

# Talislanta Westernlands

utterly unauthorised version

by  
Aaron Sell

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## **Introduction**

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## Timeline

- 1 The beginning of “The New Age” is marked by the founding of the city state of Phaedra on what is now Aamahd and Zanth.
- 28 Several Ranger families meet with Zandu and decide to make a concerted effort to take seats on the Phaedran Council. They succeed in taking 6 of the 7 seats.
- 34 Phaedran Land Tax imposed on farming communities, mostly in the east. Twenty percent of all food has to be given to the government, who sell it to merchants, rangers, and city-dwellers undercutting farmers’ prices.
- 35 Cult of Eye first appears and confiscates land tax revenue and grain caravan. They set camp outside of Badijan and retake the majority of the Phaedran Council after a fight with many ranger families including several of Zandu’s men. The Land Tax, while still law, was never again enforced.
- 38 Starving rangers from western Phaedra raid farms. The Cult of the Eye fights with them sporadically.
- 39 Zandu imprisoned after killing a fellow councilmember. Riots break out in Badijan and Zandu is freed. Soliman III pacifies the mob by allowing them to vote in the next two Councilmen.
- 44 Zandu’s Law passed without his support, outlawing iron weapons and armor.
- 68 Black Moon Invasion by the Jhangaran. The Cult of the Eye makes a last stand at Undurin and is rescued by western Ranger families.
- 71 Soliman III, ruler of Phaedra, dies of old age. The magician Damon decrees that Phaedra must mourn his death for twenty years – suspending voting in the mean time.
- 77 Phaedrans annex territories occupied by the Aeriad, who flee to the forests of Vardune.
- 91 End of the twenty years’ mourning in Phaedra. Damon decrees a twenty year period of celebration to follow and attempts to suspend voting again, but is clapped in irons and branded a lunatic. Cultists of the Eye and Paradoxists again vie for power, but the sorcerer Kabros is chosen to rule. Privately, he tells friends that the city state of Phaedra is on the verge of collapse.
- 100 Religious uprisings rock the capitol of Phaedra on the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary. The sorcerer Kabros resigns as ruler. In a stirring speech to his supporters (primarily magicians, wizards, and other sorcerers) Kabros advises them to consider

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- “an exit, and a hasty one at that.” By the following morning, he is sipping nectar on the Isle of Thaecia. Fearing for their lives, his advisors disguise Arkonitus the Fifth as Kabros, successfully maintaining this ruse for over eleven years.
- 111 Kabros’ advisors, their trickery finally uncovered, are forced to flee for their lives. The Cultists of the Eye seize control of the state, ordering dissidents to be incarcerated in the wilderness penal colony of Gao-Din. Beginning of the Cult Wars with the Paradoxists
- 133 The penal colony of Gao is abandoned by the Phaedrans.
- 146 Exiled Phaedran spell casters establish the free state of Cymril.
- 337 Aalushra leads several hundred Aamanian women out of Aaman. Though Aamanian women were prone to flight this was the first large scale systematic sojourn.
- 338 Knights of Retribution commissioned to chase them.
- 366 Thousands die in a bloody sea battle waged by opposing cult forces for control of the Phaedran Gulf. Hereafter, the gulf is known as the Sea of Sorrow.
- 442 Paradoxists on the verge of victory until Aamentag leads a prisoner rebellion out of Zandre. Paradoxist forces retreat and the Danuvian, Maruken and Phandre forces are decimated.
- 443 The last of the Danuvians, Maruken and Phandre flee east to join their brethren.
- 480 Independent city states of Danuvia, Maruk and Hadj are built by Phaedran exiles.
- 511 Exhausted after four hundred years of continuous warfare, the Orthodoxist and Paradoxist cults declare a truce. After a brief council, they agree to divide the old Phaedran territories into two separate nations: Zandu, to the west, becomes home of the Paradoxists. Aaman, to the east, is occupied by the Orthodoxists. Construction is begun on the Great Barrier Wall
- 518 The Great Barrier Wall is completed.



# Chapter One: The Rebirth of Civilization. The History of Western Lands

Excerpt from Western History by Jaladi Mascal, Cymrilian Historian

*Modern civilization was conceived and born in the western lands of Talislanta, and, if history is truly our guide, it will most likely be killed there as well. To those who know nothing of their origins, the Paradoxists and Orthodoxists who spawned from the Great Phaedran Empire seem like feuding children, born from affluent parents, who struggle with full stomachs for the last morsels of a feast. What could drive a people living in such abundance to prey on one another for so long a time? The only answer appears to be that they fight and die for ideas. To the uneducated the notion of killing and dying for so ephemeral a thing as an idea must seem monstrous and inhumane. But as historians have always known, ideas have done more for history than any man – and those incorporeal infectious beauties are more valuable than the individuals they possess. Ideas, unlike nations or the men that populate them, can live forever.*

Excerpt from Lee'Ta Chozmides, Aeriad Historian and mother of one:

*To the astute historian done is the lunacy of the name “Cult Wars” fully appreciated. The Phaedran Civil War was sparked, as are almost all conflicts, by disputes over land, food and women, and from that point on fueled by revenge. The Cults simply scrambled for power and wealth like a thief in a burning building, ignoring the falling walls around them.*

## I. The Forgotten Age

Before the Great Disaster the continent of Talislanta was home to numerous human-like Wildfolk that were largely subjugated by the reptilian “first folk”. Neither group, most agree, had any advanced knowledge of agriculture, engineering or magic. The history of this time is all but completely lost, as the Wildfolk kept no recorded history and have since evolved into the many Submen races each of which maintains largely implausible and contradictory accounts of their origin. As such all scholarly works on the Forgotten Age must be treated with skepticism and the motives of the author highly scrutinized.

The origin of the Archaen people, the ancestor to the modern races of Men, is believed to begin with the discovery of an ancient artifact called the Archaen Orb, an object described by many to be little more than a hand-sized glistening egg. This orb, it is widely believed, allowed the Wildfolk who discovered it to first perform magic. This new found power in their hands, the Archaens – as the discoverers of the orb began to call themselves – united with the Wildfolk and drove the oppressive “first folk” into extinction. After the victory the Wildfolk and Archaens began to feud, each finding the others habits distasteful. War broke over the continent as the Archaens expanded.

During this time the Archaens founded their first two cities upon the ground: Phandril and the Lost City of Arcanopolis.

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## **The Lost City of Arcanopolis**

The first city of the Archaens was believed to be founded in what is now the nation of Aaman. This is based largely on evidence from an excerpt from Koraq's Theory of Magic and Anti-Magic which states that many of the tenets of sorcery were discovered, "In the first city, founded between the jungles and the western coast." The jungles are presumably modern Jhangara and Mog, though recent theories suggest that the Great Disaster may have altered water levels both there and in the Westernlands making any attempt to isolate the location of the city from this excerpt highly suspect. Further frustrating historians and explorers is the fact that recent copies of Koraq's book "liberated" from Phaedran tombs along the Sascasm river read, "In the *sacred* city" rather than "first" city. The religion of early Archaens, if they indeed had one, is almost entirely unknown, and there has hitherto been no mention of a sacred city.

No one has found the so called "Lost City," but there are numerous theories about where it may be located. The Cymrilians claim the city was razed by the Drakken before the Archaen Age and destroyed entirely. Phantasian pilots claim to have seen what appears to be the wreckage of a city partially submerged in what is now called the Sea of Sorrow; though numerous diving teams have found nothing.

If anyone was to find the city and any of its contents were intact they could expect even the most simple of artifacts to sell for 1,000 gold lumens. The location of the city itself would be priceless to Yitek tomb-robbers, Djaffir merchants, Cymrilian explorers, Sindaran collectors and numerous others. Magical artifacts collected from the city should be kept from sight and whispered about softly, as there are few magicians who wouldn't consider killing an explorer to get them. Furthermore, given the effect the Great Disaster is known to have had on Archaen enchantments one should be careful wielding any Archaen magical item. No one knows what it might do.

## **Theory of Submersion**

A mated pair of geomancers - Mortious and Zargo Dalee - have recently claimed that much of the Westernlands was underwater during the Forgotten Age. Areas such as the Zandir Moor, the lowlands of Aaman about Andurin, Aabaal and the grasslands about the Monastic Hills were claimed to be submerged and uninhabited. Evidence for the theory rests on geological gradations found in copper mines clustered about the Monastic Hills and copper ore mines east of Zantium. Skeletal remains of bog devils in the Monastic Hills have also lent credence to the theory, though skeptics point out that bog devils can survive quite well on dry land - though they prefer the water.

The theory is still controversial and widely unaccepted, but it has spurred some interesting debates at the Lyceum Arcanum in Cymril. If the theory is true, it is likely that the greatest peaks of the Westernlands may have been islands at that time, full of strange flora and fauna. Expeditions would have to be taken to the peaks near Zantium and Arat to test the theory and are soon to be underway. The location of the Lost City also will depend on the location of the coastline during the Forgotten Age. When Mortious Dalee was asked by the Arcanum Society in Cymril what he would make of Koraq's statement of the second city being between the western coast and the jungles he flippantly remarked, "West is a relative term that requires we all agree on where north is. What if the Archaen map placed the Dark Coast on the north and the Northernlands on the south." If that

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were the case, then explorers should look for the Lost City somewhere in the eastern jungles of Chana. Given the temperament of the Chanan warriors and witches, no one has attempted such an expedition.

## **II. The Archaen Age**

The Archaen Cabal, a group of seven powerful magicians including the master illusionist Cascal and the sorcerer Koraq, negotiated a truce between the descendents of the Wildfolk – known as Submen – and the Archaen races. The Submen were granted dominion over the lands of Talislanta and the Archaens would take to the skies, living in fabulous floating sky-cities and sailing between them on majestic windships.

The Archaen Age was the golden era for the races of Men. Disease was virtually abolished in the sky-cities, control of the weather was mastered, magical inquiry and enchanting of all kinds flourished providing the citizenry with abundant food, water, protection and entertainment. The magical skills of the Archaens have never been duplicated by the modern races.

### **The Sky-City of Pompados**

Modern historians have reached a tentative consensus that the Archaen sky-city of Pompados, known to be near the lost city of Phandril during the Great Disaster, spent some time over the forests and lowlands of what is now Aaman during the Archaen Age. Detractors argue that Pompados was tethered to the ground near modern day Dracarta though they are in the minority.

Pompados was well known for their “neomancers” who analyzed and altered the basic recipes of life to produce and breed new forms – “neomorphs.” Given the complexity of life and the complicated nature of development these attempts were rarely successful. As Kabros, the third Emperor of Phaedra, put it after studying neomorphy as a young man:

*“Crafting a sword is easy - you simply fashion it to perform its function. Building a new living creature is infinitely harder. One cannot just piece together a functional neomorph and think one has accomplished something useful. They need to be capable of not only performing whatever design you have in mind but also must be capable of reproducing that design. By analogy, you would have to be able to craft a sword that has all the necessary features of a sword - lightness, sharpened edges, an evenly weighted handle, solid tang capable of transferring force, uniform rigidity to avoid breaks, and exact measures to fit a fine scabbard, but it would also have to be able to creating a second sword out of raw natural materials. This means the sword must also mine the ore, purifying the iron, producing intense heat and hammer out imperfections and do it without external guidance. Build me that sword, and then you can chastise me for not having mastered Archaen neomorphology.”*

However it was accomplished, the Archaens did create many neomorphic creations, most believed to have breathed their first breath aboard Pompados. Such creations include many surviving races such as:

- the Monad servitors, giant lumbering creatures of mild temperament who are still employed as slaves and servants throughout the civilized lands,
- the six-fingered Yassan engineers whose knowledge of technomancy may be the last surviving remnant of Archaen engineering,
- the genetically identical warrior race called Thralls who were the slaves and warriors of the Archaens, and
- the beautiful Batrean consorts.

Several other races have been argued to be Archaen creations, though most deny it. Those include:

- the Jaka beastmasters who some claim were the wardens of the Archaens,
- the Sunra sea people thought to have been navigators and divers,
- Gnomekin who some hold were designed as excavators and miners,
- and the Muse and Thaecians were thought to be designed as entertainers.

Finally, the hordes of caravan bugs are sometimes claimed to have been designed by Archaens to control the insect population on their land-based resorts.

Unsustainable neomorphs were typically annihilated following the imperfect experiment – blasted into non-existence, but some variations no doubt escaped Pompados, or were released under the assumption that the experiment was successful only to be proven wrong in later years. These may include the many various species collectively known as abominations, the malathrope, the mang, pseudomorphs (though the dubious honor of their creation is usually given to the ancient Phantasians. Many others may have been released onto modern day Aaman.

There have been several reports from Zandir black marketers that Farad merchants have recently been attempting to sell neomorphic equipment. Given the cost, the probability that the Farad are bluffing, and the difficulty in using any equipment without the requisite magical knowledge, the market is quite sparse. Even so, reputable mages have condemned the action and offered rewards for any information about this equipment, ostensibly so they can prevent it from falling into the wrong hands.

## **Conjurer's Point**

During the Archaen Age the great illusionist Cascal, member of the Archaen Cabal, had a vacation home on the western coast in an area now called Conjurer's Point overlooking the lapping waves of the Azure Ocean. In his later years Cascal, seeking asylum from the rancor of Archaen politics, conducted numerous magical experiments at his home accompanied only by his mistress – an illusion named Miraja – and his homunculus assistant. Given the legendary extent of his magical skills Cascal's home is surprisingly pedestrian – constructed of four simple pebbledash walls capped with a tent roof and a simple square chimney. Early Phaedran explorers reported that the home was completely stripped bare when they arrived. There are several theories about where his belongings were taken, but none have enjoyed much evidentiary support. Cascal's mastery over illusions allowed him to spontaneously conjure visual, auditory, tactical and olfactory illusions of such complexity that even other magicians were completely fooled. Cascal's senses were no better than the average man though, and so the first theory is that Cascal lived in a perpetually self-driven

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illusionary world at his home and had no need for conventional belongings. The fact that his mistress was, by his own account, a complicated illusion of his own creating supports this view. Another theory suggests his possessions were looted by the early Phaedrans and were either destroyed during the Cult Wars or taken by the ancestors of the Cymrilians when they fled Phaedra for Cymril. If this is the case they may still exist in the Lyceum Arcanum. Finally, Cascal's belongings may have been taken and hidden by his homunculus who is said to still haunt Conjuror's Point.

Homunculi were "little men" created by Archaen magicians to aid them in spell-casting, research and taking care of the daily, mundane chores that obsessed magicians are so well known for neglecting. The ability to create homunculi was been lost during the Great Disaster, and modern casters have yet to reinvent the method which purportedly involves dust, animal bones and hair, and copious amounts of "seed." By most accounts homunculi are animated and fed by magic itself and have no need of food, drink or rest. Their dependence on magic most likely explains their extinction during the Great Disaster; the only rumored surviving homunculus is Cascal's, who is claimed to still live around Conjuror's Point and occasionally make treks to Zandir towns to loot small items, sabotage plans and generally wreck harmless mischief upon the populace. These reports may well be fabrications, and it is likely no one will ever know because Cascal's homunculi no doubt acquired some portion of his illusion-casting abilities. Invisibility is likely the least of the homunculi's abilities.

Like all of the founding members of the Archaen Cabal, rumors of Cascal's survival float freely across the modern arcane communities. One such rumor is that Cascal's homunculi is actually Cascal, who made a bet that he could live as a homunculi for one day. He cast an illusion on himself so powerful that he believed he actually was a homunculus – one that didn't have the power to cancel the illusion and thus labors under it to this day.

Zandir Seers have recently claimed that Cascal's home is actually an illusion itself and that the real house is located in the ancient sky-city of Shalihan. According to them, if a powerful illusionist were to analyze the illusion that is Cascal's house they may be able to determine the origin of the magical item empowering the illusion and thus the location of the lost sky-city. So far this has not been done.

## **Koraq's Mountain**

Another founder of the Archaen Cabal, the sorcerer Koraq was arguably the most powerful magician to ever live. His treatise on magic was considered the final word on magic and its origin. Koraq maintained a residence in the Westernlands during the Archaen Age. Koraq's residence, standing majestically atop a steep treacherous mountain, was considerably more extravagant than Cascal's abode. Eleven outlying amberglass towers with stone parapets were connected by flying buttresses to a central palace topped with an open cupola above a captain's walk that faced the forestry. The palace itself is said to extend deep into the mountain itself. Harassed by lesser magicians, sight-seers, politicians and numerous paramours and jealous husbands, Koraq decided to banish his palace to another dimension where he could retire and pursue his magical research in private. His manse disappeared over night, presumably transported to a distance realm. For some reason, most blame an unanticipated quirk of trans-dimensional arcana, Koraq's palace will

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occasionally reappear atop the mountain that bares his name for about one to four hours several times a year. The reappearances are not on regular intervals and have so far proven unpredictable. The possibility that Koraq still lives within his palace is thought likely by many modern magicians, but most commoners find the notion far-fetched.

Numerous expeditions have been taken to Koraq's mountain, most meeting with financial, if not lethal, disaster. Because the reappearances are unpredictable explorers must camp near the base of the mountain and maintain a steady readiness to enter the abode the moment it appears. The mountains against the Azure Ocean are home to a rather rabid group of ravengers who appear to have discovered one can usually find a human or two camped near the mountain with abundant supplies of food. Zandir bandits have made that same discovery, as have desperate Mangar Corsairs who will often trek to the base of the mountain after raiding camps outside of Zir and Zantium. Being present for the reappearance of Koraq's palace is no guarantee of success as the spiked gate to the palace stands thirty feet tall and is always heavily locked – an odd condition given that numerous thieves have picked their way into the palace before. Who or what relocks the gates is not clear. Beyond the gate are numerous magical traps which, while most are non-lethal, are often sufficient to slow down intruders to the point where they must retreat. One expedition reported a roaming malathrope outside the palace, though this may have been a fiction. Inside the palace one would have to navigate through several maze-like rooms to reach one of the eleven towers that help Koraq's treasures, curios, books, trinkets, oddities and magical artifacts. These towers are protected by much more dangerous magical traps and would be practically impervious to entry if all of Koraq's original wards were intact, though it is generally accepted that many of the Archaen enchantments were damaged by the Great Disaster. At least one of the eleven towers has been emptied by thieves and explorers. All these tasks must be completed with enough time to flee the palace before it vanishes.

Three successful expeditions have been reported, though the true number is likely more. If one successfully loots part of Koraq's palace it would be wise to keep it a secret as rogue magicians hounded all three previous raiders until they had little left to show of their accomplishments.

The first expedition was by a Phaedran team of led by the sorcerer Damon, apprentice of Soliman III. Damon's team returned intact with several Archaen robes, satchels, cloaks, headwear and about four dozen pairs of curled-toed shoes. Of these only one of the cloaks was enchanted - an enchantment that struck the wearer deaf while the robe covered them. The Phaedrans argued briefly about whether the robe was a sleeping aid or if Koraq's wife would wear the robe to be free of Koraq's perpetual babbling – a condition that worsened when he would work on a new book. The Phaedran meeting concluded with a consensus statement: they didn't care. The robe was stolen from Damon's tower three weeks later.

Less is known about the treasure retrieved by the Yitek raid of Koraq's palace that took place in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. The only account came from a group of Zandir teenagers who watched the raid through telescopic lens from their camping site on the coast of the Azure Ocean. The Yitek rigged a catapult like device and shot one of their members, wrapped in protective padding, over the thirty foot gate. Once inside the gate they performed a kind of a magical ritual – not well described by the Zandir – to immunize themselves from magical wards. The palace stayed for less than two hours and when it vanished, instantaneously, four of the five raiders had made it out. The fifth appeared eighty feet in mid-air as the palace vanished around him. He fell to his death. Several Archaen

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artifacts appeared on the blackmarket shortly afterward, sold by and to rogue magicians. How much of the profit was enjoyed by the Yitek is unknown.

The third successful venture was lead by a Cymrilian magician named Surven who wrote extensively about his journey (see below). Most believe he greatly underestimated the amount and potency of the treasure he recovered, most likely as a guise to fool would-be rogue magicians. As Surven was killed less than a year after his expedition, his body naked and baring signs of torture, it is likely that someone at least knows the truth of the matter.

## **Surven's Expedition into Koraq's Palace**

“Our party departed from my home in Cymril on the 8<sup>th</sup> of Laeolis with considerable cheer and grand expectations. I had with me my diminutive Kasmiran friend Abin Ha'Cheem, a master of locksmithing and magical traps; he could pick a lock with his teeth if I wanted him to. His friend Enosh O'bedio, a Gnomekin mountaineer, secured our climbing equipment for the long trek up the mount. Our Thrall companion Thorn had served us on previous expeditions with his crossbow and mace. His mangonel lizard was weighed down with more weapons than all four of us could have used, but he couldn't be persuaded to leave any as each had some small contingent role. The dual hand axes, for example, were crucial when outnumbered by opponents with wooden shields and fighting in enclosed areas where the flail and battle axes he brought for shielded opponents would be less useful. The Zandir guards at Zadian charged us a twenty gold lumen explorers' fee for entry to the base of Koraq's Mountain. We insisted that numerous Causidian litigators told us that no such fee existed, but the sabers the guards carried had a good point and we thought it prudent to give them the gold and move along.

...

“Thorn kept our camp site protected by building roughshod fortifications against predators. Abin Ha'Cheem set a few mage-foot traps and left whispbane about hoping their repellent properties would stave off the ravengers, and Enosh kept a sling full of stinkroot handy. On our forth day of camping at the mountain we noticed one of Ha'Cheem's traps had been disabled and some of our aquavit had been drunk. Strange whispering sounds started emanating from nearby rocks. We looked under several but could find nothing. Enosh said they sounded like talking crystals – expensive devices fashioned in Durne for communicating over long distances. The sounds would come from different directions every night. Four days later, the palace appeared in all its splendor.”

...

“After Ha’Cheem picked our way past the gate we hurried along the cobblestone path, almost blinded by the brilliant reflections coming from the amberglass towers. When Thorn stumbled off the path and tripped into some bushes we realized we were caught in a vertigo illusion. I stood perfectly still and watched the world spinning around me. I ordered everyone to stop and tested the layers of the illusion. First I clapped beside each ear and listened as the sound spun around me. Then I placed my fingers beside the cobblestone path on the soft whiskery grass. They spun beneath my touch. My head began to ache intensely but I soon realized I could smell Enosh’s stinkroot bomb coming from my left. I ordered him to slingshot a bomb in any direction he could. We heard the casing crack against the rocks far to the west as it tumbled toward the waters below. He threw the next to the north and we heard the casing smash against the stone walls of the palace. With our eyes closed and hands covering our ears we stumbled, for the first time, *toward* the smell of stinkroot until the illusion lifted and our senses returned.”

...

“Pulling ourselves up from the underground cavern we found ourselves at the base of one of the eleven amberglass towers, light streaming through the walls and sparkled around a crystal fountain that spouted fresh water into the air creating a fine mist about the room. Thorn bravely sipped from the water and seemed fine. The rest of us stood cautiously as Ha’Cheem explored for traps in a straight line for the staircase that led up the tower to our treasure. Part way across the floor he paused. As he worked his magic, chanting and carving shapes on the stone floor with his ink quill I got the distinct feeling of a spell crystallizing about us. Ha’Cheem yelled for us to get down but before he could finish the droplets of water that filling the air puffed in smoke and thousands of tiny insects took their place, bubbling out of the fountain and swirling around the room. I was bit several times before I even knew what was happening. Ha’Cheem fell to the ground and covered himself with his cloak. Enosh swung his crystalsword vigorously but the biting insects crawled over his stubby arms and bit him repeatedly. His eyes were only protected by his cusps. Thorn dropped his bag of weapons and pulled out a long tower shield which he swung through the swarm of insects, cracking their chitaneous shells with every swing. I finished the swarm with a pyromantic gust of fire that I aimed at the fountain and soon there were just the occasional buzzing insect swirling around our ears. Enosh was severely bitten, and Thorn had to carry him back to the entrance if they were to escape in time. Ha’Cheem and I went up the steps to the first floor of the tower. After scanning quickly for wards and tossing a few dummy packages about the floor to test for foot-plate traps we stepped onto the second floor of what we guessed were ten floors.

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...

“After stuffing our sacks with as many of the curios and books as we could, Ha’Cheem and I began our trek back. We had managed to procure numerous historical artifacts including kitchen utensils, candlesticks, incense, a number of exotic spices and several books. Unfortunately the vast majority of the tomes we lugged from the palace as it vanished behind us were rather poorly written romance novels.

...

“Enosh and Thorn never made it out of the palace unfortunately. Ha’Cheem and I suspect that Thorn was done in by the water he ingested that could have turned to insects inside his stomach. He showed no outward signs of pain at the time, but that was perfectly in character for Thorn. Whether their remains still exist in the palace is unknown, but we are planning a second expedition to discover them.”

### **III. The Great Disaster**

No one knows what caused the Great Disaster exactly, but common belief is that the excesses of the Archaen spell-casters drained the power of magic itself, resulting in a cataclysmic disaster that ripped the sun in two, submerged massive land masses, spawned new and hideous life forms and decimated the sky-cities that housed most of the Archaen people. The Westernlands of Talislanta were once thought to have been relatively spared by the Great Disaster, as their lush forestry and abundant grasslands were both arable and hospitable to herding creatures.

Some claim that the bog devils and skalanx that inhabit the moors, waterways and the Sascasm River were also created by the Great Disaster.

### **The Ascent**

If one ascribes to the Theory of Submersion, it is during the Great Disaster that the lowlands in areas now named Aaman and Zandu were raised from the water. If the geomancers are right, eruptions below the Azure Ocean pushed land masses upward or drained water from the lands. This is consistent with scholarly conclusions about the dropping water levels near Jhangara.

If the theory is correct, it would explain why the Zandir Moors (thought to be the last to be raised) contain numerous biological anomalies – including many exotic flowers, spices, and medicines whose healing properties are only now being tested. Such flora must have evolved from sea dwelling ancestors and be relatively distantly related to other land based plants. Acceptance of this theory also leads one to wonder if the Lost City is located in the side of on the mountains near Zadian or Arat. If these areas were raised up from the ground, and the Lost City was located in the side of a mountain, as some say it was, then the remains of the city may be buried within one of the mountains, or even stuck to the side awaiting a mountaineer to discover them.

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## **IV. The Age of Confusion**

With the destruction of the sky-cities, the Archaen descendents were once again upon equal ground with the Submen races. Much of the history of Archaen and Submen migrations and settlements were lost from this time, as no major cities stood long enough for history to record them.

The Age of Confusion was racked with numerous territorial wars between Archaen descendents and the Submen species whose hatred of Archaens had only grown since the sorcerers began dumping waste, defective neomorphs and magically malfunctioning garbage down on the ground from their sky-cities. The following is a record of some of the wars believed to be fought in the Westernlands, who was believed to have fought in them, and what the results were.

Early in the Age of Confusion, when the Archaen descendants were still scavenging for any remains of their great civilization, a savage people called the Wildmen set upon the westernlands. The Archaen descendents living there are believed to have descended from survivors of Pompados who fled by windship. The Wildmen scattered the Archaens, many running south toward Jhangara where they encountered or perhaps provoked the “ancestors of rage” (see elsewhere), others fled west toward the coast of the Azure Ocean which was surprisingly uninhabited and still others far to the east where the riders of Zaran set upon them. Archeologists and geomancers who have explored dig sites and mines in the lands now called Aaman have found the remains of great battles suggesting that some of the Archaen survivors of the Great Disaster did stay and fight. Unfortunately for future generations, those Archaens were most likely the last who possessed martial knowledge of magic and enchanting. They were overrun by the Wildmen but it is not known how many of the savages they took with them because the slings, axes and spears that Wildmen were reported to wield did not last very long in the mud and dirt. Archaen weapons, however, were recovered thousands of years later in pristine form and often with runic markings symbolizing various enchantments. Such weapons are known to contain potent magical powers but remain untapped as the codes, gesturers or thoughts needed to release the enchantments died with their owners. Archaen armor is surprisingly rare and it is widely believed that they chose to protect themselves with arcane spells rather than lumber under heavy iron. Relics, mostly weapons, recovered from battle sites between Archaens and the Wildmen are virtually priceless even without the ability to activate their enchantments. The iron itself is made of an unknown black alloy and no one has yet discovered a way to break it. At least one such sword is owned by the Sultan of Zandir, and another is held in the Lyceum Arcanum.

## **The Phaedran Rangers**

The Archaen descendants who fled west from Wildmen lived as hunter-gatherers and fishermen subsisting on the uninhabited land that is now the peninsula of western Zandu. The Wildmen, for reasons unknown, did not follow them west. These Archaens, sometimes referred to as the Phaedran Rangers – though that was presumably not their name at the time - developed a great knowledge of the local fauna, being the first people on Talislanta to domesticate the wild erd that roamed the area and use them for meat, milk and cheese. With tamed ontras as their mounts they hunted the wild western ogriphants into extinction, using their skin for tents, their ivory horns for weaponry, and their flesh for food. The eastern ogriphants can still be found in modern day Aaman

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and in many eastern lands and are now simply called “ogriphants.” The rangers also trained avir as scouts and birds of prey and the quaal as lookouts and pets.

After the domestication of the erd the Phaedran Rangers began to live as a herding and fishing people. Herds were owned by a given family and roaming territorial disputes became common as access to rivers and streams for watering one’s herd became a scarce resource. Certain tribes of the rangers would sometimes attempt to stake a permanent claim to a watering hole and demand a toll for its use. These tribes never lasted long as the Phaedran Rangers took such insults personally. The rangers, like most herding people, had no stable homes and thus no stable government or law enforcement body. This lack of legal recourse, coupled with the constant threat of erd-rustlers, made the rangers vigilant, suspicious, and extremely prone to interpret any insult or slight as an irredeemable offense that must be met with a demonstration of martial prowess. Duels between rangers within the same clan were often fought with bow and arrow with each ranger standing twenty paces apart. Bystanders would choose the location so as to avoid excess cover from archer fire, but dodging was allowed as part of the fight. Duels between rangers of different clans were usually fought with mount and spear and were considerably more lethal.

Ranger society quickly became highly stratified as herds were brought under the control of one or a few men leading their extended family and hired hands. Herding bands with fewer numbers found themselves subject to frequent raids by bands of foragers with no erd of their own. Such a state of affairs led smaller herding bands to intermarry and consolidate into a single band capable of fending off the erd-rustlers. Polygyny was the norm as women frequently preferred to be the second wife of a herdsman rather than the first wife of a scrounger, forager or fisherman who could barely feed himself during the dry seasons. With most of the women married to the wealthier cattlemen the young single males were forced to work for wages or to join raiding parties who wrestled erd from their owners and sometimes kidnapped women as well. Women were the only commodity more sought after than erd and watering holes; and fathers and brothers exercised extreme control over their daughters and sisters, who were made to hide their faces and bodies beneath shag clothing and leather fans. Sexual dalliances unsanctified by marriage were gruesomely punished, often by ritual scarring of the woman’s face and dragging the man behind an ontra until death. Women were allowed to knit shag clothing from the erd hair, prepare food and tend to children, but played little if any role in politics or interband relations.

Sometime during the Age of Confusion the Imrian, a vicious aquatic people believed to have descended from the First Folk, sailed their barges onto the rangers’ lands. Word quickly spread that the Imrian had sacked a fishing village and dragging several women back to their eel-drawn barges. The Phaedran Rangers poured to the northern edge of what is now the Sea of Sorrow, dropping their petty in-fighting and land disputes immediately. Though they never had a formal leader or general to command the make-shift army, the Rangers drove the Imrians back to their barges, killing as many as they could. Particularly brave rangers took several of the Imrians barges and chased after them as they fled to the Azure Ocean. They did not return and it is not known what happened to them. After the attack was thwarted the bands enjoyed a week long celebration, exchanged brides, ontra, erd, and gathered food. After the celebration the rangers rode back to their traditional territories, but not before some of the wealthy herdsman compensated the fishermen with food and wives. The rangers, for all their faults, were a generous people.

## **The Phaedran Groundsmen**

The Archaen descendants who fled the Wildmen to the south soon found themselves wedged between their old enemies and vicious Jhangaran raiders who crossed the Axis River by boat to conduct midnight hit and run raids for food, clothing and weapons. Trapped between two adversaries the Archaens descendants hid in the expansive forests that stretched across what is now Aaman. In the forests they met the native Aeriad peoples who lived in the trees and had been repelling Jhangara attacks for some time. Striking a quick alliance, the Archaen descendants took up horticulture and agriculture from the Green Aeriad botanomancers and began to make permanent settlements to repel the Jhangaran and Wildmen offenses. The Archaens were fast learners and quickly established gardens and traps for small game animals. It wasn't long before the Archaen horticulturalists – later called Phaedran Groundsmen – realized they could till whole fields if they were to chop down areas of forestry and burn them to produce nutrient rich soil. The Aeriads were appalled at the practice of slash and burn agriculture, but the Groundsmen were near starvation living in the forests as they found it hard to live on waterbugs, tree sap and other bits of the Aeriad diet that kept the avian species healthy but offered little in the way of nourishment for the Archaen people. It wasn't until the Groundsmen domesticated the provender plant that the threat of starvation was permanently banished.

Under constant siege by Wildmen from the north and Jhangaran raids from the south, the Groundsmen continued to clear the forest and construct instruments of war to fight off the Submen attacks. They broke into small, simple townships clustered atop hills and near waterholes so they could spot incoming raiders from afar. The Groundsmen had an abundance of wood and used it to craft crossbows, wagons, simple forts and a kind of jointed wooden armor. Unlike the Rangers, the Groundsmen weren't able to domesticate the wild erd that populated much of what is now called the Monastic Hills. Instead they reigned in the mighty ogriphants and did their best to attach wagons and tilling machines to them. Ogriphants were quite rare in the forest areas and extremely difficult to breed in captivity, so whole townships would often form around just one or two of the great beasts. The same creature would till the lands of many farmers, being communally cared for and fed. Given such a scarce shared resource, the Groundsmen quickly established local laws and law enforcement. Most Groundsmen had a small plot of land on which to raise their family, always close to a communally guarded watering hole or river. Those without land of their own worked as farmhands, medicine men or soldiers and made a decent living doing it. Relations between various townships were generally positive as food and water was plentiful and there was little incentive to rob one's neighbor.

Given the sedentary lives of the Groundsmen it was difficult for young women to find mates outside of the family, and many isolated communities suffered from incestuous breeding. Deformed children were believed to be wicked in nature and were frequently put to death. Wielders of evil magic were often blamed for such outcomes. Not surprisingly, young girls frequently ran off with visiting merchants from other townships, the Phaedran Rangers, or on rare occasions even Jhangaran raiders. Unmarried women were frequently sexually flirtatious with such visitors, and their parents often encouraged such behavior, hoping to marry off their daughters. Sons were particularly prized among the Groundsmen as greater male strength was needed for difficult farm work and the constant repelling of Submen attacks.

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Because of the abundance of food and the rapidly growing farmland, the Groundsmen population grew steadily in the face of ceaseless attacks from Wildmen and Jhangarans. Technologically the Groundsmen grew just as rapidly, fueled by a relatively free economy, a number of “re”inventions appeared including water-powered lumber mills, mortars, pottery of all kinds, dams and canals designed to irrigate, remove waste and even foot-operated pumps for watering crops. It was when the farmlands began to reach the western mountains near modern day Arat that the Groundsmen technology really advanced – they discovered copper and iron ore in the mountains. Archaen ingenuity allowed them to rapidly acquire the ability to smith and work iron and copper and soon full-fledged plate armor and purified iron blades made their way from township to township allowing the Groundsmen to – for the first time – advance upon the Wildmen.

## **The Phandre Refugees and the Wildman War**

Near the beginning of the Age of Confusion a group of Archaens fled eastward from the massive Wildman invasion. Passing through the forests of modern day Vardune and the grasslands of Cymril, they came to the deserts of Kasmir. Unsure where to go from that point on, they stayed for several generations living as hunter gatherers and foragers, hoping for signs of other surviving Archaens. They were rewarded for their patience when they discovered a large band of highly skilled magicians heading westward across the desert – refugees from the second Archaen city of Phandril, located in the Wilderlands of Zaran. The Phandre mages were led by Morgendrak and came carrying exotic items, technology, books, art and every conceivable cultural relic from their old home. They were fleeing from a massive retaliation by mounted raiders – most likely ancestors of the Za – and advancing Mazdak forces from the Easternlands. The Phandre joined with the Archaen refugees from the Westernlands and the two began a slow trek back westward. It is not clear what they wanted to find, but many theorize they were returning to the Lost City. Generations later, they came into the forests that would later bear their name – the Forests of Phandril. The Phandre met with the Aeriad who lived in the southeastern forests of the Westernlands and used what limited magical equipment they were able to carry with them from Phandril to carve out a meager existence in the forests. Many of the more powerful Phandre, still unaware of the extent of the devastation the Great Disaster had brought down on the Archaen sky-cities, decided they would allow others to sort it out and return at a later date. They used their powerful magic to move stone and earth - creating elaborate mausoleums then entombed themselves within, claiming they would await rescue by their countrymen (see Phandril Forest below).

Shortly after the Phandre refugees arrived in the Westernlands they made contact with the Groundsmen of the south and the Phaedran Rangers of the north. Given the continued battle with roving bands of Wildmen, the Phandre council decided to send a young member to the various tribes of the Rangers to see if an alliance could be struck. The councilman, Soliman III, apprentice of Morgendrak, took five years trying to convince the various feuding tribes of rangers to unite, but like a blanket that was too small, every time he got one covered another popped out of the coalition. Frustrated, he returned to the Phandre who then sent him westward to the Groundsman’s lands. Embittered by constant defense, they were eager to unite and Soliman III had to do everything he could to prevent them from marching back with him to start the battle immediately. Soliman returned with the good news and the Phandre magicians planned the counterattack.

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Using paid Aeriad scouts to sail up the Axis River and report back Wildman positions, Morgendrak's small army led the hordes of ironclad Groundsmen against the Wildman encampments, one at a time. Victory was swift and contagious; the Wildmen were being exterminated. As the army pushed north the scouts reported a massive force of Wildmen gathered near the mountains of Arim. Facing defeat, Soliman and the Phandre council considered retreating. The day before the retreat was to be called an army of ten thousand Rangers rode in from the west. With the cavalry from the Rangers, the ground troops from the Groundsmen and the casters from the Phandre, the Wildmen were massacred and sent fleeing even further north. The Phandre army pursued them all the way to the edge of the Sardonyx Mountains. When the Wildmen began to climb their way toward Yrmania the army finally returned to its newfound country.

## **Insect Wars**

Green Aeriad naturalists have recently claimed that a war was fought between chigs and caravan bugs over much of the Westernlands during the early Age of Confusion. Chigs will often have explosive population gains but it is not clear what triggers such reproduction in the insects. One cue could be temperature changes as the efficiency of movement in cold-blooded animals is much higher in warmer temperatures it would make sense for chigs to reproduce most in warmer environments. If the Great Disaster increased the average temperature across the Westernlands it could explain a sudden and massive outbreak of chigs. The caravan bugs, according to the Aeriad, were most likely produced by Archaen neomorphology as pest controls. Their population and distribution across the continent of Talislanta seems to track the availability of other prey insects closely.

Chigs are universally despised by farmer, herders and outdoorsmen while caravan bugs are generally seen as mild often charming nuisances. If a war was fought between the two, modern Talislantans should be glad that the caravan bugs were not exterminated. Both sides of the war, it is argued, took heavy casualties, and the nutrient-rich corpses of billions of these bugs are thought, by those who deny the theory of submersion, to be responsible for the particularly fertile Zandir moors.

## **The Forest of Phandril**

Along the eastern front of the nation of Aaman and bordering the Axis River are the lush forests of Phandril. Full of healthy evergreens, fernwoods and gall oak, the forests of Phandril would be a welcome home for many of the displaced people of Talislanta if it were not for the Aamanian

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Church that forbids entry and the mighty Shathane that feed on the forestry. Though not particularly aggressive, the sight of a Shathane standing twelve feet tall with pupil-less eyes is often enough to send most sighted individuals fleeing.

Near the end of the Age of Confusion, the proud magicians of Phandre entombed many of their own in mausoleums scattered throughout the forest, now overgrown with weeds, vines and shrubbery so that one can only see the steep bell gable or conical roof sticking out the top of a wall of vegetation. The Phandre employed a grandiose architectural style with sculptures of the entombed used as caryatids holding up the roof of the mausoleums. Many of these structures have already been pilfered by the early Phaedrans as well as enterprising Yitek tomb-robbers. The Yitek report that the interior of the mausoleums are designed as living quarters with neatly arranged beds, closets full of extravagant clothing, jugs of water sealed air tight with a vitriol solution, artificially suspended fruiting plants, fine shag carpeting, puzzle-boxes, numerous books, paintings (usually portraits), and often a set of cards – considered evidence that the Rahastran cartomancers were in fact descended from the Phandre. Between one and six crystal sarcophagi, apparently inoperable from the outside, would be attached at one end of a wall. The oddest fixture was the bell gable that stood above most of the mausoleums – the pull rope hanging down into the tomb itself. One Yitek robber reportedly found a mausoleum that appeared to have been lived in for some time. The sarcophagus had been opened and a skeleton lay under a pile of blankets next to several empty water jugs. Though not yet substantiated, Aamanian children who sometimes boldly venture into the forest have reported hearing a crisp ringing sound coming from deep in the forest. They are told it is the wind.

The mausoleums are locked from the outside and assumed to be protected by traps, as several expedition teams have come back one or two men short with nothing to show for it. From what is known about the Archaen descendants it is likely that many of the traps are magical in nature and will be difficult for modern mages to counter. Any items from these mausoleums, if their origin can be verified, would be extremely valuable to collectors and magicians alike.

Recently the Aamanian Hierophant has met with delegates from some of the members of the displaced peoples including the Yassan, the Xambrians and the Yitek. It is believed that he offered these groups sanctuary in the Phandril Forest if they agree to convert to Orthodox faith and offer small tithes to the Church. So far none have accepted.

## ***V. The Founding of the Phaedran Empire***

Upon return from the Wildman War the victorious parties assembled between the mountains of Arim and what would later be called the Sea of Sorrow. Talks began between the heads of the Ranger families, the elected mayors of the various Groundsmen towns and the Phandre magicians. All sides welcomed an alliance in the wake of their unmitigated military victory. All had something to gain. The Groundsmen had plenty of food to give to the starving Rangers, and in return they would get access to trained Ontra, various animal skins and precious meat from the erd population. The Rangers would finally be able to import enough grain to feed a standing population and begin construction on permanent establishments rather than temporary camps. The Phandre, like most magician folk, abhorred manual labor and saw a unique opportunity to forge a new and powerful society capable of recovering the arcane secrets lost in the Great Disaster.

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The Phandre spoke quickly, relaying what they remembered about the Archaen legal system: a council of advisors chosen by magical duels and a supreme leader voted on by all adult men and women – a system of government referred to as Orthodoxy. Matters of fact and morality would be determined by the council of advisors who also controlled magical research and the collection and spending of taxes. The supreme leader would control the small military force that would be commissioned, oversee a system of courts and judges, and appoint ambassadors to townships and any future civilizations that were discovered. There would be funding to fuel the church of the Creator, but all religions would be tolerated. The laws were half written before it became clear that the Rangers and Groundsmen had little respect for the ways of old. The Rangers argued feverishly for a distributed government so that each family could make their own laws and pay only a small tithe to the central ruling body that would provide needed services such as road construction, magical research and law enforcement in intertribal matters. The Groundsmen, having little in the way of magical knowledge themselves, objected to the mageocratic aspects of Orthodoxy and were concerned that not enough taxes were going to fund a military effort to deal with the Jhangaran raiders in the south.

The Groundsmen and Rangers were a proud people and a small band of them argued strenuously against the suggestion that a council of mages would decide matters of fact for the rest of the nation. Both groups remembered all too well the results of mageocratic arrogance seen during the Great Disaster. History referred to this loose band of objectors as the first Paradoxists – who clung to the belief that knowledge was imperfect at best and a plurality of well-distributed ideas was the only way to sift fact from fiction. But in the end their concerns over Orthodoxy gave way to their need for efficient trade and security. The Empire of Phaendra – or “new Phandril” – was forming.

## **The Election of Soliman III and the Founding of Badijan**

After days of debate a deal was struck for a single ruler with up to six advisors. The ruler, to be called the Emperor of Phaendra, would be chosen by popular vote from all those present at the meeting – a stipulation that hurt the Groundsmen whose total population heavily outnumbered the others but whose ground troops had suffered the most casualties. From that point on, future Emperors would be chosen by the current Emperor in his will and testament. A council of six advisors would serve the Emperor and could veto any of his decisions with a two-thirds majority. Advisors were to be chosen every seven years. Those wishing to hold the office would gather as many supports as they could and come to the capital. The seven hopefuls with the most followers would be elected to the position.

The vote for the Emperor of Phaendra was to take place the next night. During the day the Rangers engaged in several bickering arguments leaving four dead before the end of the night. The Groundsmen had decided to elect a farmer named Citchijan who had proved to be a loyal soldier during the war. Citchijan, a religious man who, like most Groundsmen, worshiped the Creator found himself praying with Soliman III late in the night. The two prayed for wisdom and discussed solutions to the problems that plagued the Groundsmen. When the time for the vote came, Citchijan told his people to elect Soliman III, saying that he had greater wisdom than a simple

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farmer. Many believe Soliman won his support by promising a solution to the dwindling ogriphant population that plowed the Groundsmen's fields. When the votes were counted, Soliman III won by a slight margin – mostly from votes by moderate Groundsmen. His advisors consisted of one Phandre magician, four Groundsmen mayors and the father of the largest Ranger family - Zandu.

Construction began immediately on what would be the capital city of the new empire of Phaedra. It was named Badijan meaning “First City” or “City of One” depending on the translation. Stonemasons worked day and night, fed largely by Zandu's herd and weekly deliveries of provender bread and fruit from various Groundsmen farms to the south. At the same time, Soliman III realized the importance of bringing fresh water to Badijan and opening the capital to sea exploration. Zandu in particular pressed him for the commissioning of a navy to explore the coastal areas for surviving Archaen descendants and signs of the Imrian raiders. Soliman resisted the construction of a navy, feeling the labor of the young empire was spread thin at the moment, but agreed to start on a simple canal that would lead to what was called the Phaedran Gulf to the west of Badijan. Explorers were commissioned to scout for a highway that would run across the entire breadth of the empire, starting with simple dirt trails to be marked with signs and later to be set in stone.

Soliman III ordered the remaining Phandre magicians to start a school and library of magic where they could collectively store any remaining Archaen texts that were brought from Phandril. In this library, it is believed, was placed the Archaen Codex and several tomes by famous Archaen wizards including Arkon, Koraq, Rodinn and Sylvan. Soliman, a tireless reader, spent many days in this fledgling library, digesting texts and magical scrolls of all kinds. The Phaedran Arcanum took in promising students from all about the empire and trained them in the recovered branches of magical study. Geomancers began work on an underground sewer system, digging new waterholes throughout the northern Ranger lands to quell familial feuds over waterholes, and crafting instruments of stonemasonry, metallurgy and ironworking. Early Phaedran aquamancers discovered and manufactured water-purifying enchants, worked with food preparation and preservation, and designed the first city-wide water well pumps for Badijan so that homeowners could pump fresh water into their homes. Pyromancers served in the early makeshift military and as personal guards of Soliman III. Aeromancers were put to work on rediscovering windship arcaneology, a task they would never succeed under Phaedran rule. Finally naturalists and the few adapt neomancers who remained of the Phandril descendents set about working on a beast of burden to replace the ogriphants.

## **The Phaedran Culture**

Many aspects of modern Talislantan culture had their origins in the Phaedran Empire. The ubiquitous gold lumen was the universal currency Soliman III used to replace the inefficient barter system among Rangers and Groundsmen. The first coins were minted from gold bullion and distributed to families and townships throughout the lands, to be divided by the mayors or herdsman as they saw fit. From that point forward the Emperor was allowed to mint only 1,000 new lumens every year to avoid flooding the market. Prices for various goods were set by Soliman III and his advisors in a laborious three day meeting but the market ignored these rules

overnight and soon free trade passed from town to town and herd to herd.

The Phaedran calendar, still in use six hundred years later, began at the year zero and marked the “New Archaen Age” later shortened to just “New Age.” The 343 days that marked each year were divided into seven moons with seven weeks each. The first day of the year was celebrated across the empire as the day civilization returned to a destitute world. Early Phaedran astromancers, the most famous being Astrologius, mapped the skies and named each of the seven moons for their purported magical properties; their maps set the standard for all future cartography including setting north as the top of the map, a decision that still angers Farad cartographers who find their southern position insulting.

The Phaedran language, a descendant of the old Archaen tongue, was a conglomerate of at least two related dialects, including the Phandrill tongue and the language of the survivors of Pompados who later splintered into Groundsmen and the Phaedran Rangers. As the groups mixed, their Archaen derived languages changed further still but kept the basic noun-verb-object structure that is present in old Archaen writings. The written form of Phaedran was extremely complicated and unnecessarily long-winded but remained pristine and untouched throughout the life of the empire – due largely to the fact that very few Phaedran citizens were ever taught to read it. In the hands of so few, the written language changed very little compared to its verbal expression which absorbed numerous slang terms and expressions, survived surgical removal of unnecessary tenses and grammatical rules and eventually simplified into what is now called Talislan. The written form of Talislan, an easy language to learn given the phonetic spelling of almost all of its words, shares only a little resemblance to its parent Phaedran tongue.

Perhaps the most impressive cultural feat of the Phaedran Empire was the exorcism of many lingering superstitions, traditions and cultural practices adopted by the roving bands of Archaen descendants during Age of Confusion. Gone were the days in which one’s fortune was linked to the day of one’s birth, or one’s worth measured by lines in the hand. Animal and blood sacrifices were suspended. The dead were no longer believed to rise and haunt the living in their dreams, writing with one’s left hand was no longer considered a curse, and eating food that had touched a human foot was no longer believed to cause abortion. Numerous superstitious precautions were tossed aside as medicine was rediscovered. The start of the New Age was an optimistic time during which reason

and evidence reconstructed the framework for a free and prosperous country.

## City Life for the Rangers and Groundsmen

With the rapid influx of technologies both from Soliman's workers in Badijan and from independent inventors scattered across both the west and east of the Phaedran Empire the standard of living among the citizens vastly improved. Within the first ten years of the New Age the cities of Undurin (literally meaning "newfound endurance") and Fadian were founded.

The transition from roving herdsmen to city-dwellers was slow and painful for many of the Phaedran Rangers. A prideful folk, they didn't cede many of their traditional ways of life to the new government, and most continued living with their familial tribes and following the same grazing circuits. An industrious family named the Fadians settled atop a hill near a recently unearthed watering hole and started cultivating a vineyard. With help from Badijan laborers and naturalists they started a lumber mill and an orchard. The Fadians quickly became one of the richest families in the western lands, only outdone by the family Zandu whose leader, sitting on the Phaedran Council, was able to siphon off some of the taxes and funnel it to them in the form of grazing rights and a controversial patent on the Zandu nutcracker – an iron instrument used to castrate equines that was arguably in common use before anyone thought to seek a patent from the new government.

The one aspect of life in the New Age that the Rangers immediately took to was running trade routes. With an intimate knowledge of star navigation, animal handling and caravan operation, the Rangers made excellent merchants and many enterprising young men with little prospect for marriage under the polygynous mating system took to the Phaedran Causeway with an erd-drawn wagon and ontra mount. These merchants typically made a very good living, but these trade routes, combined with the presence of newly minted gold lumens, opened up one new prosperous profession – armed banditry. Erd-rustlers had always had a hard time stealing for a living as erd were often branded. More often than not, it was the herders themselves who would abscond with a straggler from a passerby's herd, but with the advent of the minted coin and the presence of rich merchant lines, full time career bandits began to pop up along the Phaedran Causeway.

With even fewer marriage prospects than before, and kept under constant surveillance by their family, many Ranger women felt trapped and oppressed by their families. Many fled at a moments notice, running away with traveling merchants or, more commonly, settling into Badijan or one of the other fledgling cities cropping up about the Phaedran Empire. With little skills and no formal education most took work as prostitutes, day laborers or for a lucky few, artists. Infanticide was their only reliable birth control, and most had no choice but to give up their child as they couldn't afford to raise more than one or two children. Even those children would often be sent off at age twelve to work on Groundsmen plantations or, if they were skilled enough, the Phaedran Arcanum in Badijan or, in the case of males, the Badijan military. Those physically unfit for such work, a surprisingly common occurrence that modern historians credit to an assortment of sexually transmitted diseases, became the first generation of Phaedran beggars. Beggars, and the city artists who made only slightly more money, were supported largely by the wealthy aristocracy that took

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hold when wealthy herdsmen settled into a city converting their massive wealth by erd sale into vaults of gold lumens.

The Groundsmen made a smoother transition to city life as they had already had simple farm towns before the founding of the Phaedran Empire. With the steady influx of erd meat, skins and linen from the Rangers and medicine, iron tools and technology from the citizens of Badijan, the Groundsmen territories solidified rapidly. Stone walls were erected around the new town of Undurin to protect from Jhangaran raids, deep wells and sewers were dug and fortified with stone. Diseases, never a very serious threat to the Groundsmen given their abundant diet, little contact with wild animals and relatively clean lifestyle, were further squelched with more potent medicines and magical cures. But even with this abundance there was a great deal of work to be done. The Phaedran government in Badijan had a great deal of work to do constructing the Phaedran Causeway, the canal and numerous scout towers and buildings in the capital. Ranger workers were difficult to hire as they tended to ride back to their homelands when the work became boring and were notoriously hard to find as many still tended to wandering herds. Furthermore most had little training with iron, lumber or any type of even simple architecture. Finally, the refined citizens of Badijan found the manners of the rugged outdoorsmen to be only mildly preferable than the erd they kept. For these reasons, Groundsmen were hired en masse by the Phaedran government for manual labor, construction, ironworking, lumbering, and engineering. It is estimated that twenty percent of the adult male population worked for the Phaedran government, leaving a great shortage of males in Groundsmen towns.

Making matters worse, was the fact that the entire Phaedran Empire depended on provender bread and the various fruits cultivated by the Groundsmen including pomegranates, quince, sicklepears and starfruit. The average farmer's lands almost doubled, and the Groundsmen took on an intense work effort. Activities that were seen as detracting from one's work were first discouraged and then outlawed. These included any kind of drug use or gambling on dice-games, cards or ontra races. Even the arts, singing and dancing were typically reserved for special holidays or worship services at the temples of the Creator – a religion shared among most of the Phaedrans. Excessive merriment was reserved for young girls who were expected, as were boys, to start pulling their own weight at age ten, trying to fill the labor gap that resulted from the exodus of Groundsmen males to work for the Empire.

## **Milk Maids and Murder**

From the typical Groundsman farmer's perspective, there was an intense shortage of males in the farm towns. From the Phaedran merchant's perspective, there was an intense abundance of females in such towns; females whose only other marital prospects were poor farmers from distant towns, or overeager cousins. These merchants, often young single Rangers with no herd to call their own, were typically a dashing and handsome lot and more than willing to abscond with a desperate maiden under cover of night – and often did. Groundsmen fathers who had freely encouraged others to take their daughters in marriage began to resent the merchants who grew richer and richer while the typical farmer

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made only meager profits. Farm towns began setting curfews for unmarried women, hiring bounty hunters to track down runaway brides, and began a formal bride-price ceremony in which fathers and brothers of brides demanded coin, barter or indentured service for the hand of their female kin. Given the steep prices demanded by these relatives, clashes between the growing merchant class and the Phaedran farmers were common. In one such case, a merchant was killed by the brother of his would-be bride and when the Badijan peacekeepers arrived to take the murderer into custody the townspeople, united behind their sheriff, refused to surrender him. The peacekeepers left empty handed.

Not only were Groundsmen women relatively eager for male attention, they were considered without a doubt the most beautiful women in the land. Numerous novels and folktales still refer to the unmatched beauty of the milk maid. Sindaran naturalists believe they know why. At the time a disease known as scarifillius or “the scars” for short was very common in Phaedra. Its symptoms were thick scar-like scabs that would grow out over one’s body and face. Commonly caught by children, the disease would run its course in a few weeks and but often left shallow scars that survived well into adulthood. Once you have the disease you will never catch it again. Groundsmen girls were responsible for milking the ogriphants and (later) the durge, and would likely have caught a much milder form of the disease called “pimple skin” which, once recovered from, gives immunity to “the scars.” Milk maids simply had better skin.

## **The Politics of Early Phaedra**

In the year 28 the Ranger families met, goaded by Zandu, and conspired to get more western advisors into Soliman’s council. With Zandu the only ranger among them, the farmers and merchants were much better represented by the Badijan government. In previous elections little fuss was made by any concerned party about keeping their seats on the council and the original members were easily reelected. But this fourth election showed a sudden sweep with five Ranger families appearing on the outskirts of Badijan, herds in tow, with families, friends, merchants – and according to some – paid voters from Groundsmen and maybe even Arim territories. Overnight the balance of power was thrown to the Ranger families who suddenly held four of the six seats on the council. Many farmers and merchants objected to the tactic but there was little they could do.

After thirty years of experimentation and research the magical class of Badijan finally invented a beast of burden to replace the meager ogriphant population in eastern Phaedra – the durge. Capable of gorging themselves on common wildgrass and storing water for several days at a time, durge were ideally suited for the grasslands that resulted from the slash and burn agriculture practiced in eastern Phaedra. Expecting to reap the financial rewards of their invention, the magicians of Badijan were disappointed to learn that once the first stock was sold they were in little

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demand as farmers quickly breed them on their own. From the farmer's perspective the invention of the durge was a great boon, perhaps the single greatest accomplishment of the Badijan elite, but from the magicians perspective it was a dismal financial failure. Given that durge could be cooked and eaten, used to pull wagons and plows, and skinned to make leather there was a sudden and steep decline in the demand for rangers' wares. Many ranger families were forced into cities or to make permanent camps and adapt to new ways of life because they could no longer sell their wares. The cities of Bandre and Santium were founded at this time. Soliman's council demanded that something be done to combat the rampant starvation that swept through the ranger community. Their solution was to impose a twenty percent farm tax on all agricultural products which were to be collected and shipped to Badijan where they would be sold, well under market value, to Ranger families, merchants, the growing lower class in Phaedran cities, and government officials. Badijan peacekeepers appeared all across the eastern farmlands bearing Soliman's seal on a document that demanded twenty percent of all food their communities produced.

The origin of the Cult of the Eye is still debated (see sidebar), but its first appearance in recorded history is clearly their response to the Phaedran land tax in the year 34. After Soliman's troops had traveled along the new Phaedran Causeway collecting food from confused and angry farmers, they made their way back to Badijan from the city of Undurin. Halfway there they were intercepted by a group of seventy greymane riders, bedecked in polished white armor bearing the symbol of a half-opened eye. The riders didn't disturb the tax collectors or their Phaedran guards but merely offered to escort them along the path that had become more dangerous in recent years as less scrupulous rangers had turned to banditry. For two days the caravan traveled under the guard of the cultists until it reached the sight of Badijan and Soliman's tower that stood up over the outer walls. The cultists then turned on the tax collectors and their mercenaries and bludgeoned them senseless – leaving four dead. Tossing them aside, the cultists set fire to the vast caravan of grain, vegetables and durge meat and stood next to it while it burned. When the gates of Badijan opened and an armed force came out to confront the cultists they soon spotted the throngs of farmers who had began following the cultists when word spread that the tax was being resisted. Facing a massive armed conflict, Soliman's apprentice, Damon, who had control of the city while his master was overseeing naval construction, called the troops back to the city of Badijan and sealed the gates. The cultists set up camp outside the city convincing as many farmers as they could to get their families and stay for the next six months until the election of the next Phaedran Council. During this time many of the farmers of Phaedra learned for the first time of the cultists' god – Aa.

## **The Origin of the Cult of the Eye**

The Aamanians claim that an eye opened in the heavens above and a voice spoke to the first cultists, dictating the early chapters of the Omnival and empowering them with holy magic. Other accounts are common but unsubstantiated including that the first cultists were a simple family with congenital mental diseases who managed to win converts slowly over time, that the "Eye" was seen before the Great Disaster and was actually the magical emanations from the bottom of the Sky-City Pompados, and the voices were commands from Archaens to obey their orders. Others claim it grew from a much more tolerant church of good will that appealed

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to a metaphorical “All-Seeing-Eye” as a standard for moral behavior – e.g. “if everyone were watching you, would you feel guilty for your actions?” The truth is no one knows where the cult came from.

Members of the Phaedran Council, somewhat unhinged by the growing camp of dissidents outside their door waiting to vote them out, sent word back to their families along with word that the promised food would not be coming. Rangers came from all over the west, many near starvation. Whole families descended into Badijan where the cultists confronted them. No one knows who pulled the first blade, but the Cultists of the Eye and a conglomerate of ranger families fought outside the gates of Badijan in what many consider the first battle of the cult wars. The forces of Badijan were ordered to intercept them by Damon who many believe was coerced by the council, most of whom were supportive of the rangers and knew that the Badijan military, which was constituted mainly by sons of rangers, would join forces with the other rangers. The farmers and cultists would have been overwhelmed if Soliman had not suddenly returned and quieted the feuding masses with a display of pyrotechnics and a voice booming so loud that several members of his entourage were struck deaf. Soliman ordered the troops back to Badijan and the rangers and farmers to stop their fighting. They restrained themselves and both rangers and farmers began setting up camp to await the elections. The death toll is estimated at three hundred by modern scholars, including several of Zandu’s sons and a well-respected mayor of a small farming community who fought on the side of the cultists. Modern Aamanians claim that not a single cultist fell in the battle.

After several minor skirmishes, the day of the Council’s election came and the farmers carried five of the seven seats. Overnight the Cult of the Eye disappeared, followed by numerous bounty hunters, spies and Phaedran peacekeepers who were hired by Soliman to find the mysterious cult members.

## **Zandu’s Law and the Black Moon Invasion**

Shaken by the violence outside of Badijan, and knowing that their meager conscripted force held strong loyalties to their towns and families, the magicians of Phaedra worried about their ability to control the general populace at the next council election. Even the members of the Council who were elected by the Cult of the Eye were suspicious of the armed militia that had no respect for the rule of law. Zandu, grief-stricken over the loss of his children, began a campaign within the Phaedran intelligentsia to confiscate and forbid the manufacture of iron plate armor, the sole purpose of which was to wage violent insurrection. Zandu’s Law, as it came to be called, gathered considerable support among the rangers of the west whose nomadic lifestyle couldn’t sustain the cumbersomeness of plate armor anyway, but it was lobbied against by the farmers of the east and the merchant class whose mercenaries would often have to clash with armed bandits. The mages of Badijan did their best to convince Soliman of the wisdom of the law, but he resisted, arguing that disarming the public was the surest way to provoke the violence they sought to avoid. Even if he had been convinced, the Council members loyal to the eastern farming towns were even less in favor of the law. One such member named Gaechter, tired of Zandu’s incessant insistence that armor was a tool of war, laughed at Zandu and said, “Armor is designed to prevent war. By such logic, a woman is a tool of abstinence.” Gaechter then followed with a comment regarding Zandu’s

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first wife and her ability to disarm sexual intent in men that look upon her. Zandu, his ranger honor deeply offended, challenged Gaechter to a duel. Gaechter dismissed the challenge as “the last ploy of the witless combatant.” Zandu pulled his saber and killed him on the spot. Soliman imprisoned Zandu to await trial.

Upon hearing the circumstances of Zandu’s imprisonment, Rangers and the members of numerous unions from the towns of Bandre and Santium poured into Badijan to protest what was, in their eyes, the only honorable act the Council had ever committed. The Council, worried about open revolt from the cities, convinced Soliman to allow the protesters to vote on the two new Council members even though the written laws claim council spots opened by death are to remain unfilled until the next regular election. Soliman agreed and the new Council was seated. Farmers and tradesmen from the eastern farmlands immediately protested that one of their representatives had been killed and the murderers’ people allowed to replace him. Armed conflict broke out between Zandu’s supporters from the west and farmers from the east. During the fight the prison was raided and numerous prisoners released upon the populace. Zandu himself was liberated and snuck out of Badijan whereupon he began his own resistance group – the Paradox Cult (see Sidebar). Soliman’s magi quelled the conflict but over forty people were dead and hundreds wounded. The latest violence led Soliman to concede and the next morning on Phandra the 13<sup>th</sup> in the year 44 Zandu’s Law was passed with an additional clause: all iron weaponry was to be confiscated, and any blacksmith caught producing iron weapons would be fined and imprisoned. It is a historical irony that Zandu openly condemned this more restrictive law that bore his name.

## **Origins of the Paradox Cult**

Zandu founded the Paradox Cult after his expulsion from the council and proceeded to write the Book of Mysteries as a challenge to the arrogant Phandre magicians who insisted that their superior knowledge and wisdom were the only forces standing between a pitifully ignorant populace and their certain self-imposed ruin. The central tenets of Paradox were that distributed systems of human action and decision making cannot be profitably coalesced into a single body – human or council – that can make decisions with such prognostication that they can plan the rules, ramifications and actions of any large number of individuals without dire consequences. “We are all ignorant about some things,” he argued, “but we are experts only about our own lives.” He argued feverishly that the unilateral laws put down by the Badijan elite were destined to fail. “Distributed systems that allow the maximization of an individual man’s freedom to determine his own destiny and to navigate the necessary tradeoffs of his own life – say between education and work, between martial training and pursuit of a maiden, or between safe living and bold initiative, will always bring superior results not only to the individual but to future generations who can learn from such decisions. Imposed beliefs and imposed laws not only crush any attempt at future progress, they impose averages over the full range of human

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variation. What is good for beggar is not good for the lord, and we ought to let them decide if they wish to participate in dangerous magical experiments for money, if they wish to duel to the death, and if they wish to believe in what you call superstitious cures or not.”

The collective wisdom of the current generations, in Zandu’s eyes, was extremely limited. He found the magician’s accounts of magic, life and individual will to be enfeebled and vastly short of the mark. In order for future generations to eventually find true explanations of these phenomena it was not enough to accept the best of a series of bad ideas. Rather all ideas must be kept open until sufficient data and learning can finally close off the false beliefs. In his words, “In order for future generations to craft better theories and reach more fulfilling solutions to our problems it becomes imperative that two actions be fervently and unapologetically defended. The first imperative is the absolute, complete and ruthless extermination of any sense of the sacred which serves no other purpose but to blind men to alternatives and make complex decisions that involve careful weighing of costs and benefits into simple reflexive laws that remain ignorant of any advances in knowledge or changes in condition. The second imperative is to question every assumption, to attack every idea, to subject every claim, no matter how sensical it may seem, to the same rigorous test of evidence and consistency.”

The Book of Mysteries was written as a demonstration that some questions will never be answered and that there are severe limits to “divine revelation” as a means of acquiring answers. Though Zandu had a great respect for evidence and experimentation as a means of getting ever closer to truth, in later years this respect was largely lost and the text misinterpreted by Paradoxists as demonstrating that people know nothing and any idea is as good as any other.

With peacekeepers, aided by magicians from the Phaedran Arcanum, patrolling the Phaedran Causeway and confiscating iron armor and weaponry, urban violence began to decline but banditry spread upon the open roads, so much so that merchants began to take their caravans through the bumpy wilderness rather than risk travel on the Phaedran Causeway.

Only woodsmen, whose bows and arrows, spears and staves could be made without iron were still armed. During the twenty years that followed Zandu’s Law and the unofficial repeal of the Land Tax, rangers-turned-bandits would occasionally raid eastern farmlands for food during the cold season. Badijan Peacekeepers would deputize law enforcers in farmtowns, but given the sprawling nature of farming settlements, by the time the word spread of a raid the bandits were already gone. Kidnappings of young milkmaids were epidemic, though it isn’t clear how many of those kidnappings were resisted by the women whose marriage prospects in small farmtowns were often

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limited to not-too distant relatives and poor farmhands. One such raiding party was intercepted by members of the Cult of the Eye, who had so far remained elusive enough to retain both their iron armaments and armor. All twelve bandits were bludgeoned to death and their heads were cut off and mounted along the Phaedran Causeway. Sporadic fights between ranger-bandits and the Cult of the Eye would erupt, but other than that peace reigned for twenty years.

Just before the turn of Zar in the year 68 Aeriad foragers from the Phandril forests warned the townsmen of a rapidly advancing party of Jhangaran raiders. The Aeriads had, up to that point, served as a buffer between Jhangaran war parties and the farmlands of eastern Phaedra, but with such a massive force trekking through the forestry, the Aeriads began to flee the forest for the uninhabited forest of Vardune to the north. The mayors of the farmtowns and the militia of Undurin called upon Soliman to send the Phaedran Army to the border to repel the Jhangarans, but much of the army had been sent on naval expeditions across the southern coast and land expeditions to the Volcanic Hills. The small force that remained, including a powerful coterie of pyromancers lead by the infamous Sassan, were appointed to protect the Council. The Council discussed whether their personal guards should be sent into battle. Soliman called upon not only the Council's guard, but the Council itself to head south and engage the troops. Though Soliman had grown weak with age he too agreed to go. Before they were to leave a Councilmen named Fodorian argued that the Jhangarans could be pacified if they were to cede the eastern part of the territory to them. Arguing that the primitive Jhangarans would be unable to cultivate the land for food, they would have no choice but to return to their jungles for sustenance. Soliman considered the idea patently absurd – as the Jhangarans could just as easily continue inward into the empire if they met no resistance. But the Council was moved by the argument and overruled Soliman's decision to send their troops into battle. In response, Soliman dispatched a note to the naval fleets of Phaedra to sail up the Axis River and meet the tail end of the invading force; in addition, he dispatched his most powerful ally, the sorcerer Kabros to organize a resistance.

Word of the invasion reached the western cities, ranger families and unions. The Union of Western Rangers was a collection of eight ranger families who had, due to the threat of organized banditry, signed a collective pact to defend one another and the Phaedran Empire from attack. Kabros met with them and urged them to come to the defense of the eastern farmlands. The Union bylaws required that all eight families vote for war or none of the families were allowed to send soldiers. Despite Kabros's plea, one of the families declined to vote for interventions.

Whole towns were destroyed by the Jhangaran raiders who fought with no fear of death. Various accounts suggest they were terrified of an impending curse coming from the jungle itself. Rumors, of varying veracity, spread across the Phaedran Empire of Jhangarans committing torture, rape and cannibalism, but still no troops came from Badijan. At the gates of Undurin the Jhangaran force was finally met by an army – several thousand strong – of Aamanian Cultists wielding iron weapons and armor. Kabros and a loyal band of Phaedran magicians stood with them. The siege of Undurin lasted several days with the masses of Jhangarans being held at the walls. Finally, relief forces came, not from Badijan, but from several of the ranger families and numerous dueling and hunting guilds of Santium and Bandre who finally ignored the Union of Western Rangers bylaws. The reinforcements, wielding bows and arrows from ontra-back, sniped at the Jhangaran forces with hit and run tactics, whittling down their numbers until the Aamanian Cultists charged from within Undurin and met them head on. Pinched between the cavalry and the ground troops, with some support from Aeriad archers, the Jhangaran force was destroyed.

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Following the battle the combined forces began to march toward Badijan. Different historical texts ascribe different motives to the force. The Cymrilian account, considered the standard mostly because modern day Aamanian and Zandir accounts have been so thoroughly poisoned with self-serving errors, suggest the force fully intended to invade Badijan and slay Soliman and the Phaedran Council. Modern Aamanian and Zandir texts (both of which credit the victory over the Jhangarans exclusively to their own forces) suggest their intention was merely to camp outside Badijan and await the voting of the new council in the year 70. The truth cannot be known because the remaining forces, battle-worn from the Jhangaran offensive, were met with armed resistance some twenty miles south of Badijan. The force came from Badijan and was comprised of Phaedran magicians. Most accounts suggest Kabros fought off the coterie of magicians single-handedly, in the process killing several of his former students. After a bloody battle both sides retreated, the Cult of the Eye disappearing again into the masses, the rangers returning home and Kabros returned to Badijan, determined to stay out of war and politics for the rest of his life.

The renegade rangers who volunteered to fight off the Jhangaran were largely ridiculed by their city-dwelling relatives in Santium and Fadian, who argued that the fight against the Jhangaran was not only unnecessary, but came at the expense of families back home, many of whom lost herds to bandits or predatory Omnivrax while their hunters were gone. The Jhangarans were seen by many as childlike and pathetic, worthy of pity and enculturation, not extinction, and the actions of the Black Moon warriors who slaughtered every last one of the invaders were seen as bloodthirsty and criminal.

## **The Reign of Damon**

The election of 70 New Age was surprisingly uneventful, and has been seen by historians as the first time that the ancestors of modern day Aaman and Zandu lost confidence in the Phaedran Empire. This interpretation only being available from the viewpoint of history, however, meant that the Phaedran Council and Soliman himself were quite worried that the year 77 would bring another violent confrontation. During a late meeting with his council in the year 71, Soliman's illness finally got the better of him, and he collapsed at the table and died. His death was a tragedy for the Phaedran people of all kinds, as he was widely respected for his early role in the Wild Wars, and frequently favored over the Council members who were supposed to represent the people who voted them into office.

The Council voted in one of Soliman III's apprentices, an enigmatic magician named Damon. Even during his inauguration reports of cult movements began to surface across the east of Phaedra that the Cult of the Eye was gathering troops. Despite a frantic effort on behalf of Badijan peacekeepers, the Cult remained in secret operation, appearing on occasion to fight western raiders, to challenge tax collectors, repel Jhangarans and, with increasing frequency, hunt down the daughters farmers who were taken or absconded with merchants, rangers, or city-dwellers of the west. From the west, Damon saw a new threat – the increasing Cult of Paradoxy led by the one-time prisoner and Councilman Zandu. Stated boldly and without qualification, the sole purpose of the Cult of Paradoxy was to offer as many plausible alternatives to the increasingly numerous statements of purpose, facts, decrees and moral positions that came from Badijan (see Sidebar). Fearing both the

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Paradoxists and the newfound Cult of the Eye, Damon went to his Council for advice. The following day, he proclaimed a twenty year period of mourning for beloved Soliman III. Voting, of course, would be suspended for this time period.

## **The Phaedran Decrees**

It was written at the founding of the Phaedran Empire that issues of fact were to be resolved by the Phaedran Council, a provision meant to streamline government decisions and trim from consideration the often whimsical musing that eccentric magicians have about what is and is not reality. Several durge-headed superstitions, conspiracy theories and paranoid fantasies were brought to a much deserved swift death under the early Council. Among them were:

- The Great Disaster was the result of a breaking of divine moral order that has since rendered all issues of morality moot.
- If a woman plants crops during the time of her menstrual flow they will grow poisonous.
- Twins are evil omens and the weaker of the two should be put to death.
- Sleeping under a gall oak tree will lead to blindness.

A generation or two later the Council began to issue ever more frequent decrees, usurping powers not originally granted to them. These decrees were particularly thorny for Phaedran unions in the western cities who thrived both on fraudulent claims and the occasional unorthodox discovery. As such, decrees about the efficacy of various alchemical remedies, treatments and pseudo-magical cures were particularly damaging to the alchemists – many of whom were descended from Zandu – himself a skilled “brewer.” Decrees affected all aspects of production including mining, crafting, transport, research, arts, entertainment, morality and warfare. The decrees regarding the effect of lewd and lascivious plays on men’s morality and sanity were thoroughly protested including, in the year 73, a nude march on Badijan that ended abruptly with the sudden onset of a cold rain.

Resentment grew among the citizens of Phaedra, but out of respect for Soliman III there were no uprisings. Still, as the year 77 approached rumors began to spread, with some evidence, that the Cult of the Eye was planning on a violent revolt – citing as grievances the unwillingness to aid the farm lands during the Jhangaran invasion and the suspension of voting. To pacify those outraged, Damon decreed that the lands belonging to the Aeriad were available for the growing population of Phaedra. The Phaedran Army marched into the forestry and removed the remaining Aeriad population who fled to the forests of Vardune. Still bitter that so few Aeriads fought against the Jhangaran invasion, the growing Cult of the Eye happily moved into the territory and began slash and burn agriculture and constructing villages.

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As the years passed the legitimacy of Damon's rule was questioned both by the growing Paradoxist Cult and the growing Church of Aa, who came out of hiding and openly worshipped their god, tearing down the colorful Temples of the Creator and erecting simple white-washed churches. Fearful of violent revolt, and – according to some historians – suffering from deeprooted insanity, Damon began pulling back the influence of his agents. Taxes were lifted, troops and peacekeepers recalled to Badijan, restrictions on magical research lifted, and the naval fleet slowly fell into disrepair as exploratory and cartographical expeditions were cancelled. The Phaedran ports of Zantil, Pha'Baal, Fir and Ralm were sold off to merchants, unions, explorers and families of fishermen. In all aspects of life the influence of Badijan and the Phaedran elite was diminished, and the Paradoxist Cult and the Cult of the Eye gained in influence.

In the year 91 the period of mourning was officially ended and members of both cults began to march on Badijan to vote in the next Phaedran Council. The council was prepared for voting, many of them quite tired of their jobs anyway now that their influence had been so restricted. Damon, however, was fearful of violent outbursts, and – by this time – suffering from intense paranoia over even trivial stimuli (rumor has it that the sight of a quaal would send him screaming), and so when the time came to announce the period of mourning was over, he instead announced that a period of intense celebration would be had for the next twenty years. As the crowd of assembled citizens jeered, the Phaedran Council subdued Damon, shackled him, and carted him off to the prison while he screamed like a madman swearing that the enemies of the empire would do anything to stop him.

Given the volatile nature of the crowd, the Council had to move with great speed and quickly announced that because Damon had no legitimate heirs the next emperor of Phaedra would be elected by the Council itself. Evidence suggests Damon *did* have several heirs as his three wives had six children between them, but he sent all his children away to live in different cities and corresponded with them only by messenger. Eager to compromise, the Council appointed the famous Kabros as the new emperor, hoping his valor during the Jhangaran invasion would stave off the threat from the Cultists of the Eye. Though the appointment of Kabros staved off any violent revolt, it spelled the third time that the citizens of Phaedra were sent away from Badijan without their voices being heard.

## **Kabros and the Fool's Gambit**

Kabros, one of few modern casters to comprehend Koraq's theory of sorcery, was best known for his magical abilities, tomes, texts and cantrips, many of which formed the mainstay of Cymrilian magic years later. But Kabros had no interest in political debates, and even less interest in attempting to sooth the relationship between the growing Cult of the Eye, the Paradoxists and the Phaedran Orthodoxists whose magicians insisted that they knew best how to govern the masses. His own view, to the extent that history captures it accurately, was that the factions between east and west were isolated for too long, and that local customs, laws and beliefs had grown so far apart that the best one could do was divide them into two states. During his tenure he attempted to integrate the eastern farmlands with the western rangers, merchants and cities. He felt the unions of western lands were strangling the free trade that would have allowed the farming towns of the east to barter for a better economic position. Unwilling to challenge Zandu and the Paradoxists who

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controlled the unions, Kabros instead decided to create a missionary circuit through which Phaedran craftsman and magicians (trained in Badijan) would travel from town to town and instruct the locals on the latest advancements in artisanry, food storage, blacksmithing, architecture, alchemy, animal husbandry and various other trades that the western cities and Phaedran magicians had developed. The Badijan missionaries had some success at transforming the technologically impoverished eastern farming towns into more stable stone-based settlements. During their tenure the cities of Aabaal, Aalm and Arat were settled on the coast, each named of course after the Cult of the Eye's deity, Aa. Ultimately the missionaries failed and led the empire one step closer to civil war – see Sidebar.

## **Phaedran Missionaries**

For several generations many of the best and bravest Phaedran explorers were commissioned as missionaries to contact, document and in some cases pacify other groups roaming the decimated lands of Talislanta. It was these missionaries that first created the ties that bound the civilized nations together for centuries to come. Contact was established with the Sarista gypsies to the north leading to a lucrative cultural and economic exchange between the gypsies and the Paradoxists, the nomadic Djaffir and Kashmirians were also contacted and the Phaedran gold lumen used as standard currency between them, and of course the various Sub-men races were contacted, documented and levels of hostility assessed. Missionaries and ambassadors, for one reason or another, seem to go to great lengths to depict their adopted culture in the holiest of lights. The Phaedran missionary to the Ur clansmen, for example, reported at great length on the pious spirituality exhibited by the Ur shaman and the latent fears of inadequacy and self-doubt that plagued the Ur leaders who saw agency behind every coincidence and misfortune. His body was never recovered.

When Kabros was appointed Sorcerer-King of the Phaedran Empire, he hired a group of young missionaries and craftsmen to travel among the farming towns of eastern Phaedra and attempt to use their arcane and practical skills to teach and train the young of the farm towns so that the next generation could – to some extent – break away from the farming lifestyle that had left them impoverished and put them at a distinct economic disadvantage compared to the western half of Phaedra. By most accounts these missions were initially successful in getting footholds for various tradeskills in the farming towns. The Cult of the Eye ignored these early interventions at first but quickly took notice when the missionaries began siphoning off the brightest of the young farmers children and sending them to Badijan for magical training. The boys were eager to leave as most faced a lifetime of backbreaking labor on farms with fewer and fewer opportunities

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for marriage as farm girls were continually eloping with western herders, merchants and – increasingly – missionaries themselves.

The missionaries were finally recalled from eastern Phaedra following a magical conflagration that took place when an archimage from the Cult of the Eye interrupted a lesson in wizardry at a small school house outside of Undurin. The anonymous archimage was said to have had no formal magical education whatsoever challenged three of the Badijan wizards to a wizard's duel, an old custom of the Phaedran elite. According to the legend, still well remembered by modern Aamanians, the "Archimage of the Hills" bested all three of the wizards, including a protégé of the famous pyromancer Sassan. Though victorious, the archimage suffered serious burns from a pyromantic spell called "Sassan's Searing Lash" which left nine hideous scars across the archimage's back and shoulders. Legend has it that the students whose lesson was interrupted left their Badijan masters and took up study with the archimage at the Temple of Aa in Undurin. Their Order serves to this day, and like their founders they show their devotion to Aa with self-flagellation.

One of Kabros's first actions was to reinstate elections for the members of the Phaedran Council, the first to be scheduled on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Phaedran Empire during a spectacular celebration that's preparation took nine years. Though his council pleaded with him to permanently dissolve the election process Kabros declared that the people of the Phaedran Empire will determine their own fate for better or worse. Though his response has been seen as flippant by many historians, the genius of his plan indicates he spent considerable time planning for the nation's future. As the journals of his advisors indicate, Kabros thought the previous violence that erupted during the elections was due to the violent minority being the only citizens willing to make the hard trek to Badijan to have their votes counted. Kabros believed if enough of the citizenry could be rallied to the capital their voices would overwhelm the members of the Cult of the Eye and the increasing number of unions, guilds and militia joining Zandu's Paradoxists Cult. And to get the citizenry to Badijan required an extravaganza unlike anything anyone had seen since the Archaens themselves flew the sky. Exotic foods were imported from across the lands – icicle treats from L'Haan, every variety of mushroom from the Gnomekin of Durne, exotic meats from Werewood and nectar from Thaecia. Thousand gold bounties were put on exotic beasts from around the lands and the Badijan Zoological Holding Grounds were stuffed full of exomorphs, winged apes, skalanxes, malathropes, mudmen, and even a prized five-headed Kytala reportedly captured by Kabros himself. Were that not enough, Kabros summoned extra dimensional entities from no less than six different planes of existence and put them into a state of suspended animation where they could be show cased in relative safety. Phaedran wine flowed into the city by the wagonload along with various newly discovered intoxicants including powdered lotus and tobacco. Thaecian thespians were hired to perform various plays and were sailed in from their isle at great expense. Magicians from throughout the empire would put on a display of arcane prowess by both dueling and magical exhibitions performed by troupes of magicians casting in unison. But the greatest attraction was the promise of that which was thought destroyed forever – the Archaen windship, exhibited by the

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newly contacted Phantasians who would bring their miraculous dream essences for sale at the celebration.

Kabros' plan worked ostensibly, bringing in by most accounts between one fourth and one half of the entire population of Phaedra. Men, women and children poured into Badijan for the festivities and to elect the first Phaedran Council of the second century. What Kabros and the magicians of Badijan did not know was how rampant the cults had spread throughout the country side and cities of Phaedra.

No one knows for sure how the riot started or even whether it was one spark or several smaller conflagrations that grew to engulf the city. Journals and correspondences from that era suggest at least three causes for the conflict. The Cult of the Eye was known to have carried iron weapons into Badijan in flagrant violation of the Law of Zandu. Knowing that the security forces normally stationed at Badijan would be insufficient to deal with such a large crowd, Kabros had hired a western militia for additional security. This militia attempted to confiscate the Aamanian Cultists' weapons provoking a small skirmish at the southern gate. This initial conflict, though largely bloodless, is believed to have provoked several subsequent fights between militia unions and Aamanian Cultists. A feud between two militia unions also added fuel to the riot. The Rain-dancers of Phaedra union of archers was not given the lucrative security contract to protect Badijan, having lost the bid with their competitors the Phaedran Riders militia – the favored military unit of the Paradox Cult. Modern day Zandir claim the archers deliberately committed burglaries, arson and assaults in various sections of the city under the protection of their union. Finally, the rape of Athelia, the niece of a prominent mayor and priest of Aa was brutally avenged by Cultists of the Eye who beat and tortured the rapist in front of his family while fellow cult members held the Badijan peacekeepers at bay. Little is known of the rapist other than that he was a member of the Paradoxist Cult and had numerous extended family who were made to watch while he was castrated and beaten so severely that he never regained the use of his legs. This incident, more than the previous two hypothesized causes of the riot, resonated so well with future generations that the civil war that ultimately erupted is sometimes called "Athelia's War."

Modern day Zandir maintain that Athelia had accused an innocent man to hide her pregnancy from her uncle and others who would likely have banished her for spoiling her virginity. The only evidence the Zandir have mounted for this interpretation is that Athelia was in fact banished from her town seven months after the incident at Badijan. According to common Zandir belief Athelia's deception was discovered when she gave birth after only seven months to a fully healthy child and was subsequently banished for her sins. The veracity of Athelia's claim is likely lost to history.

Regardless of the causes, the city of Badijan was torn apart during the riots. Homes were ransacked, children and the elderly were trampled as people ran from the fighting, as more and more guards fell they began to panic and attack almost anyone nearby, and at one point a herd from a Ranger family was stampeded through a Thaecian performance. Amidst this chaos politicians vainly attempted to tally votes by counting the number of people under the banner of a potential councilmember, including in some cases the individuals bludgeoning said contender. Regardless of these irregularities the votes were counted and seven new council members were elected: three representatives from the Paradoxist Cult, three representatives from the Cult of the Eye, and one of Kabros's former students who carried the votes of much of the Badijan populace.

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As Kabros and the Badijan guards slowly began to restore order the general populace fled the capitol. Most count the dead at no less than two hundred. Devastated by the outcome, Kabros met with his closest friends and students at the Phaedran Arcanum school of magic. He delivered a speech, the transcription of which is now held in the Lyceum Arcanum archives, and declared that the Phaedran Empire has been lost to religious uprisings – see sidebar. At the end of his speech he gathered many of his precious personal positions – though he notably left many of his magical works in the Phaedran library – opened a portal through his bedroom mirror and disappeared. Most believe he went to the Isle of Thaecia with a dancer he met at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration; though if he intended to stay there or not is unclear.

## **The Eulogy for the Phaedran Empire**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Talislandra in the year 100 of the New Age, Kabros delivered what many call the Eulogy for the Phaedran Empire, declaring the death and fond remembrance of the first Archaen civilization to follow the humbling Great Disaster. Though delivered to a small audience of comrades and students, Kabros spoke with great eloquence. Partial quotes of the speech follow.

“On the brink of civil war our nation stands, our boots still stained with blood and our hearts heavy with the loss of our beloved illusions of unity. I took this mantle of leadership with a simple plan to unify our nation behind its founding principles of open trade and respect for the rights of our citizens to be heard, counted and to chart whatever course they like for their life’s journey. Whatever the crimes our citizens have attributed to one another, whatever feuds have grown, whatever the sins of our own aristocrats here in Badijan, I was certain that all held the wisdom of Soliman in their hearts and were as committed as I to the ideals that made the bedrock of our democracy. As the events of this year illustrate, I was wrong. The fight between the Paradoxists and the Aamanians is no longer a fight between violent minorities, and more importantly, it is no longer a fight borne of revenge, jealousy or greed. It is a war of ideals and devotion. And ideas in the mind of a zealot are immune from reason and argument – they can be defeated only by the death of their hosts. A war will consume them, and we can only hope those not infected by their religious ideas can survive long enough to revive the empire once the cults finish each other off. As for those of us here today, I recommend you do as I will do. Gather your most precious of possessions, your families and your studies and leave.”

“...furthermore, the blame for this coming conflict, if one must find blame, lies partly on us for ignoring the growth of these Cults until

they had consumed the populace in which they hid. Damon's mistake cost us dearly, leaving the common citizen no one to turn to other than the cults that plagued them..."

"However beneficial having a centralized capital of learning and magical research has been in reviving the Archaen art, the siphoning of the magically proficient from their homelands has left cities and towns throughout our empire devoid of the most gifted of citizens. Followers need leaders in their midst, and if we were not there to aid and guide them with our knowledge then they had no choice but to turn to those who offered answers."

Modern scholars, mostly Cymrilians, continue to debate the role of the Badijan elite in the dissolution of the Phaedran Empire. Tanasians tend to follow Kabros's assessment and blame Damon's suspension of voting and the consolidation of the educated. The more liberal Koresians tend to blame the affair squarely on the religious influences of the Cults themselves. Pharesians(??) take a more libertarian stand and argue it was the arrogance and interference of the Badijan leaders that forced the cults to take interest in the laws and powers of the country. If there had been a weak central state, they argue, there would have been nothing for them to contest. This diversity of opinion is testament to the poor understanding modern scholars have of states and man.

The newly elected Phaedran Council, which was – contrary to some claims – not present at Kabros's farewell speech, panicked when they discovered his resignation. Despite the ideological conflict between the cult members that were elected to the council, the prospect of open war and – if you believe the cynics – the prospect of losing their new positions of power, was too frightening to the council. The Fool's Gambit, as it has been called, was agreed upon by the Phaedran Council, and grudgingly approved by professors at the Phaedran Arcanum, who provided the illusionary enchantments necessary to disguise Arkonitus the fifth (the councilmember elected largely by the wizards of Badijan) as Kabros.

Arkonitus, posing as Kabros, did his best to keep out of the public eye and limit the actions of the Phaedran government until the Council could determine how best to mend the wounds of the country. Unfortunately, as soon as it became clear that Arkonitus could play the role of Kabros to the public's satisfaction, the Council immediately returned their loyalties to the cults that elected them and began to fight incessantly. The journal of Arkonitus the fifth suggests he tried desperately to limit the conflict in the Council, but given the need to maintain his disguise there was little he could do to pacify the feuding councilmembers. To quote Arkonitus, "I am thankful only for the fact that the wild and dramatic ambitions of the cultists with whom I serve are restrained by the need to keep 'Kabros' from public scrutiny and the fact that they symmetrically oppose each other on so many issues that it is likely the council will accomplish absolutely nothing so long as these members are reelected. It is my sincerest hope that they serve very long terms indeed."

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Eleven years of relative peace passed before Arkonitus was uncovered by an Aamanian Priest who was meeting with “Kabros” to discuss a missing Aamanian frigate believed to have been taken by the Paradoxists as part of a growing slave trade. According to Aamanian legend the Eye of Aa manifested itself in the priest and he easily spotted the illusion. Though scholars and magicians disagree about the nature of Aamanian magic, it remains a mystery how a poorly trained priest spotted a powerful illusion that had fooled for far more educated casters. Some believe Arkonitus, tired of the deception, revealed himself to the priest in a moment of weakness – perhaps distraught from the recent loss of his wife who was rumored to have tired of the double life and left him for an aging geomancer.

However it was revealed, the Cult of the Eye received word of it in short order. Their leader, the Hierophant of the church gave the order for a full scale invasion. Within two weeks an army of ironclad Aamanian warriors descended on Badijan. The Phaedran Council fled to parts unknown, taking with them a fortune in gold lumens, not to mention vast magical and historical treasure. The members of the council elected by the Paradoxist and Aamanian Cults were labeled traitors by their own kind and numerous bounty hunters were sent after them, though it is believed that none were captured.

Aamanian forces easily overwhelmed the Badijan troops, some of whom immediately joined the invading force while others fled back to the western cities and villages to warn members of the Paradox Cult that their rivals had seized the capital. Dissidents, outnumbering the meager space available in the prisons of Badijan were lead west to the Phaedran Sea and sailed to penal colony of Gao-Din. The Hierophant Aatyphus the First temporarily assumed emperor’s palace and decreed himself ruler of the Phaedran Empire. As his first act he destroyed the old laws, claiming as justification the fact that it was not known how long the citizens of Phaedra had been deceived by their rulers and thus all laws were illegitimate. He rewrote the laws himself designed to govern the people at least until the next election. The new laws were called “neo-orthodoxy” to distinguish themselves from Phaedran Orthodoxy and marks the time that the Cult of the Eye became known as the neo-Orthodoxy, or later simply the Orthodoxy.

According to Aamanian historians the intension of the invading force was to dethrone outlaws and establish a temporary government until the next election in 112 one year later. When Zandu heard of the invasion he rallied the militias of the Paradox Cult and led them to the capital. Negotiations were brief and reports of what was said are so inconsistent that few bother trying to substantiate claims of what was said. A single point of agreement exists: the aging Zandu was the first to fall in battle. The result was civil war.

## ***VI. The Cult Wars***

The Cult Wars as the years between 111 and 511 are labeled was a time of constant bitter warfare during which the astounding civil progress made in the first hundred years of the empire was shredded as conflict, division and hatred escalated continuously. The war was long, bitter and showed brutal tactics that rivaled anything seen on the continent since the times of the Torquaran.

## **Grievances**

The Cult Wars is largely remembered as a fight over ideals and religion between the rather chaotic Paradoxists and the religious strict Orthodox Cult (which lost the “neo” prefix sometime in the late second century). As Kabros proclaimed, the war was a fight between ideas immune to reason. Regardless of the role religion played, there were numerous practical, economic and social reasons that the groups feuded over. The relative importance of these instigations is still debated.

From the Aamanian perspective, the Paradoxist Cult and its cabal of unions and militia held a tight monopoly on many goods high valued by the farming communities that made up the ecology of the average Aamanian. Having torched much of their own woodlands for farmland, the Aamanians were in need of lumber for housing, farming, ships, carriages and chariots. Spices were also highly valued by Aamanians, and though their preferred palate was plainer than their western counterparts, their food storage technology was quite poor and required either salt, which the Paradoxists controlled via their traderoutes with the fledgling Danalek tribes, or spices that were also controlled by the botanical unions of the west. As skilled as Aamanian farmers were at growing the provender plant and tending durge, they had few exotic plants, fruits or wild vines due in large part to their comparatively poor soil and their tendency to avoid experimenting with different crops. Given these needs, the Paradox Cult was able to make a small fortune by exerting a monopoly over spice, salt and the lumber refinement trade. When the monopoly took hold prices for these goods quadrupled leaving many Aamanian families with rotting meat. Numerous growth disorders took a hold of children whose diet consisted almost entirely of grains from the provender plant and harsh wild vegetables. Some argue the Aamanian Cult was able to perform so many mass conversions because of the malnourished minds of eastern populace. Finally, the Paradox Cult learned from the Phaedian neomancers mistake in selling the first breed of durge and, when the Zandir acquired their monopoly on the recently tamed graymane equus mounts, began enforcing a policy of only selling castrated equines to non-members of the Paradox Cult. This practice kept Aamanians highly, and unnecessarily, dependent on Zandir animal handlers.

Beyond the trade monopolies, there was still a great deal of resentment among Aamanians that their neighbors to the west had abandoned them during the Jhangaran Invasion, attempted to disarm them with Zandu’s Law, and fought them at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Furthermore, the spread of banditry and the kidnapping of Aamanian women had been a constant source of anger and distrust, particularly among Aamanians living near the rough and tumble ranger towns or trade routes where merchants – notorious for their lecherous indiscretions – had started a de facto slave trade in Aamanian women, selling them to nobles in Fadian and surrounding villages.

The Zandirs, as the Paradoxists and their sympathizers called themselves following Zandu’s death, saw the conflict somewhat differently. Still in shock about the disappearance of Kabros, the death of Zandu and the Aamanian seizure of Badijan, the Paradoxists quickly rallied to the call of defense. Religious differences aside, the Zandir held deep resentment for the Aamanians based on their violent resistance to the Land Tax that was designed to keep their people from starving. Athelia’s War weighed heavily on their heads as well, as numerous scribes, playwrights, poets and seers recalled the story of how the nameless innocent man was accused and tortured at the hands of the vicious cult and on the word of a shameless “whore” as Athelia was referred to among the Zandir.

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Economically, the Zandir had little to complain about. Though they depended heavily on their eastern brethren for grain and durge meat, these commodities were freely traded before the Cult War. Their sole point of contention was the belief that they paid the larger share of Phaedran taxes as Aamanians were notorious for simply giving their taxes to their church and avoiding Phaedran tax collectors entirely. While documents suggest this is true, the disparity was also due to the fact that the Zandir were much wealthier than the Aamanians, due mostly to the modernization that occurred when the Land Tax was unofficially repealed and the western citizens diversified their employment.

Finally, both groups found feared the destruction of their own culture and belief systems were either group to get control of the Phaedran Council and their ability to pass decrees. The ideological differences that had accumulated over the years between the western merchants and city dwellers and the eastern farmers were great before the war and their differences only intensified in the times to come (see Chapters 2 and 3).

## Cult Dominance

“A mutual enemy will do more to solidify a friendship than a thousand favors” – Sowell Moonrage, Phantasian dream merchant

Even by the most pessimistic calculations, only 1 in 10 of the citizens of the Phaedran Empire explicitly belonged to one of the Cults that brought the empire to war. But within a generation of war virtually every citizen of Phaedra had either joined one of the Cults or fled the land for their lives. Modern day Cymrilians and Hadjin are the remains of the Badijan elite who fled sporadically throughout the first generation of war. Marukans were a small ethnic minority (descended from Numenians rather than the Phandre as other Phaedran citizens) who typically worked for the Phaedran government as scribes, secretaries, accountants, tax collectors and if magically adapt - enchanters. Danuvians are the descendents of a rival all-female militia guild forced out by Cult of Paradoxy late in the Cult Wars. The Paradoxists claimed that the Danuvians were originally a guild of prostitutes that could cater only to the thriftiest of customers.

Beyond the exodus of non-believers and dissidents, the Cults extended influence over the general population by filling niches left by the fractured Phaedran government. Law and order was established separately with the Paradoxy quickly scribing laws and distributing them throughout their lands. The Orthodox Cult simply codified the hundreds of moral laws already written in the Omnival. Most local judges and justices continued to do their work as they had before though a few loyal to the Phandre elite were banished or imprisoned. The new governments needed new currencies as well to fund their war effort and the Zandir began to mint their gold crescents which were in terms of weight lighter than the standard lumen but decreed to be twice the value. Aamanian coppers began to be minted from the numerous copper mines in southern Aaman as well.

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Finally, as a tribute to their fallen leader, the second Sultan of the Paradox Cult named their new country the Sultanate of Zandu on the eighth of Drome in the year 111 New Age. As a show of solidarities, the nobles who lead the towns of Fadian and Fir changed the names of the towns to Zadian and Zir. This occurred just as the Aamanians were renaming Pha'Baal, Ralm and Undurin to Aabaal, Alm and Andurin. As difficult as it is for some historians to believe, these name changes appear to have taken place independently of one another.

## **The Holy Army of Aa**

Aamanian military service was mandated for all males over the age of sixteen who were not accepted into one of several specialty schools run by the new Aamanian Theocracy. This was not seen as much of a burden, in fact thousands of young Aamanians had to be turned away from service when it was revealed by Aamanian priests that they had lied about their age to enlist early. With a military already formed and hardened by Jhangaran raids, the Aamanian holy army held Badijan from the first Zandir attack, repelling Paradoxists. Immediately the Aamanian army took up patrols near the Phaedran Causeway, fortified their position and began building defenses. They knew the war would be a long one.

Aamanian society militarized rapidly with citizens giving freely to the military, sacrificing time and money to keep the warriors well fed, in good health, and wearing the best iron plate armor they could craft. Personal ambition bent to the good of the Church. It is said that in the first ten years of the Cult Wars there was not a single crime committed between any two Aamanians. This is no doubt an exaggeration but speaks to the communalism of the Aamanian people.

In battle the Aamanians were slow and deliberate, taking territory with overwhelming forces and then fortifying the positions with catapults, stone towers, moats, crossbowmen and militia. Footmen, the vast majority of their force, were typically equipped with clubs and mail armor until the fourth century when the iron trade with the Arimite allowed for metal maces, swords and plate armor. Scouting was always difficult as the Aamanians had great difficulty getting intact male equus mounts for breeding. At one time, before Aamanian humor disappeared all together, it was a common joke that a Zandir rider would sooner part with his own then let you get an intact pair from an equine stud.

Aamanian archimagi and priests led the holy warriors into battle – using their magical abilities to instill serene peace and calm routed troops, bless holy weapons and shields in battle, reveal enemy troop locations, blind enemies with holy light, and most importantly cure wounds and diseases among the ranks. The city of Andurin began producing enchanted weapons in the early third century and many believe they secretly purchased these items from the early Farad, though the merchants deny this to the Zandir at least. Few others seem to care.

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## The Zandir Brigades

The Union of Militias was immediately commandeered by the first Sultan of Zandu, Zor-Archer. The few remaining rangers who lived on the outskirts of civilization poured into the military of their own will, ready to fend off the Aamanian menace. Until tales of atrocities and promises of battle-won glory took hold of the next generation of Zandir men there were roaming bands of recruiters who would travel along merchant routes and cities and contract local men (and later women) to fight in the various brigades. Such “sackers” received their nickname after several incidents in which they simply tossed a sack over a drunken or intoxicated young man and carted them off to war. To this day being waylaid in Zandir is referred to as being “sacked.”

While the Paradox Cult mobilized troops and began production on instruments of war, there were still classes of Phaedrans who did not join the war effort until late in the third century at the time of Aamentag’s rebellion (see below). Such classes included several families of rangers, scholarly and wizard guilds, numerous traders who ran the routes from northern Phaedra to the gypsy territories in Werewood, and several nobles and their independent militias.

Unlike the Aamanian forces, the Zandir were highly mobile, having access to many equines at the beginning of the war and began trading for ontra from the Djaffir tribes sometime during the fifth century which could last longer without water which was useful when fighting in unfamiliar territory. This mobility came at the expense of armor and siege weaponry. The iron available to them was spent mostly architecture and tools for artisanry and agriculture, but what little remained was fashioned into dueling swords and lances – which the average Zandir male was proficient in as dueling was still a popular sport among the young. Unlike the Aamanians, the Zandir concentrated less on acquiring territory and more on raiding their enemy and cutting supply lines. The military defense of Zadian was an exception as the town nobles had invested a great deal of wealth into their palaces, stables and gardens and did not wish to see it destroyed.

Early Paradoxist forces had limited access to magical knowledge and were at a distinct disadvantage for the first forty to fifty years of the conflict. Once a generation of talented young men and women matured up during the conflict limited magical instruction began, largely at the hands of Paradoxist Seers whose magical knowledge was limited to simple cantrips and numerous superstitious cures and prayers whose efficacy was dubious at best – fraud at worst. The one area where magical knowledge was not only recovered but positively explored and generated was warrior-magic practiced by the Certament guild – a class of professional duelists whose frequent bouts quickly selected the best casters and swordsmen and awarded them with prestige and the ears of the next generation.

## The Zandir Gambit and the Widow’s Face

After the Paradoxists forces were repelled from Badijan at the start of the war they regrouped under their new Sultan - Highworthy IV, a noble from Zadian whose family had sold their herd and turned to growing vineyards generations ago. Highworthy’s command won the second battle of the war for the Paradoxists and was repeated so often during the war that the basic strategy became known as the “Zandir gambit.” His main force camped north of Badijan and harassed any scouts or suppliers entering the city. His engineers cut down trees in plain view of the city and began

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constructing battering rams and catapults. The constant threat of archers kept the gates of Badijan closed while the Aamanians called for reinforcements from Andurin and Arat.

When the full force of the Aamanian troops were ready they charged from the gate. Highworthy's troops immediately fled, leaving behind what was soon to be discovered as half-finished, ineffective siege weapons, in many cases little more than rotting wood. Before the Aamanians knew what was happening the bulk of Highworthy's force – having been dispatched two weeks prior, landed at Arat, fought through the remaining Aamanian forces there and burned half of the Aamanian fleet into the sea.

The loss of the fleet was particularly devastating to the Aamanians living in western Phaedra who had fled persecution and the threat of violence to the northern shore of the Phaedran Sea hoping to be rescued by the Aamanian merchant vessels that normally docked in Zantil. These ships never arrived and the Aamanians, many highly skilled alchemists, artisans, blacksmiths and shipwrights, fled into Werewood to escape what they were certain would be extermination. They took with them their most prized and valuable treasures, including many formulas for potions that are believed to have been lost forever. These refugees were never heard from again and are believed by the Aamanians to have been captured and killed by the Dhuna witches who lived in the forests. Others believe the Dhuna most likely interbreed with the Aamanians, though their treasure has never been found.

As frightened as Aamanians living in western Phaedra were, the Zandir living in Aamanian territory were not half as afraid as they should have been. Though Zandir were not rounded up, uniformly tortured and converted, as modern Zandirs often claim, the laws of the Orthodoxy were immediately enforced when news of the fall of Kabros spread. Because the laws of the Omnival were too numerous and specific to be posted on the city walls and squares themselves, so a simple sign declared the new rule of law, "Aa's Will is Law." The Paradoxists and those from western cities had little understanding of what that meant and assumed it was another inane platitude that Aamanians frequently spouted. Within weeks hundreds of non-believers were arrested and subjected to various punitive techniques as dictated in the Omnival. Death was somewhat infrequent, but forcible conversion to the tenets of Orthodoxy was, for the first time, accepted practice. Common offenses that led to imprisonment included: public flirtation, walking within ten feet of a Temple of Aa during services, brandishing idols of other gods, ignoring the cries of your child, hitching more than three durge to a wagon and public intoxication.

The Orthodox laws were particularly harsh on non-believing women, how had won a considerable degree of autonomy in lands controlled by the Paradoxy. Women acting in any way lascivious – and by Aamanian standards that includes staring, grooming oneself, laughing, smiling or eating in public – were taken and frequently forcibly converted to Orthodoxy. One such woman, Loretta Zadian, granddaughter of the founder of Fadian, was taken from her husband in Andurin by a particularly sadistic Aamanian inquisitor named Aasteph Rose who punished her flirtatious behavior (she apparently solicited another woman by licking her lips and nodding toward her husband) by taking an Aamanian veil, which were recommended by not required at the time, and had it sewn into Loretta's face. When she was finally released to her husband, who had to be forcibly restrained and was beaten for his resistance, he went into a rage and attacked Aasteph and his soldiers and was killed in the process.

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“Remember the Widow’s Face” became a rallying cry of the Paradoxists and effectively killed the last of the peace negotiations that were being held by the few moderates of both cults.

## **Prisoners of War**

Given the remaining sprinkles of moderates across the former empire and the patches of displaced cult members hiding in enemy lands there was tremendous pressure on both new cults to find adequate prison facilities. During the reign of the Soliman, Damon and Kabros most criminals were given either corporal punishment, banished to Gao Din, or stored in magical facilities maintained in Badijan. With Badijan in near shambles, the Aamanian fleet decimated and the Zandir fleet being used for hit and run attacks on coastal Aamanian towns and villages, there was little room for prisoners and few ships available to transport prisoners. As prison colonies began to form on both sides, requiring more and more troops to maintain and defend, both the Orthodoxy and Paradoxism began to leak prisoners across the borders. In the late second century little rain fell in the west constricting gardens, vineyards and the vast grasslands that fed herds of durge and erd. With food in short supply in the western areas, hundreds of Aamanian Cults – some of whom were taken prisoner in battle, others merely trapped in the west – starved in poorly organized prisoner camps. Few still remember, but in the early days of the conflict up until the third century Zandir prisoners were treated exceptionally well in Aaman – one priest even starved his own people rather than let his prisoners go hungry, such was the importance the Holy Church put on maintaining the rules of war.

Hierophant Aajanius, head of the Orthodoxy from the years 141 to 184, turned control of the war over to his monitors and concentrated much of his time on prisoner exchange. Against the wishes of his advisors and guards, Aajanius met with Sultan Zor-Archer and discussed terms for a prisoner exchange to unburden the eastern towns of the pressure of guarding, feeding and defending themselves from the thousands of prisoners. Zor-Archer too was eager to rid himself of many of the prisoners and the two agreed on the first of several prisoner exchanges as well as agreements about how prisoners were to be treated – including a ban on disfiguring torture, religious persecution and rape.

When the second wave of the Aamanians returned home with stories from the Paradoxists’ prisoner camps the Aamanian citizens were incensed. Though the torture of their prisoners was to be expected, the religious assaults were deeply offensive. Such assaults – desecration of the Omnival, exposing the breasts of the women prisoners, and fondling the Eye of Aa symbols were enough to convince the Hierophant that the Zandir were not following the rules of war. History suggests that Zor-Archer attempted to ban these practices, but the Paradox government worked in such a way as to minimize the Sultan’s power over outlying lands. Many prisoners were kept by noblemen who paid allegiance to the Sultan, but maintained their own militias that took orders first from the noblemen. Few knew what their neighbor was doing, and they seemed to prefer it that way.

During the fourth prisoner exchange one thousand Paradoxists and Orthodoxists marched across the beach of the Phaedran Sea escorted by knights of Aa and a contingent of mounted Zandir lancers. Though the exchange went without incident, the Zandir immediately took their freed prisoners to a nearby ranch and secured as many mounts as they could from a conclave of hired herdsmen. Newly mounted, the Zandir road into Aamanian territory, fought off the Knights of Aa

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and recaptured the Aamanian prisoners. Outraged, Aajanius suspended prisoner exchanges for twenty years, saying to his monitors, “We see today the face of our enemy – a blind, honorless impotent creature who not only fails to see the light of Aa but fails to see the simple wisdom of self-preservation.”

With no incentive to take or keep prisoners, and given the cost of keeping prisoners lodged and fed, the years between 163 and 183 were some of the bloodiest in the entire war. Entire battalions were slaughtered on the battlefield, hunted to the last man. Finally, as Aajanius neared the end of his days, weakened by an assassin’s arrow that crippled his legs, he called on Zor-Archer for one last meeting. Prisoner exchanges were agreed upon once again, but with the stipulation that anyone taken in battle must never take up arms again. Neither trusted in old Phaedran honor to maintain this bargain, so it was agreed prisoners would be branded and if a “brand” were caught fighting in a battle no mercy would be granted to his fellow soldiers. The modern phrase “got a brand with us” is still used refer to the possibility that one member of a group will rapidly escalate any fight to the detriment of the others.

Aamanian brands were – of course – the symbol of Aa burned into the shoulder of prisoner, while the Zandir seemed to delight in using erd-brands that symbolized the family name of a relative or the town animal handler, whoever had a brand nearby. For years the branding system seemed to work but in the year 214 a band of Aamanian sailors, seemingly insane from drinking salt water, washed ashore and were captured by the militia of a small fishing community referred to in documents as “Parashore La Noll.” The sailors carried numerous vials, chemicals and potions with them – unlabeled and of unknown origin. More importantly, their shoulders were heavily scarred. Two days later, when they were delivered to the commander stationed at Zantium – the prisoners’ shoulders were completely bare, as if the scars had simply flaked off. Sultan Zor-Archer immediately ordered the prisoners to his palace where his enforcers strenuously questioned them. Torturing them produced no answers – they only swore they remembered nothing about the scars – but the evidence was convincing enough that Zor-Archer concluded that the Aamanians had discovered a means of erasing the brands of capture, and a new method would need to be implemented.

Zor-Archer was killed in an Aamanian incursion that managed to push all the way to the valley around Zadian before they were pushed back by volleys from Zandir trebuchets. His successor and son, Zaphren-Archer had even less trust of the Aamanians, due in part to the fact that his third wife had been in the Aamanian Cult and lived to tell of the torment leveled on women who refused the Orthodox rules. Zaphren implemented a new policy of marking prisoners – slicing off the index finger.

Aamanians were outraged and ceased branding their prisoners as well – deciding instead to remove the right eye of the prisoners. The Zandir insisted this was a perverse attempt to make the prisoners resemble the single-eyed deity of the Orthodoxists. Many of these Zandir prisoners continued to work as mercenaries, but given that they were banned from fights against the Holy Army they found it difficult to find work in Zandu. Many went east and joined with the Phandre exiles, but most eventually took up work as pirates – joining the growing band of Gao Sea rogues who had, in the year 133, easily overwhelmed the meager Aamanian forces who had remained to guard them. Together, the Gao and their newfound Zandir ex-prisoners raided Farad, Imrian, Aamanian, and even Zandir sea vessels, though the later were often granted exceptions. The influx

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of one-eyed Zandir into the Gao ranks created the long-lived stereotype that pirates have eye-patches.

After several decades of continued warfare with heavy Aamanian casualties along the coast of the Phaedran Gulf due to the continued raiding of the swift Zandir fleet, the Aamanians managed to pull together a modest fleet of galleons for defense. Meanwhile, both Aamanians and Zandir had started trading with the Arimite miners. Aamanian forces had penetrated what is thought of today as Zandir territory, establishing a line of trade into the Arimite mountains. Zandir smugglers had to evade Aamanian forces to reach the newly founded Shattrra, but made a brisk profit running weapons back to the militias and Paradoxist army.

## Interrogation

While the Cult Wars had a harrowing effect on the advancement of knowledge in most realms, there were exceptions. Some of the most powerful warrior-magics since the days of the Erypthians were invented by Zandir Certaments, and Aamanian healers have written and perfected both magical and non-magical healing that rivals anything modern Cymrilians can do. But the most rapid advances were no doubt in the field of torture.

Aamanian interrogators started with far less barbaric forms of torture in the early conflicts. Many Zandir prisoners were, at first, engaged in somber religious discussions with a priest who attempted to reason with him about the purity of Aa and the wisdom of a life spent in his service. Few converts were reaped from this method and so the town Monitors soon called on the inquisitors to begin teaching in shifts and using sleep deprivation (often with cold water) to attempt to convert the prisoners to the Orthodoxy. Working in tandem, the priests would read excerpts from the Omnival, elaborate with personal stories, fulfilled prophecies, moral fables and various proscriptions and moral rules. Though the Aamanians did not consider this treatment torture, many of their captives disagreed.

Aamanian techniques were later refined into two branches of interrogation. One of which, perfected in the mining city of Aabaal, involved a series of incentives that were contingent on correct performance on religious tests. When a prisoner is able to recite the holy rules governing treatment of children, for example, the prisoner is allowed to sleep or eat. As Aanakapal, the father of Aabaal's Holy Order of Priests said, "Non-believers have no understanding of the power of Aa's rules. They believe that they can repeat the words but deny the meaning. But the laws of Aa are more powerful than the will of a non-believer. Once the rules are permitted into the mind they inevitably summon the faith." Interrogators in Andurin, embittered from their position on the front lines of combat for two generations, were the first to implement systematic torture as a means of conversion. Some believe the basic techniques were stolen from the Druhk torturers who haunted the hills of Arim, though this is disputed because the techniques used by the Druhk have little in common with modern Aamanian techniques. Aamanians, unlike the Druhk, attempt to do as little permanent damage as possible and require techniques where pain can be very rapidly applied and relieved.

While conventional torture was used by the Sultan and the Paradoxists, the Aamanians were notoriously difficult to break by the application of pain. Even as children Aamanians were severely

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disciplined and had learned how to meditate on scripture and buffer the mind with prayer. Attempts to use Aamanian loyalty – which was fierce – against one another by torturing soldiers to make their comrades talk was equally futile. Even if the victim begged their friends to speak out such an admission only convinced the onlookers that the victim did not deserve to be saved. This practice was short lived both because of its inefficacy and because Zandir honor was gravely offended by using comrades against one another.

While modest gains could always be made with torture, the first successful interrogation technique widely used against the Aamanians was the genius idea of an early Seer named Baron Zajeff. It was called “Coaxing” and became common in the early fourth century and lasted about two generations before the Sultan finally put a stop to the practice – see Sidebar.

## **Coaxing**

With a reputation for lechery and drunken revelry, Baron Zajeff was well liked by his fellow alchemists at Zadian. Though not part of a militia or the Paradox Army, Zajeff’s acid potions and explosive packets were in great demand for blowing locks on fortified gates, disabling carriages and siege weapons and cutting through Aamanian armor. As the popularity of his products grew, he began to be invited to dinners with Lord Zadian and his court. During one such dinner, as legend holds, Zajeff relayed his idea for breaking the Aamanian’s resistance to torture. The term “coaxing” referred to an alchemical process used to make explosive liquids that involved the slow mixing of a base with a catalyst then allowing it to cool before adding more; though Zajeff claims the idea came to him when he seduced a middle-aged Aamanian woman who had been living in exile.

Most interrogators attempt to get their targets to believe that their loyalty to their comrades is misplaced – to attack the very sanctity of the Orthodox and attempt to draw them from it. Coaxing works in the opposite manner. The goal is to coax the prisoner away from the belief that he is a moral person worthy of his comrades’ loyalty. This is accomplished by, bit by bit, convincing the Aamanian to violate his religious teachings. A typical progression would start with bits of forbidden spices secretly hidden in the food. As the dosage is increased the Aamanian will eventually realize he has been eating taboo food, spices or even mild intoxicants. But the real effort comes from the prostitutes or, in several famous cases, the Sultan’s harem. Their approach differs from woman to woman and prisoner to prisoner. Most simply start with pleasant conversation, usually posing as maids cleaning the prison floors and removing waste pails from the prisoners who usually feel guilty and embarrassed by the situation. Others pose as prisoners arrested for petty crimes and victimized by an evil Paradox judicial

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system. One way or another, the women coax them into a sexual relationship – sometimes with the aid of intoxicants or aphrodisiacs slipped into their food. From there the relationship becomes more and more decadent, involving sexual acts and perversions most Aamanians don't even know about. When confronted by their moral failures Aamanians have been drawn from their faith and, in fits of despair, told the Zandir woman whatever she wanted to know.

Some women took much more dramatic means of breaking their captive's resolve such as dancing seductively in front of the prison bars until the captive looked at them – a violation of Orthodox teachings.

Coaxing was finally ending in the year 392 shortly after the Scourge of Aamentag. While that incident played no small role in the Sultan's decision there was another reason for its dissolution: there were hundreds of reports of Zandir men shaving their heads, picking up Eyes of Aa from fallen knights, and surrendering to their comrades.

## **Aalushra's Sojourn and the Knights of Retribution**

After five generations of continuous warfare, the men of both Aaman and Zandir were outnumbered by the women. In Zandir this had little effect on the population growth as the Sultan, nobles and various landowners, distinguished craftsmen, merchants and war heroes took many wives and had many children. But in the lands of Aaman monogamy was still strictly enforced and thousands of women were left with no husband, the permanent property of their fathers or their priests if they entered the Theocratic Order. Many of these women had to work for their keep, often long hours at the needle – thus was born the proverbial “spinster” reference to any older unmarried woman. Women were forbidden from serving in positions of combat in the Holy Army but were allowed to serve as nurses near the front lines and in occupied cities.

In the year 337 a group of Aamanian women, led by a scrub maid named Aalushra, coordinated a large scale exodus of several hundred Aamanian women – most young and unmarried but some older women unhappy with their husbands. On the eighth of Talislandre the women snuck away from their farms, homes and families and moved swiftly through toward the border of Zandu which now dipped below Badijan. Some of the women were captured before arriving at the border, but most successfully entered the Zandir lands and met with their collaborators – a caste of witches and naturalists named the Dhuna who had great sympathy for the plight of the Aamanian women who were, in their eyes, oppressed and enslaved. The Dhuna helped funnel the Aamanian women through Zandir safely avoiding the Zandir militias who were known to imprison the women for use in prisoner exchange – or simply add them to the harems of the noblemen. Shifting around towns

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and roving militia, the Aamanian refugees took up hiding in the woodlands of northern Zandu on the border of Gnorlwood.

Their eastern sense of honor offended, the Aamanian Monitors unleashed several hundred Knights of the All-Seeing Eye – elite ontra-mounted troops hardened by faith and battle. Moving swiftly around Badijan and evading several battalions of Zandir archers, the Aamanians managed to track the women to the northern forest. The Dhuna witches sensed the approaching army and sought out the help of the only militia in Zandre that had not been sent toward Badijan for the Sultan's next offensive – the Danuvian Riders, a female militia group of mysterious origins. The Dhuna guardians sold much of their personal property to pay the Danuvians who agreed to work for half the price of most militias because of their eagerness to prove their martial prowess. The Aamanian Knights and Danuvians met in the grasslands before the Zandir forests. Dhuna witches lurked in the forestry and unleashed spells and curses onto the Aamanians. With little heart for fighting women, the Aamanians retreated with the Danuvians in pursuit, picking off the remaining knights until they reached Aamanian territory. Less than half the knights survived.

Hierophant Aathrone, the ruler of the Orthodox Church from the years 330 to 363, received news of Danuvian offensive and listened to his Monitors who unanimously demanded retribution for what was certainly seen as a humiliating defeat. In the year 338 the Knights of Retribution were commissioned, trained and given solemn authority to put to death any non-believing woman found carrying iron or the tools of spellcraft. Given their limited knowledge of witchcraft, the early Knights executed numerous foreign women in their midst for carrying feathers, colored thread, excessively padded shoes, incense, spicetree branches and thorned flowers. When the Knights of Retribution were unleashed, the last of the Dhuna, Danuvians and non-believing women of all kinds fled Orthodox territory. Historians see this as a grave failure on behalf of the Aamanian military, as it cemented the friendly relations between the Dhuna and the Paradoxists.

## **Battle on the Sea of Sorrow**

Western honor being what it was, the mistreatment of women and the plight of the Dhuna spread like wildfire – though it is interesting to note that little was said of the Danuvians whose bulky frame and martial prowess made them somewhat less worthy of chivalry. Galvanized, the union of militias prepared for a decisive blow against Andurin but the attack was called off by the aging Sultan Zaghould, who hoped for peace before his time was up. Three days after he refused the attack he was found dead in his palace from the bite of a chasm viper. Most believe he was murdered by one of his Dhuna mistresses. His eldest son, Zypherous, inherited the throne and decided to put an end to the war once and for all. While the Aamanians were rallying their remaining ground forces near Andurin, Zypherous ordered the entire Zandir fleet recalled to Zir where even merchant ships were equipped with ballista, catapults, trebuchets, and battering rams. Within three weeks the armada was complete and Zypherous ordered them to crush the entirety of the Aamanian coast.

It remains unclear how the Aamanians heard of the plan. Some believe the Heterodoxists warned them (see elsewhere), others hold it was simply the Aamanian spies in the area. The Orthodox position is, of course, divine revelation. The Aamanian fleet was comprised of an armada of galleons and frigates, slow moving but more powerful and resistant to damage. Their fleet was designed primarily for defense of the port cities rather than hit and run attacks and scouting like

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the Zandir fleet of pinnaces and sloops. When the fleets engaged in combat off the coast of Andurin the Aamanian fleet pulverized the early Zandir vessels with ballista and fire arrows. The Aamanians gave chase when the Zandir vessels scattered into the fog and smoke. As legend has it, the cutthroat mercenaries of the Certament guild earned their fame in this battle by hiding aboard the wreckage of an Aamanian vessel. When a large frigate stopped to search for survivors the Certaments pulled their swords and spellbooks and thrashed the Aamanian sailors, taking control of the frigate and promptly sinking seven nearby Aamanian ships.

Though often remembered as a single day of vicious blood spilling, the Battle at the Sea of Sorrow actually took place over a week's time – from the fourth of Jhang to the first of Laeolis in the year 366, with constant skirmishes. The fog over the Phaedran Gulf was so thick during the last month of the year that battle tactics and communication became impossible. Armadas became scattered and isolated, surrounded by broken vessels and the bloated corpses of the fallen soldiers. Weeks later, as wives and children waited at the ports, the broken remains of the fleets returned. It is estimated that of the twenty thousand soldiers on Phaedran ships only eight thousand returned.

Renamed the Sea of Sorrow by an unknown Zandir poet and subsequently by the Hierophant himself, the Phaedran Gulf was subsequently abandoned by both militaries. The staggering loss of life had a polarizing effect on the citizens of Aaman and Zandu. For the first time in over a century there was intense interest in peace negotiations from both sides; but at the same time there were those in both the east and west who thought of the watery graves of their comrades as a catalyst for decisive action. Some of the most brutal treatment of prisoners and enemy sympathizers followed the Battle on the Phaedran Gulf, including the famous Zagula – lord of Zandre, who claimed that victory could only be obtained when the Aamanian men were no more and promptly ordered his guards to remove the right testicle of every Aamanian prisoner they could find – the belief of at the time was that the sex of ones offspring depended upon which gonad produced the seed. This belief, while now known to be false, was actually shared by Aamanians as well and led to numerous women being burned for infidelity when the prisoner exchange of 401 freed the captives and they later reproduced offspring of both sexes.

## **The Scourge of Aamentag**

While relative peace reigned for over eighty years the Zandir army began to make steady progress along all fronts, taking back Badijan and occupying both Arat and Aabaal for several years. The specter of defeat that loomed over Aamanian territory was due to many factors including the Zandir weaponry had grown superior to the Aamanians whose antiquated methods had not advanced in over three hundred years. Similar arguments could be made about Zandir magic and alchemy – both of which continued to improve while Aamanians clung to their ancient prayers and recipes. Finally, the exclusive access to the covens of Dhuna witches had increased the Zandir advantage.

In the year 442 the armies of the Paradoxists had seized the remains of Badijan and cut across the Phaedran Straits to take Arat and Aabaal, pinching the armies of the Orthodoxists between the Monastic Hills and Andurin. The Hierophant, controlling his armies from his tower in Andurin, could see that defeat was imminent and gathered his Monitors and Warrior Priests into the courtyard of Andurin for a group prayer of salvation. The Aamanian armies, missing their

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commanders, were unsure what to do and given the overwhelming odds they faced quickly pulled away from Alm and the various farming towns about the Monastic Hills and Phandril forests. Unchallenged, the Paradoxists forces converged on Andurin, aided by a troupe of Danuvian lancers, Phandre mercenary magi and Maruken enchanters.

On the sixth of Phandir the prayers of the Aamanian clergy appear to have been answered in the most unlikely of places, deep in the lord's prison of Zandre where Zagula had trapped an Aamanian warrior-priest that, by some accounts, was named Aamentag. Zagula watched as one of his most prized concubines – a fourteen year old Batrean girl by most accounts – danced in front of his cell, taunting him. Unlike most of the Aamanian prisoners who attempted to hide their gaze Aamentag looked her directly in the eye. When she beckoned him toward the cell bars he moved to her. She placed her small head between the bars and pursed her lips for a kiss. Grabbing her by the hair, the warrior-priest pulled her head through the bars and shoved it to the side, breaking her neck. Zagula screamed for him to be killed and several of his elite guards opened his cell and charged him. Unarmored and without so much as a stick or stone, Aamentag disarmed and killed the guards with their own weapons. Zagula fled.

Turning to his fellow prisoners, most of whom were Zandir of dubious origin – petty thieves, rapists, murderers, charlatans, counterfeiterers and fences, Aamentag delivered a speech that history has since recorded several times – though which is authentic is still hotly debated by Aamanian clergymen. Whatever was said, by the time Zagula returned with his militia he found sixty believers, all their hair ripped out of their body, the gleam of Aa in their eyes. Armed only with three daggers and three swords (taken from the guards), the prisoners tore through Zagula's militia, by some accounts blasting them with holy fire and conjuring shields in the shape of Aa's eye. When the prisoners broke into the streets of Zandre they torched the buildings and slaughtered the populace who fled into the Woodlands of Zandu to the east, carrying babies and their most precious treasures with them. Those that remained were horded together in the stables (the animals were slaughtered) and given a choice: accept the will of Aa or die in fire. Those that accepted were anointed by kissing the end of Aamentag's staff – though no one knows where his staff came from and modern Aamanians claim this is proof that Aamentag was visited by Aa himself.

As Aamentag led his army – an eclectic group comprised of men, women and children of all castes and abilities, from Zandre he ordered them to set fire to the Woodlands of Zandu to purge those who had fled into its depths. As the fir trees, dried from several weeks without rain, combusted it was said that the army could hear the cries of those who had fled within it. Many claim that their treasures were buried deep in the forests and remain their in unmarked sites to the modern day.

In his wake Aamentag left nothing but destruction – slaughtering all those who would not join him. He seemed unbound by Orthodox rules and performed atrocities that the most faithful Aamanian inquisitor would find repugnant. Those who failed to convert were killed, often by their family members who had seen the light; babies too young to understand the will of Aa had their heads crushed under his iron boot; he was said to have pulled the babies from the womb of pregnant women so they could keep up with the long marches. A hapless slave merchant caravan that came upon his forces was stripped of valuables and those willing to convert, while those that resisted were tied to the caravan so that Aamentag could press the tip of his staff into their foreheads, searing the eye of Aa onto their flesh and burning their earthly eyes shut forever. Despite these

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acts of barbarism his followers were as fanatically loyal as any Aamanian army had been. Together they marched south from Zandre, destroying herds, farms, villages and passing caravans.

When word of Aamentag's "scourge" reached the ears of the Zandir forces about Andurin the rank and file deserted and headed north to defend their families and friends. Thousands of soldiers disappeared against the bleated cries of their commanders. As their forces split, the Aamanian forces inside Andurin – believing their prayers answered – charged from the fortress and overwhelmed the few remaining Zandir and their loyal Danuvian, Phandre and Maruken allies. After the loss, the last of the Danuvian, Maruken and Phandra headed east to join their brethren, eventually settling the city-states of Danuvia, Maruk and Hadj from land the Phandre had purchased from the Zandir in exchange for their service.

Aamentag's forces met the Paradox army on the streets of Badijan midway through his razing of the city. It was said that over a hundred of the citizens hung themselves from the rooftops when his troops were spotted near the remains of the city gates. The forces of the Paradoxists outnumbered Aamentag's ragtag army by more than five to one, but they had little heart to fight against their converted brethren, many of whom were untrained women, the elderly and children as young as eight years of age. Aamentag led his forces into the prisons of Badijan and recruited a number of them as the battle raged. As the converts rushed out to fight against the advancing Zandir army Aamentag stayed behind in the prisons – barricading himself inside the deepest cell. When the last of his army had fallen – it was said they fought until every last one of them died, the Zandir mob broke upon his barricade. Those that could see within it gasped in horror, some running screaming from the depths of the prison. The barricade was immediately restored and reinforced and the entire prison wing closed, locked and barred. Kasmiran trappings were called in from the east to line the entire wing with traps. The wing of terror remains sealed to the modern day.

[[PICTURE REQUEST: in Badijan, looking down a hallway with the 3D effect. In the center far away is an Aamanian knight with a staff pointing it toward the foreground. In the foreground are Zandir forces, one of which looks to his companion with a hand outstretched a look of desperation on his face. In the mid ground are ragged forces of Aamentag – women, the elderly and a vicious looking eight year old child whose sword is being jammed down a Zandir man's neck and into his torso. The Aamentag forces should be more or less picked bald, perhaps a few strands of left over hair and their eyes should be bold and insane looking – perhaps really wide. Zandir forces should be hesitant.]]

## **The Road to Peace**

After Aamentag's disappearance the Paradoxist forces were crippled, many having lost the will to fight. The desertion of the Danuvians, Markun and the ancestors of the Hadj had left them with little more to fight with. Arimite knife-fighters were notoriously difficult to use as mercenaries because they refused to fight in battles against their own kind and most Aamanian forces had a few Arimite mercenaries for exactly this purpose. The navy of both sides had never recovered from the Battle on the Sea of Sorrow, and a severe shortage of equines and the flight of the persecuted Dhuna

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Witches into Witchwood had left the Zandir spy network crippled. Making matters worse, the Paradoxist Cult leaders and the Sultan himself did not have the heart to punish those that deserted to head off Aamentag's forces and for perhaps the first time the Zandir men on the field and in the file were determined to not fight. Orders to advance were ignored. Archers and scouts returned with no news and clean boots. Sailors returned from scouting missions with Farad products or loot from Gao merchants. Lieutenants and field commanders, rather than have their orders to fight ignored and expose their lack of control over their troops began to give in to the soldiers' suggestions and stayed in defensive positions rather than advance. The Sultan himself began to realize he had no choice but to accept a kind of truce.

The Aamanian hierarchy, fevered from their miraculous salvation at Andurin, were prepared for another offensive. But even as news of the miracle spread so too did the deeds of Aamentag on the populace of the Zandir people. Even Aamanians were horrified by his deeds, his subjugation of women, his slaughter of children, and the people of Aaman, tired of war and shaken in their beliefs, began to doubt the sanctity of the Orthodox Church. Seeing their grip slip away, or perhaps simply moved as the common man was, the local priests began to fill their sermons with the kinder dictates of Aa, of forgiveness, the benefits of a life spent in familial pursuits and the greater glory to be found in farming and loving ones family than in the slaughter of ones' enemies. Monitors, getting pressure from the Hierophant for more recruits, began to raise the mana awarded for those who serve in the Holy Army, but adjudicators and local priests refused to spread the word to their congregations. Faced with the downfall of the church itself, the Hierophant listened to the people and sent word to the Sultan that they would be amenable to talk of peace.

On the first of Drome in the year 511 after a generation of Aamanians and Zandir were nursed on the horrors of war, occupying half-burnt houses, feeling the sting of hunger when their crops struggled to grow out of decimated land, and looking back on generations of their ancestors who had given their lives at younger and younger ages for a conflict that seemed unwinnable, the people of Zandu and Aaman forced peace on their leaders. The nations of Aaman and Zandu were officially mutually recognized and the land was split in two. The capital of Badijan was cut in half and it was agreed that a great barrier wall would be built across its center and extend all the way west to the Sea of Sorrow and all the way east to the mountains of Arim. Atop the wall would be a platform where yearly duels would decide who would be able to charge foreigners taxes to pass through the wall. Duels, the last noble vestige of the once Great Phaedran Empire, were still dear to both sides.

Workers from both sides of the nation toiled together, carting stone and mud from far away. Tears from hundreds of workers sealed the wall and when it was completed neither side celebrated. On the first of Drome 518 after exactly seven years after it began the final two stones of the Great Wall were laid by the Hierophant of Aaman and the Sultan of Zandu. They held one last conversation atop the platform on which future duels would be held. No one knows what was said, and neither ever spoke or wrote of the conversation. It is claimed that they stayed until night fall, staring at the stars and wondering how it had gone so wrong.

Then next day the amicability and somber attitude vanished yet again when the Aamanian warrior priest Aaphorensis trounced the Zandir duelist Kathos the Rose atop the Great Wall, winning a years taxes for the Aamanian Church.

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## **VII. Modern Times**

Modern Aaman and Zandu remain, despite the crippling effect of the war, some of the richest, culturally and economically, nations on Talislanta. While their militaries cannot rival that of the Kang Empire, and their magical knowledge cannot compete with the Cymrilians of the Seven Kingdoms, the nation of Zandu still boasts some of the greatest craftsmen in the nation, and the society of Aaman has sported a great population growth with the virtual elimination of disease, poverty and crime. There is much to be offered from both nations.

### **Embers of the Cult Wars**

Many worry that Aaman and Zandu are on the verge of another civil war. Two generations have been born and raised who have not seen the horrors of war first hand, and stories of the glory of battle are beginning to outnumber the stories of pain, disfigurement, starvation and slaughter. All that seems necessary is a sufficiently large spark and the war could rage again. Such a spark could come from a number of places. The politics of Jhangara seem a likely start, or perhaps one of the frequent skirmishes that still plague the Sea of Sorrow. It is not unheard of for Zandir and Aamanian vessels to fire on one another when they meet near the Phaedran Straits – though so far no ships have been destroyed. Nor is there any reason to think that the conflagration must start in the Westerlands themselves. Though the war has been “over” for a century there have been thousands of casualties since then – most such corpses are scattered about foreign lands. Zandir archers have been known to take shots at Aamanian pilgrims on their trek eastward. Aamanian witch-hunters have killed dozens of Zandir wizards and Dhuna witches as far east as the deserts of Carantheum. Then there are, of course, the numerous duels fought between Zandir and Aamanian men who happen upon one another on the streets of the Seven Kingdoms or the mountain towns of Arim. Finally, Cymrilian culturalists have noted that the pitch and fever of western conspiracies has increased in recent years, with ever growing numbers of accusations of poisonings, witchcraft and spying being hurled across the Great Wall.

### **Clash of Champions**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of Ardan every year the representatives of Aaman and Zandu climb ladders to the platform over looking the Great Wall to fight for propitiatory rights over the gate in central Badijan. The event draws crowds of politicians, merchants, swordsman, spectators and, of course, pickpockets from all over the continent. Deaths are common and no holds are barred against the combatants but attacks on the throngs of spectators that watch the events are forbidden, though this hasn't been a problem since the combatants are usually thoroughly occupied with each other. No temporary enchantments are allowed on the participants before the gong is rung and wizards and archimagi from both sides inspect the combatants for enchantments before the battle. Summoned entities, quadrupeds and the undead are barred from competing, but other than that any capable living creature is allowed as are any weapons, armor or magical paraphernalia. Past champions have almost always been Zandir or Aamanian warriors. Victory is achieved by knocking one's opponent off the square or simply killing him.

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The Sultan of Zandir will typically watch the event from a special pier built to house him and his concubines during the event, and though a space is always reserved for the reigning Hierophant, he rarely makes an appearance.

Cheating at the Clash of Champions is a very dangerous proposition given the threat of civil war. There have been several attempts at cheating, but no known successful attempts. In 528 the Zandir duelist Zamachandran attempted to sneak an invisible companion onto the stage to push his opponent at a critical moment. His trickery was discovered by a Zandir wizard who promptly blasted the invisible intruder – thinking it was an Aamanian trick. When it became clear that the intruder was a Zandir both mobs exploded with outrage but it was the Zandir’s own union – the Saints of Zandre – that first made it to the stage and slew him. Since that time however, rumors have spread that the Saints themselves were aware of the trickery and were merely silencing their conspirator.

In 583 the Zandir champion was the target of an assassination attempt by an Arimite revenant, but the swordsman got the better of the three knife-fighters. Though he suffered multiple stab wounds only two days before the event he hid his wounds and fought anyway. He died to the Aamanian champion on the platform. Afterwards the assassination attempt became known and many believe the Aamanians were responsible. Given the difficulty of infiltrating the Revenant Cult no one has been able to verify this claim.

## **A Visitors Guide to the Westernlands**

Given the vast differences between modern day Aaman and Zandu it makes little sense to discuss the average visit to the “Westernlands” as what is expected of you, and what you should expect from others, differs dramatically depending on which nation one enters. Outside the cities however, the nations are quite similar in terrain, weather and wildlife. Grasslands still dominate much of Westernlands including western bluegrass, olive grass and wild thistle patches. Forestry, those that have survived the war and the slash and burn agricultural practices of the early groundsman, are typically healthy and abundant in fresh water, fruit and game animals, though one should know to stay away from the Sultan’s private hunting grounds in the Woodlands of Zandu. Rolling hills can be found across the Westernlands and are relatively easy to traverse on foot or steed, though carriage wheels have been known to break on outcroppings of rocks if not reinforced or guided carefully.

Zandu is home to numerous ripe fruits including blue pomegranates and quince, numerous tubers, and weeded vegetables. The vegetation feeds a variety of pesky insects including chig. The Sea of Sorrow is also home to sea scorpions and the rare sea demon. Most wild fruit in Aaman is left to the bitter grapes and occasional quince, as Aamanians eat very little fruit in their diet, and the allowable fruits must, by law, be grown in an Aamanian garden with strict specifications as to watering, size and density. Provender plants dominate much of the Aamanian farmland and have even grown wild through the hills and grasslands of Aaman. Wild herds of orgriphants still remain though are increasingly rare as the prolific durge have largely outcompeted them for access to grasslands.

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## **Phaedran Libertarianism**

The founders of the Phaedran Empire suffered from food shortages, a dearth of magical knowledge, frequent raids by Jhangarans and the ancestors of the Ur, rampant pestilence and predatory attacks by exomorphs, babbling howlers, bog devils and manx. Their predicament was blamed squarely on the shoulders of their ancestors whose rampant abuse of magic was believed to have caused the Great Disaster. Out of this rage was born a distrust of authority and governing bodies, indeed of human nature itself. The cure was to create a government of distributed power each with severe limitations on the power of any one individual or body. Six centuries later, historians can see that both the Zandir and Aamanians have retained a glimmer of this autonomy from government.

The Aamanians, despite their numerous strict and specific Orthodox codes, enjoy a comparative economic freedom denied to most Zandir. The Orthodox Church supports itself almost entirely through “cult donations” from its members and from the tariffs charged at the Great Wall and through Andurin. Aamanian citizens are free to charge infidels whatever they like for their wares, and can give as much or as little as they like to the Orthodox Church. Despite a nominal 80% income tax, the punishment for failure to pay said tax is the decrement of aalms, and is often violated by the young. Orthodox law enforcers, like every Aamanian, must follow a strict code that defines under what circumstances an Aamanian citizen may be arrested and taken to the Halls of Penance for judgment or reeducation. Such codes, while extremely lengthy, are well known to the citizenry. The Orthodoxy may heavily regulate its citizenry but it also heavily regulates the regulators.

The Zandir are heavily taxed, regulated by unions and largely limited to the social class of their parents unless they manage to rise through dueling prowess, theft or marriage. Law enforcement, however, is about as lax as one can find in Talislanta without venturing into Submen regions. It’s hard to even know the laws in Zandu as only the Causidian Litigators seem to have read them, and even they, once they have received their degree, feel free to ignore them. The Zandir often find the Sultan’s law enforcers have little interest in settling disputes that don’t involve young women or stolen, easily miscounted, merchandise. Most problems are best settled with the threat of imminent force.

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# **Chapter Two: The Orthodox Offspring of Great Phaedran Empire**

## ***I. Aaman***

The holy land of Aaman stretches from the western Aamanian mountain range overlooking the Azure Ocean to the Axis River in the east boarding Vardune, Taz and Jhangara. The Monastic Hills and Phandril Forest break up the gentle grass and farmlands that cover most of Aaman. Fresh water streams flow out from the Monastic Hills in all directions and numerous streams also depart from the Axis River. Travelers within Aaman are safe from most natural risks: travelers have access plenty of water and can often purchase provender bread from scattered farms, weather is moderate with warm temperatures, frequent light rain and only occasional high winds during the rainy season, and the wildlife is fairly harmless unless one disturbs the roving herds of durge during their mating season. Aamanian soldiers, led by a warrior-priest commander, patrol the Phaedran Causeway in Aaman, and make frequent visits to Aamanian villages when help is requested from the local priest. Such patrols are libel to levy fines for even the slightest infraction, so travelers are advised to become familiar with the laws of Aaman before traveling (see elsewhere), and to keep any signs of wealth well hidden. Egregious violators of Orthodox law can be punished severely and be outright abducted if their behavior poses a threat to the citizens' life or piety.

Despite these dangers there are many travelers in Aaman. Jhangaran mud miners and hunters will cross the Axis River and make trade with local farmers, some going as far as Andurin to sell their wares to Aamanian middlemen (many of whom then travel to the Seven Kingdoms to sell the gems and precious stones that are of little interest to most Aamanian citizens). Arimite iron merchants travel freely throughout Aaman with their wares as well. Even the Djaffir traders can be found in Andurin selling ontra and equines to the Aamanians for a weighty profit. Non-Aamanian immigrants are rare, comprising only those souls converted to Orthodoxy. Maruken and Jhangaran are the only two races found with any abundance, and they are concentrated in the poorer areas of Aahmahd.

## ***II. The Aamanians***

Aamanians, descended from the Phaedran people, have the same copper toned skin and deep green eyes as the Zandir, though few would point this out to them. Unlike the Zandir, however, the Aamanians deplete their entire bodies of hair and have a somewhat lighter completion as very little of their skin sees the light of day. A characteristic dark ring can sometimes be seen about the eyes of Aamanian women from where the suns tan about the eye holes in their shrouds. Darkened skin is considered the mark of a poor farmer who spends most days out doors, and is considered low class but in no way immoral or shameful. Nonetheless, many use powders and astringents to whiten the skin artificially.

Women in Aaman must cover all skin except a slant across their face for sight. This practice is not only demanded in public, but recommended in private as well. Even in a bath, women must hang a white sheet above them so that heathen gods and witches cannot spy on them from above. Virgin women must wear white clothing only – typically full body smocks, simple wooden or leather shoes and fans or shrouds to cover the face. Married women are permitted to use bland colors – ostensibly so that their husbands may identify them in crowded public places, but most married women continue to wear white dresses.

Men are allowed to dress only in pale white colors, typically wearing trousers for field work or an alb or tunic for city work. Hooded capes, caps, cowls and leather helms are common among men, sometimes decorated with the eye of Aa. The youth of Aaman have taken to sewing rivet shapes into their tunics giving the illusion from a distance that they are wearing chain mail. The church frowns on this activity but Hierophant Omnus I has not yet prohibited the action.

## **The Orthodox Cult**

In the most extreme version of theocracy found on Talislanta, distinctions between religion and government in Aaman are completely absent. The government is the religion, and the religion is the government. As such, if one wants to understand how Aamanian society functions, one must examine the beliefs and functioning of the Holy Orthodox Church.

## **Church Beliefs**

The beliefs of the Orthodox Church of Aa are written and recorded for all posterity in the tomes of the Holy Omnival, a series of books updated every generation by the reigning Hierophant who authors the latest volume during his tenancy. Abridged versions are more readily available and are sold by scribes and theoreticians to the masses and generously given away to infidels in hopes of conversions.

Given the saturation of religious belief into every day society in Aaman, it is quite surprising that the average Aamanian knows so little about central tenets of the faith. While all Aamanian citizens know the laws of the land and the position of the church on important matters such as the prohibition on premarital sex, intoxicants and the role of men and women, few know the details of the philosophical answers found in the Omnival; in fact few have read the complete Omnival or even given a thorough reading to the abridged texts. Rather, popular phrases and excerpts that are brought to the public's attention via priests, Monitors or the Hierophant himself are quickly memorized and repeated. One's profession often has specific rules written in the Omnival as well, so that tailors, for example, know never to triple knot a needle and to leave absolutely no mark on the cup of a dress. When the rules are important to know, the Aamanians know them. When they are of only interest to theoreticians, philosophers or historians, one has to read the books themselves to find the answers.

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## So what does the Omnival say?

**Who is Aa the Omnipotent?** In the early chapters of the Omnival, the ones written before the first Hierophant took command of the Orthodoxy, the book was written by Aa himself. It is said that each page of the original text is seared with the light of his eye. It claims, “Aa is, above all, and in all, that who must be served, he who must be obeyed, that which is most good, and all of what should be. He existed before the heart of your kind beat. He, and he alone, knows what you are, what you should be, from whence you’ve come and to where thou will go.” At various times the Omnival refers to limbs of Aa, such as book two, verse fourteen, “During the times of strife the arm of Aa descended from the sky and brushed across the desert to reveal an oasis...” though Aamanians are not clear on whether the arm of Aa is meant metaphorically or if the giant deity actually possess arms. Aa is clearly male, though there is never any mention of him lying with women, producing offspring or in any way demonstrating traits unique to men.

**Where does Aa come from?** It is difficult to say, but it is clear that Aa was born at some point in time, or at least “came into being” as the Omnival says. Prior to the existence of Aa the world was, “in a state of blindness and decimation, a festering feeding ground for savage beasts bereft of kindness or moral sanctuary.” When Aa “became” is not clear, though it is heresy to suggest he was made, crafted, or born from a mortal or deistic womb. The history in the Omnival does not bare a close resemblance to the modern historian’s version of the past. The Archaean sky-cities are not mentioned in the original books at all, and though various passages have been interpreted as referring to the Great Disaster, none of the massive astrological changes are noted. Given that the earliest texts refer to a “glaring sun” in the singular, it would suggest it was written before the Great Disaster, or made to appear that way. The original copies of the Omnival – at least those the Church claim are original – were written in Phaedran though, a language that bares resemblance to Archaean, but was not in existence before the Great Disaster. Questioning Aamanians about these discrepancies is unwise and unlikely to lead to answers as it is not at all clear that the average Aamanian shares the same view of history as the rest of Talislanta’s literate people. Aamanians know next to nothing about Archaens, the pacts with Submen and Tirshata, or even the Great Disaster. They have heard of them, but do not consider them of much importance. Their history began with savagery and predations from which the faithful were liberated by the “becoming” of Aa the Omnipotent who showed them the way to salvation and watches over them as they move. After that, their history begins with the Phaedran Empire during which the wise Phaedran Groundsmen took up the faith and scourged the land of nonbelievers.

**Where is Aa?** The Omnival is quite clear and specific that Aa the Omnipresent resides “in a heavenly kingdom begat of his own hand,” and, “the Omniscient one stares down through cloud and rain upon the flock.” Aamanians believe that Aa lives, breathes and roams the skies of Talislanta in a floating citadel. While the explicit nature of this belief has fallen into obscurity and is rarely mentioned among non-believers, the Hierophants in generations past have been succinct, “The world is flat and Aa is above it.”

**What does Aa do?** Certainly the most fundamental of Aa’s actions are the dispensing of justice in the afterlife as he sifts through sinners and places them each in their proper role in the afterlife – stemming from eternal bliss with one’s family to eternal toil and servitude. According to the Omnival, the afterlife is very much real and exists tangibly above the land in a place referred to as

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“Aa loki malash” – translated variously as “home of Aa” or “Aa’s gift of a home” leaving some uncertainty as to whether Aa will reside next to faithful in the afterlife. Other than dispensing justice, it is clear to the faithful – and some that are not – that Aa’s divine power fuels the magical talents of the Aamanian archimagi, priest, warrior-priests and invocators. This divine power is contingent upon moral behavior on behalf of the subjects, as judged by the constant vigilance of Aa the Omniscient.

Though Aa is said to be Omnipotent, it is not clear that Aamanians believe Aa can literally accomplish all he desires, but rather that he has no intrinsic limits. Aamanians consider their work to be extensions of Aa’s will, and as such his power is limited only by the imperfections of his followers. To the extent that the world of Talislanta is not what Aa the Omnipotent wants it to be it is because of the free agents – the civilized people – that have failed to fulfill his wishes.

## **Neo-Orthodoxy**

Many young Aamanians who retain the faith are still yet unsure that the Hierophant accurately dissembles the true interpretations of the Omnival and ascribe to something sometimes called “neo-Orthodoxy” by its opponents who consider these young followers to be on the verge of heresy and would be crushed outright if it were not for the slightly increased success the young neo-Orthodoxists have had at converting others to the faith. The irony inherent in the fact that “neo-Orthodoxy” was the original term for Aamanian rule is lost on the general populations in the west.

The differences between neo-Orthodoxy and traditional Orthodoxy are scarcely comprehensible to those outside the faith as they both hold the same philosophical beliefs, moral positions and same rough prohibitions. Small differences include: neo-Orthodoxists allow their women to show their faces in foreign lands, allow meager consumption of alcohol by men, and allow greater experimentation with different professions. Neo-Orthodoxists also express a lack of knowledge about the nature of the afterlife, the origin of Aa and the accuracy of Theocratic mana in tracking Aa’s true will.

## **Church Ranks**

Ranks in the Church are determined tangibly by mana or “spiritual purity” which is measured in units called “aalms.” Aalms are awarded to every member of the Aamanian Church for pious service to the Church of Aa and, by extension, to Aa himself. Aalms are tallied and awarded by local Monitors who serve smaller districts in the cities or whole farm towns – each responsible for a few hundred citizens. When a citizen reaches a critical level of aalms he or she is automatically awarded an increase in the church ranks during a ceremony conducted by the local Monitor.

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## Aalms for the Poor

The following is a partial list of commonly rewarded activities in Aaman and how many aalms are typically given.

- Donation of 10,000 Aamanian coppers (100 g.l.) to the Theocratic Order – 1 aalm
- Completing elementary instruction and passing the test of theology at age 16 – 100 aalms
- One year service in a Monastic Order (typically warrior-priest or holy warrior) – 5 aalms
- One year service in a Theocratic Order (typically priest or archimage) – 10 aalms
- Taking an Aamanian wife – 15 aalms
- Producing a child in holy matrimony – 15 aalms
- Adopting an orphan – 5 aalms
- Converting a heretic to the faith – 10 aalms (plus 1 aalm for every 100 aalms the convert earns)
- Vanquishing a non-believer in a Holy Duel - 2 aalm
- Performing one's duty in a deadly battle – 1 to 5 aalms
- Discovering a new holy spell – 2 to 10 aalms
- Saving the life of a believer – 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the saved one's mana
- Informing on a sinner – 1 to 25 aalms
- Preventing a sin or crime – 1 to 25 aalms
- Temples of the Theocratic Order and Holy Monasteries are allowed to petition local monitors for special mana awards based on unique circumstances, for example, performing miraculous healings, uncovering a long lost holy artifact or other such valuable services. The monitor, through prayer and study of the Omnival and holy writings, channels the will of Aa and arrives at the appropriate mana award – almost always lower than 25 aalms.

At the head of the Orthodox Church is the Hierophant himself, Omnus I, who was chosen by the Monitors in 613 N.A. after the death – or “ascension” – as it is called in Aaman of the previous Hierophant Aarchibald. New Hierophants are chosen from among the four highest ranking Monitors. They are chosen by all Monitors not among those four, who meet together in the tower of the Hierophant and pray, discuss scripture, and decide who Aa the Omnificent has chosen as the next Hierophant. The Hierophant serves for life and cannot be removed from service for any reason short of death. While still expected to follow all laws of the Orthodox Church, the Hierophant can – within those laws – demand anything of any member of the Church, has complete control over the Holy Army, access to the hefty coffers of the church and is waited on hand and foot by all those beneath him. Perhaps most importantly, the Hierophant has exclusive access to the original tomes of the Omnival and is expected to pen an addendum to the tomes, containing any necessary new laws, philosophies, favorite prayers, crafting techniques and – if rumors are true – the most powerful invocations he has received from his commune with Aa. Despite this power,

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remarkably few Aamanian Hierophants have deviated from Orthodox doctrine. With one exception, they are believed to have been celibate as the Omnival commands – the exception being Hierophant Gyrallius who led the Orthodox Church in the years 534 and 544 during which it is rumored that he seduced over thirty Aamanian women, often wives of his monitors, priests and archimagi. Though official Orthodox doctrine is that Gyrallius was crushed by Aa's vengeance most outside the cult believe he was murdered by a cabal of Orthodox priests.

The Hierophant lives in Aamahd in a large stone tower where he meets with representatives – diplomats if you will – from all the Monitors in Aaman, messengers from the heads of the various Orders of the Holy Army, and representative priests from the various parishes that populate Aamanian cities and farming towns. He, like the monitors, is assisted by numerous pages, boys of ages twelve to sixteen who receive mana and experience in the theocracy for their service. Service as a page is highly valued by the older Aamanians though younger Aamanian males will sometimes snicker at pages who are viewed as effeminate and lacking the requisite strength to join one of the militaristic Holy Orders.

Under the Hierophant are the Monitors of Aaman who manage the accumulation of mana for all citizens of Aaman in their assigned districts, usually a few hundred citizens. To be a Monitor an Aamanian citizen must have accumulated at least 1,000 aalms and then must wait until one of the current Monitors dies. At such a time the Hierophant will choose the replacement from among those with over 1,000 aalms – though he almost always chooses the man with the most mana. To not do this would indicate that the mana tally does not accurately represent the will and favor of Aa the Omniscient, which is perhaps the gravest insult one can level at an Aamanian man. It should be noted, however, that Aamanians are perfectly aware that mana is tallied by mortals and not Aa, so it is understood that it is an imperfect indicator of divine favor. The aalms of Monitors are awarded and decremented only by the Hierophant himself.

The primary duty of the Monitors requires that they have access to as much information as possible so that they can accurately adjust mana levels. As such, it is a crime to lie or withhold information from a Monitor. Monitors, unless constrained by the Hierophant or a fellow Monitor, can go anywhere they like in their district, speak to anyone about any topic and can expect complete honesty and forthrightness. In addition, deputies of Monitors are, when acting in an official capacity, allowed these same privileges. While there have been remarkably few accusations against Monitors, their deputies have, at various times, been implicated in scandals including membership in the Heterodoxy, theft, bribery and a variety of voyeuristic crimes. When a deputy or “gazer” as the Orthodoxy calls them, is caught in the commission of such a crime they are stripped of mana and, in several cases, blinded with hot poker. Finally, Monitors have access to the hundreds of “all-seeing eyes” (see elsewhere) that are affixed throughout the Aamanian cities. These enchanted eyes allow Monitors, from the privacy of their towers or homes to look out across the entire district with which they are charged. Those who oversee the smaller farming towns have far fewer of these magical devices and frequently go door to door to inquire about their charges activities.

Monitors frequently come from the ranks of the Archimagi, Priests, Warrior-Priests, Inquisitors and Witch Hunters and as such differ greatly in their tactics and use of control. Former Archimagi tend to be the most lenient of the Monitors and spend much of their time in prayer, magical training and teaching. Warrior-Priests and Witch-Hunters spend much more time rooting out sinners and Inquisitors are infamous for their draconian attempts to uncover deceit or devilry. Being a Monitor

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is a rank as well as a job though, and so many of the more skilled Warrior-Priests, Archimagi and Witch Hunters do not aspire to be a Monitor as their skill at their chosen profession often suffers as a result.

Beneath the Monitors come the ten ranks of Aspirants, each rank awarded with the acquisition of a hundred aalms – e.g. rank one requires one hundred aalms, rank two requires two hundred aalms and so on. Aspirants make up the vast majority of the adult male population of Aaman and receive no particular codified special benefits or rights depending on rank, though there is considerable social weight placed on ones rank so, for example, a man ranked as a 6<sup>th</sup> level Aspirant would be unlikely to allow his daughter to marry a rank 4 Aspirant. In addition to marriage prospects, lower Aspirants are less trusted, generally wait longer to be served, receive more lax medical care from the priests when they fall ill, are more likely to be ignored at various church meetings, are regarded with more suspicion and may find their shops less frequented than their more pious competitors.

Rank ten Aspirants are promised a place of exultation in the afterlife and can be chosen to be Monitors if the spot is available. This rank is mostly limited to greatly pious, successful and dogmatic members of the priesthood though the occasional Witch-Hunter or Inquisitor will receive rank ten. Approximately 1% of the adult male population will reach rank ten before they die.

Ranks seven to nine Aspirants are frequently elder clergyman, established members of the Holy Orders of the Orthodox Army, scribes, translators and monastic scholars. Approximately 15% of the adult male population will reach rank seven sometime in their life.

Ranks four to six Aspirants make up the bulk of the skilled laborers in Aamanian including smiths, crafters, engineers, cobblers, shipwrights, merchants and alchemists. Foot soldiers and non-magically trained members of the Holy Army are fortunate to make rank four. Approximately 45% of the adult male population will reach rank four.

Ranks one to three Aspirants typically include the young and unskilled laborers including woodsmen, hunters, farmers, tailors, cleaners, diggers and animal handlers who are particularly unclean according to Aamanian Orthodoxy.

The Atoned are those with zero to ninety-nine mana, who are the poor, the unskilled, the enfeebled, the chronically ill, the newly converted or criminals and others who have “fallen from grace.” The term “atoned” is considered a gentle euphemism that assumes all those who have fallen below one hundred mana have already asked for forgiveness and are attempting to make amends to Aa for their misdeeds. Legally, the Atoned have no rights to trial or the church itself and can be turned away at the gates if the priest wishes. The Atoned may not own land or slaves but may own property. They may not marry, but if married before a demotion or punishment lowers their aalms below one hundred they will keep their wife though she may leave to stay with her family if possible rather than face the embarrassment of being seen with her husband.

Those with no mana are called Pariahs and are given no legal rights whatsoever. These include Jhangaran or Monad slaves, serious criminals and infidels. It is difficult to be charged with a crime against a Pariah as they are worthy of no consideration. According to Orthodox belief, however, the commission of certain acts will tarnish one’s spiritual purity even if the object of the act is

unworthy. For this reason, stealing, lying, cheating or the malicious infliction of pain or suffering on Pariahs is still considered immoral and will result in the decrement of aalms.

Women are considered the property of their fathers until they are married at which point they join their husband. While women do not have “aalms” in the traditional sense, they are believed to inherit the status of their husbands or fathers. For this reason women are often hesitant to marry because their fathers are usually of higher rank than their new husbands. Of course there is still the shame of not being married at the age of 24, an inevitable concern of young Aamanian women. While women do not maintain their own pool of aalms, their actions do impact the mana of their husbands and as such are a great source of pride and shame among Aamanian men. In the afterlife, women are believed to stay with their husbands, and as such have a great incentive to further their husbands service to the church.

Children are believed to follow their parents into the afterlife but also do not maintain their own pool of aalms. Upon their sixteenth birthday, Aamanian males are emancipated from their parents and allowed to pursue their own interests. Assuming they have completed study at one of the many Aamanian religious schools that teach doctrine, reading, writing, the basics of history, magical theory, crafts, civics and law the student will start life with the 100 aalms Aa rewards for completion of one’s studies. Aamanian girls remain under the auspices of their fathers (or eldest brother should he not be known) until they are married and are not allowed into Aamanian schools.

## **Holy Law**

Law enforcement is carried out by individual Temples of Aa who are given money from the Hierophant’s taxes to hire Knights – mostly holy warriors and warrior priests – who are licensed to arrest anyone in the process of committing a crime. Temple guards patrol the streets and country sides offering to help those in need and searching for bandits, contraband or violations of law. If a crime is not in the process of being committed but has been reported it falls under the jurisdiction of the local Monitor who may commandeer the temple guards at any time – though a temple high priest can appeal this to the Hierophant himself if he believes the Monitor has made a mistake. Temple priests, unlike Monitors, are notorious for their compassion toward criminals, the downtrodden, and even infidels in their lands. Many ascribe this tolerance to the generous reward of aalms given to priests who manage to convert infidels or rehabilitate criminals; Monitors on the other hand are rewarded with aalms for keeping the streets clean and purging crime from their districts. “Sanctuary” may be given by any high priest of a Temple of Aa who is of the 7<sup>th</sup> Aspirant Order or above. This sanctuary need not be given in the temple itself, and indeed follows the priest wherever he goes. Numerous criminals have been escorted out of Aaman by compassionate (or foolhardy) priests, led by the hand to the border of Vardune.

In addition to the Temple guards, the deputies working for local Monitors patrol the streets as well, and will not only stop crimes in progress (often by calling for the nearest temple guards) but will also actively investigate crimes, enter houses, interview witnesses and assess evidence. These deputies are lead on the streets by a more senior inquisitor, hooded and armed, who has the authority to take citizens and infidels to the Halls of Penance.

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Infidels, pariahs and the Atoned have no rights in the Halls of Penance and are often subjected to punishment, coercion or torture at the hands of Inquisitors or local Temple priests if they are called upon by the Monitor or the inquisitor who made the arrest. Aamanian Aspirants on the other hand have certain rights that must, by law, be respected. They may be detained for up to one week, but must be kept in hospitable conditions and can be visited by any immediate family and those related by up to two generations (i.e. cousins, uncles, half-siblings, grandparents or children). They may not be denied visits by their childhood priest, the Monitor of the district in which they were born, the head of their Theocratic Monastery if they served in one of the Holy Orders. At the end of the week, the case must be brought to an adjudicator (or the Monitor himself) in the district in which the crime was committed, two priests of the 7<sup>th</sup> order or above – one from the district where the crime was committed and the other from the home of the accused if available – and the inquisitor who investigated the crime must agree that the accused is guilty. If even one descends the accused is freed and the inquisitor travels to Aamahd to plead the case to the Hierophant himself, who will decide guilt or innocence once and for all. The accused is allowed to travel with the inquisitor to Aamahd and plead his case in person – such trips often appear in Aamanian plays and symbolize the extreme respect and devotion that Aamanians have for the law.

Though very rarely exercised, the Hierophant can arrest, punish and indeed execute anyone at any time.

The tomes of the Omnival contain many scattered laws, clauses, restrictions and codes. While very few citizens of Aaman have access to even complete copies of the Omnival, church priests comb through the Omnival whenever a new text is completed by the Hierophant and add any new crimes to the “list of the forbidden” which is then disseminated in lectures, sermons and postings throughout the nation. Aamanian citizens are very aware of what is expected of them.

Laws in Aaman fall into ranked categories based on the punishment that is applied for each. The lowest criminal penalty is punishable by public shaming during which the criminal is placed in iron shackles and chained to the town square, the Halls of Penance or to a local Church where all can see what they have done. This is the only time that Aamanian women have their faces uncovered in public and is sad to be excruciatingly embarrassing to such women. Crimes that result in shaming mostly include decorum crimes such as excessive laughter (longer than four seconds), personal scratching within ten feet of those who are eating a meal or engaging in prayer, making bodily noises in public, showing body hair of longer than a half inch or engaging in public dancing, kissing or music making. Premarital sexual flirtations are also considered decorum crimes until they cross the line to sex crimes which are punishable by death. Given how vague that line can be to an Aamanian there is very little sexual flirtation in Aaman. Punishment for these crimes is often accompanied by a mana decrement of approximately 1 to 5 aalms. Children committing more serious crimes are often punished with shaming, though their parents usually show less restraint when it comes to punishment.

Corporeal punishment is leveled upon criminals who engage in a host of so called “justice” crimes which include cheating on a business deal, failing to repay a debt to the Church, minor theft, purchasing Zandir goods, falsifying documents or violating any of the craft-specific codes for how one goes about one’s profession. Punishment for such a crime must not exceed five minutes and the subject – assuming he or she is Aspirant ranked or above – must not have permanent disability result. Brandings, lashes, dunking in water or hair-plucking are common methods employed by the

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Inquisitors who are charged with carrying out the punishment. In extreme cases, wooden mallets are used on the soles of the criminal's feet or needles may be used to puncture non-vital areas of the body. Sometimes more painful to the Aamanian, a mana penalty between 5 and 25 aalms is often imposed.

“Penitence” is the name given to the punishment for faith or violent crimes in Aaman. Faith crimes include all manners of disrespect and sacrilege that could be visited upon a holy symbol, man, word or temple. Hierophant Aathrone took it upon himself to write his chapter of the Omnival on a detailed list of every conceivable action that one could do with a copy of the Omnival that would constitute desecration. When a copy of this list appeared in Zandir there was much revelry and jesting and one famous Seer claimed he would commit every one of the acts before he died. The story goes that he was unable to complete his sacrilege because he couldn't isolate the stink gland of the peppered skunkling. Beyond intentional acts of blasphemy, faith crimes include prayer to another god on Aamanian soil, attempts to convert an Aamanian citizen from the faith, wearing non-Orthodox holy symbols or expressing any disagreement with any tenant of Orthodoxy. What qualifies as a violent crime in Aaman can be confusing for visitors as it refers to unjustified violent intent. As such, bludgeoning a dancing man for violating the ban on dancing is not considered a crime, but wishing ill will on your neighbor for producing a better harvest is. In general, violent crimes include any intentional physical harm wished or visited upon another for purposes other than preventing a crime, harm to another person or damage to someone's faith.

Penitence is carried out in the Halls of Penance under an Inquisitor who is given great latitude in how much or how little coercion is necessary before the criminal has both repaid his debt to Aa the Omnificent and reaffirmed his own faith. Penitent sessions have lasted as little as thirty minutes and as long as twenty years and frequently involve corporeal punishment, lectures and lessons on scripture, sleep deprivation, long hours of debates, and sometimes a purification process whereby the criminal is tortured without break for hours until they come to accept their miserable and powerless existence for what it is and see that their only chance for salvation and happiness is with the help of Aa the Omnipotent. Mana adjustments are complicated following Penitence as the subject is thought to be rehabilitated after the ordeal and is sometimes even given a mana reward for changing their ways. Such rewards are quite small of course.

Primal crimes are the only crimes punishable by a swift death in Aaman though interestingly this death penalty only applies to Aamanian citizens, foreigners committing primal crimes may be expelled, taken to the Halls of Penance or executed. Executions are sad, almost demure events in Aaman, seen as sending a hopeless soul on to the afterlife rather than the violent retribution for a crime committed. Public executions are exceptions rather than the rule. Often the Inquisitor simply carries out the execution in the Halls of Penance after the priests and adjudicator have ordered it. Primal crimes encompass actions that indicate little self-control or an unholy passion for forbidden activities and include such behavior as: gambling, use of intoxicants, cheating in a duel, and passionate murder - though premeditated murders are considered violent crimes and Penitence is considered sufficient to bring the murderer back in line with Orthodoxy. Sexual crimes are also considered primal crimes. Adultery, premarital sex, rape, prostitution, pedophilia, homosexuality, bestiality, masturbation, sodomy, voyeurism, frotteurism and gratuitous sexual language are all considered equal crimes in Aaman and punishable by death if desired by the offended male.

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There are special rules for dealing with corruption in the church and it is punished with religious zeal as it symbolizes the most wretched kind of crime - one that undermines the faith. Corrupt Monitors are extremely rare, but when found are collectively defrocked, stripped nude and beaten to death with holy symbols in the center of their district. Corrupt priests or heads of Monasteries are treated similarly, often being tortured first at the Halls of Penance to extract names of co-conspirators.

Interestingly, infanticide is legal in Aaman and has been practiced since the days of the Phaedran groundsmen. Conditions that lead to infanticide include: deformation of the child, the recent death of the father or mother or uncertainty of paternity on behalf of the father. Suicide is also legal in Aaman and often performed in ritual fashion with a Priest preparing an alchemical poison that puts the individual to rest and finally stops the heartbeat. Suicide is rare in Aaman though, as most are desperate for the time to gather more mana with which to purchase their place in the afterlife.

## **Among the Believers by Laousin Koreshaa**

Written by a Cymrilian convert to the faith, the book "Among the Believers" gave the first detailed, first person account of the inner workings of the Aamanian church to the Seven Kingdoms citizens and government. As Aamanians are notorious for their ability to sniff out a spy in their midst, this book, published in 586 New Age, was the greatest single determinant of the Seven Kingdoms attitude toward Aamanian faith. Famous quotations from the text include:

"...as a Cymrilian magician, trained by Devorous, student of Azmarandus, my magical talents far exceeded those of the traditional Aamanian priests and even their esteemed archimagi. It is a powerful testament to the contingent nature of Aamanian faith that they welcomed me so quickly into their ranks. The truth is, of course, that they needed my talents and dared not subject me to the invasive coercion that they so readily visited upon other thieves who haplessly allowed themselves to be caught."

Laousin described his own faith as, "Aamanians conflate the empirical belief - one that is either true or false - with the subjective belief of right and wrong. To say that one opposes rape but does not believe that Aa the Omnijust placed his holy sacrament into the womb of virgin women makes the average Aamanian furrow his hairless brow - a rather grotesque sight I must say. They simply cannot distinguish one from the other. When told that descendants of the Phandre also prohibit forced relations with their women the average Aamanian would reply only that they must have been graced with Aa's will, and that at some level of

consciousness they must believe in Aa. In fact, virtuous behavior of any kind is seen as an implicit belief in Aa. This sad irony leads the interrogators to most vigorously torment the kind and innocent among their captives – as such individuals are seen as not only the most promising converts, but those that are closest to conversion.”

Toward the end of the text, Laousin argued, “I could not help but notice, even clouded by my own belief at that time, that the seminaries and temples of Aa, when not filled with the faithful masses, were all but devoid of holy sentiment. To be sure, the sprinklings of religious paraphernalia were omnipresent – hand shakes were met with ‘In Aa’s grace’ and goodbyes were punctuated with a ‘toward his works’ or ‘Aa be with you,’ food was consumed only after a loquacious prayer praising the generosity of their one-eyed deity, and recitations of scripture flew about so regularly that one could fail to notice them once accustomed, not unlike Tazian flies buzzing in one’s ear. But beyond ritual are decisions, weighty decisions that impact from forest to coast and touch every soul under the white hood and many thousands who have thrown it off. And from the election of the Hierophant from among the Monitors to the consideration of mana adjustments to the lowliest of peasants I had never, not once, and with no exceptions saw the religious leaders actually consult the will or word of Aa. On the one occasion when I met the Hierophant to discuss the possibility of lifting the slave trade ban imposed by the good people of the Seven Kingdoms his holiness said nothing of allowing Aa’s will to flourish. I might as well have been talking to a Farad or Djaffir – talk was of prices, supplies, politics, unions, trade embargos and security.”

Laousin ended the book with the famous line, “There is nothing more anathema to the leaders of a church than an actual believer.”

The critics of Laousin include a small percentage of Tanasians who tend to be more neutral with respect to the sons of Phaedra. Such critics argue that Laousin was a simple mage who never lived up to his potential at the Lyceum and bitterly resented his lack of status and respect in the eyes of the Cymrilian people. His assault on Orthodoxy was a feeble attempt to hide the shame he felt at having been seduced into the Cult of the Eye and gain some degree of notoriety by mocking those who still believed what he had believed only the year before.

Aamanians have, when pressed, defended the assertion that their leaders are devoid of faith by pointing the sacrifices such leaders had made in the past, including the celibacy of higher ranking church members. This goes beyond the abstinence from spirits, intoxicants, unregistered potions and various heathen magical

paraphernalia. As for the absence of invocations of Aa to resolve church issues, Aamanians typically defend their leaders by claiming that they embody some part of Aa the Omnipresent and by making their own collective decisions they are in fact enacting Aa's will. It would be as preposterous to ask a man why he does not verbally consult with his stomach before choosing whether to eat or not. Aa acts through his people.

## **The Holy Army**

The Theocratic Army of the Aamanian Orthodox Cult is composed primarily of temple guards and holy archimagi who perform, guard and maintain the various temples of Aa along with the priests who control them. As direct members of the Theocratic Order, the troops of the temples are easily organized and relatively interchangeable as all temples of Aa follow strict and binding restraints on recruitment, training, armaments, outfitting and discipline. When Aamanian temple warriors meet on the battlefield they know exactly what to expect of one another. These warriors, priests and casters comprise approximately 60% of the Holy Army, and form the central nervous system of the military through which the orders of the Hierophant are carried out. Hierophant orders are carried down to Monitors who stay in close contact with the heads (usually priests, but sometimes archimagi) of all temples in their districts.

The other 40% of the Holy Army is comprised of the conscripts that are available from militaristic Orthodox Monasteries. While there are many monasteries that provide conscripts for the Holy Army, the most prestigious is the Order of the Knights of the All-Seeing Eye in Aamahd which trains archimagi, warrior priests and holy warriors. The Order of the Defenders of the Faith specializes in training warrior-priests in Aabaal, the Order of the Hooded Veil train inquisitors in Aamahd, and the Order of Retribution trains witch-hunters in Andurin. Monasteries of lesser prestige exist all over Aaman and often train combinations of warrior-priests, holy warriors, inquisitors and witch-hunters. Numerous non-militaristic monasteries also exist across Aaman, funded by the church, and perform their assigned duties for the good of the populace. Examples include the Order of Reliquaries who tend to holy relics at the Abbeys of Andurin, and the Order of Shipwrights in Arat who labor to produce the Holy Navy. Each Monastery answers to the Hierophant alone, keeping the Temples of Aa and various Monasteries separate from one another and thus breeding a degree of mistrust. Monasteries will often view the warriors and priests of the Temples of Aa as cowards and hopelessly focused on civil matters, while the Priest of Aa will often see Monastic knights as battle hungry and merciless.

The full standing Aamanian Holy Army, if all monasteries and temples of Aa were recruited, would stand at 70,000 men, which is approximately one fifth of the entire Aamanian population. Plate and chain armor is available for almost half of the standing army, and iron swords, maces and shields are available for all. Wooden crossbows and hundreds of catapults are available throughout Aaman, many clustered in Andurin and, frighteningly, Aamahd. Aamanian warriors, certain of the afterlife and the divine consequences of retreat, will fight to the death with little complaint. The military has only two primary weaknesses: very few of their troops are trained for mounted combat because of the few well trained greymanes or ontra available to them, and their network of spies is thoroughly crippled by the inability of Aamanian males to blend into other cultures. The only

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influx of information comes from divine revelation – notoriously unreliable – or the hiring of Arimite or Djaffir spies.

The Holy Navy patrols the southern half of the Sea of Sorrow ostensibly on watch for Zandir invaders, but practically their role is little more than keeping an eye out for pirates, smugglers and illegal treasure divers. Unlike the adventurous Zandir navy, the Aamanians rarely head passed the Phaedran straits to the Azure Ocean. Exceptional missionaries will occasionally request passage to one of the isles or coastal regions to the south and so it is not unheard of for an Aamanian frigate or galleon to be spotted off the Dark Coast. In sum, the Aamanians command approximately thirty to forty frigates and galleons, and numerous smaller rafts that sail up and down the Axis river into Jhangara. Fishermen in Arat own private smaller vessels that could be conscripted into the war effort if necessary, though most are slow and not battleworthy.

## **Monastic Orders and the Knights of Aa**

The militant wing of the Theocratic Order is comprised mostly of aspiring young Aamanians who, upon completion of adolescent schooling, join one of the many Monasteries that serve the Theocratic Order. Many temples, available for worship and consultation, will double as Monasteries where the young men who worshiped in the temple as boys are given privileged access to the limited number of squireships available with current Knights. Other monasteries are free standing and are merely affiliated with a local temple. Regardless, while nothing in Aaman is said to be outside the church, the Monasteries themselves are self-sufficient, serving on the gold paid to them by the parents of their pupils, by work done by the students themselves including gardening, cleaning, animal tending, sewing, cooking, masonry, blacksmithing, and anything else that need be done. Given their independence from Church monies monasteries are allowed to set their own – albeit extremely detailed and rigorous – rules. Because of the money – and thus aalms – one can attain by running a promising and competitive monastery there is extremely intense competition between monasteries to perfect their training methods, acquire pious instructors, and get the most talented boys accepted. Boys of lesser strength and spirit can usually still find entry into the military in one of the more pedestrian monasteries, but their prospects for advancement in the Theocratic Order are limited. The more successful monasteries breed fierce loyalty in their charges, often surpassing that of the Aamanians' considerable attachment to his family.

Monasteries, by law, must make seventy five of every hundred Knights available for service in the Holy Army – an arrangement that provides approximately 40% of the Holy Army. Monasteries boast that while they made up only a quarter of the forces fighting during the Cult Wars, they made 80% of the kills in the war.

The quarter of the Monastic Knights that, at a given time, are not under the command of the Theocratic Church have in times past been involved in numerous armed conflagrations with foreign forces on foreign land. In 524, for example, the Order of Holy Interception – an elite Monastery specializing in rapid response riders – sent eighty riders into Zandir to track down the wife of one of their Knights who was “abducted” by a cavalier and dashing young Cymrilian warrior-mage. The rescue, which left two families of Zandir merchants dead, was completed before Paradoxist forces reached them and chased them back to Zanth where the Aamanians made a daring midnight ride through the streets of Zanth, heading for the Gate to Aamahd. Upon reaching the gate, the

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Paradoxist forces and the wakened militia of Zanth were close behind them. The Hierophant ordered the gate closed and the knights were beaten, imprisoned and ultimately executed – though rumor has it that a handful escaped with aid from unknown Zandir conspirators. The Monastic Order of Holy Interception was ordered closed and the knights scattered – humiliated and angry at the Hierophant who betrayed them. The warrior-priests and holy warriors of the Order of the Defenders of the Faith have been involved in a number of skirmishes along the Axis River with Zandir and Seven Kingdom forces, each resolved diplomatically before escalation, though such battles have costs dozens of lives on all sides. Typically disputes arise out of arguments that start while passing on the river, and do not appear planned by either side. The witch-hunters of the Order of Retribution have run countless sorties into Witchwood and have been seen across the globe hunting witches, rogue magicians, and others on the List of Injunction – a growing list, often by birth name, of the enemies of the Church. They have been seen as far away as L’Haan, the Jungles of Chana and even hunting the diabolists of Rajanin.

## **The Holy Duel**

Phaedran honor has survived in both Zandu and Aaman, appearing in sometimes startlingly similar ways. While the inhabitants of said nations are the last to notice their similarities, outsiders can readily see them. This is not surprising. As the great naturalist Virdia once said, “Fish will be the last to discover water.”

One such vestige of Phaedra is the Holy Duel, a practice first invented by the Phaedran Rangers who engaged the duels on equus back with bone lances. This later turned into saber duels when the rangers began to move into the Phaedran cities and mounted combat became less practical. From there it rapidly spread via merchant and marriage into all the towns of Phaedra.

Orthodox Theology incorporated the notion of a Holy Duel from its very beginning – being mentioned in the first tome of the Omnival as one of several means of allowing Aa the Omniscient to communicate his will through his subjects. In this way the purpose of the duel had widened from resolving personal issues of honor and entitlement to include theocratic issues and debates, battle strategies and issues of morality.

Duels among Aamanians are never initiated by the combatants themselves. In all cases, a higher ranked church member, usually a priest, must be the one to call for a duel. This sometimes results when two men have a dispute that the priest cannot resolve because of his inability to discern the truth or his uncertainty of church doctrine or Aa’s will. Husbands who maintain their wife’s innocence when she is accused by another man are often ordered to duel as a means of determining her virtue. Battles between women in Aaman quickly become battles between their men.

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A number of famous theological debates have been resolved by Holy Duel when called upon by the Hierophant. For example, Omnus I recently called for a duel between two champions - one from among the Order of the Defenders of the Faith and another from among the Order of Retribution - to determine which argument was stronger. The witch-hunter argued that a Jhangaran slave who had mastered the elementary basics of magical invocation should be put to death for witchcraft while the warrior-priest argued that while the Jhangaran invoked the "Red God" while casting his invocations, his spells were in fact those of the Aamanian priest who had mentored him and the slaves calls were to the Holy Aa the Omnificent even if his words were mangled by a poor understanding of Talislan. What to do with those who improperly, out of ignorance, invoke Aa by another name was decided by a Holy Duel in which the warrior-priest bludgeoned the witch-hunter into a coma. The Jhangaran was freed after a brief, albeit painful, stint at the Hall of Penance in Aamahd. The witch-hunter was later revived by the warrior-priest who had bested him. In cases where a priest orders a duel to resolve a theological dispute, and later the Omnival is more thoroughly consulted and is shown to have already ruled on the issue, the duel has - according to Aamanians - invariably been resolved in favor of the prior ruling. This is argued by Aamanian theologians to be proof of divine intervention during Holy Duels. Interestingly, the participants of a Holy Duel do not pray beforehand as it would be considered a grave insult to their opponent to presume that Aa would side on one's own side. Observers and the theologian who called for the debate will offer a prayer to Aa so that he graces the duel with his will.

Historically, the Hierophant Justeious II during the height of the Cult Wars ordered two Monitors to duel - one of whom sought a peace in the war and the other demanded heightening the conflict. Needless to say the war continued.

Disputes with foreigners that are unclear to a local Monitor, inquisitor or temple priest may result in challenges being decreed between the arresting Aamanian and the foreigner or foreigner's representative. When traveling in foreign lands, an Aamanian may challenge others to duels as a means of fairly demonstrating the superior training and magical skills of the Orthodox Church. Being in a foreign land is the only condition under which it is permissible for an Aamanian may initiate a duel between himself and another.

A Holy Duel is fought at close range, starting approximately twenty paces apart. Both warriors may choose their own weapons from

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among unenchanted standard Aamanian iron weapons: mace, sword, dagger, axe or flail are common choices. Plate or chain armor along with coifs and shields are made available and usually accepted. Foreigners fighting in Aaman must use Orthodox weaponry and armor, though when duels are fought in foreign lands these rules are suspended and the Aamanian is trusted with negotiating their own rules with the foreigner. Holy duels are fought until one of the participants can no longer fight, after which priests do their best to mend the wounds of the combatants. Use of any holy artifact or spell is expressly forbidden, as use of either against a believer is punishable by death whether it be in a duel or not. No such restriction applies to dueling foreigners. Anyone caught cheating in a Holy Duel, believer or not, must be killed immediately by all who witness it. This is a very rare event in Aaman.

It is not uncommon for a Witch-Hunter to have a champion - usually a warrior-priest or holy warrior - duel a witch under the agreement that the witch will go free if she wins but must come peacefully to Aaman if she loses. Such duels must be obeyed by the Witch-Hunter, though other hunters may pick up the trail where the first left off.

There is no shame in losing a Holy Duel to a believer and no pride in winning. It is seen only as an expression of Aa's will. To lose to a foreigner, however, is deeply shameful as it indicates the imperfect faith of the warrior. As Aa is omnipotent, to lose while channeling his graces is impossible, leaving only the conclusion that the warrior contains impure faith. Losing a Holy Duel with a heretic results in a 3 point decrement of aalms, just as winning awards 2 aalms.

## **Aamanian Culture**

### ***Worship Services***

Aamanian worship services typically take place just after sundown, a farming tradition that allows for the most use of sunlight in the fields. Services are held every day, and most Aamanians attend them once a day, though the law dictates only twice a week. During a typical service the temple priest will lead the congregation in simple, often monotone, songs that seem to squash all sense of individuality and turn the congregation into a single coordinated entity. Scripture is often read collectively as well, with scrolls containing key passages being handed out as the members enter the church. The higher ranked priests will sometimes end the service with an invocation to Aa himself, sometimes shedding light throughout the temple. In at least one famous occasion a priest called upon his congregation to stare into the brightness of Aa before conjuring a glowing ball of

light in the air meant to symbolize the brightness of purity of Aa. When the congregation was all but blinded the priest disappeared with five thousand gold lumens worth of church artifacts.

Weddings in Aaman are considered times of great happiness, though such happiness is of course subdued in public. All weddings take place in one of the Temples of Aa and are widely attended. The bride is not allowed to dress in differently than anyone else, but is given an iron cup to hold identifying herself as the bride. The groom is also undistinguished but carries a blue diamond (often rented from the church itself, though sometimes purchased if the groom's family is quite wealthy). The couple stand before the Priest, who delivers readings from the Omnival and explains the duties of man to wife and wife to husband. After the sermon the man places the blue diamond into the iron cup forming the rough design of an Eye of Aa with the woman's cup forming the casing and the blue diamond forming the eye. This is meant to symbolize the relationship between husband and wife, with the wife protecting and supporting the husband who possesses the wisdom to lead them in the faith. At the end of the marriage ceremony the couple is turned and the wife's face is briefly exposed to the audience. The purported purpose of this aspect of the ceremony is to identify her as a married woman to all the men in the audience should, in the future, she attempt to seduce one of them. Rings, like all bodily adornments, are forbidden in Aaman. Married women are not easily distinguished from single women by outsiders, and most marriages are arranged by men or Temple Priests who will often recommend marriage between members of his church he feels are compatible.

Funerals in Aaman differ greatly depending on one's rank, but typically involve draping the dead in a white shroud and placing them in a white iron coffin before lowering them into the ground. The coffin is stamped with the Eye of Aa. As the coffin is lowered into the ground friends, family members and clergymen who knew the deceased will often stand at the head of the gravesite and tell stories of the man's accomplishments, deeds and service to family. Service to the church and to Aa is accurately indicated as the final mana count which is carved into the simple iron tablet that serves as a gravestone, and so the speeches are typically more personal. While it is considered improper for an Aamanian to brag about his accomplishments – the glory is Aa's after all – it is not impolite to point out the goodness of an individual who has passed on to the afterlife. At funerals it is also customary for bachelors to approach the daughters of the deceased with marriage proposals or invitations to family meetings where the young can converse under close supervision. This can occur even for very young girls if she has no brothers or uncles to take her in. Orphans immediately enter a nearby temple or Monastic order for study, and children raised by a widow are thought to be in danger of sin, temptation and moral instability. Boys of the deceased are sometimes offered early positions in a monastic order or priesthood to keep them from such dangers.

Aamanians do not “celebrate” holidays but do gather for special prayer services on three “days of remembrance” – the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Drome, 1<sup>st</sup> of Laeolis and the 49<sup>th</sup> of Zar.

The second of Drome is known as the Day of Justice during which the Theocratic Church disseminates information on those who have wronged the church and what, if any, steps should be taken to right such wrongs. The date was set in 512 when the Aamanians won the first Clash of Champions and thus the rights to tolls for travel across the Great Barrier Wall. The following year the tournament was moved to the first of Ardan and thus the Aamanians lost one month of revenue. Enemies of the church that are frequently identified include the Dhuna, the Danuvians,

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Jhangaran raiders, Gao Sea Rogues, Farad merchants, Arimite arms dealers, necromancers, diabolists, demonologists and, of course, the Zandir.

On the first of Laeolis the Aamanians spend a day of remembrance in somber mourning for those who died in the Civil War, in particular the devastating naval battle on what was the Phaedran Gulf. For many years the Orthodox Cult did not officially recognize the first of Laeolis, but the citizens of Aaman would spend the day traveling to the shore of the Sea of Sorrow and floating wreaths of flowers into the gulf. By nightfall the Zandir wreaths and Aamanian wreaths would often clump together on the eastern shore – visible from both Aamahd and Zanth. In 572 the church bent to public will and officially recognized the first of Laeolis as a day of forgiveness and reverent respect for peace. Letters of apology and gratitude are often exchanged by the Aamanian citizenry during this day.

On the last day of the year, the 49<sup>th</sup> of Zar, the Aamanian monitors and their assistants tally all the mana adjustments for the year and post the results in the temples and Monasteries on the first of Ardan. Celebrating is considered boastful and spiritually tarnishing and so it is quite rare. The younger boys at competitive monasteries however often succumb to this temptation.

### ***Orthodox Art***

Express interest in creating or acquiring art, music or fictional performances is shameful in Aaman. Lazy and pointless revelry detracts from the important work of the church. Numerous parables are told to Aamanian children that follow the same rough formula: a good child takes up interest in some art form of some kind and because they are not fulfilling their duties a terrible tragedy befalls their family and friends. The term “blinded by devil notes” refers to a common parable about a young child who was charged with watching for rising water in a new sewer system that was being erected. He was distracted by the beautiful music coming out of a magical shell nearby. The music was broken by the screams of his parents who drowned beneath the earth while digging when the water level rose.

Orthodox art is acceptable only as it glorifies Aa and his creed of hardwork and self-sacrifice. As such, the halls of Monasteries and Temples of Aa are often adorned with tapestries illustrating Orthodox principles, glorifying Cult activity, or demonstrating the steps of the afterlife that all Aamanians strive to climb. Temple services will often have simple music played on a lute, harp or simple drum in the more rural Temples. These instruments simply hold the beat that the church members follow with simple chants and repetitive phrases, sometimes merely repeating the name Aa over and over again until they reach a spiritual state of euphoria. All music must be performed modestly and without excessive expression. To be complimented as a musician in Aaman is a great insult equivalent to being called arrogant or vain.

Orthodox stage performances are acceptable only if sponsored by a local priest who sees to it that the messages of the play are congruent with Orthodox teachings and morality. Women are not allowed to appear on stage, though they can conduct the music at temples or knit the art or construct stage props. Younger boys will often play the roles of women on stage, though this deception is relatively easy to conceal given that women are almost completely covered at all times. Recent evidence suggests that Aamanian smugglers, who smuggle slaves out of the country and

elicit goods into the country, have begun to use coded messages – both verbal and semantic – to signal conspirators. The Hierophant is considering banning all plays to stop this practice.

Aamanian architecture is simple and precise. All buildings must be rectangular with simple steeples or bell-gables for Temples and Monasteries. In areas where rain is problematic a pyramid top is allowed. Most walls are made of stone though some iron buildings are common in Andurin and Aamahd. In smaller farm towns wooden buildings are still the norm, though in all cases the walls are white-washed or painted to appear white. All Seeing Eyes (see elsewhere) must be placed by the local Monitor who determines where they are to be affixed. More prestigious Monasteries or Temples may sometimes be allowed to have marble carvings of past Hierophants, but these are quite rare and tend to be vandalized with hammers – presumably by those who find them vain and offensive.

The only bodily adornment that is permissible among the faithful is a necklace holding the All-Seeing Eye of Aa.

### ***Aamanian Women***

While laboring under dominant husbands and the heavy dictates of the Omnival laid down over generations, Aamanian women have somehow retained some small source of power in Orthodox Culture. Aamanian women are more closely bonded to one another than many realize, particularly because Aamanian men frequently leave their homeland to join Theocratic Monasteries, Temples of Aa, trade guilds, or pilgrimage caravans. Meanwhile the women of Aaman, at least those who did not marry upward or who lost their husbands in war, tend to live their lives in very near proximity to their sisters and other childhood friends. Unlike most cultures, it is men who leave their place of birth and women who can recite how many generations of their mothers have lived in their place of birth. Such sororital associations have been rumored to be the cause of a number of crimes against the church including the mysterious murders of particularly abusive husbands, the freeing and transport of Jhangaran slaves to the Seven Kingdoms, and even rumors of an underground (literally) wine smuggling operation in Aamahd. If discovered, such smugglers would have little choice but to flee the land and keep careful watch over their shoulder for Aamanian Witch-Hunters.

Aamanian women, in general, are quite happy with Orthodox teachings and consider most of the restraints on their behavior to be benevolent and necessary to curb the brash young women from giving into a sinful life. The prohibitions about bodily exposure, flirtation and self-adornment are seen as ways to keep them pure and to keep the destructive impulses of young men in check. As one Aamanian woman wrote during a letter exchange with Zandir women, “When I retire to bed it gives me great pleasure to know that only my husband has ever seen me as a woman.” Another wrote, “I don’t understand the adornments of women in your land. Why would you want to put all those rings and trinkets on your body? When my husband sees me I know his eyes are only on my flesh, not the rocks and metal that hang on me.” The letter exchange, which was agreed by both the Hierophant and the Sultan, was ultimately cut short by both sides when it appeared that it had caused numerous conversions to both sides and more than a few lesbian affairs.

Other than principle duties such as cooking, cleaning, sewing and simple repairs about the home, married women are expected and often eager to produce many children. Child care is considered a sacred duty and one of the easiest ways for a woman to increase her husband’s mana, and thus

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ensure her spot next to him in the afterlife. While women are to be respected and treated with holy reverence there is no doubt that they are second class citizens in Aaman. They must, in all things, obey their husbands, or if unmarried their male relatives. In extreme cases women may take sanctuary in a Temple of Aa, but those cases are rare and are granted only if the woman has endured horrific brutal treatment, incestuous rape or has been tempted from the faith.

## **Language**

The dominant language of Aaman is Talislan, a rapidly evolved language that grew from the old Phaedran tongue. The written word in Aaman is typically done in Talislan as well, and most of the populace is literate, including women who must teach the skill to their sons. Many Temple and Monastic documents are written in Phaedran – the language of the Omnival – and thus this dead language is sometimes taught to promising young students who wish to become scribes, scholars or archimagi. According to Church doctrine the Phaedran tongue was invented by Aamanians, though no other scholars take this claim seriously. It is unclear what an Aamanian would say if one were to point out that the Book of Mysteries, the holy text of the Paradoxists, was also written in Phaedran.

Aamanian conversations are typically dry, as few have any reason to impress one another through banter. Chatting or “bleating” as the Aamanians call it in reference to the meaningless sounds durge make in the field, is seen as a waste of valuable time. Gossip of all forms is considered rude at best, sinful at worst, but it occurs in pockets clustered away from the Eyes of Aa that might be watching. Aamanian conversations are typically sprinkled with quotes from the Omnival that can be misleading to non-believers. For example, when an Aamanian says, “All who wish to hear him will hear him,” one might think that the Aamanian is issuing an invitation to listen to his word, but it is frequently meant as a threat that means roughly, “if you wanted to hear him you would; since you haven’t heard him, you don’t want to, and that is worthy of punishment.”

## **Holy Pilgrimages**

There is a great deal of mystery surrounding Aamanian pilgrimages to so called “holy lands.” The motivation of the pilgrims is the only clear fact available to outsiders: they are rewarded with aalms for every pilgrimage they make. There are two conditions that must be completed to receive these aalms: they must return with a holy artifact that proves they took the pilgrimage, and they cannot be rewarded for taking the same pilgrimage twice within four years. The prestige of completing a pilgrimage is measured in the amount of aalms rewarded: for a trip to the Well of Saints in the Volcanic Hills one receives 50 aalms if one remembers to bring back a vial of the pure water from the sacred well, for a trip to the Watchstone in the Plains of Golarin one receives 35 aalms if one is able to return with a scrapping of the tower, and one receives only 25 aalms for a trip to Faradun’s Sea of Glass if one returns with a piece of the magically-altered glass. Lesser pilgrimages are negotiated between Temple priests and district Monitors who typically award up to ten aalms for various pilgrimages, often made communally by members of a given temple and led by their high priest. Such pilgrimages have led Aamanian citizens to Thystram’s Island off the coast of Mog, the Black Pit of Narandu, the Cliffs of Khazad, the Spectral Isles of the Midnight Sea, and Omen - the mountain of skulls west of the Volcanic Hills.

Aamanian smugglers, who often consider mana to be an earthly manifestation of the Church’s desire rather than a divine promise of rewards for one’s duties, will often pay handsomely for water

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from the Well of Saints, scrapings from the Watchstone or bits of glass from the Sea of Glass. These trinkets, or finely crafted replicas, are sold for exorbitant fees to eager young Aamanians who can turn them into the local Monitor for aalms. Devout Aamanians would never consider doing this – Aa the Omniscient would know of the deception after all.

Many rumors abound regarding why the theocracy encourages, at such a steep price in aalms, their citizenry to travel to these places risking life and limb. The possibility that Aa wills such sojourns is readily dismissed by non-believers who assume the church must have an ulterior motive. Many have been suggested, including that the artifacts brought back from the journeys are being used in the creation of a new kind of weapon. The famous Kashmirian trapsmage, Abdan Snyder, claimed that the seemingly miraculous water in the well of Saints was actually super-heated condensed water that was trapped under rocks for two millennia, and thus for perfect use in thaumaturgical creations that require the essence of water. His best guess was that they were attempting to construct a water-based automaton, which would require solid non-porous stone that could have been hardened by unnatural heat – such as the material of the Watchstone that withstood the heat of the Great Disaster. The glass, he conceded, would be of no use. The Aamanians maintain that the water of the Well of Saints will cure almost any natural ailment. Others are highly skeptical of such claims.

Aamanians claim that from the top of the Watchstone they can view the cloudy gates of Aa's home in the sky. Those who report having climbed the Watchstone report no such sight, although Aamanians point out that believers have no problems seeing the ghostly shape lurking behind clouds or between the rays of the suns.

Interestingly, the average Aamanian has no idea what makes these lands so holy. While they have heard of the magical power of the Well of Saints, there are no stories of Aa having visited the Well, the Watchstone or the Sea of Glass. The Aamanians have never lived in any of the pilgrimage sites, and the Zandir have no memory of Aamanians making these journeys until after the Cult Wars was complete. Foreign governments, including the Zandir, the Seven Kingdoms and the Farad have offered rewards for information about what the Aamanian Theocracy seeks from these lands – and why.

## **Aamanian Arcana**

As Aamanians are eager to say, invocation remains one of the most limitless and awe inspiring magical orders, easy underestimated by rash wizards or haughty elementalists. Whether one believes in the divine powers of the Aamanian deity or not, the power of their priests and archimagi is undeniable. It is believed by the faithful to be nothing less than the will of Aa made incarnate and expressed through a human filter of imperfection. The limits of invocation are the spiritual purity and scholarship of the caster and as such magical training is seen as bringing one closer to Aa's will, as transforming oneself into a conduit through which the desires of the One True God are expressed.

While magical research in Aaman is less competitive than the Kingdom of Cymril or the reckless wizards of Zandir, the amount of time that an Aamanian priest or archimagi spends in training, prayer and scholarship easily doubles that of the most devout Zandir Paradoxist. As such, the

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magic of Aaman's gifted is often predictable and simple but extremely powerful. Aamanian priests are unmatched in the ability to cure and diagnose disease, which is fortunate for the Aamanians as knowledge of living or dead bodies is forbidden by law, preventing any new research in natural medicine or surgery. Aamanian archimagi are well practiced in defensive and offensive magic, capable of standing spell to spell with Zandir wizards; the more devout have been known to best very talented Cymrilian casters. Fortunately for their enemies, the Aamanian casters must operate under extreme restrictions. Among them are bans on invisibility, infliction of disease, witchcraft, colorful displays – ruling out wizardry and elementalism, and any animalistic or bestial spells. Aamanians lump all forbidden spells into “witchcraft” leading to numerous misunderstandings between friendly wizards and eager Witch-Hunters.

Outside of the Temples of Aa that generously heal the injured and cure the sick with no thought of payment, the invocation of Aa's will is often used to convert infidels to the faith. Aamanian inquisitors will use such magic as a last resort – only after argumentation, scriptural readings and finally physical coercion and torture have failed. This may seem sadistic to those who have had an ear severed by an inquisitor, but from the eyes of a believer the magical conversion of an infidel – often called “brandishing the light” – is considered the least dignified way to accept Aa's grace as it shows the convert directly that Aa exists. This denies the convert the chance to step into Aa's graces from faith and intellect alone. It is important to realize that Aamanian magical conversion is not seen as using “magic” to convert an infidel, but rather using Aa's influence to directly open the mind of the convert and allow his word and grace to enter the mind. As such, it is seen as providing powerful evidence of Aa's existence, not “forcing” a person to believe. Aamanians become quite upset when others accuse them of “forcing” someone to believe. They would point out it is equivalent to saying that punching a person in the face is “forcing” them to believe they can bleed.

Without a doubt, the most common magical enchantments in Aaman are the All-Seeing Eyes that are affixed to the plain white walls of Aamanian buildings, churches, gates and even attached to necklaces that are worn by the Monitor's deputies. These eyes transmit visual information to the towers of the Monitors where they can watch on specially crafted crystals the district with which they are charged.

### ***III. The Jhangaran Intervention***

The Aamanian missionaries are among the bravest of explorers – often finding death at the claws of Submen or the teeth of wild beasts. The Ispasians of the Quan Empire maintain that it was Aamanian missionaries who were the first to contact the Harakin warriors. Though summarily killed and eaten, the missionaries were awarded 100 aalms for their accomplishment.

Despite such bravery, Aamanian missionaries have had little success in spreading the faith with one important exception: the Jhangaran marsh peoples of Jhangara. Jhangarans are a superstitious and technologically unsophisticated group of hunter-gatherers whose lives are made miserable by excessive alcohol, superstitious fear, and a lack of basic civilized accommodations such as sewer systems, food preservation methods, insect repellent, and strong predator defenses.

## **First Contact with the Jungle People**

Among the different castes of the Jhangaran, the missionaries' greatest successes were the Outcasts, no doubt due in part to the elaborate cleansing rituals that Aamanian priests perform to remove the "stigma of doom." Such cleansing rituals do not convince other Jhangaran of much, but after performing the ceremony the Aamanians will not hesitate to take an Outcast's hand in prayer. For an Outcast this is often the first human contact they have had in years. Some success has been had at converting Jhangaran Mud Miners who find listening to readings from the Omnival to be only slightly more tedious than dragging nets through the mud. At least when the reading is done they are fed durge meat and provender plant.

Missionaries are taught a simple three-part conversion method before entering a new land, but in reality their techniques become much more sophisticated in the field. The Orthodox Code for conversions is:

- 1) immerse yourself in their culture and beliefs and show that you, like Aa the Omniscient, sees them for who they are,
- 2) demonstrate the superiority of your beliefs, and finally
- 3) convince them that their only hope for salvation is to serve those of the Eye and abandon their heretical beliefs and customs.

This is one of the few times that Aamanians are actually encouraged by the Church to learn about alternative religions and cultures.

In practice the job of a missionary is much more complicated. Initial approaches in foreign lands must start with gifts – in the Jhangaran case these gifts include iron utensils, provender bread, iron weapons and mixtures of cleric's cowl and vinegar to treat the swamp fever that plagues the Outcasts. After earning a space among them, the missionary – and several warrior priests and holy warriors – begin a campaign to improve the lives of their charges. Magical and herbal healing – following extensive readings from the Omnival – are applied to their sick and wounded, food and water are purified with a touch of the missionary's staff and a prayer to Aa, and defenses are bolstered with iron supports and the martial knowledge of the warrior-priests. Finally, the socially weak are told they are the equal of all others of their kind. Support for the Orthodoxy swells from the ground up, often meeting extreme resistance from the leaders of a given tribe who do not appreciate being told that they are no better than their subjugates. Such leaders are not forsaken by the missionaries, however, but rather are, under one pretext or another, beaten soundly about the head by the warrior-priests and shipped back to Aaman for more focused conversion at the hands of more skilled theologians – the Inquisitors.

Once the Aamanians have removed the previous power structure they face but one more obstacle – resilient weed-like cultural beliefs that resist all efforts at eradication. An early missionary, Aabal Gouldin, attempted to convert a Mud Miner group by demonstrating that the Horag did not exist. He stood outside the miners' camp taunting the darkened corners of the swamp during the Septenarial Concordance despite the cries of the Jhangaran from their village pleading with him to run. Though he was unharmed the Jhangaran never again listened to another thing he had to say. Anyone crazy enough to risk the Horag was not worth listening to.

Though not sanctioned by the Orthodox Church in Aaman, many missionaries have had great success bastardizing their religion with local customs. Some teach that the Horag is Aa the

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Omnipotent, and that only by serving his earthly followers can they prevent him from visiting his aggression upon them. Others teach Horag is the earthly manifestation of their sins, and that Aa the Omnipotent is the only protection against him. The “stigma of doom” held by the Jhangarans is said to be a curse Aa the All-Knowing puts upon the unworthy – a curse that can only be cured by servitude to the Church.

Jhangarans who have been converted are easy to identify, as they wear white rags about their arms next to their tribal colors - grey for mud miners, green for marsh hunters, black for mercenaries, and red for outcasts. Aamanians have so far failed to convince the Jhangarans to remove their tribal bands. Crude wooden eyes will sometimes hang from their neck on a string, and on rare occasions a sheet of paper with an Aamanian prayer written on it will be stuffed into their pouches. As most Jhangarans cannot read, it is unclear why the missionaries give these out. Their weapons are of higher quality, having strong black iron tips, and their fortifications are often more elaborate and resistant to assault. They go about their business as usual – giving the fruits of their labor to the missionaries in exchange for simple foods, medicine, and the promise of special treatment in the afterlife.

From the Church’s perspective, the intervention in Jhangara is an attempt to bring peace, civility, and holy virtue to a people lost. They see their actions as divinely guided, and demonstrating the mercy and kindness of a god who sees even those that others prefer not to see. As any good Aamanian orator can tell you, the benefits they have brought to the Jhangaran have been considerable. Swamp fever rapidly disappears from those with Aamanian contacts, hunger is virtually unknown, raids between rival Jhangaran tribes – usually quite common- almost never involve Aamanian converts, and most importantly, the Aamanians have banned alcoholic consumption among their converts.

## **Slavery and the Jhangaran’s Life in Aaman**

There are two conditions that result in a Jhangaran being sent from their homeland back to Aaman. During the Aamanian “intervention” headstrong leaders who resist the faith are sent back for the Inquisitors and then sold to an Aamanian family or Temple of Aa if they survive; and particularly loyal or promising converts will follow a favored missionary or warrior priest back to Aaman as their acolyte – legally indistinguishable from a slave.

Aamanians see nothing wrong with slavery, in fact quite the opposite. “We are all slaves to Aa’s will,” they say. The Omnival states clearly that slaves must obey their masters, but that masters must be a conduit for the budding faith of their primitive possessions – guiding them through hard work and servitude to the faith of Aa the Omnibenevolent. By doing so, the slaves earn a spot in the afterlife with their owners. Jhangarans are granted no legal rights under the Church, but sadism is a sin in Aaman, and brutal treatment of Jhangaran slaves will often result in a visit from neighbors and clergymen who seek to calm the aggressor. Treatment of slaves varies widely in Aaman, with those owned by distant farming communities receiving the most brutal treatment – while those owned by city-dwellers are generally treated well, perhaps due to the All Seeing Eyes that monitor them.

Most Jhangaran slaves, or acolytes as they are sometimes called, earn their keep by doing simple household chores, hunting small game, assisting in masonry work, tilling fields, training beasts of burden, or delivering items. A rare few Jhangaran slaves will work as guards, assisting warrior-priests on pilgrimages, witch-hunters on expeditions, missionaries on foreign interventions, or being enlisted into the Holy Army where they serve the soldiers on and off the battlefield.

Slaves receive no aalms for their holy works, but are believed to follow their masters into the afterlife. A Jhangaran that truly believes in the faith has every reason to serve his masters fully. A Jhangaran that lacks such faith may keep a keen eye on escape. Recently Aamanian smugglers in the farmlands near Andurin have started sending Jhangaran slaves across the border into Vardune where the Seven Kingdoms patrols will often guide them to Cymril. Less nobly, Aamanian smugglers near Ahmad have started slipping Jhangarans (by unknown means) into Zanth where they are sold on the black market as guards and hunters for noblemen – employment that is difficult to distinguish from slavery.

## **Foreign Intrigue in Jhangara**

Zandir merchants have started a profitable business buying and trading avir, animal skins, feathers, horns and glowing water raknid eggs (scintilla) from Jhangaran hunters who sail north on the Axis river to sell their wares. When the Zandir pay in coin they insist on using Zandir crescents, knowing that the Jhangaran will never be able to use them to purchase supplies from Aamanians – who would sooner burn their Church than accept Zandir currency. Jhangarans thus prefer to barter for Zandir goods – such as bows and arrows (with which the Jhangaran hunters are now gaining proficiency), black iron spear tips, sturdy leather boots, wooden and black iron shields, and most importantly, cheap, highly alcoholic grog.

With Zandir merchants cultivating friendships with the Jhangaran hunters, and to a lesser extent the Jhangaran mercenaries who frequently make the trek to Zanth for the Night of Fools celebration when they are hired by nobleman to protect their estates, a highly volatile situation is brewing in the jungles of Jhangara. Aamanians are making steady progress in converting the Outcasts and the Mud Miners, and of course giving them every reason to fear and distrust the libertine Zandir merchants who Aamanians describe as only somewhat less horrible than the Horag. Zandir merchants are giving the hunters and mercenaries every reason to believe the Aamanians will enslave, torture, and kill them if given half the opportunity. The second round of the Cult Wars may very well be fought in the jungles of Jhangara, by natives who have no stake in the outcome and little understanding of why they are fighting. This is a situation the King of Cymril has decried as, “A disgusting sequel to the travesty that befell what should have been the greatest force for righteousness and truth the civilized world has ever known. The founders of the Phaedran Empire would weep if they had any tears left.” With the influx of escaped Jhangaran slaves into Cymril, the liberal elite in the Seven Kingdoms have taken up their plight as the cause *de jour* and have begun to talk about ways of ending both the Zandir and Aamanian involvement with the Jhangaran people. Any overt action on behalf of the Seven Kingdoms would surely lead to an economic crisis, given the vital trade routes with Zandu, and possibly an all out war with Aaman. But Jhangarans have begun reporting that mercenary bands of all sorts, their pockets heavy with the Seven Kingdom’s gold pentangles, have begun silently crossing the Axis River into their territories and taking careful note of Zandir merchants and Aamanian missionaries.

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## **IV. The Natural Resources of Aaman**

While Aaman does not offer the promise of fantastic riches to the fast and dashing, it is a land where honest and careful merchants can turn a slow and steady profit. Many Djaffir traders make the trek through Vardune to Andurin to engage in this brisk trade and turn a fair profit in the process. One such ontra-dealer argued Aamanian goods were priced well below market value because so few merchants could bring themselves to enter the stagnant and boring land. Those with great patience can expect very fair prices.

### **Agriculture and Diet**

Most of the once lush forests of Aaman have been cut down and burned over many centuries. Slash and burn agriculture allowed rapid expansion of farmland but often left the soil depleted after many generations. Early Phaedran farmers discovered numerous techniques to maintain soil efficiency that were later (or originally if you believe the Cultists) in the Omnival. Such techniques include crop rotations, fertilization with durge and erd dung, alchemical pesticides, and selective breeding. Aamanian farms produce great amounts of the provender plant, a pale tuber which is used to make provender wafers, bread and can be eaten raw if one has sufficient constitution. Provender bread and water constitute the majority of Aamanian meals. Small patches of cleric's cowl are also grown, though they are delicate and frequently drowned in the rainy seasons. Willowood and pine still grow around the mountainous and hilly regions of Aaman. Flax is grown throughout Aaman by farmers who use flax seed oil to make the white paints that cover Aamanian buildings. Flax also produces a small bitter fruit that is eaten by the faithful and few others.

Spices are quite rare in Aaman, dating all the way back to the Phaedran groundsmen whose agricultural diets were high in starches, breads, fruits and heavily cooked vegetables. Recently naturalists in Cymril have argued that high spice foods are associated with warmer, wetter climates and high population density, suggesting that the spices are preferred by people frequently subjected to disease and toxic foods. Aaman certainly fits the pattern as they have extraordinarily low rates of disease and infection coupled with the blandest plainest diet. Salt, purchased through Djaffir merchants from the Danalek, is used to cure durge meat. Durge farms are common in Aamanian towns where the animals are bred, slaughtered, skinned, salted and sent to the cities for sale. Herdsmen are considered some of the lowest ranking Aamanians either because of their association with Phaedran Rangers or because of the frequent impurities they must deal with in their profession: blood, dung, animal hair, etc.

Water wells are dug, sometimes with slave labor, in all Aamanian cities and farm towns. Drinking at such wells is free for citizens and slaves but foreigners are often charged 1 copper per bucket of water. Anyone slaked with thirst, however, will often find a generous bucket from nearby Aamanians who will gladly give to the needy, often accompanied by a lengthy sermon about the kindness and generosity of Aa and his followers. Water wells have, in times passed, been suspected of spreading disease to local populaces. Aamanian priests quickly descend on these epidemics with healing magic, followed by inquisitors who interrogate the local populace and often identify one or two witches, slaves or foreigners responsible for the activity. The Zandir suggest such poisonings are orchestrated by the church in order to seize land or get their lecherous hands on Aamanian women suspected of witchcraft. Some blame the Heterodoxists or discontent slaves. Gnomekin

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geomancers are concerned that the poisonings are magical in nature and stem from a great evil lurking below the land.

Erd milk was traditionally banned in Aaman and seen as bestial, but certain Monitors have begun allowing exceptions for adult men only. Hierophant Omnus I has not ruled on this issue as of yet. All alcoholic beverages – and all other intoxicants are strictly forbidden of course, but Aamanian smugglers operating in smaller towns will often pay high prices for any alcoholic beverage, often five times their normal sales price.

## **Black Iron Works**

Tucked against the mountains of Aaman, the town of Aabaal houses the Order of the Hammer, a monastery that trains small numbers of warrior-priests and a great number of artisans who work the black iron mines near Aabaal. Approximately 80% of all the black iron work in Aaman is done there including the fashioning of cult weaponry and armor, iron utensils, holy rods, bits and bridles, tools, nails, and all manner of holy artifacts. While most of these are made from black iron from the nearby mines and from Arimite miners who export raw ore to Andurin, Aamanian artificers in Aabaal and elsewhere are also skilled at working stone, wood, copper and ceramics.

Traders and merchants who wish to make a profit in Aaman may cut prices substantially by traveling directly to Aabaal and purchasing the artifacts themselves rather than buy from Aamanian middlemen who travel to Andurin and Arat and sell the goods at a large mark up, knowing they can count on foreigners' distain for the bland Aamanian heartland to keep them on the border. Using this technique a merchant can make a decent profit by purchasing weapons, armor, tools and utensils and selling them in the Seven Kingdoms, Jhangara, Silvanus, or even the Wilderlands of Zaran.

While Aamanian artificers are free to contract out their skills to foreigners in exchange for currency, there is a list of banned items that no devout Aamanian will construct, in fact even knowing how to fashion them is considered a sin. Such items include: Zandir style sabers, smoke pipes, holy artifacts for any other religion, plate or chain armor cut for a woman, and various bodily adornments such as rings, broaches, tiaras or necklaces with the exception of the All-Seeing Eye necklaces. A further restriction is that all iron artifacts over 5 lbs must be affixed with an Eye of Aa to indicate the origin of the item. Certain church artifacts are excepted, such as the marital bowl that only becomes the Eye of Aa when the blue crystal is affixed.

## **Gouging and Aamanian Smugglers**

While most profits from Aamanian trade are low risk and low profit, provided one stays on the border of Aaman and doesn't arouse the suspicion or ire of the Orthodox Cult, there are steep profits available for the unscrupulous merchants who are willing to take

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the risks and who have contact with the hidden Aamanian smugglers who tend to operate out of smaller farmtowns.

The nations of Aaman and Zandu developed out of mutual trade with animal stock and by-products being carted into Aaman and ironworks and foodstuffs being carted and sailed into Zandu. This dependence was never fully escaped even during the Great War when Maruken – as they were later called – merchants continued dangerous trade runs between armies. After their eviction famine became a frequent problem in Zandu and the shortage of iron was particularly difficult for Zandir cities. The demand for iron artifacts in Zandu was filled by Arimite miners who had a monopoly on the trade and raised prices accordingly. The only other source of iron artifacts near enough to be worth the cost is Aaman. And therein lies the gambit.

“Gouging” is a process first invented by Farad merchants in which the Eyes of Aa that are affixed to common Aamanian goods are pried off and the iron smoothed over so as to hide the mark left by the Eye. If one can do this successfully, and without being spotted by Orthodox guards, one can take the goods and sell them in Zandir for a fantastic profit, undercutting Arimite iron merchants. Of course to do this requires careful navigation. First, one must purchase goods from Aamanians and find a nearby place to actually gouge the objects. Farad merchants actually equipped their frigates with forges below deck, but after several such ships burned to cinders they had to abandon the process. The Gao Sea rogues may lease the use of one of their forges on Gao-Din, but one becomes vulnerable to extortion in such a case. Forges in Zandir can be used, but one risks the Sultan’s guards and indignant Paradoxists in that case. Secondly, once the items are “gouged” one must transport them to Zandu and sell them for great profit. If the deception is discovered by either side, the smuggler will likely regret having sold them a high quality weapon. Even if the deception goes unnoticed, one must be careful of Arimite iron guilds who do not like having their monopoly imposed upon.

Aamanian smugglers will often pay a high price for simple cheap goods that are otherwise barred in Aaman. Consumables are in high demand as they leave no trace to be found by deputies or Monitors. Alcohol, intoxicants, spices and various forbidden writings including arcane scrolls, historical texts, alchemical recipes and all forms of fictional texts from children’s stories to pornography are in high demand. Locating the smugglers is especially difficult, but once one proves reliable a steady and high profit trade can be initiated.

## **Holy Artifacts**

Aamanian priests working with artificers and blacksmiths have begun a fair trade in magical artifacts that are sold to the populace of Aaman as well as converts in other lands. These items include Eyes of Truesight which reveal illusions and magic, chalices that are warded against poison, prayer beads that produce silence, horns that invigorate the faithful and finely enchanted blades and armor (see elsewhere#). Recently the Hierophant has relaxed some of the rules requiring that those who wish to purchase a holy artifact first prove they are devout by reciting numerous prayers from memory, answering three questions about the Omnival, pledging one's loyalty to Aa the Omniscience, and demonstrating that one has no body hair. Given the rather debilitating effect these rules had on business – particularly female business – the Hierophant has decreed that items may now be sold so long as the individual pledges allegiance to Aa. His justification: if they are unbelievers the magic will curse them in time.

The Zandir speculate that the Hierophant is hoarding this wealth to finance various sinister plots against them. While the Zandir's speculations are not to be trusted, there is increasing evidence that Omnus I has access to hundreds of thousands of gold lumens, stored in his massive tower. Such gold has accumulated over the years from exports, as the Aamanian people are largely self-sufficient, depending only on iron imports from Arim. What the Hierophant plans to do with this bounty is not clear.

## ***IV. Aaman's Noteworthy Locations***

### **Holy Cities**

While most Aamanian citizens live in small farm towns or in the outskirts of the cities, the powerful of Aamanian society live in one of the four Holy Cities: Aamahd, Aabaal, Andurin and Arat. Alm, a small coastal city is not referred to as a Holy City, though the two Monitors of Alm have vowed to increase its prestige.

#### ***Aamahd***

The home of the Hierophant stands on the ruins of Baijdan and adjacent to Zanth, the home of the Sultan. Situated in line with the Great Barrier Wall, the city of Aamahd is home to the Clash of Champions, the Holy Order of the Knights of the All-Seeing Eye and the Holy Order of the Hooded Veil. Beneath the square streets of Aamahd is the old Phaedran sewer, still connecting Aamahd and Zanth, and said to be home to thousands of urthrax. Brave smugglers interested in carrying goods between Zanth and Aamahd without paying the tariff at the gate (usually 1 gold lumen per crate, person and carriage) have but to brave the sewers. (For more information on Aamahd, see Hotan's History of the World, 49).

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## **Aabaal**

Home to the Holy Order of the Defenders of the Faith, Aabaal stands against the western mountains of Aaman between Arat and Alm. The ironworks of Aaman are found here, along with the reclusive Holy Order of the Hammer, which trains the most skilled of the blacksmiths and artisans of Aaman. Many Jhangaran slaves are owned by the mining families and the higher ranked members of the Order of the Hammer, and many can be found working the mines on the western coast and as far away as the Monastic Hills. Mining slaves are treated much more brutally than the typical city slave who is often treated as a familial servant to be pitied, instructed and shown to the grace of Aa. Mining slaves are worked almost to death and rarely receive any explicit instruction in the ways of Aa. When a mining slave is caught trying to escape – a frequent occurrence – they are often hobbled with a sledge hammer and an iron shackle. Those caught stealing precious stones have their hands crushed. If a mutilated slave is caught attempting a second theft or escape they are usually sold up the trail to Arat where tailors and fisheries use slave labor for less physical work. This is believed to be the origin of the phrase “sold up trail” which refers to accidental favors done by one’s enemy. Temple Priests in Arat and Alm have been calling for interventions on behalf of the Jhangaran slaves in Aabaal for some time now, but so far the Hierophant has done little to help them. In 598 N.A. the Hierophant considered an intervention on behalf of a priest named Vernaan the Pure until it was revealed by the Order of the Defenders of the Faith that Vernaan had smuggled several hundred slaves out of Arat and back to Jhangara via a Gao Sea merchant. Vernaan was imprisoned immediately and never heard from again. Some claim he was killed, others that he was released and allow to minister in a small farm town under a new name.

A short path leads from Aabaal down to the coast of the Azure Ocean but few ships do business in the area because of the nests of sea demons that seem to be sprinkled about the area. The ships of the Black Savants have been rumored to frequent the area as well, either dealing or fighting with the demons there.

## **The Citadel of Andurin**

Renamed from it’s original Undurin, the city has lived up to its name: it was the only city in all of Aaman that was not conquered during the Cult Wars. More of a military fortress than a city, Andurin is home to the Holy Order of Retribution which trains and releases witch-hunters into the east via Vardune, the north through Arim, and the south along the Axis River. The List of Injunctions, a scroll detailing a list of all of Aa’s enemies on earth is kept at the Monastery though the Hierophant may call for it to be delivered to Aamahd at any time should he decide to amend it. Such expeditions are heavily guarded of course and have withstood attacks from several unlucky bandits, a cabal of Dhuna witches, a renegade Cymrilian gang of overeager youth, and even an Ur would-be extortionist. In all cases the Order of the All-Seeing Eye crushed the attackers and the witch-hunters were then sent after their families. Oddly, the Heterodoxists have only made one attempt to get their hands on the scroll, and from what the captured agent said while the Inquisitor was interrogating him, he had no intention of destroying the document. He only wanted to add a few names.

The Theocratic Temples of Andurin are known collectively as the Abbeys of Andurin and, in addition to their priestly duties, are known for their intense scholarly interests and teachings. They double as Monasteries for the Order of Reliquaries who maintain holy relics and many fabled

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magical items in the Temples. More than any other city, Andurin has a curiosity about the rest of the world, perhaps due to its location as a center for trade with the Seven Kingdoms and the Djaffir merchants. Hierophants in the past have been concerned about this and have erected barriers along the eastern front of the city so that foreigners are visually separated from the rest of the city. Traders and merchants may enter the “infidels’ court” to barter and trade, but it is forbidden to spend the night among the non-believers.

Military forces stationed in Andurin are quite impressive, including an elite Order of ogriphant riders who have been specially trained for urban combat. Their ferocity was demonstrated potently in 587 when a riot broke out in southern Aamahd – believed to have been caused by the consumption of spoiled k’tallah which rendered the smugglers into a state of madness. The ogriphant riders charged down the streets, destroying everything in their path while crossbowmen picked off rioters from their backs. The Zandir military has little that could stop these riders, and the Sultan has offered a reward for any battle tactician that devises an affordable counter. In addition to the riders, battalions of crossbowmen and foot soldiers practice their skills daily in the vast Andurin military courtyard.

## **Alm**

A small coastal village in southwest Aaman, Alm is best known for the its founders – the fanatical Flagellants who demonstrate the strength of their spirit by flailing their own body while chanting passages of the Omnival and favorite prayers to Aa. While such behavior is considered pious, it does not result in the accumulation of aalms and is seen as strange even by devout Aamanians. The behavior, while demonstrating the depth of their commitment, is seen as useless bragging by priests, soldiers, artisans and others who must work for a living. Alm is fairly self-sufficient as a coastal town, sustaining itself on local fish, provender plant farms, and a small vineyard that grows grapes that have been selected over many generations to be shriveled and almost raisin like when “ripe.” While almost never required to do so, the men of Alm have taken up arms in their own defense and demonstrated considerable bravery in battle. Though not particularly well trained, the Flagellants are virtually oblivious to pain and fought off a Jhangaran raid in the year 547 N.A. without any support from the Holy Army. Nonetheless, a battalion of Holy Warriors is stationed in Alm, though such a duty is quite a disappointment to most warriors, and often considered – rightly – to be a low level punishment for annoying their commanders.

Goods are often sailed into Alm from Aamahd and Arat by Aamanian merchants, but more often the boats carry passengers. Missionaries use Alm as a staging ground for entry into western Jhangara (though many also take the Axis River from Andurin and head south). Explorers will often stop in Alm before heading to the Phandril Forests, Jhangara, or sailing to one of the Thaecian Isles. It is thus not uncommon to find explorers in Alm planning their next expedition or freed Jhangaran Acolytes ready for work.

## **Arat**

Home to the Holy Order of Shipwrights who labor to maintain and construct the Holy Navy, Arat is a relatively newer city, having been invaded and retaken many times during the Cult Wars. First and foremost a naval installation, Arat houses many of the merchant families of Aaman and is relatively friendly to outsiders who dock in Arat and sell goods to middle men who carry them to

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Aabaal or sale them to the canal west of Aamahd. Imports include all manor of treasure from Gao Sea rogues who manage to disguise their lawless ways and Farad merchants will bring glass, slaves, and lumber in exchange for the useless precious stones that come from the mines at Aabaal. Adventurers who are concerned about thievery or who have offended the Zandir will often use Arat as a seaport for expeditions to Conjuror's Point, Castabulan or Silvanus.

The Holy Navy frequently has a dozen or more frigates stationed at or near Arat, prepared to defend any area along the coast of Aaman.

Citizens of Arat who do not work as fishermen, shipwrights, or sailors often enjoy civil careers such as sewing, glass-blowing, alchemy and simple leather working. A small group of scribes also work in Arat and are believed to be the only souls alive who can speak the Phaedran tongue.

## **Monastic Hills**

While mostly farmland used by Aamanian citizens, there are parts of the Monastic Hills that have not yet been slashed and burned for farmland. These patches of wildlife contain many unique animals and plants as it was once a nature preserve run by Phaedran naturalists with a penchant for cross-breeding of crops. When the Phaedran library at Badijan was burned at the start of the Cult Wars, the last copies of several Archaen texts were believed to be held by agriculturalists and botanomancers working in the Monastic Hills in an underground bunker from which they could observe plants as they grew from seedlings to full size. Recent texts suggest this bunker was never found but likely survived the slashing and burning processes. It is possible that local Aamanian farmers have discovered it – as evidenced by the fact that Aamanian smugglers recently sold a copy of Viridian's Theoretical Botanomancy to Pharesian peddlers, or that it remains undetected somewhere under a thin layer of soil.

Regardless of the botanomancers themselves, their creations still dot the landscape near oases and patches of wildlife left uncut by the Aamanians. Rumors persist of all manners of plants including: the explosive volitilus plant that is said to create tiny targeted explosions powerful enough to blow locks, penetrate armor or shatter a carriage wheel, several species of overgrown mantraps, various animalistic forms of the dryad bush, animate tangleweed plants that responds to magical commands, the phallus shaped ticklerstalk that is said to be coated in an aphrodisiac that works by osmosis, and rumors of a safer form of the jabuta plant that can be used to distill a non-addictive form of kesh.

Anyone who would find a rare plant would have to smuggle it out of the land as it is illegal for a foreigner to own property in Aaman. The only legal way to take such plants would be to find the person who owns the land – often a local Monitor – and purchase the plant from them. Given the value of such a plant to the Aeriads in Vardune it is unlikely to go for a cheap price.

## **Phandril Forest**

There is great profit to be had in exploring the Phandril Forests, if one is willing to risk the dangers. See elsewhere for more details.

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# **Chapter Three: The Sultanate of Paradoxes**

## ***I. Zandu***

The Sultanate of Zandu is sprawled across the western half of the Phaedran Empire, from the Azure Ocean to the Onyx mountains and the dense forests of Werewood to the north. It shares friendly borders with the Sarista gypsies of Silvanus and Arimite miners of Arim and one large contentious border with their hated brethren – the Aamanians. Gentle hills and spotted woodlands are interrupted by the lush and esoteric Woodlands of Zandu that have been reshaped following Aamentag's destruction of them during the Cult Wars, and the Zandir Moors which feed acres of rare flowers and succulent fruit. Travelers in Zandu are relatively safe from violence and can readily buy food and water from traveling merchants, townspeople or the occasional herder, though one must be constantly vigilante against bandits who strike frequently against lightly armored caravans. Such bandits will rarely draw blood unless they need to, but they won't hesitate to take every last piece of copper. Weather is temperate but prone to heavy rains during the new year and fantastic wind storms shortly after that.

Unionized soldiers will often patrol the Phaedran Causeway, though with less regularity than their Aamanian counterparts. Unlike Aamanians, however, such soldiers will take great interest in recovering stolen items for a fee of somewhere 10% to 15% of the value of the stolen merchandise. Some of the less reputable militant unions have collaborated with bandits to split such rewards, but there is little a traveler can do unless they are capable of tracking the bandits themselves.

There are a great many travelers in Zandu, second only to Cymril in its propensity to attract visitors, merchants, eccentrics and others of varying repute. The Sarista consider it a second home, as do the Dhuna. Arimite merchants are a constant sight along with Monad servitors, Jhangaran servants, and Thaecian performers. Batrean concubines, Bodor musicians, Jaka manhunters, Phantasian dream merchants and Cymrilians interested in aspects of magic that are strictly forbidden in their homeland are also found in Zandir towns.

## ***II. The Zandir***

The Zandir, like the Aamanians, descended from the Phaedran people who had coppery skin, emerald eyes and chiseled features. Considered quite handsome, the Zandir people distinguish themselves from the Aamanians in about every way possible. Males tend to grow short beards or styled mustaches, and women will often allow their body hair to grow naturally. Both sexes adorn their face with sparkling powders, paint, piercings, jewelry and tattoos and anything else that will stick to the skin long enough to become a trend. Having a deep tan is considered highly attractive in both men and women in Zandir, and it is not uncommon to see a Zandir sprawled atop a mountain with a bottle of wine and a book. Skin creams and alchemical dyes are sometimes used to darken the skin, particularly the face.

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Zandir fashion is like a Zandir meal – if you don't like it come back the next day because it will surely be different. All manner of costumes are on display from vivid dresses and high-heeled boots to velvet blouses and trousers, capes of silken brocade, loincloths with tassels and streamers, gem studded tunics, sparkling sashes, feathered shoulder pads and translucent false sleeves. Modesty is conspicuous among the young and often assumed to be covering some grotesque imperfection or flaunting one's "shaved" moralistic distain.

## **Zandir Religion: Salvation is in the Questions**

It is difficult to take the tenets of Paradoxy very seriously, and many eastern scholars and philosophers consider it an ignorant puppet for superstition and sloppy thinking. Indeed the Paradoxists themselves do not regard their faith with much piety or reverence, and of all the things one can discuss with a Paradoxist their religion is one of the least likely to provoke their hair-trigger anger.

### ***Paradox Beliefs***

Since its inception the tenets of Paradoxy have changed somewhat. When Zandu gave his famous speeches and wrote the Book of Mysteries he was arguing against any bold consolidation of moral or veridical power and in favor of allowing individuals to choose their own circumstances, moral pathways, religion and beliefs. He believed in order to find the truth one must abolish the sacred and unquestionable belief and treat all ideas on an equal playing field to be judged by reason and evidence. In generations to come, the purpose of Zandu's prescriptions became unclear, but the recommendations themselves: the abolition of the sacred, the maximization of freedom and the challenging of all beliefs and moral claims were seized upon with increasing zeal. As a result, Paradoxists often jump rapidly from one belief, or god, to another with little time in between. Zandir often "discover" their own personal gods by using little more than their imagination – and any individual Zandir will invoke different gods to justify different courses of action. For example, Tomanth the Wise said "Retreat is like pulling back a sword...it prepares for the next thrust," while Zalandar the Quick said, "A coward's reputation runs faster than the coward himself."

While few have actually counted the number of gods, saints and heroes that are worshipped or invoked by the Zandir people, they are collectively known as the Ten Thousand, based on an estimate a Seer made many generations ago. Individuals do not devote themselves to one god, but rather there are different families of deities and saints, many named after old ranger families such as the Fadian. Others are borrowed from other religions such as the Red God, the hundred "Creators" who are thought to be responsible for creating various animal species, and even – by some accounts – an unnamed one-eyed God who punishes the sexually promiscuous. There are seven gods representing the seven moons and a pair of mated sun gods named Solstrus and Sulfira. For every profession there are several patron deities and saints, often different ones for different guilds. The Ten Thousand are seen as examples – guiding lights from which one can learn, but not as objects of worship or service. There are no Zandir priests wielding the power of their gods – only Seers, wielding the power of reason and an appreciation for Paradoxes. There are no churches of Paradoxy, no spells and no laws.

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Paradox does not require any particular adherence to beliefs, but there are many themes throughout Paradox. For one, Paradoxists delight when those who claim to have moral or intellectual superiority are shown to be mistaken or hypocritical. Tales of Aamanian priests seducing their female charges, or the mishaps of arrogant magicians are staple points of conversations in taverns across Zandu. To act as if one is morally superior is positively insulting to Paradoxists who consider such thinking not only arrogant but silly. The words “evil” or “immoral” are enough to make the average Zandir smirk and suppress a laugh. Secondly, Paradoxists feel no shame in contradictions or in changing their preferences or moral beliefs over time. “Consistency is the virtue of the ignorant.” This isn’t to say that a Zandir wouldn’t feel some shame in being wrong about something they are valued for – for example a Zandir artist would not want to be wrong about identifying a famous painting, but that same artist would have no trouble switching preferences between paintings, or forgiving infidelity one day and punishing it the next. Paradoxists delight in pointing out the paradoxes inherent in other’s belief systems. Ironically, they are very much like Aamanian orators in this respect. Finally, modern Paradoxists believe that questions have more use than most answers, and that only by exploring the depths of ignorance can one know how to begin charting a course of action. Paradoxes were, according to Zandu, to be appreciated for their ability to force one to think deeper about the problem. Modern Paradoxists seem to appreciate them almost as sport, and enjoy pointing them out or identifying them for others. The Book of Mysteries contains many such paradoxes and abstract questions: Why do Aamanians bury their dead in the ground if they’re supposed to go up into heaven? Why are people baffled when a bird floats up into the sky and flies, but no one seems surprised when a coin drops to the ground? Why is it that people like the taste of food but hate the taste of rocks, trees and dirt? If knowledge comes from the senses, why aren’t blind people stupid?

### ***Ranks within the Paradox Cult***

While the Sultan is the supreme leader of Zandu, he is not in any real way the leader of the Paradox Cult. There is no leadership to the Paradox Cult, and it seems clear that no one within it would accept such leadership. The only distinction in the Paradox Church is between members and Seers.

Seers are, above all, intelligent individuals who – even through non-magical means- are quite capable of giving sound advice, particularly to hot-blooded swordsmen who haven’t thought a problem through. While they are prone to exaggerate their magical and philosophical abilities, and often spend great amounts of time lecturing on some random question or inconsistency that has recently come to their mind, they are valued members of Zandir society because they can guide a people devoid of consistent principles to reasonable solutions. The following example will illustrate how a Seer of Paradox might help a member of their church.

“I’m so jealous of my brother’s skill that I find myself hating him.” To this a Paradoxist might argue that jealousy sets the bar a little higher, inspiring competition and forcing him to improve. Accepting one’s inferiority only makes you stronger. Or the Paradoxist could refer to one of the questions in the Book of Mysteries, “Why is it our neighbor’s life is so rich with envy, but so few of us ever want to be the happy slug or the engorged earthworm.” The Seer will have no good answer to this question – Seers rarely do, but they would encourage the afflicted man to think about the nature of his jealousy.

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Seers can be surprisingly reasonable at times, encouraging their followers to weigh their decisions carefully, consider odd strategies and tactics, rethink old traditions and question their pride, shame and loyalties. That being said, they have no formal training in such philosophy and the wisdom of the Seers varies as widely as their beliefs.

## **Greener's Splendiferous Debate**

Hosted at the Magical Fair in Cymril by a young metaphysician named Greener Arkonitus, the Splendiferous Debate as it was called, took place in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century and played to a host of Cymrilian and Tanasian citizenry. The debate took place between Aalams Jabis Basteel the Aamanian theologian and archimage who had been sent to Cymril as an ambassador and the esteemed Zandir Seer Zalence of Zanth. Speaking out to a crowd of captivated and impressionable youth, the debate is still hailed as a masterpiece of persuasion that garnished numerous converts to both sides and clearly indicated the perils, pitfalls and promise of both cults. A transcript of the debate can be found in the Lyceum Arcanum and numerous edited copies are posted throughout Aaman and Zandu. Famous excerpts include:

Aalams: Our faith in Aa is just as reasonable as one's belief that the suns will rise in the morn. Denied perfect evidence, a wise man believes in the most likely of alternatives. The truth of Aa's prophecies, the existence of his miracles, the manifestation of his healing hands through his priests and earthly subjects are abundant evidence of his divine power. One cannot prove his existence until one sees him after death, nor can we prove that the suns will come up until they do, but to wait until it happens to believe can hardly be called reasonable.

Zalence: I'm somewhat bemused that my opponent has referred to the "suns" in the plural. Given the supposed unerring accuracy of the ever growing Omnival, I would have expected him to claim only one such sun exists, as the Omnival states quite clearly in the first tome.

Aalams: That quote is frequently misunderstood.

Zalence: I like to think my mind is as open as anyone's to new ideas and ways of understanding, but even I cannot see how to make two equal to one.

Aalams: One debate requires two debaters.

Aalams: From what reasonable people can tell, your paradoxical religion seems to be nothing more than a childish shrug of the shoulders accompanied by baffling testimony meant to profess your own ignorance.

Zalence: I do much more than profess my own ignorance. I profess yours too, and loudly.

Zalence: Freedom is the birthright of all with will. To limit freedom for any but the direst of consequences denies future generations the ability to learn by the mistakes of others and severely limits the scope of knowledge that will ultimately be available by shutting down veins of inquiry before they can be tested.

Aalams: I agree with my opponent that decisions in life are convoluted and can test the intellectual metal of our wisest theologians. That is why an endorsement of anarchy – and make no mistake, my dear listeners, anarchy is what he recommends – is so disastrous. If one wants to win a race you don't send all your runners in random winding directions. You take your fastest runner and send him straight at the goal. Letting people run their own lives in any way they wish denies them the wisdom of those who have proceeded them, and more importantly, denies them the wisdom of He who knows all that is righteous and good.

Zalence: While Aaman and Zandu were formed at the same time, it is not difficult to see what has happened since. Under Paradoxist rule we have invented faster ships, explored further into the sea and the land. We've patented over two dozen alchemical concoctions, several score of magical enchantments, contributed to the study of wizardry here in Cymril, graduated a hundred students from the Lyceum Arcanum and made countless discoveries in swordsmithing, botany and animal handling. Aamanians have shown great patience and distinction by managing to learn absolutely nothing in the last four centuries.

Aalams: Whatever contributions Zalence might imagine his people have given to those who wish to live only in their first life, his country – standing under the banner of Paradoxo – is rife with disease, starvation, thievery, prostitution, divorce, orphans, beggars, murder and lawless abandon. Aaman is free of crime, and anyone willing to serve Aa's will can eat, marry and enjoy their health until such time as they will be rewarded for their hardships in life.

Aalams: Aa's miraculous revelations during the so-called Cult Wars are readily available to any historian who bothers to read neutral readings of the subject. The naval ambush of Arat was averted when Aa came to the Hierophant in a dream and warned him of the approaching naval fleet. In 442 the Holy Army was pinned in Andurin and while our leaders prayed Aa's grace turned Aamentag, a simple farm man, into a holy warrior who led a rebellion in Zandre and pulled the heathen army away from Andurin. By even Zandir accounts he held the staff of Aa in his hands.

Zalence: As difficult as it is to explain the acquisition of a piece of wood just outside the woodlands of Zandu, I don't think it rises to the level of a miracle. That being said, I must confess that a part of me is deeply tempted to agree with my opponent on this point. After all, how much pride could I purchase for myself if we all accept his view of history? The view that Aamanian Cultists, backed by an omnipotent, omniscient god that warned them of battles, conjured weapons of unimaginable might, fueled their spells and their hearts with power and that this holy army and their all powerful god barely managed to squeak a stalemate against my godless lightly armored people. There's much pride for me in that, but as a scholar it seems unlikely.

Aalams: The battles were close because the Paradoxists broke prisoner exchange treaties, forced women to fight and reproduce like durge with no respect for the sanctity of monogamous marriage.

Zalence: Well, being well known for my lascivious indiscretions I suppose there is no use in denying his second assertion.

Greener's debate, while initially well received, has been tainted by the murder of Zalence two years hence. The murder took place along the road to Vardune from Cymril and remains unsolved. Heterodoxists, Orthodoxists and a series of angry husbands have all been suspected.

## **Zandir Culture**

Many see Zandu as unlike Aamanian culture in just about every way, indeed the Zandir pride themselves on being the most diverse, lively and extravagant people in Talislanta. However their common Phaedran cultural history still survives in their sense of honor, rank and duty.

### ***Commoners and Nobles***

Like the Aamanians, Zandir citizenry come in different ranks and status. Unlike Aamanians, the Zandir are not particularly mobile and there is a good chance that a Zandir will die in the same rank they were born. Also unlike Aamanians, the Zandir ranks are far less formal and do not entitle them to much special treatment.

Among the Phaedran Rangers, there were two classes of men: commoners who worked for food tending to another's flock, and herdsmen who owned the herds, headed large families and generally controlled those around them. When they settled into cities, many of the herdsmen purchased the land from the new Phaedran government and became nobles – synonymous with land-owner. This distinction still survives in Zandir culture, though the requirements for nobility have changed somewhat over the generations.

Nobles are a class of Zandir who own large portions of city property and acquire fantastic wealth, but they are not guaranteed to keep their wealth, cannot charge taxes and are given no formalized benefits from the Sultan. Informally, nobles command a great deal of the Sultan's attention as they frequently maintain an armed force – sometimes contracting whole unions of duelists or archers. Because of this, past Sultans of Zandu have crossed the nobles at their own peril. Nobles send seers to the Sultan as outward gestures of support, but the truth is known to both the Sultan and the nobles, which is that the seers are ambassadors who report the Sultan's decisions to the nobles and suggest courses of action to the Sultan that would benefit the nobles. This is not to imply that the Sultan doesn't rule the land; he could eliminate any noble he wanted to, but if they were to unite the Sultan could easily become endangered.

While given no formal rights over commoners, the favor of a nobleman or noblewoman is worth a great deal to a guard, a debtor, a merchant, a bandit and even a Sultan. In practice, a noble can skirt the law and be reasonably sure that guards will not be knocking on his palace door. Nobles are also marked by their polygamous marriages, large families and brutal sibling rivalries stemming from the fact that most nobles leave their estates and their titles to their eldest son, though this tradition is not codified in law. Once twice removed from the primary noble they are considered a commoner. For example, the family Fadian owns large portions of the town of Zadian – his wife, children and siblings are considered nobles, as are his uncles, nieces and nephews. Beyond that, they are considered commoners, though admittedly ones with some influence over the most powerful man in western Zandu.

In order to pay for their militia's maintenance and their extravagant lifestyles nobles must have a steady and wide source of income. Family fortunes drop quickly when not replenished, and nobles risk losing everything, even their name, if they should have to sell their land. Buffering against such possibilities, nobles show a great deal of interest in investing their money, often loaning their money for profitable expeditions, alchemical or magical research, the establishment of new gardens, or even financing thievery and con men. This also means, of course, that nobles have a great deal of interest in bounty hunters with good reputations.

Some famous nobles include the House of Zodoris which earned its fortune with antique sales of artifacts that were said to be pilfered from the mausoleums along the Sascasm River during the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Lord Zodoris suffers from a chronic urge to gamble coupled with the unwavering confidence in a Seer with Maruken-like luck. The two result in the Lord frequently losing money on dueling and being low on funds. During such times he leaves his manor heading north and returns later with a renewed carriage of riches and antiques. So far trackers have been unable to follow him as he uses a variety of countermeasures to obscure his path – most notably an aging Dhuna warlock. The House of Fadian, the founders of the city that once bore their name before the Cult Wars, still own most of the property in Zadian and make a steady profit from making, bottling and trading Zandir wine. The Fadian militia is said to rival the size of the Sultan's Army and be far more experienced in combat given their frequent battles aboard Fadians merchant vessels which come under attack from Gao sea rogues, Mangar pirates and Imrian slavers. Recently one of Fadian's daughters converted to Aamanian Orthodoxy after she was bitten by a chasm viper while rock climbing off the coast of Zir. A passing Aamanian skift stopped and an Aamanian warrior-priest healed her wounds and comforted her. Fadian has offered a 5,000 gold lumen reward for her rescue and a 2,000 gold lumen reward for confirming her location in Arat. Rumors suggest he is considering sending his troops after her. Finally the House of Archer, the descendants of the Sultan

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Zor-Archer have sunk to the edge of poverty, their estate in Zanth sinking into a state of disrepair. Their primary income had been training archers and ontra-riders but the Union of Rainers has recently stolen their prestige by beating the Archer students in three subsequent archery duels.

Commoners typically do not own land, or own very little of it. Homes are occasionally self-owned, but more frequently they are rented from nobles. Young Zandir typically reside with the guild or union they have joined, moving to a home only after marriage. Aspiring commoners who wish to reach noble status have but one choice: gather enough wealth and purchase the palace and land from noble who is on the edge of financial ruin. Unfortunately, given the rate of burglary and the scrupulous nature of money lenders in Zandir it is very difficult to keep large stores of gold without a palace and palace guard to protect it. Nobles will often serve as banks, holding onto others' wealth free of charge and then investing it for profit, but one would have to be a fool to trust a noble with more than a few thousand gold crescents and it would take many times that amount to purchase a palace. Kashmirian bankers are somewhat more reliable, but then one must pay for caravans to transport the wealth, caravan guards, Cymrilian taxes and risk banditry on the road.

## ***Art and Entertainment***

While well known across the face of Talislanta for its artistic masterpieces, it is important to remember that for every ground breaking piece of Zandir art to tour the Seven Kingdoms, Dracarta and beyond, there are hundreds of truly terrible pieces. Artists are among the most common profession in Zandir, and many live on the brink of starvation, often only finding the most meager incomes from nobles, merchants, tourists and – on occasion – donations. Even the beggars of Zandir will drop a coin or two for a street musician. Still, to the discerning artist there are great talents roaming the streets and taverns of Zandir cities, and given the great diversity of artistic flavors, everyone is sure to find something they like.

Common artistic professions in Zandir include: painters, sculptures, jugglers, actors, singers, dancers of all forms, contortionists, mimes, mimics, ventriloquists, street magicians, acrobats, puppeteers and all manner of musicians. String instruments are the most common musical instruments, including the four stringed mandallo, lyre, lute, harp and violin. Wind instruments are not uncommon either, such as the ojo (a single-reed instrument favored by the poor), flute, woodhorn, trumpet and a uniquely Zandir piece called a starhorn which is named for its five-pointed shape holding four mouthpieces that meet in a tangled array of tubes and then exit through one horn. This is one of few musical instruments that is not played solo, and is extremely difficult to master as a team – doubly so because Zandir musicians are known for keeping their own time and improvising at every performance. Orchestras in Zandu tend to perform only for royalty and are known for their exceptionally strict – sometimes violent – discipline.

Zandir art appeals to the Zandir audience, of course, and as such is filled with titillating material from all extremes. Gore and torture are common themes in Zandir plays, as are seduction, betrayal and wanton aggression. To shock a Zandir audience requires a great deal of skill and very well paid actors.

Dancers and “female performers” are quite common in Zandir cities, and every major district has a union or two of prostitutes. Prostitution is legal, and can be well respected depending on the

qualities of the women – and to a lesser extent men. Prices range from 5 silver for various petting activities to 100 gold lumens for a night with a team of Batrean concubines.

Drugs are also frequent and legal in Zandir including a wide array of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, various exotic mushrooms grown in the Zandir Moor, euphorica from Cymril, black lotus and even k'tallah. Kaj, the Rajan hallucinogen is hard to come by, but in good demand in the seedier parts of Zandu. There is no shame associated with drug use in Zandir.

When money is tight, Zandir Seers can take work giving speeches and telling stories to nobles or even on street corners. Their most favored topic? Conspiracies (see sidebar).

## **Zandir Conspiracies**

“It would take a concerted effort to find a people on Talislanta who concoct more outrageous conspiracy theories than the Zandir Seers. Of course, if any of these conspiracies are in any way correct the Seers will surely be the last to know, because – as earnestly and sincerely as they tell the story – they see no reason to gather evidence of their suppositions as this will surely only lower the number of conspiracies that could be true. The rules of Zandir conspiracies are somewhat flexible, much like the Zandir themselves. It is not uncommon for conspiracies offered by the same man or woman to be wildly contradictory, or for the same person to believe whole-heartedly in a conspiracy one day and laugh at it the next. Some examples of conspiracies I’ve heard whispered at masked balls or shouted loudly to a drunken tavern audience include:

The Rajan and Dracartan feud was an elaborate ruse designed to gather sympathy from foreign nations so that the two countries could have complete dominion over the desert. Why anyone would want dominion over the Red Desert was not clear.

A Zann fisherman maintained that the skalanx creatures that menace the Zandir waterways are actually Aamanian soldiers wearing insectoid camouflage. His evidence? He had never seen the skalanx having sex.

The Jhangaran people are actually the hairless bastard children of Aamanians and certain farm animals. Which farm animal varies depending on who is telling the story, but erd and durge are both common choices. The Aamanians are fully aware of this relationship, according to the Seers, and their numerous charitable works among the Jhangaran is considered penance for their sexually deviate ways. This is the only context in which the Zandir will refer to the Aamanian invasion of Jhangara as “charity.” In fact,

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the same individual who told me of the interbreeding theory – a verbose drunken man who pawed at me until I listened to him – said, not five minutes later, that the Aamanians were committing genocide in Jhangara. The contradiction seemed as lost to him as my pouch of gold was to me.

Another claimed, in a hushed whisper I might add, that the Arimite Revenant Cult did not exist. A group of teenage Arimites maintain the illusion, he said, by faking public fights and deaths. The numerous incidents of Arimites being found with slit throats and notes from the Revenants were dismissed, rather rudely, as suicides.

Only somewhat more plausibly, a drunken Seer told me that she believed that if the Aamanians did not deplete their hair with balmroot extract they would still go partially bald because all of them suffer from a highly contagious dermatological disease that rots the skin's follicles and causes mindless obedient insanity.

Impotence among Zandir males is frequently blamed on a secret cabal of witches held captive by Aamanian witch-hunters who use torture and coercion to force the witches to do mischief to the most sexually adept Zandir men. While the popularity of this conspiracy has, no doubt, everything to do with its exculpation of sexual failure, one has to wonder whether Aamanians with access to powerful witches could resist the temptation to use such power against their enemies.

As you may have guessed, the favorite invisible actor in Zandir conspiracies is the Aamanian Hierophant, who, depending on who you ask and how much they have had to drink, is believed to be a demon in disguise, a brain-damaged child in a perpetual state of confusion, an illusion conjured by Cymrilian conspirators, an Aamanian woman who seized her husband's identity after his murder, or, and I must confess that this is my favorite, the Sultan of Zandu, carted back and forth from Zanth and Aahmad through the ancient Phaedran sewer system and ruling both lands in opposition to each other to maintain control over both. Regardless of his identity, all Zandir agree that the Hierophant is a force of evil and support the Sultan most highly when they are in opposition. If you missed the contradiction inherent in the belief that the Sultan and the Hierophant are the same individual coupled with the passionate desire to support the Sultan in killing the Hierophant, well then, you'll fit in quite nicely in Zandu.

-- Yohan Toobias, Cymrilian Naturalist and Wizard

## **Zandir Women**

By law, Zandir women are equal to men, a process that occurred slowly throughout history and was only complete during the later part of the Cult Wars when women were allowed into the swordsmen's schools and swiftly demonstrated their value as soldiers. While legally women are treated as men, and there are no professions that women are barred from, there remain many differences between the sexes in Zandu.

Given the high rates of infidelity, Zandir men are not known for their devotion to their children, leaving many women, even married women, to do almost all of the childcare. It is not that Zandir men do not like children, in fact they are often quite of them – finding their carefree attitude quite consistent with Paradoxy, but they are not especially attached to their own children. Nobles, who tend to be polygamous and keep close guard of their wives, tend to be the exception and take great interest in their inheritors. Because women, particularly poorer or middle class women, must spend a great deal of time taking care of their children – who face many dangers on the streets of Zandir cities, they tend to acquire somewhat less proficiency in some jobs that require away from home work. Furthermore, the obvious differences in male and female strength further divide the work force of Zandu. As such, soldiering, bounty hunting, blacksmithing, wood working, herding and exploring tend to be thought of as men's work, though women in these areas face no explicit prejudice. Interestingly, it is quite common to hire female guards – who are thought to be far more patient than males and better able to defuse conflicts without violence.

Interestingly, recent Cymrilian naturalists have claimed that one out of every ten Zandir women can be classified as *hybristophilics* – a condition leading them to be attracted to fearless and sometimes psychopathic men. This condition may be somewhat responsible for the rash and temperate breeding of Zandir men. While the Zandir have noticed their women's attraction to dashing somewhat deranged men, they swear Aamanian women are exactly the same way, and that they would flock to the north if not under Orthodox rule.

## **Language**

Zandir speak Talislan, mostly Common though some of the nobles use High. Zandir speech tends to be vulgar in nature, with little regard for politeness or custom. No topics are off limits and no taboo sacred. The written word is generally done in Talislan though Seers are trained to write in Phaedra as this is the language of the Book of Mysteries and many ancient scrolls and texts of Paradoxy. A little over a quarter of Zandir are literate.

Zandir conversations – compared to Aamanians at least – tend to be boastful, playful and full of good-natured joking. Gossip is a second job for many Zandir who seem to thrive on telling tales and staying abreast of the latest rumors and conspiracy theories. Sarcasm, often indicated by the asking of a question, peppers many Zandir insults such as: “Who paid you to act like an idiot?” or “I suppose I could keep drinking this wine, but where would I find the fifth of a copper piece to compensate you?”

One must be wary of offending the sense of Zandir honor with personal insults. This is often a difficult task because humorous ribbing is common among good friends but the same words from a stranger are considered insults worthy of bloody violence. Travelers should take care to avoid

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comments on the following subjects: martial and sexual prowess, the quality of another's mate, the loyalty another has for his union or friends, and a Zandir's sense of honor and bravery.

Oddly, the Zandir have no fewer than six words for hunger, not counting euphemisms and metaphors. There is bloodger (meat hunger), "the sweets" (fruit or sugar hunger), peckin' (mild hunger), "the fams" (starving, or "famished), ongur (hungry for flavored liquid or milk), and "sunny" (hunger in the morning or for breads).

### ***Traditions and Customs***

Zandir Seers perform the weddings, funerals and birth ceremonies for the populace of Zandu.

Weddings are joyous and flamboyant events with the bride and groom often wearing extremely long flowing robes to distinguish themselves from the multi-colored dresses and outfits worn by all in attendance. The ceremony itself is run by the Seer who leads the attendees in song and dance, will deliver a speech usually telling stories about the lovers. Little is considered sacred in the ceremony and drug use and wine drinking are common for all involved. Given the amount of revelry and drinking it is considered fortunate to be invited to a wedding if one is unwed or just looking for another mate. Rings are usually exchanged between the betrothed. If it is a polygamous marriage the metal from the old rings are melted together with the new and reshaped – the Sultan's ring is so heavy he wears it around his neck on a metal chain. Other spouses in a polygamous marriage (usually wives of noblemen), will sometimes attend the ceremony and be wed to both the husband and the new wife if she is happy about the arrangement. If not, she may abstain from the ceremony out of protest. When women marry more than one husband – a rare occurrence – they are almost always left at home – many drink heavily and seek out one of the city's brothels.

Funerals are also presided over by Seers who celebrate the accomplishments of the dead with great boasting, readings from favored poetry and whatever activities the dearly departed liked doing when alive. The funerals of lecherous men and women are quite a sight to behold. The procession usually starts at the deceased's home and travels to the graveyard on a flower laced funeral bier carried by close friends and relatives.

The Zandir nobles may use any number of minor holidays as an excuse for a masked ball or day of performances, but in practice there are only a few widely celebrated holidays in Zandu. The first, of course, is the Annual Clash of Champions (see elsewhere) on the first of Ardan when many thousands of people come to Zanth to cheer for their champion. Only a week later is the Night of Fools, during which all the laws in Zandu are temporarily suspended and the streets of Zanth become packed with drunken, costumed revelers (see Sidebar). On the 42<sup>nd</sup> of Drome, in recent years, wealthy Zandir women have begun hosting exclusive dinners to which only their favored men are invited. After the dinner they have various competitions testing their courage, strength, martial prowess or intellect. The winners of such competitions are often paid handsomely and – if the lady chooses – allowed to spend the next few nights with her. This holiday is modeled after the "Conjugal Feast" in Danuvia. Like the Aamanians, the Zandir take a day of mourning on the first of Laeolis to remember those who died in the Battle of the Sea of Sorrow. Wreathes of flowers, sometimes sprinkled with perfume, are set down river or placed directly on the shores of the sea. In recent years, both Aamanians and Zandir have begun leaving small notes or messages on the

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wreaths, knowing that those on the other side might read them. These messages are generally brief and praise the peace that the Cults have managed to attain. The 49<sup>th</sup> of Phandir is taken as a day of celebration and charity – marked by the meeting of the twin suns. Food is frequently given out at the palaces of nobles and the Sultan doubles his staff of cooks to prepare a city wide feast in Zanth. Hunters and herdsman make a tidy profit just before this holiday selling meat and spices.

## **A Practical Guide to the Night of Fools**

Most historians believe the Night of Fools started in Zandre in the year 529 when the Zandir champion Zeofall the Swift, captain of the Zandre guard and local hero, decidedly won the Clash of Champions. When news reached Zandre that he had humiliated the Aamanian fighter before finally tossing him into Aamahd where he presumably fell to his death, his fellow duelists and guards took to the streets in day long drunken celebration during which numerous townspeople were accosted, much wine was stolen, and several drunken brawls left the populace battered and bruised. The Sultan was so pleased with the victory however, that he pardoned all of the guards who participated in the incident. The next year Zeofall won the Clash of Champions a second time, being the only Zandir fighter to do such, and this time the city of Zanth exploded in lawless celebration on the day of his victory. Concerned that Aamanians could seize upon this lawlessness to attack – after all, their military is poised near Aamahd during the Clash of Champions in anticipation of a Zandir invasion, the Sultan decreed that if his populace insisted on being so foolish, he would allow for their celebration on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Ardan, two days after the Aamanian forces have redeployed away from Aamahd. Given how overworked his guards and investigators would be during such a lawless occasion, the Sultan officially suspended the laws so that his people could celebrate.

And so the “Night of Fools” was born, and the commoners of Zandu regard it with an almost religious ecstasy. The nobles, on the other hand, consider it the bane of their existence, as the rampant property destruction, thievery and in more than one case – fires. At the beginning of every year mercenaries pour into Zandu to get temporary work protecting the palaces, gardens and herds of nobles who know – with certainty – that rogues will test their defenses. Many such burglars wear a special yellow badge during the Night of Fools, which signals to any guards that – if caught – they will not violently resist. To the thieves the night is a bit of a game, and most know that if they are caught they are usually merely imprisoned in the noble’s palace until the next day when

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they are released. While the nobles could legally kill such intruders – on the Night of Fools or any other day, most know not to provoke a member of a thieves guild.

In the year 565 the nobles managed to convince the Sultan to repeal the Night of Fools celebration because of the tremendous damage done to them the year before and the mounting cost of mercenaries. The Zandir commoners could not have cared less, and they celebrated with no fear of retaliation. While the Sultan's guards did their best, they were so easily overwhelmed by drunken swordsmen, rampant thievery, and personal assaults that they simply let the festival continue. No Sultan has challenged it since. It is said that on the Night of Fools the true leaders of Zandu are revealed.

During the celebration no action is considered illegal. Of course this doesn't mean the Sultan's guards won't kill invaders, assassins or anyone else attempting to scale his palace – the guards too are liberated from legal restraint. Visitors frequently underestimate the extent to which the law has any impact on Zandir behavior whatsoever, and as such assume that if murder is not illegal they might as well take out their rivals. Many a visitor has approached an enemy with dagger raised only to be impaled by three rapiers from nearby swordsmen. Violence on the Night of Fools is relatively rare, in fact one historian claims there were actually fewer violent deaths than on the average Zandir night, because immediate, unrestrained, legal, blood revenge is quite a potent deterrent. Rape on the Night of Fools is equally rare, as there's nothing a male swordsman wants more than to stumble upon a dishonorable man accosting a beautiful maiden. Duelists dream of such opportunities.

## **Honor among Paradoxists**

Phaedran honor lives on among Paradoxists, who place a great deal of weight on the quality of a man's word. In the early days of the Phaedran Empire, honor was exclusively a male prerogative and served primarily to allow honorable individuals to resolve their disputes, protect their women, and defend their herds without lethal violence. As women gained equal footing in Zandu, female honor began to resemble that of male honor, though not completely. Honor and fair play in Zandu consist of the following rules, sometimes referred to variably as the Certament Code or the Code of Honor:

1. One's word must be stronger than one's flesh.

To swear on one's word is different than a mere promise, it is considered a sacred trust and is only given on the most dire of circumstances. To ask a Zandir to give his word on a trivial matter is a great insult and demonstrates that one does not understand Zandir honor.

2. To cheat on a duel is to invite death.

Most Zandir duelists, when they receive their training, must take the Certament pledge that requires them to swear, on their word, that if they witness someone cheating on a duel they must be killed immediately. Such an individual dishonors all Zandir, and does not deserve the protection that dueling allows. Explicit cheating: such as pulling a third weapon, "jumping the line" or using third parties is very easy to define and readily punished by death. Implicit cheating – or "raging" as the professional duelists call it is harder to define but refers loosely to rapid escalation in a non-lethal fight, for example, going for the throat or heart in a "first blood" duel (see elsewhere for more details). Furthermore, if one refuses a challenge one must be prepared to accept your loss, publicly apologize to the offended party, and bare no indemnity toward the challenger.

3. If a man, woman or child is put in your charge, you must value their life as your own.

Zandir guards are well respected in foreign lands because of their devotion to their charges. This pledge requires that the Zandir value the protected as highly as one's self, though not necessarily more highly. Zandir are not required to throw their life away in such circumstances, only that they do not save their own life at the expense of their charge's.

4. Women are to be protected above men.

The code, as it applies to women, is in a state of flux. Originally, the Code treated women as objects to be protected and cherished, but also that they were the property of their husbands. As such, unmarried women were greatly defended – often with considerable risk, but married women who were beaten by their husbands were ignored. Should she slip the wedding ring from her finger, however, there were often a half-dozen men willing to stand by her. The logic of the Code was thus: if a man marries a woman he agrees to put her welfare above his own, to care for her before himself, to care for her children and work for the rest of his days for her and their children. That level of devotion demands respect, and wives who disrespect that sacrifice were given little compassion by those outside of the marriage. As Zandir society changed with women attaining honor of their own, pledge four has changed somewhat and there is an unspoken distinction between

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women who earn their own honor, and women who are willing to accept a subservient position in order to get the benefits of male protection.

## ***The Art of the Duel***

Dueling in Zandir is not what it seems. To the uninitiated, two individuals hacking at each other with four blades is the epitome of dangerous. But behind the public façade is a well-oiled machine designed to minimize injury, maximize discrimination between skill levels, and most importantly – put on a show for the masses. There are different kinds of duels, but they all follow the same rough pattern. Someone issues a challenge to a duel, at which point the challenged can admit inferiority – with varying consequences – or accept the challenge and pick a time and place to duel. The time must be within two days, with gracious exceptions being understood such as prior engagements, etc. The place may be anywhere available for both and is commonly done outside city walls, or – if professional duelists are involved – on the tops of buildings over a cheering crowd below. Rules of a duel are settled beforehand, but usually they are allowed two weapons (with magical talents counting as one weapon), no armor, and the fight is either to first blood, death, or surrender. The challenged has final say on all rules, though he will be branded a coward if he tries to hide behind them. Unlike Aamanian duels, enchanted weaponry is allowed, but magical wards, blessings or other temporary enchantments are not. Paradoxy emblems are an exception to this rule and may be, and frequently are, used by both parties. Interestingly, nobles and commoners do not duel each other. To do so would simply be ridiculous, as regardless of the outcome the noble is generally considered superior. To the Zandir, it would make as much sense for a man to challenge a four year old child to a fist fight. No good could come of it.

There are, roughly, three kinds of duels in Zandir that serve three different purposes.

The most common type of duel is called an “offense duel” and results from conflicts of interests, insults or other offenses of honor. When offended, the individual demands an apology and if it is not given, challenges the individual to a duel either between themselves or between their champions. Professional duelists make a good living being hired to fight these duels and can charge up to 1,000 gold lumens per fight though most duels are fought for much less, often no more than 10 or 20 gold lumens. Offense duels between professional duelists are spectacular sights combining the best of stage combat with the intensity of real danger. At the time of the duel, both parties make a public announcement describing what offense prompted the duel. During this time the duelists will often shake hands and it is customary to allow them to inspect each other’s bodies for hidden weapons. During that time the duelists will often whisper rules back and forth, reveal their early fighting stances and usually set a key word that signals the “real” duel is about to begin. Once the fighting commences the professional duelists will spar and battle, hurling insults and taunts at one another and generally making sure both their clients get what they paid for – a good show and a demonstration that insults will cost their opponent either a humiliating defeat, the cost of a good duelists, or both. When the key phrase is uttered – always between bouts, the duelists will finally go at it until one of them has one. A flurry of slashes later and it is usually done, with little hurt feelings and usually only a minor cut on the loser. In either case, the employers accept the outcome and both leave with honor. Even after the performance portion of the duel certain strikes are forbidden by professional duelists including strikes to the hand, head, groin and heart. Breaking bones and grappling are also forbidden. “Cheating” in that sense does not result in death but will

lead to one's expulsion from dueling guilds and word will spread about the dueling community who will, from then on, bar no strike when fighting the cheat.

Lethal duels mostly stem from the second type of duel usually called "status duels." These are almost exclusively fought between professional duelists and draw very large crowds. In essence, a status duel is a way for a younger duelist to make a name for himself without the tedious climb through dueling circuits, offense duels, military service and street fighting. The aspiring duelist challenges a more experienced duelist to a duel and publicly claims to be superior to them. Such duels bare little resemblance to offense duels in which professional duelists put on a show to maintain business for each other. These duels are deadly serious and often agreed to be to the death.

"Conflict" duels result from situations where lethal violence would often be used, but both sides recognize they are better off resolving their difficulties by duels designed to determine who would win if they were to fight to the death. Such duels are frequently used between Zandir and Aamanians who meet outside their lands. Bounty hunters will sometimes use such duels to secure their quarry when hunting Zandir. The loser, if they have honor, will abide by the agreement. The frequency of duels in Zandir is partly due to the Zandir law enforcement system. Aggrieved individuals frequently hire duelists to settle their differences rather than rely on the Sultan's guards who would have to take both parties all the way to Zanth where they would await the Sultan who hears all grievances personally.

## **Zandir Government**

Ruled by his Illustrious Primacy the Grand Sultan of Zandu, the official government of Zandu is little more than the Sultan, his black-clad guards, and hired Causidian Litigators. Unofficially, most of the power in Zandu resides in numerous unions and guilds.

### ***The Sultan Reigns Supreme***

Originally the head of the Paradox Church, the position of Sultan is passed on by decree, usually to a favored son. The taxes and tariffs in Zandu are taken directly to the Sultan at his palace in Zanth, where he contracts out whatever projects he is currently working on, hires aspiring young swordsmen and swordswomen to serve as his guards and make up the Zandir army and navy. He is assisted by many Seers who are hired by nobles as ambassadors and advisors to the Sultan.

Living in a lavish palace, Sultans typically have over a hundred wives, concubines and "personal" servants, and thoroughly enjoy whatever vice they fancy from drug use, tobacco, alcohol or live combat entertainment. Less dangerous pursuits include musical orchestras, plays, bird watching and nature hikes throughout the Sultan's personal retreat in the Woodlands of Zandu.

All judicial cases are presented to the Sultan, often in the morning hours, who acts as judge and jury for legal offenses. His guards, dressed in all black, provide order in the court. His executioners, also dressed in black, are nearby in case the Sultan decides their skills are necessary. The Sultan's executioners are renowned for their skill and creativity, often devising cruel and sometimes humorous deathtraps to bring criminals to their final resting place.

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Sultans are known for their eccentric behavior, capricious dispensation of justice and tax funds, and their willingness to change loyalties rapidly. Past Sultans have devoted themselves to magical or martial training, alchemical experimentation,

## **Sultanic Inventions**

It is not uncommon for a Sultan to demand that his artificers and engineers go about constructing some whimsical invention that pops into the Sultan's head. Most of them are utterly useless, and a few quite dangerous. The only invention ever called upon by a Sultan that turned out to be a success was the bell-wire alarm system that allowed the Sultan to determine when doors in his palace were being opened. Unfortunately, Kasmiran trapsmages invented the system long ago, but no one had the courage to tell the Sultan that.

Among the crazier inventions was Sultan Lashanta's Spectacular Long Range Invasion Ballista. This was a Cult War era wheeled ballista that fired hollowed out logs. Lashanta believed he could stage pinpoint invasions of key military targets – towers, barracks, gates, etc. – by firing hollow logs with troops inside them, stacked head to toe. After several tests, and several head injuries, it was concluded that the ballistae may work but only if loaded with children. The Sultan considered the option, but rumor has it that several of his concubines “talked” him out of it. This was not the only weaponry constructed under the Sultan's auspices. The Phaedaran Riders (a union of mounted warriors) were given spiked iron barding to put on their elite ontra mounts. In their only conflict with Aamanian troops during the Cult Wars they charged into the ordered ranks only to have impaled enemies clinging to their mounts and pulling them to the ground. A generation later, the infamous “kick stick” was designed for Zandir guards. It consisted of a six inch blade attached to the underside of a thick leather boot. Once extended, the blade could be used to kick at opponents, but given the complex footwork that duelists often engage in during a fight more blades broke off and impaled the user's foot than ever made it into their enemies.

### ***The Causidian Litigators***

The Causidian Litigators of Zandu are the only ones who stand between a Zandir prisoner and any punishment the Sultan wishes to inflict upon him. Distinguished by their well-groomed look and fashionable blue robes, the Causidian Litigators are the last surviving union of law-makers from Old Phaedra, and often claim to be related to the Phandre though they are physically indistinguishable from other Zandir, casting doubt on that claim. Leadership in the guild of Causidians is divided

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between cities and as close to a democracy as there is in Zandu. Each member, after graduating from an apprenticeship with the approval of four other Causidians, receives one vote when electing leadership.

The primary duty of a Causidian is to represent those accused of crimes, and those accusing others of crimes, when brought to the Sultan for trial. Both parties must pay for the Causidian out of their own pocket, or more commonly from the coffers of the union they belong to. Without a litigator on one's side, the chance of being imprisoned, tortured or killed for the offense is much greater, especially for foreigners. Though if one's cause is just, and the Sultan is in a good mood, the Sultan will most likely opt for release after giving a lecture of loyalty and statesmanship. Those who wish to accuse others of a crime will hire a Causidian who then attempts to gather evidence to take to the Sultan's guards. For an additional fee they will travel to Zanth and help the guards present the case to the Sultan himself.

While working within the justice system is what most Causidians are trained to do, their skills also make them valuable as scribes, diplomats and investigators. If ambivalent about a criminal case, the Sultan will often call for an investigator to take several of his guards and go on a fact finding mission; during which they are given considerable legal authority over the populace.

In many ways the Zandir are at the mercy of a capricious Sultan who can do whatever he pleases, including kidnapping young maidens, quartering his troops in private homes, and ordering duels for sport. A previous Sultan in the fifth century made an official decree listing the laws of Zandir, which are, technically, still legitimate, but no Zandir seems to have read them, and the guards still do as the Sultan tells them so if an accused citizen wishes to seek refuge in the written law he had better have a backup plan as well. Even most Causidians haven't read all the laws, and most rely on their charisma and logic to convince the Sultan that he *should* rule in the Causidian's favor and give little respect for what the law tells the Sultan to do.

### ***In Unions They Stand***

Largely confined to Zanth, the Sultan is without a doubt the most powerful man in Zandu, but his influence is limited by his lack of interest. If someone wants something done in Zandu, the easiest way is to get a union or guild to back it. There are unions for about every profession in Zandu, and each runs somewhat differently. That being said, the typical union in Zandir is run by a council of elected officials who serve limited terms – often between 4 and 6 years. Union rules and regulations are typically written and revised by the council members and then ratified by a certain majority of the union members – often 50%, somewhat lower for unions representing traveling jobs, somewhat higher for unions that are more sedentary.

Union members must usually graduate from either an apprenticeship or a school of learning before being given the benefits of union membership. A certain percentage of one's income is usually charged by the unions rather than a flat fee. Charges are usually about a fifth of one's income, though higher for more prestigious guilds. The benefits of union membership vary, but access to healers, Seers, loans, litigators, and numerous exclusive parties are among them. Unions often form "rings" with sister unions for mutual benefit. For example, Hedona and the Certaments have had a long standing relationship: Hedona provides the Certaments with drinks and intoxicants

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while the Certaments provide protection. The costs of union membership do not become readily apparent until one attempts to leave a guild, a dangerous proposition in many cases.

Union competition is often brutal and unrelenting with unions attempting to maintain monopolies through intimidation, under bidding, incorporating of rivals, and sometimes outright murder. When monopolies gain a firm hand on an economic good the prices are kept in check only by the competition from Djaffir and Arimite merchants and the threat of the Sultan's intervention.

There are many colorful unions in Zandu. The Iron Works union deals with importing and exporting raw materials, largely from Arim but also to parts of the Seven Kingdom and to Djaffir merchants. Stationed in Zadian, the Iron Works union has been known to fashion custom items, exquisite swords and specialized armor. As the saying goes, if you need something built, iron works. A sister union to the Iron Works, the men of "Plateau" are a woodcrafting and raw lumber union named for the shape of their head that occasionally results from tree branches falling on them, at least that's what they claim. The Plateau have in times passed made numerous wooden sculptures so realistic that poorer nobles will sometimes purchase them, dress them in finery and leave them standing about as mock guards hoping to deter any theft. Known more for their borderline insanity than their skill, the Zann-based alchemist union Toil and Trouble (T&T) has purportedly manufactured sixteen different varieties of alchemical explosives that detonate at just under the blast radius of red menace. They are sister unions with the mining guild "The Dirty Nails" who mine copper from nearby underground mines that have recently been discovered beneath the Zandir Moor. "Hammer and Anvil" an engineering and smithing guild will purchase copper from the Dirty Nails but conflicts between the guilds have started recently, and Hammer and Anvil is considering taking their business elsewhere. Best known for their fine Zandir wine, Hedona has shops in every Zandir city and sells intoxicants, dream essences, euphorica, all manner of alcohol and – recently – exotic beasts trapped by a small team of Jaka hunters who have been put on the payroll. Hedona has a contentious relationship with the Holy Guild of the Virtuous Saints, a union of prostitutes, thugs, thieves and extortionists who have undersold Hedona in the euphorica market and have made numerous attempts to buy the Phantasian dream merchant from Hedona, so far without success. Finally, the well-known Serparian beggars have made a virtual empire of beggars centered in a fire-razed portion of Zanth but stretching the length of Zandu and, according to rumors, even into the Seven Kingdoms. While not the only begging guild in Zandu they are fast becoming a monopoly and are beginning to squeeze out the last remains of competition for the streets. While Serparians are generally quite poor, they take care of their own and have an enormous influence with both other unions and the general populace of Zandu. It's considered terribly bad luck to hurt a beggar.

Perhaps the best known of Zandir unions are the militias that sell their services to the Sultan, nobles and other unions. It is estimated that approximately half of the soldiers in Zandu hold allegiance to one of the militant unions. These exceptional institutions are discussed below.

## The Army of Zandu

The Zandir Army is a combination of the Sultan's standing army of approximately 15,000 souls who are paid for by taxes and stationed throughout the Sultanate, and a fair number of militant unions and militia. Even the Sultan's troops, known variously as "the Zandir Army", "the Wild Bunch", or

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“the Thousand Dancing Blades,” are not much of a standing army compared to the Aamanian Theocratic Army. Zandir warriors are notoriously difficult to control and are prone to fits of narcissistic rage on the battlefield leading them to great heights of bravery and fantastic death-defying stunts for honor and glory...sometimes even successfully. When not called into battle, the Zandir Army can be found guarding Zanth and Zadian, patrolling the Phaedran Causeway, serving as guards or sailors aboard Zandir vessels, or escorting ambassadors to various countries all across Talislanta.

The Zandir Army has no standard uniform, preferring to dress in typical Zandir finery and flamboyant colors. A crest, representing their unit's classification (archery, swordsmen, lancers, etc.) must be attached prominently on their attire and a cluster of stars, crescents and crossed blades made of copper, silver or gold must be sewn over the left breast as an indicator of personal rank. All soldiers in the Zandir Army are trained in swordsmanship at the Palaestra in Zanth and usually hold great loyalty to those with whom they graduated.

While the Zandir Army receives its orders from commanders who answer to the Sultan, the rest of the fighting units in Zandu, some 50% of the warriors, are loyal to unions of duelists, archers, lancers, scouts and hunters. Such unions are given an annual fee, usually between 1,000 and 10,000 gold lumens to be official conscripts in the Zandir Army. In practice that means nothing, but in case war is necessary, the militant unions of Zandu would be under the command of the Sultan.

Were it to come to full scale war, the Zandir Army would surge in size to approximately 85,000 thousand men and women, about a sixth of the entire Zandir population. Zandir blades are in great abundance as even the unskilled prefer to have one hanging in their home or strapped to their side, but armor is relatively hard to come by. Leather and hide armor, stitched together from cured erd hide could be made quite quickly but heavier chain armor is extremely expensive because of the lack of iron in Zandu. Bowyers and fletchers abound in Zandu, so there would be no problem supplying the Zandir archers with their wares, however there is a shortage of skilled archers as most Zandir prefer the prestige and honor of dueling over practical military needs. Crossbows, being much easier to learn, would be a good choice but the Zandir abhor the crossbow – partly because of its favored status among Aamanians but also because of its cumbersomeness and delicacy. Zandir generally do not use shields, though there are exceptions, especially by those who work the many catapult and trebuchet siege engines of Zandu who are frequently the target of arrow-fire in battle. The Zandir military has a number of weaknesses – many of them the same as their strengths. The first is the chaotic nature of their chain of command, which runs roughly from the Sultan to his commanders to their troops. But the troops themselves are scattered across the land while their commanders tend to stay in Zanth, meaning that practically the troops are led by higher ranked soldiers who have no direct connection to the Sultan. Units going “rogue” are always a possibility, and have happened in the past such as the midnight raid on an Aamanian merchant vessel in 572 which almost reignited the Cult Wars. The second weakness is the lack of hard plate armor and shields, which most swordsmen would shun even if available. This results in units that are extremely vulnerable to volleys of arrow fire. The strengths of the Zandir army include their numerous mounted units who are extremely skilled with their graymanes and ontra, and the unpredictable nature of their fighting units who will often try high risk strategies that are difficult for others to predict.

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The Navy of Zandu, sometimes called the “wave riders” in colloquial conversations, has a greater mastery of the sea than their Aamanian counterparts. With trade routes covering the Azure Coast the vessels of the Zandir merchants are led by skilled pilots who are at home anywhere on water. Few military historians believe they would have a hard time defeating the Holy Navy with ease. All told, the Zandir Sultan, who pays sea-faring unions as he does militant unions, could take command of about 70 frigates and galleons and a few hundred smaller sloops and pinnaces in a time of war. How closely he could control them is not clear.

### ***Militant and Dueling Unions***

Making up the majority of the fighting forces in the Zandu, the militant unions of Zandu demand a great deal of respect both because of their numbers and their reputation for being the best trained of all Zandir warriors. Their constant practice, organized skirmishes and tendency to hire out their services as professional duelists keep their blades and their reflexes sharp.

The most famous of the dueling unions is the Certament guild of professional duelists who have chapters in every major city and host annual, in guild only tournaments during the month of Talislandre where they choose their champion. This champion is the only one of the Certaments to compete in the Sultan’s duels which are designed to choose the champion who will compete on the Clash of Champions on the first of Ardan. This is done to avoid lethal combat between its members, as the Sultan’s duels are often fiercely competitive and particularly bloody. Identified by a tri-starred crimson crest worn on their shoulder, the Certament duelists are highly trained in swordsmanship and, most of them, wizardry. While the depth of their magical knowledge is nothing to be envied, the speed with which they can cast simple enchantments is quite impressive. While not all members of the Certaments are skilled in wizardry, they are expected to learn its basics. Members who have not mastered a few simple spells by their fifth year are often expelled by the union leaders. The Certament guild is allied with Hedona and as such their members have free access to cheaper intoxicants and alcohol and high discounts (usually 50%) on more expensive items of decadent revelry. This also means if a member of Hedona requires the services of a duelist they expect to get great discounts from one wearing the crimson crest.

There are two prominent archery unions in Zandu, not including the numerous hunting guilds. The oldest is the Rain-dancers of Phaedra which fought nobly in the Cult Wars for over two centuries and, while not as dashing or ostentatious as swordsman guilds, is granted great respect among Zandir citizens for its professionalism and commitment to protect the Paradoxy. Membership in the Rain-dancers, or “Rainers” for short, is difficult to secure and requires numerous tests of archery skill, wilderness survival, camouflage, and knife-fighting. Unlike other guilds, the Rainers have no crest but are recognized by the rain drop shaped ritual scars that dot their arms. Rivaling the Rain-dancers is a younger guild of aspiring archers and scouts, many of whom were rejected from the Rainers, calling itself the Birds of Green for the simple crest worn on their shoulder. Numerous attempts by the Birds of Green to displace the Rainers as the preeminent archery union have so far failed. While quite brave, the Birds of Green are somewhat lacking in professionalism and seem more interested in getting a name for themselves than in practicing their arts. Their slogan, “a Bird of Green is never seen” was an attempt to secure work as scouts and spies. After repeated attempts the phrase simply never caught on, prompting a Rain-dancer to say, “It would seem that a Green Bird is never heard.”

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Having split from the Rain-dancers over a century ago, the Rock-dancers took their name from their brethren when they founded the most prominent artillery union in Zandu. They are best known for their “pebble-rainer” dual catapult which fires two alchemically-treated boulders simultaneously from a pair of linked catapults with a slight inward angle. If weighed correctly, the boulders will smash together in flight and send shards of rocks scattering below, doing good damage to unarmored archers and shredding the sails of enemy ships. Artillerists have little work available to them when not in a time of war. The Sultan’s stipend for conscripted military service is larger than most units, but artillerists are still known for their poverty and many take menial jobs to bid their time until their skills become in higher demand. The Rock-dancers in particular are known for their vehement hatred of the Aamanians and are not shy about their desire to declare war once again.

The Phaedran Riders were another union with a long proud history of military service during the Cult Wars, and were arguably responsible for sustaining the Paradoxy during its darkest hours. Specializing in hit and run warfare, the “Riders” were, and are, highly skilled at lancing, animal handling and mounted archery. One of few unions that do not uniformly train with the Zandir saber, cutlass or rapier, the Riders prefer lances and bows when mounted and simple hand axes when on foot. Still, their fighting style resembles that of Zandir swordsmanship and anyone seeing a Phaedran Rider fighting off an enemy with a pair of hand axes wouldn’t think to second guess their choice in weapons. Before the graymanes were thoroughly domesticated, the Phaedrans of the Cult Wars used ontra mounts and many of the modern day Riders prefer them as well, though their classic Zandir eclectic tastes have resulted in all manner of mounts being incorporated including the rare loper, hill strider and – briefly – a mounted dractyl. Their crest is an olive colored ontra footprint with sprinkles of blood about it. In times of peace the Riders take work as caravan guards, guides, and messengers.

While anyone who sees Zandir militant unions in action will think twice about their sanity, no one even bothers to deny that the average Grunt is anything but completely mad. Trained almost exclusively to be frontline infantry, the Grunts are stationed in Zann and have a number of bizarre customs. Perhaps the oddest, all members of the Grunts dig their own grave outside of Zann and then tattoo its address on their back with instructions that read something like, “If found unresponsive, please place at Zann graveyard number four, fifth lane third from the river. Cover with dirt until smell subsides.” Many will have a Zandir crescent sewed onto their backs to pay the postage for delivery. Their slogan, “we die so you don’t have to” is taken to heart, and the average member of the Grunts does not live long in combat, of course neither do their enemies. Unlike all other mercenary unions in Zandu, the Grunts take no pride in dueling and almost never challenge others to fight. If challenged they invariably set the duel to begin as soon as possible in a place as close as possible and set the rules to be a fight to the death. Once engaged, they attack without hesitation and with little regard for their defense. Their crest is a target and worn over the heart.

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## Zandir Arcana

“What the Zandir lack in natural magical talent, they make up for in... well, actually they lack doubly from lack of dedication.” - Yohan Toobius, Cymrilian Naturalist and Wizard

Given the lax restrictions on magical research, the financial incentive to acquire new spells, and the recklessness of the average Zandir one can be forgiven for wondering why Zandir magic is not more powerful than it is. The truth is the Phaedran people – excluding the Dhuna and Phandre – were simply not very magically gifted. Fortunately, they inherited the abandoned spoils of some of the greatest inheritors of Archaen knowledge when the Phandre people abandoned Badijan. As a result, many powerful spells and enchantments circle about Zandir, attracting outside magicians of all kinds who are often bilked of their magical knowledge in exchange for “ancient Phadraen texts” sold to them by Seers who often possess handwriting strikingly similar to the supposed ancient texts. A Zandir Seer is as much a rogue magician as anyone in Cymril. Still, no one denies that Phaedran recipes circle the Zandir magician guilds.

The one area of magical research that has been greatly prolific and profitable in Zandu is the warrior-magery of the Certament guild, which rivals anything Cymrilian warrior-mages can conjure. Unlike the warrior-mages, the Zandir constantly test their battle magic in duels, public displays and union tournaments. While they have been accused of favoring flash over substance, the serious Zandir duelists know exactly how useful a spell will be in combat and see flashing lights, illusions and cantrips to be essential tools for disorienting their opponent. Zandir magic is especially designed to be deployed in the midst of swordplay, while Cymrilian warrior-mages tend to inherit the spells of pure wizards who have no expectation of finding themselves in the midst of iron play.

Zandir wizards, mostly Seers, have highly variable magical talents. Some are exceptional casters with powers of divination, influence and conjuration while others know only a few simple cantrips. If one has managed to master an older Phaedran text they can often cast spells of extreme power, even if only a few of them. Most Zandir do not have the discipline to memorize a multitude of spells and are often limited to a handful of well-practiced incantations.

Magical healing in Zandir is relatively rare, and most seek out an herbalist or an alchemist if wounded. More than a few seek out a tavern. Those that do seek help from a Seer are often given bizarre remedies of dubious magical value, such as snorting ground toad legs to cure a cold, covering one’s foot in mud, or placing wax in one’s nostrils. Even odder remedies are recommended for sexual diseases, which cause only slightly more pain than their suspected cures. Dhuna witches, who sometimes stay for a time in a Zandir city, are seen as better healers and are often approached by the ill.

The most common magical enchantments in Zandu are the Paradoxist Emblems which are silver medallions fashioned in many different shapes often after one of the Ten Thousand and are thought to bring good luck to those who wear them. Duelists will frequently kiss the Emblem before a battle, a tradition believed to have been borrowed from the Maruken.

Less common magical enchantments include the enchantments of the Kasmiran trappings that protect the palaces of nobles and the Sultan, various anti-thieving enchants including a purse that

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bites the hands of thieves, and a broad array of variously efficacious “love potions”, powders and enchantments.

Although there are no written laws preventing any type of magic, the Sultan has been known to execute demonologists and necromancers who he deems odious. Black magicians should be discrete.

Still, the rules about magical research are so lax, and the price of alchemical and magical equipment so fair, that wizards and alchemists from around the continent often come to Zandir to do their more sinister or ethically-questionable research.

### ***III. The Natural Resources of Zandu***

There is much to be taken from the lands of Zandu, and the watchful eyes of the Sultan’s guards are lazy enough that one can often get away with it. The social fabric of the country is, however, quite complex, and those who have difficulty navigating between unions, corrupt bureaucrats, deceptive Seers, money-grubbing guards, Arimite, Farad and Djaffir competitors, seductive thieves and persistent beggars than one should do trade with the Aamanians. On the other hand, if one sees opportunity in fractured authority, Zandu is the place to be.

### **Agriculture and Diet**

Less dependent on grains and farmland, the Zandir diet consists of great quantities of erd and durge meat, much fresh fish, healthy doses from a large variety of fruit – including the blue pomegranate, quince, grapes and starfruit – as well as simple vegetables and tubers. Their overall health is good, though their close proximity to man and beast often leads to the spread of contagious disease. This is not helped by their meager familiarity with cleanliness and their frequent sexual partners.

The few farms that surrounding Zandir cities typically grow simple wheat and barley for bread. Vineyards outnumber farms in Zandu by two to one, and wineries have steady business throughout the land. Herders still tend their flocks in the wilderlands of Zandu, their families fending off poachers and predators as they have for generations. When in need of supplies they drive the herd near the city and sell to butchers and nobles. Zandir erd drivers still brand their herds with a family crest. Most ranchers are not unionized but are greatly respected in Zandir culture which holds high esteem for the Phaedran Rangers from whom they descend.

The Zandir Moors is the source of a great number of fruits and spice for Zandu, and preservatives are constantly being tested by Zandir alchemists. If the fruit could be better preserved the trade to the Seven Kingdoms and Dracarta would be a tremendous boon for the Zandir. Exotic herbs, narcotics and fragrant flowers and seeds are grown throughout the Moors and sold to merchants who take them across Zandu and to the Seven Kingdoms.

The Woodlands of Zandu are often uninhabited and technically belong to the Sultan who will take visits and vacations into the woods. His personal elite guard patrol the area and keep outsiders from impinging on the wildlife there. Inside the forest are a great variety of plants including silver deodar, fernwood, gall oak, harpwood and spice trees.

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Water wells are scattered about cities and the country side in not so obvious locations. Nonetheless, thirst is rarely a problem in Zandu as rain is frequent. Drinking at such wells is free though a few guards are often stationed there to guard against pollutants. Erd milk is readily sold throughout Zandu and is often given to children in lieu of wine.

## **Spice of Life**

There is a brisk profit to be made in Zandu by selling herbs and spices. Zandir cuisine is quite spicy, so much so that many foreigners find it difficult to eat without copious amounts of wine, a situation that works out well for local winemakers and pickpockets. Intoxicants of all kinds are frequently made out of spices, sometimes using home recipes. Popular spices in Zandu include yellow pepper, garlic, powdered green onion, whole peppercorns, cinnamon, vanilla extract, and sea salt. These are often treated with alchemical mixtures like the powdered tantalus, rainbow lotus, balmroot, cleric's cowl, mantrap pollen and sometimes even rarer ingredients such as Araq blood or powdered amber.

Narcotics are common in Zandu and can be purchased at fairly low rates (usually 80% of standard) if one is willing to buy them off the street. Of course charlatans often prey on vulnerable foreigners in Zandu and so one is advised to test the product before purchasing it in bulk. One should also be careful when leaving Zandu with such products as the Seven Kingdoms and other lands have made many of the drugs illegal, such as k'tallah, kesh and black lotus. Of course there is a blackmarket starting in Zandu and ending in the Seven Kingdoms, Arim, Dracarta, and Danuvia for all these substances.

## **Smithing**

Exports from Zandir tend to go to Arim and the Seven Kingdoms and include spices, herbs, meat, and fashioned items of copper and brass. Brass is used in Zandir to make many of the horns and musical instruments popular in Zandir and sold elsewhere as well. It is also used to make kitchen utensils, decorations, bells, statues, sculptures, watering cans, alchemical equipment, wind chimes, spurs, simple tools and even forms of chain and scale-style armor. Brass is valued for its strength, corrosive resistance, and malleability. Zandir metallurgists make brass from the copper mines in western Zandu (and from imported copper) then melt it together with zinc ore from Arim.

The magical properties of brass are largely unknown, but what is known is that the Talislantan devils of all kinds despise the metal, leading many Seers to recommend brass amulets as defense against them. Brass cages are said to be the only objects capable of capturing devils, and diabolists seek them out at great expense.

Ironwood is also a favored export of Zandu, as the virtually indestructible trees grow in great numbers in northern Zandu. Unfortunately the cost of extracting lumber from them is extremely high as the lumberjacks must coat their saws with expensive quicksilver. Once felled and cut into standard strips, the ironwood is sold throughout Zandu and to the Seven Kingdoms and Arim.

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Finally, the best known of all Zandir exports are their fine iron blades, made by swordsmiths quite proud of the long standing Phaedran tradition. Sabers, cutlasses and rapiers are all crafted with exquisite detail given to the basket hilts and guards. The reputation of a master swordsmith can spread across the entire country and the best of the art can virtually name their price for a fine quality blade. While Zandir swordsmiths specialize in their dueling blades they are happy to construct any variety of blades for foreigners with heavy purses. It's estimated that about half of the swords held by Cymrilian warrior-mages were crafted in Zandu. A simple guild, the Swordsmiths of Zadian are currently the best known of all the blacksmithing guilds in all of Zandu.

## ***IV. Zandu's Noteworthy Locations***

### **Cities of Zandu**

About 65% of Zandu's population live in one of their main cities: the capitol city of Zanth, the fortress at Zadian, the towns of Zandre, Zann and Zantium Bay. The rest live in small unmarked fishing towns, herding communities, troupes of traveling performers, small towns that spring up around mines, or in small farms and vineyards near the Zandir Moors.

#### ***Zanth***

Home to the Sultan who lives at the "Palace of His Illustrious Primacy and Grand Potentate" – generally just known as the Sultan's Palace, which hoists three magnificent towers into the air for all, even the Aamanians in Aamahd, to see. The entire palace is plated in thin layers of gold and silver and when windstorms hit Zanth the streets line with beggars holding up cups to catch silver or gold flakes that might be chipped off the walls. Zanth is also home to the Chrome Citadel that holds the commanders of the Sultan's Army, and the Palaestra of the Blade where the Sultan's army is trained. (For more information on Aamahd, see Hotan's History of the World, 76).

#### ***Zadian***

The fortress of Zadian was founded by on money from the vineyards, and is home to the richest nobles in all of Zandu. For a variety of reasons, nobles tend to place their palaces away from Zanth, some say because it is difficult to make one's home seem opulent next to the gold and silver plated palace of the Sultan, others claim it is to avoid any rash jealousy on behalf of the Sultan. The noble family of Fadian still controls much of what goes on in the city, though the Sultan maintains a heavy military presence there as well. Hardened by numerous battles during the Cult Wars, the people of Zadian are fierce and aggressive, and the city boasts the highest murder rates of any of the towns in Zandu. The docks of Zadian do brisk trade with Farad merchants, Gao sea rogues – who frequently disguise their vessel to appear to be Zandir merchants, and Thaecian enchanters. Slaves are a common sight in Zadian, which holds about 40% of Zandu's slave population. Monad servitors, Jhangaran laborers and Batrean concubines are commonly seen near the palaces of Zadian's many nobles. The sewer system of Zadian, which empties into the Sea of Sorrow is believed to be infested with sea demons, though they have been quite as of late.

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## **Zandre**

Zandre is home to many hunters, trackers and traders from the surrounding areas, including the famous tracking guild – The Thistlesnout Patch – whose name no one seems to understand, but whose reputation is well known after they tracked an Arimite Revenant who had kidnapped one of the Sultan’s sons. A fair trade in exotic beasts is done here, mostly by buying from Jaka who come down from Werewood. An aviary is maintained by the Ornithological Society, a union of naturalists, which is said to contain many rare species of birds. Many Zandre will sail skiffs up and down the Sascasm River and can be hired for about 10 gold lumens a day, a steep price, but given that they are willing to brave Werewood one cannot hope to find cheaper. Given the threat of nearby skalanx along the Sascasm River, the Sultan sent a contingent of his soldiers to Zandre to hunt them. Because of the difficulty and danger involved in hunting skalanx, the soldiers have contracted out their duties and are currently paying 35 gold lumens per skalanx eye (70 gold lumens per kill) to any hunter, mercenary or adventurer who is willing to hunt them. Rumor has it that one of the Zann fisherman hatches and feeds skalanx on his farm in order to harvest the eyes.

## **Zann**

Located just off the Necros River, the small village of Zann is best known for its residents’ temperamental attitudes about everything. Contrary and stubborn, the people of Zann nevertheless make a decent living as explorers, fisherman and boatsman. Their militia, the Grunts, is known for its fearless raids on the skalanx in the area, and has even attempted to fashion chitinous suits of armor out of skalanx scales in order to camouflage their war parties from their prey. Said to look quite fearsome and provide decent protection, this armor was nonetheless ineffective at fooling the skalanx. Explorers from Zann claim to have explored the entirety of Werewood and even gone into the forbidden land of Khazad. When asked what was found there they typically replied, “None of your business.” Regardless, for 10 gold lumens a day they will escort foreigners anywhere they want to go, sailing up river if necessary. Indeed, the guides do seem bored with whatever sights their passengers find captivating, so it may all be old news to the Zann.

## **Zantil**

Build during the Cult Wars as a lookout for Aamanian attack ships, the coastal village of Zantil was little more than a lighthouse, watchtower and family of tents when first built. Since that time it has become a bit of a retreat for astromancers and wizards who find the quieter town to be more conducive to magical study and star-gazing. Zantil is rather quiet and spurns most of the licentious vices that seem to buzz about the other cities of Zandu. A library was recently established here by the “Dead Seven,” an astromancer’s union that worships – in a way – the seven moons of Talislanta. The union is broken into seven factions, each devoted to the understanding of the influence of one moon. The Zar branch, is particularly devoted to conspiracies, the Jhang branch to warfare, and so on. The library is still quite small, but available for magical research to all those who are respectful of it. It is said to have some rare texts from the Phaedran Empire that have not yet been thoroughly distributed. Zantil is reachable by sea and generally imports what it needs from Zanth by boat. The lighthouse is still functional in Zantil, but rather than scouting for Aamanian ships it now flashes a ruby-colored beacon at the sight of giant sea scorpions. Its bellow-horns are used to sound a day-time alert, often to the annoyance of those who wish to study there.

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## **Zantium**

Nestled into the mountains in western Zandu and open to Zantium Bay, the town of Zantium is well-protected from ambushes. Nevertheless, it was crushed during the Cult Wars by Aamanian forces. It was the sight of an Aamanian prison camp during the war, during which a great number of brandings and later eye-gouging took place. The citizens of Zantium still remember these atrocities and are among the more warlike of the Zandir people. They share a great affinity for the Gao Sea rogues, many of whom descended from the one-eyed soldiers whose family resided in Zantium during the war. The Gao Sea rogues sell almost all their bounty in Zantium and will often release prisoners if it is revealed they come this town. A brisk sale in hides and animals also takes place in Zantium with Jaka and Zandir animal handlers being more comfortable selling to the loyal patriots of Zantium rather than the cut throat prices offered to them in Zandre where there is a much greater supply of wilderness goods. Most of the exotic plants, spices and lumber from the Zandir Moor is sold here as well, and then sailed to Zanth, Zantil, Zadian and Zir.

## **Zir**

The outer wall of Zir was established during the Cult Wars to repel Aamanian forces and protect the naval fleet and shipwright construction facilities. Its wide birth allowed for thousands of troops to be stationed here, along with mounted cavalry, archers, siege engines, gardens and enough space to keep herds in good supply – all of it behind the outer wall. Zir was designed to be a self-sufficient fortress that could hold out long enough for relief to come. Now that the war is over, the space within the walls of Zir is a bit too big for its citizenry. Large warehouses have been abandoned, homes left stagnant and grasslands converted to rarely seen parks. Numerous smugglers, thieves and criminals hide in the northern half of the city, forming a loosely bonded group of villains. Brave bounty hunters will occasionally go on “fishing” expeditions in the northern half of the city, assuming anyone they find likely has a price on his head somewhere. The southern half of the city is still abuzz with shipwrights, merchants, traders and supplies, making a good living sending their vessels out to Faradun, Batre, Thaecia and Jhangara. Freetraders and smugglers can generally get their goods in or out of Zir with little problem. The Sultan’s army now guards Zir closely and maintains the Zandir Navy as well. If Aaman were to attack, Zir would likely be the first target.

## **Conjuror’s Point**

Magicians of the New Age show a great interest in the illustrious illusionist Cascall and his simple home that is believed to reside on the western coast of Zandu. See elsewhere for more details.

## **Koraq’s Mountain**

Of even greater interest is Koraq’s Mountain which will, if one has patience and diligence, allow an aspiring magician a chance to enter his castle and search for magical treasure. See elsewhere for more details.

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## **Abandoned Phaedran Towers**

Along the northern border of Werewood and the western coast are a few dozen Phaedran towers that once stood as look out towers for invading Ur, Wildmen or the babbling howler (thought to have been driven extinct by the Phaedrans), and as trading posts for distant, now abandoned, Phaedran colonies in the north. These towers were reclaimed by the Sultan of Zandu and sold to the highest bidder, a wealthy Zandir merchant named Samarr who operates the Grand Estates out of Zanth. For a price between 5000 and 50,000 g.l. one can own such a tower. Of course, for much less than that one can simply go there, as Samarr does not have the resources or the desire to establish armed guards at all the towers.

These towers also served as hideaways for reclusive Phandre magicians, mostly demonologists, diabolists and necromancers, whose magical research was heavily restricted by the leaders of the Phaedran dynasty. Since Phaedran times these towers have been abandoned as there is little to do in the areas they are located, though a number have been used by bandits to stash items when the Sultan's guards or the nobles' militias were watching the black market for stolen merchandise. Many have been searched for treasure already, though the possibility still exists that hidden items remain. One should be cautious however, as more than one Zandir has reported that night demons have come to roost in the towers, perhaps drawn there by some abandoned magical artifact.

## **Chapter Five: Secrets of the Old Order (GM only)**

### ***I. Secrets of the Phaedran Empire***

The following information is meant to be available to Gamemasters who are planning adventures in the Westernlands. The information is not widely known to the populace of either Aaman or Zandu.

#### ***What is the relationship between the Hierophant and the Sultan?***

While most believe the individuals holding the title of Sultan and Hierophant have not spoken in over 80 years, the Castabulan astromancers have recently sold telescopes to minions of both the Sultan and Hierophant. Guards on the Great Barrier Wall have noticed the glint of glass coming from the Hierophant's eye-shaped window, facing the Sultan's palace. The Sultan too has been seen with his telescope pointed directly at the Hierophant's tower. This odd coincidence has been noticed by concerned parties who have visited both Aamahd and Zanth on mercantile business, and it may be time for a group of adventurers, preferably not directly traceable to any government, to be hired to determine if the two are communicating.

The possibilities include:

1. The Hierophant and Sultan are engaged in an ongoing and escalating debate during which they ink their messages on papyrus scrolls and hold them up to be read by the other. As the debate escalates the threat of war looms closer.
2. The Hierophant and Sultan are coordinating an ambush for the Heterodoxy.
3. The Hierophant and the Sultan have been working together for some time, trying to maintain peace between their people and their place of power over them.
4. The Hierophant is actually communicating with one of the Sultan's wives, who may be tempting him to abandon his celibate ways and meet with her. Or perhaps the Hierophant is trying to convince her to turn on the Sultan.

#### ***What are the noises coming from the Phaedran sewer system in Badijan?***

For years people have heard strange and frightening sounds coming from the ancient sewer systems beneath Badijan. Unfortunately there is more than one explanation for this. It is known that a hive of urthrax inhabit the sewers, but their numbers are growing faster and faster, and it is believed they have recently acquired a taste for humanoid blood. This came to light when Aamanian and Zandir smugglers were attacked for the first time. Smugglers use the sewer system to move between the Serparian's land in Zanth to various homes in Aamahd owned by Aamanian smugglers. If the urthrax attack, the entire city would be in great danger, perhaps destroyed entirely. Recently Zandir alchemists and Aamanian temple priests have called for live urthrax to be captured and studied to find a weakness. The Zandir hope a disease or alchemical mixture will

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drive them away – perhaps clustering them on the Aamanian side. The priests are researching new magical wards that could be placed in the sewer and force the population toward the Zandir side.

### ***Why are the nobles of Zanth meeting?***

Among the Zandir conspiracy theories are second nature, but many skeptics have also begun to realize that the nobles of Zanth are plotting something. Every fourteen days they travel by carriage to a play, performance, orchestra, dueling tournament, or brothel and then quietly step aside and speak in private. The Sultan may be the last to know, but when the rumor reaches him he will no doubt send someone, preferably an outsider with no ties to the nobles or the guilds friendly to them, to spy on the nobles at the next meeting. Certainly any unions that could be affected by the plotting would also be interested in getting an ear. To make matters even more suspicious, they have begun to send spies into the Sultan's palace – certain cooks, concubines and guards are reporting back to the nobles.

The possibilities include:

1. Nothing, they're just talking about what to get the Sultan for his birthday.
2. They are considering an alliance to force the Sultan to suspend the Night of Fools again.
3. They are plotting an assassination of the Sultan, but first they must get a hold of his will and decree that would name the next Sultan. By changing it to name one of them, they can assume the palace and then destroy the role of Sultan in place of a council of noblemen.
4. They are concerned that the Sultan is unstable and may order his army to invade Aamahd.

### ***What is locked away in the dungeons of Zanth?***

The lower levels of the Zanth dungeon are sealed, and have been since Aamentag fought his way into them in the later half of the Cult Wars. What is it that Aamentag did or discovered there?

The possibilities include:

1. Aamentag was an avatar of Aa who cannot be killed, but was subdued and imprisoned.
2. Aamentag uncovered the Phandre's only copy of the Necromantium which had been buried there when hidden on the body of a necromancer who died in the cell.
3. Aamentag was not a follower of Aa but a demonologist who opened a gate to Oblivion which has since ceased to function, but whatever was brought forth may still lurk in the dungeon.
4. Aamentag was inhabited by the spirit of Aa which, when he died, was seen by the Zandir troops who trembled at their fear. Because of the conversions that would have occurred had the Zandir citizenry seen the holy might of Aa, the Paradoxists locked it away in the dungeon.

## ***II. Adventure in the Westernlands***

The following are brief outlines of adventures that one can run in the Westernlands. The details will be left up to individual GMs to tailor to their players origin, loyalties, etc.

## **Cult Wars Reignited!**

An Aamanian Priest named Aattamus the Thrift runs a missionary in western Jhangara with the mud miners of the village of Karansk. Recently his charges have fought violently with the marsh hunters of Tabal and a war is being prepared. Both sides are recruiting their Aamanian and Zandir allies to their sides.

### ***Scene #1: Into Jhangara***

The players are hired by individuals concerned with the growing conflict amongst the Jhangaran. They can be hired by the Seven Kingdoms, a concerned Aamanian Temple Priest or a Zandir Noble to investigate the problem. If possible, before the adventure is run it would be nice to foreshadow the conflict by introducing an ex-Jhangaran slave who claims he was working with the Zandir when an Aamanian missionary took him slave after he was captured by a mud miner.

Players must travel into Jhangara and via any number of routes, and are meant to set up watch and observe the missionary at Karansk. Swamp lurkers, water raknids and numerous giant leeches could attack.

### ***Scene #2: Aamanian Holy Warriors***

As the players are watching, a contingent of fifty Aamanian warriors arrive by boat and join Aattamus the Thrift. He tells them that the Jhangaran have been attacked by the marsh hunters, who have allied themselves with the Zandir and are giving them hides and scintilla. To defend their new converts, the Holy Warriors and Jhangaran mud miners prepare to march on Tabal. They begin training exercises which will take approximately two weeks. If the players observe this, and somehow find out where the Aamanians are planning to attack they can head to Tabal to warn them. Player can discover this by: sneaking into the camp, capturing a Jhangaran or Aamanian and getting them to talk, capturing a scout that the Aamanians send back - via boat - to Andurin to report to their Monitor, magical divination, or lip reading.

### ***Scene #3: Zandir Hunters***

The union of Zandir hunters known as “Six String Saviors” has been trading with the marsh hunters of Tabal for some time now. After they were attacked by mud miners, the Zandir hunters have decided to come down en force and aid their allies - and rack up a few more scintilla and war stories while they’re at it. They don’t expect to see Aamanians.

At this point the players should be on their way to Tabal to warn them, investigate the marsh hunters, or set an ambush for the Aamanians. As possible encounters, an Aamanian witch-hunter - Aapherious - could pursue them after being alerted to their presence by divine intervention or some more tangible cue left by the players (such as lost or dropped equipment, food remains, a camp fire remains, etc.) Try to keep the witch-hunter alive so he can be a more persistent thorn in their sides, though if the players really earn the kill, give it to them. If the players reach Tabal they will find the marsh hunters suspicious, but the Zandir, when they arrive, more willing to listen. One way or another, the Aamanian and Zandir forces will likely fight.

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### **Scene #4: The First Battle**

Unless the players do something brilliant and unthought-of, the Aamanians are determined to march on the marsh-hunters, and the Zandir union is determined to help defend them. The players can try any number of strategies, including picking a side and pushing to victory, trying to ensure that none of the Westernlands soldiers survives to tell their comrades back home, or any other strategy. If they can prevent any surviving Aamanian or Zandir from reporting back to their homeland they can prevent the carnage to come. If not, or if you want to start the war anyway, than you can always have a soldier escape unnoticed, or a report sent before the battle for example.

### **Scene #5: Assassins**

After the players report back to whoever hired them, and are paid, the next mission becomes more crucial. Both the Aamanians and Zandir are on the verge of armed conflict. Nobles in Zanth are pushing for war as are the Monastic Orders in Aaman. The employers believe only a series of surgical assassinations can stop full-scale war, and go about hiring the players to perform them.

Target #1: Aajanius the Eighth, advisor to the Hierophant and avid gardener outside of Aamahd. As he is always accompanied by six or seven warrior-priests, the players are given money to hire mercenaries to help them set an ambush. Aajanius enjoys going gardening near the mountains of Arim and is vulnerable there. Aajanius is a talented archimagi and known for his devoted hatred of all people non-Orthodox. He is also terribly rude to his guards and followers.

Target #2: Notilus of Zantium is a noble who openly demands a war with Aaman. He is vulnerable when he takes his frigate for his weekly tour of Zantium Bay. On board he typically has a dozen swordsman, ten crew members, half a dozen Jhangaran slaves and a couple of wives and occasionally some of his many children.

Target #3: Krakas the blind (who is not blind) is an Arimite merchant who works for unknown forces in Arim who have an interest in provoking the Cult Wars in order to make profits on the sale of iron. It was a crushing blow to the Arimite economy when the Cult Wars were ceased and Krakas and his employers want to provoke it again. He is planning on selling Aamanians a cargo of salt which have been contaminated with black mushroom powder; then he will frame the Zandir by planting a Paradoxist Emblem on the cart before escaping. This plot has been brought to the attention of the player's employer by an Arimite rival of Krakas who is less cold hearted, a man named Vamintice who owns six dozen Jhangaran slaves who will accompany the players to the ambush of Krakas on the outskirts of Andurin. Vamintice is actually a Revenant assassin, but told the truth about Krakas, who works for the King of Arim who hopes to provoke the war. When Krakas is eliminated, Vamintice will likely try to take out the players as well to cover his tracks. He need not do this with force, as he will likely have ample time to poison their food or leave poisoned needles in the saddles of their mounts. There is also the possibility that he could alert the Aamanians to their presence and hope the Andurin forces capture them.

### **Scene #6: Open War or Bloody Peace**

Either the assassinations stop the provocation of war, for now, or they fail and the battle reignites. If the Cult War began again it would likely start as follows:

- The Aamanian forces in Aamahd are outnumbered by the Zandir contingents, but they are better trained and have access to urban-trained ogriphant riders. Aamanians would likely take the capital and, perhaps, the Sultan.

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- The Zandir Navy would crush the Aamanian merchants and Navy, perhaps with the help of the Gao Sea rogues.
- While the Zandir navy would strike the western portion of Aaman – Arat, Alm and Aabaal, the main Aamanian force would push up past Zanth and try to block the trade routes between Arim and western Zandu. They could push to Zandre and Zadian as well, without much difficulty.
- Arim would trade with either side, but since they can't get passed Aaman's forces they would abandon the Zandir, and Arimite iron merchants and mercenaries would side with Aaman, swinging the battle in their favor.
- The Zandir, robbed of allies but having a free navy, would begin trade with the Farad for iron, supplies and mercenary slaves.
- If the Sultan is lost in the taking of Zanth, it is not clear that the nobles could elect a leader and avoid the constant in-fighting that occurs in the Zandir Army. If not, they will likely fall. If they can manage to unite, they will have a good chance of holding the Aamanian forces back and beginning hit and run attacks while trying to contact and receive aid from the Seven Kingdoms.
- The Dhuna will likely return to aid the Zandir. The Sarista may as well.
- Much rests with the Seven Kingdoms who, if they joined the fight, could easily swing the battle in favor of the Zandir. It is difficult to imagine the Seven Kingdoms joining on the Aamanians side, and the Aamanians have known about that for some time and have a plan for keeping them out of any such battle. They have contacted numerous Ur warlord leaders and arranged a pact whereupon if the Grand Army moves to the west, the Ur will make an assault from the north, striking an undefended Seven Kingdoms.

## **Other Adventures**

The following are adventure seeds that you may work into full scale adventures.

### ***The Witch-Hunter***

An Aamanian witch-hunter is after an old friend of the players. He narrowly avoided the first attempt to capture him and goes to the players for help. At first it appears he is an innocent victim of a religious zealot, but sooner or later the players must ask what it is that he did. When they find out, they might not want to defend him. Of course, by helping him once they have incurred the wrath of the Theocracy.

### ***Traces of Pompados***

Goblets and utensils that appear to be of Archaen make have suddenly appeared on the black market. Players can explore out of their own curiosity or be hired by a Causidan, noblemen, Seer or merchant to track down their origin. The trail leads through the dangerous Zandir underworld to Mangar corsairs. From there the players discover Farad merchants running a smuggling operation with a corrupt Aamanian missionary who has a small army of Jhangaran slaves searching newly discovered ruins. The players can confront him, but not if the Inquisitor and his warrior-priests get to the heretic first.

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### ***Flotsam and Jetsam***

The wreckage of an Aamanian ship washes ashore (in either Zandu or Aaman, whatever is convenient for the GM) from the Sea of Sorrow. A tightly locked, and trapped, chest contains the captain's log and small amounts of treasure. The log suggests an alternative view of the history of the Cult Wars – a view that could prove embarrassing to some very powerful people in Zandu and Aaman, people who can afford to hire assassins. Such a view could involve the real identity of Aamentag, the origin of the Cult of the Eye, or a hitherto forgotten treaty blatantly violated by one side.

### ***Missing you***

The Sultan finds a Cymrilian diplomat innocent of killing one of the Sultan's concubines – due in no small part to a missing witness. The players are hired by the Causidian who was prosecuting the diplomat to investigate the missing witness. One of the Sultan's Seers is sent to aid them by the Sultan himself. The witness is found dead but surrounded by traces of the Sultan's guards. Rumors fly that the Sultan killed his own concubine, and then eliminated the witness to prove it. Or did the diplomat commit the crime and the Sultan sweep away the evidence to maintain favorable tariffs? It makes more sense that the mercantile unions would make the witness disappear, as they would be hurt most if the Cymrilians thought their diplomat was framed. And why if the Seer was sent to help does he prefer to just watch what the players do and scribble in his notebook, largely ignoring whatever they tell him?

### ***Riches on the River***

A poor man discovers - from research in the Zanth library - that one of his family members is buried in a mausoleum along the Sascasm River. From clues in the books he fashions a map to the mausoleum and promises one quarter of the riches if the players will help him unearth it. The book seems to have been minted very recently though, and the clues are a bit too convenient... as if someone, or some thing, wants the mausoleum to be opened.

### ***Theory of Submersion***

Hired to investigate what happened to six missing miners, the players enter a copper mine in Zandu and discover a cavern with what appear to be the remains of a great treasure. The missing miners have already picked the treasure clean (scattering a few coins on the way out). The coins are completely unknown and appear stamped with seals in a strange language. Of most interest is the presence of a giant globe that sits in plainly on the ground – about the size of a man. When water strikes the globe it responds with brilliant lights on the spot where water touches it. A Zandir Seer can identify it as a Hydran artifact, proving that the cavern was once deep underground. The globe could be tremendously valuable to a collector, or to the several wizards who suddenly have taken an interest in it. Getting out of the country with the globe could prove very difficult.

### ***Anti-magic powder***

Recent documents smuggled out of the Sultan's palace indicate that a previous Sultan invented an alchemical powder that neutralized the effects of all known magic. Fearing his Seers and wizards would be useless if it became well known, the Sultan buried the recipe deep in his dungeon. The players are hired to find it, by first committing the right crime, then bribing the guard to place

them in the right cell. Of course, that plan may not work out so well, and even if they got the recipe there would be a good many wizards on their trail, eager to never see it become popularized.