perfect fabric, pattern, or accessory in a few minutes at most.

Every garment other than a peasant's outfit that Karshi makes is of masterwork quality; this grants the wearer a +2 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy checks among "cultured" folk and costs an additional 50 gp beyond the usual price for a garment of its type, modified by material costs, of course. He never wants for custom, and there is

often a wait of several weeks before one can even get an appointment to be measured, and several weeks again before one's garment is ready. He takes appointments from anyone and produces his garments in sequence, and no amount of pleading, threats, or bribery will move



him to do otherwise. (Mind you, wealthy patrons have on occasion paid poorer customers who were further ahead in the queue a sizable amount of money to switch appointments, so as to get a garment created in time for a particular social event.) Karshi is also indiscriminate as to his clientele and seems just as happy producing a simple wool tunic for a few copper pieces as an intricate bejeweled doublet for a bagful of gold.

Homes and Dwellings

78. Jabasha Al-Saba's Home

The Souk is a busy district of Shelzar, with merchants and their clients moving about day and night. There is no end to the hustle and bustle of many streets there, since deals can be struck at any time and even the setting of the sun is no impediment to commercial transactions. This fact suits Jabasha Al-Saba just fine. This attractive young woman is well known for her nocturnal revels through the area, frequenting local taverns and places of business. Spending the evening with Jabasha is considered a point of honor for the denizens of the Souk, who lust after the voluptuous noblewoman with a passion that is unnatural, even for the lascivious inhabitants of the City of Pleasures.

Of course, the reasons for this lust are indeed unnatural, for Jabasha is a vampire. Cursed with that dread condition while traveling to Hollowfaust several years ago, she has kept her undead status hidden for years. It helps that her habits were always nocturnal and that her reputation as an admirer of the finer things in life — and of handsome men — did not make it seem amiss that she should seek out the company of the Souk's richest and most influential merchants. Jabasha is nevertheless extremely intelligent. She rarely if ever kills her prey, preferring to drink blood only once from a chosen victim before moving on to another. This is why she is renowned for her supposedly "insatiable appetites" when it comes to men. Jabasha charms those upon whom she has preyed to remember only a night of passion with her, which is usually sufficient to keep them from suspecting anything is wrong when they awaken physically drained the next day.

Recently, though, one of Jabasha's victims was a foreign merchant from Lokil who happens to possess considerable knowledge about the undead. After finding two small bite marks on his body after supposedly having spent the night with the beautiful noblewoman, he began to suspect that she might be a vampire. He has not told anyone of

his suspicions just yet for fear of retaliation from her. However, he plans to take action against her in the near future, so that her evil might be eliminated forever.

**Jabasha Al-Saba, female (human)
vampire aristocrat 3/fighter 8**

CR 12; SZ Medium-size undead (5 ft., 7 in. tall); HD 11d12; hp 65; Init +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 27 [flat-footed 23, touch 14] (+4 Dex, +7 armor, +6 natural); Atk +20/+15 melee (1d6+11, crit 18–20/x2, +3 scimitar), or slam +16/+11 melee (1d6+9 and energy drain); SA charm, energy drain, blood drain, children of the night, create spawn; SQ undead, damage reduction 15/+1, cold and electricity resistance 20, *gaseous form*, *spider climb*, alternate form, fast healing 5, vampire weaknesses; AL CE; SV Fort +8, Ref +9, Will +9; Str 23 (21), Dex 18, Con –, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 19.

Languages: Shelzari, Ledean, Zathiskan, Darakeene.

Skills: Appraise +4, Bluff +15, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +8, Gather Information +7, Hide +12, Innuendo +5, Jump +20, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +6, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +6, Listen +16, Move Silently +12, Perform (amorous, dancing, singing, any 3 others) +10, Read Lips +5, Ride +8, Search +10, Sense Motive +12, Spot +12.

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Expertise, Improved Critical (scimitar), Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (scimitar), Weapon Specialization (scimitar).

Possessions: +1 glamered clothborn banded mail of luck (grants +2 luck bonus to wearer's saving throws; appears as courtier's outfit), +3 scimitar, gauntlets of ogre power, ring of blinking.

Places of Note

79. The Reflecting Pool of Siyahan

In an environment as parched as the Sweltering Plains, the necessity of water fountains and pools is great. Consequently, the empires that grew up in the regions near the Plains developed a remarkable affinity for creating these water delivery systems. The cities of the Empire of Flame and the Elzan Empire were both filled with many fountains and pools, some of which can still be seen to this day, and the styles of these pools often influenced later cultures in the region. Around Shelzar, one can find numerous examples of Elzan-inspired pools and fountains, which lend beauty to their surroundings as well as providing a source of potable water to the inhabitants of the city.

The Reflecting Pool of Siyahan is not numbered among these pools. For one, the pool shows no obvious influence of previous civilizations. Indeed, its style is wholly its own. Most people who see it find it unattractive, even ugly. The pool is tall and deep, almost cistern-like in its appearance. Its stone walls are covered in an overly exuberant stucco pattern with a spiny, prickly finish that can be painful to the touch if one is not careful when leaning against it. Moreover, the water within it is brackish and brown — hardly the sort of thing to be of use to anyone in Shelzar.

The Pool owes its construction to a sorcerer named Siyahan, who was believed in his day to be a seer and prophet. Few believed his boasts of divinatory ability, especially in those days, the latter years of the Empire of Lede, when claims such as those were considered just short of blasphemy against Enkili as opposed to merely in poor taste, as they are now. Thanks to some well-placed bribes among the City Council, Siyahan was granted permission to build his reflecting pool, which he claimed allowed one to see far-off places by staring into its waters. When Siyahan died, the pool was nearly demolished. Fortunately, a member of the Council decided to test out the cistern's prophetic powers on a lark. Legend has it that he saw the sack of the city of Elz and warned his fellow Shelzari of the approach of a titanspawn army, even though there is no way the councilor could have known these things.

In the chaos of the Divine War, the order to tear down the Reflecting Pool of Siyahan was never carried out. In principle, the order still stands and a wrecking crew should remove it so that something more useful to the city might replace it. Yet this is unlikely to happen, since the pool has since become a fixture of the Souk, and occasionally some wild-eyed fool claims to have glimpsed another place in its waters, which only furthers the disinclination to bring it down.

Old Town

As the name suggests, this is the oldest quarter of the city. This green and sheltered stretch of coastline marks the place where the original Hazari settlers founded the city of Shelzar, then called *Shai al Hazari* ("City [or Fortress] of the Hazari"). Based on what Shelzar has become, most people would be surprised to learn that the Hazari were a strict and conservative people, a fact evinced in modern Shelzar only by the harsh punishments for blasphemy or sexual predation and the traditional turban and sash that many Shelzari still affect.

Old Town is also home to Shalamar, the Shelzari seat of government and the abode of High Minister Fratrel. The docks in this area are the oldest in the city and serve only as mooring places for the pleasure craft of Shelzar's wealthy and powerful.

Temples and Shrines

80. Shrine to Denev

Although Enkili is by far the most widely worshipped deity in Shelzar, with only the demigoddesses Idra and Manawe having remotely sizable followings, other gods have their place as well. In addition to such deities as Corean and Hedrada (not to mention Belsameth and Chardun), there is the titan Denev, who has a small but quite devout following in the City of Pleasures. The foremost reason for is that Shelzar depends so heavily on the produce of the Golden Triangle for its survival; the Shelzari worship Denev as the Earth Mother and beseech her for bountiful crops to sustain them throughout the year. Related to this, many Shelzari also see Denev as one of the sources of life's pleasure, for she, even more so than Nemorga, safeguards the cycles of life and death. Still, Shelzari worship of Denev includes orgiastic rites uncommon elsewhere in the Scarred Lands, which give it a somewhat unsavory reputation among her more traditional worshippers elsewhere. Finally, the Shelzari will never forget how Denev turned against her fellow titans and stood by the gods as they waged the Divine War. Since Shelzar's survival depends heavily on the success of the gods, they regard Denev as nothing less than a savior.

Despite this, the shrine to Denev is a small one, capable of holding only a few dozen worshippers at any given time, which is far more than are likely to be there even on the titaness' holiest of days. Most Shelzari have a very good opinion of Denev and offer short prayers and sacrifices to her at appropriate times, but few are fanatical about her in the way they are about Enkili, Idra, or even Manawe. To them, Denev is an important "other" goddess, to whom they turn when they need something rather than as a focus for singular faith.

These facts disappoint Hanirah Latoloo (*female half-elf, Drd10, N*), who is the leader of the shrine. She oversees a small staff of other druids and adepts who attend to Denev's rites, as well as a band of street evangelists who spread her word. These missionaries are a recent innovation, having started only within the last year. Hanirah hopes that they might help drum up support for the shrine, in addition to deepening Shelzar's faith in the Earth Mother. So far, however, it has had little effect; most Shelzari consider the missionaries laughable at best or subversive at worst, and, regardless, avoid them if at all possible. This disheartens Hanirah, who would rather that Shelzar's worship of the goddess follow the pattern elsewhere in Ghelspad, since she refuses to use sex to entice worshippers to her shrine — a ploy that Enkili and Idra both use to good effect.

Inns, Taverns, and Restaurants

81. The Council Chambers

Catering to an upscale crowd, the Council Chambers is one of the most posh restaurants in the entire city. Its furnishings are exquisitely chosen and cost the restaurant's proprietor, Sayed Jahadji (*male human, Ari6, NE*), a tidy sum of money. Fine art, sculpture, and rugs decorate the place, and live music is a constant feature. Jahadji believes in providing his customers with a memorable dining experience. He also understands that his clientele can afford to pay much higher prices for their food and drink, especially if they are treated in a fashion to which they are accustomed. The bulk of his patrons are aristocrats, merchant lords, and government officials of one sort or another, all of whom are used to having their every whim catered to, which is precisely what the Council Chambers provides.

Unlike most restaurants in Shelzar, this one occupies several floors of a single building. Its lower level is open to the general (albeit wealthy) public, offering a wide variety of entrees from several different cultural traditions. Naturally, Shelzari and Zathiskan dishes are the specialties of the house, but Calastian and Ankilan recipes are also available for those who savor their unusual tastes. Jahadji is always on the lookout for talented cooks and is trying to expand the restaurant's repertoire by hiring individuals with experience in the food and drink of lands beyond Shelzar. As one might expect, he pays well for such services, since they ensure a healthy future for the Council Chambers.

The upper floors of the restaurant are available by reservation only. In general, only large parties of government officials and wealthy merchants holding gala events use them. For these elite customers, Jahadji spares no expense. He tailors each and every such party to the specific needs and desires of the people who have reserved the rooms. If it requires that he find musicians from Darakeene, dancers from Dunahnae, or singers from Fangsfall, Jahadji does so. He is also known to provide drugs and prostitutes to his clients, too, if they so desire.

What few know is that the topmost floor of the restaurant is reserved for use by the Sa'an Crime Cartel. No less important and dangerous a personage than Mazat himself (see Chapter 4 and *The Wise&TheWicked*) frequents that floor for his own private parties. Jahadji has long hoped that he might find a way to join the Cartel, but so far he has proven incapable of doing so. His subtle suggestions to Sa'an members appear to have gone unnoticed. He is growing frustrated by this, but is unwilling to press his case further, since he knows well the fate that could befall him if he angers Mazat or any of his top lieutenants.

Civic and Governmental

82. Shalamar Palace

With the exception of the Temple of Enkili, the Shalamar Palace is arguably the most important building in Shelzar. The immense building, actually more a complex of several dozen interconnected structures, was first erected during the time of the Hazari, when it was home to their sect's Sultan. There is plenty of evidence of Hazari influence on the architecture of the palace, since, unlike many places in Shelzar, it lacks the otherwise omnipresent symbols of Enkili. In fact, the palace shows very little evidence of any religious iconography, except in the more recent sections of the complex — which has led some cynics to suggest that this is because the Scarred Lands lack a god whose spheres of influence are pure self-interest and the acquisition of money....

Even if its origins lie in the time of the Hazari, the true genesis of the modern day Shalamar Palace took place during the time of the Elzan Empire, when it was home the Amyr of Shelzar, a nobleman appointed by the emperor to rule over a hierarchy of shayks and other lesser aristocrats. It was known as the *Shai al Amyr* ("Fortress of the Amyr"), which eventually was contracted to Shalamar. As its name suggests, its primary purpose was as a military fortification. The central building of the complex was constructed with high stone walls and protected with numerous enchantments, not to mention a series of mechanical traps designed to protect the Amyr and his advisors from those who might wish them harm.

Over time, the citadel expanded to include many outlying buildings of various sorts. The paranoia that saw the creation of so many protections and traps continued to exert itself, so these outlying buildings were joined to the central citadel by a series of catwalks, covered porticoes, and underground tunnels. The latter proved especially popular with generations of amyrs, who grew more and more fearful of assassination attempts, thanks in no small part to the numerous attempts that had actually been made on their lives over the years. Their legacy is a vast collection of subterranean walkways, some of which have long since been abandoned, giving rise to all sorts of stories of bizarre creatures that dwell beneath the ground of the present-day palace.

The amyrs' paranoia eventually grew so great that they wanted their families and closest advisors to live within the Shalamar as well. This led to a further bout of expansion, this time intended to include living quarters and other related necessities. By the time of Shelzar's secession from the

Empire of Elz, the palace had become a veritable city within a city and held hundreds of people, all of whom were involved in the governance of the city (or attendance upon the amyrr). The Divine War advanced this process even further, to the point where the palace positively hummed with activity. Nearly every important aspect of Shelzar's governance, including the City Council, is now located within the grounds of the Shalamar, access to which is strictly controlled. Despite the passage of time and the change of government, the old Elzan paranoia remains. Anyone attempting to enter the majority of the palace's grounds without the express permission of the Keeper of the Ministerial Household, Davad Elouni (*male human, Ari4, LN*), is subject to immediate arrest and harsh punishment.

There are a handful of public spaces on the grounds of the palace that are accessible to outsiders. These are mostly small parks that overlook the bay. One of them is known locally as the "Park of the Ancients," since it contains busts of famous Shelzari citizens from throughout history. These busts were all commissioned just after the end of the Titanswar as a way of reminding Shelzari of their illustrious history in the face of the recent destruction of Ghelspad. The park never proved popular, though, since it is always guarded by unpleasant looking constables who glare at anyone who takes too close a look at areas of the Shalamar near it. This has led to a decline in visits to the place — so much so that it is generally empty most of the time.

High Minister Fratreli usually makes his home in the Shalamar Palace, as do all of his closest advisors and a vast array of fawning sycophants, although Fratreli also maintains a palatial house on Ismarhi Island. Under Fratreli, many portions of the palace complex have lain unused, as he has centralized the administration of the city into fewer hands. These abandoned rooms have been sealed off to everyone, including other government officials, until such time as they are needed. Stories abound of strange goings-on in these abandoned rooms, but there is no proof of even the slightest bit of truth to them. More genuinely controversial is the bid by the Calastians to gain entrance to the Shalamar Palace, on the grounds that they need continual access to the High Minister. Fratreli has dismissed this request out of hand, saying that such is "not the Shelzari way"; again, the truth in this matter is suspect. In any case, Fratreli knows that the Shelzari populace would lynch him if he capitulated to such a demand, since the average citizen of the City of Pleasures views the Calastians rather negatively.

Merchants, Equipment, and Services

83. Quire and Quill

It is easy to forget that Shelzar was founded by a sect of agnostic philosopher-ascetics when one looks around at its contemporary decadence. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that the legacy of scholarship died with the Hazari. Certainly the Padaweh university is no more, but there remain plenty of scholars and sages within the City of Pleasure. Indeed, Shelzar remains a major center of learning in the lands south of the Mounds of Man. Compared to places like the Calastian Hegemony, it is a veritable treasure trove of ancient knowledge and wisdom.

It is understandable then that there are many businesses that derive their livelihood from the pursuit of learning. Quire and Quill is one such business. Owned by Elaqa Fatavar (*male human, Exp11, LN*), this establishment is dedicated to providing books and scribing services to Shelzar's scholarly community or, for that matter, to anyone else who has need of a good copyist. Quill and Quire employs a dozen scribes, all of whom have been well trained to meet the needs and interests of prospective employers. In addition, the business also employs another dozen individuals for the purpose of making and binding books, codices, and scrolls.

Quire and Quill has become a massive operation, churning out books and scrolls at a prodigious rate. Fatavar frets over the quality of his shop's output, fearing that such fast production somehow runs counter to good business practices. So far, though, there have been no complaints to justify Fatavar's concerns. If anything, the speed of turnover has only added to Quire and Quill's reputation as the premier scriptorium in Shelzar.

Homes and Dwellings

84. Hajjan Tal's Home

Hajjan Tal (*human male, Ari2/Exp5, CN*) fancies himself something of a diplomatic savant. The son of an old and wealthy Shelzari merchant clan with connections going back to the Empire of Elz, Tal has not wanted for anything his entire life. Rather than waste his youth in debauchery and luxury, he spent much of his time studying foreign languages and cultures. In doing so, he became a self-taught polymath, with a wide and deep knowledge of societies other than his native Shelzari. Tal fluently speaks almost a dozen languages and knows the ways of cultures as far away as Albadia.

Unfortunately, Tal's impressive knowledge is not matched by his social skills. He is arrogant, overweening, and pompous. He considers himself

to be the pinnacle of human achievement in a wide number of areas, claiming to have fulfilled the ancient Hazari goal of enlightenment (another subject about which he considers himself an expert). It is no surprise, then, that he has offered his services to the City Council and the High Minister on numerous occasions, suggesting that his wide range of knowledge would make him a perfect diplomat to Calastia or Zathiske or any number of other places. To date, no one has taken him up on his offer, because of his inability to get by in normal society without offending someone. This has only made Tal more bitter — and more determined to aid his beloved city.

Now, Hajjan Tal has set up his home as a kind of "diplomatic salon," where he entertains foreign visitors and plies them with his interest in becoming an ambassador to their homelands. He also regularly invites members of the city's government, hoping he might change their minds. Tal has, of course, done no such thing, although he has caused several incidents over the years that have nearly resulted in war between Shelzar and its neighbors.

Of course, this has all led some of his more acerbic neighbors to suggest that he is well on his way toward becoming a diplomat already.

Places of Note

85. Enkili's Way

Enkili's Way is not as old as the Grand Boulevard — having been laid down only centuries after the foundation of the city (still millennia ago, however!) — but it is now the most important thoroughfare in Shelzar. Like the Boulevard, Enkili's Way is a wide and attractive street, covered in ivory and lined with fragrant trees. Unlike its older counterpart, the Way (as it is often called, much to the confusion of visitors) is well maintained. The City Council keeps the streets cleaned and the trees well groomed so that there is no doubt that it is the pride of the City of Pleasures. It certainly helps that Enkili's Way is lined with temples, restaurants, and coffee houses. All of these establishments take equal pride in maintaining the street, going so far as to decorate the portions of it they face during important festivals and civic occasions.

Another way in which the Way differs from the Grand Boulevard is in its winding and roundabout course, which takes it through almost every district of the city. Shelzari remark that this is only fitting, given the chaotic nature of the god after which the street is named. This facet of Enkili's Way is another source of consternation for visitors, though, since giving directions to a place along the

street's length can be quite an involved series of discussions, with constant reference to landmarks and other signposts that mean little to those who are already lost.

All this has led to numerous urban legends about individuals getting lost while attempting to navigate the Way and who never return. In at least one documented case in the past few years, a person appeared in a coffee shop along the Way demanding to know what year it was. When told by the incredulous patrons, he claimed that it was a full decade after he had originally started down Enkili's Way, where he got lost by turning the wrong corner. Very few people believed him, of course, but some are not so sure he was lying, since it is entirely possible that the Trickster decided to have a little fun at the expense of a mortal.

Merchant's Quarter

The name "Merchant's Quarter" is something of a joke in Shelzar, as trade occurs in every corner of the city, but many centuries ago trade in the city was strictly regulated and mercantile activities were permitted only in this district.

Out of a sense of history and tradition, and owing in no small part to the fact that land in the Merchant Quarter is some of the most valuable in the city, most of the powerful merchant houses maintain headquarters, offices, and (often high-security) warehouses here.

Merchants, Equipment, and Services

86. Trasaric the Tailor

There are, despite what some would argue, more types of sensual pleasure than those of food, drink, and sex. Many Shelzari enjoy dressing themselves in the finest silk and damask that they can afford. Indeed, there is a sizable portion of the local economy devoted to nothing more than the sewing, weaving, and selling of expensive clothing. As with so many pleasures, there are two kinds of people who partake of these clothes. The first group, which is by far the largest, simply wishes to impress their friends and family with the sheer beauty of their finery. For these individuals, it does not matter how original or unique their clothing is, so long as it achieves its goal. The second group is much smaller and composed of true sartorial connoisseurs. These individuals demand nothing less than singular creations that are not only expensive but also without equal in the whole of the Scarred Lands.

Trasaric (*male human, Exp9, N*) is an Albadian who came to Shelzar almost a decade ago. Despite his rough background, he possessed tailoring skills second to none in all the city. He also demon-

strated a level of refinement that would seem to belie his barbarian origins. There is little question that, whatever his background, Trasaric is far beyond the skills of the best tailors elsewhere in the city — aside, perhaps, from the Urkhadi genius Karshi (see location #77) — that he can afford to charge premium prices for his services. Anyone who patronizes Trasaric is sure to get his money's worth. The surly tailor creates clothes that seem to transcend their materials. Needless to say, many members of the City Council, as well as Ayshellia, High Priestess of Enkili, are regular patrons of Trasaric.

Many Shelzari claim that Trasaric's talent is not natural. They suggest instead that he has sold his soul to a fiend in order to gain the ability to create such beautiful clothing. Exactly why a barbarian like Trasaric would do something so foolish has never been adequately answered, but that does not stop the stories from circulating, stories that Trasaric has never denied and may well have encouraged for his own reasons.

Places of Note

87. The Merchant's Souk

One of the many pitfalls of visiting a city as old as Shelzar is the confusion that can arise from the same name being applied to several different locales, especially when those locales are not all that close to one another. Locals, of course, implicitly understand the distinction between one place and another from the context of a conversation. For example, if one Shelzari were to tell another, "Go to Shaleh's place near the Gate. He'll set you up with a case of Venirian brandy," it would be apparent to most Shelzari that the Gate in question was Belsameth's Gate and not any of the other gates of the city. Many other examples abound — to the consternation of newcomers not as well versed in the intricacies of Shelzari geography as the natives.

One of the worst examples of these naming practices is the *souk*. In Shelzar, when someone refers to "the souk," they could be referring to any one of three different things, one of which is not itself a single thing but a collection of things. First of all, *souk* is a general term for any open-air market in the City of Pleasures. Many of these minor souks are makeshift affairs and rarely last more than a few hours or days at most. They are a peculiar combination of flea and farmer's markets, with a good dose of public auction thrown in as well. The Shelzari love of haggling is well known, and there is no better showcase for their abilities than in one of the many souks that spring up across the city.

The second type of *souk* is the city district of the same name. In many ways, the Souk district is much like the minor souks of the city writ large.

There are more permanent structures in this district, including homes and residences of Shelzari citizens, of course, in addition to its being much greater in size, but the same general principles apply to these two souks.

The same cannot be said of what is properly called the "Merchant's Souk." While this conglomeration of tents and stalls is indeed an open-air marketplace, it is generally of interest only to other merchants. That is because the Merchant's Souk does not sell actual goods or services, but rather promises of them. The place is a kind of "stock exchange," where traders gather to make contracts, order products, and haggle over terms.

This is not to say that only merchants ever visit this Souk, but very few ordinary Shelzari have much interest in the place, since they rarely need to order 200 bottles of Calastian wine or 1000 bolts of Veshian silk. For those who do need such bulk quantities of goods, the Merchant's Souk is the place to go. It is also where one may contract services of various sorts, such as hiring a mercenary company or chartering a caravan to Hollowfaust.

Like most souks, this locale is chaotic and cacophonous. Za'alai Mahanas (*male human, Exp5, LN*), a self-important, officious little man, considers himself its unofficial master. The merchants of the Souk nevertheless accord him some semblance of respect, if only because he does make the place run more smoothly. He and his small staff of teamsters arrange the tents and stalls, direct visitors to the proper locations, and ensure that disputes never grow into anything more violent than shouting matches. Za'alai collects no salary for his troubles, relying on his own considerable wealth (made as a spice merchant) for expenses incurred while undertaking his chosen vocation. Some traders whisper that Mahanas is actually a spy for Minister Fratrelis or the City Council (or for the Calastians or the Cult of the Ancient Ones — his supposed master changes with each telling), since there can be no other explanation for his performing such useful duties without drawing a salary.

Places of Note

88. Calastian Embassy

Until very recently, the Calastians had no presence in Shelzar. They were considered little more than bullies at best, and tyrants at worst by the freedom-loving Shelzari, who regularly thanked Enkili that accidents of history and geography had spared them the fate of the Zathiskans on the other side of the Broadreach River. Even so, most Shelzari were certain that the acquisitive King Virduk would eventually cast his greedy gaze upon the City of Pleasures — and they were right. The

Calastians have offered to "aid" Shelzar on numerous occasions, providing troops and military advisors in exchange for access to the city's ports and trade routes. The Shelzari politely declined each and every time this offer was made, fearing (perhaps rightly) that such a deal would be a deal with a Chardunite devil.

When the new High Priestess of Enkili, Ayshella, threw her weight behind the Calastian interests, the situation changed almost overnight. High Minister Fratrelis and a portion of the City Council were swayed by Ayshella's arguments that a Calastian connection would strengthen Shelzar's economic position in Ghelspad and would also serve to staunch Virduk's ambitions, at least for the time being. It wasn't long afterwards that the Calastian embassy was established in the Merchant's Quarter, occupying a large and luxurious manse that had once been home to the powerful Bilakin trading guild that became extinct during the Titanswar.

Dormane Ulimhar (see Chapter 4), the Calastian ambassador, lives in the embassy along with a large staff that includes several priests of Chardun and a goodly number of elite Consular Guards. Ulimhar has done his best to ensure that the Calastians behave themselves while in the city. Although he has little regard for the Shelzari and their decadent ways, he nonetheless understands the importance of maintaining good relations with them and fears the consequences (for himself, primarily) if he should fail in his mission. Consequently, Ulimhar harshly punishes any of his staff who do not abide by local laws or treat the locals with respect. In one recent incident, he allowed one of his Chardunite priests to be flogged for slandering the name of Enkili, the punishment mandated for such a crime under Shelzari law. This act did little to overcome the natural Shelzari skepticism about the Calastians' intentions, but it did help to prevent a diplomatic incident and the derailment of ongoing negotiations for closer relations between the Hegemony and Shelzar.

The embassy is very heavily guarded, and no one, not even Shelzari government officials, are allowed to enter its grounds due to concerns about security. Since he arrived in the city, there have been three separate attempts to assassinate Dormane Ulimhar, all by members of a Zathiskan resistance movement that has set up shop in the city. This has led to all manner of speculation regarding what goes on behind the embassy's high walls. There are frequent reports of strange shipments sent into the embassy, large enough to contain wild animals or monsters, but no one takes such reports seriously, even when the reporter



swears that he heard cries of pain emanate from inside the shipments. Most Shelzari instinctively think the worst of the Calastians, but even they are unwilling to take such outlandish tales without a grain of salt.

Typical Calastian Consular Guard, human fighter 3

CR3; SZ Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d10+6; hp 23; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft. in armor, 30 ft. base; AC 19 [flat-footed 15, touch 12] (+2 Dex, +5 chainmail, +2 large steel shield); Atk +5 melee (1d8+2, crit 19–20/x2, longsword), +5 melee (1d4+2, crit 19–20/x2, dagger), or +6 ranged (1d8, crit x3, 110 ft., composite longbow); AL LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 8.

Languages: Calastian, Shelzari.

Skills: Craft (weaponsmithing) +3, Handle Animal +3, Listen +4, Ride +5, Search +3, Sense Motive +2, Spot +4.

Feats: Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (composite longbow).

Foreign Quarter

In the early days of Shelzar, all foreign visitors to the city were obliged to make their lodgings in this quarter and required by curfew to remain within its boundaries from sunset to sunrise each night. At first, foreign visitors weren't too happy with this arrangement, but it didn't take long for them to see the inherent opportunities. With the entire body of foreign traders confined to a single area and the city watch patrolling elsewhere, a great deal of trade between these foreign merchants could go on without the knowledge of the Shelzari authorities, particularly the tax collectors. Although foreigners are no longer restricted to this single district and the archaic curfew no longer exists, this quarter is still the center of black-market and illicit trade in Shelzar, and perhaps in all of Ghelspad.

Brothels and Gambling Dens

89. Calastian Love

The brothel known as Calastian Love has been a fixture for many decades, well before the Calastians themselves were a feature in the city as they are today. For their part, the Calastians

consider this establishment to be an affront to their good names and regularly petition the City Council to shut it down or at least force it to change its name. That is due to the fact that the brothel specializes in homosexual liaisons, which has long been known locally as "Calastian love" or "love Calastian style." Same-sex couplings carry few stigmas in Shelzari society. Most inhabitants of the city are far too open-minded to look askance at those who prefer the erotic company of their own gender. Moreover, many important figures in Shelzari history have been homosexual, or at least have taken part in one or more such relationships during their lifetimes. Shelzari attitudes toward marriage are admittedly not conducive to same-sex arrangements, but that is more a function of practicality than morality. Marriage is to ensure children, first and foremost. Anything else is purely optional. Therefore, a dedicated homosexual who marries to continue his line is lauded as a pillar of society for his willingness to have children even while pursuing romance with members of his own gender.

The proprietor of this brothel is Raf Mohabet (*male human, Rog6, CN*), who cares little for the Calastians' concerns. In fact, he takes some pleasure in tweaking their self-important sense of honor. That the military-minded Calastians have a problem with homosexuality is not his concern. Indeed, he sees it as his duty as a good Shelzari to open their minds and expand their horizons beyond the narrow confines of their authoritarian society. This has led to numerous death threats from Calastians living in the city, as well as a few Calastian (or homophobic) sympathizers among the locals. However, Mohabet is undeterred. He has increased security at his brothel, but he has no intention of shutting it down, which has earned him the approbation of many Shelzari patriots, for whom Calastian Love has become an odd center of resistance against the Hegemony and its policies in Zathiske. Not surprisingly, this has only exacerbated tensions with the Calastians in Shelzar. It is probably only a matter of time before these tensions boil over into violence.

Temples and Shrines

90. Temple of Nemorga

Death comes to all mortals, whether they seek it or not. Whereas Belsameth brings death, Nemorga is the deity of the passage from life into death. He is a god of funerals and the rites of the deceased. In Shelzar, he oversees the cremation of the dead. In fact, this temple includes an extensive crematorium that is used by most residents of the city when it comes time to deal with their deceased

friends and relatives. This places Nemorga's cult in an unusual position. On one hand, he has few true worshippers. On the other hand, nearly everyone in Shelzar comes to Nemorga's priests when it is time to bury their dead.

This situation is deeply pleasing to Na'i Alshaq (*male human, Clr11, N*), the grim little man who is Nemorga's chief priest in the city. Alshaq has few social graces. He is morbid and lacks a sense of humor. He is also a dour pessimist. Simply being around him is usually sufficient to ruin one's day, as more than a few wags have said of him. Yet, despite it all, Alshaq is a profoundly thoughtful and philosophical man. He understands death better than anyone. He does not fear death, but neither does he seek it. He views it instead as an inevitable consequence of life. Since it cannot be avoided indefinitely, why fear it? Death is what the gods have in store for mortal beings, and, since the gods have demonstrated their allegiance to mortals time and again, that alone should give hope.

Interestingly, Alshaq has a deep and abiding hatred for all forms of undead, which he considers an affront to the Grey King's rightful rule. He likewise has little love for those who try to cheat death through magic or spells. He frequently sponsors groups of adventurers to eliminate any undead he gets word of in the city or in the surrounding countryside. Consequently, Alshaq is a good source of information about these and other similar topics. His delivery of said information may lack the sparkle of conversation in a literary salon, but it is always enlightening and pertinent.

Inns, Taverns, and Restaurants

91. The Quelskan Kitchen

There are many ethnic restaurants in the Foreign Quarter. Few are more famous than the Quelskan Kitchen. Run by a Zathiskan woman named Kamit Ashuja (*female human, Com1/Exp2, NG*), who fled from her homeland during the Calastian invasion some years ago, this restaurant boasts truly authentic Zathiskan food. The smell of its pungent curries and grilled meats waft through the streets for blocks away, drawing approval from those who appreciate the spicy Zathiskan palate and grumbles from those who find the food unpalatable.

Ashuja hates the Calastians and makes little secret of her sympathies for the rebel movement in her homeland. This has led to some run-ins with Calastian patriots and sympathizers, who have intimidated her patrons and threatened individuals they believed to be Zathiskan spies. Ashuja has denied all such accusations, pointing out that she has no interest in destroying her well-regarded

business to make a political point. She has been in the City of Pleasures long enough to have been accepted as a true Shelzari and takes some pride in that fact. She rarely speaks Zathiskan, even in her own restaurant, preferring to converse in Shelzari and to dress like a native.

These decisions on her part have led to some trouble from the other end of the political spectrum. Displaced Zathiskans consider Ashuja a sell-out and a traitor to her people. They see her restaurant as little more than her way to make money off the misery of her fellow Zathiskans, who eat there to get a taste of their native cuisines. Ashuja is hurt by such accusations, but, again, says little to defend herself. She believes that fanatics on both sides of the issue are the true enemy, and hopes that the day will come when she can return home to Quelsk and live in peace.

Civic and Governmental

92. Constabulary Office

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Shelzar is a chaotic city: in fact, this is rather an understatement. In many ways, Shelzar is constantly on the verge of collapse. The City Council has only limited powers to impose order on the city and, even if it possessed a greater ability to do so, it is unlikely that it would. Order is simply not appealing to most Shelzari. Their almost innate faith in the providence of Enkili makes them ill disposed toward anything like an orderly lifestyle. They would find it dull and boring, without any challenges or unexpected turns of events. "What is the point in that? Why live in Vashon when you can die in Shelzar?"

Nevertheless, even the Shelzari City Council recognizes the need for keepers of the peace. Therefore, a small number of constabulary offices have been established throughout the city, particularly in trouble spots such as the Shahdi District, the Maze, and the Foreign Quarter. In those areas, small groups of warriors patrol the streets, empowered by the Council to arrest and detain individuals caught in the act of committing a crime. The constables may also investigate crimes, although their ability to do so is limited, because Shelzari law places a premium on privacy. Consequently, many investigations are handled by private individuals, who are not as constrained by legal niceties even if they cannot use such "illegally obtained" evidence in a court of law.

The constabulary office in the Foreign Quarter is a noteworthy exception to the usual suppositions about such places in Shelzar. Its chief constable, Safiyah Hanal (*female human, Ftr8, LG*) is a convert to the faith of Corean. As such, she seeks to uphold virtue in all things. She zealously pursues her man-

date to protect the inhabitants of the Quarter, sometimes overstepping her authority in the process. Hanal considers this a hazard of her occupation, but some foreign visitors and many locals see her as a menace and seek to have her removed. They argue that her devotion to Corean is incompatible with her job as a law enforcer — a position the City Council is said to agree with, even if they have not thus far acted on it.

North Docks

The original city docks, these ancient piers and pilings simply cannot handle the volume of trade needed in the modern era. Nowadays, the North Docks handle smaller trade ships, the vessels of visiting dignitaries, and the few but regular passenger vessels that visit the city. This quarter is home to numerous expensive restaurants serving a wide variety of foreign food and numerous cultural and social events and functions: Albadian and Broadreach cuisine are the current vogue among the cognoscenti, and theatres, art galleries, and coffee houses are ever-present. That is not to say that the vices available elsewhere in Shelzar are absent from this quarter, but simply that they are much more discreet, tasteful, and, of course, expensive.

Merchants, Equipment, and Services

93. Honorable Brotherhood of Sailors and Pilots Guildhall

In general, the Shelzari are not much given to guilds and unions of any sort. Organizations of this type smack of centralized authority, which is anathema in many parts of the City of Pleasures. Nevertheless, many groups have arranged themselves into loose sodalities of one sort or another. Most are closer in structure to professional associations that provide a structure for newcomers who wish to learn the trade in question. A few are similar to the hierarchical guilds of other lands, but these are rare and do not usually last long. In the past twenty years, for example, a proposed guild of teamsters and stevedores has broken up no fewer than four times. There is currently no such guild in Shelzar, although there are plans to reform it in the near future.

One of the primary exceptions to this Shelzari tendency is the Honorable Brotherhood of Sailors and Pilots. Despite its name, women are welcome to join this group, which supports and promotes mariners based in the City of Pleasures. Seafaring is considered an ancient and noble profession in Shelzar. Most Shelzari tend to think well of sailors, since they realize how much the city's economy depends on their work. In addi-

tion, the sea has provided Shelzar with an impregnable defense against attack for generations. The cult of Manawe is growing here, too. All these factors have made the city a welcome headquarters for many a sailing crew.

The Brotherhood exists to establish guidelines for hiring sailing crews, as well as standards for individuals hoping to sign on as a mariner. Members of the brotherhood are treated to free medical service, as well as access to a bunkhouse where they can stay while in Shelzar. There is also a profit-sharing arrangement that provides a small stipend to members in good standing over the age of forty. The arrangement is designed to give assistance to the older members of the brotherhood, whose prime sailing days are behind them. Anyone who wishes to hire a sailing crew bound out of Shelzar is expected to work through the brotherhood. Failure to do so is not strictly speaking illegal, but it is frowned upon — especially by the armed toughs the brotherhood sends to deal with such “scabs.”

94. Amah’s Orphanage

In a city as large and as devoted to pleasure as Shelzar, unwanted children are a fact of life. The streets of some districts are positively adrift in dirty ragamuffins who often eke out a pathetic existence as beggars, pickpockets, and petty criminals. The local constabularies rarely do much about these children, who are easy prey for manipulative criminals who use the children to make them wealthy without undue risk to themselves. Shelzari consider these street children “Enkili’s stepchildren” and trusts that the goddess will take care of them. A common character in Shelzari literature is the “street rhaat,” an abandoned child with a heart of gold and a remarkable determination, who claws his way out of the gutter to the top of city’s society. The reality is usually far different, but few Shelzari wish to hear about such things.

One of the few exceptions to the typical Shelzari’s lack of concern for such disenfranchised children is Amah Shayr (*female human, Clr5, CN*), a priestess of Enkili, who has made it her mission in life to tend to the needs of orphans and wayward youth. She has established an orphanage, where she takes in any children who are brought to her, as well as those she can convince to live with her. Amah is a devoted, loving woman, and her intentions are quite honorable. She truly does want nothing more than to make life better for these children, whom she considers to be the responsibility of all Shelzari, even if few are willing to listen to her sermons on that very topic. Even the other members of her own temple consider Amah somewhat eccentric for taking up such a star-crossed cause.

Homes and Dwellings

95. Salid’s Home

“The sea tells many tales — even if we do not always understand them,” is an old Shelzari saying. It certainly applies to the man now known only as Salid. Twenty years ago, a sailor stumbled across a mysterious man on the South Docks, where he lay unconscious. Both his legs had been amputated just above the knees and lying beside him were a jug of water and a tin of salted meat. A skilled surgeon had obviously amputated his legs, but the stumps were only partially healed and bandaged. The man was also suffering from cold and exposure.

The sailor who found him recalled a ship the day before passing back and forth a half mile off the coast of Shelzar. He assumed the man must have been brought in from the ship after dark and left on the docks. The castaway was carried to the sailor’s home where he was wrapped in warm blankets and given food and drink. The mystery man moaned and muttered, but did not speak. The only word he said coherently was “Salid,” so the sailor took to calling him by that name.

When found, Salid’s hands were not calloused and his clothes were cut from fine cloth. These facts led many to believe he had been a privileged officer who attempted a mutiny and was punished by amputation. Others suggested he was a kidnap victim whose ransom went unpaid and who was thus tossed from a pirate ship. Some thought he was heir to a fortune and was crippled and cast away to make way for someone else to seize his inheritance. Of course, none of these stories has yet been proven and Salid, who still lives in Shelzar, has not spoken a word since his discovery.

Interestingly, Salid is fond of children. He spends most of his time with children and enjoys watching them play. He conducts himself with dignity and when offered a few coins he appears embarrassed, almost humiliated. However, he does accept gifts of candy, coffee, and fruits. Salid is wary of strangers, but in appearance and manner is perfectly honorable. Although he prefers to sit, he has learned to walk on the stumps of his legs. Because of his predicament, the Honorable Brotherhood of Sailors and Pilots granted him a stipend of 5 gold ordu a week to pay for his upkeep.

Sailors of many nationalities come to Salid to see if he can speak their language. Despite these efforts, Salid has never spoken, although his reactions to the sailors suggest he is familiar with many of the languages of the Scarred Lands. He also becomes very angry when any visitor mentions Quelsk. Some people who have met Salid believe

he has a noble bearing and might be an aristocrat. These same people also think his complexion marks him as a Zathiskan, a Calastian, or even a Shelzari, but, again, no one really knows who he is or where he hails from.

Places of Note

96. The Shelzar Rose

The importance of seafaring to Shelzar cannot be exaggerated. Many sailors and mariners are significant local heroes, so it is no surprise that the Shelzari government would preserve the sailing ship of Captain Makam Hakar, who lived in the City of Pleasures almost two hundred years ago. Captain Hakar's ship, the "Shelzar Rose," made numerous trips to ports all over Ghelspad. He is also supposed to have visited the continent of Termana, as well, years before the explorers who are credited with its discovery; the historical evidence of this is spotty at best, though, based at least in part on boasts made by Hakar in which he claimed to have "sailed all the way around Scarn and back." Given Hakar's penchant for hyperbole, this is hardly sufficient cause to believe his claim.

There is no question, however, that Hakar brought exploratory trade to new heights with his travels, thereby ensuring the economic future of Shelzar for years to come.

The Shelzar Rose is a classically built dhow, but with several modifications that enabled Captain Hakar to travel much farther from the coast than is typical. These modifications have been adopted by many modern sailing vessels, giving Shelzari ships greater range than they once had. Visitors can step aboard the Shelzari Rose, permanently moored here on the docks, to see how sailors lived in the days before the Titanswar. There are stories of a ghost (or ghosts) that haunt the Rose, with some saying that Captain Hakar's spirit can never be freed until his ship is cut loose from its moorings and allowed to drift off into the sunset. Like many such stories, it is probably untrue, but it has spread far and wide, making the Rose a popular tourist attraction for both native Shelzari and visitors to the City of Pleasures. Thanks to funds from the City Council, the dhow is well maintained despite its advanced age. Barring some catastrophe, it will be a fixture of the docks for years to come.

Chapter Four: People of Shelzar

The teeming streets of Shelzar are home to thousands, from the unbearably poor to the unimaginably wealthy. There are many centers of power in this city of Enkili, and many individuals who would lead openly or rule from the shadows. Although this chapter includes only some of the prominent citizens who live and work in Shelzar, they represent valuable allies and dangerous enemies for the adventurers who brave Shelzar's streets and alleys.



Amelyana, Shelzari Courtesan

Amelyana is every inch the characteristic Shelzari courtesan: beautiful, intelligent, and well-versed in the amorous arts. She lives in gorgeous houses, eats fine food, and wears beautiful clothes, all provided by her lovers and admirers. She is accomplished at attracting a man's attention and keeping him interested, and she has no compunction about drawing every coin from his purse while doing so. This could all have something to do with her background, of course.

Amelyana's parents, merchants from Termana, were killed when she was just a child, and she grew up on the streets of Shelzar. For a few years she tried making a living doing odd jobs — waiting tables, shoveling manure, cleaning rats out of bilges — until she could take no more. When she was old enough to attract a man, she took to the streets as a prostitute.

She found that she had something of a gift for the amorous arts and made more money in her first week than she'd seen in her entire life. It wasn't long before she had a dozen men paying her way and keeping her in style. The more she earned, and the better she was kept — and the less often she found herself earning her way on her back. Many of the men she was involved with wanted a beautiful woman on their arm at a ball as often as they wanted her in the bedroom. And of course she was meeting all the right people.

Every party she went to allowed her to jettison one of her less wealthy suitors for a richer man. It wasn't long before she was spending time in the Shelzari courts, mingling with the wealthiest and

Amelyana, female half-elf commoner 3/expert 5/aristocrat 2

CR 7; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 6 in. tall); HD 3d4+3 plus 5d6+5 plus 2d8+2; hp 47; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 [flat-footed 10, touch 13] (+3 Dex); Atk +9 melee (1d4+1 and wounding, crit 19–20/x2, +1 *dagger of wounding*), +8 ranged; SQ half-elf traits; AL CN; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +9; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 21 (15).

Languages: Elven, Shelzari, Calastian, Veshian, Ledean, Albadian.

Skills: Bluff +7, Diplomacy +13, Gather Information +10, Handle Animal +8, Innuendo +9, Knowledge (history) +6, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +9, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +9, Knowledge (politics) +6, Knowledge (sex and sexuality) +10, Listen +8, Perform (amorous, plus any 9 others) +14, Pick Pocket +8, Profession (prostitute) +9, Ride +6, Sense Motive +10, Spot +8, Use Rope +6.

Feats: Ambidexterity, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Weapon Finesse (dagger).

Possessions: *Clothing ring*** (2 courtier's outfits, 2 sets of "evening-wear"), +1 *dagger of wounding*, *cloak of charisma* +6.

most powerful people in the city. Most recently, she has been spending a great deal of time at the Asuras compound, and there are rumors that she has even taken up with Minister Fratrel. Whatever the truth, there is no doubt that she is a woman to watch.

Amelyana is a stunning beauty, all the more outstanding in Shelzar where her pale skin and night-black hair are extremely exotic. Aside from her coloring, she shows little of her elven heritage save for slightly elongated ears, faintly almond-shaped eyes, and long, thin limbs. She has a natural grace, a sultry walk that brings a lump to most any man's throat, and a knack for adopting the most provocative poses without seemingly meaning to do so. Her face is open and smiling, although there seems to be a faint sadness in her eyes.

References to Other Works

Spells and items marked * may be found in *Relics & Rituals*.

Spells and items marked ** may be found in *Relics & Rituals 2*.

Spells and items marked † may be found in *The Divine and the Defeated*.

Anssara Inshani, Sultan of the Hazari

The position of Sultan has long ceased to be anything more than a relatively hollow religious honor. The last sultan to wield temporal power lived millennia ago during the time of the Empire of Lede, before the Hazari were all but wiped out after the infamous Night of Majeel incident. Now, the sect is little more than one strange cult among many. Its emphasis on self-discipline combined with its rejection of the gods and titans does little to endear the Hazari to contemporary Shelzari, who tend to see them as prudish boors. The current Sultan, Anssara Inshani, is attempting to reinvigorate the sect. Inshani is a renowned scholar of history and philosophy, and his library contains numerous ancient texts, some of which are preserved from the days of the original prophets of the faith. In them, Inshani sees a possible roadmap into the future, one that might restore the Hazari to the prominence they once possessed.

Inshani's plan is simple: show Shelzar that the Hazari are not merely puritans who cannot appreciate the finer things in life. The Sultan has read the old scriptures and knows well that the early Hazari loved life as much if not more than almost anyone in the region of Zathiske. That love was tempered with discipline, true, but it was no less pure a love. In many ways, the Hazari enjoyed the pleasures of life even more, because they saw in such experiences the keys to enlightenment. Soft-spoken and affable, Inshani is waging a quiet battle to win new converts with his "neo-essentialism." Some of the more traditional mem-

bers of the sect consider his approach foolish and question the Sultran's judgment for even suggesting it. These individuals believe that leading by example is the best way to reach out to other Shelzari. Inshani is headstrong, however. Whether his approach will be successful remains to be seen.

Ayshella, High Priestess of Enkili

Like the god/dess she serves, Ayshella embodies unpredictability. Those who do not know her do not know what to make of her, which suits the priestess just fine. Tall, thin, and distinctively androgynous, Ayshella does not look the part of the most powerful servant of Enkili in Shelzar. She rarely dresses in her robes of office, preferring simple, loose-fitting garb that billows around her like storm-driven clouds. On those occasions when she does dress as befits her station (such as on high holy days), Ayshella has a distinctly otherworldly air about her. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that she is actually an avatar of the Trickster, just as Ghurika or Sanabia Eftadi during the ancient days of the City of Pleasures.

While she is no avatar, it is easy to see how this belief came about. Ayshella's behavior is consistently erratic — one day she is calm and reasonable, the next indulging in fits of rage or drunken lewdness. She has the ear (and perhaps more) of High Minister Fratrel, who frequently seeks her advice in matters of state. In fact, it was at Lady Ayshella's suggestion that he sought an alliance with the Calastians, which makes outside observers even more suspicious. Many have questioned the motivations of the priestess, since they cannot see how the Chardun-worshipping Calastians could possibly serve the ends of Enkili. Of course, no one has yet dared question Ayshella in this matter, making the matter a topic of continual speculation among the chatters of Shelzar, especially now that Fratrel has begun to question the wisdom of it himself.

Nevertheless, Ayshella is beloved by the majority of Shelzari. She regularly officiates at important civic and religious ceremonies, but participates just as if she were an ordinary citizen. At once haughty and down to earth, she is the perfect earthly embodiment of the Trickster's many aspects. Like Ghurika of old, Ayshella often bestows her favors upon random citizens of the City of Pleasures. She shows little discrimination, choosing high and low, male and female, with equal abandon. Those so favored are treated to a night of exquisite pleasure followed by a special blessing, after which it is believed that Enkili's luck will fall upon them. (Darker rumors hint that the High Priestess does not always bless those she chooses, instead cursing those who fail to please her. Like so many stories of Ayshella, this one is of questionable truthfulness, which only adds to her mystique.)

Anssara Inshani, male human aristocrat 2/expert 6

CR 6; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 7 in. tall); HD 2d8+4 plus 6d6+12; hp 45; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 [flat-footed 12, touch 9] (-1 Dex, +3 natural); Atk +6 melee (1d4+1 and special, crit 17-20/x2, *shadow dagger***); AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +14; Str 11, Dex 9, Con 15, Int 16, Wis 19, Cha 15.

Languages: Shelzari, Ledean, Calastian, Zathiskan.

Skills: Appraise +4, Bluff +5, Craft (calligraphy) +8, Diplomacy +13, Gather Information +13, Heal +12, Knowledge (history) +14, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +11, Knowledge (philosophy: Hazari) +14, Knowledge (religion) +13, Listen +11, Perform (any 2) +4, Sense Motive +15, Spot +9.

Feats: Endurance, Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Leadership.

Possessions: Amulet of natural armor +3, noble's outfit, ring of invisibility, shadow dagger**.



Ayshella, female human cleric (Enkili) 11/rogue 6

CR 17; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 11 in. tall); HD 11d8+11 plus 6d6+6; hp 90; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 21 [flat-footed 18, touch 13] (+3 Dex, +5 armor, +3 natural); Atk +14/+9/+4 melee (1d8+2, +1 *light flail*); SA sneak attack +3d6, spells; SQ rebuke undead, spontaneous casting, evasion, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked); AL CN; SV Fort +10, Ref +13, Will +12; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 17, Cha 18 (16).

Languages: Shelzari, Calastian, Zathiskan.

Skills: Bluff +13, Concentration +9, Diplomacy +20, Disguise +9, Escape Artist +8, Forgery +5, Gather Information +10, Hide +8, Innuendo +5, Knowledge (arcana) +3, Knowledge (religion) +15, Perform (amorous, dancing, plus 2 others) +8, Ritual Casting +9, Scry +8, Search +6, Sense Motive +10, Spellcraft +3, Spot +7, Use Rope +4.

Feats: Dodge, Enlarge Spell, Hide Spell*, Lightning Reflexes, Martial Weapon Proficiency (light flail), Mobility, Spring Attack.

Cleric spells (6/6+1/5+1/5+1/3+1/2+1/1+1). *Domains:* Luck, Trickery.

Possessions: Bracers of armor +5, amulet of natural armor +3, noble's outfit, +1 *light flail*, cloak of charisma +2.

B'layne Nightfall, male elf expert 17

CR 16; SZ Medium-size humanoid (4 ft., 8 in. tall); HD 17d6+17; hp 82; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 [flat-footed 10, touch 12] (+2 Dex); Atk +19/+14/+9 melee (1d6+6, crit 15–20/x2, +5 *keen rapier*), +14/+9/+4 ranged; SQ pictographic memory, elf traits; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +13; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 17, Cha 14.

Languages: Elven, Ledean, Shelzari, Zathiskan, Calastian, Darakeene.

Skills: Appraise +16, Bluff +8, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +7, Forgery +7, Gather Information +8, Handle Animal +8, Innuendo +10, Knowledge (arcana) +26, Knowledge (geography) +21, Knowledge (history) +26, Knowledge (law) +21, Knowledge (literature) +21, Knowledge (religion) +26, Listen +10, Ride +4, Search +6, Sense Motive +11, Spot +5.

Feats: Dodge, Endurance, Skill Focus (Knowledge [arcana]), Skill Focus (Knowledge [history]), Skill Focus (Knowledge [religion]), Weapon Finesse (rapier).

Pictographic memory (Ex): B'layne has an amazing ability to retain and recall instantly any information he has read. This effectively grants him the *bardic knowledge* ability of a bard whose level is equal to B'layne's character level.

B'layne Nightfall, Shelzari Sage

B'layne Nightfall is the most revered sage in the city. His breadth of knowledge on almost every topic rivals that of Yugman himself, and he has an incredible ability to recall virtually any piece of information he has read. He owns possibly the largest collection of books in the city, and unless he requires one for future reference or research, he is more than willing to lend or even give his books away to anyone who asks. There is no greater source of information in the city, though his prices are often quite steep.

Nightfall always seems somewhat unfocused, as if he is thinking about something important — which is quite probably the case — and he is never without a book. Even while walking down the street he generally has his nose buried in a book, seemingly paying little heed to his heading or his destination. He always wears a fine rapier at his belt; given his somewhat bookish appearance and distractedness, some people have made

the fatal mistake of assuming that he doesn't know how to use his blade, much to their chagrin.

Nightfall is big for an elf, not so much in height but in build. He looks almost more like a small human than a thin-limbed elf, an impression heightened by dark hair and dark eyes quite unusual in one of his race. He has a comely face, not quite beautiful but open and friendly, despite its generally distracted expression. His manner of dress could not be described as sloppy, for his garments are of the finest cut and quality, yet there is always a slightly disheveled look about him that suggests he had something more important on his mind when he was getting dressed.

Caslon Ebra al Asuras, Head of Asuras Business in Shelzar

Caslon is a rarity indeed, for he is one of the few people to bear the title "al Asuras." This title denotes a select handful of individuals who were neither born nor married into the Asuras family proper, but who have been adopted into it and accepted as part of the family honorarily, due to services rendered.

Caslon was born into a wealthy Venirian family with ties to the Asuras of old. Although they retained their title, the Ebra family had fallen on hard times, and when Caslon came of age Telos took the lad on as a guard. Caslon proved himself time and again, suffering numerous injuries guarding Asuras caravans and properties all over Ghelspad. Within a few years, Telos had him moved to Shelzar, where Caslon served as a house guard and an apprentice to Telos himself.

Caslon proved to be quick-minded, capable, and fanatically loyal. Some claim that the old man's mind is failing him, for he welcomed Caslon as part of the family and made him *al Asuras* just a year after bringing him to Shelzar. Since that time, Caslon has appears to have virtually run the Asuras business affairs in the city; some whisper that Caslon may actually be chosen to replace Telos when the old man dies. Should Telos name Caslon his heir, *al Asuras* or not, there will most certainly be war within the house.

Caslon is a large, powerful man. Barrel-chested with limbs wrapped in cords of muscle, his powerful physique has softened somewhat, as evidenced by the thickening of his midsection since he took up his duties in Shelzar. His dark hair is thinning rapidly, leaving only a ring around the back of his head that connects his ears, but his beard is thick, striped with broad streaks of gray. Caslon's eyes are dark and piercing beneath thick brows, which are almost constantly drawn together in a frown, giving him a fierce and determined appearance. A number of tattoos and hard-won scars decorate his arms, which he normally keeps bare to best show them off.



Caslon Ebra al Asuras, male human aristocrat 1/warrior 2/fighter 2/expert 6

CR 10; SZ Medium-size humanoid (6 ft., 3 in. tall); HD 1d8 plus 2d8 plus 2d10 plus 6d6; hp 45; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 [flat-footed 16, touch 10] (+6 armor); Atk +13/+8 melee (1d8+4 and special, crit 17–20/x2, *crimson blade of Glivid-Autel***), or +11/+6 melee (1d8+4 and special, crit 17–20/x2, *crimson blade of Glivid-Autel***) and +10 melee (1d4+3 plus 2d6 unholy and energy drain, crit 19–20/x2, *bone dagger**); AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +2, Will +10; Str 15, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 17, Wis 12, Cha 16.

Languages: Shelzari, Ledean, Calastian, Veshian.

Skills: Appraise +17, Bluff +15, Climb +7, Diplomacy +12, Forgery +12, Gather Information +9, Innuendo +6, Intimidate +8, Jump +7, Knowledge (trade routes and practices) +17, Listen +4, Profession (teamster) +6, Read Lips +7, Ride +5, Sense Motive +12, Spot +5, Swim +7, Wilderness Lore +2.

Feats: Ambidexterity, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Appraise), Skill Focus (Knowledge [trade routes and practices]), Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Possessions: *Bracers of armor* +6, *crimson blade of Glivid-Autel***, *bone dagger**. Caslon has access to the resources of House Asuras and if necessary can bring all of the Asuras resources in Shelzar to bear against anything that threatens either him or the house.

Dormane Ulimhar, Calastian Ambassador

Like many Calastians, Lord Dormane Ulimhar has a well-deserved reputation for frankness. A soldier by training, but one of noble blood, he led men in numerous battles with the Calastian legions in his younger days. He expects others to treat him with respect and to tell him the truth, even if that truth might displease him; Ulimhar, always pragmatic, believes that there is no point in self-deception. He understands well that if he does not know all the details of a situation, no matter how unpleasant those details might be, he cannot make appropriate decisions or judgments. Consequently, he loathes the diplomatic doubletalk he encounters so often in his homeland and abroad — and especially from the Shelzari, who seem to enjoy tormenting him with their evasions and equivocations.

Ulimhar is in Shelzar for two reasons. The first is to secure the city against the Zathiskan rebels who have been harrying Calastian patrols and merchant caravans for years. King Virduk's advisors worry (rightly) that the Shelzari, who share much culture and even more history with the Zathiskans, might side with these malcontents and use their considerable economic influence to support the Zathiskan cause.

Dormane Ulimhar, male human aristocrat 3/fighter 10

CR 12; SZ Medium-size humanoid (6 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 3d8+3 plus 10d10+10; hp 84; Init +3 (−1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft. (20 ft. in armor); AC 12 [Flat-footed 13, touch 12] (−1 Dex, +3 deflection), AC 21 in armor; Atk +15/+10/+5 melee (1d6+3, crit 18–20/x2, +1 rapier), or +18/+13/+8 melee (2d6+8 and 1d6 cold, crit 17–20/x2, +3 frost brand); ALLE; SV Fort +9, Ref +5, Will +7; Str 14, Dex 9, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 16.

Languages: Calastian, Shelzari, Zathiskan.

Skills: Climb +4, Diplomacy +12, Gather Information +16, Handle Animal +8, Innuendo +5, Intimidate +13, Jump +7, Profession (officer) +6, Ride +12, Sense Motive +16.

Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Endurance, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (greatsword), Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-By Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword).

Possessions: +1 rapier, ring of protection +3, ring of mind shielding, noble's outfit. Ulimhar keeps his +1 full plate and +3 greatsword (frost brand) ready for use in his apartments in the Calastian Embassy (see Chapter 3, location #88).

So far, Ulimhar appears to have been successful in this mission, for High Minister Fratrelis has been nothing if not supportive of Calastia's interests in the region.

The second reason for Ulimhar's presence is to learn more about a supposed connection between the ancient Hazari and the Slarecians. Certain loremasters in Calastia claim that the Hazari learned arcane knowledge from these formidable mentalists, secrets that they have preserved over the millennia. The Calastians would like to know more about the Hazari connections to that long-dead psionic empire (assuming that these rumors are to be believed). To that end, Ulimhar employs numerous agents in the city, including several close to Sultan Anssara Inshani. To date, Ulimhar has uncovered nothing, which leads him to believe that there is no connection to be found, yet he continues his quest because he has been ordered to do so. The ambassador is nothing if not obedient to his king.

Ebalo, Champion Knife-Fighter

In 126 AV, the sutak of the Ukrudan Desert launched the infamous Fourth Siege of Hollowfaust under the leadership of Pherakka, their most renowned leader. Yet the sutak were again routed and scattered to the winds, and the people of Hollowfaust retreated to their city to live in peace once more, or so the story goes. The truth is rarely so straightforward, however. What the Hollowfaustians keep secret is that following that last siege they began hiring mercenaries to hunt the sutak in the Ukrudan in an effort to completely annihilate the race, thus assuring that there will be no Fifth Siege.

When Ebalo's settlement was raided by Crimson Legionnaires in the employ of Hollowfaust, he fled into the desert, eventually making his way down to the Mounds of Man where he was captured by Urkhadi beast-traders. He was taken to Shelzar in a cage and sold to Re kai Peche, owner of one of the city's biggest underground entertainment dens. Peche threw Ebalo in with a couple of novice knife-fighters as an intermission event, assuming that the young men could deal with the beast, but Ebalo proved to be more than a match for the two humans. He dispatched the first with nothing but his bare hands, and, once armed with the dead man's knife, finished the second off in short order. The crowd went wild for the sutak warrior and demanded more. It didn't take Peche long to see the potential draw in a sutak knife-fighter, so he put Ebalo into training immediately.

Ebalo made a fortune for Peche, so much so that after four years he was released and began to farm himself around as a free agent. He is by far the most popular knife-fighter in the city today, commanding vast sums to fight for a stable — and he gets every copper he demands. (He also enjoys a rather more informal but no less enjoyable relationship with many of the wealthy women of the city who take pleasure in bragging of having bedded such a great and dangerous beast.)

Ebalo, male sutak
fighter 6/Shelzari knife-fighter† 5

CR 12; SZ Medium-size monstrous humanoid (6 ft., 7 in. tall); HD 2d8+8 (base) plus 6d10+24 plus 5d10+20; hp 124; Init +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 24 [flat-footed 24, touch 18] (+4 Dex, +2 natural, +4 armor, +3 deflection, +1 monk-like bonus); Atk +20/+15/+10 melee (1d4+4 and puissant strike, crit 16–20/x2, *Dexter*), or +18/+13/+8 melee (1d4+4 and puissant strike, crit 16–20/x2, *Dexter*) and +18/+13 melee (1d4+3 and puissant strike, crit 16–20/x2, *Sinister*), or +19/+14/+9 ranged (1d4+2 and puissant strike, crit 16–20/x2, 10 ft., masterwork throwing daggers); SA puissant strike +2d4, flurry of blades; SQ monk-like AC bonuses, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked), improved critical 1, darkvision 60 ft., fire resistance 10; ALLN; SV Fort +10, Ref +13, Will +7; Str 14, Dex 18, Con 18, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 13.

Languages: Sutak, Shelzari.

Skills: Bluff +11, Climb +8, Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +10, Intuit Direction +6, Jump +11, Listen +6, Move Silently +9, Swim +8, Spot +6, Tumble +14, Wilderness Lore +6.

Feats: Ambidexterity, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Critical (dagger), Improved Initiative, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse (dagger), Weapon Focus (dagger).

Possessions: *Ebalo's bracers* (as *bracers of armor* +4 that also grant a +3 deflection bonus to AC; each bracer has a dagger scabbard built into it that lets the wearer draw the contained daggers as a free action), *Dexter & Sinister* (paired +2 daggers), bandolier with 9 masterwork throwing daggers.

‡ The Shelzari knife-fighter prestige class can be found at the end of this chapter.

Although Ebalo is on the smallish side for a sutak, he is still more than a head taller than most Shelzari. His powerful body is covered in the rust-colored hair common to his race, and he has the typical tight-fleshed, horse-like head. His body, face included, is a network of bare patches and scars, a result of his time as a knife-fighter. More than a dozen gold rings hang from his left ear — mementos of various important victories in the pits — but his right ear is almost entirely missing, sliced off in a particularly hard-fought battle with a talented (but short-lived) vertigen only a year ago. Apart from a black linen kilt slit up the sides to allow free movement, the only things Ebalo wears are his ornately decorated bracers, each with a built-in knife scabbard, and a bandolier of throwing knives.



His Most Gracious Host, High Minister Fratrel

Minister Fratrel, the Most Gracious Host of Shelzar, is the City of Pleasure's nominal leader. As head of the City Council, he is technically the single most powerful man in the city. In addition to casting his own vote as a member of the Council, he also has the privilege of breaking ties when civic matters become deadlocked. A short, wizened man, he nevertheless possesses a commanding personality. Those who meet him cannot help but be swayed by both his eloquence and his rationality; that he carries himself in a dignified manner only adds to his charm. Fratrel dresses in extravagant clothing of the finest materials that emphasize his nobility and his authority. He always wears gloves, as well, garments that are not currently fashionable in Shelzar (nor have they ever been so).

Fratrel's taste for fine clothing is one of his few obvious vices. Unlike many other Shelzari, the Gracious Host does not indulge in the debauchery that is commonplace among the citizenry; he partakes to a limited extent, but rarely seems to enjoy his partaking. This makes him a rather remarkable oddity in a city of voluptuaries and sybarites whose only real joys are experiencing everything life has to offer. The truth of the matter is that Fratrel suffered an accident as a boy that affected his nervous system, such that he simply does not sense or experience things as acutely as others do. His senses of touch, taste, sight, and smell are weak if not entirely deficient. It is thus literally true that he enjoys very little about most of the activities in which most other Shelzari revel. However, he is, it is perhaps worth noting, an ardent admirer of good music.

Another of the city's many rumors (at least among those close enough to the High Minister to know of his odd handicap) has it that Ayshell, High Priestess of Enkili, has found some way to return Fratrel's senses temporarily. By doing so — and the stories do not explain how — she has made him her slave. Desperate for any chance to enjoy himself like an ordinary man, Fratrel now willingly does whatever Ayshell commands. Of course, similar rumors say that he is the thrall of Amelyana, the famous courtesan (see above). Those who know the Minister believe neither story, since they run counter to what they know of the man. Even so, the rumors do explain his odd behavior, such as allowing the Calastians into the city at Ayshell's request after first rejecting them. On the other hand, friends and allies point out that Fratrel is a true descendant of Elz and a master of diplomatic scheming. They argue that it is just as likely, if not more so, that the Gracious Host has his own reasons for anything he does, reasons that serve only Shelzar and himself.



High Minister Fratrel, male human aristocrat 8/expert 7

CR 14; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 6 in. tall); HD 8d8–8 plus 7d6–7; hp 41; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 [flat-footed 14, touch 15] (+1 Dex, +4 deflection); Atk +11/+6/+1 melee (1d4, crit 19–20/x2, +1 *dagger of venom*) or +12/+7/+2 ranged; SQ nerve damage; AL CN; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +14; Str 9, Dex 13, Con 9, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 19.

Languages: Shelzari, Calastian, Ledean, Zathiskan.

Skills: Appraise +11, Bluff +24 [circlet], Diplomacy +26 [circlet], Forgery +11, Gather Information +24 [circlet], Innuendo +11, Intimidate +21 [circlet], Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +13, Listen +19, Search –1, Sense Motive +17, Spot –2.

Feats: Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Leadership, Noble Immunity†, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Sense Motive).

Nerve damage (Ex): Due to trauma resulting from a childhood accident (a serious blow to the head), Fratrel suffers a –4 penalty on Search, Sense Motive, and Spot checks, or any check otherwise involving the senses of smell, taste, touch, and vision, and also on ranged attacks beyond 10 feet. However, he also gains a +2 bonus on saves against all mind-affecting attacks and a +4 bonus against attacks or effects that assault the senses directly, such as *pain touch* or illusions of the figment subtype.

Possessions: +1 *dagger of venom*, *ring of protection* +4, *circlet of persuasion*, royal outfit, signet ring.

† This feat appears in **Calastia: Throne of the Black Dragon** (p. 92), and grants a +4 bonus to Fortitude saves against poison.

Gellarion, Proprietor of the Fiend's Folly

Gellarion is unusual for a half-elf in that he is singularly unattractive in appearance, with a wide, pudgy face and an unpleasant scar that runs along the back of his head. He received the scar years ago, when he was little more than a pickpocket on the streets of Shelzar. Since then he has learned a great deal, both about thievery and about survival. Like so many in the City of Pleasures, Gellarion made his place in the world by taking a chance and trusting in Enkili. He bet all his meager earnings on a single game, a longshot — and he won. He used the small fortune he thus acquired to buy a stake in an inn and brothel called the Fiend's Folly. Gellarion hoped that, one day, he would own the establishment and improve his circumstances. That day would never have come had Gellarion not this time decided to make his own luck.

The Fiend's Folly always had an unwholesome reputation, due both to the unsavory activities that went on beneath its roof and its tendency to catch fire from time to time. Some Shelzari considered the place haunted; others felt it had somehow displeased the Trickster. Gellarion took advantage of this reputation and set fire to it once more — but he was careful to make sure that the other stakeholders were consumed in the flames as well.

Now the sole remaining owner, Gellarion used his savings to rebuild the inn and even to expand it. So far, his efforts have proved incredibly successful, with

the tavern attracting more patrons than ever. The Folly's evil reputation remains, and Gellarion's own rather noteworthy reputation — as a man truly favored by Enkili — has only added to his success. Criminals, merchants, and nobles alike partake of the many pleasures the establishment has to offer.

Further, Gellarion continues to make his own luck. He uses his bartenders, waitresses, and show-girls as spies. He has amassed an incredible amount of information about goings-on in Shelzar, making him one of the most well-informed men in the city. If someone wants to know a secret and is willing to pay the price, Gellarion can most likely provide it.

Ismal Khemari, Grand Commander of the Shelzari Army

Shelzar is a power in the south because of its economic might, not because of its military. That is nowhere more obvious than in its army's Grand Commander, Ismal Khemari. A tall man with handsome, if not striking features, Khemari spent most of his youth living a life of luxury as the son of a prominent noble house. His elder brothers ran the family businesses, so Khemari was never expected to do anything except indulge in the vices for which Shelzar is so well known.

All that changed when he met a beautiful Calastian warrior named Bandwina, with whom he was immediately smitten. Bandwina would have little to do with Khemari, though, whom she considered a

Gellarion, male half-elf expert 2/rogue 4

CR 5; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 2d6 plus 4d6; hp 29; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 [flat-footed 13, touch 12] (+2 Dex, +3 armor); Atk +7 melee (1d4+2, crit 19–20/x2, masterwork dagger), or +6 ranged; SA sneak attack +2d6; SQ evasion, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC), half-elf traits; AL NE; SV Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +8; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 14.

Languages: Shelzari, Elven, Zathiskan.

Skills: Appraise +11, Bluff +11, Forgery +11, Gather Information +11, Innuendo +11, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +13, Listen +12, Pick Pocket +11, Profession (innkeeper) +8, Spot +8.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Knowledge [local: Shelzar]).

Possessions: Masterwork studded leather armor, masterwork dagger, *cape of the mountebank*, courtier's outfit.

Ismal Khemari, male human aristocrat 5/fighter 4

CR 8; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 11 in. tall); HD 5d8+10 plus 4d10+8; hp 67; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 21 [flat-footed 16, touch 11] (+1 Dex, +6 armor, +4 shield); Atk +12/+7 melee (1d6+5, crit 18–20/x2, masterwork scimitar), +8/+3 ranged; AL CN; SV Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +5; Str 16, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 11, Cha 14.

Languages: Shelzari, Zathiskan.

Skills: Bluff +6, Diplomacy +6, Handle Animal +7, Innuendo +2, Intimidate +11, Jump +5, Knowledge (history) +3, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +4, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +5, Knowledge (warfare) +5, Listen +2, Ride +12.

Feats: Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Endurance, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (scimitar), Weapon Specialization (scimitar).

Possessions: *Clothborn banded mail**, +2 lion's shield, noble's outfit, masterwork scimitar, *potion of heroism*.

weakling, as she did all Shelzari. Khemari vowed to win her love, however, and, to prove his devotion, he hired a Calastian tutor to train him in martial skills and swordplay. Khemari proved a mediocre student, but what he lacked in natural talent he almost made up for in determination. Almost.

In the end, Khemari proved little more than a dilettante. Nevertheless, he impressed his family (although not Bandwina, who returned to Calastia to marry another), who used their influence with the City Council to get him posted to the Shelzari army. Even with such meager talents, Khemari stood head and shoulders above the vast majority of his peers. The army had dwindled to near insignificance since the Divine War. It was thus only a matter of time, given his "exceptional" skills and his noble birth, that Khemari became Grand Commander of this showpiece army, a position he greatly enjoys even if his army is remarkably ineffectual compared to the mercenaries Shelzar uses as its first line of defense.

Although he admits it to no one, Khemari still pines for Bandwina, despite her marriage years ago. A great many Shelzari noble-women who would gladly wed him, both for his good looks and for his position; for his part, he will gladly bed them, but he will take none to wife.

Japheth Mawar, Master of the Cutpurse Guild

While not on par with the Sa'an Crime Cartel, the Cutpurse Guild (see Chapter 3, location #29) is an up-and-coming player in the Shelzari underworld thanks in no small part to the leadership of Guildmaster Japheth Mawar. He rules the Guild with an even hand, though he expects nothing less than absolute loyalty, punishing any betrayal against the Guild far more severely than any other transgression.

The Cutpurse Guild is based in Shadhi, largely in the Hanged Halfling Inn, and its members are viewed almost as heroes by the people of the district. The Guild never preys on Shadhi citizens, and in fact is quite willing to give large amounts of cash away to the needy. The Cutpurse Guild is largely responsible for keeping the Shadhi from being completely demolished by the wealthy. Japheth is a common and welcome sight on the streets of the Shadhi, a folk-hero of sorts, chatting with residents and handing out coins to children. The Shadhi residents are only too happy to reciprocate, refusing to cooperate with the watch when they come sniffing around, and, when the heat is really on, making sure that members of the Guild have thousands of safe-houses to choose from.

Japheth is short and quite fat, but this belies his power and his surprising grace. He is deceptively light on his feet, moving like a cat. He does nothing to hide his girth, and indeed dresses in bright colors, elaborate

Japheth Mawar, male human rogue 9

CR 9; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 3 in. tall); HD 9d6-9; hp 32; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 [flat-footed 12, touch 12] (+2 Dex); Atk +10/+5 melee (1d4+2, crit 19-20/x2, masterwork dagger), +8/+3 ranged; SA sneak attack +5d6; SQ evasion, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC; can't be flanked); AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +10, Will +3; Str 15, Dex 15, Con 9, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 16.

Languages: Shelzari, Zathiskan, Calastian, Veshian.

Skills: Appraise +15, Balance +9, Bluff +13, Diplomacy +15, Disable Device +9, Disguise +11, Gather Information +15, Innuendo +7, Intimidate +15, Listen +8, Move Silently +9, Pick Pocket +11, Search +13, Sense Motive +12, Spot +12.

Feats: Dodge, Great Fortitude, Leadership, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (dagger).

Possessions: Ring of truth, masterwork dagger.

The Ring of Truth

Description: The first Ring of Truth was crafted by Hafrith, High Priest of Enkili in the early days of the Divine War. Wishing to draw more worshippers to his faith, he crafted the ring to aid him in reaching his goal, but he found himself driving people away as often as attracting them as his normally impressive powers of persuasion failed him. It seems that the trickster had played a joke on his favorite servant, made all the more humorous when Hafrith found he was unable to remove the ring.

Powers: Anything the wearer says quite literally has the ring of truth. Anyone who hears the wearer speak must make a Will save (DC 24) or believe whatever he says to be true. This is not an enchantment effect and does not in any way determine how the listener will react to the information—she simply believes it to be entirely factual. Conversely, the wearer of the ring must make a Will save (DC 24) to tell a lie. Failure means that he must tell the absolute truth as he knows it no matter how much he may wish not to.

Once the ring is put on, it can only be removed by a *limited wish* or similarly powerful spell, or by the will of Enkili.

Caster Level: 13th; **Prerequisites:** Forge Ring, *discern lies*, *suggestion*; **Market Price:** 36,000 gp.

garments, and broad, horizontal stripes to accentuate his rotundity. His hair is cut short, although he sports a ridiculous goatee that comes to a point and curls up almost until it meets his hooked, hawk-like nose. Adept at playing the awkward clown, Japheth is often mistaken as a brazen, ostentatious buffoon by those who have just met him.

Jasmine Shetai, Manager of the Belsameth's Bliss

In her youth, Jasmine Shetai was actually an infamous thief known as "The Mink." Through the course of several daring robberies of mansions and temples, and even of a valuable tapestry from the Shalamar Palace itself, she became something of a legend in the city. Few people know of her history, of course, but she always wears a wistful smile whenever she hears the tale of one of her exploits told around the fire.

Because of her talents, she was found and recruited by the Cult of Ancients to join their order. However, although she was loyal and skilled, she found she had little stomach for cold-blooded murder, so when the old landlord of the Belsameth's Bliss died, she was only too happy to take over the running of the place. She remains utterly loyal to the Cult of Ancients — at least partly because she knows the penalty for disloyalty — and she runs a tight ship. She tolerates no tomfoolery in "her place" and strives hard to maintain the façade of normalcy that the Cult requires of her. Still, she sometimes misses the old days and every once in a while she dons her old gear and commits a crime or two, trying to keep the legend of The Mink alive.

Jasmine was obviously once quite beautiful, although years of living among the Cult in the Shelzari underworld have tempered her looks. She could now be best described as a "rather handsome" woman. Her dark hair is streaked with gray and time has begun its steady pull. She has dark circles under her eyes — a result of too many long nights at the Bliss — and has grown slightly pudgy, but she is still not unattractive, and time has done little to slow the speed and grace of her movement. She dresses in unremarkable but neat, fine-quality clothes, as befits the image the Bliss projects, and she always wears simple but elegant jewelry.

Luficint, Bat Devil Rogue

Luficint (see also **The Wise and the Wicked**) is not a permanent resident of Shelzar. He spent a portion of his youth here where he was sold as a slave and, ever crafty, managed to escape into the City of Pleasures. He took up the life of an adventurer and thief for hire. In the process of doing so he amassed great wealth, which he used to live ostentatiously — much to the chagrin of a great number of Ghelspad's merchant houses, who considered him nothing more than a common criminal. Given their enmity, he has



Jasmine Shetai, female human rogue 7/assassin 2

CR 9; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 4 in. tall); HD 7d6+14 plus 2d6+4; hp 50; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 [flat-footed 17, touch 17] (+3 Dex, +4 deflection); Atk +6/+1 melee (1d4, crit 19–20/x2, dagger), +9/+4 ranged; SA sneak attack +5d6, death attack (Fort DC 15); SQ spells, evasion, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked), poison use, poison save +1; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +13, Will +5; Str 11, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 17, Wis 13, Cha 15.

Languages: Shelzari, Zathiskan, Calastian, Darakeene.

Skills: Appraise +12, Bluff +11, Decipher Script +7, Diplomacy +11, Disguise +6, Forgery +8, Gather Information +11, Hide +11, Innuendo +10, Intimidate +9, Move Silently +12, Open Lock +8, Profession +10, Search +12, Sense Motive +10, Spot +10, Tumble +12.

Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility.

Assassin spells prepared (2): 1st — change self, spider climb.

Possessions: Ring of protection +4, dagger, noble's outfit.

traveled continuously about Ghelspad, having many exciting adventures along the way and all the while growing in power and status.

Recently, Luficint heard rumors of unrest in Shelzar. Always seeking new sources of diversion, he returned to his old haunts and quickly became immersed in its nightlife. He found that very little had changed since he left. The merchant houses still exert

Luficint, male bat devil rogue 10

CR 11; SZ Medium-size monstrous humanoid (6 ft., 1 in. tall); HD 2d8+4 (base) plus 10d6+20; hp 83; Init +12 (+8 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft., climb 10 ft., fly 80 ft. (poor); AC 27 [flat-footed 27, touch 20] (+8 Dex, +3 natural, +4 armor, +2 deflection); +9 Atk +20/+15 melee (1d4+5, crit 19–20/x2, +3 dagger), or +18/+13 melee (1d4+5, crit 19–20/x2, +3 dagger) and +11 melee (1d6+3, crit 19–20/x2, +2 short sword), or +19/+14 ranged (1d6+3, crit x3, masterwork mighty composite shortbow and +1 arrows); SA sneak attack +5d6; SQ evasion, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked), defensive roll, pedal dexterity, blindsight 120 ft.; AL N(g); SV Fort +5, Ref +20, Will +8; Str 14, Dex 26, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 14.

Languages: Shelzari, Zathiskan, Elven, Darakeene.

Skills: Appraise +10, Balance +15, Bluff +8, Climb +15, Decipher Script +12, Diplomacy +8, Disable Device +17 [masterwork tools], Escape Artist +15, Forgery +10, Gather Information +8, Hide +20, Intimidate +7, Move Silently +20, Open Lock +17 [masterwork tools], Pick Pocket +15, Search +15*, Tumble +15, Use Magic Device +12, Perform +6 (flute, lute, witicism, story-

telling), Listen +20, Spot +8. *Due to their weak eyesight, bat devils receive a –4 racial penalty to Search checks conducted by sight alone.

Feats: Ambidexterity, Fly-By Attack, Lightning Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse (dagger).

Possessions: Ring of protection +2, bracers of armor +4, key to the fourth gate at the tower of shadows (unique artifact; see boxed text), goblet of fortune (once per day, grants imbiber +2 luck bonus to saves for 1 hour after wine is imbibed from goblet), +3 dagger ("Fangshorn"), +2 short sword ("Scaleclaw"), potion of gaseous form, dust of disappearance (5 doses), potion of alter self, love potion, potion of protection from arrows, 2 potions of nondetection, 6 potions of cure moderate wounds, wand of deeper darkness (caster level 5, 38 charges), masterwork thieves' tools, masterwork mighty (Str 14) composite shortbow, 20 +1 arrows, 2 doses anti-toxin. Fine wines, silks, art, and jewelry valued at around 50,000 gold pieces.

Note: Where Luficint's statistics herein differ from those in *The Wise and the Wicked*, these take precedence.

Key to the Fourth Gate at the Tower of Shadows (Minor Artifact)

Description: An onyx cylinder carved with a maze-like network of grooves. At one end is a looped silver chain.

Powers: Once per month, the key can be used to open a circular (8-foot diameter) gateway into a shadowy demi-plane. The gateway can be closed only by a *greater dispelling* or similar effect, or by the use of the key. The wielder may step into this opening and emerge on the next melee round from any other opening that the key has created. Users normally create gates in advance, but are careful not to leave them open too long.

When first created, and every hour thereafter, there is a 50% chance that 1d10 hostile shadows (see MM, "Shadow") will emerge from the gate, attacking any living thing in the vicinity, including the key's user. After fighting or driving off nearby living beings, the shadows often wander about, causing further destruction, but also sometimes simply return to their home plane (the mysterious "Tower of Shadows") or remain clustered around the gate, attacking anyone who comes near.

far too much control and the common people often became too immersed in their vices to see the danger around them. However, Luficint was disturbed by the Calastian presence in Shelzar. He never liked the Calastians, and he of course suspects that they have ulterior motives for being in the city. In searching around for the real explanation for their interest in Shelzar, he made contact with citizens sympathetic to the Zathiskan independence movement. Although he has not thrown in with them (he prefers to stay out of politics), Luficint has nevertheless performed a few missions for them, smuggling goods into the city and stealing items from Calastian sympathizers.

Not surprisingly, Luficint is once again a wanted fellow; both Shelzari and Calastian authorities wish to catch him. He has not decided to leave the city, though, at least not yet. Perhaps in his adulthood he is developing a bit of a conscience. He recognizes that the Calastian Hegemony is a force for great evil and is contemplating doing his part to fight it. While still fond of wealth and all that it can buy, Luficint has also come to understand that there might be more to life than luxury — a realization that surprises him as much as anyone.

Madrani, Shelzar's High Priestess of Idra

Madrani was born to the Frost Wolf clan in Thurfas. Madrani's father, Vestenfor, was a renowned warrior and her mother was a priestess of Idra, garnering the family great respect in the community. Madrani's father had a brother called Eystingfor, who resented his brother's success and coveted his brother's wife. When Vestenfor was found dead one morning with a dagger in his back, there was also little doubt who was responsible — but there was no proof as to who had committed the crime.

Without proof, the authorities were powerless to punish Eystingfor, a situation that was unacceptable to Madrani. In a rage, she confronted her uncle in the street, demanding that he confess to his crime. He laughed aloud at her, enraging the girl further. Beyond thought, Madrani snatched the sword from Eystingfor's belt as he turned away and cut his head from his shoulders right there in the middle of street. Most were sympathetic to her case, but with so many witnesses there was nothing that could be done. She was branded with the *mark of the kinslayer** and banished from Albadia forever.

Wishing to bring what little respect she could to her family legacy, Madrani followed in her mother's footsteps and became a priestess of Idra. With Albadia now and forever closed to her — and all of the north for that matter, for she could no longer bear the cold — she made her way to Shelzar.

With her great height and sun-blond hair, Madrani is obviously of Albadian heritage, and thus quite exotic in this city. She has a curvaceous body that she takes great care to accentuate, but her close-cropped hair and sharply angled eyebrows give her beauty something of a hard edge. Her arms, shoulders, and lower-face are heavily tattooed; although tattoos are common among Albadians as well as Shelzari, most of these were done in Shelzar. (She had them done to hide the *kinslayer's mark* branded on each of her cheeks.)

Madrani, Female human warrior 1/cleric (Idra) 12

CR 12; SZ Medium-size humanoid (6 ft. tall); HD 1d8+1 plus 12d8+12; hp 78; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 20 [flat-footed 19, touch 11] (+1 Dex, +9 armor); Atk +14/+9 ranged (1d3+3, 15 ft., +3 whip); SA spells; SQ spontaneous casting, turn undead (7/day), damage reduction 5/+1 [armor], *mark of the kinslayer* tattoo*; AL LN; SV Fort +13, Ref +5, Will +13; Str 11, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 17, Cha 20 (16).

Languages: Albadian, Shelzari, Zathiskan, Ledean.

Skills: Appraise +4, Concentration +13, Diplomacy +13, Handle Animal +9, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Knowledge (religion) +14, Listen +, Perform (amorous, dancing, plus any 5 others) +11, Ride +5, Scry +10, Spellcraft +8, Spot +5, Wilderness Lore +5.

Feats: Craft Wondrous Item, Great Fortitude, Heighten Spell, Iron Will, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Transmutation).

Cleric spells prepared (6/6+1/5+1/5+1/3+1/3+1/2+1): 0 – cure minor wounds (x2), detect magic, detect poison, guidance, purify food and drink; 1st – bless, bless water, command (x2), divine favor, prevarication's bounty*; 2nd – aid, commanding presence* (x2), cure moderate wounds, zone of truth; 3rd – cure serious wounds, mind raid* (x2), prayer, siren song†; 4th – cure critical wounds, divination, mind over matter*; 5th – commune, greater command, inquisition*; 6th – heal, word of recall. *Domain spells* (Entrancement, Secrets): 1st – hypnosis; 2nd – veil of lust**; 3rd – suggestion; 4th – discern lies; 5th – Idra's ecstasy** (as Gulaben's ecstasy); 6th – mass suggestion.

*Granted power – Entrancement**:* 1/day – As a free action, Madrani may gain an enhancement bonus to her Charisma equal to her cleric level. This bonus lasts long enough for her to make any one Charisma-based roll or check.

*Granted power – Secrets**:* 1/day – Madrani can receive a truthful answer to a single question from any being whose language she can speak. The person question may omit information or attempt to be misleading, but he cannot lie. Creatures with 12 or more HD get a Will save (DC 20) to ignore this effect.

Possessions: +4 mithril breastplate of invulnerability, +3 whip (deals real or subdual damage at wielder's will), cloak of charisma +4, ring of agelessness**.

Mazat, the Shadow of Shelzar

Mazat (see also *The Wise & the Wicked*) is the leader of the city's infamous Sa'an Crime Cartel. He came to Shelzar over 30 years ago, then still a simple man, and soon fell in with the Cartel. Because of his incredible ego, Mazat believed that he could overthrow old man Sa'an, who ran the organization. Unfortunately (for Mazat), his weakness for prostitutes proved his undoing. He confided his plans in a certain harlot and she in turn revealed them to the Cartel, who decided to torture and kill Mazat for this affront. In his terror, as he lay dying on the rack, Mazat called upon the gods to save him — and the Trickster heard him. But Enkil's blessing came at a terrible cost: Mazat was transformed into a skin devil. He quickly used his newfound powers to kill his torturers and former allies and to assume the identity of Sa'an himself, and then took over leadership of the Cartel, just as he had originally planned.

Since that fateful day, Mazat has been expanding the Cartel's interests obsessively, making it the single largest criminal enterprise in all of Shelzar. He has his hands in drug running, slavery, gambling, prostitution, and all manner of other unsavory ac-

tivities. The more lucrative a thing is, the more likely it is that Mazat will take an interest in it. Yet, even this has proven unsatisfying for him. As the years wear on, he is growing restless. He looks for a challenge and wonders if he will ever again find himself in a situation he cannot overcome. Trusting in Enkili (whom he still worships, in his own twisted way), Mazat has decided to find out the answer to that question by going legitimate...

...Or, rather, Mazat wishes to gain the *semblance* of legitimacy, by overrunning House Asuras. The crime lord has set his sights on taking over that most powerful of merchant houses, which he sees as his ticket to even greater power and influence in Shelzar and beyond. To that end, he has had a number of his men infiltrate House Asuras, hoping they will become privy to Telos Asuras' secrets. So far, though, Mazat has been frustrated in his attempts. He placates himself by claiming that he enjoys being foiled, as it encourages him to try harder. In fact, though, he is filled with self-hatred and loathing, as he wonders whether he might not be up to the challenge of defeating the Asuras. In his rages, Mazat has taken to killing random members of that merchant house. These sporadic killings have now begun to draw the attention of Shelzari authorities and to threaten the security of the Sa'an Cartel. Mazat's underlings wonder whether or not their leader is stable enough to lead his criminal empire, or whether they will be forced to eliminate him as Mazat did to Sa'an himself decades ago.

Mazat, the Shadow of Shelzar, male skin devil sorcerer 9

CR 13; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 9 in. tall); HD 5d8+10 (base) plus 9d4+18; hp 74; Int +3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 [flat-footed 13, touch 13] (+3 Dex, +3 natural); Atk +12/+7 melee (1d8+4, crit 19–20/x2, masterwork longsword), or bite +11 melee (1d4+4) and 2 claws +6 melee (1d4+2); SA spells; SQ grow new skin; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +10, Will +7; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 18, Wis 11, Cha 19.

Languages: Shelzari, Zathiskan, Ledean, Calastian.

Skills: Alchemy +16, Bluff +14, Concentration +9, Disable Device +12, Heal +3, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +16, Listen +10, Move Silently +3, Scry +12, Spellcraft +9, Spot +6.

Feats: Alertness, Combat Casting, Enlarge Spell, Power Attack, Spell Penetration.

Sorcerer spells known (6/7/7/7/5): 0 – dancing lights, detect magic, detect poison, ghost sound, light, mage hand, prestidigitation, read magic; 1st – charm person, mage armor, magic missile, shield, undetectable aura; 2nd – acid arrow, blur, fog cloud, levitate; 3rd – dispel magic, slow, wind wall; 4th – polymorph self, wall of ice.

Grow new skin (Su): If Mazat succeeds in causing 4 or more points of damage to an opponent in a single claw attack, he can successfully remove sufficient skin to grow a disguise identical to his victim. He needs one full night to grow the skin, and by dawn has a flawless

Hunger Pastries

Description: These thumb-sized pastries are filled with jellied fruit or similar confection and look delicious. After baking, they are blessed by a druid of Gaurak. The pastries are so delectable that few can resist eating them.

Powers: After eating a *hunger pastry*, a creature must make a Will save (DC 16) or be affected as per the spell *gluttony**.

Caster Level: 7th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Wondrous Item, *gluttony*; **Market Price:** 700 gp.

disguise — similar mannerisms and voice, and the ability to call upon the victim's skills and abilities at one-half the victim's level. These abilities last for one week or until the skin itself is destroyed (i.e., until Mazat takes more than half his total hit points in damage). Mazat can also take skin from fresh or preserved corpses.

Possessions: Fine robes, masterwork longsword, *Dimitri's ring**, 4 *love potions*. Mazat is almost always attended by a chained slave, usually a 1st-level expert. He has the wealth and resources of the Sa'an Cartel at his command, which are considerable.

Note: Where Mazat's statistics herein differ from those in *The Wise and the Wicked*, these take precedence.

Paunles Finn, Shelzari Merchant

The son of a prostitute and a petty criminal, Paunles Finn spent much of his impoverished youth hungry. When he learned his father's trade, he used his skills to steal food for himself and vowed never to be hungry again. Eventually, his gluttony brought him to the attention of the Cult of Gaurak, who inducted him into its membership. Finn then used his ill-gotten wealth to found a business that would secretly promote the worship of Gaurak and encourage others to indulge their own gluttony to the utmost.

Finn has recently taken a great interest in the increasing trade between Shelzar and Calastia. Indeed, he has used his wealth to bribe members of the City Council to maintain good relations with the Calastians, despite the growing dislike of their presence. Finn believes that a continued relationship between the two states can only serve the cause of Gaurak, since it gives the titan's cult yet another geographical area into which to expand. To that end, he has sponsored merchant caravans carrying his "special" foodstuffs (in reality, this food is made from the flesh of sentient beings) to Calastian outposts along the Shelzari trade routes. He hopes to make new converts to the Cult in this fashion, although to date

his efforts have been less than successful. Consequently, he has considered taking a different tack, possibly by encouraging anti-Zathiskan sentiments in Shelzar, which he hopes will cut off the supplies of food to the rebels and thereby create another ripe target for the Cult's attentions.

Paunles owns several mansions and always has at least one caravan in the field. His wealth totals well over 2,000,000 gp and thus, for game purposes, is virtually limitless. He is always accompanied by at least two bodyguards (warriors of at least 2nd level).

Paunles Finn, male human expert 3/sorcerer 4

CR 7; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 9 in. tall; 360 lbs.); HD 3d6+9 plus 4d4+12; hp 48; Init -3 (-1 Dex, -2 circumstance); Spd 20 ft.; AC 16 [flat-footed 16, touch 9] (-1 Dex, +7 natural); Atk +4 melee (1d4, crit 19-20/x2, dagger), or +3 ranged; SA spells, spell-like ability; SQ blessed of Gaurak, fatty tissue; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +0, Will +6; Str 11, Dex 8, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 13.

Languages: Shelzari, Titan.

Skills: Appraise +6, Bluff +13, Innuendo +2, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Knowledge (Gaurak) +3, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +6, Profession (cook) +6, Profession (merchant) +7, Sense Motive +5, Spellcraft +3.

Feats: Craft Wondrous Item, Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Bluff), Still Spell.

Sorcerer spells known (6/7/3): 0 – *clean**, *detect magic*, *distort shadow**, *mending*, *read magic*, *steal sleep**; 1st – *acid spittle**, *charm person*, *detect gold**, *inflict light wounds*, *protection from good*; 2nd – *alibi**, *desecrate*, *shatter*.

Spell-like ability: 1/week — *gluttony**. As the spell cast by a 7th-level druid (Will negates, DC 14).

Blessed of Gaurak (Ex): Paunles gains access to spells from the Evil and Destruction domains as if they were sorcerer spells known to him.

Fatty tissue (Ex): Paunles' unnatural flab grants him a +2 bonus to Fortitude saves, +6 hit points, and a +7 natural armor bonus to his Armor Class. It also causes Paunles to be very slow, however, imposing a -2 circumstance penalty to initiative and a -1 penalty to Reflex saves, and reducing his base speed by 10 feet. Once per month, Paunles must consume one sentient Medium-size creature or lose all benefits from his fatty tissue for that month, although the penalties are permanent.

Possessions: Robes, signet ring, dagger, *potion of flying*, *scroll of acid spittle**, *hunger pastries* (as many as he needs; see boxed text).

Note: Where Paunles' statistics herein differ from those in **The Wise and the Wicked**, these take precedence.

Rie of Shelzar: Sorceress, Courtesan, and Adventurer

The most famous Shelzari literary work is undoubtedly *1001 Shelzari Nights*. This famous book relates the story of a nobleman who has grown tired of his wife, and who tells her that he will have her put to death as soon as she is no longer able to pleasure him in bed. During the days thereafter, his wife Shelamelar prays to Idras for guidance, and for a thousand nights she pleases her husband with more and more elaborate sexual techniques, until on the one-thousand-and-first night the old man can bear no more and dies with a smile on his face.

This much of the story is common knowledge, at least in Shelzar, although most people believe it to be just a fanciful tale. In fact, the story is based in truth. What the tale does not relate is that on that last night, when Shelamelar lay with her husband for the last time, he impregnated her. The knowledge and skill that Idras passed on to Shelamelar the woman passed on to her daughter, and she to hers, and so on down through the centuries. Rie of Shelzar, daughter of Adzimash, is in fact the last living descendant of Shelamelar.

Rie has slept her way through life, and she is very proud of it. She is unabashedly sexual, and the tiniest movement of her body suggests sensuality and carnal pleasure. This is to some extent a façade, however, for Rie is not content to merely dance for and pleasure strangers. She is smart and curious, and spends much of her time researching magic and traveling the world at large. Those who have adventured with her have come to call her "Sword-dancer" (among numerous more affectionate and some less flattering names) for the incredible style and liveness with which she fights.

Rie is also the foremost living authority on the *1001 Shelzari Nights* and is in fact writing a sequel that she calls *The Hundred Senses*, a treatise on myriad ways of stimulating the erotic senses.

Rie is tall and voluptuous, seemingly built to stimulate the sexual appetite of virtually anyone who sets eyes on her: midnight-black hair, jade-green eyes, full red lips, perfect breasts, full hips, lush buttocks, and long, graceful legs.

Rie's familiar is Kiki, a silver mink, an animal native to the Shelzar region.

**Rie of Shelzar, female human sorcerer 8/courtesan of Idras 4/
Shelzari eroticist 4½**

CR 16; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 9 in. tall); HD 12d4+12 plus 4d6+4; hp 60; Init +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 23 [flat-footed 19, touch 18] (+4 Dex, +5 natural, +4 deflection); Atk +16/+16/+11 melee (1d4+3, crit 19-20/x2, +3 dagger of speed), +13/+8 ranged; SA spells; SQ amorous performance +2, seduction (2/day), amorous suggestion, dance of desire, dances of the perfumed blossom½, dances of the radiant lotus½; AL N; SV Fort +9, Ref +15, Will +17; Str 12, Dex 19 (16), Con 13, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 23 (20).

Languages: Shelzari, Ledean, Calastian.

Skills: Concentration +13, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +9, Gather Information +12, Innuendo +10, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (history) +7, Knowledge (sex and sexuality) +22, Listen +5, Move Silently +6, Perform (amorous, dancing, singing, plus any 7 others) +14 [+16 amorous], Profession (courtesan) +10, Scry +9, Sense Motive +10, Spellcraft +9, Use Rope +6.

Feats: Craft Wondrous Items, Heighten Spell, Improved Initiative, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (Enchantment), Still Spell, Weapon Finesse (dagger).

Sorcerer spells known (6/8/8/7/7/6/4): 0 – arcane mark, daze, detect magic, Elina's perfume**, filch**, ghost sound, light, mage hand, read magic; 1st – charm person, change self, comprehend languages, disappear**, Elina's wardrobe**, 2nd – alibi*, alter self, commanding presence*, detect thoughts, Rie's lustful gaze**, 3rd – clairaudience/clairvoyance, spy sense*, suggestion, veil of lust**, 4th – dimension door emotion, polymorph self; 5th – gullibility**, Idra's ecstasy (as Gulaben's ecstasy**); 6th – Rie's dance of seduction*.

Courtesan of Idra spells (2/2): 1st – change self, charm person, detect poison, hypnotism, rabbit feet*, Rie's lustful gaze**, sleep, spider climb; 2nd – alter self, cat's grace, commanding presence*, darkness, enthrall, intoxicate*, suggestion, undetectable alignment.

Possessions: Courtesan's garb**, "Silverwasp" (+3 dagger of speed), ring of protection +4, cloak of resistance +3, ring of invisibility.

‡ The Shelzari eroticist prestige class can be found in the **Players Guide to Wizards, Bards and Sorcerers**. If this product is not available, replace Rie's eroticist levels with sorcerer levels, and ignore the special qualities marked with ‡.

Kiki, male silver mink [Rie's familiar]

CR –; SZ Tiny magical beast; HD *; hp 30; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 20 [flat-footed 18, touch 14] (+2 size, +2 Dex, +6 natural); Atk bite +11 melee (1d3–4); SA attach, touch; SQ low-light vision, scent, alertness, improved evasion, share spells, empathic link, speak with mistress, speak with kind; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +13; Str 3, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 12, Chr 5.

Skills: Balance +10, Climb +11, Hide +13, Move Silently +9, Spot +4.

Feats: Weapon Finesse (bite).

Attach (Ex): If Kiki hits with a bite attack, he latches on with his powerful jaws and automatically deals bite damage each round he remains attached. While attached, he gains no Dexterity bonus to AC (so he is AC 18).



Solon Telos Asuras, Reeve of House Asuras

The details of Telos Asuras' life and virtues are well known, from his childhood in Old Venir to his aptitude for business and his almost preternatural ability to spot opportunities and weaknesses in his enemies before anyone else. So what can one say about possibly one of the most well-known people in all Ghelspad?

Most importantly, Telos is much closer to death than anyone outside the Asuras house knows. He is more than 100 years old, and the attempts of legions of mages, clerics, and mystics have so far failed to stop the progress of time. What few but a handful of Telos' most faithful confidants suspect is that the old man has had all the preparations made to become a lich; as much as Telos abhors the idea of undeath, his life of life and money was enough to sway him.

Before resorting to this unpleasant option, though, he still hopes to find a way to stave off death, a hope which may just be answered. Word has come to him recently that someone in the city, someone in a position of power, is in possession of a *ring of agelessness***, a staggeringly rare item that would keep Telos alive forever.

As anxious as Telos is to stay alive, there are some who are just as anxious to see him dead. Foremost among them are Telos' son Khelarian and his nephew Neso II, both of whom are among the forerunners in the race to take over the House upon Telos' death. None of these many aspirants are so stupid as to act openly against him, or even to risk hiring an assassin to kill the old man, but all are working through their own agents to block Telos' ambitions to extend his life.

Telos Asuras is tiny and frail, but his mind is as sharp as ever. Never a tall man, the years have robbed him of what height he once had. His hair and beard are stark white and thin, showing the parchment-dry skin beneath. His dark eyes are sunken and the meager flesh of his face is a map of wrinkles and age spots. Incongruous in his aged face is Telos' mouth: though often drawn into a scowl of determination wrought by years of resolve, his lips are full, subtle, and dark, almost feminine in appearance.

Telos Asuras, male human expert 16

CR 15; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 16d6–32; hp 19; Init +1 (–3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 7 [flat-footed 10, touch 7] (–3 Dex); Atk +9/+4/–1 melee (1d4–3, crit 19–20/x2, dagger), +9/+4/–1 ranged; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +17 [luckstone]; Str 4, Dex 4, Con 6, Int 21, Wis 18, Cha 16.

Languages: Venirian, Shelzari, Calastian, Veshian, Ledean, Darakeene.

Skills: Appraise +24, Bluff +22, Diplomacy +24, Disguise +7, Forgery +5, Gather Information +22, Heal +4, Innuendo +21, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (geography) +18, Knowledge (history) +22, Knowledge (local [New Venir]) +7, Knowledge (local [Shelzar]) +8, Knowledge (titanspawn) +6, Knowledge (trade routes and prac-

tices) +24, Listen +6, Perform +3, Profession (merchant) +23, Read Lips +24, Scry +24, Search +5, Sense Motive +23, Spot +6, Wilderness Lore +4.

Feats: Alertness, Iron Will, Leadership, Skill Focus (Appraise), Skill Focus (Knowledge [history]), Skill Focus (Profession [merchant]), Skill Focus (Sense Motive).

Possessions: Luckstone, crystal ball with telepathy, amulet of proof against detection and location (fashioned in the shape of the Asuras house symbol), *potion of intelligence*, *potion of wisdom*, *potion of charisma*, dagger. Realistically, Telos can buy almost anything he wants, but he is wise enough to entrust certain things to his bodyguards and servants where they will see better use. Besides: he likes money better than goods.

Talina Som, Whisper of Belsameth

Talina Som, the Whisper of Belsameth, is the head of the infamous Cult of Ancients, and has twisted that group from a dangerous but otherwise common guild of assassins into the very hand of Belsameth. Som usually sits alone in the Chamber of Secrets deep beneath the streets of Shelzar, in quiet contemplation, listening to the whispers of the Goddess of Murder in her ear.

Despite her power and the many hundreds of assassins and henchmen who surround her in the Temple of Shadows, Som is one of the loneliest people in Ghelspad. Since taking her place as head of the Cult she has only very rarely left the Temple of Shadows, and now never does so. Last year, she had a group of her assassins murder a member of the Vashon mirror court and had the magic mirror transported back to Shelzar and installed in her private chambers. She has become obsessed with the mirror court, visiting it every night, her face veiled to hide her identity. Belsameth seems yet to favor her first-daughter and Som's grip on the Cult is still firm, but many senior members of the Cult fear that she is losing her already somewhat tenuous grip on reality and that the cult will self-destruct if her leadership should fail.

Though Som's night-black hair is not out of place in Shelzar, her milk-white skin and startling violet eyes instantly mark her as an outlander, though none know from where she hails. She is rather tall and strikingly beautiful, but it is the feral, dangerous beauty of a panther, a beauty that promises danger and keeps most people at a distance. Eschewing Shelzari-style clothing, Som normally dresses in the elaborate gowns and garb of the Vashon mirror court.

Talina Som, female human rogue 9/cleric (Belsameth) 7

CR 16; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 8 in. tall); HD 9d6 plus 7d8; hp 79; Init +10 (+6 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 23 [flat-footed 23, touch n/a (*amulet of ghost armor*)] (+6 Dex, +7 armor); Atk +21/+16/+11 melee (1d6+4, crit 19–20/x2, *wormtongue*), +17/+12 ranged; SA sneak attack +5d6, spells; SQ curse of life, evasion, uncanny dodge, spontaneous casting, rebuke undead (6/day); AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +14, Will +11; Str 12, Dex 22, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 17.

Languages: Shelzari, Ledean.

Skills: Bluff +24, Concentration +15, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +20, Escape Artist +22, Hide +24, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (religion) +18, Move Silently +24, Open Lock +21, Scry +13, Sense Motive +14, Spellcraft +10.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Leadership, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Hide), Skill Focus (Move Silently), Weapon Focus (short sword), Weapon Finesse (short sword).

Cleric spells prepared (6/5+1/4+1/3+1/1+1): 0 – *bleeding disease**, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *inflict minor wounds*, *read magic*, *resistance*; 1st – *bane*, *detect good*, *doom*, *inflict light wounds*, *protection from good*; 2nd – *assassin's senses**, *commanding presence**, *hold person*, *inflict moderate wounds*; 3rd – *bestow curse*, *inflict serious wounds*, *sacred weapon**; 4th – *unholy channel**. **Domain spells (Death, Trickery):** 1st – *grim feast**; 2nd – *invisibility*; 3rd – *nondetection*; 4th – *confusion*.

Granted Power – Death (Sp): 1/day – Som can use a *death touch*. She must succeed at a melee touch attack against a living creature, then roll 7d6. If her total equals or exceeds the victim's current hit points, he dies.

Curse of life (Ex): The Whisper of Belsameth cannot die. If Som is brought to 0 hit points, she merely fades away only to reform an hour later in her fortress. Each time this occurs, she loses 1 point of Constitution permanently.

Possessions: *Wormtongue**, *amulet of ghost armor**, clothing for latest disguise or ceremonial vestments.

Usaa Hosai, Iron Champion of Thulkas

The worship of the titans is proscribed in Shelzar, just as it is in any “civilized” lands. Of course, the Shelzari are not fanatics about religion (except where Enkili and Idra are concerned). Consequently, the city authorities have become lax over the years, allowing small cults devoted to the Defeated Ones to spring up here and there. Provided they do no harm and keep their devotion quiet, most Shelzari are content to leave such groups well enough alone. Unfortunately, the Iron Band is not content to remain quiet. Led by the hulking half-orc Usaa Hosai, the Band is a bunch of fanatics devoted to Thulkas, the titan of fire.

Hosai claims to be the inheritor of magicks from the Empire of Flame, when the worship of Thulkas was not only common but lauded. While exploring the Sweltering Plains with his companions, he stumbled upon an ancient shrine to the titan and received what he says was a vision from his master. He was commanded to go forth and reestablish the Empire of Flame, so as to bring the glory of the Father of Fire to the world once more. Whether the story is true or not (most would say that Hosai is quite insane), the half-orc soon demonstrated a remarkable command of magic, despite his having never before been a sorcerer.



Usaa Hosai, male half-orc barbarian 6/sorcerer 6

CR 12; SZ Medium-size humanoid (6 ft., 6 in. tall); HD 6d12+12 plus 6d4+12; hp 84; Init –2 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 14 [flat-footed 16, touch 14] (–2 Dex, +6 deflection); Atk +14/+9 melee (2d6+6, crit 19–20/x3, Large masterwork warhammer), +7/+2 ranged; SQ rage (2/day), uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC, can't be flanked), summon familiar, half-orc traits; AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +2, Will +7; Str 19, Dex 6, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Languages: Shelzari.

Skills: Bluff +4, Climb +10, Concentration +5, Intimidate +12, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +7, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Listen +6, Ritual Casting +5, Sense Motive +2, Spellcraft +4, Spot +3, Swim +5, Wilderness Lore +5.

Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Improved Critical (warhammer), Power Attack, Student of Ritual**.

Sorcerer spells known (6/7/5/3): 0 – *daze*, *detect magic*, *dowsing**, *flare*, *read magic*, *resistance*, *spark**; 1st – *burning hands*, *flame bolt**, *mage armor*, *true strike*; 2nd – *commanding presence**, *flame/frost weapon** (flaming version only); 3rd – *fireball*.

Possessions: Large masterwork warhammer, *amulet of protection +6* (as *ring of protection*), *ring of sustenance*.

** This feat appears in **Relics & Rituals 2**, and allows Hosai to prepare and use true rituals despite being a sorcerer.

He then gathered together a small group of others he somehow won to his cause and headed for Shelzar, bypassing Elz as being insignificant to his plans. Now, he and the other members of the Iron Band work in the darkness, recruiting new followers and planning for the day when they can lead the minions of Thulkas into the light. Then, and only then, they can restore the Empire of Flame and cast down the hated lackeys of the gods once and for all.

The Shelzari Knife-Fighter

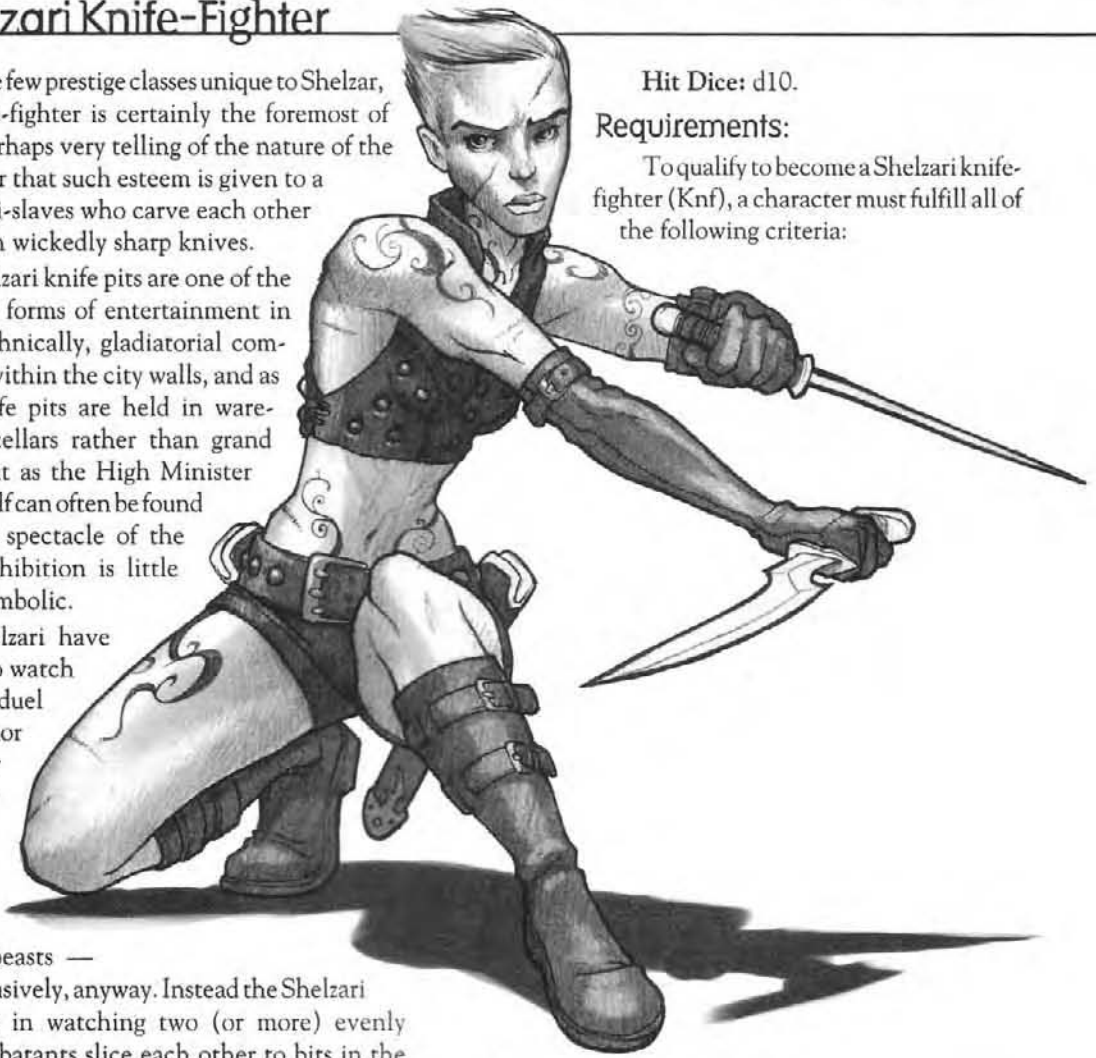
There are few prestige classes unique to Shelzar, but the knife-fighter is certainly the foremost of them. It is perhaps very telling of the nature of the city of Shelzar that such esteem is given to a group of demi-slaves who carve each other to pieces with wickedly sharp knives.

The Shelzari knife pits are one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the city. Technically, gladiatorial combat is illegal within the city walls, and as such the knife pits are held in warehouses and cellars rather than grand coliseums, but as the High Minister Fratrel himself can often be found enjoying the spectacle of the pits, this prohibition is little more than symbolic.

The Shelzari have little desire to watch armored men duel with swords, nor do they enjoy watching defenseless people torn apart by deadly opponents or beasts — well, not exclusively, anyway. Instead the Shelzari take pleasure in watching two (or more) evenly matched combatants slice each other to bits in the most drawn out and bloody manner possible.

Needless to say, few manage to survive long in the pits, but those who do generally thrive, joining the small and exalted brotherhood of the knife-fighter. Easily recognized by their battle-honed bodies, hard eyes, and the startling network of scars which covers their body, talented knife-fighters are considered celebrities in the city. The wealthy squabble to have them grace their parties — or to bed them. Children play with dolls of their favorites, acting out bloody knife battles for fun.

Many knife-fighters are indentured slaves, as the knife pits are one of the few areas in which slavery is still common in the city. Even those few who come to the pits of their own free will are “auctioned” to a stable and indentured for three years. If they survive that period, they are free agents and all the stables start bidding for their services. The most accomplished knife-fighters — such as the sutak Eballo — command staggering sums to fight for a stable, and they get their demands every time. Other successful knife-fighters do their time and then take the skills they learn and put them to use as guards, assassins, mercenaries, or even adventurers.



Hit Dice: d10.

Requirements:

To qualify to become a Shelzari knife-fighter (Knf), a character must fulfill all of the following criteria:

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Feats: Ambidexterity, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (dagger).

Special: If the character is not already a slave, she must join a fighting stable and agree to a term of service of at least three years.

Class Skills

The knife-fighter's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Escape Artist (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Perform (Cha), Sense Motive (Wis), Spot (Wis), and Tumble (Cha).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

Note that the word “knife” is used throughout, but this should be taken to include knives, daggers, kukri, and even double-bladed knives in all instances.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The knife-fighter is proficient with all knives, but no type of armor.

Monk-Like AC Bonuses (Ex): When the knife-fighter is wearing no armor or shield, she receives an AC bonus as that listed in Table 3–10 in the *PHB*. If

Table 4-1: Shelzari Knife-Fighter (Knf)

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+0	+2	+0	Monk-like AC bonuses, uncanny dodge
2	+2	+0	+3	+0	Puissant strike +1d4, flurry of blades
3	+3	+1	+3	+1	Uncanny dodge, improved critical 1
4	+4	+1	+4	+1	Improved Two-Weapon Fighting
5	+5	+1	+4	+1	Puissant strike +2d4
6	+6	+2	+5	+2	Improved critical 2
7	+7	+2	+5	+2	Imbue knife +1, dexterous parry
8	+8	+2	+6	+2	Puissant strike +3d4
9	+9	+3	+6	+3	Improved critical 3
10	+10	+3	+7	+3	Imbue knife +2, phase knife

the knife-fighter also has monk levels (or levels in some other class that grants monk-like AC bonuses), these levels stack for the purpose of determining the knife-fighter's total AC bonus. The knife-fighter does not gain his Wisdom modifier as an AC bonus as do monks, however.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): This ability is identical to the rogue's uncanny dodge ability. At 1st level, the knife-fighter retains her Dexterity bonus (if any) to AC even while flat-footed. At 3rd level, the knife-fighter cannot be flanked, except by a character who also has this ability and is at least 4 levels higher than the knife-fighter.

If a knife-fighter already has this ability from a previous class, those levels stack with her knife-fighter levels for the purpose of determining her total level of uncanny dodge ability.

Puissant Strike (Ex): At 2nd level, the knife-fighter gains the ability to strike with deadly precision when wielding a knife (or knives), dealing 1d4 points of additional damage with any hit using such a weapon. This ability works only against creatures with discernible anatomies; any creature that is immune to critical hits (including undead, constructs, oozes, plants, and incorporeal creatures) is invulnerable to a puissant strike, and any item or ability that protects a creature from critical hits (such as armor with fortification) also protects that creature from a puissant strike. This ability also applies to thrown knives, but only if the target is within 30 feet of the knife-fighter.

At every third knife-fighter level gained after 2nd, the extra damage for puissant strike increases by +1d4.

Flurry of Blades (Ex): The knife-fighter may strike with a flurry of blows, at the expense of accuracy, when wielding a knife (or knives). When doing so, she may make one additional attack in a round at her highest base attack using her primary weapon, but this attack and every other attack in the round suffer a -2

penalty to hit. This penalty applies for 1 full round, so it also affects any attacks of opportunity the knife-fighter might make until her next action. The knife-fighter must take a full attack action (see *PHB*, Chapter 8, "Full Attack") to use this ability.

Improved Critical (Ex): At 3rd level, the knife-fighter is so skilled that the threat range of her weapons is increased by 1 point. At every third knife-fighter level gained after 3rd, the threat range increases by a further point. Thus, by the time a knife fighter reaches 9th level, a normal dagger in her hands has a threat range of 15-20. This ability stacks with the Improved Critical feat and with other means of increasing critical threat ranges, although the rules for multiplying variables apply as usual (see *PHB*, Appendix, "Multiplying").

Improved Two-Weapon Fighting: At 4th level, the knife-fighter gains the Improved Two-Weapon Fighting feat (if she does not already have it).

Imbue Knife (Su): At 7th level, so close is the spiritual bond between the knife-fighter and her knives that they develop a supernatural quality: as long as she holds a knife, it effectively gains a +1 enhancement bonus. Thus, the bonus applies while she uses a knife (or knives) in melee, but not if she throws a knife.

The imbue knife ability improves when the knife-fighter reaches 10th level, so that her knives gain a +2 enhancement bonus.

Dexterous Parry (Ex): At 7th level, if the knife-fighter chooses to fight defensively or to use the total defense option, she gains a +1 dodge bonus to AC equal to her knife-fighter level.

Phase Knife (Su): At 10th level, the knife fighter is truly one with her knives: as long as she holds a knife, it effectively gains the ghost touch ability and ignores armor as if it were also a brilliant energy weapon. This ability applies while she uses a knife (or knives) in melee, but not if she throws it.

Chapter Five: Adventures in Shelzar

Shelzar may be known as the City of Pleasures for good reason, but that is not to say that everything that goes on within its sturdy walls is pleasurable — far from it. The Shelzari come by their reputation for decadence and viciousness honestly. For every one of them who is an amiable, drunken lecher, there are two who would be willing to cut your throat for one reason or another, and many for very little reason at all. Shelzar is, after all, one of the largest of the city-states in Ghelspad, with a huge population and open gates and ports that bring both trade and visitors from across the Scarred Lands. It is also strategically vital to the plans of both the Zathiskan rebels and the Calastians against whom they fight, although for very different reasons. Finally, Shelzar, in one form or another, has existed for over three thousand years. That is an exceptionally long time, particularly in a land ravaged by the Divine War. There is literally no telling what secrets may lie beneath its placid surface.

Shelzar is the perfect locale for socially oriented adventures, which is to say adventures where more than swordplay or spellcasting is necessary to achieve their goals. Shelzar is truly a den of vice. Nearly anything can be bought or sold here. Everything — and everyone — has a price. This creates an environment in which no one can be certain of their friends or their enemies. People may quickly change their allegiance, depending on circumstances. This suits the chaotic Shelzari quite well, who have learned from Enkili how to navigate the ever-changing waters of mortal relationships. Yet it can be quite unnerving to outsiders, who expect a degree of certitude in their dealings with others. PCs who excel at diplomacy and intrigue will find themselves right at home in the City of Pleasures, for a quick wit

and a keen mind are as important as a sharp blade amid Shelzar's winding streets.

Admittedly, not all adventures in Shelzar need be about backroom deals and decadent entertainments. There are still many opportunities for more traditional sword and sorcery tales within the City of Pleasures. The GM simply needs to keep in mind that the debauchery and vice of Shelzar are everywhere. The city runs on a heady concoction of greed, corruption, and carnality. Thus, an otherwise ordinary rescue mission, for example, might include little Shelzari touches, such as villains who run an underground slavery operation or who have indentured their captives into a life as prostitutes in some dark temple. The mood of Shelzar is one of exuberant — even glorious — decadence. The city is old and rich and its citizens are thoroughly jaded. If the GM includes these little elements into his adventures, even simple treasure-hunting expeditions in the catacombs take on a whole new meaning in the City of Pleasures.

Adventure Hooks

Dragon Rampage

Shelzar's large and well maintained Menagerie (see Chapter 3, location #49) is home to a large menagerie of beasts from all over Ghelspad and even from the far-off lands of Termana. These creatures are all kept within cages both mundane and magical in order to prevent them from causing any harm to the many visitors who enter the Menagerie to gawk and stare at them. Sages and scholars have likewise taken an interest in the park's inhabitants, because there are several examples of beasts that are rare or non-existent elsewhere on the continent. Chief among these rarities is Qashami (Shelzari for "Midnight"), the black dragon. This creature was brought as an egg several decades ago, and in the interim has grown larger and larger, becoming the primary attraction of the Park.



Setup: An inquisitive wizard from Lokil has come to Shelzar in order to see the black dragon firsthand. However, he wishes to examine the creature from closer than anyone ever has — by actually entering the dragon's lair. Of course, the officials will have none of it, so the wizard has resorted to alternative tactics. He uses a magical amulet that enhances the power of his *dispel magic*, and thus breaks through the magical barrier that keeps the dragon from escaping. Unfortunately, this ill-conceived plan had a fatal flaw: the wizard had no means to restore the barrier after he brings it down. Worse still, the dragon proves far more dangerous than the wizard had anticipated and it quickly kills him. With the barrier now down, Qashami is free to leave his lair and terrorize first the Menagerie and then the entirety of Shelzar, as it wanders the streets of the City of Pleasure, confused and angry at having been held in captivity for so long.

Complications: Recapturing the black dragon is a difficult task suitable only for experienced PCs. The City Council will offer a substantial reward for the person or persons who can return Qashami to his lair unharmed. The value of the black dragon is immeasurable to the city; it is a source of pride that the city possesses the only known specimen of such a creature in all of Ghelspad.

Qashami, male juvenile black dragon

CR 7*; SZ Medium-size dragon (water); HD 15d12+45; hp 147; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Spd 60 ft., [fly 120 ft. (clumsy)]**, swim 60 ft.; AC 24 [flat-footed 24, touch 10] (+14 natural); Atk bite +19 melee (1d8+4), 2 claws +14 melee (1d6+2), 2 wingslams +14 melee (1d4+2); SA breath weapon (60-ft. line of acid; 9d4 acid damage; Reflex half, DC 20), spell-like ability; SQ acid, paralysis, and sleep immunity, water breathing, keen senses, blindsight 120 ft., darkvision 400 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +12, Ref +9, Will +12; Str 18, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 11.

Skills: Bluff +18, Diplomacy +7, Escape Artist +15, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +8, Listen +18, Search +12, Spot +18, Swim +12.

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Power Attack.

* This CR rating, from the MM, assumes a fully prepared and alert party of 4 7th-level characters.

Languages: Shelzari.

**Note: Within 6 hours of escaping, Qashami will figure out that he can fly; consider the dragon to have "clumsy" maneuverability and a fly speed of only 120 ft., though, rather than "poor." Given 6 months or so of freedom, he will learn to use his wings properly for a dragon of his age (Qashami is only a couple of years away from reaching the young adult category).

Qashami is moving about the city in a haphazard and unpredictable fashion. He seems desperate to find his way out of Shelzar's walls, apparently unaware (due to his wings having been magically bound during his years in captivity), that he could now simply fly away immediately if it wished. The City Council is worried about just such an occurrence. Even though his ability to use his wings is slight, it is inevitable that Qashami will eventually learn to do so. Note also that, although he has cunningly not allowed his captors to realize it, the dragon has learned to speak the Shelzari tongue perfectly and has gathered a great deal of information about his surroundings, even though he has never seen most of Shelzar first-hand. He has never revealed his spell-like ability to create magical darkness, either, which might be quite useful in his escape given that there are no living experts on true dragons in Shelzar (or perhaps even in Ghelspad).

Further complicating matters is the fact that Calastian Ambassador Dormane Ulimhar has decided to recapture the dragon quickly and secretly and to ship it back to his liege, King Virduk, as a prize. The Ambassador has sent out teams of agents, including nearly all of the Calastian Consular Guards (see Chapter 3, location #88, sidebar) — out of uniform, to avoid any connection to the embassy — to find and capture the beast.

Making a Mint

"One must spend money to make money" is an old Shelzari saying. It is now truer than ever. Every seven years, the City Council renews the contract for the right to mint the city's coinage. The right to mint everything from the lofty platinum ayam-kebir to the lowly copper ouda is contractually assigned, and the lucky person or organization that gets the contract is sure to become wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice. (See Chapter 1, "Coinage and Finances.") Shelzari law allows the holder the contract to claim a portion of all the raw materials used to mint the coins, in addition to the fees he collects from the City Council. Competition for the contract is fierce, as it is one of the most coveted of all responsibilities in Shelzar.

Setup: For the last 28 years, House Asuras has held the contract to produce Shelzar's currency. Reeve Telos Asuras simply assumes that the Council will renew his contract without question, since his family has held it for the last forty years without interruption. Unfortunately for House Asuras, there are other players in the game, including the ambitious House Fayhood, whose matriarch Jaliah Fayhood has decided to do whatever it takes to win this lucrative contract. The PCs are approached by one of these rivals to ensure that they and not House Asuras wins the day.

Complications: The granting of the contract is determined by a simple vote of the entire City Council, although as always High Minister Fratrel has a tie-breaking vote. At the moment, the Council is evenly split between those who favor granting the contract to Telos Asuras and those who favor other candidates. However, this means that House Asuras holds the upper hand, since no other bloc of votes is sufficiently strong to overcome its own — at least not yet. The characters are instructed by their employers (who may work for House Fayhood or another faction at the GM's discretion) to use any means necessary to sway the Council's votes in their favor. This includes intimidation, seduction, and outright bribery. Magical means are frowned upon, since they can be detected easily and might turn opinion against the PCs' faction. One possible avenue for the PCs to undermine Asuras' claim is the fact that Telos is very cozy with the Calastians, a position that does not sit well with many members of the Council.

Diplomatic Incident

No one really likes the Calastians. At least, very few Shelzari admit to having any love for these foreigners. Since the end of the Divine War, the Calastians have been nothing less than bullies in the southern lands, expanding their territories and kicking over any cities or governments that got in their way. The Calastians hoped to gain a toehold in Shelzar decades ago but were rebuffed by the City Council at the time. Recently, though, the Council reversed its decision, thanks to the intervention of both High Minister Fratrel and High Priestess Ayshella. Now, a short time after that decision, the Council is beginning to regret having acquiesced. Several members believe, probably quite rightly, that the Calastians are abusing their diplomatic privileges in the City of Pleasures in order to further their own position in Zathiske and elsewhere.

Setup: Dhuhani Inshkar (*female human, Ari6, CN*), a member of the City Council, approaches the PCs. She admits that she has long been receiving bribes from the Calastians to turn a blind eye to shipments into and out of their embassy. For some time, she rationalized her complicity in these activities by telling herself that the Calastian presence provided protection for Shelzar. She no longer believes her own tales. Recently, she happened to witness the Calastians bringing another of their shipments into the embassy, and she is certain that there was a person inside the crate! Inshkar has no idea who the person was or why the Calastians shipped him or her into Shelzar in a box, but she fears something diabolical. She asks the PCs to help her infiltrate the Calastian Embassy and find out what is really going on.

Complications: The Calastians are indeed smuggling people into their embassy — prisoners from Zathiske. The prisoners are captured rebels, who are interrogated for information about the ongoing rebellion. The Calastians bring them into Shelzar for two reasons. Firstly, it is standard Calastian practice to remove captured rebels to an unfamiliar locale in which to interrogate them; the Calastians believe it disorients them and leads to a better interrogation. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the ambassador intends one day to use the prisoners to embarrass the City Council by suggesting collusion between the rebels and Shelzar. He finds the current public neutrality of the city intolerable and suspects but cannot yet prove that there is covert support for the Zathiskan rebellion. One day soon, he intends to manufacture all the proof he needs by using his prisoners as evidence. The prisoners (and there are several of them) are held in a dungeon beneath the embassy and are guarded by elite Calastian troops. If the PCs can get access to them, freeing them would prove diplomatically sticky for the ambassador, since Calastia agreed to abide by Shelzar's neutrality, which of course means not using the city as a staging area for suppression of the Zathiskan situation in any way. If the PCs offer proof that the Calastians have violated this agreement, the ambassador would be at pains to explain himself and would undoubtedly be forced to make concessions to conceal his actions.

Defenders of the Truth

Once, long ago, the Hazari were a powerful and important sect in Shelzar. They rejected both gods and titans and sought a life in which mortal beings found their own answers; through self-discipline and immersion in the experiences of life, they believed, they might achieve enlightenment. Yet the people of Shelzar, through the many twists and turns of history, eventually abandoned their devotion to the Hazari philosophy, coming to see experience as its own reward rather than as a gateway to anything more. Now, reduced to a small and otherwise insignificant sect, a fanatical few of the remaining true Hazari of the City of Pleasures have decided to embark upon a desperate quest to regain their lost prestige — by killing the descendants of very old Shelzari families who long ago abandoned the Hazari faith, in an effort to remind them of their past and to intimidate them into acting against the decadent city that rightfully belongs to the sect.

Setup: This small band of Hazari fanatics have organized themselves into a rough semblance of the ancient Haz a'Shien (see Chapter 2, "The New Prophet"). A series of murders takes place in the city, but the victims show no obvious commonality, except that all are human and Shelzari — a priest

Typical "Haz a'Shien,"

human expert 4/rogue/assassin 3

CR 7; SZ Medium-size humanoid; HD 4d6+4 plus 1d6+1 plus 3d6+3; hp 36; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 [flat-footed 16, touch 13] (+3 Dex, +3 armor); Atk +9 melee (1d4+4, 19–20/x2, +2 assassin's dagger), or +11 ranged (1d4+1 and poison, 19–20/x2, +1 hand crossbow and masterwork bolts); SA sneak attack +1d6, death attack (Fort DC 16 with assassin's dagger), poison use, spells; SQ poison save +1, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC); AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +9, Will +6; Str 15, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Languages: Shelzari, Ledean.

Skills: Balance +7, Climb +6, Concentration +5, Disable Device +13, Disguise +9, Escape Artist +7, Gather Information +6, Hide +11, Listen +4, Move Silently +14, Open Lock +10, Search +12, Spot +9, Tumble +8.

Feats: Blind-Fight, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (hand crossbow), Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (hand crossbow).

Assassin spells prepared (2/1): 1st – obscuring mist, spider climb; 2nd – alter self.

Possessions: Bracers of armor +3, +1 hand crossbow, 5 masterwork bolts, +2 assassin's dagger, 2 doses of blackleaf poison (injury, DC 15, 1d6 Con/2d4 Con).

here, a gambler there, and a bureaucrat there. The victims range in ages from young to old and are from every social class and walk of life. Yet there is ample evidence that each victim has been carefully chosen before being murdered in a precise and methodical fashion. When the PCs become involved (perhaps because they knew one of the victims), they must put together a series of clues to understand that all the victims were descendents of families who were once members of the Hazari sect, and who had abandoned their affiliation at some point in the past. The latter day Haz a'Shien intend to kill every one they feel has betrayed the Hazari cause by living side by side with the sybarites of the City of Pleasures. Ultimately, their target will be the current Sultan, whom they also see as a turncoat to the "true" Hazari.

Complications: None of the Hazari in Shelzar will be willing to cooperate with the PCs — all prefer to keep their involvement with the sect secret, as it has been for centuries, since belonging to it carries a considerable social stigma in contemporary Shelzar. Even those who are not shy about their Hazari connection (however distant from the Hazari practice of ages past), such as the current Sultan Anssara Ishani (see Chapter 4), do not want to draw attention to the possible resurgence of the

Haz a'Shien. After all, knowing that the Hazari have a faction of hardcore fanatics who will kill for their beliefs is hardly good public relations. Finally, all books and records relating to the Hazari are very old and difficult to obtain. They still exist, if the PCs can make the right connections, but it will require lots of legwork and some very convincing arguments with aged loremasters. Without such information, unraveling the secret of the Haz a'Shien will prove exceptionally difficult.

Temple War

To be devout in Shelzar is to serve Enkili, or so many outsiders believe. The fact of the matter is that the City of Pleasures is home to many different faiths, not merely that of the Jester. The faith of Idra, for example, is also popular, as is that of Manawe, especially among the lower classes. In general, relations between these temples are cordial if not always friendly. Each temple is respectful of the others and avoids becoming involved in the internal politics of their counterparts. This is simply considered good manners among the Shelzari, who are glad to place religion at the center of their lives — so long as it does not get in the way of a good time. It is little surprise, then, that hedonistic faiths receive the lion's share of adherents in the city, while stern and moralistic religions are less likely to attract the same devotion.

Setup: Recently, temple politics in Shelzar have ceased to be so placid. Ayshella, High Priestess of Enkili, has become heavily involved in city politics, bending the ear of High Minister Fratrel and seemingly persuading him to allow the Calastians into the city. This decision did not sit well with many other temples, including the temple of Manawe, whose adherents distrust the Calastians and suspect (as many others do, as well) that the Ayshella and the Calastians do not have the best interests of Shelzar in mind. To that end, the clergy of Manawe have begun to speak out against the Calastians and have suggested the temple of Enkili is filled with traitors to the Shelzari cause, right up to the High Priestess herself. The PCs are approached by a representative of either the temple of Enkili or the temple of Manawe to foment the dispute between the two temples. In exchange for a sizable fee, the characters are instructed to stir up ill feelings toward one temple or the other. Everything from simple rabble-rousing to framing a temple official for a crime is permitted, so long as the characters do not get caught — and, if they do get caught, of course, the hiring temple will certainly deny any involvement.

Complications: The growing distrust between the temples is the result of Calastian agents provocateurs who believe unrest in Shelzar might provide an excuse for the Hegemony to invade the city to restore

order. However, these agents do not have the official sanction of the Calastian ambassador. Indeed, they actually work for one of his rivals in Calastia, who not only wishes to embarrass him but who also favors a more direct approach to dealing with the decadent Shelzari. If the PCs can provide evidence of Calastian involvement in the brewing temple war, the ambassador will become very interested in what they have found. As much as he detests the Shelzari and their lascivious ways, he would much rather handle them his own way and in his own time. If the PCs share what they know with him, he will assist them in defeating the plot—and will then use the information to destroy his rival as well. Despite all this, it should be noted that the rivalry between Enkili and Manawe is real. The reason the Calastian agents have been able to stoke the flames of this war is because it is real. Even after the PCs expose Calastian involvement, the dispute between the two temples will continue.

The Demon Barber

The profession of barber is an old and honorable one in Shelzar, being a combination of apothecary, healer, surgeon, and dentist in addition to hair-cutter and trimmer of beards. During the days of the Hazari, clerics and other divine spellcasters were naturally rare in the City of Pleasures. Barbers thus filled an important gap in public services. Later, when the worship of the gods became commonplace in Shelzar, barbers retained their position of social importance simply due to the weight of history. Although it might be easier to visit a cleric for healing, many old school Shelzari preferred to visit the barber. It is tradition, after all, and even in the City of Pleasures, tradition exerts a powerful influence. Perhaps not surprisingly, some unscrupulous types have taken advantage of the lack of regulation of the profession of barber (a consequence of its antiquity) for their own nefarious purposes.

Setup: Samdoor Nassadi is one of the most influential barbers in all of Shelzar. His family has worked in this profession for centuries and he has a clientele that includes some of the most important people in the city. Everyone from City Councilors to soldiers to diplomats visit him regularly. These clients admire his skills and respect his discretion, since he attends to their needs without ever revealing their secrets. More than one city official relies on Nassadi to dye his hair and not expose his physical imperfection, for example. Things were going well for Nassadi until he made the mistake of accepting Paunles Finn (see Chapter 4), a member of the local Cult of Gaurak, as a new client. Thanks to the ingestion of one of Finn's "specialty foods," the barber has become addicted to the taste of human flesh. He uses the information he gleans from his regular clients to find victims unconnected

to himself. He then murders them, grinds them into meat pies and consumes them, selling the leftovers through Finn's businesses. When the murders are investigated, they show no connection to Nassadi and the demon barber can continue his awful business unimpeded. The PCs somehow become involved in investigating one of these mysterious "disappearances" (since no bodies are ever found) and runs afoul of the Cult of Gaurak.

Complications: As noted above, the clues in this investigation are minimal. Without bodily remains (Nassadi is careful to use every part of his victims' corpses), there is no proof of foul play and no way to speak with the dead or use similar means of divination. Nassadi is meticulous in choosing only victims completely unconnected to himself, totally at random.

Unfortunately for Nassadi, he accidentally chooses a victim who has a rather close and dangerous connection to Paunles Finn, which brings the PCs attention to this minion of Gaurak. When Finn discovers Nassadi's error, he decides to eliminate him before the PCs can make the inevitable connections that would expose the Cult and its activities in Shelzar. Betrayed, Nassadi tries to avoid Finn's minions, leading them on a merry chase through the city. The PCs thus find themselves having to contend not only with the central mystery of this adventure hook, but also with the internal strife of the Cult of Gaurak, as it does its best to prevent being exposed to the population of Shelzar.

Heritage of Flame

Once, the southern lands were part of the ancient Empire of Flame, whose sorcerers were feared for their command of fire magic. Serving the titan Thulkas, these sorcerers formed the aristocracy of that fell empire and extended their titanic master's influence throughout the region. Even after the worship of Thulkas was forgotten, the spellcasters of Shelzar and the surrounding territories have generally retained an interest in fire magic. Numerous magical societies sprang up dedicated to the cultivation of this sort of sorcery. Since the Divine War, the practice of fire magic has once again declined, except among a few dedicated individuals who keep the old ways alive, waiting for the day when they might once again wield the power that their ancestors possessed in such great abundance.

Setup: Traditionalist sorcerers are not the only ones in Shelzar with a penchant for fire magic. The Iron Band of Thulkas is a cult dedicated to the worship of the Lord of Fire. Led by the half-orc Usaa Hosai (see Chapter 4), the Band has been trying for months to increase its membership and give glory to its titanic patron. Thus far, they have met with little success. The fire mages of Shelzar do not take the

Band seriously, seeing it as little more than a collection of ruffians who know a few parlor tricks. Not surprisingly, this angers Hosai, who has decided that now is the time to demonstrate the power of the Band once and for all. To that end, he has been testing out a new ritual he has discovered, by which means he will summon an elder fire elemental to Shelzar. His efforts to date have been less than successful, leading to a string of apparent arsons that destroy houses and arouse local suspicions. Despite these setbacks, Hosai is convinced that he is close to succeeding and continues to enact these rituals. Whether successful or not, the Band destroys buildings on a weekly basis and is wreaking havoc throughout the city.

Complications: Hosai is indeed very close to summoning the elder fire elemental. The ritual has so far simply lacked a sufficiently large venue. Once the Band finds a sizable enough building to immolate, they will be able to complete the ritual and summon the elemental as they wish. Unfortunately, Hosai will not be able to control the elemental, which will run amok and destroy large swaths of the city if the PCs cannot intervene. To make matters worse, a genuine fire mage in the city has taken an interest in Hosai's summoning attempts, and is sufficiently curious about what would happen if an elder elemental got loose in the city that he will subtly aid the creature when it does appear. The PCs must contend with not only the powerful elemental and the Iron Band of Thulkas, but also with a hidden elemental who has an appetite for random destruction.

The Elder Fire Elemental

CR 11; Huge elemental (fire); HD 24d8+96; hp 211; Init +13 (+9 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 50 ft.; AC 25 [flat-footed 16, touch 17] (-2 size, +9 Dex, +8 natural); Atk slam +25/+20/+15/+10 melee (2d8+9 plus 2d8 fire and burn); Face 5 ft. by 10 ft.; Reach 15 ft.; SA burn; SQ elemental, damage reduction 15/+3, fire subtype; AL NE; SV Fort +12, Ref +23, Will +8; Str 22, Dex 29, Con 18, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 11.

Skills: Knowledge (the planes) +5, Listen +26, Spot +26.

Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse (slam).

Burn (Ex): Those hit by the elemental's slam attack must make a Reflex save (DC 22) or catch on fire (see DMG, Chapter 3, sidebar: "Catching on Fire"). Creatures striking the elemental with natural weapons or unarmed attacks take 2d8 points of fire damage and must also save against catching on fire, as above.

Honeymoon in Shelzar

While Shelzar is not what one would conventionally call romantic, it is nonetheless a destination for many travelers from across Ghelspad, who are attracted by its many sights and promises of exquisite pleasures. For rebellious individuals brought up in puritanical societies, the City of Pleasures is the ultimate getaway. It is a chance to cast off the old inhibitions and live a wild and unrestrained life, if only for a few days.

Setup: The characters are approached by a young couple who have come to Shelzar to spend a week in which they can do what they like without any concern for the consequences. They ask the PCs to show them around and act as their guides — but not chaperones. The couple intends to take full advantage of as many sights and events as possible, sampling the diverse pleasures of the city for themselves, both together and individually (they seem to have a very liberal definition of "couple"). They also ask the characters to protect them, since they worry that Shelzar's reputation for ruthlessness is as true as its reputation for licentiousness. They pay the PCs excellent wages and provide the characters the perfect opportunity to indulge in Shelzar's many delights as well.

Complications: The couple is actually a pair of soon-to-be Chardunite priests from Calastia. They have run away from the rigid structure of their temple in order to sample Shelzar's exotic pleasures before returning home to live the disciplined orderly life to which they have devoted themselves. They are strangely naïve and inexperienced in the ways of the world and frequently get into all sorts of trouble and misunderstandings. Whether they like it or not, the PCs will quickly become their chaperones, since it rapidly becomes apparent that it would be unwise to leave the two to their own devices: They do not understand Shelzari ways and are bound to create chaos if they are not properly guided through the city. On top of this, a squad of soldiers and senior priests from Calastia have been following the pair for weeks, intent on capturing them. If they succeed, they will take the pair home for grave punishment, ending their careers as priests. The characters must ensure that this does not happen or else they will be implicated in the priests' temporary defection — with similarly grave consequences.

The Favor of Ayshella

True to her reputation as an inveterate voluptuary, High Priestess Ayshella of Enkili sometimes chooses random strangers off the streets of Shelzar to dally with her for a night. Those on whom she showers her affections, however temporary, report

that it is an experience unlike any other. Ayshella does this at regular enough intervals that Shelzari look forward to her wandering the streets, dressed in provocative garb, to select her next conquest. Many a person has attempted to attract her attention in the hope of being chosen. Occasionally, such strategies work. At other times, the only things they arouse is her anger. Even so, this has not stopped Shelzari from trying — including the Cult of the Ancients, which seeks to kill the High Priestess for the greater glory of Belsameth.

Setup: While the characters are wandering the streets of Shelzar, they stumble upon a huge crowd of people. As they press in to look on the source of the commotion, they are accidentally pushed forward into the center of the circle, where they see Ayshella and her bodyguards. The High Priestess is about to select a young man as her consort for the evening when she turns to see the party of PCs and smiles seductively. She then instructs the PCs that she has chosen them — all of them — to be her companions for the night. The young man whom she was about to choose is actually a charismatic young assassin of the Cult of the Ancients, under direct orders from Talina Som to seduce and slay Ayshella. Now that the characters have been selected, his chance to do so has been ruined.

Complications: This scenario can be played as deadly serious or for laughs. Either way, the characters have little choice but to accompany the High Priestess, for she brooks no contradiction of her wishes. She takes them on a whirlwind tour of Shelzar, visiting inns, brothels, and gambling dens before retiring to her home, where she wines and dines them before settling down to an evening of exuberant lovemaking, enhanced by drugs and potent magic. Along the way, the Cult of the Ancients attempts to insert one of their own members into the PCs' group, hoping to gain entrance to Ayshella's home. When this plan does not work, they try a series of different tactics, each one more deadly than the last, culminating in an assassination attempt at the High Priestess's home. Naturally, if the attacks are successful, the adventure ends, possibly with the characters' deaths as well. If they fend off the attacks, the PCs earn Ayshella's undying thanks — which she promises to bestow upon each and every one of them in the manner they most desire.

Mistaken Identity

While High Minister Fratrel is not known to enjoy the pleasures that so many other Shelzari love, he is nevertheless well known for his lavish and well-prepared parties. He holds them in a part of the Shalamar palace that is accessible to the public — albeit a small and select public whom he invites to

these gala events. Most of his guests are the usual suspects: high clergy, politicians, bureaucrats, diplomats, and visiting dignitaries. He rarely invites anyone who is not part of his normal social circle and maintains very tight security at his palace. The last thing Fratrel wants is for an uninvited guest to stumble in on one of his parties. Needless to say, the measures the Gracious Host takes to prevent such an occurrence only makes the desire of others to gain access all the more acute.

Setup: The characters find themselves the beneficiaries of a rare windfall: they are accidentally delivered an invitation to Fratrel's next party. The invitation is addressed to a person they have never heard of before, one Isaarit Qas. From the context of the letter, it would seem that Qas is a Shelzari merchant who has been away from the city for several years, along with his family and staff. All are invited to the Shalamar palace in one week's time. The invitation includes instructions on how to get past the guards and attend the party without any harassment.

Complications: If the characters choose to go to the party, they will find themselves having to impersonate someone they do not know. If they investigate beforehand, they may find out some simple facts about Isaarit Qas, enough at least to fool casual acquaintances. Fratrel does not know Qas except by reputation. However, a member of the Minister's staff is quite intimate with the merchant. The characters must avoid meeting him or her (or at least pretend to be someone else while in his or her presence), or they risk revealing their ruse. While they are at the party, the PCs are treated to an enjoyable evening of food, drink, dancing, and other diversions. By the standards of Shelzar, the night is quite tame, as most of the attendees remain fully clothed and there are no rites of Idras observed. However, guests can make quite a few valuable contacts at the party that could prove useful later. The only problem is that such contacts now believe that the PCs are Isaarit Qas and his family. Can the PCs maintain the ruse forever? And what happens when the real Qas finally arrives in Shelzar? What will he think of the characters' actions?

The Path of True Love

A common, if antiquated practice in Shelzar is for secret lovers to exchange gold bands, which they wear on their upper arms, hidden (but not too well hidden) underneath their clothing. There must be the potential for the band to be seen by others, since part of the thrill of the tradition (and one of the reasons why few practice it anymore) is the potential that the secret might be revealed. The more daring the lover, the more likely that he or she will flaunt the gold band almost in open sight, as if

daring others to notice it. Older Shelzari poems laud such lovers for trusting in the protection of Enkili. Of course, there is more to the tradition than this. The bands are fitted with a hinge that makes it easy for someone to snatch it from the arm of the wearer, which is why the bold taunting of a secret lover is seen as so glorious. To make matters even more interesting, both bands are engraved with the names of the lovers. Anyone who obtains one of these bands will know the secret of the lovers and will be able to expose — or, in modern Shelzar, blackmail them.

Setup: Aziha Sajani is the only daughter of Ayoob Sajani, an important Shelzar merchant known for his sympathies to the Zathiskan rebel cause. He hates Calastians and considers their presence in the City of Pleasures to be an affront. Unsurprisingly, Ayoob is a political opponent of Minister Fratrel and an outspoken one at that. Even more strangely (especially for a Shelzari), Ayoob is a follower of Corean, adding a further religious dimension to his opposition to the Calastians. As such, he opposes the Temple of Enkili, which he also sees as being too cozy with the Calastians, especially given Ayshella's seeming support for the Calastian embassy in the city. Unfortunately for Ayoob, his daughter Aziha has fallen in love with a Calastian soldier named Andwaru, who is a member of the embassy staff in Shelzar. Both Aziha and Andwaru are young and more than a little naïve, but both have been smart enough to realize that their affair would have terrible repercussions if uncovered. Unfortunately, that might well happen, for the gold band worn by Andwaru has been lost — possibly stolen — and the couple are desperate to get it back. They turn to the PCs for assistance and ask that they act discreetly in order to preserve their secret.

Complications: Andwaru is right when he says that he lost the gold band. It came loose and fell from his arm while he was running an errand for his ambassador in the Souk. The band was picked up by a beggar, who sold it to a pawnbroker for a few gold ordu to buy himself food. The band was then purchased by a prostitute devoted to Idra named Shaydeela, who now wears it without realizing what it actually is. She does not recognize the names of the two lovers, so has no reason to return it to them. The PCs might be able to follow this chain of events based on the information Andwaru gives them, but they will not be the only ones to do so. A group of enterprising ne'er-do-wells have found evidence of the affair and want to get the gold band in order to blackmail the couple — or expose them to the highest bidder, whether it be the Calastians, Ayoob Sajani, or his political opponents. The PCs must not only find the band but prevent others from doing so.

Risky Business

Longtime residents of Shelzar often forget what a dangerous place the city can be, especially for those in certain occupations. Criminal elements abound and not just in organized groups like the Sa'an. Pickpockets, muggers, kidnappers, and thieves are common in the city, but they are far from the worst of its underworld elements. Even more unsavory types can be found, if one is either ignorant or foolhardy. Most Shelzari do not like to talk about it, but the city is home to a cottage industry devoted to the collection of human body parts (and those of other species) for sale to necromancers and others who experiment on the dead. For the most part, these parts are taken from unclaimed bodies or unfortunate victims of violent crimes. The local constabulary turns a blind eye to this business, since it is a classic "victimless crime" and they are sometimes paid hefty bribes to keep quiet. Moreover, the City Council tries to keep their knowledge of this business a secret, since they worry it might ruin Shelzar's "good name" as a place devoted to pleasure. Nothing turns off the tourists like knowing there are body snatchers wandering the streets of the city.

Setup: The PCs meet a wizard who asks them to help him to obtain an item he purchased from a recently deceased merchant. The wizard explains that he has already paid in full for the item — a small leather bag and its contents — but that he never received it, owing to the merchant's unexpected demise from overexertion in one of Shelzar's houses of ill repute. He produces a bill of sale to show that he is indeed entitled to the bag and asks if the characters might be willing to enter the merchant's home (now sealed by the constabulary until an heir to his estate can be found) and obtain it for him. The wizard pays quite well and explains that he himself cannot undertake this mission since he is a member of the Hazari sect and will be busy with a series of holy days over the course of the next week, during which time he must remain ritually pure. He asks the characters to act quickly since the contents of the bag, listed on the bill as "medical supplies," are quite perishable.

Complications: The wizard is lying about his connections to the Hazari, as anyone who knows anything of them will be able to ascertain. The truth of the matter is that he is a lich necromancer who used his merchant contact to obtain body parts for his experiments, in this case a batch of preserved charduni tongues. When the merchant died (exactly as the lich described), he was left without a means to get them himself, since there is a powerful ward against undead on the merchant's home that prevents the lich from entering. If the characters

accept his offer, they will find that the merchant's home includes numerous other magical traps and wards and that the constabulary keeps a close eye on the house. It is sealed because they suspected that the merchant was involved in grave robbing and related crimes, but wanted to find evidence. If the characters are not careful, they may find themselves arrested for complicity in these activities unless they reveal the real reasons behind their involvement, in which case they may earn the enmity of a lich.

Pay the Piper

The Night of Masks is an important social event in Shelzar. Originally borrowed from *Hollowfaust*, the event takes on a much more lascivious character here, as befits the City of Pleasures. Shelzari look forward to the event all year long, since it provides them with ample opportunities to indulge their every lust, whether for drink, food, sex, or even more dubious things. On this night, even the most upstanding and austere of citizens tend to participate in the bacchanals, since to refuse to do so carries a great deal of social stigma. In Shelzar, the only perversion that is not lauded is not enjoying oneself when given the opportunity, or at least so say many outsiders. The Night of Masks is touted as an evening when one can act as one wishes without any concern for the consequences — a nice theory which is unfortunately not completely true in practice.

Setup: The PCs meet a young bard who claims that he is the illegitimate son of Yasar Al-Kaza, a prominent priest of Hedrada. He says that his father and his mother both participated in the Night of Masks twenty years ago and that he was conceived on that night. His mother, a merchant, left Shelzar shortly thereafter and the bard was born in Mithril, where he spent most of his early life. After that, he traveled about Ghelspad, hoping that he might convince his mother to reveal the identity of his father. She initially did not want to do so, because she felt there was no shame in what occurred as a result of the Night of Masks. In fact, his mother considered her son to be a blessing from Enkili. Nevertheless, the bard wanted to know the truth and, when he discovered it, journeyed to Shelzar to see his father. So far, Al-Kaza has not agreed to meet the bard and in fact denies that he is his father. The bard asks the PCs if they would assist him in making contact with the priest. He has no desire to exact money or anything else from Al-Kaza; he simply wishes to talk with him and know the man who sired him.

Complications: The bard is not telling the truth. Yasar Al-Kaza is not in fact his father. The entire story is a fabrication. The bard is in fact an assassin sent by Zathiskan rebels to murder the reclusive priest. Al-Kaza has frequently spoken out against any efforts to aid the Zathiskans, claiming that it

would unduly involve Shelzar in Calastian affairs. While the priest has no love for the Calastian Hegemony (and has in fact denounced it on several occasions), he is something of a Shelzari isolationist and thinks the city is better served by minding its own business. However, Al-Kaza appears in public only during temple rituals. The rest of the time he remains within his private quarters and does not admit any visitors. Temple guards and junior priests protect his privacy. Since the "bard" has had no luck in meeting Al-Kaza himself, he hopes to enlist the aid of the PCs, whom he ensnares in his ridiculous story. If the PCs can actually aid him in this, he will waste no time killing Al-Yaza and framing the characters for the deed.

The Doppelgangers

The openness of Shelzari society is one of the things that endears it to the rest of Ghelspad. Here, in the City of Pleasures, nearly anyone is welcome, provided that they can get along with others and abide by the city's few laws and customs. No one is rejected simply on the basis of who — or what — they are. There is ample opportunity to prove oneself here. Indeed, the city's history is filled with numerous examples of individuals who have risen above their mean circumstances or the prejudices of the rest of the Scarred Lands to make a name for themselves in Shelzar. Of course, Shelzari openness has drawbacks as well. Sometimes, disreputable types take advantage of the city's ways and use them to their own advantage.

Setup: As the PCs travel about the city, they find themselves attracting odd, even frightened stares from local citizens. More than a few of them back away or even refuse to talk to them. Eventually, citizens even turn their backs on the characters and treat them as if they were pariahs. If the PCs ask for an explanation, almost no one will say anything to them. At last, an old woman berates them for having committed numerous crimes in the district, including the theft of gems from the eyes of a statue of Enkili that had stood in the local square since the days of the Elzan Empire. When the characters profess their innocence, no one believes them. In fact, some of the citizens pelt them with rotten vegetables and say they plan to alert the constabulary. A group of indignant ruffians tries to apprehend them as well. The characters are left with no choice but to flee the city or get to the bottom of this mystery.

Complications: The characters are in fact the victims of impersonation by a pack of doppelgangers that moved into Shelzar recently. The shapechangers entered the city in the guise of simple travelers, and, once inside the city walls, they saw the PCs, whose appearances they decided to adopt. While in these forms, the doppelgangers have committed a number

of crimes, some of them quite horrific. Now that they have drawn too much attention to themselves in the form of the PCs, they are preparing to adopt new forms and continue their crime spree. The problem for the characters is locating the doppelgangers in order to prove their innocence before the constabulary arrests them or the people of Shelzar dispense a bit of vigilante justice.

The Unlucky Inn

Shelzar has an ancient history stretching back thousands of years. Some of its buildings predate the New Wall of the city and were constructed during the days of the Hazari ascendancy. As one might expect, many of these buildings have tales and stories associated with them. Some tell the legends of great lovers or epic battles or are humorous and amusing. A few have horrific stories associated with them, tales of death and murder.

Setup: The Battered Dwarf is one of the oldest inns in Shelzar. Although it has gone by many names of the centuries, it has existed in one form or another on the same spot since a nobleman named Alzubah built it. The inn has an evil reputation. In fact, many say that it is haunted, the unluckiest inn in all of Shelzar. The story goes that Alzubah was an eccentric old man who fancied himself an amateur scholar of matters arcane. He was especially interested in the Slarecian Empire and kept many artifacts from that time in his home, which is now the site of the Battered Dwarf. Alzubah became obsessed with one particular artifact which he valued above all others. It appeared to be a vase, but the old man insisted it was something more. In time, someone stole the vase and the old man searched for it till the day he died. When someone else bought the property and built an inn on the site, he claimed that it was haunted and tried to sell the inn. No one would buy it because of the bad luck of the place. People fell down stairs, mirrors broke, and objects moved around by themselves. Worse still, the owner found himself unable to leave the home until he either convinced someone else to take his place by buying or found the vase and returned it to the site of the inn. The characters meet the current owner, who pleads with them to free him from the curse of Alzubah's ghost.

Complications: If any PCs agree to buy the inn, they will find themselves bound to the place, physically unable to leave the inn just as if under the effects of an *imprisonment* spell, except that it traps them within the building instead of in the earth. They can only escape if they either convince another person to take their place or they find and destroy the ghost of Alzubah which haunts the place. Alternately, they could find the vase that was stolen from Alzubah so long ago. It is now owned by a collector of slarecian artifacts who believes it is indeed nothing more than

a vase, however ancient and valuable. He will not part with it, though, unless the characters are willing to offer something equally valuable in return. In fact, the vase is a slarecian funerary urn. In any event, if the characters can obtain the vase and take it back to the Battered Dwarf, they can free Alzubah and break the curse.

Alzubah the Ghost, female (human) ghost aristocrat 7

CR 8; Medium-size undead (incorporeal); HD 7d12; hp 43; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Spd fly 30 ft.; AC 14 [flat-footed 14, touch 14] (+4 deflection); Atk incorporeal touch +5 melee (1d4); SA corrupting touch, telekinesis; SQ undead, incorporeal, manifestation, +4 turn resistance, rejuvenation, darkvision 60 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +7; Str 14, Dex 10, Con —, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 18.

Skills: Diplomacy +14, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (history) +13, Knowledge (local: Shelzar) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Profession (scribe) +5, Search +8, Sense Motive +10, Spot +10.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Knowledge [history]).

Other Plot Hooks

Shelzar may hold a thousand and one adventures within its walls; but occasionally the PCs may like a change of pace. Fortunately, the City of Pleasures has many ties to other cities and nations, providing the GM with many ways to set scenarios elsewhere, while still maintaining a connection to an ongoing campaign set in Shelzar. The following are but a few short examples of such adventures:

- A cleric of Manawe asks the characters to assist her in finding an explanation for the mysterious City Beneath the Sea that many Shelzari believe exists off the coast. She claims to possess a map that dates from the days of the Empire of Flame and shows evidence of a powerful undersea rival to the Empire — a nation as devoted to elemental water as that empire was to elemental fire. The cleric can provide only a small fee to the characters now, but is willing to supply the boat they will need for their exploration. She likewise promises them a healthy share in any treasures or artifacts they discover.

- A criminal or enemy of the PCs flees Shelzar and takes refuge in Sandoval. The characters have no choice but to pursue him into this renowned den of thieves. Once there, they find the locals singularly unhelpful, and they must use their own wits to find out where their quarry is hiding before he can escape again.

- The caves of Kath Bay are well known in Shelzar. Many a mariner's tale includes details of how a dying sea captain hid his ship's cargo in one of these caves and that it now awaits discovery by adventurers willing to risk the high tide — and of course the dangerous creatures that thrive in the Bay. The PCs are advised to be wary of such stories, until someone they trust approaches them with "proof" that the stories might just be true. He asks the PCs to accompany him, as well as a share of whatever they find.

- There have been sightings of a mysterious ship along the Thunder Coast. It appears on the first night of every month and is said to weather the storms of the region without any ill effect. Superstitious sailors claim that the ship is a ghost vessel, manned by undead and helmed by a lich king from the days before the Empire of Elz. If these claims are true, the PCs might decide to seek out the ship either to plunder it or to seek the wisdom of the lich king, who is supposedly wise beyond imagining and willing to aid those who pay him homage or bring him kingly gifts.

- The lighthouse on Wrecker's Reef has already collapsed three times and its architects are regularly accused of incompetence. Now, the PCs uncover proof that the fault lies with a genie trapped in the reef millennia ago. His original master is long since dead and he wishes to be freed from his captivity. Until he can escape, he rails against the world and destroys any ships or structures he can reach. Perhaps the PCs could find a way to break the magic that binds him and end the curse of Wrecker's Reef.

- The aquatic ogres of Merrow Point are a curiosity the Shelzari would rather avoid if possible. Recently, though, the appearance of land-dwelling trolls along the point is a cause for concern. Some scouts claim that the two groups of monsters are conspiring to attack the City of Pleasures. Others claim that they are the minions of the ritan Mesos and included sorcerers in their number. Which story is true? Or are both merely tall tales without any basis in fact? The characters are hired by a merchant house to find the truth and report their findings.



Appendix

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