



Qadira

**GATEWAY
TO THE EAST**



Alignment: N

Capital: Katheer (132,450)

Notable Settlements:

Dimayen (4,890), Gurat

(8,490), Hatavit (280),

Khoka (920), Omash (23,500), Sedeq (89,760)

Ruler: Xerbystes II, Satrap of Qadira

Government: Satrapy of the Keleshite Empire of the East

Languages: Kelish

Religion: Irori, Nethys, Pharasma, Rovagug, Sarenrae, elemental lords

HISTORY

Before the armies of Kelesh came, Qadira was a far more sparsely populated land, empty of the teeming caravans that now dot its sands and plains. The native humans of the region, related to both the Keleshites and Garundi, were a wandering folk, goatherds and gatherers for the most part who abandoned one region when the sands came to wash them away, moving their tents eastward toward the mountains in summer, and westward toward the sea in winter. They often mixed freely with elemental creatures, and that legacy lives on today in the region in the form of native outsiders like ifrits, undines, sylphs, and oreads.

It was in the waning years of the Age of Destiny that merchants first led Keleshite war parties to Qadira. Claiming the land in the name of Padishah Emperor Adalan IV, soldiers of Kelesh raised the empire's green flag of conquest, with the Black Blade of War crossing its field. After 2 years, when word returned from Casmaron that Adalan IV had approved the conquest, they added the Silver Blade of Kings to the flag. Formalizing their rule in -43 AR, Kelesh installed its first satrap, Cerush, and began bringing the rest of the region under its heel.

An ancient kingdom of arid deserts and exotic cities, Qadira is the westernmost satrapy of the Padishah Empire of Kelesh. All along the seacoasts, the ships of Qadira ply their trade, carrying goods brought by camel, caravan, and flying carpet from lands farther east: silks, spices, and salt, as well as the exotic magical luxuries for which Qadira is so well known. Qadira is not the wealthiest of lands in the Keleshite empire, but even its relatively enormous frontier cities possess marvels that much of Avistan can only wonder at, from its peacocks and flowering trees to its animated siege engines and well-disciplined elemental mercenaries.

It took the Keleshites less than a century to settle the Plains of Paresh and expand northward to the border with Taldor, sparking a series of minor conflicts. Fortifying the boundary with a hundred stone watchtowers and the fortified camp of Omash, Qadira's satraps bided their time, waiting for their northern neighbor, this uncivilized "empire," to show weakness.

During the Age of Enthronement, Qadira's satraps again sought to expand the power of the Padishah Empire. This led to the conquest of the mountain settlement of Gurat, further skirmishes with the Taldans, and eventually one of Qadira's most legendary achievements—the subjugation of the nation of Osirion. With this incredible addition to Qadira's growing power, Satrap Xerbystes I struck a now-ancient bargain: he would rule Qadira and its new holdings in Osirion as a hereditary (rather than appointed) satrap and have absolute control over the nation's interior, but the Padishah Emperor would install a vizier to advise Xerbystes and his successors, communicating the imperial will on matters of expansion, war, and trade.

A time of relative peace settled over Qadira, broken periodically by uprisings in Osirion and a few notable natural disasters (including the great earthquake of 2920 AR that killed tens of thousands in northern Qadira). Prosperity enriched many families to the point that they could petition the empire for grants of nobility. In 4067 AR, however, a debate over the successor to the Padishah Emperor turned bloody, and 40 princes left Katheer to contest their rightful claim to the throne of Kelesh. The succession took nearly 15 years to resolve, but when Taldor faced trouble in the form of a power grab by the king of Cheliix, Qadira settled its internal strife to organize a strike into Taldor.

Qadiran armies crossed the northern borders in 4079 AR with a force of more than 40,000 Qadiran and Keleshite soldiers. This proved a greater force than Taldor could contend with, and the northern empire lost much of its influence in the area over the next decade. While most of Avistan notes this period for the Even-Tongued Conquest, in which Cheliix and several other nations successfully threw off the yoke of the Taldan empire, Qadiran histories record these events as the Gheveran Victories. Peace with Taldor would not be achieved for another 500 years.

GOVERNMENT

Taldor and other nations on the Inner Sea and Obari Ocean fear the ambitions of the current satrap of Qadira, young Xerbystes II. He works as the hand of Kelesh's emperor, given free rein over local affairs in exchange for an annual tribute of 13 golden bulls and 300 concubines for the vast pleasure palaces of the imperial heartland. Because of Qadira's strategic importance, however, Xerbystes bows to the imperial will on matters outside his borders, such as piracy, trade, and war with Taldor. In those matters,

his vizier Hebizid Vraj serves as the emperor's hand. Since Qadira's generals also follow orders from Kelesh, Xerbystes cannot have the war with Taldor he craves. He makes do by giving his heroes—a group of nobles and advisers called the Peerless—ever more difficult tasks in his service.

The Cult of the Dawnflower remains very popular among the Qadiran dervishes and military, and its leaders have long had powerful voices in the satrapy. Indeed, their call for an invasion of Osirion led to Keleshite dominance of that region, and their meddling in northern Garund long ago reshaped the region violently. Sarenrae's followers are much less eager to turn their goddess's wrath against anyone but Taldor these days. A growing number of lower-ranking priests in the church fear that its leadership grows ever more blasphemous and heretical in this lust for war, for Sarenrae's teachings preach tolerance and redemption. War is to be an act of final resort—not a preventative measure against real or imagined threats. A schism is building in Qadira's most powerful church as a result, one that goes unnoticed by the government and the populace at large but could explode at the slightest triggering event.

The arrival of new ideas and cults from the east is almost as common as the arrival of camel trains and silks. A small group calling itself the White Feather Monks recently arrived with such a caravan, teaching peace and serenity to any who would listen. The monks are closely watched by the satrap, who fears any new faith or idea as potentially dangerous. As pacifists, the White Feather Monks face a long struggle to win the satrap's good graces, for he has little use for those who cannot feed his war machine as he prepares his desired offensive against Taldor. The traditionalists in the church of Sarenrae see these pacifist priests as possible allies, yet they too are suspicious of the secrecy that the White Feather Monks maintain regarding their background and true motives.

GAZETTEER

Al-Bashir: The greatest ruins in Qadira lie deep in the desert and are often inaccessible when dunes cover them. The one exception is the oasis of Al-Bashir, which lies at the center of many stone walls beneath a towering cliff at the feet of a Zho escarpment where the River Pashman touches those heights. This ruin is avoided by caravans heading to Katheer from points east, for it is home to a roosting colony of hundreds of harpies, whose songs bring herds of antelopes and entire camel trains to ruin. The pile of treasure at its heart is rumored to be immense, although no one has found a way to slay enough harpies to make it possible to carry it home. The satrap has tried to clear the ruins several times with small armies, but has accomplished only the creation of new generations of widows. For now, he saves his strength.



Dimayen: Once a rather large farming community, Dimayen has fallen upon hard times. The collapse of its irrigation network, failing crops, unseasonable dust storms, and most recently a staggering increase in the local ankheg population has the town on its knees. Half of the buildings of Dimayen now lie abandoned, and all that keeps the remaining population on site is a stubborn refusal to allow what is still seen as “a spate of bad luck” run them out of town.

Gurat: The city of Gurat is home to scholarly colleges and a strange prophet. The prophet is the Mouthpiece of Gurat, an ancient cyclops oracle who serves the emperors of Kelesh. Visitors are not allowed anywhere near the Mouthpiece, who is guarded by a thousand deafened eunuchs. The city of Gurat is also known for its weavings, many of which are enchanted as flying carpets of various sizes.

Katheer: Glorious Katheer, the city of a thousand caravans, is a place like no other, full of every spice, race, and magic, and home to the largest population of camels beyond the Kelesh homelands to the east. The palace of Xerbystes II stands here, as do several noted academies of mathematics, philosophy, and learning. In the schools

and bazaars, the activity is great and many foreign scholars frequent Katheer’s libraries. The busiest places of all, though, are the port and the camel pens. Ships sail to Quantum, Katapesh, and Absalom daily. These include both ocean-going dhows and a small number of enchanted sandships, able to sail above the dunes and powered by elemental winds.

Many different schools contend for students in Katheer. The greatest of Katheer’s colleges is the Venicaan College of Medicaments and Chiurgery. Founded in ages past, the healers from Venicaan’s halls are one of the advantages that Qadira holds over Taldor, where the healing arts are much less advanced. Both magic and herbalism are combined here in vast halls to save the lives of soldiers, who rest there only so long as is needed before departing to fight once more. The more recent accomplishments in this line are related to the healing of camels and horses, a specialty always in demand, by caravan-masters and cavalry alike.

Within the palace, a hundred princes and princesses contend for the favor of the satrap, for he alone grants the commissions for the most valuable caravans back to the

imperial heartland: salt, spice, silk, *heatstones*, and a dozen other sorts of goods besides. The wealth and strangeness of the place sometimes overwhelm visitors, but the Keleshites laugh and proclaim the city a pigsty compared to the empire's heart. Perhaps this sentiment is mere modesty, but the empire has many satrapies, and Qadira is by no means the largest.

Ketz Desert: This high desert is inhabited by numerous nomadic tribes of human slavers who often recruit the aid of creatures like bugbears, jann, or barbaric giants. As the desert approaches the sea, the land rises until it ends along a several-hundred-mile-long stretch of sheer cliffs that runs from the mouth of the Pashman River south to the Zho Mountains.

Omath: Omath, situated as it is on the northern border with Taldor, is primarily a fortress city—it marks the eastern end of the satrapy's patrols. It is from among the several schools of war here that the satrap personally chooses the guards for his palaces, the elite soldiers of his armies, and even a few of his famed Peerless.

Sedeq: The settlement of Sedeq, south of the Zho Mountains, is a place of warm breezes, lush gardens, and frequent desperate pleas and screams, for it the heart of the Qadiran slave trade. There, captured slaves are broken, shorn, and made ready for sale. What makes Sedeq all the more unusual is that this city specializes in the enslavement of genies and their kin. Jann and elemental races like ifrits and oreads are often put up for sale, and those buyers with enough coin can even purchase bottled djinn or shaitans encased in amber. The genie binders of Sedeq are masters of their craft, yet periodically one of their projects escapes—it is at these times that life on the streets of Sedeq is at its most perilous, for little can compare to an enraged genie unleashed in the heart of a city.

Shadun: The ruined city of Shadun lies somewhat east of Gurat. The people who bear its name abandoned their terrace farms along the hundred green trails and riverbeds of the Pashman watershed long ago, when the Zhonar and Zho-bl volcanoes first stirred and threw great clouds of ash and dust over their once-fertile farmland. The fate of the Shadun people themselves is unknown, although strange, shadowy figures with glowing embers for eyes are said to stalk the otherwise empty alleyways of Shadun at night.

Tapur Forest: The shared name for two distinct regions of woodland, the Tapur Forest contains a number of inhospitable fey creatures, the presence of whom likely explains how these woodlands of fruiting trees and palms can exist in such inhospitably arid climes.

Zho Mountains: These ragged peaks, while not unusually high (averaging at a mere 7,500 feet in height), form an effective barrier due not to their terrain but to the large number of feral giants, draconic beasts, and elemental outcasts that dwell within the range's often volcanic caverns. Rumors of villages or even entire cities populated by ifrits, oreads, sylphs, and undines persist, although these settlements must be well hidden—perhaps via magical effects like permanent *mirage arcana* spells, for no such settlements have been discovered by humanoid explorers in these mountains.



ENSLAVED DJINNI



Rahadoum

THE KINGDOM OF
MAN

Alignment: LN

Capital: Azir (72,370)

Notable Settlements: Botosani
(23,540), Haldun (1,400),
Manaket (26,780)

Ruler: Malduoni, Keeper of the
First Law

Government: Council of Elders led by
the Keeper of the First Law

Languages: Common, Osiriani

Religion: None (see below)



Visitors to Rahadoum often arrive via ship at Azir (known by many as “Port Godless”) to trade for the country’s fine cloth, exotic produce, and priceless gemstones. Yet despite the lure of trade, visits to Rahadoum are strictly regulated, for the so-called “Kingdom of Man” tolerates no devotion to the divine within its borders. Foreigners must submit to a thorough search by the Pure Legion, a group of trained soldiers who watch for signs of faith in the gods. The black markets of Rahadoum do a brisk business selling and buying divine magical items, but such activities are risky. Possession of contraband (such as holy texts or symbols) results in heavy fines and

potential exile, while preaching religious doctrine earns imprisonment or worse.

HISTORY

Early in the Age of Anguish, the Jistka Imperium became humanity’s first attempt at the recovery of civilization in the Inner Sea region after the horrendous devastation that was Earthfall. Jistka could well have gone on to found much of both Garund and Avistan’s modern nations, yet its fate was altogether more ignominious, for another nation—ancient Osirion—would prove to be the victor in that race. Today, little is known of Jistka and their accomplishments, as their ancient traditions were obliterated or absorbed by Osirion.

After ancient Osirion’s fall, the region known today as Rahadoum fell under the control of numerous isolated city-states. When the faithful of Sarenrae, spreading their religion like rising sunrays across northern Garund, came upon this region, they met sudden resistance from these independent city-states, who favored Nethys and Norgorber. The Oath Wars—more than 6 ruinous decades of religious war between rival followers of the three gods—followed, devastating the region.

In 2555 AR, the weary militia of Azir put all of the great city's temples to the torch and exiled members of their clergies. Led by the philosopher Kalim Onaku, the militia stabilized the warring city and set down a list of new laws, the first of which was, "Let no man be beholden to a god." Over the next 5 years, the laws of Azir spread across the region, ending the Oath Wars and expelling all forms of religion from the land. Communities willing to swear by the new Laws of Man were welcomed into Onaku's growing nation of Rahadoum.

Since then, Rahadoum has charted a resolutely secular path. No one denies the existence or power of the gods, but their aegis comes at too high a price for the people of Rahadoum. The lack of religion has brought the region the peace it so desperately desired, though it has also brought its own costs. Plague has ravaged Azir and Botosani three times in the past 500 years, and the prospect of famine hovers over the fragile land like a shroud. A century ago, Manaket was among the lushest ports of the Inner Sea. Today, it is choked by encroaching desert sands, and its famous gardens are a memory of the distant past. While few dare speak it aloud, nervous whispers abound that the gods have finally decided to punish the people of Rahadoum for their insolence. Still, the Rahadoumi resolutely hold to their ancient laws and avoid any contact with religion.

GOVERNMENT

Rahadoum is ruled by a council of elders comprising representatives from every major settlement and nomadic group. The council in turn elects one of its members to be the Keeper of the First Law for a period of 5 years. Council members elect Keepers to represent their interests, but ambitious Keepers use the position to sway public opinion toward their own agendas. This tension means Keepers rarely get reelected, and the resultant lack of continuity leads other political powers to wait out Rahadoum's government when it becomes difficult to work with, relying on its relatively frequent changes of direction. Malduoni, a genuinely likable man, has bucked the trend, and is now serving his second term as Keeper and forcing other nations to deal with him.

Rejecting religion has made Rahadoum few allies. Nonetheless, the free ports draw their share of merchants from around the Inner Sea. Money talks louder than most preachers, although the most superstitious sailors won't even set foot on Rahadoum docks for fear of divine disfavor.

A lively appreciation of philosophy also draws scholars to the nation's universities and observatories.

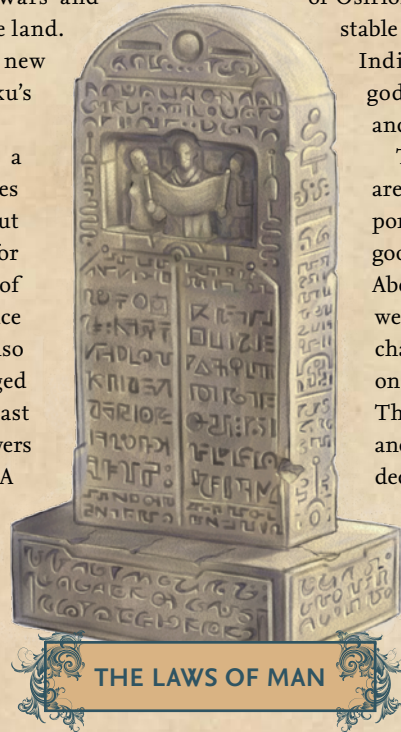
Relations are chilly with neighboring Thuvia, where the faithful of Sarenrae still hold power. The long-ago sting of the cult's castigation has faded, but Rahadoum's stern denials keep the grudge alive. Prince Khemet III of Osirion has a pragmatist's appreciation for the stable government and safe ports of Rahadoum. Individual Osirians might distrust the godless traders, but Osirion's government and military find them excellent neighbors.

To the south, the pirates of the Shackles are a continual burden on Rahadoum's ports. The Rahadoumi navy has lost many good ships chasing pirates into the Eye of Abendego, and as a result is willing to pay well for a navigator who can provide good charts or, better yet, lead Rahadoumi ships on a raid around the murderous hurricane. The Mwangi Expanse, across the desert and over the mountains, is too far and too decentralized to be of immediate interest to city dwellers. Nomads, however, cross the borders frequently, bringing treasures to market that command high prices. The Sodden Lands to the south, the mantis-god-worshipping assassins of Mediogalti to the west, and devil-governed Cheliaz to the north are stark reminders of why Onaku banned religion in the first place.

Civic participation is a major focus in Rahadoum. Most citizens are well educated, and philosophy and politics are common pursuits. Speeches delivered by government figures are analyzed over drinks in tents and cafes around the country. Self-disciplined behavior is the rule, but within those bounds, morality is largely at an individual's or a family's discretion. Narcotics, enthusiastically imported from Katapesh, are common in cities, although sloppy addicts are not tolerated. Slavery is commonplace.

Rahadoum's enduring atheistic nature has had another, invisible side effect. Outsider servitors of gods use Azir as a neutral ground. The gods certainly watch their dealings there, but without open followers on the ground, the gods lack agents to enact their agendas, leaving room for plain negotiations. Many unexplained supernatural effects that occur within the cities of Rahadoum are due to invisible conflicts between celestials and fiends.

Rahadoumi are sometimes characterized as grim optimists. Although serious, they maintain a backhanded positivity they use to pull through any hardship, simply because they don't have anyone else to rely on. They typically exhibit an ironic, black wit so finely tuned that



THE LAWS OF MAN



they say, “A Rahadomi laughs at death—but it’s a shared laugh, not a defiant one.”

Philosophy and rhetoric are valued traits in Rahadomi culture, as well as self-discipline and family loyalty, especially among the nomads. With no external powers to provide spiritual guidance, the Rahadomi are serious about their responsibilities to themselves and each other. They expect no mercy from Pharasma after death, so they work very hard to make mortal life worthwhile, collectively and individually.

GAZETTEER

Azir: Azir is a somber city in many respects, but recently, art and architecture have exploded with creativity. New buildings sport improbable angles, as builders strive to “break geometry,” while older buildings receive colorful new facades and unexpected gargoyles peering down from their eaves.

Botosani: Hearsay that a powerful cult of Iomedae has taken root in Botosani with the blessing of the locals has recently evolved from mere rumor to an open secret. Routing the nascent cult amid the current famine would be

a rough task for any government, but the council intends to try. The Pure Legion hopes to secure outside help to either damage the cult or to create a public spectacle it can heroically clean up.

Eternal Oasis: Neither fed by any river nor producing any of its own, the Eternal Oasis of western Rahadom is a mystery to even the realm’s most learned sages. Here, freshwater springs bubble forth in the thousands, creating pristine ponds and networks of marshes that feed vast, leafy trees seemingly more appropriate to the jungles of the Mwangi Expanse. Perhaps the strangest aspect is that the trees drink the available water so thoroughly as to make the demarcation between desert and forest knife-edged, with no bleed out into the sands. Whether this line is magical or natural remains an open question. Some suggest that this legacy of ancient Rahadom’s fertile bounty is protected by its mysterious residents, or perhaps the forest itself. Certainly something seems to lurk in the shadows of the wood, and many of the merchants who succumb to its lush temptations never return to their caravans.

Haldun: Once the center of trade with Lirgen and other lands to the south, the town of Haldun is now a fortification,

a mud-brick fortress standing in the only convenient pass through the southern mountains. Here, grim warriors and grimmer wizards maintain the Rainwall, a network of sentries and magical wards designed to give Rahadom advance notice should the curse of the Sodden Lands ever begin to creep northward, and prepared to lay down their lives preventing it if necessary. So far, the job has consisted primarily of defending against cultists and monsters emerging from the storm, but even that is no small task. The lone scouts of the Rainwall, as well as the hardy farmers that feed them, take a certain perverse pride in living on the edge of a cursed land, and its proximity makes them all the more resolute in their conviction that such is the end of all nations who place their faith in deities.

The Last Temple: Rumored to exist somewhere in the eastern foothills of the Napsune Mountains, or perhaps in the trackless dunes beyond, the Last Temple is a fairy tale told among Rahadom's secret religious circles. According to legend, the Last Temple moves around, never appearing in the same place twice but always showing up just when it's needed most. Surrounded by colorful banners that fly in the wind, the colonnades and stepped pyramids of the temple complex are said to be run by spirits and petitioners of every religion, hidden from the unworthy and devoted to keeping faith alive in Rahadom. Many an ousted preacher has headed into the desert one step ahead of the Pure Legion, hoping for sanctuary in the legendary temple.

Manaket: The prestigious wizard college in Manaket, the Occularium, plans to reclaim desert land through a shifting series of trenches and dikes carefully designed to hold back the sand. The city devotes significant resources to studying the feasibility of this project, and has even been attempting to entice dwarven engineers from distant Alkenstar to aid in the project.

Nuat: Located 50 miles off the western coast, the island of Nuat is Rahadom's first line of defense against pirates from the Shackles. The Rahadoumi navy keeps a sizable fleet on the island's eastern flank, and patrols the bay leading to Azir heavily enough that only the bravest smugglers and buccaneers dare try to run the blockade. Much of the rest of the island is given over to small farming and fishing communities, and warm rain showers drifting up from the south make it the most productive farmland in the nation, exporting vast stores of food back to the mainland. Mostly flat—in some stretches just a few feet above sea level—the island is at particular risk for storms, and though its residents are as godless as their countrymen, they harbor a wide range of “superstitions” that find leniency with the Pure Legion. Many of these concern the Thin Men, ghostlike creatures that haunt the cane fields and lurk just out of firelight. Whether these are truly spirits, or some unknown race that predates the Rahadoumi's residency, none can say.

Shepherd's Rock: Despite its innocuous name, this towering citadel is one of the most feared and respected

sites in Rahadom, as it is here that the Pure Legion organizes its operations. Beholden to no one save the First Law, existing both within and apart from the Rahadoumi government, the Pure Legion keeps its most important secrets here, safely away from any cities where faith might suddenly sweep in like wildfire to destroy all they've built. It is from this blocky, cliff-top fortress that Karsakim, the current Sword of Man, looks out over 20 miles of desert, secure in the knowledge that should the weak-minded ever take up arms against the keepers of the First Law, his troops would have plenty of time to set fires in the hidden Vault of Lies, where thousands of confiscated religious texts are carefully analyzed to help the guardians of reason wage their secular war.



KARSAKIM,
SWORD OF MAN



Razmiran

THEOCRACY OF THE LIVING GOD

Alignment: LE

Capital: Thronestep (17,340)

Notable Settlements: Pilgrimage (1,020),
Whispertruth (690), Xer (9,200)

Ruler: Razmir, the Living God, Lord of the
31 Steps

Government: Theocratic Dictatorship
with Razmir at its head, supported by a
council of Visions

Languages: Common, Hallit

Religion: Razmir (false god—see below)



The northeastern shores of Lake Encarthan have always been a turbulent place. For centuries, this land was part of the unruly River Kingdoms, changing hands dozens of times from one burgeoning prince to the next. All of that changed 47 years ago, when the living god Razmir came to the shores and claimed his dominion in the world of mortals.

HISTORY

Razmir first appeared to the people of Xer (then part of the Arch-Duchy of Melcat) and told them of his power. He claimed to have taken the Test of the *Starstone* in faraway Absalom,

and to have attained divinity through this test. Using his supposedly divine powers, Razmir set about gathering a flock by ousting the local magistrate and the Trades Guild, “exposing” them as a front for thieves and extortionists. Those who came to worship him, however, knew nothing of the truth: Razmir expelled the magistrate by murdering him and disbanded the Trades Guild by incorporating all of its members into his faith. Razmir’s biggest lie, however, is hidden from even his most trusted followers—for Razmir is not in fact a god. Although powerful, he is simply a man, and one whose mortal end grows closer with every day.

In the months following his takeover of Xer, Razmir’s faith spread across the arch-duchy until it reached the capital of Aerduin on the border of the Vergan Forest. The forces of Melcat refused to bow to Razmir’s faith, and on 17 Erastus, Razmir himself came to the city. He made three requests for fealty to Duke Melcat—each one was refused. That night, a terrible cloud of fire and smoke descended upon the city and screams echoed through the night. By morning, the entire city had been reduced to ash and Razmir’s takeover was complete. In the years since, Razmiran—as the theocracy came to be called—has expanded its borders five times at the expense of various River Kingdoms.

Today, Razmiran is a society governed by force and intimidation. The faith's ruthless priests control every facet of the state and economy from behind their iron masks (worn in imitation of their god). While the common folk toil at their fields or meager trades, the true faithful take a portion of the commoners' work known as the Tithing Step. The higher-level clergy, meanwhile, enjoy a life of comfort, with their station in the faith granting them a great deal of power and wealth. Those who dare to defy the faith face severe punishment—imprisonment, exile, or even execution. This leads many to join the faith as a path of prosperity, regardless of their belief. Such acolytes are sent to the Exalted Wood for training and come back changed, acting in league with the faith despite any previous misgivings.

GOVERNMENT

A council of high-ranking “priests” known as the Visions handles the actual governance of Razmiran. These gold-masked priests carry out Razmir's erratic mandates, each in their unique way. While some Visions are gifted sorcerers, others are skilled at martial combat, and still others use honeyed words and bribes to accomplish their goals. Since all Visions are identically attired, most citizens obey any Vision's commands without question, for fear of angering one of the more cruel members. Razmir himself consults with his Visions from atop a 31-stepped throne—a reference to the 31 steps he supposedly took to achieve divinity. From there, he hides his mortality behind an ornate ivory mask. As age has enervated him, his greed and lust for power have only increased. He has recently (and secretly) sent agents to Thuvia in hopes of staving off his mortality with a dose of the *sun orchid elixir*. Should this information come to light, his entire kingdom could crumble around him.

Temples dedicated to Razmir appear throughout Razmiran and several nearby River Kingdoms, but some also stand in Molthune, Nirmathas, and even Ustalav, while the governments of Druma, Kyonin, and Lastwall have outlawed them. A typical temple of Razmir houses a large worship chamber arranged around a great set of stone steps that lead up to a gold or silver mask. At first, these are temples set up in the poorest neighborhoods, where the priests give alms and tend to the sick and poor. They use their growing flocks to influence local governments, to extort money from businesses as “protection” from their mobs, and eventually to place their faithful in positions of power.

Those who follow the teachings of Razmir are organized by their loyalty to the faith and accomplishments in the

name of the Living God. These orders are referred to as “Steps,” in accordance with the number of steps the cleric is allowed to ascend when in the presence of the Living God. Each follower is assigned a simple robe and a mask to denote her station in the faith. The orders are as follows.

Steps of the Living God

Title	Robe	Mask
Acolyte of the First Step	White	Iron
Priest of the Third Step	Gray	Iron
Herald of the Eighth Step	Black	Iron
Mask of the Twelfth Step	Blue	Silver
Vision of the Fifteenth Step	Red	Gold

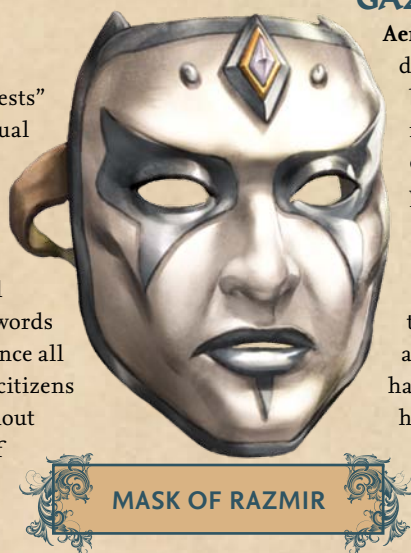
GAZETTEER

Aerduin's Folly: The old capital of the archduchy, now known as Aerduin's Folly, has been abandoned for nearly 50 years, covered in a layer of ash and dust generated by its destruction at the hands of Razmir. In the years since, no plants have grown here, and the shattered buildings and buckled streets have become a haven for undead. While the first of these undead rose from the spirits of the people of Aerduin, there are rumors that a powerful skeleton lord has recently claimed the ruined city as his realm, and that he has been creating additional undead from the city's ashes.

Some say this undead lord is actually the vengeful Duke Melcat, returned to claim his throne.

Exalted Wood: This vast and untamed forest is home to a wide variety of beasts, from the blood boar to large emerald owls. Despite the voracious appetite of these predators, none of them are as dangerous as Razmir's faithful, who dwell in a secret fortress called First Step in the forest's heart. The northern reach of the wood is also home to a curious breed of centaurs who possess human torsos and arms but have the heads of horses. Their unique language makes them difficult to communicate with, and as of yet Razmir's faithful have been unable to subjugate them.

First Step: Located near the center of the Exalted Wood, the fortress of First Step is a massive edifice of black stone. Extending almost twice as far below ground as above, this is where new “recruits” for Razmir's faith are broken and trained to become acolytes. While most emerge as loyal priests (albeit with fresh scars and burns) others are never heard from again. In reality, the church takes every step possible to convert a doubtful member, including coercive magic and even torture. After indoctrination, a new acolyte is assigned his first task. This usually consists of reporting to a new temple somewhere in the Inner Sea region to serve.



MASK OF RAZMIR



Other acolytes are instead assigned to cities or regions in which the church has no influence, and ordered to convert as many of that city's desperate and poor as they can to Razmir's faith.

The Forgotten Track: North of Thronestep lies a region known only as the Tracks—a place of jagged clefts, furrows, and canyons, as if the ground itself were decaying into a complex series of tracks in the earth. At the heart of this region is a particularly large rift known as the Forgotten Track, so named not because it is itself forgotten but because that is the eventual fate of those sent there by the faith. Deep in this rift lies a vast prison and mining complex, a place where the Living God sends those who lose faith or displease him. New prisoners are lowered down to the rift floor in an iron cage. At the bottom, they are released and assigned to one of any number of work gangs, forced to toil until their sentences are served (a rarity) or they perish from exertion (the most common outcome). Although the mines do uncover precious metals and valuable ores, there seems to be another purpose to the tunneling, for Razmir periodically sends directives to the prison's wardens detailing schematics for new directions of tunneling.

The Mask in charge of the facility is a gigantic man who goes by the name of Rastagar. Although feared by both the prisoners and the guards, Rastagar grows increasingly nervous himself about the progress of the tunnels, which have recently been intersecting with upper levels of the Darklands and exposing the complex to strange denizens and dangerous hazards.

Gensmaren: When Taldor's Second Army of Expansion swept through the region, it established a regular series of supply forts along the way. Some of these have since seeded the sites of modern settlements, but many, like Gensmaren, were forgotten. By the time Razmir's followers were moving against Xer, Gensmaren had already secured for itself a shadowy reputation. The old fort lies half in ruins, shrouded with thick webs and reeking of decay. Rumors of what lies within range from an infestation of giant vermin to a clot of undead to a cult of demon worshipers. It is this final rumor that is the most accurate, for Gensmaren is the lair of a sizable group of driders who worship the Creeping Queen Mazmezz, demon lord of bindings, driders, and vermin. The driders themselves tend to limit their presence to the ruins, the immediate surroundings,

and the extensive catacombs below the site, knowing from previous encounters with humanity that they are not well-liked on the surface. The long route to the Darklands through which these driders initially came to the surface has long since collapsed, stranding the monsters here forever.

Pilgrimage: This small community has been growing in size of late. Pilgrimage was founded to give those making their way to Thronestep a safe place to rest on the journey from Xer to the capital. What started out as a roadside tavern has transformed in a bustling community with more than a dozen inns, a large temple, and a reasonably sized port. While most of the traffic through town consists of travelers to Thronestep, Pilgrimage has become a frequent meeting spot for those wishing to do business outside the capital city's influence. While most of these shady dealings are done with the knowledge of the clergy, an ever-increasing number of deals and arrangements made here occur without the consent of the faith. Should the "opportunists" involved ever be uncovered, they would certainly find themselves on a one-way trip to the Forgotten Track, or worse. For outsiders wishing to deal with duplicitous clerics or hoping to garner certain contraband items, Pilgrimage is the first place to visit.

Thronestep: Founded in 4672 AR, the city of Thronestep was built to be Razmir's capital—a task that a small army of laborers accomplished with astounding rapidity. Sitting on the shores of Lake Encarthan, the city was meant to be a paradise for his faithful. Built using rich woods and imported stone, the buildings of Razmir's capital feature leering images of his masked visage. Thronestep attracts thousands of the poor, who flock to Razmir hoping for his blessing. Most never leave the city, taking up residence in its growing slums where they hope to one day see the god and personally petition him for aid. As a result, the city can be easily divided into two districts. The first is the Steps district, where Razmir and his faithful enjoy all the delights the world has to offer. The Steps is a place of absolute decadence and debauchery. The second, and by far the largest district, is the Stones, where the poor live in squalor and filth. Many hope that they will be part of the Choosing, a weekly ceremony where

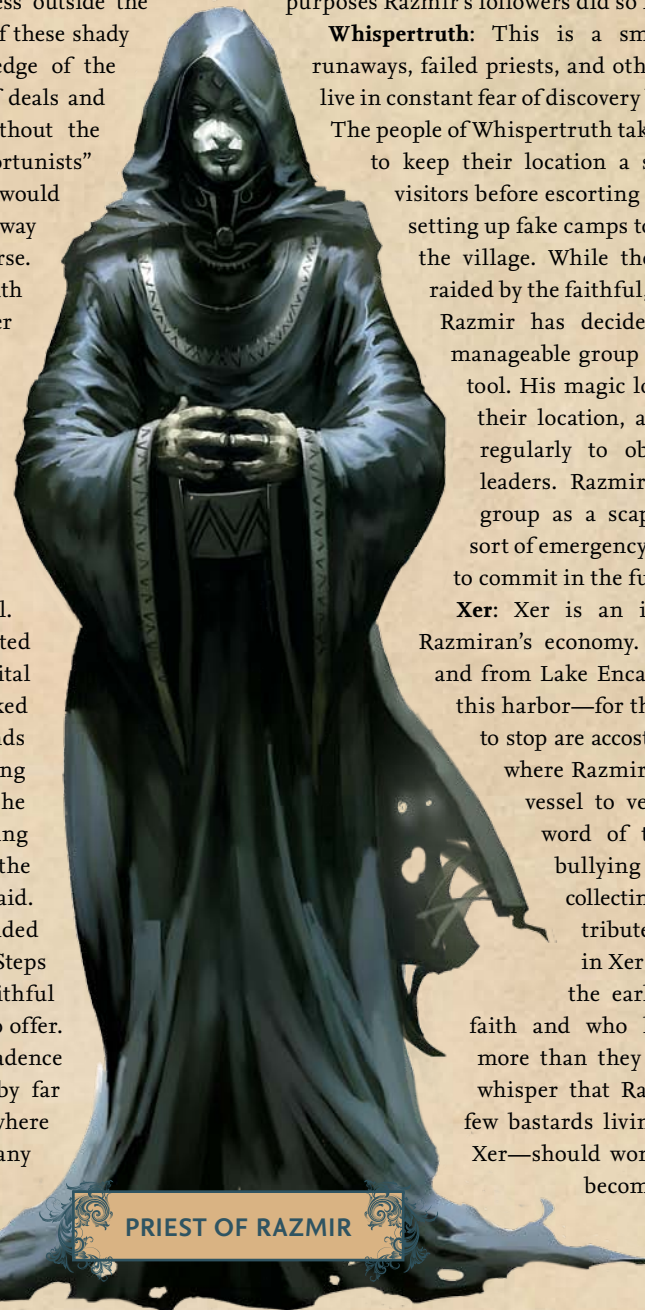
five people are chosen to speak with Razmir. Little do the poor know that those chosen are planted by the faithful, and the entire ceremony is a fraud.

Vergan Forest: Just south of the Exalted Wood lies the Vergan Forest, a haven for outlaws and those seeking to avoid the cruel and fickle hand of Razmir's faith. When Razmir first launched his bid to seize control of the land, many of his followers used the Vergan Forest as cover—a safe place to hide and rest during the campaign. Today, the people of Razmir have little reason to visit these woods. The forest is littered with ruined buildings never built to last, forgotten caches of weapons and supplies, and in more than a few cases pockets of anarchists, troublemakers, and bandits who, ironically, use the woods for the same purposes Razmir's followers did so many years ago.

Whispertruth: This is a small community of runaways, failed priests, and other malcontents who live in constant fear of discovery by Razmir's Visions.

The people of Whispertruth take extreme measures to keep their location a secret, blindfolding visitors before escorting them to the town or setting up fake camps to vex those who seek the village. While they have never been raided by the faithful, this is only because Razmir has decided that this small, manageable group of rebels is a useful tool. His magic long ago determined their location, and he uses scrying regularly to observe the village's leaders. Razmir plans to use this group as a scapegoat for whatever sort of emergency or atrocity he needs to commit in the future.

Xer: Xer is an important port for Razmiran's economy. Those traveling to and from Lake Encarthan must pass by this harbor—for those who choose not to stop are accosted by "faith barges," where Razmir's clergy move from vessel to vessel, spreading the word of the faith (meaning bullying ship captains) and collecting tithes (demanding tribute). There are some in Xer who still remember the early days of Razmir's faith and who know a great deal more than they should. Some even whisper that Razmir might have a few bastards living on the streets of Xer—should word of these children become public, Razmir's reputation would suffer greatly.



PRIEST OF RAZMIR



River Kingdoms

INDEPENDENT REALMS
OF LOW CHARACTER

Alignment: CN

Capital: None

Notable Settlements: Artume

(2,650), Avendale (11,280),
Bacul Gruii (380), Daggermark
(27,460), Deadbridge (4,113), Jovvox (1,450), Liberthane (170),
Gralton (9,200), Lockridge (1,810), Maashinelle (2,977),
Mimere (345), Mivon (10,870), Mormouth (740), Novoboro
(488), Outsea (6,700), Pitax (8,790), Riverton (572), Saad (240),
Sarain (414), Seredain (3,539), Sevenarches (4,340), Sezgin
(688), Solanas (501), Thom (1,036), Tymon (2,564), Wilkesmont
(1,190), Uringen (1,713), Voluse (1,380)

Rulers: Various bandit kings and petty lords

Government: Multiple squabbling kingdoms

Languages: Common, Hallit

Religion: Calistria, Cayden Cailean, Desna, Erastil, Gorum,
Gyronna, Hanspur, Lamashtu, Norgorber



of sin, treachery, and thievery, for the River Kingdoms are where desperate men go to escape their pasts and carve out new lives.

HISTORY

A true history of the River Kingdoms could fill a number of tomes, for the kingdoms that currently thrive or struggle here are but the most recent. Dozens, if not hundreds, of kingdoms have risen and fallen in this region over the past several thousand years—some, like Razmiran, have managed to stabilize and become their own nations, while others have faded forever into obscurity. Yet regardless of each specific kingdom's creed or goal, they all share one rough code of justice called the Six River Freedoms. Not all honor the code, but enough do that it serves as a sort of shorthand for the independence that all people of the River Kingdoms hold dear, the closest thing this region has to a common ground and shared legacy. The six freedoms are summarized below.

Say What You Will, I Live Free: Talk is cheap, and everyone is entitled to speak their own words.

Oathbreakers Die: Those who swear oaths—particularly those of fealty to a River King—and break them can expect any number of painful and lethal fates.

The massive Sellen River basin drains all the eastern lands, carrying waters from the Lake of Mists and Veils north of Brevoy, the massive Lake Encarthan, and lakes and rivers all over Galt, Numeria, and Ustalay down to the Inner Sea. As the tributaries pass through the hundred marshes and forests of the River Kingdoms, they seem to carry an especially heavy freight

Walk Any Road, Float Any River: Freedom to travel is fundamental. No River Kingdom is allowed to bar traffic on a river or a road, save in times of active warfare.

Courts Are for Kings: The law is always malleable. Who you know and who you can count as friends are more important than what the law says, and a lord can change laws in his territory at will.

Slavery Is an Abomination: Slavers may visit the River Kingdoms, but taking or holding slaves there upsets the many people who were once slaves themselves.

You Have What You Hold: Property laws are weak in the River Kingdoms. Taking something openly by force is different from stealing, and those who can't protect their property don't deserve to keep it.

GOVERNMENT

Each of the tiny River Kingdoms follows its own ruler or council, and each possesses its own idiosyncrasies. Most are city-states of a few thousand souls at most. The River Kingdoms are bound together by the River Freedoms and by the Outlaw Council, a group that gathers each year in Daggermark, a town known for its effective assassins' and poisoners' guilds (and thus rarely a target of conquest). At the Outlaw Council, rulers of the region's various holdings gather to argue, fight, and plan how to keep their freedom for another year against the larger forces arrayed against them. The Riverfolk would be offended at the very idea that their lands have a prime city or ruling principality, although if pressed they might confess that Daggermark comes closest. Others might argue that Gralton is the most central city, or Sevenarches the oldest, but Daggermark is the largest and has long served as the seat of the Outlaw Council.

GAZETTEER

Daggermark: With almost 30,000 inhabitants and the deadly guilds that keep bandits and troublemakers at arm's length, Daggermark is large enough to have a substantial amount of crops and livestock, forges turning out arms and armor, and even its own coinage. The city proper has both an inner and outer wall; the inner section is called the Dagger Keep, and is home to the wealthiest and most powerful of the city's captains. The ruler is Martro Livondar, although the dwarven Lord Captain Jallor Clovesh commands half the army, and no one dares ignore the sister guilds of assassins and poisoners. Daggermark fields by far the largest army of the kingdoms, with more than 1,500 veteran foot and cavalry.

Most of all, though, Daggermark attracts applicants to its schools for poisoners and assassins. Those who learn these trades in Daggermark are feared throughout Golarion. The current head of the assassins' guild is Lady Smilos, whose assassinations included the use of magical poisons, curses, and fatal misadventure through monstrous encounters.

Her equal partner in the poisoners' guild is the elven druid and herbalist Tragsshi, a golden-skinned maiden from the east with a lilting voice and strange notions of what constitutes the worship of nature. She is always accompanied by a dozen venomous snakes, which slither beneath her robes disconcertingly.

Gralton: The poor inhabitants of Gralton consist mostly of the old aristocracy of Galt, all exiled or fled from that land's Red Revolution. Many of these ruined nobles cannot accept their exile, and scheme and plot to regain their lands and wealth from the ruins of Galt. Every so often, a powerful noble gathers an expedition or finds the funds to pay adventurers to conduct a rescue or recovery mission. The nobles grow increasingly desperate, which brings both swindlers and false prophets calling, peddling hope or quick fixes. Many of the citizens in town behave quite strangely—some believe that a spirit of vengeance or an avatar of Calistria controls them. Certainly, the priests of Calistria are always present, preaching revenge, even on the steps of the temple of Cayden Cailean.

Lambreth: In the River Kingdoms, some realms are held together by magic or threats. Lambreth is held together by the sheer physical power of Lord Arnefax, an Andoren knight banished for his excesses and crimes against nature. Leading a company of 50 heavy cavalry (unusual in the River Kingdoms, where bandits rarely use heavy armor or heavy horse), he rules from Maashinelle's small citadel and makes frequent nocturnal visits to his borders riding a powerful nightmare. His people are terrified of both his night riders and their shadowy dogs, and perversely proud that Arnefax is powerful enough to keep their lands free and unmolested by raids. The few occasions when Lambreth has lost livestock, the ensuing retaliation usually involved the death of two people for every cow or sheep stolen—often by lynching and burning. Few dare challenge the Andoren's ruthless rule.

Mivon: Mivon began as a refuge for Aldori swordlords fleeing Rostland during the era of Choral the Conqueror. Today, Mivon is home to a thriving industry in eels and fish harvested from the marshy ponds all around the city. It is said that the eels of Mivon often feed on the flesh of men. Certainly, the swordlord Raston Selline, who rules the city under a guise of gentility but with a network of informers second to none, is sometimes seen walking out into the marshes with some petty miscreant or annoying adventurer and returning accompanied only by his faithful guards. "A walk to the fishponds" has a very particular meaning in Mivon.

Pitax: Ruled by the megalomaniacal King Irovetti, Pitax is a place of garish, trashy art created by sculptors and poets tightly controlled by the city's despot. As long as Irovetti's massively bloated ego remains fed, all is well, but those who oppose him in the most trivial details soon learn that he sees himself as an all-conquering god. Underneath his



mania, the small town struggles to survive in the face of hostility from Brevoy and borderland barbarian tribes of Numeria. Stories claim that Irovetti is himself little more than a bastard son of a minor Numerian lord, hounded from the kingdom by ancestral enemies. He leaves the hard fighting to others, and prefers to use bards and insults to tear down his enemies.

Sevenarches: This ancient elven settlement is named for the elegant stone gateways scattered in and around the forest town. Sevenarches is now a human habitation, and has been for thousands of years, since the sect of Oakstewards claimed the land from the elves who failed it. Indeed, the Oakstewards especially forbid elves and other outsiders from visiting, and are quite strict in who and what they allow to approach Sevenarches. Stories claim that the arches each once led to another world, and the elven council of Kyonin hopes to reclaim them and complete or restore the work begun on them long ago. So far, the elves remain unwilling to use force to oust the human presence there, but at some point the idea of war might carry the day, especially as the Oakstewards grow increasingly rigid and intolerant with each passing century.

Tymon: The half-orc champion Ullorth Ungin, one of the most influential members of the Outlaw Council, controls the timeworn city-state of Tymon. Founded by a Taldan gladiator and hero of the Fifth Army of Exploration who mapped the riverways of the unsettled territory centuries ago, Tymon's gladiatorial college and fabled arena enjoy a reputation that stretches into all lands that thrill to the dance of bloodsport. The insane "living god" Razmir hatches plots against Tymon from his expanding homeland to the southwest, increasingly forcing Ullorth Ungin to turn his trained warriors loose not on the arena floor, but upon the field of battle. Fortunately, a large cadre of priests of Gorum assists him in this endeavor. Each year, Ullorth Ungin pleads for "true champions of the Riverfolk" to step forward at the Outlaw Council to help him as well, and so far each year, various lordlings have pledged their support against Razmir, and the independence of the kingdoms has been preserved.

Uringen: Standing near the Embeth Forest, this strange settlement appears and disappears with the mists. Its travelers are distinctive, with black-and-white garments and unsmiling faces, and the alchemical goods sold are always

welcome for their healing and strengthening properties. The people speak a dialect of Skald, and the city itself seems somehow suspended half in and half out of time, perhaps entangled in fey magic or trapped by horological magic.

Other River Kingdoms

Numerous other River Kingdoms exist in this region—brief descriptions of these other kingdoms are listed below.

Artume: Plagued by assassinations and treachery, Artume is a kingdom without a king. Only unexpected luck or the aid of a powerful new patron can save this realm from becoming the River Kingdoms' most recent failure.

Cordelon: Once used by the elves as a staging ground for their return to Golarion after their self-imposed exile preceding Earthfall, this small kingdom has been claimed by a loose-knit tribe of humans.

Heibarr: Disputes over taxation and the destructive influence of the cult of Gyronna reduced Heibarr to its current status—a ruin haunted at night by ghosts.

Hymbria: This woodland kingdom was established by Kyonin as a base of operations for elven interests in the River Kingdoms.

Liberthane: A glimmer of hope and idealism in the cutthroat milieu of the River Kingdoms, Liberthane is ruled by an old revolutionary who hopes, one day, to save his homeland of Galt.

Loric Fells: Currently unsettled, the wildlands of Loric Fells are a gloomy, troll-haunted wilderness of dense forests and rocky canyons.

Mosswater: Established by an exiled merchant from Ustalav and decorated with strange luminescent paints and dyes, Mosswater now lies abandoned thanks to the rampaging of a family of merrows (aquatic ogres).

Nystra: Once a well-established producer of silk from rare silkworms, the kingdom of Nystra now stands eerily empty after a mysterious night of savage ruin brought down by some unknown, shadowy force.

Outsea: Perhaps the most unusual kingdom in the region, Outsea is as large below the waterline as it is above, and is populated by humans above and merfolk and sahuagin below in the briny waters magically transported here from the sea.

Protectorate of the Black Marquis: This realm is ruled by a single despot guided by the principle of “shared” wealth—shared in that any who wish to do business here must share their wealth with the Black Marquis, paying protection money for the privilege.

Riverton: The people of Riverton follow the teachings of Hanspur the Water Rat with a ferocious tenacity.

Scrawny Crossing: All that remains of this realm is an abandoned ferry landing known as

Scrawny Crossing—the site is now the lair of an unseen but sinister force.

The Stolen Lands: This large swath of land along the northeastern border serves as a buffer between Brevoy and the River Kingdoms—traditionally the haunt of bandits and monstrous humanoids, the Stolen Lands are regarded as “stolen” by all nations along its border, even though none have ever been able to keep these realms under their control for long.

Touvette: Touvette's current ruler served the previous king as general. Today, Touvette is a realm where religions are not tolerated and all young men of age are required to serve in the kingdom's growing army.



KING IROVETTI
OF PITAX



Sargava

THE LOST COLONY



Alignment: N

Capital: Eleder (8,900)

Notable Settlements:

Crown's End (812), Fort

Bandu (198), Freehold (1,330), Kalabuto (11,340), Port

Freedom (2,950), Stark Point (490)

Ruler: Baron Utilinus, Grand Custodian of Sargava

Government: Colonial barony ruled as independent kingdom

Languages: Common, Polyglot

Religion: Abadar, Gozreh, Iomedae, Shelyn

Sargava is a land being pulled apart at its seams by multiple agendas. As Sargava's ruler, Baron Utilinus has come to discover that none of these agendas are his own.

HISTORY

The lush plains of Sargava carve a swath of civilization out of the western coast of the dense jungles of the Mwangi Expanse. Once dominated by Mwangi tribesmen, Sargava was first settled by Chelish colonials in 4138 AR, under the ambitious whims of the mad prince Haliad I. A jewel of the empire, distant Sargava stood as a symbol of Chelixa's sheer might at the height of its power.

With the sudden death of the god Aroden, Chelixa collapsed into civil war and Sargava was isolated from the empire, no longer cut off by just its distance, but also by the addition of the newly formed perpetual hurricane, the Eye of Abendego. Desperate to remain in the empire's favor rather than be left adrift, Sargava's appointed ruler, Baron Grallus, gathered much of the colony's treasury. He then sent it in several shipments, sailing wide around the Eye and then north to Chelixa to finance House Davian, a leading contender in the war, hoping to secure Davian's bid for the fallen throne. Grallus, however, backed the wrong house—as the war progressed, the House of Thrune and its allies ripped apart House Davian in the Battle of a Hundred Kings near Corentyn.

Once word of House Thrune's ascension reached Sargava, Baron Grallus, with the support of his lesser earls, turned to the notorious Free Captains of the Shackles for help, knowing that the colony was in danger. And in fact, once Thrune firmly secured its hold over Chelixa and the throne, Her Majestrix Queen Abrogail I turned her attention to her more distant colonies, dispatching a flotilla of Chelish galleons to Sargava, loaded with diabolic missionaries and sadistic governors loyal to the House of Thrune's new

regime. For the second time in its history, Sargava faced resettlement. As soon as Thrune's imperial fleet sailed into Desperation Bay and had Sargava's shores in sight, however, the Free Captains struck a decisive blow that would become the colony's defining moment. Flying their infamous black flags, the Free Captains ambushed the Chelish fleet and demonstrated their naval supremacy. Chelixa's defeat was total, their galleons wrecked on desolate shores or left resting on the ocean floor, but the price for the Free Captains' cooperation was far from cheap. Baron Grallus promised Port Peril not only Sargava's remaining coffers, but a significant portion of its future bounty as well. As such, in exchange for the continued protection of the Free Captains, Sargava pays a continual if not exhaustive flow of tribute to the pirates. Rarely a day goes by that the steep price of Sargava's autonomy is not called into question, yet the prevailing view remains that no cost is too high.

In the meantime, Sargava rots from within. With empty coffers and no support from the motherland, the colonists' ability to control the native population continues to degrade. With the death of Aroden and the loss of the powers he granted the colonial clerics, the Mwangi tribesmen have stepped up their efforts to reclaim their ancient lands. The Sargavan military has so far managed to suppress the native revolts, but each time the threat grows a little greater.

GOVERNMENT

Today, Baron Utilinus rules Sargava as an independent nation by default, employing the faux-modest title of Grand Custodian. Unfortunately for him, between the demands of the Free Captains and the uprisings in Kalabuto, he finds his nation cracking at the edges. Despite his able efforts, it is unclear how long he can continue to hold Sargava together.

In between reinforcing national defenses, the baron institutes a number of festivals and events designed to bolster citizen morale and the nation's coffers. Foremost among these events is the Sargava Chalice—one of Garund's longest-running and most prestigious sporting events. A marathon-like competition, this footrace spans multiple days, in which competitors traverse dense jungles and scramble over mountain passes. The race is dangerous, and death is not unheard of, but many see having their names engraved on the coveted chalice that commemorates the victors as a form of immortality. Past competitors include adventurers from across the globe, from vainglorious Pathfinders to—in one noteworthy case—a deposed monarch.

GAZETTEER

Barkskin Lake: Adventurers traveling to Sargava often purchase extra canteens and head into the west Bandu Hills searching for fabled Barkskin Lake. At the right time each year, minerals leaching out of deposits under the streams that feed the lake are said to combine in certain remote pools along the shores to create a naturally occurring magical liquid that grants those who drink it flesh that looks and feels like thick tree bark for a few minutes after consumption (treat as *potions of barkskin* +2). Those who seek the lake navigate by following sightings of wood-skinned monkeys and parrots, but they soon encounter the more dangerous predators that also make yearly pilgrimages to the lake.

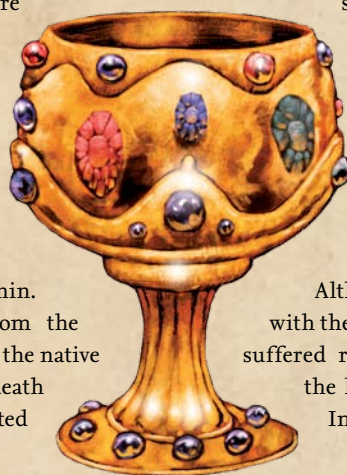
Crown's End: After the original landing at the harbor in what is now Eleder, a group of Chelish colonials split off and settled on a high bluff overlooking the northern part of Desperation Bay. Although they established friendly relations with the nearby Ijo, a tribe of Bonuwat humans, they suffered regular attacks from jungle predators and the less amiable natives from the Kaava Lands.

In time, Crown's End became the port of choice for smugglers, slavers, and pirate ships, and more respectable merchant ships simply stopped visiting—or professed as much to the customs officials in Eleder. Today, Crown's

End is a rough-and-tumble town of just over 800 inhabitants, most of whom are criminals or retired pirates. The town is ruled by former slaver Ilina "Icehand" Ysande, who maintains some semblance of order and pays Crown's End's taxes to Eleder on time and without complaint. Icehand's policy toward the rest of Sargava is for Crown's End citizens to take advantage of any opportunity that arises, but to otherwise appear to be contributing members of colonial society—and she deals harshly with citizens who draw too much attention to the port's robust smuggling trade.

Eleder: Sargava's capital, Eleder, is starting to show the brunt of its tribute obligations. Once host to the opulent Grallus Ball, a lack of funds has placed a stranglehold on the city's excesses. On the other hand, Eleder's extensive dockworks are maintained as a top priority, as both merchants and Free Captains alike dock their vessels here for repair by some of the best shipwrights in Garund.

Fort Bandu: Created to protect miners in the Bandu Hills from hostile Mwangi, Fort Bandu has suffered in the last hundred years—much to the consternation of its half-elf commander, Praetor Sylien. Though the aging Sylien rarely ventures outside anymore, he is a skilled commander of his 150-soldier legion, and it is largely thanks to him that



SARGAVA CHALICE



miners and explorers are able to operate in the area at all. Fort Bandu nevertheless still has tremendous difficulties with local tribes, particularly the Bandu, who take every opportunity to attack the work crews Sylien has sent to build a bridge over the River of Tears.

Freehold: Freehold started as a cattle ranch in central Sargava, a vacation estate for one of the colony's earliest Grand Praetors, Olgran Macini. The Macinis have expanded and developed their family holdings to the extent that the original ranch is now the center of a small town consisting of Olgran's descendants and the native Mwangi who help them run the spacious ranch in exchange for homes and a share of the ranch's profits. Part of why Freehold has thrived is the fact that Olgran was progressive for his generation; he always treated the Mwangi as equals—paying them the same wage he paid his Chelish ranch hands—and insisted his children do the same. Freehold is still run according to this philosophy by Olgran's great-great-granddaughter, Mindra, though her cousin Salgarth would prefer to see the ranch run more like businesses in Eleder or Kalabuto, and is trying to maneuver Mindra into giving him control of Freehold.

Kalabuto: A ancient, crumbling city built in the precolonial era, Kalabuto is populated by a huge community of Mwangi tribesmen and governed by a small contingent of Sargavan colonialists. These are troubled times for Kalabuto. The city is under invisible siege by its eastern neighbor, Mzali, which has sacked Kalabuto three times within the span of the last few years alone. Observers agree it is only a matter of time before Kalabuto's lower classes join with their Mzali brethren and support the attacks, instead of dying in defense of the city for their colonial masters.

Lake of Vanished Armies: Although this long and deep lake technically lies just outside of Sargava's southern border, it enjoys a fair bit of notoriety in the colony. When the colonists first attempted to travel up the Korir River, they initially found this lake to be a natural wonder—beautiful scenery combined with a perfect place to settle. Yet on the seventh night, something emerged from the waters of the lake and snatched the entire army away, leaving behind empty tents and discarded gear. Two more armies met this mysterious fate before the colonists turned their attentions northward. The mystery of what befell the three vanished

armies has never been explained—in theory, what caused the vanishing could still dwell in the deep lake to this day.

Mines of Deeptreasure: The Deeptreasure Mining Company consistently mines the largest, most beautiful gems sold in the Eleder markets. Their secret is a platoon of allied xorns who glide through the Bandu Hills searching out the tastiest morsels, then spitting them back up at Deeptreasure headquarters in a hidden compound just inside the hills themselves. The mine bosses promise the xorns a way home to the Plane of Earth if they bring back more gems than they eat. The exact price, however, always remains tantalizingly vague.

Port Freedom: Eleder may be the only deepwater port in Sargava capable of receiving the massive ships required to circumnavigate the Eye of Abendego, but that doesn't mean it's the only port in the nation. Situated farther south, along the banks of the Korir River delta, Port Freedom may not be able to accommodate oceangoing vessels due to its extensive maze of sandbars, but neither can cargos of any significant size make their way upriver without enlisting the services of its rivermen and bargemasters. Though a few brave captains risk running the marshes without help, the people of Port Freedom have a chokehold on river trade with Kalabuto—and they aren't afraid to protect that arrangement with violence when necessary. While Port Freedom is technically ruled by the Grand Custodian, it also has its own local governors: a council of representatives from the various shipping concerns who do business along the river. It's an open secret that the council is controlled by the Rivermen's Guild.

Smuggler's Shiv: Although this island is relatively small, its notoriety along the southern coast of Desperation Bay is legendary. So named not only because of the knifelike reach of its northern half, but also for the treacherous currents and razor-sharp reefs that surround its shores, the island has claimed countless vessels eager to avoid Eleder's navy. Rumor holds that cannibals, ghosts, and worse dwell on the isle—certainly strange glowing forms have been sighted on its shores by ships that drifted too close to the island at night.

Stark Point: Consisting of a large inn, stable, and general store surrounded by a mud-brick wall, Stark Point is a gathering point for explorers, adventurers, and soldiers from Fort Bandu. Stark Point was originally meant to be a mining community overseen by the church of Aroden, but with Aroden's death, the overly large cathedral closed its doors to the public. Soon thereafter, the mines played out, and bereft of spiritual guidance and a ready source of income, most of the locals moved to Kalabuto. Today,

the village has little more to offer than a trading post. The temple of Aroden still looms starkly on a hill overlooking the river and village, but no one goes there anymore—although some visitors claim to have seen periodic lights and heard strange sounds of chanting coming from deep within the boarded-up building.

Stasis Fields: Deep beneath the Bandu Hills spreads a frozen penal colony populated by ancient prisoners of war, eternally bound within imprisoning spells. Each prisoner floats within the center of a separate cavern of the massive subterranean complex, slowly turning in space to match Golarion's field of rotation. It is said that the frozen prisoners still wear the distinctive turquoise scale armor and shining blades of their now-forgotten military units. Those who brave the prison's deadly wards can attempt to steal the soldiers' ancient equipment or discover what might happen should a prisoner reawaken.



SARGAVAN
PATHFINDER



The Shackles

TREACHEROUS PIRATE ISLES



Alignment: CN

Capital: Port Peril (43,270)

Notable Settlements:

Drenchport (9,690),

Hell Harbor (9,230), Neruma (5,230), Ollo (7,340), Quent (12,560), Slipcove (1,400)

Ruler: Captain Kerdak Bonefist, the Hurricane King

Government: A council of pirate lords known as the Free Captains

Languages: Common, Polyglot

Religion: Besmara, Calistria, Cayden Cailean, Gozreh, Norgorber, Pharasma

however, the pirate lords eventually banded together to form a single, unified pirate fleet. In the spring of 4674 AR, the Free Captains of the Shackles, under the banner of their newly elected Hurricane King, began to ravage merchant shipping far to the north, near the Arch of Aroden.

HISTORY

The pirate lords of the Shackles sail from an assortment of outlaw ports, hiding their illicit activities behind the cover of the ravenous Eye of Abendego. Forgotten ruins of the ancient civilization of Ghol-Gan dot the island chain and treacherous coastline, their crumbling stone walls carved with horrible depictions of cannibalism and blood sacrifice. So disturbing are these images that when Chelish explorers discovered these ruins 600 years ago, they marked the region as cursed and haunted on their maps and continued south to found the colony of Sargava.

Before long, raiders began to prey upon the lucrative trade between Sargava and Chelias, using the countless natural harbors among these islands to hide from Chelish warships. These pirate havens soon grew into small communities that eventually even accepted legitimate merchants and businesses.

Although scholars argue to this day about possible connections between Aroden's death a century ago and the powerful storms that pummel the Inner Sea region, none can deny the impact these storms have had on the region's inhabitants. The greatest of these storms was the Eye of Abendego, which formed just north of the Shackles. This gigantic, permanent hurricane forever changed the shipping lanes in the region. Most nations abandoned the hope of continuing trade with Sargava, and the buccaneers of the Shackles soon fell to infighting over quickly dwindling resources. Rather than succumb to complete dissolution,

Over the past 30 years, the corsairs of the Shackles have enjoyed unprecedented success. All of the Free Captains are skilled at skirting the dangerous fringes of the Eye of Abendego, giving them an easy escape route from less experienced pilots. Foreign powers continue to launch attempts to suppress the pirates of the Shackles, but few meet with any success. The Shackles themselves have endured two major invasions—once by Cheliox and once by Rahadoum—but in both cases the invaders met with disaster, losing most of their fleets to the merciless winds and treacherous currents of the Eye.

The Shackles today consist of a motley collection of bandit and slave ports, where freebooters find safe harbor and trade their ill-gotten plunder with unscrupulous merchants. Their populace is mostly runaway criminals, escaped slaves, and buyers seeking proscribed goods such as drugs, poisons, and other disreputable wares. A powerful Free Captain rules each port, divvying the loot from recent raids and dispensing pirate justice as needed.

GOVERNMENT

The overlord of the Shackles is the Hurricane King Kerdak Bonefist, captain of the man-o'-war *Filthy Lucre*, flagship of the Shackles fleet and one of the few ships in the Inner Sea region to be fully outfitted with Alkenstar cannons. Captain Bonefist's obsession with firearms extends to his personal weaponry—he carries a magic pistol and claims to have shot dead no fewer than a hundred scoundrels, lawmen, and landlubbers since he procured the valuable weapon. He heads a council of pirate lords, each of whom commands his or her own fleet of ships and rules one of the Shackles's numerous islands, ports, or anchorages. While Bonefist is king by virtue of his possession of Port Peril and command of the strongest fleet in the Shackles, in reality he reigns at the sufferance of the council's most powerful lords. Tessa Fairwind, Mistress of Quent and captain of the sloop-of-war *Luck of the Draw*, is a popular figure throughout the Shackles. Rumor has it that Lady Tessa is next in line for the Hurricane Crown, either by acclaim or by force. The mysterious druid-captain known as the Master of the Gales rules Drenchport and commands the xebec *Kraken*, accompanied by his giant squid companion. Avimar Sorrinash, cruel captain of the brig *Blood Moon*, is lord of Ollo. When the *Blood Moon* returns fresh from a successful foray on the high seas, Sorrinash and his werewolf crew often roam Shark Island in orgiastic hunts of celebratory destruction. The disgraced Chelish admiral Arronax Endymion is of lesser importance, but still a force to be reckoned with on the council. He leads a squadron of Chelish mutineers called the Devils' Own from his flagship, the former imperial frigate *Tyrannous*.

Most Free Captains command only a single ship or small flotilla, and are beholden to one of the more powerful pirate lords who control the various ports and

islands of the Shackles. These lesser captains have the opportunity to increase their station by entering the Free Captain's Regatta, a grueling annual race among the most treacherous sandbars and reefs at the fringes of the Eye of Abendego. Entrants must be captains of their own ships and pay a purse fee of 500 gold pieces. The course changes every year, and many who enter the contest never return to port, but the rewards ensure a large number of competitors every year—the winner receives the total purse from all entrants, and is awarded a seat on the Pirate Council, as well as lordship of a small island or anchorage. In recent years, the Regatta has not resulted in any changes in the Pirate Council's membership, as the Master of the Gales has won the last 5 years in a row.

The majority of those who dwell in the Shackles are human, although half-orcs and half-elves are more common than elsewhere. Tengus dwell in large numbers in the region, with many of the cities having sizable tengu districts known as rookeries—having a tengu “mascot” on board is thought by many pirates to bring good luck, due to a popular local superstition that tengus “soak up” bad luck. In the wilder regions of the isles, goblins inhabit many of the scattered ruins of the Shackles, as do the race of savage cannibalistic degenerates called kuru, humans believed to be possessed by the spirits of the ruins' original inhabitants. Lizardfolk raiders also make occasional sorties from the swamps of the Sodden Lands to the north. The waters of the Shackles are home to sharks, enormous cephalopods, and scattered communities of locathahs. Sahuagin villages are present near the western isles, particularly around Ollo, while water nagas dwell on the mainland's southern coast. Farther west, feared dragon turtles prey upon ships making the dangerous passage around the Eye of Abendego.

The Shackles have only one true ally—the former Chelish colony of Sargava. In exchange for defending the colony from Cheliox, the Free Captains receive regular tribute of trade goods, including slaves, from the baron of Sargava. Elsewhere, the marauders of the Shackles are feared and hated, particularly by Cheliox and Rahadoum, who bear the brunt of the Free Captains' depredations, as do the wealth-laden ships of the Aspis Consortium out of Bloodcove.

A rumor currently making its rounds suggests that one of the Free Captains has offered to safely pilot a Chelish fleet to the Shackles in exchange for immunity for past crimes. Whether this is true or just a ruse to discredit one of the lords of the council, it's a well-known fact that Cheliox would like nothing more than to see the pirate confederacy eradicated.

GAZETTEER

Cannibal Isles: Beyond Shark Island, the westernmost islets of the Shackles are uninhabited by any freebooter or pirate lord. Known as the Cannibal Isles, this scattering of tiny atolls contains numerous ruins of Ghol-Gan, now



populated by degenerate kuru cannibals. By day, the islands seem peaceful enough, but at night, torchlit processions flicker through the jungle trees, and a horrible, guttural chanting can be heard rising into the night sky. Ignorant captains who drop anchor in the atolls' peaceful lagoons find their ships overwhelmed during the night, their crews carried off to some unknown and terrible fate. A legless old beggar in Quent named Strong-Arm Hix claims to be the last survivor of the crew of the *Spindrifft Reaver*, which landed on the Cannibal Isles 50 years ago. According to Hix, the kuru took the crew to a flooded temple in an isolated lagoon, where his shipmates were eaten alive as sacrifices to a god the kuru called "The Blood Queen." Hix himself managed to escape in one of the kuru's dugout canoes, but not before the cannibals took both of his legs.

Drenchport: The dour city of Drenchport huddles on Tempest Cay. Its storm-lashed buildings are built of waterlogged driftwood and flotsam from wrecked ships. An infamous tavern called the Drowned Dwarf stands at Drenchport's edge and is known as much for its remarkably high murder rate as for its cheap but strangely delicious black kelp beer.

Hell Harbor: Numerous imps roost on the rooftops of this port, giving the anchorage its name. Hell Harbor is famous as the home of the Shackles' sole opera house, the Three-Horned Hall, which hosts numerous productions of High Chelish Opera in the original Azlanti. Arronax Endymion, lord of Hell Harbor, is well known as an aficionado of traditional Chelish opera (rather than the "new" opera currently popular in Cheliox), and those seeking to curry favor with him are often found filling the seats. Ironically, ethnic Chelaxians are not welcome in Hell Harbor, as Arronax fears retribution from his homeland. The disgraced admiral has even recently introduced a program to exterminate the imps in the skies above Hell Harbor, lest any of the infernal pests be spying on behalf of Cheliox.

Neruma: This trading enclave on the shores of the Terwa River is one of the few mainland settlements in the Shackles. Neruma deals in the shipment of artifacts and slaves from the Mwangi Expanse and the Sudden Lands, providing an extra source of income for the Pirate Council. Unknowingly built on traditional lizardfolk breeding grounds, Neruma has come under repeated attack recently from lizardfolk raiders from the north intent on reclaiming their lost territory.

Olo: The people of the wretched port of Olo are sullen and fearful, for the sahuagin that live just off Shark Island regularly raid the town for food and plunder with the permission of the community's unscrupulous lord.

Port Peril: The Shackles's largest port, Port Peril is located on the mainland overlooking Jeopardy Bay. Fort Hazard, the fortress retreat of the Hurricane King, dominates the walled city and its deepwater harbor from the bluffs above the city. The twisting streets of Port Peril are lined with taverns, brothels, gambling halls, and other vice dens. Its teeming market squares do a brisk trade in all manner of stolen goods and contraband, such as Tian silks, Qadiran spices, Nidalese poisons, and Mwangi relics. Untold riches from years of plunder and tribute are said to be hidden away in the sea caves beneath the city.

Quent: The lively city of Quent is perhaps the most open port of the Pirate Isles, and the sacred prostitutes of Calistria at the House of Stolen Kisses are known as the best information brokers in the Shackles for those seeking gossip, blackmail, or revenge.

Slipcove: This small port is home to the largest population of halflings in the Shackles, thanks to the work of Jolis Raffles, lord of Bag Island and captain of the former Chelish slave galley *Chains of Freedom*, crewed entirely by freed halfling slaves. A former galley slave himself, Raffles preys only on Chelish slave ships, rescuing their living cargoes and offering them new lives in the free ports of the Shackles. For all the nobility of his cause, however, rumors abound that Raffles makes a tidy profit reselling those slaves who don't wish to join his crew or settle on his island.

Temple of the Ravenous Moon: High in the peaks of the Terwa Uplands stands an ancient ziggurat of bone-white stone, marbled with veins of blood red. The disturbing carvings on the ziggurat's walls give the edifice its name, with graphic depictions of mass blood sacrifices atop the temple beneath a swollen moon with a horribly grinning, fang-filled maw. Even the savage kuru tribes give the temple a wide berth, leading to no end of speculation about what might lie within. The Hurricane King has sent two expeditions to explore the ruined ziggurat and recover any secrets that might be left inside, but none have returned. Whatever their fate, rumor has it that the Pathfinder Society lodge in Nantambu is readying its own mission to survey the temple.

Raptor Island: West of Shark Island lies notorious Raptor Island, a jungle-covered uninhabited land ruled by ravenous packs of deinonychuses. Normally overwhelmed in size by other dinosaurs, on Raptor Island, the deinonychuses are the largest predator. Pirate lords are fond of stranding malcontents upon the shores of Raptor Island—a fate most crews consider to be as harrowing as keelhauling. Rumors of surviving bands of exiles on the isle do little to lessen these fears.

The Slithering Coast: The southern coast of the mainland Shackles is known as the Slithering Coast for the large populations of venomous sea snakes and territorial water nagas that lair in the many rocky inlets along the coastline. While the sea snakes are rarely a danger to humanoids, enterprising alchemists and assassins regularly venture to the Slithering Coast to harvest the snakes' venom. The water nagas, on the other hand, pose a much greater danger, as they are unafraid to attack and kill anyone trespassing near their lairs. The nagas are storehouses of local information, however, and a few Free Captains are known to cultivate friendly relationships with these reclusive beings in the hope of gleaned useful knowledge that might set them above their peers.



CAPTAIN KERDAK
BONEFIST