

Arcanis

THE WORLD OF
SHATTERED EMPIRES™

City of Secrets

An Adventurer's Guide to Nishanpur



Kimberly A. Wajer-Scott





City of Secrets

An Adventurer's Guide to Nishanpur

By Kimberly A. Wajer-Scott

Cover: Richard Pace

Artists: Alex Bradley, Chad Sergesketter, Eric Lofgren, Richard Pace, Thom Scott, Jason Walton

Additional Development: Henry Lopez and Derrel Weaver

Additional Material by: Vince Au, Sam Cluck, M. Sean Molley, and Philip Scott

Editor: M. Sean Molley (Lead), Adrian Estergaard

Layout: Philip Reed

Cartography: Anthony Marker

Team Paradigm: Henry Lopez, Nelson Rodriguez, Eric Wiener, Pedro Barrenechea, Jim Beck

Except as otherwise identified, all portions of this publication are © 2000-2004 Paradigm Concepts, Inc. All rights reserved. The mention of, use of or reference to any company, trademark or product in this publication is not a challenge to the trademark of copyright in question. Dungeons & Dragons ® and Wizards of the Coast ® are registered trademarks of Wizards of the Coast and are used with permission. The D20 System and D20 System Logo are registered trademarks of Wizards of the Coast and are used under the terms of the D20 System Trademark License.

LIMITED LICENSE FOR THE USE OF PRODUCT IDENTITY (PI)

Paradigm Concepts, Inc. hereby grants royalty-free limited license to use the Arcanis specific PI elements which appear in the names of Spells, Feats or Bloodline Powers contained in this book in OGL publications. Use of PI elements is restricted to using those PI elements in the Spell Name, Feat Name, Magic Item Name or Bloodline Power name and for no other use. EXAMPLE: The Bloodline Power name "Cadic Guides My Hand" may be used to apply to the Bloodline Power "Cadic Guides My Hand" even though the name "Cadic" remains PI of Paradigm Concepts, Inc. From this example alone, the name "Cadic" cannot be used in any other way except where it appears as part of the name of the Bloodline Power "Cadic Guides My Hand." Any publication making use of such PI must bear a notice declaring 1) the Feat, Spell or Bloodline Power name is reserved Product Identity and 2) the Feat, Spell or Bloodline Power name is copyright 2004 Paradigm Concepts, Inc.

DESIGNATION OF PRODUCT IDENTITY

The proper names of NPCs, all description/persona information, mention of Arcanis specific locations, deities or races and all illustrations are considered to be Product Identity of Paradigm Concepts. All other material contained within this publication is considered to be open content and if so used must bear the following Copyright Notice: COPYRIGHT 2004 Paradigm Concepts, Inc. All Rights Reserved.



ISBN 1-931374-16-3

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2	CHAPTER THREE: BRICKS AND BLOOD.....	19
CHAPTER ONE: A HISTORY OF DARKNESS	3	The Outer City.....	19
CHAPTER TWO: THE CITY OF SECRETS REVEALED.....	9	The Barren Hills Quarter	23
Church of the Dark Triumvirate.....	11	The Trade Quarter	24
The Dark Apostate.....	12	The Corpse Quarter.....	30
The Council of the Nihangs	12	The Temple Quarter	33
The val'Mehan/val'Mehen.....	12	The High Ridge.....	36
The val'Mordane.....	14	The Undercity	36
The val'Virdan.....	14	CHAPTER FOUR: THE WILES OF SARISH.....	41
The Swords of Nier	15	New Spells	41
The Knights of the Red Fist.....	16	New Magic Items	43
The Order of the Hidden Flame	17	CHAPTER FIVE: NATIVES OF NISHANPUR.....	44
The Seekers of the Hidden Masters.....	17	CHAPTER SIX: LIVING ARCANIS.....	50
The Ratcatchers	18	New Prestige Classes.....	50
The Sisters of Nier	18	CHAPTER SEVEN: ADVENTURING IN NISHANPUR.....	54
		Scenario: City of Secrets	54

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Arcanis, the World of Shattered Empires!

This sourcebook is meant to help you begin to fathom the web of lies and deceit that surrounds one of the most dangerous and intrigue-filled cities in the nation of Canceri: Nishanpur. This book will give you insight into the dark and twisted history of this city, as well as an overview of its important locales and NPCs. This supplement also includes new monsters, spells, magic items, and prestige classes drawn from Nishanpur and its environs. There is something here for any campaign.

Also included is a complete, ready-to-play adventure set in the city of Nishanpur, suitable for home play. The module is compatible with the RPGA's Living Arcanis: Nishanpur campaign. To find the documents necessary to tier this module and to play the module as an RPGA-sanctioned event, visit the RPGA homepage, or Paradigm Concepts' own LIVING ARCANIS website at www.livingarcanis.com.

My introduction to Arcanis was through a classic module: For Duty and Honor. I found the entire idea of a complex campaign where diplomacy and politics affect the course of events as much as magic and the sword to be very attractive. Not to mention the idea of a Roman Empire-based setting; something refreshingly different from the stereotypical fantasy-medieval genre.

I began to run the Living modules for my own group of players, and they found the setting as intriguing as I did. As the local group grew, I got more involved in the campaign. It wasn't often something so new and different came along, and I was afraid that Arcanis might disappear like so many other settings have. I didn't want that to happen to my new favorite! So I volunteered my time to build a fan website and organize information for the prospective new Living Arcanis: Nishanpur spin-off campaign.

I was stunned when I went to GenCon in 2002, and saw just how many other Arcanis fans there were! I realized Arcanis was a growing campaign, but I never expected the sheer enthusiasm I encountered there. When the crowd started chanting "For Duty and Honor" during mustering for Assault Upon the Gate of Tears, I knew Arcanis was a phenomenon unlike any other.

It was at that GenCon where I finally met Henry, Nelson, Eric, Pedro and Michelle in person. I never expected to find the leaders of a company and campaign so friendly and accessible. When Henry and Eric then asked if I would be willing to write this book, I went from stunned to absolutely floored!

The rest is history. Now, after over a year of effort, you have in your hands the result. I hope that you will find this book as fun to read as I did to write!

As a final note, I need to offer my thanks to all the folks that helped me get this far, and made this book possible: Team Paradigm, as well as the folks on the LA: Nishanpur Development Team, Edit Team, Metaorg Team, etc.: Vince, Sam, Jeff, Daniel, Adrian... I can't name all of you! Everyone contributed to this book in some part, whether in ideas or help editing, etc. And, of course, the players. Without you, we wouldn't have a campaign!

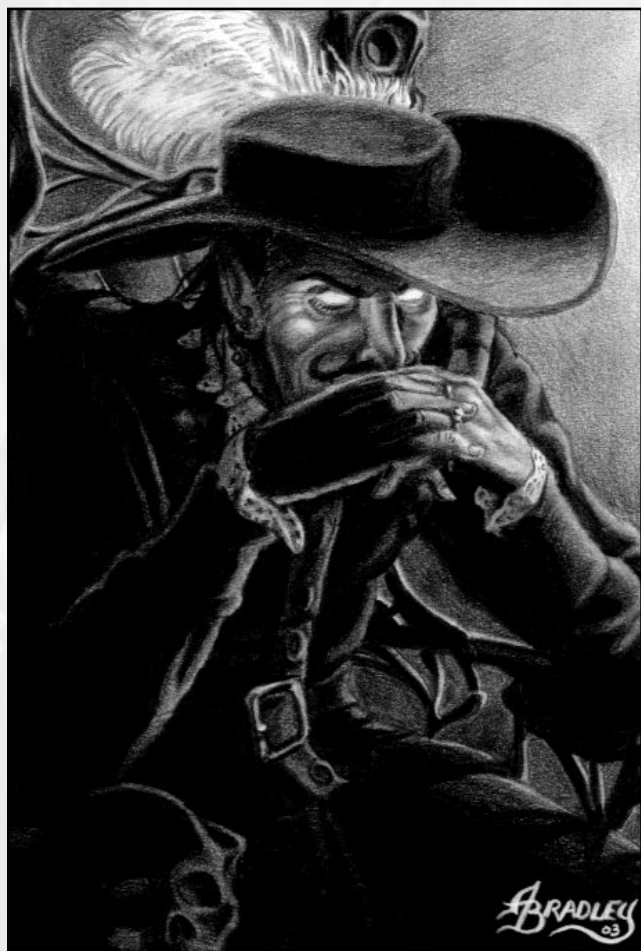
And a special thanks to my husband, who not only put up with the fact that for a long time, I spent more time with my computer than with him... but also agreed to give up playing Nishanpur to become the latest member of the LA:N support team. You're the best Phil!

- Kimberly Wajer-Scott
May, 2004

Chapter One

A HISTORY OF DARKNESS

Losknek's cultured voice drifted through the room. "So, you wish to make your fortune in Nishanpur, do you? A bold choice, though you are hardly the first to make it. In order to be prepared for what you will face here, you must understand the history of this place, and its character. This city is built not of stone, but of intrigues and betrayals, layer upon layer, all set in a foundation of blood. You won't last five minutes unless you are willing to do whatever it takes to survive. And yet, I am not entirely offended by the look of you, so perhaps it will be worth my time to enlighten you... in anticipation that you will someday return the favor, of course. If you truly wish to succeed in the City of Secrets, then sit, and listen carefully to what I have to say..."



Birthed in Blood

The history of the city of Nishanpur cannot be understood without considering the context of the region now known as the Theocracy of Canceri, of which Nishanpur is the current capitol. Thus, we shall begin this tale with a brief description of Canceri in ages past.

The land of Canceri itself is harsh and inhospitable. The ancient Elorii shunned the territory, saying that it was cursed, its very ground steeped in corruption and malevolence. The first human settlers that ventured forward into this place found the land rough and untamed. To the north rose the great volcanic mountains of Nier's Spine. The land there was rocky and crops were sparse. The Voiceless Ones, which have now largely gone into myth, also plagued the north, and of them I'm sure I need say no more. To the south, crops grew readily in the large tracts of marshy wet ground, but predatory beasts and sinister creatures made life

hard for the settlers there. To the east, the land stretched away into the barren plains and steppes that eventually lead to the Hinterlands. Nowhere was there a place where any group could live peacefully and prosperously.

During the years since the founding of the First Imperium, some of the peoples that came from the far eastern continent migrated east and south, wishing to live apart from the vast Empire of Coryan and to remain free from the rulership of the val'Assanté. Others broke away from the Imperium in the hopes of finding and securing dominion over areas that could be of great strategic value in the future. For these reasons and many more did the families of the val'Mordane and the val'Mehan journey to this unpleasant land. For the val'Virdan, on the other hand, it was nothing more and nothing less than a perceived insult that drove them from the Imperium and placed a wedge between them and their brethren, the val'Emman.

Losknek paused, seeing the look of confusion and ignorance upon his listener's face. "What's this? You know not of the val'Emman and their incestuous ties to the val'Virdan? Truly this is a benighted age..."

Sibling Rivalry

After the end of the Gods' War, the champions of the Gods were chosen. These scions were touched by the power of the Gods' own Valinor to create the various Val families.

The Chosen of Nier, however, had fallen in battle against the forces of the Other. Rather than take him from his rightful place in the Paradise of the Gods, Lord Nier chose to anoint both of the Chosen's children, Virdan and Emman, with His power, as one was equally as worthy as the other.

While both children possessed the ability to command Lord Nier's holy flames, Virdan's particular abilities tended to augment his nearly-unmatchable prowess in battle. In contrast to her brother's reliance on power and strength, Emman manifested those traits that best complemented her grace and speed.

Following the anointment of the Val as the protectors of humanity, the Gods left Mankind to craft a magnificent new empire. That was when it became clear that even though the Val families had been blessed by the glory of the Gods, they were not immune to the baser emotions that even to this day hold sway over all mankind.

The Lady Emman was an untamed beauty, as wild and passionate as any of the val'Sheem. She was equally thoughtful and graceful, a worthy bride of Imperators – or so the first lord of the val'Assanté felt. In order to woo her, the first Imperator gave the val'Emman family and all its subjects title to the fertile lands to the south of the Corlathian Mountains.

This gift of the Imperator to Lady Emman and her progeny infuriated Lord Virdan, who had originally been promised those same lands. During one tempestuous night in court, Lord Virdan demanded that he be granted the lands of his sister – a demand that was not only denied, but also ridiculed by the entire court. Incensed, Lord Virdan cursed the Imperator's name and vowed that neither he nor his children nor his children's children would ever be part of the Imperium.

That very night the entire val'Virdan family, as well as all its vassal families and subjects, abandoned the fledgling Imperium and struck off to the east, eventually settling in the lands that would one day be known as Canceri. As for the eventual fate of the val'Emman... ah, but theirs is a tale for another time.

The Founding of Nishanpur

"Are you still paying attention? I assure you, this history lesson is for your own good, and not simply for me to have the pleasure of hearing my own voice. Yes? Splendid. In any case, time passed, until – as Empires are wont to do – the legions of the First Imperium marched forth in order to subdue and unify all the people of Onara..."

The Nerothian settlements in the southern regions of Canceri were the first to encounter the legions, and neither they nor their val'Virdan trading partners to the north welcomed this invasion of their territories. It was the year 127 of the First Imperium; what you would call 3641 Ante Imperium. The Emperor was Claudius val'Assante, if I remember correctly... which, of course, I do. The Cancerese settlers had fought hard to eke a living from their unforgiving land, and the thought of paying tribute to a far-away emperor did not please them. For the val'Virdan, of course, the resentment was far deeper than mere monetary and political concerns. The Nerothians, being the closest, were the first to be attacked. Some retreated into their underground towns to wait; others called forth their undead guardians or stood to fight the legions in person. Thus began the first siege of Canceri.

The val'Mehan, to the east, waited and watched. They had only managed some sporadic trade with the other regions of Canceri and the Hinterlands, and so did not see themselves as having a vested interest in the outcome of this conflict. They also realized that this invading army was not the small and harried force of a Nierite settlement, nor the gruesome spectacle of the val'Mordane' undead guardians. The First Imperium's forces were disciplined, organized, and well-supplied. The val'Mehan leaders quickly realized that their own settlements were not capable of standing against the might of the legions. As is often the case with Sarishans, they chose to negotiate rather than to do battle.

When the first centuries of the Legion of the Might of the Empire reached the eastern settlements, they were surprised to be met by emissaries from the Sarishans. The val'Mehan elders had gathered and reached a consensus: that the best way to survive the advance of the legions was to welcome and aid them. The val'Mehan decided to join the Imperial forces. Using not only their skill at diplomacy, but also their facility for summoning and controlling Infernal creatures, the val'Mehan actively helped assault first the val'Mordane, and then the val'Virdan.

With the Voiceless Ones still inhabiting the northern mountains, and the Imperial Legions advancing from the south, the followers of Nier were not willing to sit idly and risk becoming trapped between two enemies. They therefore marched forth to meet the legions. Although their foes outnumbered them and were better-supplied, the val'Virdan warriors proved themselves both brave and capable. They won many battles, even against staggering odds, but the war as a whole went against them. Even in defeat, the val'Virdan won the respect of their Imperial adversaries, and many of the conquerors chose to take the val'Virdan as slaves rather than kill them outright. Even so, attrition took its toll, and as the Imperial forces moved inexorably forward, aided by Sarishan intelligence, the ranks of the devotees of Nier grew thinner and thinner. The Emperor had sent no less than three full legions to subdue Canceri: the Legion of the Might of the Emperor, the Legion of Radiant Glory, and a new legion that would later become known as the Legion of the Black Sun.

As the inevitability of the Imperial conquest became clearer and clearer, the remaining forces of the val'Virdan contacted the Nerothians to the south. In secret negotiations, the two groups made a pact. The Nerothians would bring their remaining undead to stand with the Nierites. Although they could animate the dead bodies of their enemies to fight, the Nerothians did not have the means to withstand an indefinite siege, and could not prevent the starvation and slaughter of those still living. The two factions agreed to make their final stand on that northeastern edge of the Cold Plains that later became known as the Plains of Blood.

The results of the final battle between the legions of the First Imperium and the combined army of the Nierites and Nerothians can still be seen to this day. It is said that the brown clay of the Plains of Nishanpur was stained forever red with the blood of all those that died in that conflict. To this day, bits of rusted armor and shards of bone still wash out of that red clay during heavy rains.

The battle lasted seven days and seven nights. The Nierites called forth the fires of their patron god and the Nerothians walked among the fields of battle calling upon the newly fallen to stand again and fight as the minions of Death. The tireless undead hordes and the burning zeal of the val'Virdan fought the Imperial legions to a near standstill. The carnage was indescribable; the dead, countless. The bodies of many men had been slain twice before their souls reached Beltine's cauldron.

Finally, the battle lulled, as both armies pulled back to assess the stalemate. The pride of both sides made a surrender or retreat by either

unthinkable. It was the Sarishans who intervened to end the deadlock. They saw that the eventual victory of the legions of the First Imperium was unavoidable, though it might take weeks, or even months, of continuing battle. They reasoned that by arranging a resolution that would minimize further bloodshed, they might garner favor with their new overlords, and thereby better their own positions. The val'Mehan sent their best diplomats into the camp of the combined val'Virdan and val'Mordane armies to negotiate a settlement.

What exactly happened during those negotiations, I am not at liberty to say, but what I can tell you is this: over the next few days, the tenuous cooperation between the Nierite and Nerothian forces was shattered. Internal fighting broke out between the two factions and unknown assassins killed several of the higher-ranking generals of both armies. Rumors spread that these assassins had arisen from among their own men. These events shattered the backbone of the resistance, and the Imperial legions were able to sweep in soon afterward, easily completing their conquest. Many of the surviving Nierite fighters were enslaved, and most of the remaining mindless undead belonging to the val'Mordane forces were destroyed.

Now firmly in control of Canceri, the Imperium naturally began imposing the trappings of Empire upon its new province. Ventaka, being the largest settlement, was named the provincial capitol. However, the Plains of Blood, as they were called in those days, were determined to be the location most central to the three major population groups in the new province of Canceri. Emperor Claudius thus wisely decided to place a fort at this location to monitor his newest province and her conquered peoples. So it was that Fort Nihilaspera, which later came to be known as Nishanpur, was founded.

The Burning Times

For centuries, the small settlement of Nishanpur slowly grew and prospered. Its central location gave it a competitive advantage over other towns and cities, and over time, it became the center of trade for the entire province of Canceri, eclipsing Ventaka with its mercantile success. The legionnaires stationed at the city-fort built a great reservoir, in order that the growing population would have a reliable water supply, even in years of drought. The legionnaires also constructed an arena, and held games for the entertainment of all. However, the Empire itself could not remain stable forever, and Canceri was once again embroiled in conflict around 1800 Ante Imperium.

Many val'Virdan soldiers had been consigned to slavery after the first conquest of Canceri. In the ensuing generations, the lot of these slaves had improved but little. They looked towards their brethren, the val'Emman, for succor – but found none. Over the centuries, these former soldiers' progeny had been impressed into the Imperial Legions, where they formed a considerable force, regarded as some of the best in the Empire. Their masters prized them for their fighting prowess, loyalty, and discipline. Unfortunately, their masters demonstrated no such virtues. In these waning years of the First Imperium, the enslaved val'Virdan saw corruption and debauchery all around them. They felt that the empire had lost whatever honor it once had, and that they could no longer serve such an unfit master. They rebelled, and though initially these slave revolts were quickly suppressed, others who were disenchanted with the majesty of the Empire quietly lent their support, with the result that the val'Virdan uprising gained momentum. Finally, in a desperate attempt to quell the growing Nierite threat to his rule, the Emperor ordered all val'Virdan to be exterminated.

The effect was the opposite of what he had intended. Though many val'Virdan died in the ensuing purge, many also escaped, making their way back to their ancestral homeland in northern Canceri. From among these refugees rose a figure who would come to dominate his era of history – Leonydas val'Virdan, called the "Sword of the Heavens." Leonydas was powerful and charismatic, and was said to be favored by Nier Himself. It was whispered that Lord Nier had blessed Leonydas with such divine providence that no army could be defeated as long as the Sword of the Heavens stood at its head on the field of battle. Leonydas journeyed to Nishanpur, and began firing the passions of the native val'Virdan, appealing to their pride. He called for the Nierites to rise up and overthrow the corrupt government, thereby freeing themselves from imperial tyranny. He called for Onara to be cleansed by fire.

Leonydas had little difficulty recruiting men to his cause. Regardless of the truth or falsehood of the tales of his divine blessings, many in Canceri still resented the long-ago Imperial intrusion in their lives, and were more than willing to march with the Sword of the Heavens for the promise of fortune and glory. He built an army within a matter of months, and the Imperial garrison in Nishanpur was his first target. The rebel army burned the military encampment, and Leonydas' warriors slaughtered the soldiers stationed there. From Nishanpur, the Sword of the Heavens marched south, crossing Canceri, and attacked the First City, the heart of the Imperium.

Leonydas and his loyal men succeeded in overthrowing the Emperor, and the Sword of the Heavens thus became the leader of all Onara. Though he was ultimately thwarted in sitting upon the Throne of Man by the sealing of the Imperial throne room, these events nevertheless marked the end of Orismandros' reign and the beginning of Leonydas'. Incidentally, though most people now refer to his reign as the end of the Imperium and as the establishment of a new government known as the "Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame," that is an improper label. Leonydas never saw himself as overthrowing the Empire, only the Emperor. In his own mind he was – and is – the last Emperor of the First Imperium.

Regardless of his true beliefs and motivations, Leonydas' doctrines of discipline – which many who thought the empire had gone soft initially welcomed – soon chafed upon the people. The Sword of the Heavens demanded a renewed worship of the Gods, but only in the strict forms he permitted. He sent his armies out to burn libraries, purge heretics, and remove all trace of what he believed were "improper" doctrines. He was merciless to those that stood against him. Whole families were burned alive when they would not destroy the "heretical" holy texts of their faiths and submit to the way of life that Leonydas demanded of them. In his own mind, he had no trouble justifying these acts; he sought to return the empire to its glory days of old by cleansing the decadence that had corrupted it. However, his subjects did not appreciate this point of view. They merely saw the destruction of the ways of life they cherished, and grew to hate him.

Leonydas' harsh rule made him many enemies, even back in Canceri. Finally, a courageous prince, Volthar val'Holryn, dared to stand against the Sword of the Heavens. Volthar led an army against the val'Virdan forces, succeeding in his guerrilla campaign by cannily avoiding direct combat with the divinely-gifted Leonydas. After seven years of revolt, Leonydas finally cornered and killed Volthar's forces, but by this time, the resulting bloodbath had drawn the entire empire into rebellion.

One by one, the regions of Leonydas' empire rose to throw off the yoke of his tyranny. Leonydas' forces were run ragged putting down one rebellious province after another. Nishanpur itself was no exception. The citizens of the city rebelled again and again, despite the repeated slaughter of all those involved in these rebellions and their families. Finally Leonydas himself came to Nishanpur to address the issue. The city that had seen the rise of his regime would also see its fall.

The forces of Canceri were fierce and defended themselves fanatically, but they were only men. With Nier's gifts, Leonydas val'Virdan was no longer merely a mortal. His body wreathed in glowing fire, he stood as if a being of flame itself, almost a living extension of the will of Nier, and the rebels could not kill him.

Then, when there seemed no hope, a mysterious sorcerer, Amath, came forth with a plan. In council with the Sarishan leaders, Amath told them of a powerful ritual, one that would freeze the eternal flames surrounding Leonydas, imprisoning him forever. Though the ritual was long and dangerous, the rebellion's leaders felt that it was their only hope. For it to be effective, however, they needed to enlist the aid of many wizards and sorcerers. These others agreed, for they saw no other feasible alternative and knew the fate that would await them once the Sword of the Heavens had placed Nishanpur back under his thumb. The strongest and most skilled warriors of the armies of Canceri volunteered to stand against Leonydas in combat, in order to distract and delay him so that he could not leave the city while the ritual was being enacted.

When all was prepared, the army tensely waited for sundown as the battle swirled before them. They all were in unspoken agreement: they could not falter, for doing so would mean the death of them all. As the last rays of Illiir's light departed from the world, the ritual began. The casters formed a magical circle not with chalk or even blood, but with their own living bodies. They encircled the camp of Leonydas in the

failing light. They chanted continuously through the growing darkness. Leonydas could not fail to notice. Though he did not know specifically what they were doing, he knew it could not be to his benefit.

Leonydas sent his elite troops to eliminate the chanting mages. The warriors of Canceri stood against the Swords of Nier to protect the casters they saw as their last hope, and held firm. Then, those remaining warriors, the strongest and most skilled of their day, went forward to engage the Sword of the Heavens himself. One by one, they stood against him, and one by one, they died. He slaughtered them mercilessly, despite their skill. Even the best of them could not cross blades with him for more than a few instants. Nevertheless, all of their deaths, Flavius val'Tensen, Marcus of Vrain, Erlik val'Borda, and many others whose names are lost to history, delayed Leonydas and kept him on the battlefield and away from the nearly-completed ritual. The hours wore on as the pile of bodies at Leonydas' feet grew. The Sword of the Heavens' cries of anger and frustration could surely be heard all the way to the Paradise of the Gods, but he was not able to push through the throng of living sacrifices that threw themselves under his blade to prevent his passage.

Finally, the chant was completed. As the final words of power were spoken, the first light of dawn crept over the horizon, illuminating the Sword of the Heavens as he stood upon the blood-soaked streets of Nishanpur. With a great cracking, the flames engulfing Leonydas froze solid. The ground then opened beneath him, and in a flash, he was gone. The remaining warriors on the field were all transfixed by the sight, and stood staring for minutes after, unable to comprehend what they had seen. An unearthly silence swept the field, followed by an unearthly noise. The army of Canceri believed the Sword of the Heavens had been struck down by the Gods. The great cheering that arose carried the news across the lines of battle in a flash, and the remaining Swords of Nier quit the field in defeat. Rather than be taken prisoner, they retreated out of Canceri and into the Hinterlands.

As for the mages and priests who had performed the ritual, the effort required to constrain one divinely touched was too much for mortals to bear. Most of those involved in the casting had died in the moment of its completion, their very life forces tied into the enchantment. Only a few remained who knew the truth of what had happened, and upon seeing the success of their efforts, they quickly disappeared, along with the mysterious sorcerer who had brought the knowledge of the ritual to Nishanpur in the first place. As a result, most of the people of Onara believed the tales that came from the battlefield, claiming that Leonydas had been struck down by the Gods and eradicated forever. The true fate of the Sword of the Heavens fell into shadow, forgotten by the world for millennia.

Blood and Ashes

After the fall of the Theocracy of the Cleansing Flame, Canceri remained mostly isolated for many generations. The whole world had collapsed in upon itself, much of the knowledge and skill of the past falling into shadow. The remaining Nierite settlements became more insular than ever, not wishing to attract undue attention. The domed cities of the val'Mordane to the south recovered their strength more quickly, not having to rely only on the living. Nishanpur rebuilt itself as a trading community during this time, as its location was still advantageous. This isolated and reasonably peaceful phase of existence lasted for several centuries.

It was during this period of relative calm that the first wall was built around Nishanpur. As often happens with cities, this boundary was eventually usurped by growth and expansion, so that now it is the inner wall of the city. Built of rubble from the destruction caused by the fall of the Sword of the Heavens, it rose tall, cased in new-cut stone from the ridges surrounding the city.

Losknek paused, lost in thought for a moment. "In a way, I suppose that the walls of the city are the very embodiment of the soul of Nishanpur, are they not? After all, many sins can be hidden, encased within a wall..."

The Reign of the Devil-Kings

In the year 35 A.I. everything changed again. The dome of the heavens split asunder, and in one tragic night, the "Time of Terror" began. But all, of course, is not what it seemed.

The priests of Sarish had received warning of this event, and wisely had made preparations. Like their forebears during the First Imperium, they knew that the best way to survive the onslaught of an unstoppable force is simply not to resist it. The Sarishans had long been wise to the ways of Infernals, and when the first powerful devils arrived in Nishanpur, they found themselves welcomed as rulers. The val'Mehan struck bargains with the more powerful devils, and convinced the other cities of Canceri to submit as well. In this way, the people of Canceri did not suffer like the other peoples of Onara during this time.

Instead of rampaging the countryside, like they did elsewhere, the Devil-Kings, as they became known, set up their demesnes in Canceri. Though they ruled with an iron fist, those of Canceri agreed that servitude was preferable to final death. It was during this time that the second wall of Nishanpur was constructed, in order to encompass the palaces of the Devil-Kings.

For 35 years, the Infernals ruled Canceri unopposed. But the human spirit is not so easily crushed, and in other lands the events that would lead to the Devil-Kings' fall were already underway. A warrior from Coryan, who shall be forever unnamed, arose in 32 A.I. He spent the next 30 years campaigning against the Infernals. One city-state at a time, he drove back the nether hordes, uniting every city that he freed under his banner. Those who had seen him claimed that he wielded the holy weapon of Illiir himself.

By the time this holy liberator's campaign reached Canceri, he had assembled a mighty army. The Devil-Kings of Canceri, however, also had 30 years to prepare, and Canceri was a single country, not individual city-states. Thus, the Infernal masters of Canceri had their own slave-army ready to stand against the Coryani upstart's forces.

Betrayal seems ingrained in the souls of the Cancereese. They are truly a people after my own black heart. Knowing that the army of Coryan was coming, again the Sarishans saw a great force on the march that could devastate them. This time, however, they were not in agreement on the necessary course of action. Many saw the Devil-Kings as a superior force, and did not wish to earn the enmity of their erstwhile lords by supporting this latest uprising. Others felt that any effort to put the Infernals back in their rightful place as servants rather than masters should be encouraged and supported.

The man that tipped the balance for many in that time was not a man at all. Seeing that the Coryani emperor had the blessing of Illiir, one of the Devil-Kings of Nishanpur decided it was time for action. He disguised himself as a human, and went among the Sarishans, gathering as many as he could to his cause. He would lead them to turn against the other Devil-Kings. By hiding among those fighting the other Infernals, he reasoned that he could eliminate his competition and avoid discovery himself. Then he could re-establish his own power at a later date, unopposed by other Infernals. It was truly a plan worthy of a Devil-King.

This individual managed to convince roughly one-third of the val'Mehan forces in Canceri to turn against their masters. None knew the turncoat Devil's true identity. This faction sent emissaries to parley with the Coryani, and agreed to aid them, and drive the Infernals out, in exchange for their lives. Between the divinely-inspired army of Coryan and the surprise attack from inside led by these conspirators, the Devil-Kings were overthrown. Eventually, the Time of Terror came to a close, with the final defeat of the armies of the Infernal and the subsequent raising of the Wall of the Gods by Illiir.

"You know," Losknek pondered, "I suppose that the Devil who inspired this turn of events may still be among you to this very day. After all, I never heard of his death..."

Outcast Province

For the first several hundred years of the newly-formed Coryani Empire's existence, the province of Canceri remained largely undisturbed by any uprisings or major events. Nishanpur once again rebuilt itself from the ravages of war, but the people of the city left the palaces of the Devil-Kings in ruins as a reminder of their past. Then again, perhaps it was because many feared what the Infernals may have left behind there... Regardless, that region of the city soon became known as the "Corpse Quarter." Only the Nerothians lived there without worry. During this time, the people of Nishanpur also built the canal known as the Vein of Sarish, linking the city to river traffic.

Despite its isolated location, Canceri has never lived totally in isolation. In the year 4 I.C., Vesiti val'Assanté called together the Convocation of the Divine. His 12 Pymen determined which modes of worship were to be allowed as the dogma of the Mother Church of the new Coryani Empire. Although there were representatives of Nier, Neroth, and Sarish among the Pymen, the decisions made at the Convocation were not pleasing to many of the worshippers of those gods.

The Sarishan representative to the Convocation agreed that the "true" doctrine of Sarish was to bind and banish any Infernals still wandering Onara, and only to summon Infernal servants for the briefest instants and even then only during times of greatest need. It should come as no surprise to you that this representative hailed from Coryan, rather than from Canceri. But, so shortly after the Time of Terror, perhaps he felt he had no choice, as most of the representatives of the other faiths were horrified at the casual summoning and binding of Infernals that was so common in Canceri. Regardless, this declaration contradicted a way of life that the Cancereese Sarishans had practiced for thousands of years. In Canceri, the use of Infernal servitors was an established way of life for many, and indeed the very infrastructure of the city itself depended on the use of such creatures. Even many Sarishans outside Canceri were displeased at the declarations made by the Convocation. Many returned to the ancestral val'Mehan holdings in eastern Canceri, but those who still sought influence went into Nishanpur.

The established hierarchy in Nishanpur was not pleased with this great influx of refugees (and political rivals). A schism developed between those val'Mehan families that had historically held positions of power in Nishanpur, and those who had recently immigrated or originated in the eastern settlements. The scions of the houses that had originated in Nishanpur changed the spelling of their surnames to val'Mehen, in order to distinguish themselves from what they considered to be the "lesser" branches of their family.

In 374 I.C., a plot to assassinate the Emperor Marellius val'Assanté was thwarted by members of the Legion of Vigilance. The Emperor survived, but the Patriarch of the Coryani Mother Church, Hulantin val'Assanté, was killed. The general of the Legion of Searing Purity, Erdul val'Virdan, was executed for this crime, and the Legion of Searing Purity was disbanded. All Nierites within the Empire were exiled to Canceri. Most returned to the ancient val'Virdan holdings near the mountain range known as Nier's Spine. Those who sought to stay in positions of power naturally gravitated to Nishanpur, as it was the provincial capitol. Worship of Nier was still marginalized there, however, as the bulk of the people of the city followed Sarish or Neroth.

Several hundred years later, around the year 524 I.C., there arose a radical sect of Nerothians known as the Blight Bearers. This small group believed that the only true worship of Neroth was through his aspect as God of Disease. They quickly gained a number of adherents among the common folk, even though the rest of the Nerothian Church of the day considered them heretical, since those with the power to cause disease also have the power to cure it. The Blight Bearers spread every type of plague imaginable, carrying horrible diseases everywhere their demented disciples could reach. This incident prompted the Coryani Emperor to outlaw the worship of Neroth. The Empire mounted a five-year crusade to wipe the Blight Bearers out. All records of this group were expunged from the common historical records, in the hope that the memory of them could likewise be eradicated.

The ban of Neroth's worship prompted most of the val'Mordane to retreat into their necropoli in Canceri to avoid persecution, just as the earlier ban on the worship of Nier had disenfranchised the val'Virdan. Nishanpur once again absorbed an influx of disgruntled refugees, and another internal power struggle commenced. Though the ban was quickly lifted, the insult to their faith was not forgotten by the long-lived val'Mordane. In later centuries, texts mentioned the ban, but not its exact cause. This is one of the reasons that prompted a man named Becherek to preach against the Coryani in later years.

Dying for Faith

Becherek was born in Nishanpur, in the year 744 I.C. He grew up in the capitol of the outcast province of Canceri, and all around him he saw his people oppressed by the unjust rule of the Coryani Emperors.

Though Sarish, Nier, and Neroth were all part of the Pantheon, the laws of the Empire suppressed their traditional forms of worship. The Emperor, not the priests, determined who would be Patriarch of the Mother Church. Imperial law treated those of the blood of the “dark three” as second-class citizens at best and as slaves at worst. Though Becherek was not a Val, or even of noble birth, he nevertheless grew up with a keen sense of justice, and wished to see this great wrong righted.

In the year 767 I.C., Becherek's voice rose across Canceri. He started preaching loudly that the Emperor had angered the gods. He railed for the election of a Patriarch not controlled by the Emperor, and the reinstatement of the three gods of Canceri to their proper places. Although he was but 23 years of age, Becherek's words struck a chord among many of the people of Canceri, who added their voices to his own. Unfortunately for him, as often happens to prophets, Becherek's words were twisted by many to fit their own agendas. He originally preached only for a reinstatement of the three dark gods to the Pantheon, as was their due. As his cause began to find favor and achieve popularity, many saw this as an opportunity to break with the Empire that had so long oppressed them. A number of other preachers began to traverse the countryside, spreading Becherek's words but also subtly twisting his meaning to serve their own ends.

These self-proclaimed apostles went forth preaching that the three dark gods were meant to head the Pantheon, and that Illiir had unjustly usurped them. They also began promoting the Akali of Nishanpur, a lich-lord of the val'Mordane, as their candidate for Patriarch. All this caused great consternation with the Coryani, which was, of course, the intention of these rabble-rousers. Becherek himself became eclipsed by his own growing legend; he had never even heard of many of the causes that were advanced in his name.

The Patriarch, Hemill val'Tensen, threatened the province of Canceri with mass excommunication if the “heretic” was not turned in. Unfortunately for the Patriarch, the teachings promulgated in Becherek's name had become extremely popular with the people of Canceri, even stirring up the faith of the three major Val families. At the urging of the Patriarch, the Emperor, Quron val'Dellenov, then sent a Century of the Legion of Radiant Glory to Nishanpur to forcibly arrest Becherek and bring him to Coryan.

The Centurion leading the Coryani forces, Longinus val'Dellenov, reached Nishanpur and was easily able to arrest Becherek. The poor, foolish man was eager to set straight all the twisted misinterpretations of his words, and so he willingly surrendered, saying that he actually wished for a hearing. The people of Nishanpur, however, had no intentions of letting Longinus leave with their Prophet. Crowds of shouting commoners surrounded the legionnaires and physically prevented them from leaving the city. Angered at their interference, Longinus stood at the gates, and beheaded Becherek. After the fatal blow had been struck, the Centurion cried to the people: “If you wish to keep your Prophet, then have him,” and threw Becherek's body to the crowd. The assembled mob of citizens erupted in anger, and tore apart the entire century of soldiers. The body and head of Becherek disappeared in the ensuing carnage.

Losknek grinned maliciously, seeming to relish the thought of such carnage. “You know, there are those who say that Longinus val'Dellenov's most trusted advisor was a val'Mehen, but no historical records have yet verified this account...”

Rise of the Dark Triumvirate

Within days of the death of Becherek, the province of Canceri raised an army and launched a war of secession against the Coryani Empire. The Nerothian val'Mordane unleashed hordes of undead on



the Coryani garrison, and the ranks of undead soldiers grew with every battle. The val'Mehan used their Infernal servants to gather intelligence and were able to prevent the capture of the leaders of the revolution. The Nierite forces of the val'Virdan then came in and pushed the remaining Coryani forces out of Nishanpur and then out of Canceri altogether. Because the Coryani Empire was embroiled in a war with the Khitani at the same time as this uprising, it was unable to effectively resist this insurgency, and the province of Canceri was successful in its efforts to break free of the Empire.

Nishanpur was declared the capitol of this new nation. The nobles of Canceri gathered there to take oaths of service to their gods. They also took the preaching of Becherek to heart – and perhaps to extremes. They formed a new church, the Church of the Dark Triumvirate, and began their own holy war, seeking to overthrow the rest of the Coryani Empire and place their own Dark Apostate at the head of the Coryani Church. The first Dark Apostate of Canceri was Arthmoor val'Virdan, a Nierite.

This holy war of the Cancere Church of the Dark Triumvirate ended almost before it began, although its consequences are still felt to this day. The march for Coryan came to a halt at the southern edge of the Blighted Mires. The Coryani province of Milandir had felt threatened by the events taking place in Canceri and pulled its own forces back from the Khitani war to defend the home province, thereby stopping the Cancere advance. By leaving the front to look after their own homes, the Milandisians incurred the Emperor's wrath and effectively seceded themselves from the Empire. This occurred in 803 I.C., and though the Canceri did not realize the significance at the

time, their failure to press through the Milandisians ultimately worked to their advantage, because it created a buffer state between Canceri and the Empire.

The Nierite Dark Apostate, Arthmoor, died during the conflict with Milandir. After his death, the lich-Nihang of Sohbuk, Hegrish val'Mordane, made a deal with the Sarishans to keep the Nierites on the margins of Cancere politics. For the next several years, a succession of Sarishans held the position of Dark Apostate. Hegrish himself became Dark Apostate in 827 I.C.

Around 984 I.C. the first of what has become known as the Heretic Wars began. This conflict was apparently sparked by a plague known as the "Infants' Sleep" that crept southward down Milandir's trade routes. Palic val'Mehen, the current Nihang of Nishanpur, supposedly had a hand in starting these wars, though of course there was never any conclusive evidence found of his involvement.

The last of the Heretic Wars began in 1011 I.C. Sir Aeorin val'Holryn of Milandir led the forces marching against Canceri. Aeorin had the favor of both Illiir and Saluwé. He vowed to conquer the ancient citadel of Ventaka within a year. His march was successful, defeating the Nerothians and Sarishans at Kielmun and Sohbuk. When he reached Nishanpur, the Nierites declined to fight him, and so he moved on. As usual, the residents of Nishanpur found the simplest way to deal with the problem of invaders was simply to let them roll past, unopposed. Besides, they had a plan.

Aeorin moved on toward Ventaka, and camped there to prepare for his assault. It had been almost a year since the beginning of his quest. The next morning, Aeorin's lieutenants discovered that he had mysteriously vanished, his tent and personal guardsmen completely undisturbed. He was never seen again. The crusaders were demoralized by the loss of their leader, and were routed in the ensuing battle for Ventaka, but the Nerothians did not pursue the fleeing forces.

Losknek chuckled. "No one ever did figure out what happened to Aeorin..."

The Return of the Sword of the Heavens

In the year 1025 I.C. a series of events was set in motion that has spelled great change for Nishanpur and indeed for all of Canceri. The Dark Apostate, Hegrish val'Mordane, was assassinated, leaving the Church of the Dark Apostate with a power vacuum.

A group of adventurers, the Order of the Spear, had gone into Nishanpur on an unrelated errand when the Dark Apostate's assassination occurred, and they became embroiled in the ensuing events. These adventurers discovered the assassin, and learned that this agitator, along with Palic val'Mehen, had plans that extended far beyond the Dark Apostate's demise. The plotters had brought an Ordainer from Ymandragore to help them complete something called the "Ritual of Genesis," which was to be powered in part by a powerful source of raw magical energy that they had discovered below the city of Nishanpur. Killing Hegrish was the price for the aid of the Ordainer, as the Sorcerer-King of Ymandragore stands in favor of the possible reunification of Canceri with the Coryani Empire, which Hegrish had adamantly opposed.

The Order of the Spear revealed the assassin to the Nihang Council, causing an uproar that swiftly turned violent. The Order then pursued the assassin into the underground vaults beneath Nishanpur, where they discovered the Ordainer completing a version of the Ritual of Genesis. The adventurers killed both the Ordainer and the assassin, but the ritual was at least partially completed despite their efforts.

In the aftermath, the source of the magical energy that had been used to power this ritual was determined to be some kind of column composed of the purest magical fire. The column had been cracked by the aborted Ritual of Genesis, and something had apparently escaped from inside. Though no one present at that moment realized the true importance of their discovery, that fiery column was nothing less than the frozen prison of the Sword of the Heavens.

Having thus been awakened after millennia of imprisonment, Leonydas val'Virdan saw a strange city, one filled with decadence and

sloth. He felt that he had been called forth once more to purge the world and return it to the true worship of the Gods. Upon reaching the surface, the Sword of the Heavens revealed himself and led the Nierites of Nishanpur in a rampage. The city of Nishanpur, and all of Canceri, fell into civil war.

The longer he looked at the world around him, the more Leonydas saw that corruption he fought against in his day had only grown even stronger and more pervasive. The Coryani Empire had become as decadent and "fallen" as the First Imperium that preceded it. Resolving to cleanse the world for a second time, Leonydas set out to rally his forces. Sending a fiery column of light high into the sky, he awaited the return of any that still remained loyal to him.

Far away in Erduk, the long-exiled val'Virdan saw this light, and recognizing it from legend and prophecy as the sign their great leader had returned, they marched to Nishanpur to stand at his side. They brought with them not only their warriors, but also the Sisters of Nier, a sect of Larissan oracles that had accompanied them into their exile millennia ago. The Mother of the Order, an ancient hag, came to serve Leonydas as his most trusted advisor.

But time waits for no man, not even Leonydas val'Virdan. Over the last year, battles have raged across Canceri, as Leonydas once again attempted to seize the throne of Onara and purge it of "heresy" and decadence. Although his conquest of Nishanpur was practically effortless, the Sword of the Heavens did not meet with such instantaneous success elsewhere. After a protracted siege, his forces were unable to breach the domed necropolis of Ventaka, so the Sword marched onward, laying waste to a large portion of Milandir before turning towards the First City and the Throne of Man, which had been denied to him millennia earlier. His army was some forty thousand strong, and it seemed as though the remaining forces of Milandir would be crushed while the Emperor of Coryan laughed from the sidelines. However, several unexpected events occurred. First, Leonydas himself took half of his army and marched into the Citadel of Silence, an ancient Nierite stronghold in the Blessed Lands. What he hoped to accomplish there, none can say; what is known is that the Sword of the Heavens and all those who accompanied him did not return.

The remainder of Leonydas' vast army was subsequently defeated at the Milandisian town of Heliadaquae, during the Battle of the Four Armies. During this conflict, General Menisis val'Tensen, Defender of the Empire, defied his own Emperor to march to Milandir's aid. Also fighting against the Sword of the Heavens was a small group of Canceri rebels led by a man named Eremis val'Virdan, who had been one of Leonydas' most senior commanders until he turned away in disgust at the Sword's brutal methods. Eremis is beloved by many of the people of Canceri, who see him as a potential inheritor of Leonydas' divine legacy – but without the Sword's tyrannical ways.

Following their humbling defeat, the survivors of Leonydas' army retreated back to Canceri. Nevertheless, the Sword of the Heavens' effort to reshape the world a second time was not entirely unsuccessful. The Swords of Nier maintained control of Canceri after Leonydas' coup, and do so to this day.

Rumblings of the Future

"And so we come to the present. Only a short time ago, with both moons full in the sky, another strange event has taken place, one that gives sages and scholars great pause. A terrible earthquake, of a previously undreamed-of magnitude, rocked the whole of Onara. It was centered to the north, on the mountain range known as the Wall of the Gods. What the effects of this earthquake are likely to be is beyond even my ability to predict. I can only say that now, as the people of Canceri – and those of the world at large – pick up the pieces after this event, things are likely to get much more interesting..."

Losknek smiled, though whether it was with satisfaction, amusement, or vexation would be impossible to say. "And now, children, you know all that I know... or, at least, all that I am willing to tell you. Perhaps you will find your destiny in Nishanpur; perhaps your skulls will be the latest to adorn her walls. Either way, I'm sure that I will be amused."

Chapter Two

THE CITY OF SECRETS REVEALED

Nishanpur

Type: Metropolis

Population: 279,438 (including living creatures and sentient undead, as of the last census in the year 1000 I.C.)

78% Canceri Human/Val, 15% Other Human/Val, 3% Dark-kin, 4% Other

Power Centers:

Conventional: Church of the Dark Triumvirate (*not fully functioning during the city's occupation by the Swords of Nier*)

Dark Apostate: *position currently unoccupied*

Nihang of Nishanpur: Palic val'Mehen

Nonstandard: Swords of Nier (*occupying forces*)

Priesthood of Sarish

Various underworld factions

Military: Swords of Nier: 12,670

Knights of the Red Fist: 1,350

Militia: 4,800

Currency: Baht (gp), Triumvirates (sp), Asher (cp) **Industries:** Trade, Sarishan steel armor and weaponry, and various other industries

buildings often are decorated with bas-reliefs, brightly-colored mosaics of tile or glazed brick, and sculptures. Throughout the city, travelers are also likely to note the presence of many gargoyles leering from atop walls, towers, and roofs. Some are beautiful, some grotesque; many look quite aged; but all are obviously the work of master artisans from many eras.

In the aftermath of the great earthquake that has recently washed over Onara, Nishanpur is in a state of rebuilding. Several areas, especially the southeastern Trade Quarter, suffered heavy damage from fires and the collapse of some of the less-sturdy buildings. On the whole, however, business goes on as usual in this pragmatic city, and the damage will soon be repaired.

People and Customs

Nishanpur is a city unlike any other in Onara, as should become apparent to travelers the moment they approach the walls. Although it is a large city, and a trade hub, the city has an unearthly hum, which quickly fades to quietude. Not until they reach the stillness of a sealed room, though, does the uneducated traveler realize just how deceiving that quiet is. The humming continues unabated at all times, the result of a quarter-million people whispering. The presence of this background noise usually goes unnoticed until it is absent.

The City of Secrets earns its moniker from this hum of barely-discernible voices. Everyone whispers, even in everyday conversation. Even when under attack, or frightened, the natives here are likely to respond not with screams or shouts, but with unsettling silence. There is a virtual taboo against loud noise or speech. Residents begrudge even the noise of falling objects here, and those who create such noise, even unintentionally, may receive startling or embarrassing attention. The ignorant traveler who speaks loudly here is likely to receive a range of responses: he may find himself quickly being hushed; the person he is speaking to may simply stare at him with incredulity; if he is truly loud, the locals might cover their ears, take a few steps back, and even act physically pained at the sound of a raised voice.

Music even follows this odd custom: instrumental music is the rule, with vocal performances being almost unheard-of. Bards who do use their voices almost always are reciting histories, chanting the records and tales of the past in a low voice.

Welcome to Nishanpur

Nishanpur is the capitol of the Theocracy of Canceri. As such, it functions as both the bureaucratic and religious center for the entire country. For millennia, it has also served as one of the central trading hubs for the northern lands of Onara. Although Nishanpur is currently under occupation by the army of the Swords of Nier, the day-to-day activities of this great city go on unabated. The city arose from strife, and military and political maneuverings are not unfamiliar to its residents. In fact, the very character of the city of Nishanpur has grown out of this constant intrigue and upheaval. However, the manner in which Nishanpur has continued to prosper even when under occupation has not earned it a good reputation with the outside world. Although most residents would merely consider their actions and attitudes practical, many in the rest of the world, especially in the Coryani Empire, believe the people of Nishanpur to be inherently untrustworthy and treacherous.

Within Canceri itself, most would consider Nishanpur to be a place of both great danger and great opportunity. Any man with sufficient wit and guile can improve his position in Nishanpur, but his advancement comes only at the risk of his life, or even his soul. The game of power is not without danger. Young and ambitious Cancerese from all walks of life come here, hoping to find success and wealth. Many fall prey to their own weakness, or to various sorts of predators (particularly those of the two-legged variety), and end up no better off than when they began. Enough succeed, though, to keep others coming.

With all the intrigues surrounding Nishanpur, many visitors from outside Canceri are surprised to learn that it is a physically beautiful city. The dark rumors that abound regarding the City of Secrets seem to make most outsiders expect that this place would be dark and foreboding in appearance. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Cancerese people have always been masterful architects, and the val'Mehan in particular have always loved beauty in all its forms. Most buildings (at least, those outside the so-called "Corpse Quarter") are usually in good repair, with flat tiled roofs and stuccoed, painted walls. The wider streets are paved in smooth stone, and in the better parts of town, temples and other important



Other unique mannerisms have arisen along with this odd quiet. One is that Nishanpur natives have almost no sense of “personal space.” They will step right up to someone in order to be heard and engage in what they would consider normal conversation. Most outsiders find this startling, or even threatening. Some merchants have even found sport in this, slowly pursuing their potential clients across a bazaar one step at a time; they will step forward to speak, and the outsider will step away to regain a sense of space. This dance can continue for some time, to the locals’ great amusement and the unwary traveler’s great consternation.

Dance is a highly formalized activity in Nishanpur. Movements are smooth and sequences complex. The true scope of communication here is lost on an outsider; body language, especially when dancing, is very important. The act of dancing can clearly convey social messages: whom you dance with and the attitude of the dance can mean a lot. Even the angle of a dancer’s hands and the amount of eye contact made with other dancers can be significant in this context.

Another trait common to many citizens of Nishanpur is a near-obsession with personal grooming. When you live in close quarters to many others, poor hygiene can quickly lead to social ostracization. Makeup, perfumes, and body oils are in heavy use among the populace. A common rule of thumb for visitors is that you are close enough to converse when you can smell the person to whom you wish to speak. Heavy cosmetics also help to mute the effects of the sun, and sometimes also act as a form of disguise, allowing residents to have a bit of control over the image they present to others – just another way to mask one’s true identity.

Legal System

The laws of Nishanpur may seem strange to an outsider, but not so to a native. Nishanpur is the capitol of a theocracy, and the doctrines of the Church establish that power belongs to those that can take and hold it. Thus, the powerful established the laws that have come into practice, and it is only to be expected that these laws largely serve to keep power in their hands.

The courts are an arm of the Church, and those arrested are considered guilty until proven innocent. There are no appeals, and treason and heresy are largely identical. Many cases never reach an actual hearing in court, as many criminals die – either at the hands of fiends summoned by the Mark of Sarish, or due to “resisting arrest.”

Court proceedings, when they do occur, largely follow a simple formula. Both the defendant and the accuser submit an oath, sworn to Sarish and witnessed by a priest, in support of their positions. Additional witnesses for each side may also be required to submit a sworn oath. A defendant has no right to confront his accuser, and only the judge may ask questions of the participants. As a result, lawyers (as such) are not common in Nishanpur; however, “legal advisors” often serve those with sufficient funds, assisting them in the careful wording of the oaths that will be read in court.

If no conclusion is obvious to the judge after the reading of both sides’ oaths, the defendant, if a free commoner, may endure a trial by ordeal. Various methods of ordeal are available, depending on the nature of the crime. Common ordeals are the ordeal of hot water, the ordeal of red-hot iron, and the ordeal of fire (which is especially popular with Nierite judges). Alternately, if the both the defendant and the accuser are members of the gentry, trial by combat may be offered. Slaves have no legal recourse against other slaves or their masters. In the case of a freeman or noble accusing another freeman or noble’s slave of commission of a crime, the slave is often tortured if the sworn oaths are not revealing.

Contrary to what one might expect from a theocracy, punishments are not leveled in order to purge criminals of their sins, as most crimes are not considered sins. Instead, punishment takes the form of reparations to the injured party. Common punishments range from fines for monetary losses to death. In general, a common thief will normally receive a fine of several times the value of the item stolen. In cases of assault or murder, a wergild (blood payment) is levied instead. Wergild can range from large monetary payments to the enslavement or death of the guilty party, dependent on the ruling of the judge and the severity of the crime. If the offender is destitute and cannot pay his or her fine, the judge often levies a sentence of slavery (indentured servitude) instead.

Laws of Nishanpur

While the entire legal code of a large city cannot be compacted into a few paragraphs, it is in the interest of the visitor that the most commonly encountered restrictions are delineated here.

1. No arms and armor except those of Sarishan steel are permitted within the city walls

This means exactly what it says. The only exception is for flintlock pistols and their ammunition (which can be made of any material). Any person with the influence to carry a flintlock is either noble or very powerful. This law largely serves to keep the populace under control. By allowing them to resort to the *Mark of Sarish*, the rulers of the city have set up a system where the commoners can protect themselves to a degree, but do not have the means to resist or upset the current power structure.

Keep in mind that Nishanpur is a trade city; the law forbids weapons, but not tools. A woodsman carrying one small axe or a smith with his forge-hammer may pass through the gates, but someone with waraxes or warhammers could not. The guards will permit each person to keep a single dagger, regardless of material, and “walking sticks” (quarterstaves) are not generally taken. Any other weapon, and any type of armor, is strictly forbidden, unless the item is made of Sarishan steel. (Non-metal armors cannot be made of Sarishan steel, so they are not allowed at all.)

2. Strike not another, except in self-defense

3. Strike not a priest

4. Enter not a temple, except with the permission of that temple’s priest

5. Steal not from a priest

In all of these cases, the underlying rule is simple: there is no legitimate excuse for defying a priest. Since this city is, in fact, an evil one, general theft is basically ignored. If a thief successfully steals something, the victim is obviously weak and deserves to suffer the loss of his material possessions. Priests, on the other hand, receive protection as part of the ruling class. In the Theocracy of Canceri, striking a priest will always carry a harsher penalty than striking a commoner, and judges reject “self-defense” as a justification in these cases. This all, of course, assumes that the guilty party survives until the trial (by no means a foregone conclusion). On the rare occasions that cases of assault or theft from a priest actually go to trial, the punishment is usually twice that leveled for any other crime. Wergilds of slavery, entombment, or slow death are common in these cases.

6. Interfere not between a slave and his master

Slavery is legal, and is in fact something of a cherished institution here in Canceri. Freeing slaves or intervening between a master and slave is the one case of theft that the authorities generally punish in Nishanpur, outside of theft from a priest. Interference between a master and slave carries a minimum fine of 500gp, and killing or freeing a slave incurs a further penalty of several times the slave’s replacement cost.

7. Approach not the city walls, except to enter the gates

The city maintains a “Dead Zone” of 30 yards around the city walls to prevent the freeing of those undergoing ordeals of exposure, as well as to aid in the interdiction of any smuggling of contraband over or through the city walls. Guards shoot anyone off the main roads that approaches the city walls as soon as they get within 30 yards. No warning is given. If those approaching survive the initial volley and manage to run back outside the Dead Zone, the guards do not pursue them.

In wergild cases where enslavement is not appropriate, punishments involving slow mortification of the flesh are more popular than those that result in a quicker death. These may include, but are not limited to: impalement, crucifixion, exposure in cages hanging from the city walls, entombment, or in mild cases, pillorying.

Again, as in all other aspects of life in Nishanpur, power lies with those who take it, and for all intents and purposes, the worst crime is simply that of getting caught. Bribery is widely practiced, and although bribing an official is not a guarantee that a favorable judgment will follow, it certainly makes a particular outcome more likely. Often, crimes are reduced or ignored with the proper application of gold as a “memory reparative.” Ultimately it comes down to survival of the fittest. Those that are stealthy enough, smart enough, or rich enough may be able to quite literally get away with murder.

There are some additional matters of precedent that are not stated in the published city laws, but may be discovered by those that encounter the legal system in Nishanpur (either intentionally or otherwise). When seeking to apply (or evade) the laws, the following precedents apply:

1. All native Val are considered Priests

Technically, the oaths sworn by their forefathers to the Gods remain binding, so that every val'Mordane is consecrated to Neroth, every val'Mehan to Sarish, and every val'Viridan to Nier. Every noble is considered a priest to the god that his or her family is sworn to, though not all learn the rituals specific to that god's priesthood.

This means that assault upon or theft from any native Val may carry the same punishments as assault upon a cleric of the Dark Triumvirate.

2. The invading Erdukeens are immune to the legal system.

These invaders (generally referred to as the Swords of Nier, though not all of the Erdukeen immigrants are members of the active-duty military) are for the most part lawful and unless provoked will generally leave people alone. They should be treated with the deference of priests, however, and legally they receive the same protections as priests. They consider themselves the “true followers” of the Sword of the Heavens, and as such some of the holiest people in Nishanpur. Moreover, they enforce their will without hesitation or remorse. They control the city; therefore, they are the law.

3. Ignorance is no excuse

A law is a law. It doesn't matter if you knew about the law or not. In Nishanpur, they have no concept of “extenuating circumstances.”

Church of the Dark Triumvirate

To truly understand Nishanpur, you must first understand the faith that lies closest to the city's heart. The Church of the Dark Triumvirate serves as both the religious and administrative force in charge of Nishanpur (and the rest of Canceri). In times past, the Dark Apostate ruled the Church and the country from his seat in Nishanpur, though under the occupation of the Swords of Nier, that post is currently unfilled.

The doctrines of the Church, while not in line with those followed in most other places on Onara, serve the country well. The main doctrine of the Church is that all of Onara is a place of evil, and that this is by the intention of the gods. The Church teaches that by accepting evil, and in fact by acting out evil impulses, a man may gain an understanding of his own soul. In this fashion he will eventually grow tired of evil, and cease to gain enjoyment from the inherent evil of the world. Therefore, his soul will eventually choose not to reincarnate into the world, as it will hold no more allure for him, and he will instead be purified and ascend to the Paradise of the Gods.

This doctrine helped create and reinforce the kind of social structures common to Nishanpur. They acknowledge the darker impulses of humanity, and teach that all flesh is impure. In this way, any action against the flesh becomes merely a purgation of evil impulses, and is not considered inappropriate. Acts like slavery, torture, theft, or murder – crimes elsewhere – are, at least to a certain extent, considered acceptable behavior here. Rule by the strong is the natural way of things in Nishanpur, and there is no real concept of “fairness” in government or religion. A man is

entitled to any social position he can seize and hold. He receives respect only for as long as he can maintain his position.

With the final death of Dark Apostate Hegrish val'Mordane in early 1025 I.C. the church has been operating at a lessened capacity for over a year. In the midst of a power struggle to establish the next Apostasy, the army of the Swords of Nier overthrew the forces in charge of the city proper. Although they did not remove the Church as an administrative entity, neither did the Swords allow the ascension of a new Dark Apostate, and they have repressed the religious functions of the Church since that time.

Holy Days in Nishanpur

Although the Swords of Nier seek to repress what they consider “heretical” worship, there are still several folk holidays that take place in Nishanpur each year. The average man may or may not understand the theological basis of these festival days, but he most certainly seems to enjoy the celebration of them. Religious connotations aside, they offer a measure of relaxation and freedom to slaves and nobles alike, as most are considered days of rest, and no farm labor or work unrelated to the festival itself takes place.

Shadowfast

The most well-known of the city's folk festivals is Shadowfast. Taking place on the darkest three nights of the year, when Aperio is new and Viridis nothing but a sliver in the sky, this festival is when the Temple of Shadows and the Temple of the Keeper of Mysteries open their doors to new initiates. On these nights the city comes alive after dark, torches bringing flickering light and deep shadows to the bright walls, and all the citizens go about masked.

For these few precious nights, the city is turned upside-down. Slaves become freemen, commoners pretend to be nobles, and nobles go about as commoners, in one great masquerade. It is a night of freedom, and also a night when many plans come to fruition. Most merely use this time to relax inhibitions and take part in otherwise unobtainable entertainments and assignations. It is not unheard of, though, for the masks to be removed at the end of this festival, only to find that a round of schemes, plots, and assassinations have changed the power structure of the city.

The use of a grand masquerade as a festival serves the temples well. Due to the anonymity that is part and parcel of the festival, any man or woman may dare to come forward and audition for a position within the Greater Academy of the Temple of Shadows, or take oaths of service to Sarish, regardless of his or her previous status or position in life. Thusly the temples can select the best talents without care for other entanglements. Many of the most secretive groups, including the mysterious Oathspeakers, make appearances during Shadowfast, and the city's various secret societies often recruit new members during this time.

Kindling Dawn

Kindling Dawn is the most important annual festival for the Nierites of Nishanpur. On this day the Everlasting Flame is ceremonially relit, renewing the city's bonds to Nier, the Lord of Fire.

Though most of the city's citizens see this as a one-day festival of purgation and renewal, the ritual which culminates with the relighting of the Everlasting Flame actually begins many days earlier. Each year, the senior Nierite clergy chose a single worthy man or woman from the city's most faithful worshippers. To be chosen is a high honor, requiring many tests of stamina and devotion. Those hoping to be chosen train for months, or even years.

The individual who is finally chosen is stripped down to a tunic, cleansed with blessed ash, and given a magically enhanced torchiere. The chosen one must then run, barefoot, all the way from Nishanpur to the settlement of Hunder, far to the north. The runner cannot stop at inns, buy food, or even ask for nourishment; he or she must rely on what the land provides, or what is given by other Nierites passed along the way. Upon arriving in Hunder, the chosen one must light the torchiere from the sacred pillar of Nier's fire that eternally burns in that city.

The runner must then retrace his or her steps, returning to Nishanpur, bearing the sacred fire and protecting it from any threat along the way. The sacred fire's entrance into Nishanpur is greeted by a veritable wall of worshippers, stretching along the roadside from the Flame Gate all the way to the Temple of Everlasting Flame itself.

Within the Temple, the worthy then bears witness as the priests of Nier make a ritual sacrifice. In ancient days this was traditionally a human sacrifice, though it has in modern times more often been an animal. The heart's blood of the sacrifice flows over and quenches the sacred flame that has burned for the past year. At the precise moment the old flame dies, the runner relights it from the torchiere, thereby renewing the flames, and with them the city's symbolic connection to Lord Nier.

Burning Man

This festival to Neroth is held in the depths of winter, when all of Canceri finds itself covered in snow and ice. During this festival the followers of the Lord of Death acknowledge the shortness of their days and the inevitability of death's cold embrace.

At the beginning of the festival, a large effigy of a man, generally between fifteen and twenty feet tall, is erected in the Bone Market of Nishanpur. As the daylight wanes, the effigy is lit on fire and allowed to reach a steady burn. The followers of Neroth then smear themselves with ash and emerge into the snow, often wearing nothing but loincloths despite the cold.

The worshippers then attack the effigy with missiles of snow and ice. Throughout the night, they pelt the wicker man, their assault not ceasing until the fire is thoroughly quenched. By dawn the effigy is usually soaking and frozen, along with the participating Nerothians. It is quite common for several to die of hypothermia and exposure during the proceedings.

At the first light of dawn, when the effigy's "spirit" has departed, the remaining worshippers then attempt to crawl into the remains of the wooden frame, in order to "animate" the effigy and make it walk around the city. Though rare, if the effigy can be made to stand again in this manner, it is considered a good omen.

New Blood

This springtime festival is perhaps one of the strangest in Canceri, and certainly one of the least understood. Every year, nearly every city within Canceri sends representatives to the New Blood festival in Nishanpur. The festival takes place after the snow is off the ground, and just before planting begins.

These village and town representatives all gather in the Bone Market, wearing nothing but simple head wraps and cloth tunics. They circulate among one another, announcing challenges. These challenges break out into fistfights, with pairs or threesomes beating each other with fists and gouging with fingernails. Men and women both take part. No weapons, armor, or magic are used in these fights. The fighting continues throughout the day, sometimes even for several days. Participants fight until they cannot fight any longer. Injured fighters remain where they fall. The contestants fight until the ground is red with blood; at least one, and usually several, participants end up dying in the process.

Witnesses from each village then carry all the fighters, living and dead, back to their homes, where they are venerated as conquering heroes. The origins of this festival are unknown, but those who propagate it claim it serves to renew the land and ensure a bountiful harvest.

The Dark Apostate

The office of Dark Apostate is simultaneously the most coveted and least envied position in the politics of Canceri. Though holding absolute power in terms of laws and faith in the Theocracy, the Dark Apostate is also the target of countless machinations and schemes. An incredible amount of pressure bears down on the individual in this role.

The first Dark Apostate, Arthmoor val'Virdan, led the fledgling country of Canceri to war with the neighboring province of Milandir in 803 I.C., getting himself killed in the process. The val'Mehan and val'Mordane then struck a bargain. Since then, no val'Virdan has ever been able to sit the Black Throne.

Following Arthmoor's demise, a succession of Sarishan Apostates held the post, most not lasting more than a year before the intrigues of the City of Secrets overcame them. This cycle of assassinations reached its peak in the year of 827 I.C., known as the "Year of Fifteen Apostates."

At the end of 827, Hegrish val'Mordane, the lich-Nihang of Sohbuk, finally powered his way to the Apostate's chair. The Nerothians had become tired of the constant disruptions to politics and commerce caused

by the short-sighted intrigues of the val'Mehan. What followed was nearly 200 years of relative peace and stability, allowing Canceri to finally consolidate its power and become a true player on the world political scene.

Unfortunately, not even the undead are immune to assassination. Hegrish's demise as part of a val'Mehan plot ended this period of stability and led, in part, to the country's slide into civil war. No new Apostate has arisen since Hegrish, partially due to the politics of the Church and partially because the dominant Swords of Nier will not permit it. What is certain, however, is that should the Swords of Nier ever be overthrown, a new Apostate will eventually be forced into the spotlight as a unifying face for this battered country.

The Council of the Nihangs

Though the Dark Apostate (when one is in office) holds absolute authority in matters of state religion and politics in Canceri, most of the day-to-day operation of the country actually falls into the hands of the Council of the Nihangs. Even the Swords of Nier continue to allow the provisional operation of the Council, as they have no desire to take over the petty bureaucratic details of so large and intrigue-filled a country as Canceri.

The Council consists of one Nihang from each of the cities of Canceri, appointed by the Akali of the city, and representing the dominant church of that city. Nishanpur itself is the only city with multiple representatives on the Council. As the capitol, and only truly cosmopolitan city in the country, Nishanpur has four. The Nihang of Nishanpur is appointed by the Church of Sarish, being the technically dominant church in the city. Over the years, however, each of the three churches have managed to have an extra representative placed on the Council; in order, theoretically, to more adequately represent the three largest populations of the multi-cultural city.

The ruling Val families of the City of Secrets also each have a voice on the Council. Though not technically Nihangs, their opinions often carry weight in debates simply because of the power they represent. They are permitted to attend meetings in the entourage of the Nihang of the temple of their family's patron deity. Each Nihang also usually has a bevy of assistants and advisors, leading to the necessity of the Nihang Council meeting in the ancient amphitheater of Nishanpur. A fully attended meeting can call to bear many voices indeed.

The val'Mehan/val'Mehen

Traditional rulers of Nishanpur, the val'Mehan are a family at war with itself. Since the founding of the city during the First Imperium, Nishanpur has been known as the City of Sarish. The val'Mehan dominated the city both in terms of politics and of religion.

It was during the Time of Terror (known locally as the Reign of the Devil-Kings) that the val'Mehan truly came into their own as the leaders of Nishanpur, and indeed of all Canceri. Their natural affinity with the Internals that dominated the region gave them an advantage over the other peoples of Canceri.

The first major "family schism" occurred during the First Crusade of Light, when the Coryani Emperor drove the Infernal hosts from Onara. Some of the val'Mehan supported his cause, and turned against their Infernal masters. Most, however, believed that the Internals would eventually triumph.

After the Time of Terror ended, most of the "renegade" val'Mehan – those that had turned against the Devil-Kings – left Canceri. There was too much strife between them and the surviving "loyalist" family members for the two factions to peacefully coexist.

It was one of these so-called renegades who became the Sarishan Pyrman of the first Convocation of the Divine. He led the movement to put a more attractive public face on the worship of Sarish. No longer would the summoning and binding of Internals as personal servants be permitted in canonical doctrine, except for brief periods of time and only in situations of greatest need. Sarishan clerics would only banish Internals, thereby protecting the citizens of the new empire. And while sacrifices of blood could not be totally eliminated, full human sacrifice would be considered heretical.

While this move certainly helped to solidify the position of the Church of Sarish within the fledgling empire, and mollify a population still shaken by the Time of Terror, many other members of the val'Mehan

Palic val'Mehen, Nihang of Nishanpur

Palic is in his sixties, an older man who believes himself still to be in the prime of his life. He is a man who has spent his life walking on the edge of the abyss, but never seeing the drop. Early in life, the death of his mother led to his appointment as the Nihang of Nishanpur, as his father (being too old himself) deemed Palic the most fit of the val'Mehen to take the position. In his youth, Palic's actions on the Council led to the Heretic Wars with Milandir; he combined plots with a Nerothian, leading to the plague known as the "Infants' Sleep."

Throughout his tenure as Nihang, Palic has managed, just barely, to keep himself one step ahead of disaster. He continually tries to put complex, multi-stage plans into operation, but as many of his predecessors learned, the more complex a plan, the more opportunities there are for that plan to go wrong. Palic refuses to see this; he believes himself fully capable of controlling all the factors involved in his plots. Unfortunately for Palic, though he would never admit it, the actions of others are beyond his control.

The current situation in Nishanpur is a perfect example. Palic planned the assassination of the previous Dark Apostate. He hoped to use the power vacuum that followed to increase his own personal influence, and ultimately become Dark Apostate himself. He could not foresee, or hope to control, what actually followed. Although Hegrish's death occurred as planned, the awakening of Leonydas val'Virdan that unexpectedly followed led to the complete collapse of Palic's plans. The ensuing chaos and the conquest of Nishanpur by the Swords of Nier rendered his original objective moot, but, Palic continues his efforts to manipulate the political situation to his advantage.

Bethalic val'Mehan, Nihang of Sarish

Bethalic is the paragon of what many consider the Cancereze Sarishan to be. Sadistic and cruel, he walks the edge of sanity. Addicted to hallucinogenic drugs, and given to indulge in orgies of food and drink, at any time he is as likely to be partaking of pleasures in the Silken Noose as he is to be doing business in the Hall of Contracts.

Bethalic despises Palic, not least because the Nihang of Nishanpur has little in the way of vices, and lives a relatively ascetic life. Bethalic seeks to control most of his associates through their weaknesses. He will consider the discovery of a new vice to be important knowledge for future "negotiations." It was through such blackmail and exploitation that Bethalic achieved his position on the Nihang Council many years ago.

When not immersing himself in sensuous pursuits, Bethalic is an accomplished mage as well as cleric. He researches spells and other magical phenomena with almost as much passion as he indulges his vices. From time to time, he has been known to teach at the Sanctorum – when not otherwise occupied.

Eremis val'Virdan, Nihang of Nier

Born in the far northern village of Hunder, Eremis inherited the position of Nihang when his father was assassinated, shortly after his fifteenth birthday. By the time he reached the age of twenty, he had moved to Nishanpur to pursue his goals, as he was constantly in conflict with Hunder's Akali. Eremis quickly rose to prominence among

the Nierites of Nishanpur, and when Hunder's Akali appointed a new Nihang from that settlement, Eremis was appointed the Nihang of Nier for Nishanpur.

Although Eremis val'Virdan served on the Nihang Council, he often spent much of his time outside the city. Eremis takes very seriously his charge to protect the interests of all Nierites in Canceri. He frequently consulted with the other Akalis and Nihangs from Nierite settlements, and with the captains of the Red Fist, in the days before Leonydas' return.

With the occupation of the Swords of Nier, his position on the Nihang Council was considered unimportant, and he was sent into the field with the army of the Swords of Nier. There he achieved the rank of General, under the command of Leonydas val'Virdan himself. During the resultant march on Milandir, Eremis decried the slaughter of civilians, and was stripped of his rank and sentenced to death.

Sent back to Nishanpur to be executed, Eremis was rescued by a group of adventurers sent by the grateful Milandisian citizens he had spared from Leonydas' wrath. After he was rescued, Eremis assumed leadership of the Cancereze forces opposing Leonydas. Eremis led a small group of Nierite warriors against the Swords of Nier at the Battle of Four Armies; their participation has come to be called "the March of the 100," a reference to their meager numbers.

The victory over the Swords of Nier was bittersweet for Eremis, as almost all the members of his small band of rebels were destroyed. In an attempt to salvage something from the carnage, Eremis then returned to Nishanpur to take command of the underground Nierite resistance growing against the Swords. Though technically still a Nihang, he has not been publicly seen in the city for some time, and many wonder what he is planning for the future.

Porphal val'Mordane, Nihang of Neroth

Of all the Nihangs in Canceri, Porphal is certainly among the most mysterious. As a young man he was fairly typical – insofar as he was a plotter, seeking power at the expense of all around him. On the whole, though, it seemed that Porphal's schemes were not on the same level as those of his elders, and although he coveted a seat on the Nihang Council, it was beyond his reach.

It was the failure of one of his plots, however, that changed him forever. In an attempt to claim an artifact known as the Spear of Urumeh, Porphal perished at the hands of his own undead forces. Death was only the beginning for Porphal. Apparently chosen for greatness by Neroth – as the depth of his change was well beyond his own abilities – Porphal currently numbers among the lich-lords of Canceri.

Now, Porphal's rare pronouncements are met with attention by those around him, yet he speaks only infrequently. He wanders the city and the countryside beyond at the behest of inner urgings beyond the comprehension of even his peers on the Council. His actions seem to make no sense, yet often have far-reaching effects. Sometimes he possesses startling knowledge and insights, from sources unknown even to him. He no longer seems to pay heed to either the efforts of the Nihang Council, or the machinations of his family. Ironically, when this change in him was noted, he was then elevated to the seat of Nihang he had so coveted in life.

Once, when Porphal was asked what it was that preoccupied him so, the only answer he gave was a single word: "Silence."

family, including many former "renegades" living throughout the Coryani Empire, were angered. The traditional ways in which Sarish had been worshipped for millennia were being challenged. Many former 'renegades' returned to Canceri (and to Nishanpur in particular), where their families and forms of worship had originated and had been observed for thousands of years.

Distant from the seat of the empire, the val'Mehan felt they could continue their traditional worship privately, without interference, while still presenting a good "public face." Unfortunately, the val'Mehan traditionalists in Nishanpur had not forgotten about the betrayals of those who had sided with the overthrowers of the Devil-Kings. Many of the "renegades" found themselves ostracized, or limited to lesser positions than their talents merited. This prejudice continues among the various

val'Mehan branches to this day, even though the families are largely identical in belief and practice, and few can remember why or how it began.

In Nishanpur itself, the ruling val'Mehan family was so incensed by what they perceived as a challenge to their leadership that they changed the spelling of their surname to val'Mehen, in order to distance themselves from those they considered of lesser merit.

Since the time of the raising of the Godswall, things have hardly changed. The val'Mehen branch of the family still considers itself the "purest" branch, with members often intermarrying within their own number. They have been known to choose marriage with humans, or even dark-kin, rather than wed a val'Mehan. They cling tenaciously to the loftiest positions within Nishanpur, seeking to maintain the power their family has held for millennia. Their clannishness has often protected

them, limiting strife within their family, but it also weakens them. Over the centuries, their numbers have dwindled, and inbreeding sometimes throws up bizarre and aberrant behaviors in their line.

Ironically, in recent generations, a few of these clannish val'Mehen returned to Coryan, rejecting the ways of the Dark Triumvirate. Much to the chagrin and disgust of the family patriarch, Kuros val'Mehen, some have even achieved positions of influence, including his own cousin Tedaris, who currently heads the Inquisition of the Mother Church of Coryan.

Unlike the val'Mehen, the typical val'Mehan has no such close concept of family. Widespread in number, they have grown more cunning, it seems, with every generation. Those val'Mehan originating in Nishanpur have been waging a silent war with the val'Mehen, whom they view as inbred and weak, for millennia.

Kuros val'Mehen, Patriarch of the val'Mehen

Kuros is the elderly father of Palic val'Mehen. Though it was his wife who was Nihang of Nishanpur before her death, it is Kuros who rules the val'Mehen family. He allowed his son to succeed his wife to the position of Nihang, but retained control of the family itself, as he felt his son to be unpredictable and not yet fit to ensure the future success of the family as a whole.

Kuros rarely lets his family in on his schemes. He sees security in secrecy. If no one else knows his plans, then no one can betray him to his enemies. This leads to much consternation from his descendants, as he expects blind obedience, and they would prefer to choose the paths they walk with their eyes open. Kuros even goes to the extent of arranging the marriages of his kin, choosing only those mates he sees as worthy to carry on the family line.

Kuros' ideas of the right course for his family might be considered treasonous or even suicidal anywhere but Nishanpur. He has been a member of the Seekers of the Hidden Master since he was initiated by his own grandfather; this is something neither his son nor any other member of the family knows.

Kuros' iron-fisted rule of his family has kept it from ruin on several occasions, as he is an astute and intelligent manipulator, but has caused no shortage tension among his progeny. Palic hardly speaks to him, and many of the younger members of the family consider Kuros to be too unyielding and set in his ways to be an effective leader in the face of the massive changes brought on by the return and subsequent disappearance of Leonydas val'Virdan.

The val'Mordane

Even among the paranoid and secretive denizens of Nishanpur, the val'Mordane are a reclusive lot. Unlike the val'Mehan and val'Mehen, who plot openly against one another, the val'Mordane present a unified face to the public. Any infighting that may occur in this ancient family is resolved quietly, without the notice of others.

So unified is their appearance that not even other val'Mordane from outside Nishanpur have seen the inner workings of this family. The matriarch of the Nishanpur val'Mordane keeps it that way. She is so ancient that she was old even before Hegrish val'Mordane, the former Dark Apostate of Canceri, was born, and so secretive that, being from Sohbuk, Hegrish himself never met her, and may not have even known of her existence.

This unified face presented by the ruling val'Mordane is literal, as well as metaphorical. All members of the family wear a plain white mask of finest bisque porcelain when going about in public, whether they are living members of the clan or undead ones. On the Council they have a "speaker" that represents them, selected from among their number. This speaker, always unnamed, is the only unmasked member, though only in council. The speaker may change, but is always living, usually young (sometimes surprisingly so), and is most often trained in the bardic arts.

While the voice of the val'Mordane carries influence on the Council of the Nihangs when it is heard, they speak much more rarely than most others on the Council. This leads to a feeling of wisdom and respect for the val'Mordane, but also isolates them, as they are the least active in daily matters of state.

Itakayt val'Mordane, Matriarch of the val'Mordane

Itakayt is so ancient that she can remember the waning days of the Myrantian Hegemony, though the exact year of her birth eludes even her memory these days. She does, however, understand that knowledge is power, and therefore what few pieces of information she allows to be known about herself are simply part of her hold on those around her. Her own family members have never seen her face, and those outside of her clan rarely even learn of her existence.

She gives her descendants intricate instructions relating to matters she finds of interest. She will take the time to instruct her numerous kin on the subtleties of her plans; she believes that only if her agents are empowered to make intelligent choices can they succeed in the face of uncertain and ever-changing circumstances.

The one obvious weakness Itakayt has is her vanity. Though she has been one of the undead for longer than most of the lich-lords of Canceri have existed, she still insists on dressing as one of the living. Her face is covered by a beautiful golden death mask, enameled in the ancient Myrantian fashion. She wears a wig of black human hair, elaborately coiffed, and expensive scents cover the lingering odors of death. Even her clothing is new, of the softest fabrics and most fashionable Myrantian cut, contrasting grotesquely with her skin, which is as yellowed as parchment and hard as marble.

Itakayt also is a great lover of the bardic arts; aside from making sure the "speaker" of the family receives such training, she also encourages the bardic pursuits among her numerous descendants, and takes a special interest in those that wish to become Blackchanters.

The val'Virdan

The val'Virdan are the least secretive of all the ruling families of Nishanpur. As a whole, Nierites tend to find the City of Sarish distasteful, but they acknowledge the necessity of a firm presence there. In the past they have been politically and religiously minimized, and understand that an active stance is the only way to avoid this fate in the future.

To avoid any erosion of their political positions within the city, the val'Virdan have taken a completely different tack than most other families. Rather than investing their authority in a few highly vulnerable and (by necessity) isolated individuals, they divide it among many. Knowledge is passed through several layers of command, like a military unit. In this manner, even if one leading figure is assassinated, corrupted, or compromised in some fashion, their plans can be completed by others.

Maradevi val'Virdan, Matriarch of the val'Virdan

One family of Nierites saw permanent residence in Nishanpur as both a mission and a challenge. They had hoped that by living here they could be an example to their neighbors. Unfortunately, they underestimated the temptations of the City of Secrets.

Maradevi is the current leader of this family, and sees herself as a fine example to those around her. She runs her family with great efficiency, and is utterly ruthless towards those that stand in her way. Despite Maradevi's own high opinion of herself, many Nierites from outside the city do not find her example appealing. She affects much of the finery of her Sarishan neighbors, and often puts on the airs of a military commander, though she herself has had little fighting experience (only serving a brief stint in the Knights of the Red Fist during her youth).

Maradevi retired from the Knights when her first child was born, and since that time has put all her energy into raising and teaching her numerous progeny. Even in her dotage, she continues to try to manipulate her children and grandchildren, with varying degrees of success. She refuses to step down even though many of her descendants are more than ready for leadership positions.

Many of her children continue to humor her, though privately they consider her senile and sad. They cannot, however, bring themselves to shatter her pride.

The val'Virdan also make certain that they are heavily involved in the daily operations of the city. Many of the powerful figures in the family hold positions in the Knights of the Red Fist, and one even oversaw the Grand Library.

Unfortunately, with the return of the Swords of Nier to Nishanpur, the val'Virdan family has been subjected to upheavals from within. The Sisters of Nier, a group of Larissan oracles, declared many of the ruling val'Virdan to be "unclean." By order of Leonydas, these individuals were demoted to positions of manual labor until their penance "cleanses" them.

The Swords of Nier

The Swords of Nier are everything the average citizen of Nishanpur is not. Where most are secretive, they are forthright. This does not make them any easier to deal with, however. The truth of the matter is that the Swords of Nier believe themselves to be a cut above anyone else. They cling to the belief that they and they alone are the chosen of Nier. They grudgingly accept other Nierites, though they do not give them any respect or deference. Anyone who is not a follower of Nier is no better than a slave to them.

In public, the Swords are largely silent. When they do speak, they keep to the low tones of other residents of the city, though their whispers are gruff, rather than sibilant. They are highly disciplined, and even in the worst weather, their patrols are like clockwork. They tolerate no disobedience, and are likely to respond to disorderly conduct with a swift strike rather than a warning. They do give some grudging respect to the Mark of Sarish, though, and generally do not hassle those who wear it. If one of the Swords does trigger a Mark, whether intentionally or otherwise, he tends to take to the ensuing combat with what almost seems like glee. For these men and women, combat is a time to unleash the destructive forces within and thereby become closer to Nier.

Though the Swords of Nier originated in the city of Erduk, in the Hinterlands, this band of fanatical Nierites entered Canceri in 1025 I.C., with the return of the Sword of the Heavens. Initially welcomed by the Nierites in Canceri, the Swords' brutish and uncivilized manners and complete disregard for the Cancere way of life has made them many enemies. They overturned the previous order of things, seizing positions of power in Nishanpur and preventing the election of a new Dark Apostate. At the order of the Sword of the Heavens, the Swords demoted many who had positions of power to menial status, and placed their own in control of the city, though most, even among the Swords, did not understand why this was being done. Not being fools, however, the Swords of Nier have grudgingly allowed the continued operation of the temple of Sarish and the Church of the Dark Triumvirate as administrative entities. The Swords' wish is to rule, not to be bureaucrats. They also left the city guard in place, although they placed members of their own organization in most leadership positions, and moved many of the most skilled warriors into the lower ranks of their own army.



Quintus Attulus val'Virdan, Autocrat of the Swords of Nier

LE Val (Virdan) Male Cleric 6/Fighter 5/Warrior of the Eternal Flame 3
Medium-size Humanoid (5'8")

CR: 14

HD: 6d8+18, 5d10+15, 3d12+9 +3 (132hp)

BAB: +12 (+14 grapple)

Init: +4 (Improved Initiative)

Spd: 20ft

AC: 23 (+10 full plate +2, +3 RoP); touch 13, flat-footed 23

Full Attack: greatsword +17/+12/+7 melee

Attack: greatsword +17 melee (2d6+9/ 19-20/x2)

Damage: greatsword 2d6+9 (19-20/x2)

Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.

SQ: Child of Nier, Rebuke Undead 4/day, To call forth his Servants: Lesser, To tap the fire within

Languages: Altharin, Cancere, High Coryani, Low Coryani, Yhing-Hir.

Alignment: Lawful Evil

SV: Fort +15, Ref +5, Will +11

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 11, Con 17, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 12

Skills: Concentration +12, Diplomacy +4, Knowledge (Religion: Nier) +10, Knowledge (Strategy & Tactics) +7, Ride +2, Search +4, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +4, Spot +6, Swim +6.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (all), Improved Critical (greatsword), Improved Initiative, Leadership, Power Attack, Shield Proficiency (includes tower), Sunder, Toughness, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Proficiency (simple & martial), Weapon Specialization (greatsword).

Blood Rank: 5

Bloodline Powers: To Know the Sight of Our Lord, None Shall Stand that Oppose the Gods, The Sword of Heaven, To Withstand the Crucible of Flame, The Puissant Warrior

Spells:

Base DC: 13+ spell level (bold for domain spells) for clerical spells or 11+spell level for WoEF spells

Spells Per Day: 5/4+1+1*/4+1/3+1

* denotes Warrior of the Eternal Flame spell

Warrior of the Eternal Flame Spells Known:

1st Level: *bless weapon*

Spells Typically Prepared:

0-Level: *detect magic, guidance, light, read magic, resistance*

1st Level: *command (2), divine favor, magic weapon, shield of faith*

2nd Level: *bull's strength, darkness (2), hold person, spiritual weapon*

3rd Level: *continual flame, dispel magic, invisibility purge, magic vestment*

Domains: Destruction, War

Possessions: +4 greatsword (flamberg) "Bladeshatter", +2 full plate "Crucible", ring of protection +3

Quintus was born to a noble family in the Nierite settlement of Erduk, in the Hinterlands. Like any other youth, he trained avidly in the martial arts. Though he was highborn, he still had to fight for prestige and position, as Erduk puts more emphasis on personal achievement than family ties. His unusually strong spiritual connection to the Lord of Flame quickly became apparent, and he received further training in the priesthood. Just as he had shown great promise as a warrior, Quintus quickly rose through the ranks as a cleric as well. At the age of 32, he defeated the previous Autocrat in single combat, proving his worth and ascending to the position himself.

In the six years since his ascension to Autocrat, Quintus has ruled with an iron fist. The return of the Sword of the Heavens initially served to solidify his position further, as it was seen as a blessing for this event to occur in his time. Since the occupation of Nishanpur began, however, Quintus' position has become shaky. Left behind while Leonydas himself marched onward at the head of the Swords, Quintus' efforts to keep Nishanpur under control have met continued resistance from the local populace. Many devout Nierites believe some impurity of the Autocrat himself has led to this inability to completely subdue the people. Quintus has reacted by becoming even more strictly devout. He believes that maintaining the Swords' grip on Nishanpur, and converting the city's people fully to the "true worship" of Nier, is and always will be his ultimate test and goal.

Talshira val'Virdan, Knight-General of the Red Fist

LN Val (Virdan) Female Fighter 4/Ranger 5/Red Fist Elite Knight 4
Medium-size Humanoid (5'2")

CR: 13

HD: 4d10+8, 5d8+10, 4d10+8 (107hp)

BAB: +13 (+14 grapple)

Init: +7 (+3 Dex, Improved Initiative)

Spd: 30ft.

AC: 22 (+3 Dex, +7 chain mail armor +2, RoP +2); touch 15, flat-footed 19

Full Attack: 2 Longswords +14/+14/+9/+4

Attack: Longsword +16 melee

Damage: Longsword 1d8+4+1d6(19-20/x2)+1d10 extra damage may be shock or flame, see possessions below.

Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.

SQ: Animal Companion, Badge of Honor, Combat Style (Two-Weapon Fighting), Ear of Sarish 2/day, Favored Enemies (Infernal +1, Milandisian +2), Masterful Rider, Wild Empathy

SV: Fort +13, Ref +11, Will +8

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 17, Cha 15

Skills: Diplomacy +5, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (local: Nishanpur) +4, Knowledge (law) +4, Ride +9, Spot +9, Listen +9, Handle Animal +9

Languages: Cincerese, Low Coryani

Feats: Armor Proficiency (all), Cleave, Endurance*, Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Initiative, Leadership, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-by Attack, Shield Proficiency, Track*, Two-Weapon Fighting*, Weapon Focus (longsword) Weapon Proficiency (simple & martial), Weapon Specialization (longsword)

Blood Rank: 3

Bloodline Powers: To Know the Sight of Our Lord, None Shall Stand that Oppose the Gods, To Withstand the Crucible of Flame

Spells:

Base DC: 13+spell level

Spells Per Day: 0/2

Spells Typically Prepared:

1st Level: *pass without trace, speak with animals*

Possessions: +1 flaming burst Sarishan steel longsword "Nier's Wrath", and +1 shocking burst Sarishan steel longsword "Sarish's Ire", +2 grace chainmail armor "Catsbreath", ring of protection +2, 150 Baht

Talshira is a native of Nishanpur, and has spent her life defending the interests of the city. She worked her way up through the ranks of the Red Fist, serving first as a footsoldier, then as a mounted Knight. She fought in the Heretic Wars, and managed to return with quite a grudge against the Milandisians. She came to the attention of her predecessor as Knight-General, Eremis val'Virdan, and in many ways Talshira became his protégé during her years of service. Eremis recognized in her a moderate voice and a steady hand. It was during these years that the Order of Hidden Flame contacted her and she began a membership in that clandestine organization.

Talshira was elevated to the rank of Knight-General eight years ago, when Eremis val'Virdan ceded the position to her so that he could take a spot on the Nihang Council. When Leonydas val'Virdan returned and the Swords of Nier arrived, like any other Nierite she welcomed them at first, hoping they would bring more equality and authority to the Nierite cause. This attitude quickly changed, however, when she realized that the Swords wanted total domination of everyone, including the local Nierites, and that their actions went completely against the ideas of reconciliation that she had long held. Talshira now quietly works to undermine their operations in Nishanpur, although she will not do so in such a fashion that it brings general disorder or damage to the city at large, since she does take seriously her charge to preserve the safety of the general population.

The goal of the Swords of Nier is to re-establish the dominance of Nier and purge the world of the "heresies" promulgated by the other gods. They fervently believe that Nier is the true ruler of all things, and that the corrupt and debased world badly needs cleansing by His holy fire. While this position does not truly mesh with the beliefs and tenets of their leader, Leonydas val'Virdan, he nonetheless sees the Swords as wayward children that will soon come to see the light with his guidance. The Swords, for their part, see

Typical Sword of Nier or Red Fist Footsoldier

LE Human Male or Female Fighter 3

Medium-size Humanoid (average 5'3")

CR: 3

HD: 3d10+12 (38hp)

BAB: +3 (grapple +5)

Init: +5 (+1 Dex, Improved Initiative)

Spd: 30ft

AC: 13 (+1 Dex, +2 armor); touch 11, flat-footed 12

Attack / Full Attack: Longsword +6 melee

Attack / Full Attack: Light Crossbow +4 ranged 80'

Damage: Longsword 1d8+2 (19-20/x2), Light Crossbow 1d8

Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.

SQ: None

Languages: Cincerese, Low Coryani, Yhing-Hir

SV: Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +1

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 14

Skills: Bluff +4, Gather Information +4, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (local: Nishanpur) +3, Spot +2, Search+3.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (all), Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Shield Proficiency, Toughness, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Proficiency (simple & martial)

Possessions: Sarishan steel dagger, Sarishan steel longsword, leather armor, 100gp in other equipment.

Description/Persona: These guards are well trained and mercenary. Many are cruel or sadistic, and most are bribable, if they will talk at all.

Leonydas as a figure of myth, rather than as a man, and place more weight on the thousands of years of doctrine they have established in his absence than on his current teachings. Indeed, Leonydas himself has never really served as the political leader of the Swords; that role is filled by the Autocrat, who is chosen from among the eligible candidates by a rite of trial by combat and who can be removed from his position by a suitable challenger in a similar fashion.

The Swords of Nier put great emphasis on martial prowess, especially on swordplay. Their favored weapon is the greatsword. They take this emphasis on skill at arms to such a degree that all members of their society in Erduk submit to military service of some degree for a portion of their lives. Furthermore, the various military units that make up the Swords' army are named after the parts of a sword, and individual ranks within each unit are graded by metallic types. Annulet, blade, back, cross, edge, guard, hilt, quillion, forte, foible, fuller, grip, pommel, tang, and tip are all unit designations. The grades are, in ascending order, brass, bronze, copper, silver, gold, steel, mithral, and adamantite. For example, a Gold Annulet would be a mid-ranking cavalry officer.

The Knights of the Red Fist

Though the Swords of Nier dominate the city of Nishanpur, they have not eliminated the existing infrastructure of the city guard, known as the Knights of the Red Fist. This corps of warriors has always been devoted to Nier, but they work closely with the priests of Sarish, who provide them with their infernal mounts. The Knights' base of operations is the Menagerie of the Red Fist in the Barren Hills Quarter, which serves as combination command post, prison, and stables for the Knights' infernal steeds. Foot patrols are the rule within the city itself, walking the city streets, alert for any trouble. Of course, "trouble" is a relative term in the City of Secrets. The Knights will not intervene in personal disputes, even if these come to violence, unless one of the parties involved is a native Val or Priest of the

Dark Triumvirate. Remember that evil acts are not crimes here. The Knights will intervene against those who try to preach of the Pantheon, those that try to incite revolt among the peasant populace, those that smuggle non-Sarishan steel weapons into the city, those that violate the sanctity of the temples of the Dark Triumvirate, and all others who violate the city's sacred laws and precepts. General theft, violence, and even murder are not their concerns. They are the police of the state, and only seek to enforce state dictates.



Mounted patrols fly the airspace above and around Nishanpur itself. Their main duties are to reinforce foot patrols as needed, and to keep the area around the city free of monsters or uncontrolled Infernals. Some Knights of a less darksome nature may occasionally accost travelers on the road to Nishanpur. Their mounts, which are called Melatorm Demons, can smell iron from up to a mile away, and these Knights will sometimes swoop down and warn travelers that non-Sarishan steel is illegal in the city proper. They may, if asked, give a brief summary of Nishanpur's laws for the travelers' benefit.

The current Knight-General of the Red Fist is an aging warrior named Talshira val'Virdan. Her position carries much less power than it once did, as she must now answer to the Autocrat of the Swords of Nier. She hides her ire well, however. She is secretly conspiring with Palic val'Mehen to remove the Swords from Nishanpur. She is also a member of a secretive organization called the Order of the Hidden Flame.

Typical Red Fist Mounted Knight

LN Human Male or Female Ranger 3
Medium-size Humanoid (average 5'3")

HD: 3d8+12 (32 hp)

BAB: +3 (+5 grapple)

Init: +7 (+3 Dex, Improved Initiative)

Spd: 30ft.

AC: 15 (+3 Dex, +2 armor); touch 13, flat-footed 12

Attack / Full Attack: Longsword +5 melee

Attack / Full Attack: Dagger +5 melee or +6 ranged 10'

Attack/Full Attack: Composite Shortbow +6 ranged 70'

Damage: Longsword 1d8+2 (19-20/x2), Dagger 1d4+2 (19-20/x2), Composite Shortbow 1d6 (x3)

Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.

SQ: None

Languages: Cangerese, Low Coryani, Yhing-Hir

SV: Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +1

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 14

Skills: Bluff +5, Gather Information +5, Handle Animal +8, Intimidate +5, Ride +9, Spot +9, Search +7, and Survival +6

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light & medium), *Endurance, Improved Initiative, Mounted Combat, Shield Proficiency (non-tower), Toughness, *Track, *Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Proficiency (simple & martial) (* Denotes Ranger Feats)

Possessions: Sarishan steel dagger, Sarishan steel longsword, leather armor, shortbow, 20 arrows, 100gp in other equipment

Description/Persona: These guards are well-trained and mercenary. Most will protect travelers, but do no more than strictly necessary.

The Order of the Hidden Flame

The Order of Hidden Flame is an organization consisting of moderate Nierites from Cangeri and Coryan who wish to see a religious reconciliation between their two nations. Cangerese members of this organization must be cautious and circumspect in their actions, as their belief in religious reconciliation is heretical to the doctrine of the Church of the Dark Triumvirate, and membership in the Order certainly would be considered treasonous by the Swords of Nier.

Members are organized into small cells, each of which has a specific mission or purpose. Most members do not know anyone in the organization beyond their immediate contacts. The society's tactics tend to be slow and calculated, as they believe their goal is a long-term one, having been slowly working for decades under the Apostasy of Hegrish val'Mordane. The current political climate is very volatile, and many within the Order see it as both very dangerous for them (as Nierites are less trusted than ever) and also a great opportunity (as any Nierites that help oust the Swords of Nier may gain a greater level of acceptance and prestige under the succeeding regime).

The Seekers of the Hidden Masters

This order, rare in other parts of Onara, has a strong presence in Nishanpur. Seeking to use any means at their disposal to bring about the return of the ancient Devil-Kings, the Seekers constantly search for ways to allow Infernals free access to roam the city. They scour the ruins of the Devil-

Ayrus Dhat, "Candle" of Nishanpur

LN, Male Dark-kin Ranger 6

Medium-size Humanoid

CR: 6

HD: 6d8+12 (45 hp)

BAB: +6/+1 (grapple +7)

Init: +6

Spd: 30 ft.

AC: 12 (+2 Dex); touch 12, flat-footed 10

Full Attack: Unarmed Strike +6/+1 melee

Attack: Unarmed Strike +6 melee

Damage: Unarmed Strike 1d3+1

Space/Reach: 5 ft. / 5 ft.

SQ: Animal Companion, Combat Style, Darkvision 60', Favored Enemies, Immunity to charm spells, Improved Combat Style, Unnatural Aura, Vision of Darkness, Wild Empathy.

Languages: Cangerese, Infernal, Low Coryani, Yhing-hir

AL: Lawful Neutral

SV: Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +4

Abil: Str 12, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 10

Skills: Bluff +4(+8,+6), Concentration +6, Handle Animal +5, Heal +6, Hide +6, Knowledge(nature) +6, Knowledge (Local) +6, Listen +9(+13,+11), Ride +4, Search +7, Sense Motive +6(+10,+8), Spot +9(+13,+11), Survival +6(+10,+8).

Feats: Endurance, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting*, Improved Unarmed Strike, Track, Two-Weapon Fighting* (* Denotes Ranger Feats)

Possessions: 30 Triumvirates.

The regional leaders of the Order of the Hidden Flame are known as 'Candles'. The Candle of Nishanpur is named Ayrus Dhat. Ayrus is a younger man – surprisingly young for his position as he is only in his twenties – and is also unusual in that he is a dark-kin. Despite his heritage, he was chosen for the position of Candle because of his intense devotion to the Order's cause, and for his superior organizational skills. Ayrus' heritage works to his advantage in one respect: no one would expect a dark-kin to lead an organization largely composed of humans and Val.

Because of Ayrus' unusual attributes and his relative youth, many of his opponents tend to underestimate his talents as a strategist and tactician. Inside the Order, however, his skill has earned him the respect of his elders, and they pay no mind to his youth.

Ayrus works as a stable hand at the Menagerie of the Red Fist. His dark-kin heritage is not a hindrance when working with the Melatorm Devils that the Red Fists use as mounts, and the position allows him to keep an eye on the activities of many of the Nierites in the city.

Huxt'xe'tnal, Hidden Master of the Seekers

Unbeknownst to the membership of the Seekers in Nishanpur, they have been more successful than they could have hoped. Their previous leader opened a gate to the Abyss, and released a terrible Infernal known as a Quara'te, which he did not have the wisdom or strength to control. The Quara'te, named Huxt'xe'tnal, quickly assimilated him.

Huxt'xe'tnal learned much from his first servant, and saw the Seekers as the perfect tools to accomplish his goals. Since they conceal their identities, the assimilation of servants becomes much simpler. Huxt'xe'tnal keeps his tendrils covered by masks and robes, and so far his subterfuge has gone undiscovered. Since the Seekers already work for many of the same goals that naturally attract Huxt'xe'tnal, he has chosen to leave most of the members of the organization uncontrolled, that they might better to do his bidding even from afar.

The Seekers knew when their leadership changed, as they saw the personality shift of the "man behind the mask." They do not suspect the truth, however, as their "leader" wears a *ring of the devil-kings*, which they believe affords him protection against any attack.

Huxt'xe'tnal has recently used his first servant to bring him an increasing number of others he can assimilate to increase his power. At first they were nameless wretches from the streets, used as raw materials to build his body. Now, however, he plots to begin assimilating more powerful and influential persons in order to extend his grasp over Nishanpur.

Kings' palaces in the Corpse Quarter, hoping to find any scrap of knowledge relating to the Devil-Kings, their powers, and how to summon them or release them from whatever bondage prevents their return to Onara. Although their numbers here are stronger than in most other places, the Seekers still strive to keep themselves and their operations well-hidden, even from each other. On the infrequent occasions that they meet, all members wear devil-faced masks and voluminous robes to conceal their identities. Many also seek out items like rings of mind shielding or rely heavily on spells that block divination magic to prevent the prying of others into their thoughts and plans.

The Ratcatchers

This rather secretive organization is composed of members of the powerful merchant families and trade organizations in Nishanpur. Their main purpose is to protect the economic and political interests of the city's cartels and guilds.

Members of the Ratcatchers will routinely buy off those that can provide information relating to profitable ventures, and they run a variety of protection and extortion rackets throughout the Trade Quarter. They also have prevented the formation of any other single large thieves' guild in the city, as they relentlessly pursue any figure or group seen as damaging or interfering with

Bashaa Karush, Master of the Ratcatchers

In addition to being the Guildmaster of the Stonemasons' Guild, Bashaa Karush is also the leading voice in the secret organization of the Ratcatchers. From his palace of marble, he oversees all the contracts and negotiations of the Guild, and also protects the profit margins of his two "families." He protects his own interests above all else, however, and makes sure he maintains his status in the political struggles of the Ratcatchers as well as managing his other businesses.

Like any other merchant in this town of deceit, Bashaa can be bought, but his price is high. Those who have been unfortunate enough to cross him have generally not lived long enough to repeat that error.

Bashaa is acquainted with Lauret Batori, and often takes potential "clients" with him to the Silken Noose. If the prospects cannot come to an arrangement with Bashaa, they are often found dead in their homes the next day, with no sign of entry or known cause for their death (except having raised the ire of Bashaa, a fact that he takes care to circulate through the city). He has gotten a reputation as a clever and cunning wizard from these assassinations, something he will neither confirm nor deny.

Despite his underhanded dealings, Bashaa is a very personable man, and has one true and pure love in his life: his young daughter Aleshia. He often brings her gifts from his journeys abroad, and caters to her every wish. If anything were ever to happen to his daughter, Bashaa would stop at nothing to utterly destroy the person who caused his sorrow.

the profits of the local guilds. Smaller groups may exist, especially in the Corpse Quarter, but as long as they do not make a nuisance of themselves by damaging the operations of the Ratcatchers, the group ignores them.

The Sisters of Nier

The Sisters of Nier are an order of Larissan oracles. The Sisters followed the remnants of the army of Leonydas val'Virdan into exile (mainly at the city of Erdum in the Hinterlands) at the beginning of the Shadowed Age.

Choosing to live the ascetic and disciplined life of the Erdukeen Nierites, the Sisters have almost completely forsaken the aspect of Larissa as goddess of love and pleasure. They devote themselves instead to the study of divination, and Larissa's aspect as Seer. Most of the Sisters of Nier come to the order later in life, often after the end of their childbearing years, or following the death of a spouse. In this way they can be sure they will not be distracted from their duties by family ties. The vast majority of Sisters are (as the name implies) female, though one or two men have served as "Sisters" within living memory.

Like the Swords of Nier, the Sisters of Nier have assimilated many of the mannerisms and traditions of the native Hinterlands peoples into their own culture over time. Unlike their more "civilized" relations that go about exquisitely groomed, the Sisters of Nier show little or no regard for their appearance. They often wear tattered robes and leave their hair long and uncombed.

Though almost all Val that join the Sisters of Nier have the val'Sheem bloodline abilities, the val'Sheem name has largely died out in the order due to extensive intermarriage with the val'Virdan families of the Swords of Nier. Very few Sisters still carry the val'Sheem name, and fewer still have both the name and the matching bloodline abilities.

Basuhe val'Virdan, Revered Mother of the Sisters of Nier

Basuhe val'Virdan is an ancient crone, eighty or ninety years old. Her teeth fell out long ago, and cataracts cloud her once-gray eyes. She shuffles about with the aid of a knurled staff, but needs little assistance otherwise. Her followers say that she "walks in vision" and that her steps will never falter.

The truth of Basuhe's visions is not doubted by any among the Sisters or the Swords. She preached for many years to prepare for the return of the Sword of the Heavens, which has now come to pass. She also predicted with great accuracy the death of the previous Autocrat.

What her followers do not know, or at any rate, do not choose to see, is that not all of her "predictions" are true visions. She knew of the inevitable death of the last Autocrat because she poisoned him on the eve of his battle with Quintus Attulus val'Virdan, assuring the young challenger's victory. Although Basuhe frequently "sees" truly – and she is indeed a gifted diviner – she will just as often fabricate a "vision" that suits her political goals and then subtly work to ensure that it comes to pass.

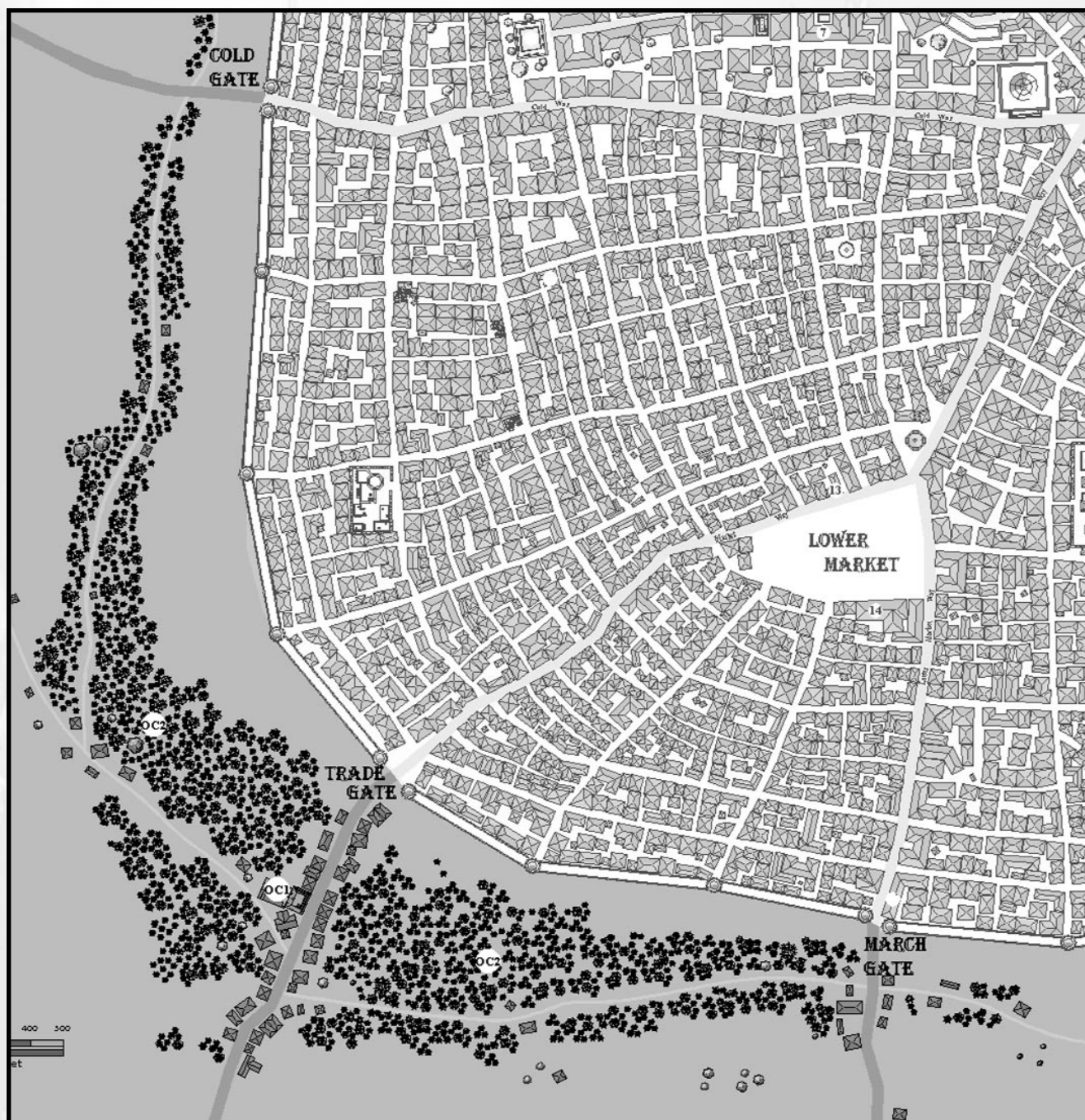
Even the Sword of the Heavens himself is not proof against her lies; when the Erdukeens marched to him in Nishanpur, the Sisters came as well. Basuhe made the long journey along with the rest of the Sisters, though she had to be carried in a palanquin, in order that she could counsel Leonydas. He accepted her as a trusted advisor, for her order had served his men loyally even before the Shadowed Age, though many of the trappings of devotion had changed.

It was Basuhe who determined which of the Cancereese were "worthy" of service, and which descended from bloodlines that had been part of the decline into decadence in days of old (such as the val'Emman). In truth this determination was at least partly made by Basuhe's assessment of who would be most likely to interfere with her plans; the ancient bloodlines had become so muddled after millennia of migration and interbreeding that almost any val'Virdan could be considered "worthy" or "unworthy" to some degree. Those she felt were dangerous to the Erdukeen cause were sent into the exile of hard labor. Others were chosen rather randomly, so that suspicion would not fall on her.

Though she is too frail and elderly to travel with Leonydas' army, she still corresponds frequently with him via spells, in order to continue her role as trusted counselor. Whether or not she has been able to contact the Sword of the Heavens since his disappearance into the Citadel of Silence is unknown, but if anyone alive were likely to be the first to receive word of Leonydas' true fate, it would be she.

Chapter Three

BRICKS AND BLOOD: THE PHYSICAL CITY



The Outer City

The area that most citizens of Nishanpur refer to as the “outer city” encompasses the lands roughly a mile or so beyond the walls of the city proper. The Outer City can be said to formally extend precisely as far as the Mark of Sarish is effective. The customs of Nishanpur still hold here, but not the laws. The formal city government does not recognize this area as qualifying for legal protections by the city’s police forces (the Swords of Nier and the Knights of the Red Fist), but the Nihangs of Nishanpur still expect business owners in the Outer City to pay annual taxes.

There are many inns in this area, as well as some merchants (mostly selling things of interest to travelers, such as Sarishan daggers – and, of course, at enormously inflated prices). There are also a growing number of shanties and tents in the fields outside the city walls.

This settled area has developed for many reasons. One is that travelers often need a way station before entering the city proper: somewhere they can store gear not appropriate or legal to take inside the walls. Another reason is that this ancient city is very crowded, and some residents prefer to risk living outside the walls rather than endure the crowded conditions within. Yet another is that the Second War of the Cleansing Flame (the name given to the recent campaigns in Canceri and Milandir following the return of the Sword of the Heavens) has left many refugees, who do not have the means to secure any accommodations better than a tent or shanty in this outer fringe area.

(OC1) The Dark Gathering

The Dark Gathering is one of the more popular inns on the road to the Trade Gate. The owner of the Dark Gathering, Zekar Kradeq, not only





maintains rooms at reasonable rates for travelers, but also provides stabling and secure storage for items not permitted within the city walls. The building has a narrow front, in typical fashion for the region, and stands three stories tall. It borders an alley on one side, which leads around to the stable gate, and a row of small shops on the other. The windows are narrow, and no windows face the street or alley on the first floor. A mural painted on the stuccoed walls around the door depicts cloaked figures moving toward the doorway under a cloudy sky. The lead figure in the mural carries a scroll, upon which "Dark Gathering" is written in Cancerese, Yhing-hir, and Low Coryani.

The inn itself is not unpleasant to those accustomed to city dwelling. The first floor is paved stone, so even on the warmest summer days the common rooms stay cool. There are large fireplaces to keep the area warm in cooler weather. There are a few small tables, but most of the common room is taken up by long tables with bench seating. Since personal space is not an issue here, several parties will often share seating at one long table, and carry on their own whispered conversations, each group conspicuously ignoring the others.

Another entrance to the Dark Gathering is through the alley alongside the building. A gate wide enough for a wagon leads into a large courtyard area behind the inn. On one side of the courtyard is a well-equipped stable; on another side is the large storage facility that Zekar maintains for the use of travelers to Nishanpur. The storage facility has no windows, and magical wards seal all entrances. Guests may enter the Dark Gathering through a door into the common room from the courtyard, and there are windows facing into the courtyard from the first floor.

The best rooms in the Dark Gathering are two private suites on the first floor. They are away from the common room, and have their own fireplaces. Zekar, the proprietor, maintains his own quarters on the second floor, which is also where the less opulent rooms are situated. The least expensive sleeping areas are on the third floor. Second and third floor rooms have windows looking out onto the street or into the back courtyard.

Zekar is used to foreign travelers, and although he, like any other native to the city, speaks in whispers, he is used to the loudness of outsiders and does not react badly to it. This is part of the reason for his success. Zekar also maintains current broadsheets with announcements in many languages, so that newly-arrived visitors can stay up-to-date with the current happenings in the city.

The prices for Zekar's storage facilities tend to be a bit high, but he guarantees the safety of items stored there. Mounts are well cared for, and he has never had a problem with items being lost or stolen. Many a traveler in the past has had reason to thank Zekar for his security and discretion.

the Dark Gathering

offers rental of secure storage for all items travelers wish to leave outside the city gates. No questions asked, safety guaranteed!

1. Small trunk storage 10 Baht a week
the perfect size for saddlebags!
2. Large trunk storage 15 Baht a week
fits a suit of armor and several weapons
3. Closet storage 25 Baht a week
a great deal for companions traveling together!
4. Wagon storage 35 Baht a week for those who need to store large quantities of goods

All storage fees include stabling of animals. Trunk storage includes stabling and care for 1 beast. Closet storage includes stabling for up to 4 beasts. Wagon storage includes stabling for 6 beasts. Additional beasts may be stabled at a rate of 2 Baht per week for each additional beast.

"Trunk" storage is available in two sizes: "Small" for weapons only (2 slots of weapons or equivalent equipment), and "Large" for both armor and weapons (one set of armor and 4 slots of weapons). "Closet" storage can hold an entire adventuring party's worth of gear (4 suits of armor and 10 weapon slots), and "wagon" storage is available for those that never travel light. Generally, a Large weapon counts as two slots, a Medium-size weapon counts as one slot, a Small weapon counts as one-half of a slot, and a Tiny weapon counts as one-fourth of a slot.

Blood Markets

A Blood Market is not a specific place; rather, it is a semi-regular event that occurs outside the walls of Nishanpur. Blood Markets usually take place near the point that the Vein Canal exits the city walls, but they can occur anywhere outside the city. Named both for the fact that much of the merchandise is alive and for the fact that these events tend to churn up the red clay of the Plains, Blood Markets are raucous gatherings where herders or traders arrange to sell large lots of forge-made goods, animals, or human slaves that would be difficult to keep control of within the city walls.

Slavers, butchers, and owners of other large interests that would benefit from purchasing in quantity attend these events, even if that means some of the purchased goods may not be in peak physical condition. Yhing-hir traders that do not wish to enter the city walls also sometimes call Blood Markets. If an expedition has sufficient goods, animals, or slaves to sell, its members will usually send a messenger ahead of their arrival by a few days, to announce the impending Market and drum up a sufficient quantity of interested buyers.

(OC2) The Shanties

In the past year, a growing number of shanties have begun springing up like mushrooms around the city walls. The denizens of these makeshift suburbs stay far enough away from Nishanpur that they are not shot by the guards on the walls, but the arrangements seem to have little other organization to them. Often a group of refugees will simply stop when they see the walls before them, just far enough from the road that the local merchants will not harass them. They will begin arranging their meager shelters around whomever they consider their representative – this is usually a family head, or perhaps merely the doughtiest fellow among them. Because of this, each small cluster of shanties often behaves like a family or mercenary unit.

Not surprisingly, the standard of living in these shanty-towns is generally not pleasant. Many shanty dwellers simply beg from passers-by, while others may seek more legitimate labor in the city or the surrounding farms. Some have turned to the more risky occupations of thievery or banditry. The shanty areas are always evolving and changing, as some groups move out and others settle in.

Every so often, the city guard or the Swords of Nier go out and roust the shanty residents. They will harass and harry the shanty folk to keep them away from the main gates, and often will arrest them for any petty offense they can think of. These sweeps often net large numbers of indigents that the guardsmen consign to the Flesh Market for sale as slaves.

Many folk die here, from starvation, disease, or misfortune; but the inconvenience of death doesn't necessarily mean that a person stops residing here. Some shanty groups do in fact house undead, as even a necromancer will be evicted from Nishanpur if he cannot pay his rent. Most folk keep to themselves, so the presence or absence of undead isn't necessarily apparent: a dead peasant in dirty rags often looks much like a living one.

Passing the Gates into Nishanpur

Because of the restriction of weapons and armor passing into the city, the Nierite guards will give a cursory search to all those entering the gates. The purpose of this search is to identify any illegal items, particularly armor and weapons (other than those made of Sarishan steel). If a PC specifically says that she wishes to hide an item on her person, an opposed Hide check against the guardsman's Spot check will suffice to elude the search for most small (palm-sized) items. A humanoid creature cannot hide armor or items too big to be palmed on her person. A Hide check can sometimes suffice to smuggle in a single larger item in a wagon or a horse's saddle bag.

If someone wishes to try to talk a guard into letting her go through the city gates as-is ("That staff isn't a weapon, I need it to support my bum leg!") then a Bluff check opposed by the gate guard's Sense Motive check might be in order. Because of their long experience dealing with sneaky travelers and their lame excuses, however, the gate guards get to add their base attack bonus to these opposed checks. Use the statistics for a typical Sword of Nier or Red Fist footsoldier if you do not have other statistics provided for your module or campaign.

Perhaps the best method for moving illegal items and contraband through the gates of the city is that oldest and most venerable of urban traditions: the well-placed bribe. Though the Swords of Nier and Knights

The Gargoyles of Nishanpur

There is an ancient folktale that explains the origins of the multitude of gargoyles in the city of Nishanpur. It is said that in the ancient days, even before the val'Mehan worshipped Sarish, they were masterful stonecarvers and masons. Life in Canceri was hard, and flying reptilian predators often harried the people.

The val'Mehan were not warriors like the val'Virdan, and they could not bring themselves to forsake the sunlight and burrow underground like the val'Mordane. Thus, they found themselves subjected to increasing losses from these predators. It was at this time that the god Sarish sent an emissary to the val'Mehan with an offer: in exchange for their worship, He would defend them. The emissary instructed the carvers who agreed to this bargain to employ all their skill and create great statues of flying beasts from the living rock around the city. For a year and a day they worked, even though many scoffed at them.

After the appointed time had passed, the val'Mehan craftsmen stared at their finished handiwork. What good were flying beasts of stone? But the spirit of Sarish entered the stone beasts and animated them. These newly-created gargoyles flew forth and slew the reptilian predators that plagued the countryside. When the gargoyles returned to the city, they then slew all those that had scoffed at Sarish's power. Since that time, no one has scoffed at the might and wisdom of Sarish, and the gargoyles remain to this day, although they have not animated again since that fateful time. Now, whenever stonecarvers (of any race or family) wish to honor Sarish, they traditionally create new gargoyles to join the ranks of those that already adorn the great city.

of the Red Fist are loyal to their cause, and are generally lawful in their outlook, the customs of bribery are so well-established in Nishanpur that virtually anyone in the city can easily be persuaded to "look the other way" for the right amount of money. A suitable bribe can range anywhere from one-tenth to one-half of the market price of the item in question, depending on how obvious the item is, how likely the guard thinks it will be that the item getting into the city will be traced back to him, and (most importantly) how much the guard thinks the individual in question is willing and able to pay.

Priests and wizards of Sarish also congregate at all the gates into Nishanpur. Their purpose is to provide travelers with the opportunity to purchase a casting of the Mark of Sarish, a spell of protection that functions within Nishanpur (for details, see Chapter 4: The Wiles of Sarish). Those entering the city can purchase a casting of the spell at the gates for 30 Baht.

The Barren Hills Quarter

The name of the Barren Hills Quarter is rather deceiving. Though it sounds bleak and empty, this is in fact a heavily populated area in the city. It has only one outer gate, the Flame Gate, and most enter this part of Nishanpur through access gates from the Trade Quarter. This most northern portion of the city is home to a large percentage of the Nierite population. It is also where the Knights of the Red Fist maintain their base of operations.

Life in this quarter of the city is more regimented than elsewhere. People rarely wander about here, as the residents generally prefer to go directly to their destinations, without much ado. Even in the Upper Market, things seem to run in a swift and orderly fashion, more like a military camp than a city. This is especially true now that the Swords of Nier have taken up residence in Nishanpur. Many of the Swords live in this quarter, having displaced some of the existing residents.

(B1) The Upper Market

The Upper Market is where much of the city's trade in armor and weaponry takes place. Under the watchful eyes

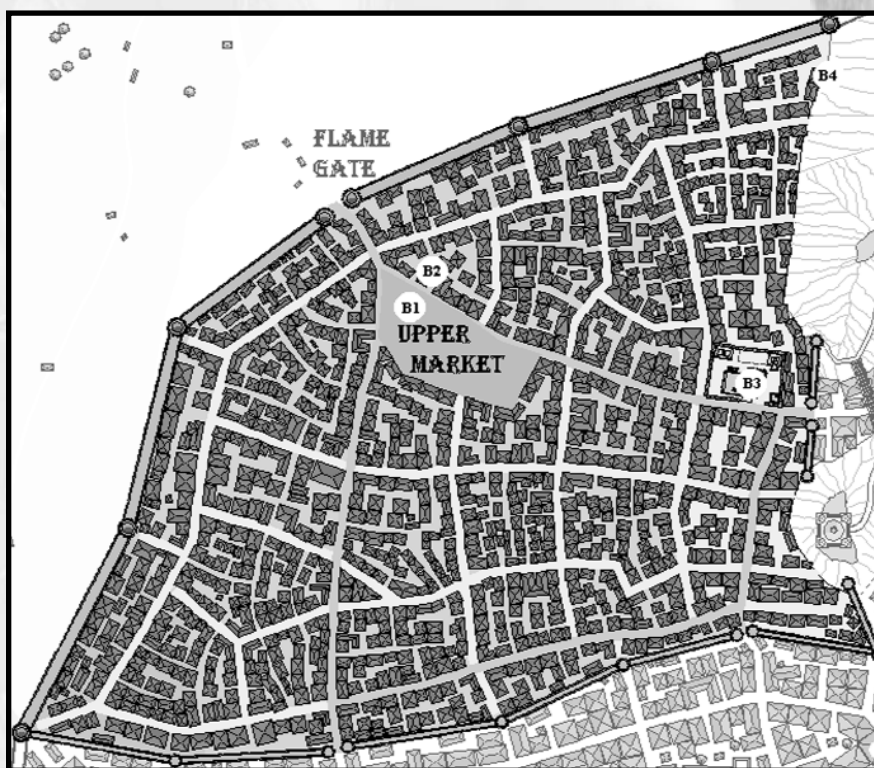
of the Knights of the Red Fist or the Swords of Nier, various smiths and armorers regularly display their wares here. Other craftsmen also set up shop here, selling specialized goods for the Red Fist's infernal mounts or providing services for the maintenance and care of unique or rare equipment. Not all the merchants deal in the accoutrements of war, however. Some sell foodstuffs or general household items. These goods, however, tend to be less varied than those found in the Lower Market, and are offered mainly for the benefit of those that do not wish to leave the quarter to procure their supplies.

(B2) Harmon's Harnessing

This establishment sits on the edge of the Upper Market, where the streets do not crowd in around the building. It caters to the needs of the Red Fist's mounted Knights, and is the preferred establishment at which to buy specialized tack and barding for both horses and more unusual mounts of all sorts. The chief craftsman of this establishment is Harmon Des, a master of the forge, as well as an expert hand at leatherwork. Harmon is a dwarf, though of which Enclave is not generally known; he has revealed only that he is not from Solanos Mor. Harmon's ruddy complexion and his easy manner of working with all manner of beasts – even the infernal ones – have led to dark rumors as to his true origins. However, as to these matters, Harmon has neither confirmed nor denied the stories of his parentage.

What Harmon has confirmed is his firm hand with the Melatorm Demons used by the Knights of the Red Fist. Each of these creatures is unique, slightly different in shape and build to all others, so each requires its own specialized equipment. Once the Sarishans that work with the Knights have bound a Melatorm into their service, Harmon is generally called to the Menagerie to measure the beast for tack and barding. The Sarishan who bound the Melatorm will stand by during this process to help control the beast if necessary, but Harmon rarely has need of such assistance. He will take into account not only the proportions of the beast, but also the desires of the rider. Some prefer, or can afford, different equipment than others. Harmon delivers the rider's first set of tack to the Menagerie when it is completed, though repairs or replacements often take place at his workshop – hence the need for open airspace around the building.

Harmon's facilities are quite extensive, and he is capable of working with several specialized materials, including Sarishan steel. When clients request such special work of him, the raw materials must be delivered to his forge, as he keeps no stock of these rare or expensive metals on hand.



A group of apprentices that work under Harmon's guidance staff his workshop. He is a firm taskmaster, and tolerates no lapse of craftsmanship. If a piece of work is not up to his standards, he will toss it back into the forge and force the apprentice to begin anew, not allowing them to rest until a suitable piece of work is achieved. Harmon will personally do the forge work for most pieces of equipment that are meant to be magically enchanted.

Harmon Des, Master-Smith

LN Dwarf Male Expert 4/Master-Smith 8

Medium-size Humanoid

CR: 12

HD: 4d6+8, 8d8+16 (83hp)

BAB: +13/+8/+3 (grapple +16)

Init: +1 (+1 Dex)

Spd: 15ft.

AC: 19 (+1 Dex, +8 Breastplate); touch 11, flat-footed 18

Attack/Full Attack: Warhammer +16/+11/+6 mele

Damage: Warhammer 1d8+5 (x3)

SQ: Master Smith, Secret of the Art, Secret of the Artisan, Secret of the Forge, Secret of the Smithy (ignium & Sarishan steel) Skill Mastery (weaponsmith & blacksmith)

Languages: Cancerese, Dwarven, Low Coryani, Yhing-Hir

AL: Lawful Neutral

SV: Fort +9, Ref +4, Will +14

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 17, Wis 15, Cha 11

Skills: Alchemy +7, Animal Handling +6, Appraise +13, Concentration +11, Craft (armorer) +27, Craft(blacksmith) +27, Craft (leatherworker) +25, Craft (tanner) +24, Craft (weaponsmith) +21, Diplomacy +1, Intimidate +1, Knowledge (metalurgy) +10, Listen +3, Profession (armorer) +5, Profession (leatherworker) +4, Search +7, Sense Motive +3, Spellcraft +6, Spot +8, Use Magical Device +12

Feats: Armor Proficiency (all), Craft Magical Arms & Armor, Endurance, Iron Will, Shield Proficiency (non-tower), Skill Focus (armorer), Skill Focus (weaponsmith), Weapon Focus (warhammer), Weapon Proficiency (simple & martial)

Possessions: Ring of Fire Elemental Command (activated), +2 Sarishan steel Warhammer "Negotiator", +3 Sarishan steel Breastplate "Compromise"

Harmon is a scarred and dour fellow, very closed-mouthed about his own life. Though he claims never to have been an adventurer, the scars he bears point to at least a few dangerous encounters. One such encounter involved the slaying of a large fire elemental, in order to activate his *ring of elemental command*. He does not advertise his ownership of this ring, however, and the burns on his body could merely be the result of his craft....

Harmon is in fact a Nol Dappan dwarf, but he moved to Nishanpur 15 years ago in order to practice the armorers' art in an environment more conducive to his own creativity. He is a master of the forge, certainly, but also enjoys the integration of skins and leathers into his works, which the heat of Nol Dappa makes difficult. Harmon has found a comfortable place in Nishanpur, and as long as his profits continue to be good, he sees no practical reason to leave.

Though he is training several apprentices, Harmon has yet to find one he would consider a true protégé.

(B3) The Menagerie of the Red Fist

This compound is the headquarters of the city guard: the Knights of the Red Fist. It is also the largest open space in the quarter, aside from the Upper Market.

The wall surrounding this compound is made of cut stone, rather than the more usual brick constructions, and it is devoid of the ever-present gargoyles that adorn so many other structures in the city. This is because the tall walls surrounding the main buildings of the Menagerie often become perches for Melatorms that fly in and out of the area, and nothing is permitted that will interfere with their flight.

The largest building here is not the administrative building; it is in fact the stables. The infernal mounts of the Knights are larger than horses, and require very stoutly-built accommodations to keep them secure. At any given time, a score of these beasts are stabled here, and another score are coming and going across the skies over the city.

Administrative functions take place in a small building next to the entrance gate. The Knights do not reside in the compound; most have residences nearby. Some Knights receive special assignments daily, but most have regular patrols and know their duties well. Another small

building in the compound serves as a jail, holding those scheduled for trial. Considering the high mortality rate among lawbreakers in Nishanpur, however, this facility is usually not very crowded. The third and largest ancillary structure in the compound is the Red Fist Armory. Here, the Knights keep all their specialized weapons, armor, and other equipment. Most Knights will outfit themselves on the premises before going on patrol, as they are not permitted to keep armor or weapons they did not themselves purchase when off-duty, and must observe the laws of the city like any other citizen when not on patrol. Most patrolmen wear the Mark of Sarish, as their duties do not preclude it, and the extra layer of protection can be quite valuable in a city where many resent the ever-present police force.

(B4) Kutir Abhyasa

The Kutir Abhyasa, or "House of Spiritual Practice," is never referred to except by this, its Cancerese name. It is the headquarters of a reclusive organization, known as the Kshatriya Antarasura, or Warriors of the Inner Demon. It is a small and unassuming building, more attention being attracted by the intricately-tattooed warriors themselves than by their modest headquarters.

The small, three-storied brick building sits at the northeastern-most corner of the Barren Hills Quarter, where the outer wall of the city meets the rocky outcrop that surrounds the Temple Quarter. The Kutir Abhyasa is, in fact, a larger building than it seems from the outside, as the brick-work abutting the outcrop disguises the fact that rooms have been added by cutting into the rock of the outcrop itself.

Elder members of this order use the front areas of the ground floor as a tattoo parlor, making a modest income (which is used to sponsor their warriors) by decorating the bodies of others. Some of their tattoos are rumored to possess special, even spiritual, qualities. A kitchen and several other utility rooms encompass the remainder of the ground floor. The upper floors, which extend a short ways into the outcrop, are arranged into blocks of small cells, much as a monastery would be. Here, the members live a simple, ascetic lifestyle, with younger members serving under the tutelage of elders.

At the rear of the topmost floor, a hallway cut into the rock spirals off into a long downward stair. This stairway branches several times, each fork leading to a small, isolated chamber deep within the rock. These chambers are used for isolated meditations and for practicing the strict lessons of mental discipline the order teaches.

In the past year, many of the mid-ranking members of the order have departed the city, leaving Nishanpur on a voyage northward for some unspoken purpose. Only the eldest remain behind, continuing to train the youngest, so that whatever dangers or trials may come, the order will endure.

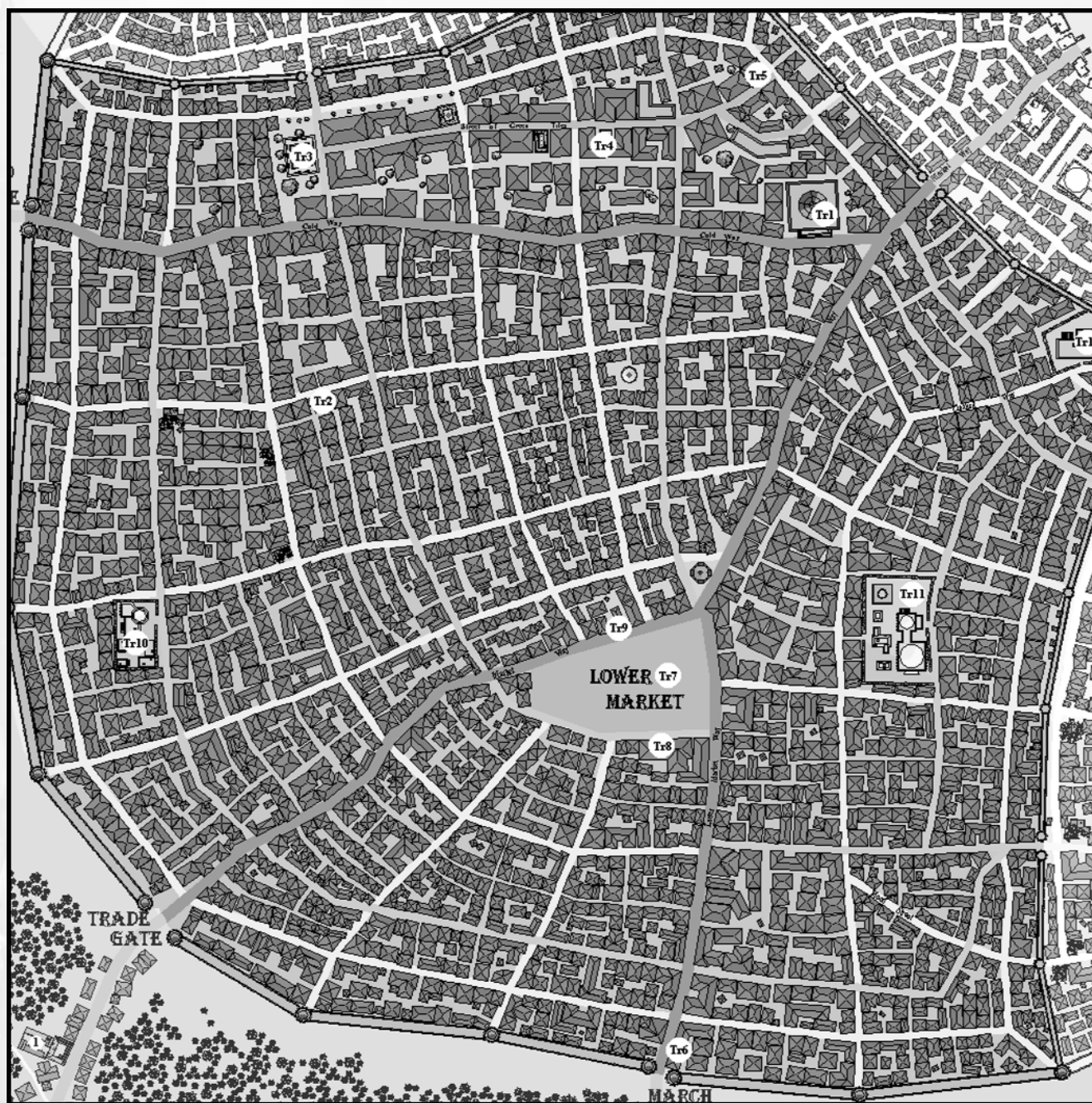
The Trade Quarter

This quarter is the one that most visitors to Nishanpur know best. This is easily the busiest, and most densely populated, area of the city. Here, the buildings crowd in on the streets, and the flat roofs of the buildings form balconies and terraces rising up several stories. Most buildings do not have ground floor windows facing the street, relying on light wells or windows facing onto courtyards for illumination. Residents plaster and paint many buildings in this quarter with bright colors and geometric patterns. Main streets are paved in cut stone, to better support the large volume of traffic.

Three gates give access to the Trade Quarter from the outside, the largest of which is the aptly-named Trade Gate. The others are the Cold Gate and the March Gate, which lead off onto the Cold Plains Road and the Red March, respectively.

(TR1) The Grand Library

The Grand Library of Nishanpur is an imposing structure indeed. Easily standing twelve stories tall, the building appears to be a tower, but is actually more like a ziggurat, each floor just slightly smaller than the one beneath it. The library is constructed of solid stone, rather than the more common brick buildings of the city. Gargoyles and other statuary cover the narrow ledges, and brightly painted bas-reliefs of gods, demons, and Valinor ornament the walls. A dome-shaped observatory, from whence scholars observe the heavens, caps the top floor. Though it has fallen on somewhat hard times of late, sages once rated this library as



one of the best in all Onara, ranking it with Coryan's great library. Only the Shrine of Althares' Memories in Altheria and the mythical lost library of the First City are said to have surpassed the Grand Library of Nishanpur during its heyday.

The ground floor has an entrance that opens out onto the Cold Way, and the library is open to the public during daylight hours. Each floor of the library holds specialized collections of lore from all over Onara. The ground floor holds a copy of the complete legal code of Nishanpur, as well as books pertaining to the history of the city and of Canceri, and many other public records. The second floor deals with lore pertaining to the Coryani Empire, and the third to Milandir. The fourth floor houses the records of Canceri's dealings with the Hinterlands, and the fifth with Altheria. Collections of lore related to the study of magic, and Canceri's collected knowledge of the Isle of Ymandragore reside on the sixth floor. The seventh floor and above are rarely seen by the public. They are said to contain, among other collections, lore relating to the Gods, Valinor, and Infernals, and histories of many ancient or lost civilizations of Onara. The records of Nishanpur's time under the rule of the Devil-Kings were stored here as well.

Unfortunately, although the plaques and descriptions on each floor of the Great Library make reference to the mighty collections of

knowledge that were once kept here, in point of fact the shelves are currently all but bare due to the depredations of the Swords of Nier, who ordered the burning of all texts that did not fit with their view of the world upon their assumption of control of the city. The last Archivist of the Histories was Kelimrhe val'Virdan, a devotee of Nier and a magic-user of some skill. While being a Nierite in the city during this past year may seem to be contradictory to Kelimrhe's role as a librarian and protector of knowledge, it in fact made his job somewhat easier. In the past, he had publicly disagreed with some of the rulings of the Church of the Dark Triumvirate. This made it less difficult for him to blend in with the invading Erdukeens, pretending to support their doctrines.

The lip service he gave the Swords of Nier bought the Archivist enough time that he was able to remove many of the rarest and most valuable texts in the library's collections and allow the Sarishans to place them in safe storage until such time as the Erdukeen oppression ends. Kelimrhe personally supervised the burning of many of the more common texts, in order to make the Swords of Nier believe he had purged all "heretical knowledge" from the Great Library's collections. In exchange for this display of loyalty, the Swords then promptly demoted Kelimrhe to the position of bricklayer elsewhere in the city. His subordinate, a monk named Kadyre, now tends what remains of the once-great library.

Kelimirhe val'Virdan, Ex-Archivist of the Histories

LN Val (Emman) Male Fighter 2/Sorcerer 8

Medium-size Humanoid (5'6")

CR: 10**HD:** 2d10+6, 8d4+24 (70hp)**Init:** +2 (+2 Dex)**Spd:** 30ft**AC:** 16 (+2 Dex, +2 armor, +2 RoP); touch 14, flat-footed 14**Attack / Full Attack:** Greataxe +10/+5**Damage:** Greataxe 1d8+3 (x3)**Special Qualities:** Summon Familiar**Languages:** Cincerese, Low Coryani, Yhing-Hir, Milandisian, Altharin**SV:** Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +8**Abilities:** Str 12, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 17, Wis 15, Cha 18**Skills:** Concentration +10, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +8, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (religion) +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Profession (scribe) +8, Search +7, Spellcraft +9.**Feats:** Armor Proficiency (all), Dodge, Mobility, Scribe Scroll, Shield Proficiency (all), Spell Focus (evocation), Spell Penetration, Weapon Focus (greataxe), Weapon Proficiency (simple & martial),**Bloodrank:** 1**Bloodline Powers:** To Know the Sight of Our Lord**Spells:****Base DC:** 14 + spell level (+2 for bold spells)**Spells Per Day:** 6/7/7/6/4**Spells Known:****0-Level:** *arcane mark, detect magic, detect poison, disrupt undead, flare, light, mage hand, open/close***1st Level:** *burning hands, detect undead, identify, magic missile, shocking grasp***2nd Level:** *flaming sphere, invisibility, scorching ray***3rd Level:** *fireball, greater magic weapon***4th Level:** *ice storm***Possessions:** +2 Sarishan steel Greataxe "Opener of Ways", +2 Bracers of Armor, Ring of Force Shield, Iron Bands of Binding

Kelimirhe is middle-aged, and has curly black hair and a beard. He normally wears simple red robes. He is a follower of the philosophies of Nier, although he does not agree with the Swords of Nier in their extremist views. His influence with the Nierites of Nishanpur before the return of the Sword of the Heavens was sufficient for him to gain a seat on the Nihang Council.

Kelimirhe loves knowledge for its own sake, and has spent many long hours in research at his library. It has been said of him, "he would leap into the mouth of a volcano, if it would let him learn something no other man knew."

The coming of the Swords of Nier changed much in Kelimirhe's life. Though he sought to deceive the Swords into believing him loyal, his efforts only resulted in his demotion to the position of bricklayer, as his family line was not considered "pure" enough to grant him a more prestigious position. He now seeks ways to overthrow the Swords, and regain his previous position at the Grand Library. His hatred of the Swords only grows with each brick he lays.

(TR2) The Velvet Glove

Those who visit the Velvet Glove had best come prepared. There is an old saying that avows, "The velvet glove can oft conceal an iron fist." In this case, at least, that is certainly true. The Velvet Glove is a bar in the Trade Quarter, but it is no ordinary drinking establishment. Rather, this is a place where the visitor should come prepared to prove his physical prowess. Behind the main bar area is a fighting ring, roped off in a courtyard. Around the ring a sit a few benches, though the majority of spectators will stand to watch the fights there, usually crowding the ropes and exchanging whispered bets for their favorites.

Gzegorz Mariel, a former adventurer who found the City of Secrets to his liking, runs the establishment. He has decorated it with mounted animal heads, weapons, and all manner of other souvenirs from his adventuring career. He serves all manner of potent potables, and usually some form of hot food as well. Though the cooking here isn't of high quality, the prices aren't unreasonable either. The Velvet Glove doesn't have any rooms, catering more to the residents of Nishanpur than to travelers.

Gzegorz's rules are simple: cash on the barrelhead, no credit. Anyone in the bar is fair game for a challenge, though a physically incapable per-

son may appoint a champion. A challenge can only be refused if the person being challenged has already fought once that night. Gzegorz maintains a bouncer, Marekal, who is also currently the bar's "champion." Marekal is a dark-kin, and known to have training in unarmed combat. Gzegorz will usually send Marekal in to fight for him if he is personally challenged, unless he feels particularly slighted by his challenger. It isn't that Gzegorz won't fight for himself; he will, and has never lost, but he prefers to keep his eye on his cashbox, since others have tried to rob him while he was the ring before.

There are no pre-defined stakes on the fights other than honor, or whatever wagers the individual competitors choose to place. Of course, side-betting is always going on, and the odds are always against anyone foolish enough to challenge Gzegorz or Marekal. During a challenge, it is customary for both combatants to fight unarmed and unarmored, and for the brawl to continue until one party or the other is rendered unconscious. Other arrangements are acceptable, however, so long as both parties agree beforehand. Violations of the rules governing a particular contest are harshly punished by the spectators and the proprietor alike. The Velvet Glove has a reputation for being dangerous and bloody, but it also has a reputation for being fair.

Even the help here are fighters, after a fashion. The bartenders, cooks, and other servants hired (or bought) by Gzegorz all receive training from him. After enough time and training, a slave will typically challenge Gzegorz for his or her freedom. Gzegorz will gladly free any of his slaves who can fight Marekal to a standstill. Marekal himself was once a slave; he won his own freedom in Gzegorz's ring and as a result is very loyal to his employer.

Marekal, Champion of the Velvet Glove

LE Male Dark-Kin, Monk 8

Medium-size Humanoid

CR: 8**HD:** 8d8+16 (59 hp)**BAB:** +6/+1 (grapple +12)**Init:** +7**Spd:** 50 ft.**AC:** 16 (+3 Dex, +3 Monk); touch 16, flat-footed 13**Full Attack:** Flurry of blows (Unarmed Strike) +5/+5/+0 melee**Full Attack:** Unarmed Strike +6/+1 melee**Attack:** Unarmed Strike +6 melee**Damage:** Unarmed Strike 1d10+2**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.**SA:** Flurry of blows, Ki strike**SQ:** Darkvision 60', Fast movement, Immunity to charm spells, Purity of body, Slow fall 40ft., Still mind, Unnatural Aura, Vision of Darkness, Wholeness of body**Languages:** Low Coryani, Cincerese, Infernal, Yhing-hir**AL:** Lawful Evil**SV:** Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +7(+9)**Abil:** Str 14, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 10**Skills:** Balance +12, Bluff +5, Listen +11, Move Silently +12, Sense Motive +12, Spot +11, Tumble +13.**Feats:** Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Evasion, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Improved Unarmed Strike, Stunning Fist**Possessions:** 30 Triumvirates

Tactics: During a challenge, Marekal's favorite tactic is to talk his opponent into a blindfolded fight. With his blind-fighting ability, Marekal is hardly at a disadvantage under such circumstances.

The Street of the Green Tiles

The Street of the Green Tiles is home to the most exclusive and successful merchant families in Nishanpur. It earns its name from the green tiles that pave the street, but the tiles are far more than a single uninteresting swatch of color. In fact, the pavement in front of the fine buildings here is one vast mosaic, inlaid into which are the names of the families living in this quarter, along with illustrations depicting their various business ventures. Horse or cart traffic is not permitted on this finest of streets, as the rough hooves of the beasts would damage the precious tiles.

Most of the residents here maintain offices in their homes, so that those who seek them for reasons of business can easily make contact. The business folk who keep residence here include the heads of several trade cartels, high-end jewelers, and crafters of magic items, among others. This street is not where people go to window shop, so guards approach those who dawdle around these upper-crust homes and offices and ask them to move along. Most merchants here also have their own security forces on the payroll, so anyone who seeks to gain entry without an appointment is likely to meet strong resistance.

(TR3) The Shrine of Swift-Winged Salvation

This open-air park is a surprise to many visitors who visit the City of Secrets. In such an urbanized area, especially one of so dark a reputation, to come upon such a place of simple beauty can be startling. Surrounded by trees and well-tended grass is an elegant marble shrine. Within one finds another mystery: the only object enshrined by this carefully maintained facade of stone is an ancient and crumbling gargoyle. Carved of the native stone of the outcrops, this beastly figure appears so old and worn that its features are nearly unidentifiable. Pits and gouges cover the stone in several locations.

Local legend has it that this ancient figure was one of the original gargoyles carved long ago by those first masons who were granted the wisdom of Sarish's teachings. This gargoyle supposedly defended the ancient city long ago, and, if the city is ever again threatened by destruction, it will once again rise to defend the faithful of Sarish.

(TR4) House of Stone

The House of Stone is the largest, and most elaborate, building on the Street of Green Tiles. It is the main guildhall of the Architects' and Stonecutters' Guild, and for themselves they build only the best. The House of Stone is constructed of high-quality and tough granite, faced in beautifully polished marble. The whole structure stands three stories tall, and is fitted with intricately-carved doors and windows of colored glass.

A marble fountain sits in front of the building, pumping fresh water through an elaborately-sculpted array of tiny gargoyles perched on a miniature tower. The fountain falls into a reflecting pool, one of only a few areas of open water in the whole city. Even the fountain is constructed with the best craftsmanship; down to the miniature tower's tiny doors and glass windows, which are fully functional.

The building not only serves as the Guild's offices, but also as the home of the current Guildmaster, Bashaa Karush, and his family. Oddly enough, though he is not Sarishan, Bashaa has an affinity for cats, which his daughter adores. Many cats wander the House of Stone, and Bashaa will not willingly harm a cat, if he has any way to avoid it. He keeps a large white cat in his office with him, which he sees as a snide comment on his position as head Ratcatcher.

(TR5) The Silken Noose

The Silken Noose is a high-class and exclusive establishment, found at the eastern end of the Street of Green Tiles. The outside of this establishment is well-kept but unassuming, although in the warmer months a colorful Jafal bird sits in a bronze cage outside the door. Almost anything can be had here – for the right price – whether the seeker wants to try his luck with dice or other games of chance, wishes the services of a slave or Larissan priestess for the evening, or instead prefers the more potent embrace of a mysteriously distilled alchemical substance.

Many visitors come to the Noose often, merely indulging in the finest food and drink, or the occasional game of dice, without ever learning what other services can be obtained. It is (on the surface) one of the best restaurants in the city, serving food fit for rulers, at an appropriately inflated price. There are no menus here, and no price lists. As the saying goes, "if you have to ask, you can't afford it."

The restaurant and bar area is lushly appointed, with private tables and intimate lighting. Diners sit around low tables on cushions laid on raised daises. A staff musician, trained in the bardic arts, plays soothing music throughout the evening. Gauzy, colored curtains

Lauret Batori, Proprietress of the Silken Noose

NE Dark-Kin Female Bard 5/Assassin 3/Cleric 5 (Larissa)

Medium-size Humanoid (5'3")

CR: 13

HD: 5d6+5, 3d6+3, 5d8+5 (67hp)

BAB: +8/+3 (grapple +8)

Init: +3 (+3 Dex)

Spd: 30ft

AC: 17 (+3 Dex, +4 Bodice)

Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft

Attack / Full Attack: Dagger of Venom +9/+4

Attack / Full Attack: Spiked Chain +13

Damage: Dagger of Venom 1d4+1 (19-20/x2) + poison, Spiked Chain 2d4 (x2) +1d6 sonic

SQ: Bardic music, Bardic knowledge, Countersong, Darkvision 60', Death Attack, Fascinate, Inspire Competence, Inspire courage +1, Poison Use, Rebuke undead, Sneak Attack +1d6, Spontaneous casting

Languages: Cancerese, Low Coryani, Milandisian, Yhing-Hir

AL: Neutral Evil

SV: Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +8

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 17, Cha 18

Skills: Bluff +14, Concentration +9, Diplomacy +14, Disguise +8, Escape Artist +7, Gather Information +12, Heal +8, Hide +8, Knowledge (religion: Larissa) +6, Listen +5, Move Silently +11, Perform +11, Sense Motive +14, Spellcraft +9, Spot +9, Use Rope +6

Feats: Armor Proficiency (all), Shield Proficiency (non-tower), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (whip) Fishmonger, Honeyed Tongue, Judge of Character, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Proficiency (simple & assassin)

Assassin Spells:

Base DC: 12 + spell level

Spells per Day: 0/2/1

Spells Typically Prepared:

1st Level: *change self, detect poison*

2nd Level: *darkness*

Bard Spells:

Base DC: 14 + spell level

Spells per Day: 3/4/2

Spells Known:

0-Level: *daze, detect magic, mage hand, mending, read magic, resistance*

1st Level: *detect secret doors, expeditious retreat, hypnotism, sleep*

2nd Level: *delay poison, hold person, invisibility*

Cleric Spells:

Base DC: 13 + spell level (bold for Domain spells)

Cleric Spells Per Day: 5/4+1/3+1/2+1

Spells Typically Prepared:

0-Level: *cure minor wounds, guidance, purify food and drink, resistance, virtue*

1st Level: *bless, charm person, command, cure light wounds, divine favor,*

2nd Level: *augury, calm emotions, cure moderate wounds, hold person,*

3rd Level: *cure serious wounds, deeper darkness, suggestion*

Domains: Charm*, Flesh, Luck

Possessions: Bodice of the Sacred Harlot, Dagger of Venom "Aspergil", Screaming Spiked Chain +2 "Dominator"

Lauret has not always been the alluring female she is today. In fact, as a young bard, she was once a *he*! Lauret came upon the Bodice of the Sacred Harlot during her training as an assassin, and quickly discovered that wearing it transformed her into a female. She embraced the change, as it provided a near-perfect cover. She even found her path as a devotee of Larissa, worshipping the Goddess' dark aspect as the Giver of Pain and Delight.

Today, Lauret owns the Silken Noose, which she uses as a cover for her illicit activities. Lauret's most unusual tasks deal with torture rather than death, and she delights in causing pain, poisons being her specialty. She also provides assassination services to those who can afford her truly exorbitant rates. One of her favorite tactics is to have her target escorted to the Noose as a guest. She can then spend the evening beguiling her target with her copious charms (magical and otherwise). During this time, she will cast a *delay poison* on the target. During the course of the evening's eating and drinking, Lauret can then poison the target liberally, knowing that the effects of the various poisons will be deferred until much later, when she cannot personally be connected to the victim's sudden and grisly demise. In this way, several unwitting souls have spent their last meal with this lovely lady, never knowing it was this beautiful creature that caused their beastly deaths.

When Lauret is forced to kill outright rather than by subterfuge, she will attempt to use her charms to bluff her opponent, and use her assassin's death attack if possible. She prefers to hedge her bets, and will always leave a path of retreat open.

provide privacy, while allowing light to gently filter through the room. Patrons' orders are taken quickly and discreetly, and regulars can have their "usual" brought as soon as they take their seats. Gambling (along with the other, more private pursuits) takes place in small upstairs rooms, whose furnishings can quickly be customized to suit nearly any patron's particular requirements.

Although the Silken Noose is one of the worst-kept secrets in Nishanpur, there is surprisingly little talk of it. The proprietress of the establishment, a hauntingly beautiful dark-kin by the name of Lauret Batori, prefers to keep it that way. Only after an initial subtly conducted "interview" by the proprietress will the visitor have access to many of the more exclusive options available. She only offers these services to those who can afford them, or from whom she knows she can elicit favors. Lauret keeps careful tabs on the wishes of her clients, and has an almost uncanny ability to detect just what it is someone really wants, even if they themselves are uncertain. The intensely personal service here, however, does come at a price. Lauret requires all her clients to sign a Sarishan-bound contract, one that keeps them quiet about exactly what services they receive from her. The same, in turn, goes for her suppliers. In this simple fashion, she has managed to keep the full breadth and depth of her operations in shadow. No one, other than herself, knows the whole extent of what goes on behind the iron-grated door.

The truth is that while many of Lauret's clients seek out dark pleasures indeed, others seek merely to secure "services" that are best carried out under cover of darkness and that often end with a body or two splashing into the Vein of Sarish. Lauret herself is a highly trained Larissan priestess, a follower of an especially dark aspect of the goddess. She has great skill in manipulating others, through both pain and pleasure, and often both at once. Some seek this out voluntarily; others become subject to her skills by the wishes of others. None leave quite the same as before. A few have never left at all, either through death or mental incapacitation. Lauret also has connections with the Troupe of the Final Note and many of the other underworld factions that vie for dominance in Nishanpur.

(TR6) The Ebon Steed

The Ebon Steed is one of the largest inns in Nishanpur, positioned on Lower Market Way, just inside the Trade Gate. The Steed is operated by a party of retired adventurers, who called themselves the Ebon Brotherhood. They named the inn for one of the treasures they discovered, a great stallion carved of black marble. Unwilling to part with it, as it seemed so fitting a symbol of their group, they instead made it the showpiece of the Inn's common room. It now proudly stands just past the entrance, pointing the way inside with one upraised hoof. Many of the regulars to the inn have taken to rubbing the great beast's nose for luck as they leave, which has resulted in a slightly scuffed spot on the end of the muzzle, but the proprietors don't mind. They do the same thing.

The proprietors themselves are something of an odd bunch. Once adventurous mercenaries, they have now decided to settle down in Nishanpur and make a serious living. Though not all of them are originally from Canceri, they are happy enough to stay here, as the profits have been reasonably good. Lately, the influx of travelers has diminished somewhat, but in wartime, this does not surprise them. They hope that the situation is resolved soon, though, as their business is beginning to feel the pinch.

The Ebon Brotherhood, as the ex-adventurers call themselves, consists of a Cancere dark-kin named Irishum Dagan, an Altherian gent named Masgava val'Abebi, a mysterious dwarf named Arekal Maxun, and a human woman named Nadinta Zakati. Nadinta has borne children to both Masgava and Irishum, and both of her offspring live on the premises with their mother. Her daughter by Irishum, Arwia, is 10, and appears fully human, while her son by Masgava, Enusat, is 7, and has his father's gray eyes.

This unlikely family (including Arekal) occupies the entirety of the top floor of the Steed's four-story building. The second and third floors are dedicated to guest rooms that can comfortably sleep anywhere from one to six people. The bottom floor has a large common room and kitchen, as well as a bar that stays open well into the wee hours of the night. As long as those staying here have a room, they are not breaking curfew to sit up and drink, a fact that has earned the group more than a few coins from residents of the city whose drinking kept them out longer than expected.

The Ebon Steed is popular with travelers from Milandir and Coryan, as they can get food from their native lands, and the proprietors do not react badly to the occasional raised voice, though they only whisper themselves. The inn's rates are reasonable, and for an additional fee, Nadinta will sometimes allow Arwia or Enusat to serve as Nishanpur tour guides, directing respectable travelers to the major attractions in the Trade or Temple Quarters. She will not allow her children to lead guests through the Barren Hills or the Corpse Quarter, as she fears for their safety in those parts of the city.



(TR7) The Lower Market

The Lower Market is where a large volume of the day-to-day trade in the city takes place. It is here that the visitor will find much of the traffic in household goods: foodstuffs, basic goods, and utensils. Travelers can acquire finished wares, pottery, and almost any necessary adventuring gear here. The craftsmen here do sell a great many masterwork-quality items, at appropriately inflated prices, of course.

Prices are variable, as haggling is a way of life, and the GM who wishes to adjudicate purchases here is encouraged to play this out. Remember that an NPC merchant is likely to have many inherent prejudices, often treating Val with deference, and certainly regarding non-Cancere with some inherent level of scorn. A contested roll of the Appraise, Diplomacy, or Black Market skills can help swing a transaction if PCs need a little help. A character clever enough to make an Appraise check before deciding what to purchase should occasionally be rewarded, as things are not always what they seem here. A supposedly masterwork item might sometimes have carefully-disguised flaws.

Most of the merchants here display their wares on tables, in booths, or even just on rugs laid in any open space. The entire square often becomes a maze of milling people, and those residents of the city not wanting to shop often avoid the area altogether, as passing through the throng of buyers and sellers can take quite a long time.

The buildings ringing the Lower Market are mainly inns, taverns, restaurants, and brothels, catering to the various hungers of the passers-by. The one major exception is the Factors' Guildhall.

(TR8) Factors' Guildhall

The Factors' Guildhall is the largest building in the Lower Market. The decoration outside its doors depicts a woman holding a set of scales. It is open to the public, unlike many guildhalls, because its main function is to

provide currency-exchange services to the city's merchants and their potential customers alike. Long counters, many small tables, and private offices fill the entire bottom floor of the hall. Here visitors can exchange currency, pawn gems, and have ingots weighed, all at only moderate fees. Trained workers are available to appraise and certify the market price of jewelry and art objects, and can even help broker the sale of such rare and expensive treasures, for a percentage (usually 2-5%) of the appraised item's value.

The services available here are surprisingly fair and unbiased in this city of deception and lies. The Guild Master, Bethgeer Malkuth, realizes that the City of Secrets thrives on trade, and by keeping all transactions above-board, she makes sure that her own business flourishes. She knows that if she were to allow corruption to take root in her guild, in the end, her own profits would be hurt, as visitors would not trust her employees or make use of her services.

Bethgeer also knows that discretion lends itself to success. She will appraise, and even sometimes help fence, items that are illegal within Nishanpur, as long as she feels she does not endanger herself by doing so. She has contacts within several of the underworld groups that vie for power in the city. Non-nobles can sell flintlocks to her, as she is Altherian, and would rather buy the firearms away from those not entitled, instead of alienating a customer by seizing them. If a flintlock is part of a large appraisal job, she will claim the weapon as her fee in lieu of other payment.

(TR9) The Stout

Across the market square from the Factor's Guildhall sits a rather small structure, one that may seem rather out of place in Nishanpur. The painted door is only 4' tall, and the only sign of what may lie beyond the small door is a sign of a half-full mug of ale. Some folk laugh at this establishment, but yet it does sufficient business that it has never been in danger of closing.

The Stout is in fact an inn, run by a gnome, one Darius Mecodan, who specifically and exclusively caters to the needs of the dwarves and gnomes of the city. As a youngster, Darius was enraged at the way the bulk of the populace treated gnomes, and to a lesser extent, dwarves. Always being looked down upon (literally and figuratively) made him bitter, and his answer was simply to return the scorn by ignoring all those who are not of the "short folk." Darius' establishment therefore only serves those short enough to enter the door without stooping, and he even goes to the extent of having his dwarven bouncer forcibly remove the occasional curious human-sized traveler that crawls in. His prices are a bit high, but his regulars don't complain. In exchange, they receive chairs, tables, and beds that are the "right" size, instead of too large or too tall. Everything here is kept within easy reach, and a "short" joke is the quickest way to find oneself the recipient of extreme bodily injury.

Darius discriminates strictly on height, not on religion or creed. He will even willingly put up the occasional dwarven Reaver of Bealak Gempor that travels through, as he can understand their bitterness and scorn for the "human" world. Several Reaver plots have been hatched over ale in The Stout's private rooms. Darius cannot join their order, of course, but he has no qualms about supplying the Reavers with information and the occasional batch of supplies.

(TR10) Confraternity of the Just Death

The Confraternity was a small order of monks that preached the doctrines of Illiir. They managed to barely avoid persecution at the hands of the agents of the Dark Triumvirate by masking their teachings with the idea that death needed to have meaning, a concept that was appealing to many members of the region's Nerothian populace. When the Sword of the Heavens emerged from his imprisonment, however, everything changed. In Leonydas' rampage across Nishanpur, the Confraternity was one of the establishments put to the sword and the flame.

Fortunately for the monks, they were not completely unprepared for such an eventuality. Although some, including the former Prior of the local order, died in the chaos, many of the monks escaped into the city, where members of their congregation hid them until the worst had passed. The Prior, along with three brothers, delayed the soldiers of the Swords of Nier long enough that the brothers were even able to remove the holy objects of Illiir from the Confraternity's central chapel.

Since that dark day, the monks have tried to make the best of their situation. Having given up their robes and tonsures, they now go about like any other residents of the City of Secrets. They still try to help their small Illiirite congregation, and make stealthy preparations in anticipation of the day when they can reopen their monastery.

A few of the more courageous monks have even begun secretly rebuilding their chapel. Within a month of the Confraternity's initial destruction, the monks had cleaned up and reconsecrated the chapel of Illiir in the center of their former monastery. They have even replaced their holy relics within the chapel, right under the noses of the Swords of Nier. After all, if the Swords are so bent on searching for heretics, what could be a better place to keep Illiir's relics than a chapel that has already been "cleansed" by Nier's fire? Though the monks of the Confraternity are careful not to be seen coming and going, and they leave the visible portions of the buildings in ruin, several of the central rooms have also been repaired, and see sporadic use for important rituals to Illiir. Still, a single misstep or betrayal could find the entirety of the Confraternity hanging in tatters from the walls of Nishanpur as a warning to other heretics.

(TR11) Ruined Temple of the Pantheon

In the heart of the bustling Trade Quarter sits one particularly noteworthy large and derelict ruin. Once a shining and beautifully decorated structure, this temple to the Twelve Gods of Onara has long been overgrown and abandoned. Completed during the reign of the val'Dellenov Emperors of Coryan, this temple to the Pantheon had been in service for barely a score of years before Canceri broke with the Empire. When the citizens of Nishanpur rebelled after Becherek's death, this building was burned, and the temple has lain abandoned ever since. The mob only removed the holy relics of Nier, Neroth, and Sarish before the building's desecration; the articles of faith to the other members of the Pantheon were destroyed.

The citizenry largely ignores or avoids the area of this desecrated and deserted temple. Most believe that looters ransacked it long ago and nothing of value remains. Others believe that to go into the abandoned temple might bring down some curse from the gods. Many simply acknowledge that being caught in the temple by the Swords of Nier would be grounds for arrest and possible execution on a charge of heresy.

The official stance of the government on this building is less straightforward than might be expected. The Nihangs of Nishanpur have never allowed the temple precincts to be demolished or cleared, even though the city itself is quite crowded, and new construction would quickly fill the space. When pressed on the subject, the only official response has been that this temple was one of the places where the holy prophet Becherek once preached, and so it is preserved as it is. Since the place was cleansed long ago by Nier's fire, now only the natural decay of Neroth will be permitted there.

In truth, the Nihangs are more concerned about this particular temple because of a prophecy that was revealed during a Larissan ceremony performed at the temple's original dedication. The Sarishans keep this prophecy hidden, as they fear that the temple is part of it, and knowledge of the prophecy may in part lead to its fulfillment. The words of the prophecy are as follows:

He who seeks ancient truth
Shall be himself lost in deception
He who seeks to destroy the gods
His weapons shall turn against him
When the houses of the twelve fall
A dark heart shall descend from the heavens
All secrets shall be revealed
And the temples fall into a sea of blood.

(TR12) The Silver Cage

The Silver Cage is located on the end of the Cloaked Way, where it runs into the wall of the Temple Quarter. The Priesthood of Sarish operates the establishment, which is named after the colloquial term for a Sarishan contract. The Cage is the largest public scriptorium in Nishanpur, and one of the largest in all of Canceri. Here people can come, and for a fee, have documents fair-copied, contracts drafted, oaths witnessed, and any number of other clerical services performed.

Fees for these services vary; for dictation and fair copying the price is generally one Triumvirate per page. Translations start at one Baht per page, and increase in cost depending on the difficulty and rarity of the language needing translation. Contracts and oaths vary in price depending on the complexity and number of parties involved; the rates generally start at 30 Triumvirates and go up from there. For ancient, rare, or magical documents, the Sarishans will usually include in their fee a requirement that permission be given for their order to retain a copy of the text.



A small open-air courtyard area surrounds the scriptorium, insulated from the traffic outside by a tall glazed brick wall. Atop this wall sit more of the beautifully-carved and ever-present gargoyles of Nishanpur. On sunny days, many Sarishan scribes prefer to work outdoors on stone benches scattered throughout this courtyard.

The main floor of the scriptorium is surprisingly open to the outside air. Large windows provide natural light to the rooms, and mirrors reflect light into the hallways and corridors. There is excellent air circulation, and unlike many other libraries, the atmosphere inside the Silver Cage is not at all musty. This is mainly because there are relatively few documents stored here. Recent documents, books that are currently being repaired, copied, or translated, and letters being fair-copied may be found here, but the bulk of the Sarishans' records are stored elsewhere. The main floor is only a work area, and is almost always full of Sarishan scribes. The Silver Cage in fact employs over 100 scribes and linguists.

The second floor of the Cage has a common room and a few private offices for the copying of sensitive information. There is also access to a large terrace that consists of most of the first-floor roof, with more outdoor seating. Weather permitting, many of the scribes will often be found on this terrace instead of in the main building.

There is also a lower floor, beneath the main level of the Cage, which connects to the passages of the Hall of Contracts. Most citizens of Nishanpur do not realize it, but the Cage is in fact just one extension of a large underground complex. The vast majority of the scribes and linguists who work for the Cage are acolytes of the Sarishan Church, and live in the Hall of Contracts below the city. The Hall of Contracts is also where many of the documents drafted at the Scriptorium are stored. In the past, others were stored in the Grand Library, but that changed when the Swords of Nier assumed control of the city and sacked the Library. The basement of the Cage leads to the living quarters of the Hall of Contracts; from there, the Archive of Bindings and other areas of the Hall are accessible.

The Corpse Quarter

Most citizens regard the Corpse Quarter as the most dangerous section of the City of Secrets. The "good" streets here are paved with rough

cobbles, while most others are little better than muddy ruts. Many buildings are drab and in ill repair. The ruined palaces of the Devil-Kings, thought by most to be cursed and very dangerous, are found here. The city's necropolis is found in this quarter as well, as is the infamous Flesh Market. On most days, the smell of the docks blends with that of the funeral pyres and leaves a moldering smell of wet ash in the air. Two gates give access to the outside – the Corpse Gate and the Devil's Gate – but most people who enter this quarter do so through the docks. Warehouses fill the area near the docks, and a large volume of goods, both durable and perishable, enter Nishanpur by way of the Vein of Sarish for distribution to the city's various markets.

The Corpse Quarter is where the poor and desperate folk of the city come to live, those who have neither the skill nor the luck to beat the odds and succeed. Many sorry souls live out their last days in the Corpse Quarter, when they discover that the fortune promised to the quick-witted and strong turns out to be harder to achieve than they had anticipated. This quarter also houses a large percentage of the city's Nerothian populace. The pall of death that can hang over the quarter bothers the Nerothians but little, and they in turn are less inclined than others to enjoy the bright vigor that fills much of the rest of the city. Buildings here, especially near the Pits, often take on a gray hue from the pall that hangs in the air, particularly if many funeral pyres have been burned recently. Most residents do not bother to wash the walls of their buildings often enough to keep the ash off, with the result that many are soot-streaked, giving them an even more funereal appearance.

Violence is endemic to this quarter; theft and murder are commonplace. Patrols of the Red Fist are uncommon, and most of the poor, destitute folk who live here cannot even afford the Mark of Sarish for protection. They live in squalid conditions, some even inhabiting the burned-out shells of ruined buildings when they cannot pay rent for better lodgings. The most unsavory characters in the city often squat here, living like jackals upon the helpless and hopeless.

(C1) The Docks

This area is easily the worst and roughest part of all Nishanpur. The physical docks themselves are kept relatively clean and well repaired, as the Vein Canal is one of the sources of Nishanpur's lifeblood: trade. Day or night, workers here are constantly loading and unloading merchandise of all sorts from barges traveling up and down the canal. At night, workers line the docks with torches, the murky water reflecting the flickering light dimly. Under the current curfew imposed on the city by the Swords of Nier, these dockworkers are the only group permitted to work after sundown.

Troops of the Red Fist, or the Swords of Nier, frequently inspect the shipments here for contraband, and occasionally roust the worst beggars and scum from the alleyways. Across the canal, crammed up against the wall, are shanties and trash heaps, where homeless drifters will scavenge for anything they can make use of. In this area, even the Dead Zone around the city's walls is not enforced, and the shanties around the water's edge cling to the marginal protection the walls give against the weather. These are the worst of the shanties, and the groups that live here tend to be among the more resourceful rogues and blackhearts.

One of the surprising trades found practiced here is that of the diver; the Vein Canal is a man-made structure, and does require maintenance. Many of those who travel the canal merely throw their trash overboard, and sometimes even a slow-moving barge will sink, so there are times when a dredge is organized to clean the bottom of the canal so that passage remains clear. There is also a need for those that can clean the bottoms of the barges; though there is little wildlife in the canal, an ecosystem of sorts has developed, including the spread of a mollusk that flourishes in the still waters. These creatures collect on the sides of the canals and barges, and divers must periodically remove them. The divers will collect these mollusks in great numbers, from the barges and the bottom of the canal, and will eat them in many cases. The mollusks are, amazingly enough, marginally edible, and s'sressen actually find them tasty, although dwarves and many gnomes are violently allergic to them. This unusual supply of food, along with the occasional salvage windfall from the bottom of the canal, sustains a number of the poorest denizens of the quarter.

Flood Street

Flood Street runs along the docks, one end cutting through the ruins of the Devil-Kings' former palaces, the other leading off into the Trade Quarter. Most of the buildings lining this street are warehouses and offices of merchant companies. A few inns, flophouses, and brothels serve the needs of the bargemen that come and go. The permanent residents of the Corpse Quarter largely avoid this street whenever possible, as this is one of the higher-risk areas for thievery and unprovoked assault in the quarter. The portion of the street stretching from the area of the docks into the Trade Quarter is actually well-kept stone, to allow easy passage of unloaded goods, but the section of the street that heads northeast into the Corpse Quarter quickly degrades into a muddy track.

(C2) Rhomas the Moneylender

Rhomas is one of the many "independent businessmen" that have set up shop in the Corpse Quarter. His place of business sits next to the docks, in one of the few structures on the waterside of the street. Making short-term, high-interest loans is his specialty, though he also fences goods and provides appraisals, with no questions asked. Rhomas keeps a few Myrntian thugs on his payroll, to make sure that his "customers" make their payments on schedule.

Rhomas receives a large amount of referral traffic from his brother, Sammael. Sammael is a cleric of Sarish who often works the gates of the city, providing the Mark of Sarish to those that can afford it. Sammael sends those who are short of funds to his brother Rhomas – for a cut of the profits, of course.

Kharum Gebuul, Master of the Flesh Market

NE Human Male Expert 3/Rogue 5

Medium-size Humanoid (5'5")

CR: 8

HD: 3d6+3, 5d6+5 (hp 44)

BAB: +5 (grapple +6)

Init: +3 (+3 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft

AC: 16 (+3 Dex, +2 armor, +1 RoP); touch 14, flat-footed 13

Attack/Full Attack: Dagger +6 melee or +8 ranged (10')

Attack/Full Attack: Flail, light +7 melee

Attack/Full Attack: Sap +6 melee

Damage: Dagger 1d4+1 (19-20/x2), Flail 1d8+2(x2), Sap 1d6+1(x2)

SQ: Evasion, Sneak Attack +3d6, Uncanny Dodge

Languages: Cancerese, Low Coryani, Yhing-Hir, High Coryani

AL: Neutral Evil

SV: Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +5

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 14

Skills: Appraise +13, Black Market +7, Bluff +9, Disable Device +3, Forgery +7, Gather Information +10, Hide +2, Innuendo +11, Intimidate +11, Jump +1, Knowledge (local: Nishanpur) +7, Listen +6, Move Silently +7, Open Locks +7, Profession(Slaver) +10, Read Lips +9, Search +9, Sense Motive +17, Spot +9

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (flail, light), Honeyed Tongue, Judge of Character, Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Weapon Proficiency (simple)

Possessions: Dagger, +1 Cat-of-Nine-Tails (light flail) "Obedience", Sap, +2 Bracers of Armor "Merchantshield", +1 Ring of Protection "Vigilance"

Kharum grew up on the streets of the Corpse Quarter, but unlike most, had the wits and skill to rise above the squalor that surrounded him. He began working for the Ratcatchers as a young boy, first running errands and eventually learning the ins and outs of commerce. By the time he was a young man, Kharum had moved up to working in the Flesh Market, and quickly grasped the concepts of sale and maintenance of goods there.

Kharum rose to his current position of Master of the Market by the usual method: he arranged the death of the previous Master. Kharum had his prized *ring of protection*, called "Vigilance," carved from the bone of his predecessor's arm, both to protect him and to serve as a constant reminder that he too can become a casualty if he isn't careful.

Having grown up poor, Kharum now enjoys the wealth he has as Master of the Market, and long ago vowed to himself that he would never want for anything again. He has put on quite a few pounds in the past decade, and is now impressively rotund.

Unlike most of the previous Masters of the Market, Kharum does not go out of his way to torment the slaves in his care. Though he doesn't care about them as people, he makes sure their holding areas are clean and that they are not treated too poorly. This is sometimes mistaken for pity, but in fact Kharum sees to the slaves' welfare simply because ill-kept merchandise doesn't bring a good price. For him, everything is business.

(C3) The Flesh Market

A block from the docks sits the largest functional structure in the Corpse Quarter, the Flesh Market. Every day, people can be seen coming and going from here, either to buy, to sell, or to be bought or sold. This place is not only for the sale of slaves, however. Auctioneers sell livestock here as well, and in truth, the slaves and the livestock are hardly treated differently from each other. The slave masters chain slaves to prevent escape, but both sets of pathetic creatures live in filthy, crude pens, awaiting their sale and hoping not to be slaughtered by their new owners.

Auctions are held every day, but vary as to the specific merchandise. One day, the Flesh Market will see livestock sales; the next will see slave sales. This is for the benefit of the buyers. Rarely will a single buyer be after both, so by alternating days, the buyers can be assured that what they are seeking can be found there as long as they come on the correct day. The sale of exceptional beings happens only at the end of the week, with exotic animals being auctioned every Festivus, and valuable or exceptional slaves each Emptor. By this method, the higher bidders know when to arrive,



and don't waste their time on lesser merchandise. These "special" auctions also can lead to spirited bidding, with some of the more unusual chattel commanding high prices.

When buyers purchase slaves, they will usually bring their brands with them, in order that the slaves can immediately be marked as their property, from which point forward the sale cannot be disputed. Some wealthier buyers use Brands of Mastery to further enforce their rights (see Chapter 4: The Wiles of Sarish).



(C4) Ruined Palaces of the Devil-Kings

This area takes up a full fourth of the area of the Corpse Quarter. Here, crumbling facades of brick, tile, and stone serve as the last reminders of the rule of the Devil-Kings. Once, these were huge, horribly magnificent structures, towering over the mundane buildings of the city's human inhabitants. Now, weeds and vines choke the rubble, with bits of grotesque statuary poking out of the leaves now and again. Only the ubiquitous gargoyles of Nishanpur seem at home here, though no one can quite remember who put them in place, or when, or why.

The locals largely consider the ruins to be haunted or cursed (or both). Most citizens will not go near the ruined palaces, though the occasional brave or foolish soul may go searching the crumbling buildings for something of value to salvage and sell. Rumors of treasures abound, as well as tales of deadly curses and horrible deaths that await those fools that attempt to steal from the ancient Infernals' buried treasure troves.

In truth, though many of the gargoyles that haunt Nishanpur are merely sculpture, and many more are fauxgoyles, most of those that are found here are true gargoyles, and these creatures do prey on those few souls that sneak about the ruins. The gargoyles will operate from ambush, and mainly at night, as they are not foolish and know that if they reveal themselves too readily, others may come to believe in their existence and decide to hunt them down.

The only people that do frequent this area with some level of confidence are the members of the cult known as the Seekers of the Hidden Master. They secretly return to these ruins repeatedly, seeking any item or scrap of knowledge that may help with their quest to someday restore the Devil-Kings' dominion over Nishanpur. As these structures continue underground, as well as towering above it, the Seekers have an awful lot of

searching ahead of them. Many of the passages beneath the ruined palaces connect into the catacombs of the city, though rare indeed are those who know the passages well enough to find these connections.

(C5) The Pits

The one inevitable thing in life is death, so every city needs a place to lay its dead to rest. The Pits serve as Nishanpur's necropolis, though the area is a far cry from a quiet cemetery. Unlike most of the burial grounds of Onara, this place is humming with activity. Long ago, this area was a quarry, where much of the stone for the old city originated. Later, quarrying operations moved outside the city, and the barren area of the "Pits" remained. The area's use as a necropolis dates back to before the reign of the Devil-Kings. Many folk died in the quarrying and construction of the city walls and temples, so it was natural to bury them on the spot by the simple expediency of tossing them into the quarries. The area has several entrances to the catacombs that stretch under this quarter of the city. It has been in continual use for centuries. Chalky white ash and the smell of funeral pyres cloak the area.

The name of this place has evolved from the types of funerals often performed in the city. The catacombs themselves delve deep, so part of it comes from them. Nierites, however, prefer cremation, as they believe that by allowing fire to consume their bodies, their souls become closer to Nier. Their great pyres burn hot, and the remaining white ash collapses into large fire pits underneath. That is what most people refer to when they describe the "Pits."

It is often quite surprising to the visitor to learn that such a relatively small area can serve the needs of such a large city as Nishanpur. The answer lies in the fact that many, if not most, of the dead do not remain in the Pits for long. Once a body has passed one dawn in death, the soul is beyond recall, at which point the body is merely a shell. Necromancers and priests of Neroth therefore use the Pits as a place to harvest materials for their researches and for the construction of their many undead servants. Daily, just after the break of dawn, it is not at all uncommon to see troupes of undead shuffling through the dim light, carrying away bodies left at the Pits or from the upper reaches of the catacombs. Flesh-eating scarabs, often called "Neroth's children," also frequent this area, feasting upon any discarded corpses or other bits of flesh that might happen to be available. In the passage of a swarm of these scarabs, nothing but clean-picked bones is left behind. (See Chapter 5: Natives of Nishanpur: for details on Scarab, Flesh-Eating.) Between the salvage efforts of the undead and the digestive efforts of the scarabs, this area stays relatively clear.

The dead bodies of the populace of Nishanpur serve as more than just the fodder for an undead workforce. Many Nerothian constructions, magic items, and spells use bone or other body parts as components. Sections of the catacomb walls under the city are made of bone, ossified remains mortared into haunting mosaics of mortality. Most of the citizens of Nishanpur know this, and accept it. Many are Nerothian, and even consider it honorable and appropriate.

Overall, the somewhat strange ecosystem of the Pits is advantageous to the citizens of Nishanpur in many ways. A city as large and as old as Nishanpur would normally require a staggeringly large area devoted to the interment of the dead, much like Grand Coryan has. By making use of the remains of the dead in so many different ways, the denizens of Nishanpur reduce the space needed for their city's necropolis. The flesh-eating scarabs keep the area relatively clean, helping to prevent the sorts of disease that can spread in areas where dead bodies are handled. In addition, since the Nerothians can use the bodies as raw materials, the costs for funerary rites to the commoners are low. The city's leaders wish to encourage people to bring their dead here, after all. As gruesome as many outsiders find the spectacle of the Pits, all in all, this system works well for the residents of the City of Secrets.

(C6) The Temple of Shadows

The Temple of Shadows is part of a small complex dedicated to the god Cadic. This complex is built up against the wall of rock that marks the northern edge of the Corpse Quarter. The Nihangs tolerate its presence, even though the worship of Cadic is not an accepted part of the state religion, due to the valuable training the followers of Cadic provide for certain members of the populace of Nishanpur. Surprisingly, it is not the temple's ability to train people in the arts of assassination that is most highly valued. It is, rather, the hauntingly beautiful music of its bards which has assured

the Temple of Shadows a secure place in Nishanpur. Those trained in the bardic arts here have the capability to stir even the shriveled hearts of the ancient undead.

Instead of trying to spread the worship of Cadic directly, which would most likely result in the expulsion of the clerics here, this temple's primary function is to serve as a training academy. Each year at Shadowfast, the celebration of Cadic and Sarish that occurs each year, the elders of the Temple of Shadows hear recitals by hopefuls that come from all over Canceri. They only choose those candidates that show the most potential to benefit from further training, and the competition to study here is fierce. The interviews at Shadowfast can lead to many sorts of training. Some come merely in the hopes of learning the bardic arts, or to profess their devotion to Cadic and enter the priesthood. These candidates usually join the Lesser Academy, assuming they show enough basic skill. The real competition, however, is for the very limited number of admissions to the Greater Academy.

Joining the Greater Academy represents a true commitment on the part of the hopeful initiate. For at least a year, the student is completely isolated from the outside world, during which time she receives intense training in advanced bardic arts. This can include not only musical instruction, but also lessons in dance, calligraphy, and various forms of death-dealing, such as poisons and subtle assassinations. The student directs the course of her own studies here, and the Greater Academy produces not only bards of exceptional skill, but also Assassins, Blackchanters, Shadowdancers, Oathspeakers, and other rare practitioners of advanced arts.

Eriane val'Borda is the current head of the Temple of Shadows. The previous High Priest, Darius val'Borda, mysteriously vanished almost a year ago, and Eriane quickly established herself as the new leader of the temple. Several students of the Greater Academy disappeared at roughly the same time, so what actually occurred is an open question. No bodies were found, and divination magics employed in attempts to learn the fate of the missing have given inconclusive results.

(C7) The Forges

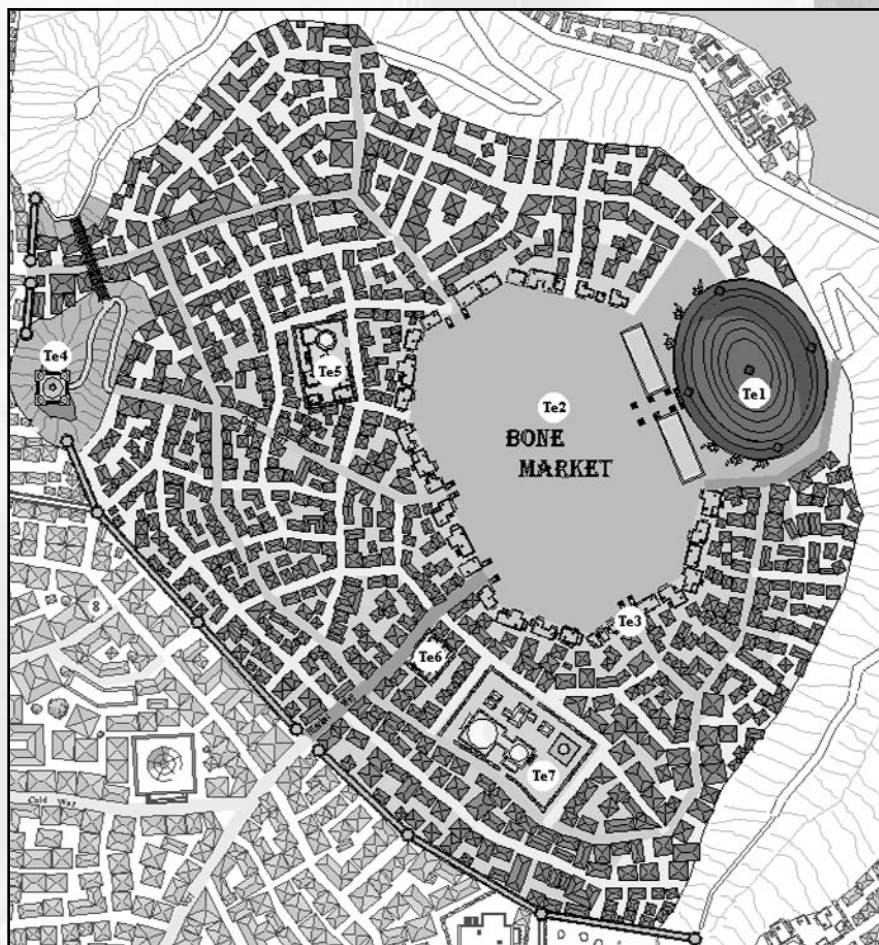
Much like the disposal of the dead, trash disposal is another problem faced by all large urban areas, and it is one that Nishanpur has taken innovative strides in solving. Along with the development of their city's sewer system, the priests of Sarish also established the Forges. The forges are not all that they would appear to be on first glance. While workers do melt and shape metal here, much more goes on as well.

The minor Infernals that are bound for service in the sewer system bring any inorganic materials here for processing. Other minor Infernals sort these materials by type and composition. Any items of value (coins, jewelry, weapons, etc.) are removed by more intelligent Infernals. The Forgemaster evaluates these items to determine their usefulness and value. This occasionally includes a scroll or leather item that the sewer Imps found before the Ykrup devoured them. The Forgemaster lays aside some items for resale, while he consigns others to the forges for meltdown or keeps them for further examination.

Non-valuable items are disposed of based on their composition. Metal items are melted into ingots, based on the type of metal involved. Several forges are in operation for this purpose, segregated by the type of metal they process. These ingots can then be re-sold to metalworkers or traders throughout the city. Several large heaps serve as dumps for ceramic items, where potters collect the shards for use as tempering for bricks, or as base materials for other new ceramics. Stone fragments become street-cobbles or meals for the city's captive Xorn (which lives in an enchanted metal enclosure).

Once a week or so, workers bring a cartload of ingots, along with whatever valuable goods may have been recovered, to the Lower Market for sale. The city's various master-smiths often look forward to this, as they can obtain quantities of sometimes difficult-to-acquire metals cheaply in this manner, though the quality of the ingots is variable. Bargain hunters and those souls who have the forlorn hope of finding lost items often come to these "cart-sales" as well.

The Forges also play host to trash-pickers, most often the destitute poor of the Corpse Quarter, who search through the piles of shards and leavings, looking for any usable items that they can keep for themselves. The Infernals working here generally ignore these insignificant souls, as long as they stay out of reach. The forge demons will gladly kill anyone they can get their hands on, however, so for this reason few are foolish enough to try to steal the more valuable ingots. Nevertheless, stealing ingots from the forges, or even pilfering the more valuable items from the Forgemaster's office, is something of a rite of passage for initiates and would-be members of some of the petty gangs that operate in the Corpse Quarter.



The Temple Quarter

The Temple Quarter is the area that was first encompassed by the original city wall centuries ago. It is the oldest part of the city. Over time, much of the space within the ancient wall became grounds for public areas, such as the temples to the state religion and government buildings. The few people who still live within the inner wall are mostly either part of the priesthood, students at the Sanctorum of the Arcane, or members of the various aristocratic ruling families that hold positions of power within Nishanpur.

(TE1) Nihang Council Building

The Nihang Council building is the oldest still-standing structure in Nishanpur. It dates from the time of the First Imperium, when it was originally an arena, where combatants contested blood sports in front of cheering crowds. Now, the large structure serves a more practical (though sometimes equally bloody) purpose. The council of the Nihang, the governing body of Canceri, meets here. Official meetings take place on the 14th of each month, when Aperio is dark. Informal meetings, or emergency sessions, can be called at any time. These meetings are not open to the public.

The millennia-old superstructure of the building seemingly remains as it was, and looks its age, though Infernal laborers have reconstructed many of the interior passages and seating banks over time. One addition to the original architecture was the construction of a domed roof, tiled in

thin, red slate. The building of this new feature necessitated that many of the passages within the building be filled with stone, to better support the weight of the massive roof. The laborers also have filled in and bricked over all the entrances besides the main one. The remaining passages to the seating banks are narrow and direct. The roof, though heavy, was necessary as some of the Nihangs of Canceri are no longer part of the living world. Therefore it was necessary to remove any possibility of sunlight entering the council chambers.

The public rarely enters this massive structure. Only on specified holidays are any sort of public functions held here, though the Nihangs occasionally stage a state execution or other spectacle. For the most part, only the Nihangs of Canceri and their staff gather here, to discuss and decide matters of state. Three large banners hang at equal intervals around the banks of seats, designating the areas for Sarishans, Nierites, and Nerothians to gather. In the center of the arena floor is a dais. Upon this is the seat of the Dark Apostate, known as the Black Throne. The entire council chamber is overlaid with an enchantment that allows speakers to be easily heard – or silenced. He who stands upon the dais controls this enchantment.

At the present time, the Council of the Nihang is largely a figurehead organization; the Autocrat of the Swords of Nier makes nearly all of the important decisions of state. The Council members still meet, however, and attend to the day-to-day functions of governing the nation of Canceri.

(TE2) The Bone Market

In this market, the merchants of the city sell their best and finest wares to the elite of Canceri. Scribes, gemcutters, manufacturers of luxury goods, and makers of magical items all bring their wares here, trying to impress the well-placed and well-to-do of Nishanpur. Merchants also bring imported materials here first, before distributing them to other markets in the city. Prices are high, but this is where a person will find the best of the best in any category. Rare and imported foodstuffs are shown side-by-side with the most skilled and exotic slaves, all carefully arrayed to catch the discerning eye. The Bone Market is also the best place to find magical items and spell components, due to its proximity to the local Sanctorum. This market is conveniently located for most of the local priests as well. Public executions sometimes take place in the Bone Market, particularly when the state decides to make the death of heretics and traitors a spectacle.

(TE3) Ezram's Apothecary

Ezram val'Ishi is a former student of the Sanctorum of the Arcane here in Nishanpur. He has managed to set up shop in the Bone Market as a purveyor of herbs, potions, poisons, and spell components. His shop is close to the Sanctorum, and he gets a lot of business from its current students.

Ezram's Apothecary shop is not exceptional in its looks, being a plain and undecorated building. The herbs arrayed in its windows serve as a more-than-adequate advertisement for Ezram's wares. Inside, Ezram has meticulously arranged every inch of space, in order to facilitate his work. Bundles of herbs hang from the ceiling, and bottles of all shapes and sizes line shelves and sit bunched on every windowsill and flat surface. Jars of preserved animal parts and vials containing plant tinctures sit everywhere. A large bench serves as both counter and work area.

Ezram can provide components for most common arcane and divine spells, even keeping a small stock of holy symbols (though these are not on display). He will deal in healing herbs or poisons with equal facility, and has no qualms about discussing the finer points of the properties of various concoctions. His professional integrity goes just far enough to thoroughly inform his clients of the properties of what they are purchasing – and not be coy about it. If Ezram sells something, it is what he says it is: no more, no less. He charges what he feels his clients can afford, though he will make sure he is always making the best profit possible in the given circumstances. If a client cannot afford something, Ezram will try to provide a less expensive substitute that can achieve the same or similar results.

Ezram can and will brew potions to order, though this takes time, and he expects to be appropriately compensated for his efforts. For truly strange potion ingredients and material components, Ezram has a 15% chance of having enough stock for one casting or brewing. If he does not have the necessary items on hand, he will ask for time to acquire what he

needs. Ezram will sometimes hire adventurers to procure odd things for his researches, but largely gets his supplies from traders. He will be keen to gather recipes for new potions, or rare components from travelers, if given the chance.

(TE4) Temple of the Keeper of Mysteries

This temple sits atop an outcrop of rock that rises above the city of Nishanpur. The steep stone of the outcrop is part of the curtain wall that surrounds the Temple Quarter. From here, the priests can look out over the city and watch the goings-on. Though their faith and devotion is to the Lord of Secrets, the priests make no secret of their location. Far from it – the priesthood of Sarish is an important part of the infrastructure of the City of Secrets. In fact, the road that leaves the Bone Market directly across from the entrance to the Nihang Council Building is called the Oath Way, and leads directly to the temple's outcrop. At intervals along the Oath Way stand a long row of torches that have had continual flame cast upon them, so that even in the dead of night, and in the worst weather, those who seek to pay their tribute to Sarish can find His sacred ground.

The temple itself appears surprisingly small, considering the large number of worshippers of Sarish live in the City of Secrets. This is mainly because this temple extends far underground, and those walking the city streets only see the tip of the iceberg, as it were. Even so, any single location could not serve more than a small proportion of the Sarishan worshippers of the city. This temple is in fact only one of a number of places of worship to Sarish, scattered in shadowy corners and alcoves throughout the city. This largest and most obvious of Sarishan temples merely serves as the "public face" of the priesthood. It is also the place where priests traditionally come to make their blood tributes to Sarish.



The inside of the temple is quite plain, especially compared to many of the other temples in the city. Sheets of blood lapis cover the walls, a purplish stone shot through with veins of red. Covering the columns supporting the roof, and the ceiling itself, are complex and twisting swirls of tile and precious stones that are dizzying to behold. Censers fill the room with a smoky haze of incense, and great red velvet drapes hang scattered

throughout. Bronze mirrors cast twisting shadows of light around the temple. Imps and quasits flit about, keeping the censers burning, and performing other tasks for their masters. The main altar to Sarish sits draped in purple, before a statue of the Lord of Mysteries: a great, cloaked demon of indeterminate features. The idol itself is composed of a single piece of bloodstone.

The most unique and startling feature of this temple though, is the Pool of Ten Thousand Vows. Many clerics and congregants come to pray here, hoping to receive the blessings of Sarish and be anointed with the dark liquid of the Pool.

The Pool of Ten Thousand Vows

This pool spreads out before the dais that leads to the altar of Sarish. A bridge spans the pool to enable one to reach the altar. This pool is rather large, and filled with constantly-flowing blood. In the strange lights of the temple, the blood appears almost black. Steps lead down into the Pool, and at any given time, priests come and go, especially during the night. Many clerics of Sarish choose to pray for spells at the foot of the pool.

Those spellcasters who follow Sarish and wish to learn the Mystery of the Mark of Sarish receive instruction here. In a ritual closed to the uninitiated, the caster is consecrated, and bathes in the Pool, mingling his blood with that which swirls through it. After that he can learn to cast the spell, and at the end of each day, returns to the Pool to place in it a drop of blood from each being that received the Mark, as well as a bit of his own, in order to renew his bond to the Pool, and reinforce the power of the spell. If a consecrated caster does not observe this daily ritual, then any Mark of Sarish he created that day only lasts a few days at best (rather than a month) and the caster loses his ability to cast the spell at all until he bathes in the pool once again.

Unknown to most, the Pool of Ten Thousand Vows actually flows beneath the dais that holds the altar of Sarish. Since the pool is constantly enhanced with tributes of new blood, the overflow creeps under the dais, and works its way downward, until it eventually joins with the blood of the Reservoir of Nishanpur's Heart.

(TE5) Temple of the Lord of the Catacombs

Often considered the most disturbing structure in the city, at least to outsiders, the Temple of the Lord of the Catacombs stands as a grim reminder that at the end of life's journey, Death awaits us all. Its facade is similar in style to the outer wall around the complex, and the walls of the temple itself are covered in bas-reliefs of figures marching in procession toward the temple's main entrance. Unlike other carvings elsewhere in the city, though, these figures are all depicted as being dead, and in various stages of decay. Some are quite gruesome, their death wounds graphically obvious.

The temple itself is much less colorful than many others. Like other important structures, mosaics fill the building, but uniquely, these mosaics are made of bone, and mortared in cement mixed with blood and ashes. It has no windows, or exterior features of any sort, other than the reliefs on the walls. Nearly everything is either the white or ivory of bone, or the blackish-gray of ash. The columns that support the ceiling are made entirely of skulls, and skeletal figures dance upon the walls, made of inlaid bones. The domed ceiling has supports constructed of the fossilized ribs of some gargantuan beast of a sort unknown to modern Onara. Painted to resemble the night sky, the dome is truly an impressive sight.

In the center of the great chamber is an immense and masterfully constructed chandelier, made entirely of twisted and exotic bones. They branch out like a great ghostly flower, each stalk ending in a skeletal hand that clutches an ever-burning candle. Hundreds of pinpricks of light thusly dance in the darkness of the dome.

Even the altar is constructed of partly of bone, the mummified forms of four large beings kneeling at the corners, supporting the altar stone of perfect onyx on their backs.

When the Sword of the Heavens began his rampage in the city a year ago, the Priests of Neroth decided that the best course of action was simply to wait out the storm. They knew that in time even the Nierites would fall to the inexorable touch of Neroth, and become part of His domain. The Nerothians simply barred the gates to the temple, and retreated into the catacombs beneath. Though the outside of the structure suffered some burning damage, on the whole the empty temple remains largely as it was, patiently awaiting the return of Neroth's worshippers.

The seemingly-abandoned temple is not without its guardians, however. If the doors to the temple are unbarred without uttering the correct supplication to Neroth, these guardians will emerge to defend it. The bas-reliefs on the outside of the walls conceal many undead, literally plastered into the walls. These defenders can emerge when needed. In addition, many of the mosaics in the walls feature sparkling gems that are, in fact, flesh-eating scarabs, known as "Neroth's Children" (See Chapter 5: Natives of Nishanpur: for details on Scarab, Flesh-Eating). They will awake and attack if disturbed.

(TE6) Temple of the Everlasting Flames

This is the smallest of all the major temples of Nishanpur, but in these times also the busiest. Here the Swords of Nier, and many citizens, come to make their offerings to Nier. Covered in mosaics of flames and warfare, this small temple focuses on the worship of Nier in his aspect as the Lord of Flame. Instead of a standard altar, in fact, the priesthood of Nier maintains their most prized item: the eponymous Everlasting Flame. Through trials and tribulations, this small flame has burned continuously since the founding of the temple during the days of the First Imperium. Though the location and appearance of the temple has changed many times over the millennia, the priesthood has always faithfully fed and maintained the flame, carefully transporting it to each new temple in turn.

The flame currently burns in a large golden brazier, magically treated to withstand the heat. Constantly fed, the ashes of this flame serve to consecrate the holy water of Nier. Surrounding the holy fire are tiers of hundreds, if not thousands, of votive candles lit by the faithful of Nier during their daily prayers. Each votive burns until expended, whereupon it is quickly replaced. Racks of unlit candles cover the walls of the temple, ready for the many supplicants that come here each day. Worshippers whisper prayers to Nier while lighting a candle, or write their supplications on parchment and toss them into the holy flame. At the end of each day, the acolytes of the temple gather the wax of the burned candles and ashes of the burning flame. They use these in the creation of holy items of luck or blessing.

(TE7) Sanctorium of the Arcane

Unlike those in most of the rest of the known world, Nishanpur's Sanctorium of the Arcane is an open and obvious structure. Since Hegrish val'Mordane took the Apostasy over 800 years ago, the Harvesters of Ymandragore have not been tolerated within Canceri, so there was no need for the practitioners of the arcane arts to hide. Over the centuries, the Sanctorium has grown into a large campus complex, and hundreds of aspiring wizards and sorcerers train here.

This openness, while it encourages the growth and learning of its many charges, ironically also isolates them. While the Harvesters cannot reach the Sanctorium here, it is certain that they watch it closely, since it seems that many young mages of the Sanctorium mysteriously vanish after they begin to travel outside Canceri. This dilemma is not unknown to those who teach and study here, with the result that many graduates choose never to leave their home nation. The complex has been largely shunned by many members of the Hawk and Shield because of its obviousness, and almost all of the instructors are citizens of Nishanpur who were themselves trained in this same Sanctorium. Those mages from outside of Canceri are aware of the Sanctorium's openness as well, and most do not wish to risk their own anonymity to teach or study here. The young mages here therefore tend to learn little of magic in the outside world, other than to have the purest hatred of Ymandragore instilled into them.

Different areas of study take place in separate buildings in the Sanctorium, in order to isolate potentially dangerous experiments and prevent injuries to the staff and facilities. Alchemical studies and potion brewing have their own building, as do the schools of Evocation and Summoning magic. The main building houses administrative functions. It also has room for some student housing, and contains the classrooms dedicated to more innocuous spellcasting classes, such as Divination. Many times, lessons in various area-effect spells take place outside, in the large courtyard areas. The buildings are all made of stone, heavily reinforced, and magical runes and wards are everywhere.

In typical Cancerean fashion, students receive only the bare minimum necessary instruction on any given subject, and must learn how to apply the knowledge themselves. If they cannot pass the tests of the faculty, they are dismissed, or relegated to lesser classes. Students are not

informed about the presence of wards, and even though it may be triggered by any number of magical accidents on the campus, most of the staff actively choose to wear the Mark of Sarish. Students must use their own deductive reasoning and common sense. Most see this as a natural sort of selective process, and any student unfortunate (or clumsy or unwise) enough to trigger a ward or Mark is seen as deserving of the consequences. Students that survive such mishaps are advised to treat this as a "learning experience."

The High Ridge

Upon the high ridge surrounding the oldest section of the city, along the banks of the great reservoir, there are a relatively small number of structures. They overlook the city below, accessible by only by a few paths. One path leads off from the top of either side of the curtain wall that surrounds the Temple Quarter. A bridge from the outcrop of rock that houses the temple of Sarish connects to this path. Another leads up from the rear of the Nihang Council building.

The main path, however, leads from the edge of Ridge Row, in the Temple Quarter itself. This is the path taken by religious processions going up to the Cathedral of the Dark Apostate at the peak of the ridge. This path cuts into the rock of the ridge itself, and bas-reliefs depicting worshippers in procession decorate the walls, moving upward toward the Cathedral.

(HR1) Cathedral of the Dark Apostate

The Cathedral of the Dark Apostate is a magnificent structure, which took several human lifetimes to complete. Nageel Sagrivan, Master Architect of Canceri, oversaw the final stages of construction for this huge building. Now, under the occupation of the Swords of Nier, the Cathedral sits empty most of the time, being opened only occasionally for compulsory worship services to Nier.

The Cathedral is one of only a handful of important state buildings that sit outside the ancient wall of Nishanpur. Situated at the highest point on the ridge above Nishanpur, its tall walls and towers rise above the city, casting their shadows across the Temple Quarter.

Although its name implies otherwise, the Cathedral, though huge, is not at all gothic in aspect. Its four walls and four tall towers are in fact entirely Cancerese in style and ornamentation. This particular temple became colloquially known as a "cathedral" in Low Coryani to emphasize its precedence over all the lesser temples in Nishanpur.

In the past, worship at the Cathedral of the Dark Apostate was largely restricted to the Val and other nobility of the City of Secrets. The building could never house but a tiny fraction of the populace, so this most magnificent of temples has been kept for those citizens considered "worthy" of its grandeur. Now, though, the Swords of Nier have closed the cathedral, only opening it for Nierite services that serve their own number.

Each of the towers is devoted to a particular god of the Dark Triumvirate, with the fourth tower reserved (at least in the past) for the private use of the Dark Apostate himself. Each of the three consecrated towers has a shrine to the particular god on its ground floor, with access to the upper and lower floor of each being restricted to the clergy of that particular deity. Now, the Swords of Nier have closed off ground-level access to the Nerothian and Sarishan shrines. They have not yet interfered with the towers themselves, though, and Sarishan and Nerothian clergy have removed any objects of high value through secret passages connected to the city's catacombs and underground tunnels.

The main worship area of the Cathedral is a huge hall, with a great altar at the end facing out towards the reservoir. Massive pillars line the chamber, each one carved into giant depictions of the minions of the three patron gods of Canceri. The pillars lead up to a great domed ceiling that depicts the gods themselves, in their most favored aspects. The floor is a single gigantic mosaic, with depictions of swirling masses of undead and demons writhing and dancing in flames, truly a macabre spectacle. Gems and precious materials are inlaid everywhere to enhance the statuary and mosaics. There are no benches or seats in this main worship area. The devotees must stand, kneel, or prostrate themselves, depending on the particular rituals being performed at the time.

The Swords of Nier have taken over the portion of the Cathedral that was formerly reserved for the Dark Apostate, as well as the tower devoted to the worship of Nier. They attempted to cover over the floor mosaic in the main hall with depictions of flames, but quickly found that no matter how many times they painted over the demons and undead beings in the

mosaics, the paint quickly chipped away or crumbled to dust. When they sought to drape banners of Nier's glory over the columns, these too mysteriously always fell down in the night, never remaining up for more than a day at a time. The Nierites have since given up trying to change the cathedral, and do nothing except hang banners and lay out large rugs immediately before important rituals. They remove these after worship, for they know that they will only find the coverings damaged or disturbed come morning.

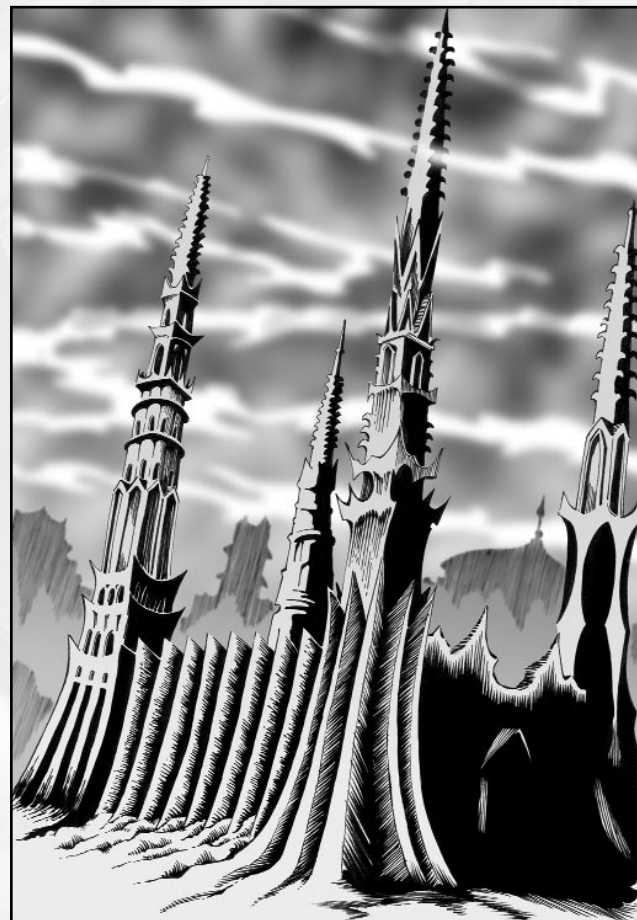
(HR2) Enclosure of the Portal

Though the walls surrounding it are relatively new and well maintained, this area is ancient indeed. Here is where the Portal of Anshar that serves Nishanpur sits. A few members of the val'Inares family tend the Portal, which is enclosed in a small, plain building. Officials of the Dark Triumvirate chiseled off, or painted over, any depictions of Ansharan worship in the enclosure long ago. The val'Inares that tend the Portal were chosen not only for their bloodline ability to use the Portal, but also because they are truly devoted to the Church of the Dark Triumvirate. The current Portalmaster, Kerdan val'Inares, is in fact a priest of Sarish.

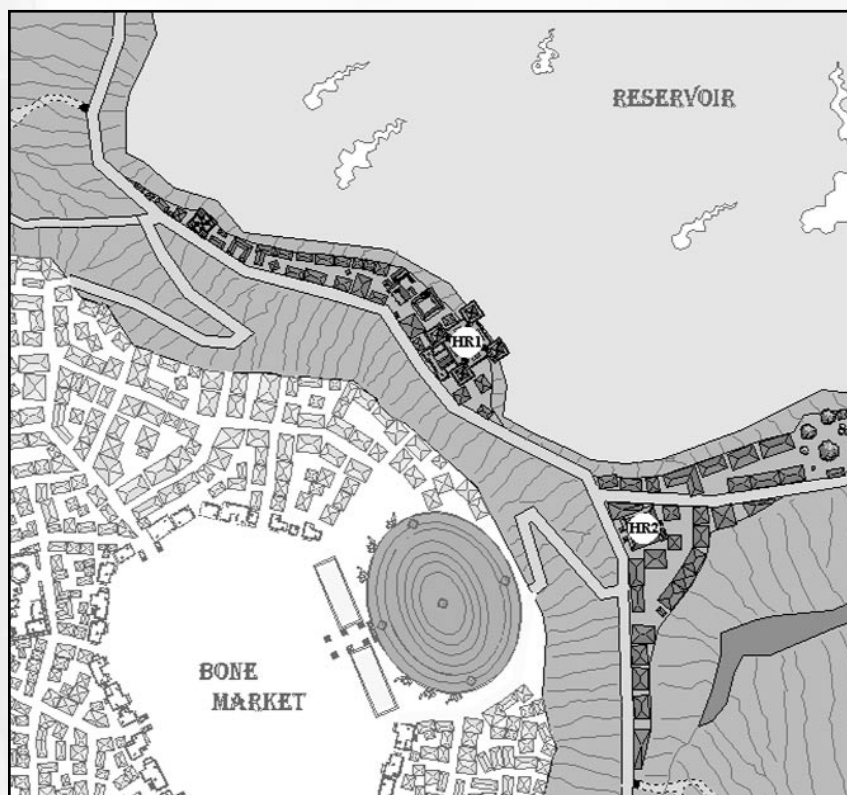
Hegrish val'Mordane ordered the enclosure rebuilt during his time as Dark Apostate. Guards can bar the gate, controlling entrance and exit from the outside as well as from the inside. This feature serves to contain travelers coming through the Portal until guards can decide whether to allow them to continue on. If the guards consider the new arrivals dangerous, the walls can serve as high ground, from which to launch an attack. There are no members of the Legion of Grim Lamentation stationed here. Although in times past the Sarishan priests kept bound Infernals here to stand vigil, it is currently the Swords of Nier who closely watch the Portal.

The Undercity

No large city is without its underworld, but few can equal the depth of Nishanpur's subterranean delvings. Unknown to most of the residents of Nishanpur, the underground constructions below the surface are as large as the city itself. The Sarishans, as well as the Nerothians, maintain large underground complexes beneath Nishanpur's streets. Add to this



both the city sewers and the cavernous underground reservoir beneath the Temple Quarter, and the scale is staggering. After thousands of years of occupation, the maze underground has become so huge and convoluted that it is quite easy to become permanently lost inside.



Water and Sewers in Nishanpur

No one wants to think about where trash actually goes after they toss it into the streets, but disposal of unwanted garbage is an unpleasant fact that must be dealt with, especially in a city of a quarter-million souls. Thankfully for the citizens of Nishanpur, the long-ago architects of the city set up a rather efficient system of trash disposal that continues to this day. This system even provides a way to transport fresh water from the city's reservoir into the homes and shops of those that can afford the service.

The system relies upon a type of infernal known as a Ykrup, more commonly called "cleaner-demons." Under the streets are a maze of tunnels of varying sizes, supplemented by pipes of clay and iron. Residents throw refuse into the dry wells around the city, or wash it down the grated holes along streets. The Ykrup scour the pipes clean, devouring any organic material they find. They excrete only water and inorganic material. Their steady diet keeps them growing – most of the Ykrup eventually grow as large as the pipes will allow. When one of these creatures finally becomes so fat that it is immobilized, the Sarishans arrange for it to be dismissed back to its native plane. Dretches supplement the Ykrup, by gathering non-organic garbage and taking it to the Forges for reprocessing. Imps controlled by the Sarishan clergy command these lesser Infernals, and keep them working day and night. The imps also place Ykrup in the piping that delivers water from the reservoir into the city, where the daemons serve as both water filters and pumps. Since these smaller daemons must frequently be replaced, citizens that wish to have water pumped into their homes or shops must pay a monthly fee for the service.

Humans can easily traverse many of the larger sewer passages, and the less scrupulous of the city's citizens often travel in the sewers, as nothing prevents them from doing so. The Ykrup gleefully devour any organic matter they can find, however, which keeps travelers of this Underground Highway on their toes.

The Coven of Unsleping Terror

Under the streets of Nishanpur, in the sewer system that runs beneath the homes and businesses, lives the Coven of Unsleping Terror. The coven consists of an uneasy alliance of thirteen Night Hags, who spend their time stalking the citizens of the City of Secrets.

Though Night Hags usually prefer solitude, in as heavily-populated an area as Nishanpur, there are more than ample opportunities for a coven. From the safety of their sewer-based lair, they can use their dream haunting ability to torture the souls of innocent citizens in the city above.

Since almost no one in the City of Secrets can be considered truly innocent even under the best of circumstances, this particular coven specializes in the torment of children. Their nightly attacks have created a phenomenon where many parents believe there is a new disease, which they have named "dream fever," causing the terror and slow wasting-away of their afflicted children.

Of course, the Night Hags have had to deal with the Infernal cleaners in order to maintain control over their lair, and the disappearance of the Imps and Dretches in that area of the sewers has not gone completely unnoticed. The Coven is not overly concerned, though, as together the thirteen of them are truly a force to be reckoned with.

The Hall of Contracts

The Hall of Contracts is a vast underground complex carved out of the living rock by the followers of Sarish and their infernal servants. Sarish is the Master of Secrets, both kept and revealed, and those who walk the Hall of Contracts will quickly learn that although the mysteries of the Hall tend to keep themselves hidden, the visitor will likely find even the deepest-held secrets of his own heart laid bare.

Although the chambers and halls of this place have no windows, during the daylight hours most of the complex has no need for artificial or magical lighting. The Sarishans have cunningly positioned countless mirrors at corners and in alcoves throughout the Hall of Contracts. Most are of polished brass, though some are glass or other materials. These mirrors reflect the natural light that descends from carefully placed light wells. This light reflects over and over between the mirrors, lending a low level of ambient light to most of the Hall during the day. Due to the Hall's repeated expansion over the centuries, the Sarishans have needed to add increasing numbers of mirrors, and some inevitably need replacement; thus very few of these devices match one another.

The panoply of light, shadow, and reflection within the Hall can be quite unnerving to those not accustomed to it. Added to this effect is the odd property of a polished brass mirror: any decoration etched into the back of a brass mirror appears in the shadow cast by that mirror. Taking advantage of this property, the Sarishans have etched many of the brass mirrors in the Hall with complex glyphs or infernal images. Twisted shadows track across the walls all day, lending a disconcerting air to even the simplest and most brightly lit of rooms.

These mirrors have the added benefit of reflecting the images of any who walk the corridors, making it quite difficult to surprise any resident of the Hall, as most have gained a keen sense of place and direction in this confusing maze of light and shadow.

At night most of this complex is totally unlit; main thoroughfares, like those near the living quarters, may be lit with torches or the occasional light-globe, but many of those who dwell within the Hall of Contracts find such illumination unnecessary, as they have become comfortable in the darkness. The mirrors reflect starlight and moonlight, so even in the dead of night the Hall is not completely dark. Low-light vision can serve to give the general outlines of many rooms, though again the confusing reflections and shadows cast by the brass mirrors can blur these perceptions.

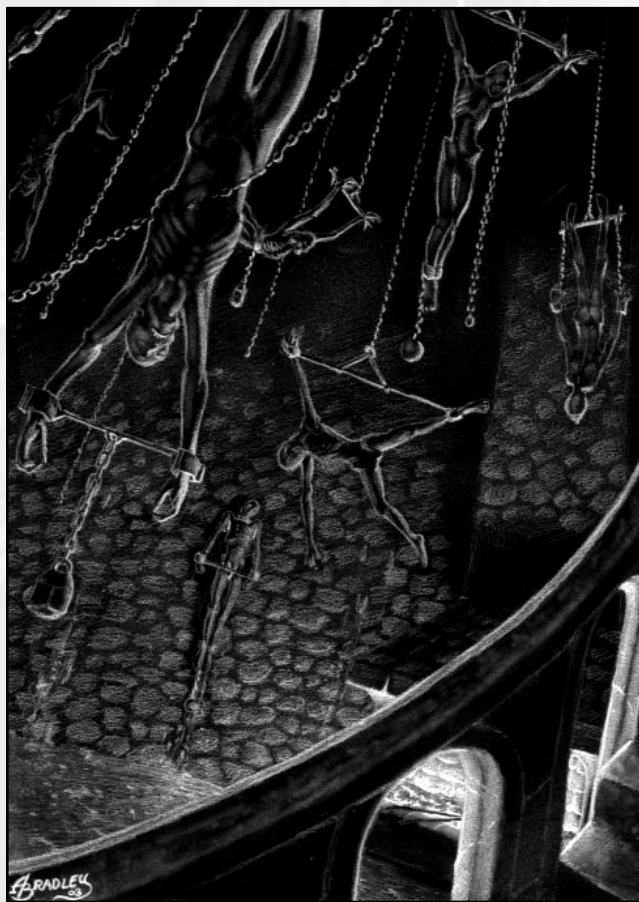
The Hall is largely devoid of the fireplaces or hearths one would expect from a large living space. One of the virtues of living underground is that the temperature is constant, regardless of the time of year. It is comfortably cool even in the heat of summer, and warm despite the winter chill.

Among the labyrinth of rooms here, the wanderer may find the following:

The Pain Garden

This is a wide chamber, with chains hanging from the ceiling and draped down the walls. Some of the chains have manacles attached; others sport hooks, spikes, or cruel protuberances of dubious functionality. Hanging from these chains at any given time are a varying number of beings, usually around a dozen. These are not prisoners, but followers of Sarish, brought here by choice or force to learn the lessons that can only be taught by forcing a seeker to transcend the pain of the body. Some hang by manacles, often upside-down, while others have hooks, rings, and spikes imbedded in their flesh. (Those Sarishans from Nishanpur who seek to gain the feat Alien Understanding or to raise their Concentration skill to high levels may well find themselves spending time in this place.) Tiling the floor of this room is a dizzying mosaic, which if stared at too long can induce vertigo. This mosaic also conceals small drains in the floor. The whole room smells of sweat and blood.

A large mirror stands in the corner of the room, reflecting light through the chamber. This mirror is glass, and is in fact a Mirror of Rystas, one of a series of interconnected magical mirrors that can be used for transportation (similar to, but not nearly as powerful as, the Portals of Anshar). Though the Sarishans know of several of these mirrors, they do not necessarily control them all (or even know where all are located), with the result that unpredictable and unexpected things can emerge at any time. The Sarishans keep this particular mirror here so that the acolytes can serve as a sort of guard upon it. Should any hostile beings come through the mirror, the nearby acolytes can summon Infernals and raise the alarm. Normal travelers, on the other hand, will be greeted pleasantly, and the acolytes will even help direct them to their destination.



The Workshops of Sarish

In this chamber is placed a forge, and the sounds of metalwork can constantly be heard here. The light is rather dim, and though there is a large brass mirror here, a few small light globes and the baleful glow of the forge furnace provide the main illumination. Three long tables provide work surfaces for the score of Othanti demons that toil here day and night. These Infernals spend their time constructing wondrous and magical items for the priesthood of Sarish. At any given time, the partially completed bits of a dozen projects reside here. The Othanti themselves

pay little attention to those that may enter, provided that the Mark of Sarish protects the entering soul. Those foolish enough to venture here without the blessings of Sarish may find themselves in serious trouble.

The Refractory of the Senses

This large chamber is part winery, part alchemical laboratory. A cloying and sickly-sweet odor fills the air, and the area is quite cool. The room is arranged around two large fermentation vats, and is kept dark unless in immediate use, as the fermentation of the wines and spirits produced here can be affected by too much light or heat. The Sarishans brew or distill all the potent liquids needed for their strange ceremonies in this place.

Along the walls are stacked racks of wine bottles, casks, and potion vials, all filled with substances of varying consistency and color. The Sarishans manufacture everything from potentially hallucinogenic wine to poisons and magical liqueurs here. Some are finished products, ready to be drunk (or slipped into someone else's drink), while others are only ingredients needed for further work. Tables lie covered with mortars, pestles, alembics, vials, and all the other tools used to prepare herbs and potions for use. This room only sees intermittent foot traffic, as many of the substances produced here require long fermentation times to reach their peak potency.

The interloper foolish enough to randomly consume some substance from this room rarely needs to be taught the lesson twice; there is a 75% chance that the substance is a hallucinogen, causing the imbibor to experience weird visions or mind-altering effects for 1d4 hours. A Will save (DC 16) may be used to resist the visions for one round. There is also a 50% chance that the substance is narcotic, causing the consumer to become numb or sleepy, requiring a Fortitude save (DC 18) to avoid the loss of 1d6 points of Dexterity for 1d4 hours (these properties can stack). Finally, there is a 25% chance that the substance is addictive, in which case the imbibor may find himself hopelessly in thrall to the priesthood of Sarish to keep him supplied with more of his unwise draught.

Nearly any sort of potion, oil, or elixir can be found here. Roll on the appropriate magic-item tables, or simply select potables of your own preference, if a group of PCs spend any amount of time rummaging around in this place. There is no predicting what might be brewing in the vats here at any given time.

The Archive of Bindings

This series of chambers is a huge scroll storage and reference area. Racks upon racks of carefully arranged documents fill this room from floor to ceiling. The Mark of Sarish seals each scroll. These documents record all of the contracts made or witnessed by the Sarishans in Nishanpur. They also store copies of contracts witnessed throughout all of Canceri. Some of the walls here show evidence of scorch marks from a long-ago fire, though no other signs of damage are visible.

At any time of day or night various members of the priesthood can be found here researching contracts in order to better understand the tangled webs of obligation and oath between all the souls in Nishanpur and beyond. There is always an Acolyte of Sarish or two here as well, helping to find scrolls and filing them again to keep things in their proper order.

The Sarishans' infernal servants are always excavating new chambers to add more storage space to the archive. Most recently, the Acolytes of Sarish moved many rare and valuable texts from the Grand Library and the Silver Cage here, to protect them from the zealous fury of the Swords of Nier.

The Menagerie of the Forsworn

Unlike other chambers in this complex, the reinforced metal door here is clearly designed to bar exit from the room, not to prevent entrance. The room is unlit, except for the unearthly glow of many powerful symbols and runes of binding. The air has a smell of ozone, and an almost electric feel, from the ambient energy filling this chamber. Against the rear wall of the room is a low dais, with several tiers. Though the room is eerily silent, there is no dust here, and the chamber appears well tended.

Upon the dais are arranged countless tiny figures, each apparently carved of bone. Some appear recent, while the dress and styles of others seem to indicate they are figures from various eras of history, a few apparently quite ancient. The top tier of the dais is empty. The purpose and meaning of these figurines (and indeed the chamber as a whole) are known only to the highest-ranking members of the Sarishan clergy.

The Temple of the Sabbat

This large chamber is open to the sky. Passages lead off like spokes in every direction. A huge circle permanently inscribed in the stone covers most of the floor. At night, the circle glows faintly. Mirrors ring the entrances to the side passages, and light from this chamber reflects throughout the complex. Whispers seem to constantly echo on the wind. Along one wall of this circular chamber sits a large carved altar to Sarish. In this case, the God is depicted as a faceless, demonic gargoyle holding a key and a mirror. The mirror is bronze; it is a Mirror of Soul's Travail and Delight. (See Chapter 4: The Wiles of Sarish for specifics on this mirror).

The Sarishans perform rituals here only after nightfall, most often at midnight. Most of the side passages lead to the sleeping quarters for Acolytes of Sarish. Three of the passages lead to the chambers of the leaders of the clergy of Sarish.

Bethalic val'Mehan's Chambers

Bethalic keeps his chambers locked at all times. The door is marked with the typical sigils of Sarish, and the markings of a Nihang priest. The room beyond is opulent, filled with expensive furnishings. Rugs, including one that appears to be the pelt of some large beast, cover the stone floor. Instead of a bed, a large divan, draped with sheets of silk and many elegant pillows, dominates the room. Several mirrors arranged at odd angles cast reflections around the divan, including one on the ceiling.

Next to the divan, a thick chain is bolted into the wall, and a dish sits within reach of the chain on the floor. There are scratch marks on the wall around the chain. Also within this chamber is a wardrobe; it contains costly robes of the Sarishan priesthood, sized to fit a rather large wearer. There are additional items of masculine toiletry here, as well as personal effects. A desk sits in one corner, covered with paperwork. A magical dagger lies on top of the desk; it is enchanted to attack intruders that come within one foot of the desk without speaking the proper phrase (known only to Bethalic).

There is a 50% chance that Bethalic has something chained up within his chambers at any given time. The nature of his current "pet" varies according to his whims. There is a 45% chance that the current subject of his attentions is a normal human slave (equal likelihood of either gender), purchased at the Flesh Market. 30% of the time, Bethalic instead keeps another sort of humanoid pet, which can rage from a dark-kin to a goblinoid, but is generally something smaller and weaker than he is. The rest of the time, Bethalic keeps some sort of non-humanoid pet, which could be anything from a large dog or a hunting cat to some sort of extra-planar entity.

Dominiq val'Borda's Chambers

A year ago, during the debacle that led to the release of the Sword of the Heavens from his timeless prison, Sulemei val'Mehan perished. Sulemei had been one of the three in charge of the local priesthood of Sarish, so Palic val'Mehen quickly appointed a replacement, in order that her duties would not be neglected for an unseemly length of time. Imagine the surprise of the local Sarishan hierarchy, then, when Palic chose someone not of the traditional val'Mehan family!

Dominiq val'Borda has chosen to decorate her chambers in a less lavish fashion than the previous occupant did. Though the large draped bed of the late Sulemei remains, Dominiq has stripped it of its silken sheets and now it sports fittings that are more utilitarian. Rows of vials and bottles of all shapes and sizes cover the dressing table and desk, and the wardrobe contains a variety of clothing, ranging from fine Sarishan robes to the common vestments any peasant might wear. Some of the numerous bottles contain makeup or fragrances, while others hold potions or poisons.

The secondary chamber continues to serve as a work area, and sports a summoning circle inscribed on the floor. The volumes on the bookshelves deal more with music than magecraft, and a stand with a beautifully-constructed lyre rests in the corner.

The Sanctum of Master Palic val'Mehen

Palic always locks his chamber, and the doorknob is in the shape of a lion's head. A light globe kept on a desk will automatically brighten whenever someone enters the room. Palic is a very stoic and disciplined person, and his chambers reflect that. Rather than a bed, he keeps a hard wooden bench against one wall, and folds his blanket up each morning

at the end of the bench and places his pillow atop it. His wardrobe contains only practical vestments and hygiene items along with necessary accoutrements related to his status as a Nihang and leader of the Church of Sarish. His desk is neat, the papers meticulously filed.

The rest of the room is mostly bare, except for one striking item: in the far corner of the room is a great tank made of thick glass, standing about four feet tall. Inside the tank are the remains of what was once an elaborate miniature Milandisian castle. Palic built this tiny edifice and used it to hold his "pets" – the shrunken forms of his enemies, or anyone else he found interesting. He would toss creatures in to see them fight, and to provide food for his tiny charges. After the Sword of the Heavens sacked Nishanpur, though, Palic became enraged, and smashed his tiny kingdom. Many of the people inside perished, but some still survive. Palic has neglected them lately, though, and the survivors are planning an escape from their glass-walled prison.

The Reservoir of Nishanpur's Heart

Deep under the Temple Quarter rests one of Nishanpur's greatest secrets – and its greatest treasures. In a vast cavern, far underground, is a great lake, the depth of which is unknown even to the oldest of Nishanpur's sages. Early settlers discovered this chamber long ago, shortly after the founding of the city. The lake's waters are red, the red of millennia of blood, slowly seeping and dripping through the rock above, only to pool here. The walls of this great cavern weep blood, and the lake churns and bubbles, giving the air here a sickly-sweet odor.

The lake churns with a great deal of blood, left here over millennia by all the deaths and bloodshed on the aptly-named Plains of Blood, now called the Plains of Nishanpur. Despite its appearance, the lake is not completely composed of blood, however, not by any means. A reasonable amount of water does seep in, and this helps keep the blood flowing. In addition, various other minerals have leached from the rock and entered this strange brew.

When the first priests of Sarish found this place, they did not know quite what to make of it, and were unable to discern how or why it formed. They did discover, however, that the pool formed a massive battery, capable of storing a vast amount of magical energy. Since that day, they have tended to this underground lake, making sure it maintains itself, and adding as much to its volume as they can. In fact, the Pool of Ten Thousand Vows in the Temple of the Keeper of Mysteries slowly feeds a steady drip into the Reservoir. Only the leaders of the Sarishan clerics here know the goal to which they work by constantly feeding this massive lake of blood. The current clergy monitor the lake closely. A balcony extends from the Hall of Contracts into the reservoir chamber, and they placed a Mirror of Rystas on the ground level of the chamber for access purposes.

The Reservoir does not maintain itself only by the efforts of the priests, however. There is an ecosystem here that the clerics of Sarish have little knowledge of, and that they did nothing to establish. It has been here as long as the lake itself and the Sarishans are quite reluctant to do anything that might disturb it. The water churns and froths with currents of its own, and what creatures live within the lake's depths are unknown. The priests only know that despite the fact that numerous open wells in the city above have penetrated the lake's great chamber, and everything from rainwater to trash, and even the occasional Ykrup has fallen into the depths of the lake, the bloody froth continues unabated and uncontaminated. No one who has sought to figure out the solution to this mystery has met with success, either coming back empty-handed, or not coming back at all.

When the Sword of the Heavens was first defeated millennia ago, it was in this great chamber that his crystalline prison came to rest. The knowledge of what that prison contained, however, was unfortunately lost, or at least misplaced in the great wealth of knowledge the Sarishans hold. Its huge ruby-red crystal appeared as merely another facet of the magical energy battery that is the reservoir. When the Sword escaped from his prison, the resulting explosion of energy shattered the crystal, sending fragments all over the chamber. Though the chamber itself remains intact, the Sarishans did suffer some damage to the Hall of Contracts, but they managed to recover quickly. What effects this event may have had on the reservoir itself are unknown.

The Abodes of the Keepers of the Dead

This mellifluous name is given to the catacombs of Nishanpur, which serve as dwellings for the undead populace of the City of Secrets as much or more than they serve as places of eternal interment. Here, the large numbers of the unliving go about their business, undisturbed by the bustle of life above. The catacombs delve deep, and although they have never been completely mapped, it is likely they extend well outside the known bounds of the Corpse Quarter, and possibly even past the city walls. The catacombs are not one large system of delvings, but many smaller ones, some interconnecting with others in a constantly evolving arrangement.

It is certain that the catacombs are constantly being enlarged and elaborated upon by the residents, as from time to time a passage will break through into an area of the sewers or of the Hall of Contracts, necessitating a round of negotiations between the Sarishans and Nerothians of the city. Occasionally, dwellers from one area encounter creatures from another, with the occasional Ykrup being discovered in the catacombs, or swarms of Neroth's Children spilling out into the sewers. For the most part, however, the catacombs are a world unto themselves, a world the living rarely see.

Known entrances to the catacombs are in the Pits, the Docks, the Forge, and the Temple of the Lord of the Catacombs. Other entrances certainly exist, but their locations are unknown except to those that traverse them. In the Pits, the entrances are clearly marked, and many citizens of the city hold funeral rites in the upper reaches of the catacombs, laying their dead to rest in areas reserved for their family's bodies. Most are not brave enough to travel further into the depths, though. Offerings of goods, such as the deceased person's favorite items, household goods, or equipment, are often left with the bodies of departed loved ones, as one never knows who might be gifted with Neroth's touch. On some occasions, a family will (willingly or unwillingly) entomb a spouse, slave, or other relative of the dead person in the catacombs. This is most commonly done for the body of a person who is expected to rise again, or when the person being buried alive has expressed great love or jealousy regarding the deceased. This practice of live burial is considered the "old way," however, and not practiced by the general populace.

In some cases, when it is known that a family member has deliberately prepared for undeath, the family may actually prepare a dwelling-place for this entity in the catacombs. Such preparations include cutting a room or a small home out of the rock, and even furnishing it with goods in the expectation of the person's continued existence. The val'Mordane nobility often do such things, even connecting these passages into their own homes, in order for the deceased relative to interact more easily with his living descendants.

Within the catacombs many passages are completely unlit, or only dimly so, as there is little need for light here. The exception is the areas where sentient undead have set up their dwelling places. These may be as brightly lit as a home above and as well furnished, though the furnishings are often old and in a decrepit state. These areas also often have chambers that entirely confuse the living, or completely unnerve them.

Mapping the catacombs is an exercise in futility for dwellers of the living world. Few indeed are those brave enough to explore the depths of Nishanpur's catacombs. The catacombs are a three-dimensional environment, excavated layer upon layer, for the benefit of those that no longer breathe and eat. Huge portions of this area have no water and no light. Some chambers may be filled with unbearably stale or polluted air, or have no circulation at all, causing slow suffocation. Other areas interconnect with winding tunnels, or rooms connected to other rooms, seemingly at random. Cave-ins have occurred, and some areas may even connect to natural caves. Some special areas of note are detailed in the following paragraphs, though their precise locations can seldom be pinpointed with any degree of accuracy.

Family Crypts

These are areas excavated by families wishing to honor their departed ancestors. They are most often found in the upper reaches of the catacombs. These are usually chambers constructed like the living areas of a typical above-ground home, with benches and alcoves carved from the rock lining the walls. Walls tend to be brightly painted, in the styles of various eras of Nishanpur's past. Furniture and grave-goods are often present here. Some of the niches may contain bodies, dead or undead. Intelligent undead often visit – and sometimes guard – the crypts of their

own families, particularly if they have any continuing interest in contact with their living descendants. These undead may also remove offerings or bodies into deeper chambers for their own use.

Bone Mosaic Chambers

These chambers are often created by undead of a more artistic bent, or perhaps ones that are merely bored (or insane). Constructions made of the bones of the dead cover parts, or sometimes all, of these chambers. Walls and columns created by nothing more than a single type of bone, such as femurs, or skulls, are not unheard of. Often arranged into strange shapes, these mosaics depict gruesome or even strangely beautiful scenes.

Chamber of the Inexorable Hand of Death

This is one of the numerous chambers created from bone. This one is worthy of note, however, for its disturbing complexity. This is a large chamber, and bone covers the walls and floor almost completely. If examined closely, it is obvious that all the bones used in this room are the finger-bones of humanoids. Arranged on end, each bone only shows its rounded tip, like a tiny mosaic tile. Placed according to size and shade, these "tiles" are arranged to form an extremely graphic depiction of all the ways in which a man might die. The mosaic shows bodies piled upon bodies, each with a different and obvious form of death; wounds, diseases, anything that could kill a human being. The only color other than the ivory and gray of bone and ash is sanguine red – enamel has been applied to the mosaic where blood would be. There are areas of the mosaic that are clearly not yet finished, and the chamber is generally free of dust, both clues that indicate the creator may return.

Storage Crypts

These crypts are often dangerous to the few living that make their way into the catacombs – not because of the undead creatures that may be here, but rather because of the living ones. These chambers are cut from the rock in such a way that dozens, if not hundreds, of small niches are formed. Corpses, or pieces of them, are stored here for later use. The dead are stacked like cordwood in many cases, complete with any grave offerings and still wrapped in their burial shrouds.

These chambers tend to be located in areas that are quite dry. This often leads to a natural sort of mummification, preserving the corpses for long periods of time. The concentration of bodies also attracts the roving swarms of flesh-eating scarabs that inhabit the catacombs, and the unwary looter may find that these mindless scavengers form more effective guardians than undead ever could.

Crypt of the Companions

This is a large, obviously man-made chamber, from which smaller passages branch off in all directions. Lining each of the smaller excavated passages are niches, floor to ceiling, packed with sealed clay pots. Decorations cover many of these urns, and some are protected with warding spells.

Within each pot is the carefully wrapped and mummified body of a single animal. Different types of animals are stored in separate passages within this large crypt. There are thousands of carefully preserved toads, ravens, cats, dogs, ibises, and even some larger and more fantastic creatures. Some were the companions of wizards or sorcerers; some were mundane but beloved pets, brought here to follow their masters into death. Others served as sacrificial offerings to the gods. Many have some memento interred in their protective pots with them – some trinket or token of the care they had in life – a jeweled collar, a few coins, or a favorite toy.

Chapter Four

THE WILES OF SARISH

New Spells

Black Tide

Conjuration (Summoning)
Level: Clr 9
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 full round
Range: Close (25ft. + 5ft. / 2 levels)
Effect: Swarms of insects
Duration: 1 minute / level
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No



This spell is only known to a handful of ancient clerics of Neroth. It calls forth Neroth's Children from across the far reaches of Onara. Swarms of these dangerous insects are summoned to consume all flesh within view. (See Chapter 5: Natives of Nishanpur: for details on Scarab, Flesh-Eating, Swarm)

Masses of scarabs will erupt from the ground or walls in a torrent, rushing forth to attack all living things within sight, except the caster. The caster's allies are not immune to this spell and the beetles will attack them without hesitation. Once they have been unleashed, the caster cannot control the beetles, though they recognize him and will not attack him.

The spell summons eight 10' swarms of beetles in the eight squares adjacent to the caster's location. (Initially, the swarms are squeezing, and appear to be only 5' in size.) These swarms will autonomously attack and follow the nearest living creatures, attacking until they are killed or the spell's duration ends. If victims flee in different directions, the scarabs will divide equally to follow all living creatures. The initial swarms may divide into smaller swarms; each 10' swarm may divide itself into four 5' swarms, each of which has one-fourth the total hit points of the original swarm. If the victims flee out of sight, the scarabs will continue onward in the direction last indicated by the fleeing victims, unless their Scent feat finds a trail.

At the end of the spell's duration, the scarabs disappear, as all summoned creatures do, usually leaving behind the cleanly-picked bones of their victims. This spell can decimate a small or mid-sized town within the span of just a few minutes.

Create Skeletal Beast

Necromancy
Level: Clr 2, Death 2, Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Close (25ft. + 5ft. / 2 levels)
Target: One or more animated corpses
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No



This spell takes one or more animated corpses (skeletons or zombies) and combines them into one large skeletal beast. The number of Hit Dice of undead that can be affected is equal to the caster's level. The available undead may be combined into one large skeletal beast or several smaller beasts. At least 6 Hit Dice of undead are required to create a single skeletal beast, though larger and more powerful beasts may be created if more undead are used (up to a maximum of 12 Hit Dice for any single skeletal beast).

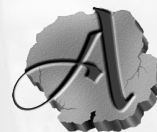
See Chapter 5: Natives of Nishanpur: for details on Skeletal Beast for the statistics of the monsters created by this spell. If more than 6 Hit Dice worth of undead are used in the creation of a single skeletal beast,

then the standard advancement rules should be used to determine the resulting creature's statistics.

The spell must be cast upon undead controlled by the caster, and the resulting skeletal beast is also controlled by the caster. The caster is still subject to the normal limitations regarding the total number of Hit Dice of undead creatures that he can control at any given time.

Hallucinatory Screen

Illusion (Glamer)
Level: Brd 5, Sor/Wiz 5
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 10 minutes
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft. / level)
Area: 20-ft. cube / level (S)
Duration: 1 hour / level (D)
Saving Throw: Will disbelief (if interacted with)
Spell Resistance: No



This spell ensures privacy in an inconspicuous way. Anyone looking into the area from outside sees an empty structure or bare terrain. Objects and creatures inside are masked by the illusory screen. Darkvision cannot penetrate it (it appears normal even to creatures with darkvision). Those inside the screen can see out normally. The screen does not prevent creatures or objects from moving into and out of the area. The screen is not invisible per se, so spells such as see invisibility do not automatically reveal it (true seeing shows its existence and boundaries, however).

No noise, including sonic or language-based spells or spell-like abilities, can pass through the screen, so nobody can eavesdrop from outside. Divination spells are blocked unless the person attempting to penetrate the hallucinatory screen can beat the screen's creator on an opposed caster level check (and even then the creator knows of the attempt and its success or failure). The illusion prevents speech between those inside and those outside, but its creator may choose to allow other sorts of communication, such as sending or message spells, a telepathic bond, or empathic communication between a master and her familiar. This decision is made by the screen's creator at the time the spell is cast and may not be subsequently changed.

Only a few Sarishans have access to this spell, and they guard the knowledge jealously.

Material Components: A piece of opaque glass, a wad of cotton or cloth, and powdered chrysolite.

Mark of Sarish

Conjuration (Summoning)
Level: Clr 2, Sor/Wiz 2
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 3 rounds
Range: Touch
Target: One sentient creature or one sealed document
Duration: Special
Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless) or None
Spell Resistance: Yes

The Mark of Sarish is perhaps the most well-known sigil in all of Nishanpur. It signifies the protection and sanctuary of the Lord of Secrets himself. The Mark resembles an inverted triangle between two parentheses. It pulses with a deep red glow. The Mark is always obvious and cannot be deliberately hidden or obscured by any means, or it ceases to function. (If the target becomes invisible, however, then the Mark remains active and is treated as any other light source held by an invisible creature.)

To create a Mark, the caster must take a bit of the subject's blood, which is used to anoint the subject's forehead. If the Mark is to be placed on a document, then the blood of either the signatories or the witnessing Sarishan priest may be used, and the blood is used to anoint a seal placed upon the document. Once the spell is cast, the blood spreads and flows of its own accord, taking the shape described above.

If a non-Infernal creature physically, magically, or psionically attacks a creature wearing the Mark, or attempts to damage or destroy the document on which the Mark has been applied, the Mark activates and summons 1d4 Demons of the Mark (See Chapter 5: Natives of Nishanpur: Demon, Vorlerath) to destroy the attacker. When placed on a document, the Mark can also be keyed to a particular individual whose name is known to the caster, and only that individual will thereafter be able to break the seal and open the document without triggering the Mark. After a single activation, for whatever reason, the power of the Mark is then exhausted, and the Mark vanishes. An attack constitutes an attempt to do physical or mental damage in any fashion. Scrying, charm or compulsion effects, and gross insults do not constitute an attack.

Note that the Mark can be placed just as easily on sentient undead creatures as it can on the living, but a creature must have an Intelligence score of 3 or higher in order to be a recipient of the Mark. (No such restriction exists on those who can trigger a Mark, however; thus, you couldn't place a Mark on your pet cat, but she could trigger it on others if she attacked them.)

If, at any time, a person wearing the Mark breaks any law of Nishanpur, commits a crime against the priesthood of Sarish, leaves a radius of roughly one mile around the city of Nishanpur, or specifically and deliberately attempts to cover or hide the Mark, it fades. The mark can also be destroyed without triggering if a Cleric of Sarish consecrated to cast the spell simply wills it (this is a standard action and does not require any sort of save or check). Otherwise, the duration is one month (when cast upon a living or undead being) or permanent until used (when placed upon a document). A targeted dispel magic spell can defeat a Mark of Sarish, but it is more difficult than usual to do so: the DC for the dispel check is 16 plus the Mark's caster level (instead of the usual 11 plus caster level). The Mark is not considered a magical trap and so cannot be disabled by a rogue.

The specifics of casting this spell are a closely guarded secret of the priesthood of Sarish in Nishanpur. They will not teach it to anyone who is not a lieutenant in Sarish's Church in Nishanpur. Those wishing to learn the spell must undergo an initiation at the Temple of the Keeper of Mysteries. The power of this spell is linked to the Pool of Ten Thousand Vows, which is located within the temple. Only those attuned to this pool can cast the spell at all. When the spell is cast, only part of the gathered blood (material component) is used in the spell itself. The remaining drops are gathered by the caster, and in a midnight ceremony of prayer, are added to the Pool, reinforcing the spell's power.

This spell is readily available for purchase at any of the gates entering the city of Nishanpur. The price has been fixed by the Temple of Sarish at 30 Baht.

Note: This version of the spell supersedes the original version from *Blood Reign of Nishanpur*.

Greater Mark of Sarish

Conjuration (Summoning)

Level: Clr 4, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 3 rounds

Range: Touch

Target: One sentient creature or one sealed document

Duration: Special

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless) or None

Spell Resistance: Yes

The Greater Mark of Sarish functions exactly as its lesser cousin (see above), but when it is activated, it goes dormant instead of fading away completely. A Greater Mark cannot be activated more than once within a single hour. It has all the same powers, restrictions, and triggering conditions as described under the Mark of Sarish, but once activated, a Greater Mark automatically resets after one hour. Its total dura-

tion (one month for creatures or permanent for documents) remains unchanged regardless of how many times it activates.

The Greater Mark can be discerned from the standard version of the spell, as the sigils created on the subject's forehead or on the sealed document glow with a golden light rather than a reddish light. This difference is automatically understood by any native of Nishanpur, while outsiders may take note of the differently-colored runes without necessarily knowing their significance. A Knowledge (religion: Sarish) check at DC 20 enables anyone to know the differences between the two types of Marks.

A targeted dispel magic spell can defeat a Greater Mark of Sarish, but it is more difficult than usual to do so: the DC for the dispel check is 21 plus the Mark's caster level (instead of the usual 11 plus caster level). The Greater Mark is not considered a magical trap and so cannot be disabled by a rogue.

Unlike its lesser cousin, the Greater Mark of Sarish is not automatically available at the city gates of Nishanpur. When a caster of sufficient ability can be located to cast this spell, the price is fixed by the Temple of Sarish at 100 Baht.

False Mark of Sarish

Conjuration (Summoning)

Level: Clr 1, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 3 rounds

Range: Touch

Target: One sentient creature or one sealed document

Duration: Special

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless) or None

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell is created following the same ritual (including the requirement of blood as a material component) and has the same appearance as a Mark of Sarish (see above). However, this spell does not offer any true protection in the case of an attack. Its purpose is mainly to serve as an intimidating decoy, as it is virtually indistinguishable from the true Mark. Many of the common folk of Nishanpur will seek out a False Mark instead of the real thing, because they can often get it cast for much less than the 30 Baht price that is required by the Temple of Sarish for the true Mark. The appearances are so similar that the protection afforded is often identical for all intents and purposes. Even a consecrated caster of Sarish may surreptitiously offer this spell in lieu of the true Mark, sometimes (but not always) at a lesser price. Particularly unscrupulous individuals will even cast a False Mark instead of the true Mark, especially if the subject of the spell has in some way offended the caster.

The specifics of casting this spell are a closely guarded secret in Nishanpur. This spell was not developed by the priesthood of Sarish, but many of them have learned the spell. Its true origin is unknown, though it is suspected that the False Mark was originally developed by a caster who was already consecrated to cast the true Mark, as its procedures and conditions mimic the true ritual so closely.

A False Mark of Sarish can be detected with a Spellcraft check (DC 30 for an unconsecrated caster, or DC 25 for a consecrated caster.) It most often goes undetected, however, until some condition that would trigger a true Mark is encountered and nothing happens, generally to the chagrin of the person who thought that he was protected.

Wall of Silence

Illusion (Glamour)

Level: Clr 4, Secrets 4, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft. / level)

Effect: Wall whose area is up to one 10-ft. square / level or a sphere or hemi-sphere with a radius of up to 1 ft. / level

Duration: 1 minute / level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No



This spell creates an invisible, intangible wall. The wall is 3 inches thick. It blocks line of effect for all natural and magical sound (including sonic effects), as the silence spell. No type of noise, sonic or language-based spells, or spell-like abilities can pass through the wall.

The wall cannot move, nor does it inhibit movement in any way (including ranged attacks). It is immune to damage of all kinds, and it is totally unaffected by most spells, except for a targeted dispel magic.

A wall of silence is often used by Sarishans to ensure their privacy and prevent eavesdropping. They guard the details of this spell jealously and there are few outsiders who have access to the necessary incantations.

New Magic Items

Brand of Mastery

This brand is a rod about three feet long. One end is typically fashioned into the house seal or arcane mark of its owner or creator. The other end is capped with a small blade. A creature who is branded with this item suffers the effects of a *geas/quest* spell (no save), with the conditions of the spell being that any attempt to escape from or deliberately disobey the commands of the brand's owner will invoke the spell's penalties. Only one such brand can be in effect on a particularly creature at any given time. If a second brand is placed on a creature already branded, the first mark remains in effect and the second immediately fades away. A brand may be removed either by a remove curse, limited wish, wish, or miracle spell, or by the physical burn mark being cut or marred by the blade on the opposite end of the brand that created it. A *brand of mastery* may be used once per week.

Caster Level: 11th; Prerequisites: Craft Rod, *geas/quest*; Market Value: 12,000gp; Weight: 6 lbs.

Dagger of Mahememnûn

This bronze ritual dagger was created by Myrantian priests of Neroth long ago. Used in rituals of mummification, the dagger served the dark priests for centuries. After the fall of the Myrantian Hegemony, the dagger fell into obscurity, entombed with the last priest who used it. About 20 years ago, the dagger was rediscovered by a band of adventurers. When the Nerothian priesthood that remained in former Myrantian lands heard of its discovery, they set out to retrieve it, by any means necessary.

The pommel of this dagger is shaped as a skull, and the hilt resembles an ancient column, inscribed with holy supplications to Mahememnûn. The crossguard is a great winged scarab, beautifully enameled. The blade is unadorned bronze.

The dagger is enchanted such that it will cut through the toughest hides, and any creature killed with the dagger is 75% likely to rise as one of the undead, without any spells or prayers being invoked for this effect. (01-24% does not rise, 25-76% Zombie, 77-88% Wight, 89-95% Ghoul, 96-99% Ghast, 00 Vampire) Furthermore, if the dagger is used in the preparation of a body for mummification, the resultant mummy will gain a 5-point increase to its inherent Damage Reduction.

Those wishing to use this dagger in the creation of undead should note that this dagger does not impart any ability to control undead upon the user. The undead created by this dagger are uncontrolled, and divine casters may attempt to turn, rebuke, or command these undead normally. The dagger provides no bonuses or penalties in this regard.

Caster Level: Unknown; Prerequisites: Unknown; Market Value: Priceless (the Myrantians would pay at least 50,000 gp to recover it, though they are far more likely to kill its possessor instead of negotiating); Weight: 1 lb.

Mirror of Soul's Travail and Delight

This device resembles a large polished brass hand mirror. The mirror's "frame" is masterfully etched around the edge, and the end of the handle is set with a large ruby cut into a perfectly faceted sphere. The mirror only functions when enough light is available for it to reflect an image (torchlight or better).

When one side of the mirror is gazed upon, the viewer will see his or her heart's most fond desire reflected in the polished surface. The viewer will then hear whispered promises that this desire will be fulfilled, simply by making a sacrifice to Sarish and promising their soul. If this is done, the wish will be fulfilled, but it will be in a contractually literal, and usually twisted, fashion (for instance, the desire to have a dead loved one be returned may result in the loved one being raised as a ghoul and transported into the viewer's presence).

The opposite side of the mirror may also be gazed upon, and in this side, the viewer will see his or her greatest fear. Again, whispered promises will echo in the viewer's mind that this fear can be forever defeated, for the simple price of an oath made to Sarish. After a suitable sacrifice is performed, the mirror will magically transform into a magical weapon or other item appropriate to the viewer's capabilities, and the fear will manifest itself (for example, if the fear is falling, the mirror will transform into a ring of feather falling and the viewer will be transported high into the air). After the fear has been faced, whether successfully or not, the mirror returns to its previous form.

The sacrifice demanded to activate this item will vary from viewer to viewer, but the ritual itself will always be required to take place at midnight. The price will invariably include a blood sacrifice of some sort. The mirror may require only an animal sacrifice for those whose desires are simple, or it may request a human sacrifice (even that of a loved one) for particularly dark or difficult wishes.

Caster Level: 17th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *wish* or *miracle*; Market Value: 165,000gp; Weight: 4 lbs.

Unguent of Animation

When used to anoint a dead body, this oil causes the corpse to animate into a skeleton or zombie. The undead creatures created by this unguent remain animated until they are destroyed. Unlike the animate dead spell, these undead are not automatically controlled by the user of the unguent, however. If the user is a cleric, she may attempt to turn, command, or rebuke the undead as normal. If they become uncontrolled, the undead will attack the nearest living beings. Each vial of unguent of animation contains enough oil to animate up to 10 Hit Dice worth of skeletons or zombies, all of which must be created from Medium-size or smaller corpses.

Caster Level: 5th; Prerequisites: Brew Potion, *animate dead*; Market Value: 1,000gp; Weight: 2 lbs.

Chapter Five

NATIVES OF NISHANPUR

Cold Infant

Small Undead
HD: 1d12 (6 hp)
Init: +0
Spd: 5ft.
AC: 11 (+1 size); touch 11, flat-footed 11
Base Attack/Grapple: +0/+4
Attack: Touch +5 melee (see below)
Full Attack: Touch +5 (see below)
Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.
Special Attacks: Cold Touch
Special Qualities: Undead
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0
Abilities: Str 18, Dex 10, Con -, Int -, Wis 6, Cha 1
Skills: N/A
Feats: Improved Grapple
Environment: Any land or underground
Organization: Individual or siblings (2-3)
Challenge Rating: 1/2
Treasure: None
Alignment: Neutral
Advancement: 2-3HD (Medium)
Level Adjustment: -

Cold Infants are the risen remains of infants or toddlers that have passed away. They are almost all naturally occurring, as necromancers would rarely create something with so little in the way of practical use. The infant bodies appear naturally mummified, as if the flesh and fat has desiccated and now clings to their bones. Cold Infants can hardly move, only being able to slowly crawl along reasonably level surfaces. Despite their frail appearance, their tiny hands hide an iron grip.

Combat

The only form of attack or defense a cold infant has is its cold touch. They are unintelligent, their only motivation being an attraction to the heat of living beings. They generally attempt to grapple living creatures so that they can apply their cold touch each round with a successful grapple check.

Cold Touch (Ex): Characters touched by cold infants are frozen in place (touch causes paralysis for 1 round; Fort DC 11 negates) as long as the creature remains in contact with them. This touch drains 2 hit points per round from the victim until the victim dies, or contact is broken in some fashion.

Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Dæmons Ykrup

Small Outsider (Evil, Infernal)
HD: 2d8 (9 hp)
Init: +0
Spd: 20 ft.
AC: 14 (+3 natural, +1 size); touch 11, flat-footed 14
Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+1
Attack: Bite +6 melee (1d4+4+1d4 acid)
Full Attack: Bite +6 melee (1d4+4+1d4 acid)
Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.
Special Attacks: -
Special Qualities: Damage reduction 5/good or Sarishan steel, SR 5, Resistances, Scent, Tremorsense 20'
Saves: Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +3
Abilities: Str 16, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 2, Wis 8, Cha 3
Skills: Climb +8, Hide +9, Move Silently +5, Survival +4
Feats: Great Fortitude

Environment: Any aquatic, land, or underground
Organization: Individual or Clutch (2-10)
Challenge Rating: 2
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always Neutral Evil
Advancement: 3 HD (Small), 4-5 HD (Medium), 6-8 HD (large)
Level Adjustment: -

Ykrup are native to Gehenna, a neutral evil plane. Ykrup are some of the least powerful of the countless beings who live there. They look like little more than giant maggots. They begin their lives about the size of a house cat, and grow as they eat.

Ykrup will eat any organic material, and they are capable of eating constantly (and growing constantly). They excrete only water and inorganic lumps, the remains of bits that they could not digest. Ykrup have no ears, and very poor eyesight, but have a highly developed sense of smell. They spend their entire existence trying to find organic material to eat.

The Sarishan clergy of Nishanpur have found a use for these disgusting little creatures, placing them in the sewers where they serve as a sort of garbage disposal for the city. Though Ykrup cannot communicate, they can receive telepathic commands from other Infernals.

Combat

When threatened or hungry, they will lurch forward and attempt to bite an opponent, leaving their sticky acidic saliva all over the foe. They can barely think or plan, and so are likely to continue attacking even if they are obviously outmatched.

Immunities (Ex): Ykrup are immune to acid, disease, and poison.

Resistances (Ex): Ykrup have cold and fire resistance 5.

Delusion Witch

Medium-size Undead
HD: 1d12 (special – see below)
Init: +5 (+1 Dex, Improved Initiative)
Spd: 30 ft.
AC: 13 (+1 Dex, +2 natural); touch 11, flat-footed 12
Base Attack/Grapple: +0/+0
Attack: 1 claw +0 melee (1d4)
Full Attack: 1 claw +0 melee (1d4)
Space/Reach: 5 ft. / 5ft.
Special Attacks: Illusion of Truth
Special Qualities: Undead, Damage Immunity
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2
Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 11
Skills: N/A
Feats: Improved Initiative
Environment: Any land or underground
Organization: Individual
Challenge Rating: 4
Treasure: Standard
Alignment: varies (usually neutral)
Advancement: N/A
Level Adjustment: N/A

The Delusion Witch is a form of undead that is said to appear in cases where a deceased person feels that they have been robbed of their life through no fault of their own. This cannot be proven, however, as the being itself does not have the awareness of its own condition necessary for self-examination. The Delusion Witch appears as it did in life, or more accurately, as it saw itself in life. It clings to one perfect moment in its past, creating the illusion of life around it. In truth, these creatures' bodies rot away, and their true appearance can be seen in the reflection of a mirror, or through use of a true seeing spell.

The Delusion Witch will continue to stay in an area it knew well in life, maintaining an illusion of the area the way the creature remembers it was. The area may decay around it, but the witch will not acknowledge the changes. The only exception is that the Delusion Witch will not tolerate the presence of mirrors anywhere near itself.

A Delusion Witch gains strength from the energy of others, and so it will attempt to lure others into its illusion, convincing them that they are lost loves, family members or friends. Bewitched victims waste away, living the same events over and over again. In truth the Delusion Witch seeks only the reinforcing mental energy of its victims; it does not seek to kill them. Victims actually starve to death, not eating as they cycle through events, or the food they believe they eat being illusory. A dead victim will simply cease to exist in the Delusion Witch's reality, and the creature will "replace" the missing person as quickly as possible.

Combat

If a person who encounters a Delusion Witch makes his or her initial saving throw (see below), the undead will attack. Perceiving such a being as a threat to its reality, the Delusion Witch will claw and hit the "intruder," hoping to drive away or kill the interloper. The witch will not willingly permit those that become part of its illusion to leave.

Illusion of Truth (Su): The Delusion Witch projects the illusion of its past life around it, similar to a permanent hallucinatory terrain spell. Those that enter into the lair area of the Delusion Witch will be engaged in conversation, as it tries to lure the newcomers into its illusion. When they attempt to leave, they must succeed on a Will save (DC 10), with a cumulative -1 circumstance penalty to the roll for each minute of time spent in conversation with the Delusion Witch. Anyone who fails this saving throw will become part of the illusion; such victims believe themselves to be whoever and whatever the Delusion Witch believes them to be.

Damage Immunity (Ex): The Delusion Witch is immune to all damage from weapons and spells. The only thing that can harm the Delusion Witch is the truth. If presented with a mirror, the Delusion Witch will see its true reflection, and it will be destroyed.

Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Deathgleaner

Medium-size Undead (Infernal, Evil, Lawful)

HD: 12d12+17 (95 hp)

Init: +5 (+1 Dex, Improved Initiative)

Spd: 30 ft., (fly 60ft. (clumsy) winged)

AC: 20 (+1 Dex, +9 natural); touch 11, flat-footed 19

Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+10

Attack: Slam +13 melee (1d6+10+Blight)

Full Attack: Slam +13 (1d6+10+Blight)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. / 5ft.

Special Attacks: Blight, Despair

Special Qualities: Creature of Neroth and Sarish, Damage reduction 15/magic or Netherite or Sarishan steel, Immunities, Resistances, Resistant to Blows, See in Darkness, SR 17, Undead

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +10

Abilities: Str 24, Dex 12, Con -, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 13

Skills: Hide +11, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (any one) +9, Listen +12, Move Silently +11, Search +12, Sense Motive +14, Spot +12.

Feats: Alertness, Toughness, Improved Toughness, Improved Toughness, Improved Initiative.

Environment: Any desert or underground

Organization: Individual or guardians (2-10)

Challenge Rating: 10 (11 winged)

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always lawful evil

Advancement: 13-15 HD (Medium), 16-18 HD (large)

Level Adjustment: +10 (+12 winged)

Deathgleaners are a form of Infernal-based undead, first created by a collaboration of the priesthood of Neroth with the Seekers of the Hidden Master in the catacombs under Nishanpur. Fearsome opponents, they were designed especially to fight against the Erdukeen Nierites. Immune to fire, and resistant to the sword, they can be controlled by either the clergy of Neroth or Sarish.

As they are created using a variety of devils, roughly 50% of them are winged, and capable of flight. In constant pain due to the process of their creation, they often attack anything they encounter in a blind rage. In quieter moments, they are likely to be found pondering their situation, as many still retain fragmented memories of their past lives.

Combat

When unleashed, a Deathgleaner will attack relentlessly with its massive fists. Its strength and determination make it a formidable foe.

Blight (Su): Whenever a Deathgleaner makes a successful slam attack, the opponent must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 17) or suffer 1d4 points of temporary Constitution damage from a virulent Nerothian plague.

Creature of Neroth and Sarish: Deathgleaners are made from a melding of energies and intents. As such, clerics of either Neroth or Sarish can turn, command, or rebuke these creatures more easily than other clerics. When attempting to turn, rebuke, or command Deathgleaners, clerics of Sarish or Neroth may treat them as if they were only 7 HD.

Despair (Su): At the sight of a Deathgleaner, a viewer must succeed on a Will save (DC 17) or be paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Regardless of success or failure, the viewer cannot be affected by that Deathgleaner's despair ability again for 24 hours.

Immunities (Ex): Like the Devils used in their creation, Deathgleaners are immune to fire and poison.

Resistances (Ex): Deathgleaners have acid and cold resistance 10.

Resistant to Blows (Ex): Deathgleaners possess an amazing resistance to physical attacks, possessing damage resistance of 15/-. This effect applies before damage reduction. Magic, Netherite, and Sarishan steel do not bypass this damage resistance, though they do bypass the deathgleaner's normal damage reduction.

See in Darkness (Ex): Deathgleaners can see perfectly in darkness of any kind, even that created by deeper darkness spells.

Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Demons

All Demons have the following qualities:

Immunities (Ex): Demons are immune to poison and electricity.

Resistances (Ex): Demons have cold, fire, and acid resistance 20.

Telepathy (Su): Demons can communicate telepathically with any creature within 100 feet that has a language.

Demon, Quara'te

Large Outsider (Evil, Chaotic, Infernal)

Hit Dice: 10d8+20 (65 hp)

Initiative: +3 (+3 Dex)

Speed: 10 ft

AC: 26 (+3 Dex, -1 Size, +14 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +10/+23

Attack: barbed tentacle +15 (1d10+5)

Full Attack: 4 barbed tentacles +15 melee (1d10+5)

Space/Reach: 10ft./25ft.

Special Attacks: Corrupt Being

Special Qualities: Damage reduction 15/cold iron or good or Sarishan steel, Demonic Qualities, Regeneration 5, SR 20.

Saves: Fort +9, Ref +10, Will +7

Abilities: Str 20, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 7

Skills: Bluff +11, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (local) +16, Knowledge (any three) +16, Listen +13, Sense Motive +13, Spellcraft +16, Spot +13, Use Magic Device +11

Feats: Combat Reflexes, Improved Grapple, Improved Natural Attack, Weapon Focus (Tentacle).

Environment: Any land or underground

Organization: Individual

Challenge Rating: 10

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always Chaotic Evil

Advancement: 12-16 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: -

The Quara'te, or Sinew Demon, is a vastly malevolent being that slowly corrupts all things around it. The demon itself is nothing but a huge mass of stringy tendrils of viscera and sinewy material, from whence it gets its name. These tendrils, however, could be more equated to huge nerves in terms of their function. The Quara'te grows by insinuating itself into the flesh of other living organisms, and slowly corrupting and transmuting the flesh of these beings into its own essence.

By insinuating itself into intelligent beings, it can also control them. It will often take over several fierce or highly skilled beings, and force them to use their abilities to protect the Quara'te, rather than immediately assimilating their flesh.

Sinew Demons have been known to bargain with beings they encounter, in order to increase their own influence or power. Once the conditions they ask for have been achieved, however, they cannot be trusted to hold up their end of the bargain unless forced into a Sarishan contract, which most will cunningly avoid by any means available.

Their goals seem only to be to grow and to release others of their own kind into the Prime Material Plane. They cannot control or absorb undead or extra-planar beings, so they constantly seek to attract new mortal victims.

Combat

As an isolated being, the only form of attack available to a Quara'te is its barbed tentacles. It will lash out with these tentacles and ensnare beings that approach it. Once it has captured another being, however, it can control that being and force it to use all its resources in the Quara'te's defense.

Corrupt Being (Su): Beings grappled by a Quara'te must succeed on a Reflex save (DC 18) or a barb from one of the tentacles digs deep into the character. Grappled characters that failed the saving throw take 1d4+2 points of piercing damage from the Quara'te's tentacle barb and must make an additional Fortitude save (DC 17) or become paralyzed. Paralyzed characters must succeed on a Will save (DC 15) every round, or they become assimilated. Assimilated beings become an extension of the Quara'te under its control (this functions as per the spell dominate monster, but the duration is effectively indefinite).

Regeneration (Ex): Cold and holy effects deal normal damage to a Quara'te. If a Quara'te loses a tentacle, the lost portion regrows in 2d6 minutes.

Demon, Vorlerath

"Demons of the Mark"

Medium-size Outsider (Evil, Chaotic, Infernal)

Hit Dice: 3d8 +5 (18 hp)

Initiative: +4 (+4 Dex)

Speed: 30ft.

AC: 17 (+4 Dex, +3 natural); touch 14, flat-footed 13

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+6

Attack: Claw +7 (1d6+3)

Full Attack: 2 claws +7 melee (1d6+3)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: None

Special Qualities: Damage reduction 5/cold iron or good or Sarishan steel, Demonic Qualities, Regeneration 3, SR 7.

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +3

Abilities: Str 17, Dex 19, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 10

Skills: Bluff +6, Climb +9, Escape Artist +10, Hide +10, Jump +9, Listen +6, Move Silently +10, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +8, Spot +6.

Feats: Toughness, Weapon Focus (claws).

Environment: Any land or underground

Organization: Individual or Group (2-10)

Challenge Rating: 2 + Random Qualities

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always Chaotic Evil

Advancement: 3-5 HD (Medium), 6-9 HD (Large), 10-12 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: +5

Vorlerath are the Demons summoned by the Mark of Sarish. Native to the Abyss, the chaos of that realm readily manifests itself in their widely varying appearance and abilities. No two Vorlerath Demons ever act or appear quite the same. Bound by Sarish to serve as the enforcers of his Mark, they take glee in attacking those that oppose them in strange and unexpected ways.

Combat

When these creatures encountered on the Prime Material Plane, it is almost exclusively due to their being summoned by the Mark of Sarish. They will thus directly attack the being which triggered the Mark, and any subsequent beings which attack them, to the exclusion of all other activities. After completion of this task, they return to their home plane.

Language (Su): Vorlerath can speak to any creature that has a language in that creature's native tongue.

Random Qualities (Su): To determine the Random Qualities of the Vorlerath, roll once on each of the two charts below.

Physical Features:

Tail: Tail attack +6 (melee) 1d4+1 damage. A hit with the tail allows the vorlerath to make a free trip attempt without provoking an attack of opportunity or needing a touch attack. If the trip attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the vorlerath.

Wings: fly 30 ft. (good) and gains the Flyby Attack Feat.

Tough: +4 Str, +2 Con, +2 natural armor, gains the Toughness feat.

Sneaky: +4 Dex and gains a 1d6 Sneak Attack as per a Rogue.

Horns: Gains a gore attack: Gore +6 (melee) 1d6+1 damage, double damage on a charge. Also gets the Multiattack feat and, during a full attack, may make a Gore attack at +4 melee in addition to the two claw attacks.

Tentacles: Clawed tentacles for arms give a 10 ft. reach. Also gains the Improved Grab feat.

Special Features:

Agile: Base speed for all existing forms of movement increases by 10 ft. and also gains a climb speed of 20 ft.

Poison: Gains the Ability Focus (Poison) feat as well as poisonous claws. Poison Fort save DC 14, initial effect 1d6 temporary Str damage, secondary effect 1d6 temporary Con damage. (+1 CR)

Spells: +4 Cha and gains the following spell-like abilities: 3/day – invisibility, magic missile, mantle of unassailable flame, mirror image, scorching ray, shield; 1/day – bestow curse (DC 15), summon monster III. Caster level 7th. The save DCs are Charisma based. (+2 CR)

Brute: +8 Str, +8 Con, +4 natural armor, gains Toughness x3 and the ability to Rage as a Barbarian. (+2 CR)

Champion: +4 Str, +4 Con, +4 Cha, and gains four or more class levels. (+3 CR or more)

Classed: gains one or more class levels. (+1 CR per class level)

Devils

All Devils have the following qualities:

Immunities (Ex): Devils are immune to fire and poison.

Resistances (Ex): Devils have cold and acid resistance 20.

See in Darkness (Su): All devils can see perfectly in darkness of any kind, even that created by deeper darkness spells.

Telepathy (Su): Devils can communicate telepathically with any creature within 100 feet that has a language.

Devil, Melatrom

Large Outsider (Evil, Lawful, Infernal)

HD: 5d8+15 (37 hp)

Init: +6 (+2 Dex, Improved Initiative)

Spd: 30ft., fly 60ft. (good)

AC: 21 (+2 Dex, +10 natural, -1 size); touch 11, flat-footed 19

Base Attack/Grapple: +5/+13

Attack: Claw +9 (1d6+4) melee or Bite +9 (1d8+4) melee

Full Attack: 2 claws +9 melee (1d6+4), Bite +4 melee (1d8+4)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. / 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Corrosive Bite

Special Qualities: DR 10/good, greenglass, Sarishan steel or wood, SR 15, Devilish Qualities.

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +5

Abilities: Str 18, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 8

Skills: Balance +6, Climb +10, Jump +10, Listen +9, Move Silently +10, Spot +9

Feats: Flyby Attack, Multiattack.

Environment: Any land
Organization: Individual or Pack (2-10)
Challenge Rating: 4
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always Lawful Evil
Advancement: 6-10 HD (large), 11-14 HD (Huge)
Level Adjustment: —

Melatorn Devils are the Infernal mounts commonly used by the Knights of the Order of the Red Fist. Their appearance varies somewhat in size and body shape, leading to the necessity of custom-fitting the flight saddles that are used to ride them.

They are somewhat draconic in body form, but their forelimbs are comparatively quite short. Up close, though, it is obvious they are not related in any significant way to dragons. They have thick, leathery skin rather than scales. They have large ears, and their joints sport large tufts of stiff bristly spines. Males have a ridge of bristles running down their long necks. Their tails end in long spines. Females tend to be larger than males, but the males have longer and more impressive bristles. A Melatorn often sleeps with its head tucked beneath a leathery wing, like a bird.

Melatorns have good hearing and an excellent sense of smell. In their native environment they consume metal items as well as flesh, and they can smell iron from up to a mile away.

The intelligence of these creatures is barely above the level of animals, but they can follow instructions well enough that once they have been bound into service, they will serve their master loyally for the duration of that master's life. They readily learn simple commands and basic strategies of attack.

Combat

When a Melatorn attacks, it will first take guidance from its rider (if any). If untrained it will swoop and circle its prey, harrying the victim until it can strike a critical blow. In their natural habitat, Melatorns hunt in packs, much like wolves.

Corrosive Bite (Ex): A melatorn that makes a successful bite attack against a metal object causes the metal to corrode, falling to pieces and becoming useless immediately. The size of the object is immaterial. Magic armor and weapons, and other enchanted items made of metal, receive a Fortitude save (DC 20) to avoid being dissolved. Wooden, stone, and other nonmetallic items are unaffected.

Red Shadow

"Nier's Hounds"

Medium-size Incorporeal Outsider (Evil, Fire, Lawful)
HD: 6d8+6 (33 hp)
Init: +7 (Dex, Improved Initiative)
Spd: 40ft.
AC: 14 (+3 Dex, +1 deflection)
Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+14
Attack: Incorporeal envelop +6 melee/grapple (1d4+3 fire damage)
Full Attack: Incorporeal envelop +6 melee/grapple (1d4+3 fire damage)
Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.
Special Attacks: Immolation
Special Qualities: Fire Subtype, Fire blend, Incorporeal, Shadow blend.
Saves: Fort +8, Ref +8, Will +5
Abilities: Str -, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 12
Skills: Hide +14, Intimidate +10, Listen +9, Search +8, Sense Motive +9, Spot +9, Survival +9.
Feats: Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Stealthy
Environment: Any land or underground
Organization: Individual or pack (2-6)
Challenge Rating: 4
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always Lawful Evil
Advancement: 7-8 HD (Medium) 9-12 HD (Large)
Level Adjustment: +6

It is said that the Red Shadows were created long ago from a co-mingling of the powers of Nier and Cadic. The truth of this is unknown, though given the mixed abilities of these creatures this tale of their origin does seem plausible. These beasts are nothing more than reddish-colored shadows that

relentlessly pursue any prey they are set upon. They are usually under the command of a powerful cleric of Nier, but occasionally are known to hunt down a being on their own, perhaps for sport, or by the wishes of Nier himself, though this is mere speculation.

Red Shadows seem to understand Infernal, but have never been known to speak. They prefer to stalk their prey in silence, and seek to attack from surprise, waiting until the victim is alone and unable to summon help, if possible. They blend well with the flickering shadows of torchlight, but their red coloring can sometimes give them away if their environment lacks this color.

Combat

When the Red Shadow hunts, it seeks to use stealth to its advantage. It is a relentless opponent, stalking its prey unceasingly. It will often allow its victim to see it, and drive him to exhaustion before attacking. It will avoid being seen by any except its victim, leading many common folk to believe that these creatures are only a myth.

A blast of cold can often drive Red Shadows from their chosen victim for a time, as intense cold is their one main weakness. These beasts will flee if faced with death, as they can simply resume their stalking when they have recovered.

Fire Blend (Su): Under any conditions other than full daylight, a Red Shadow can disappear into the flickering light of a fire, giving it total concealment. Artificial illumination, even a light or continual flame spell, does not negate this ability. A daylight spell will, however.

Fire Subtype (Ex): Red Shadows are immune to fire. They have vulnerability to cold, which means that they take half again as much damage (+50%) as normal from cold-based attacks, regardless of whether a saving throw is allowed or if the save is a success or a failure.

Immolation (Ex): When a Red Shadow is near death, it can choose to immolate itself in a single fireball of destruction, doing 8d6 points of fire damage to its victim and everything within a 5-foot radius. This attack destroys the Red Shadow. An enveloped victim gets no saving throw against this damage, but others within the blast radius can attempt a Reflex save (DC 14) for half damage.

Incorporeal: Can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better magical weapons, or magic, with a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. Can pass through solid objects at will, and its own attacks pass through armor. Always moves silently.

Incorporeal Envelop (Ex): When a Red Shadow attacks, it seeks to envelop its prey, causing the victim searing pain. The victim's skin will appear to turn bright red, as the creature's own coloration can be seen. Under these circumstances, any damage done to the Red Shadow (or attempted, in the case of corporeal damage), also applies to the enveloped victim. If the Red Shadow is not dislodged, it can automatically deal its damage on subsequent rounds without needing to make a successful grapple check.

This maneuver is handled in much the same way as a grapple except that the Red Shadow gains a +4 circumstance bonus to its grapple check (which is already included in its Grapple attack bonus above) and may not pin its opponent.

Shadow Blend (Su): Under any conditions other than full daylight, a Red Shadow can disappear into the shadows, giving it concealment. Artificial illumination, even a light or continual flame spell, does not negate this ability. A daylight spell will, however. Unlike the fire blend ability, the creature's concealment is not total in normal shadows, as its red coloration can still give its location away.

Scarab, Flesh-Eating Single

"Neroth's Children"

Fine Vermin
HD: _d8 (1 hp)
Init: +3 (+3 Dex)
Spd: 20ft., Climb 15ft., Fly 5ft. (clumsy)
AC: 22 (+3 Dex, +8 size, +1 natural); touch 21, flat-footed 19
Base Attack/Grapple: +0/-
Attack: Bite +11 melee (1)
Full Attack: Bite +11 melee (1)
Space/Reach: 1ft. / 0ft.
Special Attacks: Burrow
Special Qualities: Darkvision 60', Disease Immunity, Scent, Turning Vulnerability, Vermin,

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +0
Abilities: Str 1, Dex 17, Con 10, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 8
Skills: N/A
Feats: Weapon Finesse
Environment: warm desert or underground
Organization: Clutch (2-10) or swarm (see below)
Challenge Rating: 1/4
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always Neutral
Advancement: 1 HD (Diminutive)
Level Adjustment: -

Scarab, Flesh-Eating Swarm

"Neroth's Children"

Fine Vermin
HD: 17d8+9 (85 hp)
Init: +3 (+3 Dex)
Spd: 20ft., Climb 15ft., Fly 5ft. (clumsy)
AC: 22 (+3 Dex, +8 size, +1 natural); touch 21, flat-footed 19
Base Attack/Grapple: +12/-
Attack: Swarm (6d6 + See Below)
Full Attack: Swarm (6d6 + See Below)
Space/Reach: 10ft. / 0ft.
Special Attacks: Burrow
Special Qualities: Darkvision 60', Disease Immunity, Scent, Swarm Traits, Turning vulnerability, Vermin,
Saves: Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +5
Abilities: Str 1, Dex 17, Con 10, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 8
Skills: N/A
Feats: Ability Focus (Distraction), Hover, Improved Natural Attack, Improved Toughness, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness
Environment: warm desert or underground
Organization: Swarm
Challenge Rating: 10
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always Neutral
Advancement: -
Level Adjustment: -

The flesh-eating scarab is an insect commonly found in dry areas where there is carrion for it to feed upon. Originating in the area of the ancient Myrantian Hegemony, "Neroth's children" (as they are called) have traveled along with the val'Mordane and other worshippers of Neroth, and now can be found in catacombs and crypts all over Onara. Though these insects can fly for short distances, they usually will scurry along the ground, walls, or ceiling.

Though small, and reasonably innocuous in appearance, those that visit the places of the dead are wise to beware of these vermin. As long as there is a source of carrion on which to feast, flesh-eating scarabs will generally leave ambulatory living creatures alone. These creatures truly become dangerous when they are hungry. One scarab may be dispatched without undue difficulty, but a swarm of them can easily form a carpet of death from which escape is nearly impossible.

Combat

When threatened or hungry, the flesh-eating scarab will run forward and attempt to bite an opponent, allowing it to use its burrow attack.

Burrow (Ex): Any living opponent struck by the scarab's bite attack must succeed on a Reflex save (DC 12) to stop the scarab from latching on. Upon its next action, if it has not been dislodged, it begins to burrow. Dislodging an attached scarab requires a standard action while it is still visible; once it has penetrated the skin and disappeared from view, it can only be removed by the methods described below.

As the scarab digs into the opponent's flesh and eats its way through internal organs, it causes the victim excruciating pain and deals 1 point of Constitution damage each round. When the opponent's Constitution score reaches 0, the scarab has reached the opponent's heart and eaten it. While burrowing, a remove curse spell will kill the scarab and expel it from the wound, a remove disease will expel it from the wound without killing it, and any sort of cure spell will slow it down, preventing the victim from suffering

damage for that round. Successful turning attempts (see Turning Vulnerability below) can also expel them.

If the opponent is wearing leather armor or has natural armor, it can burrow through the armor in 1 round per point of armor bonus. In this case, the initial bite attack must only hit a Touch AC, but does no initial damage, and the scarab can be pulled off as a standard action at any time up to the point when it finally burrows through the armor and into the victim's flesh.

Burrow: Swarm (Ex): When flesh-eating scarabs are swarming, any living creature that begins its turn in the same square with the swarm, and that had taken damage from the swarm on its last action, must make a Reflex save (DC equal to damage taken from swarm attack) or have 1d4 scarabs begin to burrow into its flesh, with the same (albeit accelerated) effects as described above.

Disease Immunity (Ex): As eaters of carrion and creatures of death, these insects are immune to all forms of disease, both mundane and magical.

Distraction (Ex): Only when Swarming: Any living creature that begins its turn with a scarab swarm in its square must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 20) or become nauseated for 1 round.

Turning Vulnerability (Su): As creatures of Neroth, these insects are subject to His will. Though they are not undead, a cleric or paladin of Neroth may turn, rebuke, or command these insects as if they were undead. The scarabs cannot be destroyed by turning, but a successful turning check expels them from a victim whose flesh they have burrowed into.

Vermin: Immune to mind-influencing effects.

Scarab, Guardian

"Neroth's Watchdog"

Large Vermin
HD: 8d8+32 (68 hp)
Init: +1 (+1 Dex)
Spd: 30ft., Climb 15ft.
AC: 20 (+1 Dex, -1 size +10 natural)
Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+15
Attack: Bite +14 melee (2d6+12)
Full Attack: 2 Bites +14/+9 melee (2d6+12)
Space/Reach: 10 ft. / 5ft.
Special Attacks: Trample (1d6+12)
Special Qualities: Darkvision 60', Disease Immunity, Scent, Turning Vulnerability, Vermin
Saves: Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +2
Abilities: Str 26, Dex 12, Con 19, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 8
Skills: N/A
Feats: Improved Natural Attack (Bite), Power Attack, Weapon Focus (Bite)
Environment: warm desert or underground
Organization: Solitary, pair, or clutch (3-6)
Challenge Rating: 4
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always Neutral
Advancement: 10-12 (Large) 13-15 HD (Huge)
Level Adjustment: -



The guardian scarab, also called "Neroth's Watchdog," can be found anywhere that Nerothians have created large catacombs or crypts. These insects are fiercely territorial, and will defend their territories with grim efficiency. Usually solitary, they will pair only briefly to mate, abandoning any produced eggs. Young guardian scarabs will stay together until they reach maturity (about 5 months), then separate to find their own territories.

Though they are winged beetles, guardian scarabs cannot fly. Instead, they use their wings as a means of communication, making a clicking or humming noise to call to mates or clutch siblings, or as a display to ward off rivals. They will often make this same noise before attacking, giving opponents a chance to flee. They eat carrion, and if hungry will attack living creatures of smaller or equal size without fear.

Combat

When threatened or hungry, the flesh-eating scarab will run forward and attempt to bite an opponent, or to trample multiple opponents, crushing them.

Disease Immunity: As eaters of carrion and creatures of death, these insects are immune to all forms of disease, both mundane and magical.

Trample (Ex): As a full-round action, a guardian scarab may move up to twice its speed, trampling Medium-size or smaller opponents for 1d6+12 points of damage. Opponents must choose either to make attacks of opportunity (at a -4 penalty) or to attempt a Reflex save (DC 22) to halve the damage.

Turning Vulnerability (Su): As creatures of Neroth, these insects are subject to His will. Though they are not undead, a cleric or paladin of Neroth may turn, rebuke, or command these insects as if they were undead. The scarabs cannot be destroyed by turning; but they do flee when successfully turned.

Vermin: Immune to mind-influencing effects.

Shadow Fetch

Medium-size Undead (Incorporeal, Infernal, Outsider)

HD: 3d12 (19 hp)

Init: +3 (+3 Dex)

Spd: 30ft.

AC: 14 (+3 Dex, +1 deflection)

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-

Attack: Claw +4 melee (1d6)

Full Attack: 2 Claws +4 melee (1d6)

Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.

Special Attacks: Shadow Theft

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60', Damage reduction 5/cold iron or good or Sarishan steel, Incorporeal, Undead

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +4

Abilities: Str -, Dex 16, Con -, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 12

Skills: Hide +9, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Listen +7, Spot +7, Survival +7

Feats: Improved Natural Attack (Claw), Weapon Focus (Claw)

Environment: any land or underground

Organization: Individual or group (2-10)

Challenge Rating: 3

Treasure: None

Alignment: Usually Chaotic Evil

Advancement: 4-6 HD (Medium), 7-10 HD (Large), 11-15 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: +5

Shadow fetches are the shadows of mortal men, which have been twisted and given a life of their own. They resemble the human shadows that they once were, but often show demonic or inhuman traits.

These servants of Sarish, when not specifically working toward a goal, are often allowed to wander freely around the area of their last task. They are sometimes sent as servants, or retainers, to Sarishan spellcasters of sufficient power.

Combat

These undead are formed of the darkest parts of the human spirit. They attack without reservation, and though they will use intelligent tactics if their goal is to kill their adversaries, they will just as often fight without killing, hoping to keep the victim alive to torture for as long as possible.

Shadow Theft (Sp): Living creatures successfully touched by a Shadow Fetch suffer 1d4 points of temporary Charisma damage. If the victim's Charisma reaches 0, he falls comatose until healed. The victim's shadow is forever altered, showing infernal traits. The victim will suffer a -2 penalty to all Charisma-based checks, except Intimidate, which instead receives a +2 bonus. When the subject dies (whenever that may occur) his shadow rises one day later as a Shadow Fetch, unless a Sarishan temple "exorcises" the incubating undead before the subject's death.

Incorporeal: Can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better magical weapons, or magic, with a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. Can pass through solid objects at will, and its own attacks pass through armor. Always moves silently.

Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Skeletal Beast

Large Undead

HD: 6d8+4 (18 hp)

Init: +7 (+3 Dex, Improved Initiative)

Spd: 40ft.

AC: 16 (-1 Size, +3 Dex, +4 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/-

Attack: Claw +7 melee (1d8+4)

Full Attack: 2 Claws +7 melee (1d8+3), Bite +1 melee (1d8+2)

Space/Reach: 10ft. / 5ft.

Special Attacks: None

Special Qualities: Damage reduction 5/bludgeoning, Darkvision 60', Immunity to cold, Undead

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +5

Abilities: Str 19, Dex 16, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: N/A

Feats: Improved Natural Attack (Claw), Power Attack, Weapon Focus (Claw)

Environment: any land or underground

Organization: Individual or group (2-10)

Challenge Rating: 3

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always Neutral

Advancement: 7-8 HD (Large), 9-12 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: -

Skeletal beasts are the result of magical experimentation by Nerothian clerics and magic-users. They do not occur on their own; they must be created.

Skeletal beasts are created by combining the skeletal remains of several mindless animated creatures (skeletons or zombies); they do not have to be complete or of the same type. As a result, no two skeletal beasts are identical. Each one appears to be a grotesque jumble of bones, not necessarily arranged in anatomical order. Skeletal beasts lurch about with amazing speed, running on arms, legs, and any available appendage.

Combat

These undead are unintelligent (though they can follow simple commands) and do not make use of advanced tactics. If not controlled, they will blindly attack any living thing they encounter. They have roughly the same capacity to follow instructions as a skeleton or zombie does.

Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Chapter Six

LIVING ARCANIS: NISHANPUR

The materials in this book, as well as in the module, are meant to be fully integrated into the LIVING ARCANIS campaign setting. Players can use their regular LIVING ARCANIS characters in this module, or make new characters native to the City of Secrets. Players who wish to create new characters that are native to the City of Secrets are may make use of the following rules for the LA: Nishanpur campaign.

Skills

Characters from Nishanpur may elect to take the following skills as class skills:

Knowledge (local: Nishanpur)

Knowledge (religion: Dark Triumvirate)

Characters native to Nishanpur that choose to take the Black Market skill receive a +4 bonus when attempting to buy and sell contraband within the city of Nishanpur itself.

Gentry

Characters from Nishanpur taking the Gentry feat at character creation receive the opportunity to purchase one item (a single weapon or suit of armor) made of Sarishan steel. This is in addition to the opportunity to purchase a flintlock. Val characters are not automatically given a Sarishan steel item; they must purchase it like any other piece of equipment. This uncerted Sarishan steel item may only be purchased at character creation, not afterward. It should be recorded on the log sheet at your first module. For weapons, the cost is equal to the base weapon's cost +200gp per pound of item weight. For armor or shields, take the base cost and add +2,000gp for a shield or suit of light armor, +4,000gp for a suit of medium armor, or +6,000gp for a suit of heavy armor. (Note: the above prices represent the lowest-available prices at any time. Prevailing market conditions and developments in the campaign world may mean that the market price of Sarishan steel goes above the amounts listed above, but new Gentry from Nishanpur can always buy their initial Sarishan steel item at these prices.)

The chosen item may be either a basic piece of armor or a basic weapon from Core Rulebook I, or a gladius. The weapon of the Coryani Legions has become ubiquitous through much of Onara. Weapons or armor specific to a region or country other than Canceri/Nishanpur are not available (For example, a dwarven urgosh, suit of lorica segmentata, or Tralian hammer could not be selected.) Flintlocks have never been manufactured of Sarishan steel, and will not be, although ammunition of Sarishan steel is available for purchase.

Secret Societies

The following new Faction is available with the advent of the Nishanpur campaign:

Order of the Hidden Flame

This secret society is formed of Coryani and Cancerese devotees of Nier that wish to re-integrate the Nierites with the Coryani Mother Church. Members of the Order tend to be much more moderate in outlook than many Nierites. They fervently believe that exiling the purging flames of the Nierites from the Empire has led to the Empire's decadent decline. Only through reunification of the Mother Church can the Empire be stopped from sliding into decay and eventually collapsing.

Important Note: Alignment may not matter in the city of Nishanpur, but it still matters in the LA: Nishanpur campaign.

Please keep in mind that although the PCs may literally get away with murder in Nishanpur, this does not mean that running around randomly killing people is a good thing to do. In a home campaign, PCs are free

to be as evil as the GM is willing to allow, but a Living Campaign is meant to promote good fun and teamwork among the players. Although Nishanpur is a dark city, and many modules will involve choices of questionable morality, if a PC behaves consistently in a disruptive or evil-natured manner when it is not necessary to do so, GMs should call the player on the carpet for it. Having to kill NPCs to achieve the objectives of a module is one thing, but a PC just randomly killing peasants is another. Even in Nishanpur, the PCs are still meant to be heroes, if conflicted ones.

New Prestige Classes

The following prestige classes are approved for play in the LIVING ARCANIS campaign. Note that each of these classes requires membership in a particular campaign meta-organization, however, so players will need to obtain the appropriate credentials before taking a level in these classes.



Oathspeaker

Dominiq moved silently through the darkness with a measured pace. Each movement was deliberate, each breath controlled. So practiced was she that even the simple act of walking became an intricate dance. She turned onto the main hallway, ignoring the guards as they gaped at her in astonishment and fear. Steadily she headed towards the gigantic double doors, pushing them open with but a flick of her henna-covered hand.

When Lord Grann val'Mordane saw the Oathspeaker enter his court, he felt a cold pit forming in his stomach...

Background:

In Nishanpur, a unique group of bards has arisen out of the peculiar customs of the city. In a land where singing is not part of the accepted musical traditions, bards had to evolve to become quite adept at the more acceptable forms of entertainment. Some of these bards eventually formed the Oathspeakers of Sarish. Stringed instruments prevail among the Oathspeakers, and their dancing has become an art form that entrances all who witness.

Their entrancing dances are supplemented with barely-vocal chanting, most often tales from the ancient past. Beyond their artistic façade, the Oathspeakers further specialize in knowledge of the web of commitments and oaths that bind so many in the City of Secrets.

Their fellowship is so formalized, that even the day-to-day appearance of an Oathspeaker is part of a carefully-constructed display. They take new names upon admission to the Greater Academy, and begin to dress in the order's traditional attire of purple and black. Under makeup and garb, and behind new names, the would-be Oathspeakers' appearance becomes completely androgynous. During their training, their movements are very limited, being largely restricted to areas within the Academy. Only as they near graduation are the students allowed free access to the city again, once their masters judge them ready to ply their trade as master performers and lords of oaths.

Hit Die: d6

Requirements:

To qualify to become an Oathspeaker, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Alignment: any Lawful

Deity: Sarish

Skills: Concentration 4 ranks, Knowledge (Sarishan oaths) 6 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 6 ranks, Perform (Any form of non-vocal performance) 10 ranks

Feats: Skill Focus (Knowledge [Sarishan oaths]), Skill Focus (Perform)

Spellcasting: Must be able to cast 2nd-level arcane spells, and be able to use the bardic *fascinate* ability.



Table 6-1: The Oathspeaker Class

Level	BAB	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spell Advancement
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Bardic Performance, Oath Maker	+1 arcane caster level
2nd	+1	+1	+2	+2	Oath Seeker	+1 arcane caster level
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+3	Oath Lore	+1 arcane caster level
4th	+3	+2	+3	+3	Dance of Revelations	+1 arcane caster level
5th	+3	+2	+4	+4	Oath Binder	+1 arcane caster level

Special: Oathspeakers must audition, and receive admission, to the Greater Academy at the Temple of Shadows in Nishanpur. In the LIVING ARCANIS campaign, PCs must instead gain admission to the Oathspeaker meta-organization, and maintain good standing within that organization.

Class Skills:

Oathspeakers have the following class skills (listed with the key ability for each skill): Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Gather Information (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (any) (Int), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Spellcraft (Int), and Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class Features:

All of the following are class features of the Oathspeaker prestige class.

Armor and Weapon Proficiency: Oathspeakers gain proficiency with the blowgun and warfan. They do not gain any new armor proficiency.

Bardic Performer (Ex): Oathspeakers are consummate performers just as much as they are masters of oaths and contracts, meshing both specialties in the fulfillment of their duties. Oathspeaker levels stack with bard levels in order to determine number of bardic music uses per day and bardic knowledge bonus. In addition, though the life of an Oathspeaker is quite structured and bound by lawful tenets, characters that take this class are freely able to gain levels in the bard class and are no longer considered ex-bards.

Oath Maker (Su): Oathspeakers are masters of contracts and oaths, and are blessed by Sarish to act as sealers of covenants. Starting at 1st level, the Oathspeaker gains the ability to witness and seal any oath, contract, promise, or covenant of any kind in the name of Sarish. If one of the parties involved in the oath breaks his side of the deal, that creature is then affected by the curse of Sarish, suffering from a -1 penalty to all skill checks, attack rolls, and saving throws. When the Oathspeaker reaches 5th level, the penalty for breaking an oath that she sealed increases to -2. This power is identical to the val'Mehan bloodline power of the same name. A val'Mehan Oathspeaker who already has this bloodline power increases the penalty of the curse to -2 at 1st Oathspeaker level and -4 at 5th Oathspeaker level.

Oath Seeker (Su): As she grows in the secrets of her society, the Oathspeaker's mastery of oaths allows her not only to seal them, but to detect them as well. Starting at 2nd level, the Oathspeaker is able to *detect thoughts* as per the spell cast by a sorcerer of her total caster level. The Oathspeaker's *detect thoughts* ability is modified as follows: its duration is concentration, up to 1 round per class level; the information gained is always treated if the Oathspeaker had been concentrating for three rounds; and the information gleaned from the target creature's thoughts on the first three rounds of concentration is exclusively about oaths, bonds, contracts, and other covenants and commitments made by the target, allowing the regular use of the spell only after the fourth round.

The Oathspeaker has two ways of utilizing her oath seeker ability. The Oathspeaker may use this ability on any target that she has *fascinated* using her bardic music ability. Using the oath seeker ability this way is a standard action. The Oathspeaker may also use the oath seeker ability on a target that is not fascinated. Using the oath seeker ability this way is a full-round action. The Oathspeaker may use this ability a total number of times per day equal to her Oathspeaker class level plus her Charisma modifier (minimum 1).

Oath Lore (Ex): Oathspeakers gain a very thorough knowledge of laws and precedent, allowing them to understand the intricacies of oaths to uncanny levels. At 3rd level, the Oathspeaker may add her bardic knowledge bonus to any Knowledge (law) or Knowledge (Sarishan oaths)

skill check. She may use this ability a number of times per day equal to her Intelligence modifier plus her Oathspeaker class level (minimum 1).

In addition, once per week, by making a Knowledge (Sarishan oaths) check (DC 30), the Oathspeaker is able to find a legal loophole in an oath she sealed, thus allowing one target creature to get out of an oath without any supernatural repercussions. If the Oathspeaker wishes to find such a loophole in an oath not sealed by her, the DC increases to 35. If an oath is made between only two people, and either one of them gets out, then the entire oath is dissolved and both parties are absolved without penalty. If the oath involves more than two people, then only that single creature gets out of the oath, while the rest remain bound by it. Oathspeakers rarely use this ability, lest people take Sarishan oaths frivolously, but they have been known to do so in special circumstances.

Dance of Revelations (Su): An Oathspeaker's performance can be used for more than entertainment—it can reveal a person's deepest secrets and all the promises unkept. Starting at 4th level, the Oathspeaker learns a new form of bardic performance, known as the Dance of Revelations. Although it is called a dance, note that this performance can actually take many other forms, such as acting or pantomime. The Dance of Revelations allows the Oathspeaker to reach into a target's mind and act out an unfulfilled promise or oath. It is a performance that takes time to accomplish, but one that can have powerful outcomes.

To perform the Dance of Revelations, the Oathspeaker must set up her performance over a period of at least 1 minute, and make a Perform (any form of non-vocal performance) skill check (DC 30). If this check is failed, she may attempt it again with the DC increased by 2 for each further attempt. Once the check is successful, the Oathspeaker spends two of her daily allotment of uses of bardic music to enact the Dance of Revelations. The Dance only works on a single target creature, which must have an Intelligence score of 6 or higher. The target may attempt a Will save (DC equal to the Oathspeaker's Perform check result) to negate the effect. If the target fails his save, the Oathspeaker is able to subconsciously go into his memories and seek out one unfulfilled promise or oath to enact. Oathspeakers usually use their oath seeker ability first to investigate their potential target and determine the best choice for their subsequent performance.

Enacting the Dance of Revelations takes a period of at least 10 minutes, as the Oathspeaker performs the target creature's story of his promise unfulfilled. Once the Dance of Revelations is completed, the target must immediately attempt a second Will save (DC equal to the Oathspeaker's original Perform check result). If he succeeds, there is no in-game effect, though the Oathspeaker must still deal with the target's reaction to having his secret life exposed (a reaction that can range from mild annoyance to full-blown rage). If the target fails the second saving throw, then he is affected as though by a *crushing despair* spell cast as if by a sorcerer equal to the Oathspeaker's total character level. This effect has a duration in days equal to the Oathspeaker's Charisma modifier plus her Oathspeaker class levels, and cannot be dispelled or removed except by a *limited wish*, *remove curse* (and only if the caster level is at least two higher than the Oathspeaker's character level), *miracle*, or *wish*. *Dispel magic* and *break enchantment* do not counteract the effects of a Dance of Revelations, which is treated as a mind-affecting effect, but not as an Enchantment.

Oath Binder (Sp): At 5th level, the Oathspeaker achieves the pinnacle of her tradition. She is now not only able to seal, seek, and analyze oaths, but gains the ability to oath-bind people simply by her own will. Once per day, the Oathspeaker may cast *geas/quest* as a sorcerer of level equal to her total character level.

Ex-Oathspeakers: An Oathspeaker that ceases to be of Lawful alignment loses all Oathspeaker class abilities. She may also not progress in levels as an Oathspeaker. She regains her abilities if she regains her Lawful alignment and receives an *atonement* spell cast by a cleric of Sarish of at least three levels higher than her total character level.

Red Fist Elite Knight

In the training arena at the headquarters of the Knighthood of the Order of the Red Fist, a dozen knights sparred with each other, honing their melee skills. Commander Ulit val'Mehan surveyed the scene, his furrowed brow scanning the combatants' faces, searching for one in particular. "Yemlid!" he shouted.

The combatants stopped in unison, snapping to attention at the sight of their approaching officer. Commander val'Mehan stopped in front of the knight Yemlid, and after a few seconds of uncomfortable silence, he spoke. "Congratulations, Yemlid. You have been awarded the recognition of being an elite knight of the Order of the Red Fist." Commander val'Mehan produced a scarlet and black armband embroidered with the insignia of the Order of the Red Fist in gold, wrapping it on Yemlid's left arm. "Report at once to my office for further instructions."

Background:

The Knighthood of the Order of the Red Fist is tasked with being the guardians and police force of Nishanpur. Within their ranks, common soldiers train in order to serve the city and the knighthood. From the ranks of the knighthood, certain individuals always exceed their officers' expectations, going above and beyond their regular duties, becoming living examples of the virtues and tenets that define the Order. These knights are declared Elite Soldiers of the Order of the Red Fist, and awarded the Scarlet Band of the Elite Knight.

Red Fist Elite Knights are usually promoted to leadership positions upon conferral of the honor. All officers in the Order are Elite Knights, though not all such knights are officers; some of these individuals choose not to be promoted in rank, preferring to serve alongside their companions. Regardless of the position they occupy, Elite Knights serve as rallying points for the knighthood as a whole; they represent the paradigm of the true knight.

Red Fist Elite Knight NPCs are mostly found in Nishanpur, performing their duty as guardians of the city. Some patrol the streets with their squads, while others patrol from the air atop their Melatorm Devil mounts. Occasionally, one can find a Red Fist Elite Knight outside of Nishanpur, on a special mission to another area of Canceri. It is uncommon, though not completely unheard-of, to find elite knights outside of Canceri. Such Knights are generally performing very special, and quite often top-secret, missions on behalf of their order.

Hit Die: d10

Table 6-2: The Red Fist Elite Knight Class

Level	BAB	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Badge of Honor
2nd	+2	+2	+1	+1	Bonus feat, Ear of Sarish (1/day)
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Masterful Rider
4th	+4	+3	+2	+2	Bonus feat, Ear of Sarish (2/day)
5th	+5	+4	+2	+2	Summon Melatorm Mount

Requirements:

To qualify to become a Red Fist Elite Knight, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Base Attack Bonus: +5

Skills: Diplomacy or Intimidate 3 ranks, Knowledge (law) 2 ranks, Knowledge (local: Nishanpur) 2 ranks, Ride 6 ranks

Feats: Leadership, Mounted Combat

Special: Must be a member of the Knighthood of the Order of the Red Fist, with an exemplary record of service, and must have been chosen to become an Elite Knight of the Order. In *LIVING ARCANIS*, this means the PC must belong to the Knights of the Red Fist meta-organization and must remain in good standing.

Class Skills:

The Red Fist Elite Knight's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Diplomacy (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (law)(Int), Knowledge (local – Nishanpur)(Int), Listen (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), and Spot (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features:

All of the following are class features of the Red Fist Elite Knight prestige class.

Armor and Weapon Proficiency: Red Fist Elite Knights are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, all types of armor, and all shields (except tower shields).

Badge of Honor (Ex): All members of this highly-selective unit are decorated with the Scarlet Band of the Elite Knight – an arm badge that displays their special status for all to see. When he wears this badge of honor, the Elite Knight gains a +2 circumstance bonus to all Diplomacy, Intimidate, and Gather Information skill checks within the nation of Canceri. Within the city of Nishanpur and its surrounding area, this bonus increases to +3.

Bonus Feat (Ex): Being a member of the knighthood's elite means having access to specialized training that enhances the knight's ability to fulfill his duties to the Red Fist. At 2nd and 4th level, the Red Fist Elite Knight chooses a bonus feat from the following list: Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Exotic Weapon Proficiency*, Great Cleave, Greater Weapon Focus*, Greater Weapon Specialization*, Improved Critical*, Improved Sunder, Mounted Archery, Power Attack, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Trample, Weapon Focus*, Weapon Specialization*.

The Elite Knight can select feats marked with an asterisk (*) more than once, but must select a different weapon each time such a feat is chosen. The knight must still meet all prerequisites for any feat, including ability score and base attack bonus minimums.

Ear of Sarish (Sp): In the fulfillment of their duties as Nishanpur's city guard, the members of the Red Fist must often conduct investigations as well as interrogations. The Elite Knight excels at this task, as he is able to force others to speak only the truth – a rarity in the City of Secrets.

Starting at 2nd level, once per day the Red Fist Elite Knight is able to create the effect of a *zone of truth* spell as if cast by a cleric of level equal to his Elite Knight class level. At 4th level, the Red Fist Elite Knight may use this ability a second time per day. The saving throw DC to resist the Elite Knight's *zone of truth* is equal to 10 plus the Elite Knight's class level plus the Elite Knight's Charisma modifier.

Masterful Rider (Ex): Red Fist Elite Knights receive superior training with their Infernal mounts, gaining the ability to ride the order's signature devils with great mastery. Starting at 3rd level, the Red Fist Elite Knight learns to communicate with all Melatorm Devils as if he spoke their native language, and he may add his Elite Knight class level as a circumstance bonus to all Ride skill checks made when riding a Melatorm. In addition, the Red Fist Elite Knight may cause his Melatorm mount to hover (as if it had perfect maneuverability). The Elite Knight also gains the benefits of the Spirited Charge feat while devil-mounted, even if he does not meet the prerequisites.

Summon Melatorm Mount (Su): Starting at 5th level, the Red Fist elite knight is able to summon his Melatorm mount to his own location. This ability may only be used once per day, and requires one full round. The Melatorm appears at the beginning of knight's next turn in a place designated by the knight, up to 15 feet from his position. Once it appears, the Melatorm awaits the knight's orders. If the knight is under attack, the Melatorm immediately attacks the knight's opponent, unless commanded to do otherwise.

Ex-Elite Knights: A Red Fist Elite Knight that is expelled from the knighthood or demoted from his position as an elite soldier loses all Red Fist Elite Knight class abilities. He may also not progress in levels as a Red Fist Elite Knight. He regains all class abilities and the ability to progress in the class if he is reinstated and once again named an Elite Knight by the senior commanders of the Red Fist.

Table 6-3: The Sisters of Nier Class

Level	Fort BAB	Ref Save	Will Save	Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	See Through all Veils	+1 caster / manifester level
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	Discern Bloodline	+1 caster / manifester level
3rd	+1	+1	+1	+3	augury (3/day)	+1 caster / manifester level
4th	+2	+1	+1	+4	Walls are but Curtains (+1 level)	+1 caster / manifester level
5th	+2	+1	+1	+4	To Look Within the Heart of the Fire	+1 caster / manifester level
6th	+3	+2	+2	+5	divination (3/day)	+1 caster / manifester level
7th	+3	+2	+2	+5	Walls are but Curtains (+2 levels)	+1 caster / manifester level
8th	+4	+2	+2	+6		+1 caster / manifester level
9th	+4	+3	+3	+6	true seeing (3/day)	+1 caster / manifester level
10th	+5	+3	+3	+7	Walls are but Curtains (+3 levels)	+1 caster / manifester level

Sisters of Nier

Basuhe val'Virdan gazed deeply upon Kelimhre the Archivist as he spoke. He was nervous; she could see that much clearly, it took no special powers for that. The answers to his questions were satisfactory as well; she began to think that perhaps he was no threat to her overall plans, after all.

But there was something else there, something that didn't quite seem right, so she looked deeper... Yes, there it was – a quickness of the blood; something the Sword of the Heavens particularly despised. Kelimhre would have to be demoted and kept away from positions of power. He was descended from the hated Emmans...

Background:

When the followers of Leonydas val'Virdan retreated to Erduk after the fall of the First Imperium, they did not go alone. With them went an order of Larissan oracles known as the Sisters of Nier. The Sisters were devoted to Larissa in her guise as Mistress of Prophecy. Over the years, their isolation has led to a great specialization. They have devoted themselves so totally to prophecy that Larissa's face as the goddess of passion has been almost completely forgotten.

The Sisters now train in any form of divination possible; clerical, arcane, or psionic. Their goal is to be able to read the will of the Gods for man; how successful they are in this goal is, of course, itself a matter of interpretation.

Requirements:

To qualify to become a Sister of Nier, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Religion: Must venerate Nier as well as Larissa

Alignment: Any

Skills: Concentration 8 ranks

Feats: Skill Focus (Concentration)

Special: Must be able to cast and/or manifest at least 2 Divination spells or Clairsentience abilities. The character must also gain admittance to the organization, and faithfully study the teachings of both Nier and Larissa. In the LIVING ARCANIS campaign, this means that the character must gain admission to the Sisters of Nier meta-organization, and maintain good standing within that organization.

Hit Die: d6

Class Skills:

The Sisters of Nier have the following class skills (with the key ability for each skill): Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Knowledge (any, taken individually) (Int), Listen (Wis), Profession (Wis), Psicraft (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (Int), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis).

Skill Points per level: 4 + Intelligence modifier.

Class Features:

All of the following are class features of the Sisters of Nier prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The Sisters of Nier gain no additional weapon or armor proficiencies.

Increase in Caster/Manifester Level: As a Sister of Nier progresses, her caster or manifester level increases by one each time she gains a level in the prestige class. If the Sister has multiple spellcasting or manifesting classes, then she must choose which class receives the level increase each time she gains a level in the Sisters of Nier prestige class.

See Through all Veils (Su): Whenever a Sister of Nier attempts to use the *screaming* or *greater screaming* spells to observe someone, the target suffers a penalty on his Will save equal to the Sister's class level.

Discern Bloodline (Su): As a full-round action, a member of the Sisters of Nier of 2nd level or higher can examine any Val and determine his or her true blood line. This requires concentration on the Sister's part. If she continues to concentrate for a second round, the Sister can determine the Val's precise bloodrank. For each additional round of study, the Sister can determine the Val's specific bloodline powers, at a rate of one power per round (beginning with the lowest-level powers and moving up).

Walls are but Curtains (Su): Beginning at 4th level, a Sister of Nier casts or manifests all spells from the school of Divination and all psionic powers from the discipline of Clairsentience as if her caster or manifester level were one higher. At 7th level, this bonus rises to +2, and at 10th level, the bonus rises to +3.

Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): A Sister of Nier gains the use of certain spell-like abilities as she advances in power. At 3rd level, she gains the ability to use augury three times per day. At 6th level, she gains the ability to use divination three times per day. At 9th level, she gains the ability to use true seeing three times per day. All of these spell-like abilities are treated exactly as if the spell of the same name had been cast by a cleric of twice the Sister's class level. The Sister does not require any material components to use these spell-like abilities.

To Look Within the Heart of the Fire (Ex): Beginning at 5th level, a Sister of Nier may use any source of open flame as her focus for screaming and greater screaming spells. She no longer requires any other focus or material components when casting these two spells.

Ex-Sisters of Nier: If a member of this prestige class ever turns away from the worship of Nier and Larissa (in her aspect as Divine Oracle), then the character loses the use of all of the supernatural and spell-like abilities granted to her by the prestige class. She may regain the use of these abilities by receiving an atonement spell from a senior Sister and by reconsecrating herself to the worship of both of the order's patron deities.

Chapter Seven

ADVENTURING IN NISHANPUR

Why Adventure in Nishanpur?

The question I most often encounter from players of *LIVING ARCANIS* is “Why would I go to Nishanpur at all?” It seems many players are put off by the nature of this city, where violence is completely acceptable, yet weapons and armor are so heavily restricted. It concerns them that they cannot seem to find a reason for their characters to enter a city where they feel their safety is so imperiled.

Ultimately it is up to the player to decide why a character chooses to explore the City of Secrets, but for the GM trying to find reasons to bring characters to the city, I offer some suggestions.

- Rogues may have heard of the legendary high-stakes gambling that takes place in the city, and can't help but want to participate.
- Warriors may be attracted by the inevitability of civil war, seeking to join the side they perceive as most desirable (or that is paying the highest wages).
- Clerics may wish to go into Nishanpur as missionaries, preaching (carefully) against the heresy of the Dark Triumvirate.
- Mages may have heard of the Sanctum in Nishanpur, and wish to go somewhere that they can study openly, without fear of the Harvesters of Ymandragore.
- Characters may be attracted by the fact that the markets of Nishanpur openly sell items that would be illegal elsewhere: poisons, gruesome components for obscure spells, etc.
- Perhaps a PC has heard of and seeks instruction from practitioners of an obscure prestige class. The availability of training for prospective Assassins, Blackchanters, Oathspeakers, and similar classes is far better in Nishanpur than in other cities.

Plot Hooks

Sometimes it can be difficult to find a way to ease a party into the convoluted politics of a city like Nishanpur without having outside forces act on the party and force them into actions that entangle them in the GM's pre-planned adventure.

In acknowledgement of this difficulty, I offer here some ways a GM can tempt her party into taking the sorts of actions that would lead them deeper into the intrigues of the city.

- A PC is bound by a Sarishan contract, for which he does not know all the conditions of completion or compliance. The character must seek help from the Sarishans in Nishanpur to research the contract (and hopefully find a way to get out of it).
- The PCs need a piece of obscure knowledge that can only be found in the Grand Library.
- A family member of a PC has died, and the party must travel to Nishanpur to settle the estate.
- The party may be fleeing from Harvesters and choose to hide out in Nishanpur because it is well-known that the agents of the Sorcerer-King are not tolerated within the city.

Scenario: City of Secrets

As presented here, this module is written for a home-play game with a party of four to six adventurers of levels 1-3. The Player Handouts referenced in the scenario text, along with all the information needed in order to play this game as an RPGA tournament and to scale this module for character levels 1-11, can be found at the official Paradigm Concepts website (www.paradigmconcepts.com) or at the *LIVING ARCANIS* campaign website (www.livingarcanis.com).

During this scenario, any time the party runs afoul of city guardsmen, use the stats for “typical Red Fist or Sword of Nier Footsoldier” in Chapter 2. The PCs should encounter patrols of one less than their number if they are 1st level, an equal number at 2nd level, and one more than their number at 3rd level.

Adventure Summary and Background

Nothing is simple in the City of Secrets. With the Swords of Nier in control of the city, a great unrest has settled over the population. The authoritarian regime of the Swords is beginning to destroy the commerce that has always been the lifeblood of the city. As the merchants suffer, the Ratcatchers have been scheming, trying to find a solution to this problem.

The Nerothians retreated underground when the Swords arrived in Nishanpur. Their ire simmers slowly; for now, they are content to wait, and plan for the long term. They know that eventually everything dies, even governments. The Sarishans, on the other hand, are less sanguine about the situation. Palic val'Mehen, once so close to the ultimate seat of power, has found his plans thwarted again. Palic plots the downfall of the Autocrat of the Swords of Nier, while the Seekers of the Hidden Master try to determine how they might best use their resources to bring forth the Devil-Kings they see as the salvation of Canceri.

In a bizarre twist of fate, a few members of the Nerothian clergy and the Seekers saw a way to work together, and have come up with a plan to severely damage the strength of the Erdukeen invaders in their city. They have developed a ritual that they believe will create a new form of Infernal-based undead. Immune to fire, and resistant to the sword, this type of creature could be commanded and controlled easily by either Sarishan or Nerothian clergy. They hope to build up a secret army of these creatures in the catacombs under the city.

The two groups have sent agents throughout the city streets above to procure the necessary implements and components for this ritual. Among these is the ancient Dagger of Mahemennün, a ritual blade created by Myrantian priests of Neroth long ago. The conspirators also seek to gather a number of young slaves, whose blood will serve as a sacrifice to Sarish. Such a sacrifice will help to bind the Infernals meant to take a part in this strange new creation. Some of the slaves' bodies will also serve to help create the undead. Anyone who knows too much, or finds out about their plans, is being surreptitiously eliminated. They wish to keep this very quiet, the better to surprise the Nierites when they have their invincible army ready to strike.

Unfortunately, these cultists made the critical mistake of getting in the way of the Ratcatchers. Not only have they killed several members of that organization, but their tactics in gaining the resources that they need have gotten the group's attention. Now the Ratcatchers are looking for some expendable adventurers that they can manipulate into solving their problem with the cultists, without revealing their own involvement.

This adventure begins with the characters already near the city gates of Nishanpur. Please let the players know this, and please make sure you go through the entire Introduction if you have PCs that have never been to Nishanpur at your table. In that encounter, they will learn a number of important pieces of information about the laws and culture of the city. For example, they will be informed that their characters must leave any weapons and armor that are not made of Sarishan steel behind. The main establishment used for this purpose is known as the *Dark Gathering* (see Chapter 3 for details). These items will not be stolen, and are assumed to be retrieved by the PCs after the end of the module (when they leave the city).

Note that flintlock pistols are an exception to the rule barring non-Sarishan steel weapons and armor from the city. Flintlock pistols (not rifles) are allowed into the city (assuming their possessor is legally entitled to carry them), but other missile weapons are not. The guards will allow each character to bring a single dagger through the gates; a dagger is a tool and eating implement just as much as it is a weapon. PCs may try to conceal additional small weapons (no bigger than a dagger) or convince the guards that a multipurpose weapon (like a quarterstaff) is something innocuous (“you wouldn't part an old man from his walking stick, would you?”). Doing so requires a successful **Bluff** or **Sleight of Hand check (DC 20)** depending on what exactly the PC is trying to sneak into the city and how.

Important Caveat: The guards of Nishanpur search people at the city gates, but pay little attention to those already in the city or to those leaving. Therefore, any character that does not leave Nishanpur between adventures

is **not** subject to search and may retain items that would otherwise be illegal. Such items must have been gained during the play of modules set within the city. If you have any characters at your table who fit this description, let them keep the “illegal” equipment that they gained from previous Nishanpur modules (to verify this, the player must show you that the character has no log entries for non-Nishanpur modules made since the module where the equipment was gained).

Marks of Sarish: Upon entering the city, PCs may purchase the *Mark of Sarish* or *Greater Mark of Sarish* (see Chapter 4: The Wiles of Sarish for details) if they wish. The *Greater Mark* is not advertised; PCs must ask for it if they want it. (Characters that are natives of Nishanpur will know of the standard prices and functions of both types of marks.) Some PCs may already have a *Mark* from previous modules (this should be noted on the character's log sheet). Please make a note of which PCs bear the *Mark*, as this will affect the way NPCs react (and who gets jumped in combat encounters).

Every NPC that the PCs will encounter in Nishanpur is well aware of the effects of the *Mark of Sarish*, and will not attack characters wearing one unless absolutely necessary. Note that if a character wearing the *Mark* attacks someone else, that constitutes a breach of the Laws of Nishanpur (“Strike not another save in self-defense”) and the *Mark* immediately vanishes. This is true even if the PC is coming to the defense of a fellow party member; unless the wearer is directly and personally attacked, the only way to preserve a *Mark of Sarish* is to stay out of combat. It is a purely defensive enchantment and while PCs are free to do anything they want to try and provoke NPCs to attack them and thereby trigger the *Mark*, the denizens of Nishanpur are generally smarter than that.

Buying Legal Goods: There are several blank certificates for Sarishan steel items provided in the downloadable cert file for this module. PCs are free to purchase these at any time during the adventure when the markets would reasonably be open. The price of Sarishan steel has gone up recently due to the fall of the Godswall and subsequent fears of an invasion of Infernals; the correct price is reflected on the certs. A few other useful items are included in the cert file and may also be purchased at any time (including after the module). Due to the prohibition on arms and armor, other sorts of protective items are brisk sellers in Nishanpur. Ymandragoran Harvesters have not been permitted within the city for centuries, and Nishanpur is better than most places at keeping unwanted visitors out, so magic items are readily available for those who have the coin.

Buying Illegal Goods: Nishanpur does have a thriving black market, and PCs with ranks in the Black Market skill may be able to locate items that would otherwise be considered illegal and seized at the city gates. Characters that are natives of Nishanpur receive a +4 bonus on Black Market skill checks made within the city. Also note that the only way to sell arms and armor that are not made of Sarishan steel at the end of the module is to sell them on the black market or carry them out of the city and sell them elsewhere. Rules for the use of the Black Market skill are found in the *Living Arcanis Rules Compilation* (LARC).

Investigations: LIVING ARCANIS: NISHANPUR modules tend to be investigative in nature, due to the fact that there are so many competing groups within the city, none of which is necessarily any more “good” or “evil” than any other. Investigation-style adventures generally require the characters to talk with a variety of NPCs in order to succeed. There will often be a great deal of information provided for you, the judge, throughout the module. However, PCs will not automatically learn this information unless they ask specific questions. No one in the City of Secrets is likely to give out information without provocation. The generic query “Is there anything else you know that might be useful?” that many players fall back on to get the GM to spill info when they can't think of questions on their own should be met with a response of “Like what?” Lead them a little to help them out if necessary, but don't just give away everything.

If the players are really stumped in questioning NPCs, allow one or more of the PCs to attempt a **Gather Information check**. Information is everywhere in the City of Secrets if one knows whom to ask (and how much to offer). Nishanpur natives should receive a +2 bonus on such checks since they have a better understanding of the way things work. If the check result is 15 or higher, go ahead and give that character a tidbit the party would otherwise have missed.

Bribery can also be useful in many situations, depending on the particular NPC. If the characters are willing to cross a few palms with silver (or better still, gold) then they will generally be more successful in their dealings with the various bureaucratic functionaries of the city. This should not turn

into an outrageous expense; a few coins here and there should be sufficient to lubricate the lips of most of the minor NPCs of the city. A typical bribe for a commoner would be a few *Triumvirates* (silver pieces), while a bureaucrat would want at least 10 *Baht* (gold pieces).

Preparation: Check to see if any of the PCs have an *Infamy* rating with the Swords of Nier, or whether any of the PCs have equipment that is obviously *Erdukeen* in nature (this will be noted on the certificate, so you don't have to guess). Such characters have a harder time moving freely about the city, although due to the fact that their grip on power is slipping, the Swords are trying to avoid provoking incidents and thus will not aggressively harass infamous PCs unless they are doing something obviously illegal (in which case the usual consequences apply).

Introduction

No Room at the Inn

Parts of this encounter are optional, and are intended for players whose characters are not native to Nishanpur. Due to the strange laws of the city, they must leave their arms and armor outside, except for flintlocks and items of Sarishan steel. For details, see the Laws of Nishanpur section of this book. Native PCs are assumed to have a hovel or room somewhere that they can stay. When you are ready to begin, read or paraphrase the following:

Your long journey through the war-torn country of Canceri has finally brought you to signs of civilization. Nishanpur, the City of Secrets, spreads out across the Plains of Blood before you. Its high walls conceal much of what lies within, though you can see the outcrop that holds the inner city, its own walls peeking out above the line of the outer wall. You can see the dome of the Nihang Council building, once a great Coryani-style arena, as well as the towers of some of Nishanpur's temples, peeking over the inner wall. Above all looms the huge Cathedral of the Dark Apostate, small in the distance, but clearly visible, sitting on the highest ridge point above the city. You can see guards on the walls, their small forms picked out by the glints of their armor. Other small objects appear to hang off the walls, but at this distance it is impossible to tell what they may be.

Outside the walls, the shops and homes of the Outer City spread around you. Past the rather narrow rows of structures that line the road leading to the Trade Gate, you can see bunches of tents and shanties in the fields beyond. There are too many of these to count, but there must be thousands of people here, crowded around the city. None, though, are near the walls themselves; the area nearest the wall seems to be clear.

Though the Outer City is full of activity, everything is strangely subdued. You can hear the wind flapping through the pennants and drapes of the market stalls, and the tents of the shanties beyond. People travel in small groups, whispering to each other. Many regard you with looks of curiosity, or suspicion. A troop of red-armored guards marches past; people look away, intent on their work, doing anything and everything to avoid drawing attention.

The PCs can explore the Outer City if they wish. See Chapters 2 and 3 for a great deal more detail on the area. If they try to see what is hanging on the walls, they can get close enough to determine they are gibbets – many of the hanging cages contain the rotting corpses of humanoids, surrounded by clouds of flies. One of the gibbets contains a still-living human. If they approach too close (within 30'), the guards on the wall will shoot at them, enforcing the Dead Zone around the walls.

The man in the cage is Corlinth of Savona. The PCs cannot get close enough to speak to him while he is caged, as he hangs high on the wall within the Dead Zone and the guards will shoot at them if they try. If the PCs attempt to help Corlinth, proceed to Optional Encounter A: A Thief in the Hand.

If they wish to seek an Inn, they can easily find the Dark Gathering...

An Inn called the Dark Gathering has a board, covered in posts in various languages, most in Low Coryani and Cancerean. Some announce that there is a curfew in effect; all who are not indoors by sundown are subject to arrest. Others describe the more general laws of Nishanpur and are clearly intended for the benefit of travelers. Apparently, arms and armor are illegal here, unless they are made of Sarishan steel. Various other posts include a listing of executions; it seems one Corlinth of Savona was caught here and sentenced to death by exposure for attempting to steal from a priest. The Dark Gathering also has an advertisement posted: secure storage for travelers' gear. Apparently they make a living in keeping goods safe for those wishing to enter the city.



The PCs should be allowed to rent storage here for any gear they wish to leave behind. Their gear will be safe and they can retrieve it with no difficulty when they leave the city. Rates are listed in the section on the Dark Gathering in Chapter 3. This storage would be in addition to any normal upkeep paid for this module. There are no rooms currently available at the Dark Gathering, as the proprietor has rented out the whole building to a large contingent of mercenaries that have recently come in from Censure. The PCs will instead be encouraged to seek rooms at the Ebon Steed, a large inn just inside the March Gate of Nishanpur. Keep in mind that NPCs in the Outer City will be especially leery towards any PCs that are obviously Nierite, or that wear Nierite armor and weapons.

If the PCs wish to enter into Nishanpur proper, be aware that the guards at the gate will search any travelers entering the city for contraband weapons and armor. See Chapter 2 for details, and use the stats for a “typical Sword of Nier or Red Fist Footsoldier” for this encounter. Once inside the city gates, PCs may purchase the Mark of Sarish at this time, as well. Consecrated Sarishan casters that can grant the spell are stationed at every gate.

You can easily join the line of travelers at the gate. Many are seeking to enter Nishanpur as the sun sinks low in the sky. Others seek the spellcasters stationed here; they seem to have having a spell cast that leaves a strange glowing mark on their foreheads. Many of your fellow travelers seek a place to stay, and you too will need to find a room before long, if you don't want to break curfew here.

You see a rather foppish group ahead of you, apparently led by a flamboyant fellow that seems to think he will be allowed to bring his flintlock into the city. To your surprise, the guards hardly look at him, and he is permitted to enter without a hassle. The next fellow in line isn't so lucky. The guards stop him, and they are apparently having an issue with his breastplate, as well as his sword. They exchange heated words, and it looks like a fight may break out...

If the party wants to try and sneak items through the gates, now is their chance. While the guards are arguing with the mercenary, the PCs can attempt to slip past, under the pretense of wanting to purchase the Mark of Sarish. With a Bluff check (DC 15) they can slide past the guards. The casters will notice them, and try to remember their faces, though. They won't stop the party, just notice them. If any party member has actually purchased the Mark of Sarish, it will disappear as soon as they sneak through the gates, as doing so breaks a law of Nishanpur.

After a moment, the flintlock-carrying gent returns, and joins the debate. He quietly hands a few coins to each of the guards, and the swordsman retreats from the gate, hurriedly heading for the Dark Gathering. Today discretion is proved the better part of valor.

At this point the party can continue through the gate as law-abiding folk, if they wish. The guards will give them a cursory search. Assuming they are not bringing illegal items in, the PCs can enter freely. Any contraband items found will be confiscated, and the offender will be beaten up a bit. As they witnessed, however, a suitable bribe can stop the confiscation, and they can retreat with their item(s) to the Dark Gathering and store them. Then they can enter, or not, as they choose. If a PC actually manages to successfully smuggle in an illegal item, the Mark of Sarish, if they purchase it, will vanish immediately so long as they are carrying the item.

If the PCs seek to ask about the searches, or the spellcasting, here are sample answers that can be gained from others at the gates:

“Why are they searching people?”

“Haven't you heard? It's illegal to carry unhallowed steel into the city. They're checking to make sure no one is smuggling in anything.”

“Unhallowed steel?”

“Yes, steel not produced by the Priests of Sarish.”

“What about the guy with the flintlock?”

The person to whom you are speaking shrugs. “I suppose that when you are nobility there are exceptions to every law.”

“What are those spellcasters doing?”

“Granting the Mark of Sarish.”

“What is the Mark of Sarish?”

“A spell that protects you. If you are attacked while wearing the Mark, Infernals will appear and defend you.”

If the PCs ask one of the casters about the Mark, then they will get additional information:

“The Mark will protect you once, and only once, if you are attacked within the city. It lasts for one month, so long as you do not break a law of Nishanpur. It will be effective anywhere in the city, and even for a short distance past the walls. It costs 30 Baht, and I must have a few drops of your blood for the Mark to be effective. Would you like the spell to be cast?”

Casting the spell (including the donation of blood) does no damage to the PC whatsoever. The priests are very well practiced at their craft.

“Can I learn how to cast that spell?”

“Only those that live here, and are exceptionally devoted to Sarish, are permitted to learn the secrets of its casting. It requires certain... commitments... on the part of the caster. More I cannot say.”

Once inside the city walls, finding a room at the Ebon Steed is simple, as the inn is quite large. The PCs can settle in for the evening. If they wish to ask around about the city, the innkeepers can answer some questions, though in this time and place too many questions can be unhealthy. Allow the PCs to interact and get the feel of things.

For Nishanpur, the Ebon Steed is quite raucous; anywhere else, it would be considered unsettlingly quiet. The source of the name is quite apparent, as immediately upon entering the building you find an immense black marble statue of a horse pointing the way into the common room. Long benches, packed with people, fill the dining area. Animated conversations take place all over the room, filling it with sibilant whispers and the occasional low chuckle.

A lithe woman carries a large tray through the room, delivering food and drink while a dark-kin tends bar. From the kitchen emerges a stout dwarf bearing a haunch of roasted beef on a large tray, destined for another bench. He sees your group, and nods to acknowledge you, waving you to a reasonably empty bench. Rooms are available, he assures you, as is warm food. What's your preference, crisp Coryani wines or stout Milandisian beer?

Important Note: Curfew begins at nightfall in the city. If the PCs are roaming around the city after dark, they are likely to have a run-in with a contingent of guards; use the “typical guard stats” from Chapter 2. The PCs should encounter patrols of one less than their number if they are 1st level, an equal number at 2nd level, and one more than their number at 3rd level. Half of the guards are warded with the Mark of Sarish, which ought to be enough of a deterrent all by itself. Fighting the guards will earn them a point of Infamy with the Red Fist, if they survive and are not captured. PCs that are arrested by the Red Fist are out of this adventure, and depending on the severity of their crimes will receive a punishment of anything from a fine to hard labor to slavery to death.

Encounter 1 The First Day of the Rest of Your Life

The morning sun looks red as it slowly rises up over the walls and towers of the city. The humming of insects slowly replaces the hooting of owls and the fluttering of bats in the city's airspace. Any obligations to previous employers have been dispensed with, and you find yourself at odd ends, in a bustling city with nothing particular to do. Outside, you can see people of all sorts making their way through the city on morning errands.

At this point, allow the PCs to wander a bit. If they wish to find a temple, the temples of the Gods of the Dark Triumvirate are simple to locate. The temple to Cadic in the Corpse Quarter is also easy to find, though the PCs might get a funny look for asking. Public inquiries about temples to any other deities will get them a dirty look and a response of “there are no such places here” – and the persons to whom they ask these heretical questions will retreat quickly. The Sanctum of the Arcane is also large and obvious. Members of the Hawk and Shield factions may be reminded that such public exposure just doesn't seem right, somehow.

More subtle inquiries about temples to other deities, or for safe houses for Hawk and Shield members, or meetings with other factions, can be accomplished with a **Gather Information check (DC 17)** or a **Black Market check (DC 15)**. Any characters that have faction orders will be contacted by their organizations and should be relayed their orders at this time. Other PCs can be given the optional “No Orders” sheet, if you wish to keep who is receiving orders a secret. Faction orders and player handouts may be found in the downloadable RPGA module extension.

As the morning wears on towards noon, you find yourselves together again at the Lower Market. The world around you is a swirling panoply of color. Exotic merchants attend to their customers amid equally bright draperies and rugs.

An old woman in drab clothes stands out amid the color. She is apparently begging, as she moves amidst the crowd, trying to speak to one person after another. Most people avoid her, and one shoves her to the ground as he leaves. She slowly gets up and continues to try to speak to people.

Boards outside of shops along the edge of the market hold notices in many languages. The largest structure along the market is the Factor's Guildhall, a place to exchange Imperials for Cancerese currency or have gems and other valuables appraised.

If the party seeks to give alms to the old woman, you may choose to proceed with Optional Encounter B: Where, Oh Where?

Development: If the PCs read the notice boards, they will find two items of interest. Give out Player Handout A at this time. The first advertisement is from the Factor's Guildhall, seeking persons interested in recovery work. The second notice is from a businessman, offering employment to discreet persons who can aid in an investigation. The PCs must decide which of these leads they will pursue (or both, or neither). If the party goes to the Factor's Guildhall, proceed with Encounter 2: Arts & Crafts. If they seek out the businessman, proceed to Encounter 3: Vengeance is Mine. If they do nothing, and do not seek employment, you may choose to proceed to Optional Encounter C: Dangerous Beauty.

Encounter 2 Arts & Crafts

The Factor's Guildhall bustles with activity. Behind the long counter, workers count out currency of various types, or look over gems and other items with an appraising eye. Guards stand close to hand, in case a transaction becomes less than amiable. A few well-dressed people head to private offices in the rear of the building. There seems to be a queue, in order to reach the workers here.

After a bit of waiting, an area by the counter clears, and a dwarf looks toward the front of the line, to where you stand.

“Yes, you're next. What can I help you with?”

The PCs are free to exchange currency, of course, or have items appraised. If they mention the flyer, the dwarf will nod.

“You'll need to speak with Bethgeer about that. Wait here, I'll get her.”

With that, the dwarf hops down from his stool behind the counter and clomps away to the back of the hall. After a few moments, he returns with a gray-haired Altherian woman.

“Good day. I am Bethgeer Malkuth. Shall we adjourn to my office?”

Assuming the PCs agree...

“Thank you for responding to my posting. Sometimes it can be difficult to get any help around here. Nobody wants to get involved in anything.”

“Regardless, here's the situation. A local person's estate goods were brought here for appraisal; a standard thing. There wasn't much of particular note, except one item: a dagger, one that was determined to be magical, though we didn't have the opportunity to determine what its specific enchantment might be.”

“Unfortunately, a few nights ago, we were robbed...” Bethgeer looks quite embarrassed. “My night guards were apparently drugged, or ensorcelled... They were found the next morning in a deep sleep. Most of the estate goods were stolen, including the dagger. The vast majority of the goods were mundane, and the Guild can compensate the family for those without much difficulty. The dagger is another matter. Being magical, and of an undetermined nature, it is almost impossible for us to set a fair value upon it for compensation. I expect that if the dagger cannot be recovered, we are in for a court battle over it.”

“This is why I am seeking aid; to recover the dagger, along with as many of the other estate goods as possible. I can provide you with an inventory. Payment will be 250 Baht for the dagger, plus 2% of the fair market value for any other goods recovered. Will you take the job?”

The PCs can haggle if they wish. Bethgeer will go as high as 500gp for the dagger, plus 5% for other goods recovered. If the party wishes to be paid in other currency than Baht (Imperials, gems), doing so is a simple matter for her (she does run the currency exchange, after all). If asked about any leads, she has little to offer. Examining the crime scene will give the PCs little insight, as the theft occurred several days ago, and the Guildhall has maintained its normal hours of operation since then. The only clues found the morning of the robbery were a few ashy smudge marks on the door and walls, where someone apparently leaned. Player Handout D includes a list of all the stolen goods that were recorded as having been part of the estate.

If the PCs inquire about fences or other sources of stolen goods, trying to figure out where the missing property might be likely to end up, Bethgeer will not know where to send them (but she will discreetly suggest that they can probably find this sort of thing out by asking around). In regards to the smudges, this indicates someone who lives, or spends a great deal of time, in the Corpse Quarter. It is common knowledge in Nishanpur that the funeral pyres in the Pits often result in an ashy haze throughout that quarter.

Development: To track down a fence in the Corpse Quarter, a **Gather Information check (DC 15)** or a **Black Market check (DC 10)** will point them to Rhomas the Moneylender. If they wish to speak to Rhomas, proceed to Encounter 7: Wolf in Ashy Clothing. If the PCs wish to enquire about the history of the dagger, or about the deceased man whose estate this was, Bethgeer will set up an interview with one of the heirs of the estate. Proceed to Encounter 8: Speaking with a Forked Tongue.

Encounter 3 Vengeance is Mine

The second notice leads the party to the Velvet Glove, a tavern in the Trade Quarter.

The walls of this small tavern are adorned with mounted animal heads, and a variety of strange and exotic weapons. People whisper to one another around small tables or in booths. The crowd eyes one another warily, as if expecting a fight to break out at any moment. Strangely, such behavior almost

seems to be expected, rather than dreaded.

Behind the bar an older man wipes glasses and takes orders. A pair of well-worn short swords hangs on the wall behind, within easy reach for him. The man is bald, and a long scar snakes its way across his scalp. At the end of the bar stands a menacingly tall dark-kin, obviously a bouncer.

If the PCs ask the bouncer about Derhain, he will turn to the bartender;

"Hey Gzregorz." He indicates the party with a head nod. "Derhain."

If the PCs ask the bartender for Derhain, he will nod and indicate an empty booth.

"He'll be here. That's his spot."

If the party has come at dusk, they will be allowed to have a seat, but told they are too late. Since there is a curfew in effect, and this tavern has no rooms, most patrons are careful to leave in enough time to get home before nightfall. If they have come during the day their wait will not be too long. Although he wishes for a quick response, Derhain cannot neglect his business, and frequently returns to the tavern to see if anyone awaits.

If any party member has the misfortune or lack of wisdom to stare too long or get nosy with any of the other patrons of the establishment, they have set themselves up for a challenge. Feel free to take them to the ring out back and give them a fight. If they follow the rules, and win, they will have earned a modicum of respect from the patrons. If they lose, they are allowed to remain as they were, though they hopefully have learned a lesson. Provided here is an opponent suitable for a low-level party. Most challenges involve unarmed combat, but if a PC wants a knife fight, this drunken half-orc will be happy to oblige. If any of the PCs are cocky enough to challenge the bouncer, who is also the bar owner's champion, his stats are provided in Chapter 3.

If the PCs cheat during a challenge, and get caught, there is a 50% chance that they will be thoroughly beaten and expelled from the establishment and told not to return. Otherwise, their tactics are considered intelligent or bold, and all is forgiven. (This is an example of the philosophy of the city: if the crowd favors you, you can get away with nearly anything.)

1 Drunken Half-Orc

LN Half-Orc Warrior 2

Medium-size Humanoid (5'10")

CR: 2

HD: 2d8+2 (hp 15)

BAB: +2 (grapple +5)

Init: +1 (+1 Dex)

Spd: 30ft.

AC: 11 (+1 Dex); touch 11, flat-footed 10

Attack / Full Attack: Unarmed Strike +5 melee

Attack / Full Attack: Dagger +5 melee

Damage: Unarmed Strike 1d3+3(x2) non-lethal, Dagger 1d4+3(19-20/x2)

Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.

SQ: Darkvision 60', Orc Blood

Languages: Cancerese

AL: Lawful Neutral

SV: Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 11 Cha 9

Skills: Bluff +2, Intimidate +4, Spot +1

Feats: Improved Unarmed Strike

Possessions: 12 Triumvirates, Dagger

As the frequent glances from the other patrons sweep over you, you can easily feel the expectant tension here. Just when you think someone is going to come over and start something, a small man enters and eases into your booth. Eyes turn away from you, and the man whispers:

"I am Derhain. I hope that you have come for the job?"

Assuming the party gives some sort of affirmative response:

"Good. Straight to business then. My partner Terjhin was murdered yesterday. I want to find out who and why. Then I want revenge. 100 Baht to each of you, if you can determine the killer. An extra 50 Baht each if you can then arrange for that person's death without incriminating me in any way. Questions?"

His matter-of-fact manner about matters of revenge and assassination may disturb some PCs. He will be annoyed if the party proves squeamish.

"If you don't want the job, then go. Let me find someone who will do what is needed."

"How did your partner die?"

"Poison, apparently. I found him dead in his home early this morning, no wounds on his corpse. His body lay twisted in agony."

"Did he wear the Mark of Sarish?"

"Yes. Though, of course it was gone when the body was discovered. I cannot tell if it was triggered or if it merely disappeared upon his death."

"Did he have a wife/any family?"

"He was my cousin. He was unmarried and childless."

"Do you suspect anyone? Did he have any enemies?"

"Who do I not suspect? Any of our competitors could have done it. Or, perhaps he offended someone. . . I do not know. That is why I need your help."

"What is your business?"

"We are merchants. We deal in goods traded from the south. Myrastian goods, mainly. Spices, rugs, things like that."

"Was your cousin a member of any organizations or religious groups, that you know of?"

"He was a Sarishan, as am I. What does that have to do with it?"

"What do you know about his past?"

"He adventured for a time. He studied magic a little, though he never did get any good at it. I wish he had learned divination; it might have been useful. After his adventuring days were over, we began our business together. His contacts in the south, and my trading skills, made a good combination."

"Do you know if any of his old companions live around here? Might they be mad at him?"

Derhain shrugs. "It is possible, but I do not know. I only know a few of his contacts in the south. None of them have been in Nishanpur recently, however."

"Could we / Did you try a speak with dead spell? Did you try to have him raised?"

"Dawn had passed by the time I found him. His spirit is beyond recall, surely you know that. Don't be stupid."

"Can we examine the body?"

"Yes, if you wish. I have not yet taken the body to the Pits."

"Can we search his house for clues?"

"Yes. I think that might be prudent. I am no investigator."

Development: Derhain will escort the party to his cousin's house now, or the next morning if it is getting late in the day. He will not risk breaking curfew. By the next morning, however, the body will be quite ripe, and any clues relating to the murder will be gone. Proceed to Encounter 5: Dead Man's Hand when the party is ready to investigate further.

Encounter 4 Flesh of My Flesh

This encounter can occur for any number of reasons, including the possible sale of a PC into slavery, and the GM should be careful to adjust it as necessary for the circumstances.

Making your way into the Corpse Quarter is like entering another world. The bright colors of the Trade Quarter slowly fade, and a thin haze of ashy fog hangs above the buildings, dimming the sunlight. As you pass through the gate into the Quarter proper, you can see that the buildings are ill tended, and almost everything is dirty and falling apart. Many of the streets are unpaved, or filled with potholes and sewage. The people here are equally dirty, and avoid your glance. You can see gnomes huddled in alleys, and the occasional desperate type eyes you appraisingly.

Approaching the region of the Flesh Market, the smell of water blends with the ash in the air, and the streets, though paved here, are slick. The Flesh Market itself is in better repair than most of the area, attesting to its constant use. The sides of the building are painted with a fading mural of bound prisoners in procession.

The inside of the building is cramped and narrow. Dim light filters in from small barred windows near the high ceilings. The entrance hallway leads to seating surrounding a dirt floored display ring, where various posts and rings provide tethers for slaves awaiting sale.

A few people mill around in the stands, awaiting the start of the next sale, while a corpulent man dressed in faded finery apparently does some haggling in a nearby office.

This is the master of the Flesh Market, Kharum Gebuul. He will quickly end his other business if the PCs approach him.

"Ah, yes, you are here for the sales? In the next hour we have many fine goats for sale. Cattle are available in the evening."

"Goats? Cattle? I thought you sold slaves here?"

"Ah, I see. You are new to this establishment, no? Livestock today, slaves tomorrow. We alternate, yes? You have come on the wrong day. You may inspect the merchandise today, but no sales until tomorrow."

"We are looking for (a woman named Iole)(a fellow party member). Is (s)he here?"

"No one works here by that name. If you mean the merchandise, I do not know names. I can let you inspect the slaves if you wish, yes? But no sales until tomorrow..."



Kharum Gebuul, Master of the Flesh Market

NE Human Male Expert 3/Rogue 5

Medium-size Humanoid (5'5")

CR: 4

HD: 3d6-3, 5d6-5 (hp 22)

BAB: +5 (grapple +6)

Init: +2

Spd: 30 ft

AC: 13 (+2 Dex, +1 Bracers); touch 12, flat-footed 11

Full Attack: Dagger +6 melee

Attack: Sap +6 melee

Attack / Full Attack: Dagger +8 ranged (10')

Damage: Dagger 1d4+1(19-20/x2), Sap 1d6+1

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.

SQ: Evasion, Sneak Attack +3d6, Uncanny Dodge

Languages: Cancerese, Low Coryani, Yhing-Hir, High Coryani

AL: Neutral Evil

SV: Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +5

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 15, Con 9, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 14

Skills: Appraise +13, Black Market +7, Bluff +9, Disable Device +3, Forgery +7, Gather Information +10, Hide +2, Innuendo +11, Intimidate +11, Jump +1, Knowledge (local: Nishanpur) +7, Listen +6, Move Silently +7, Open Locks +7, Profession(Slaver) +10, Read Lips +9, Search +9, Sense Motive +17, Spot +9

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (flail, light), Honeyed Tongue, Judge of Character, Simple Weapon Proficiency, Skill Focus (sense motive)

Possessions: +1 Bracers of Armor "Merchantshield", Dagger, Sap, 85 Baht

Kharum is currently recovering from a bad bout of filth fever. Though he is no longer contagious, he is still feeling weak and unsteady. Not at his best, he neglected to wear his magical ring today, or grab his magical flail, and now regrets it. Even in his weakened state, though, he is still a formidable foe.

"But our friend/the girl shouldn't be here! (S)He is a free-man! (S)He didn't do anything wrong! (S)He was brought here wrongfully/by mistake!" (Etc.)

"Ah, but that is not my problem, no? Once here, they are slaves. It matters not how they got here. Besides, no one thinks they belong here, not at first, but they learn, yes? It is the way of things here."

"Let our friend/the girl go! Or else!" (Or other Intimidation attempts)

"Come now, I am a businessman. If I throw away my merchandise I would not be in business long, no? Besides, I do not know if I even have the person you seek. You want to inspect first, yes?"

If the PCs agree to inspect the slaves, they will find their missing comrade(s), if any were taken here. At this point in time, an appropriate bribe can result in a favorable outcome for the party. Kharum will sell them any enslaved comrades, at a minimum price of 50gp/level (subject to haggling). He will make the sale because he wishes to avoid a potential combat encounter.

If they have come here seeking Iole, they will find no one here matching her description. If they ask about a black-haired, green-eyed woman, Kharum will think hard, then respond that he thinks he sold her already... perhaps yesterday?

A bribe will also net Kharum's cooperation in finding Iole. He will admit there has been an unusual demand for young slaves recently. He has been working with the Red Fist to acquire them. The names of his buyers are not always known to him, but their faces are. Iole was purchased by someone who has bought several attractive young people recently. He suspects the person will return for tomorrow's sale. If the party wishes, they may set up a "sting" operation to find her. If no PC has a sufficiently high Charisma to attract the buyer's attention, then Kharum suggests they simply use another slave in residence (he has one he suspects the buyer will be interested in). If the party sets up a sting, proceed to Encounter 6.

If the PCs do wish to start a fight, Kharum will give them one. The home GM may choose to use his full stats from Chapter 3, or if you are feeling merciful, Kharum has been ill, and you can use the somewhat-weakened stats given here. If the PCs fight Kharum, they have earned the enmity of the Ratcatchers, for killing or injuring one of the city's more successful merchants. Furthermore, if they proceed to free the slaves imprisoned here, they will earn a point of Infamy with the Red Fist. On any subsequent encounter with Red Fist guards, roll a d20, and if the roll is equal to or less than their Infamy rating, the guards have recognized them and will attack them on sight. Infamy points are cumulative.

Encounter 5 Dead Man's Hand

If the party has been brought to the dead businessman's house on the first day of the module, then the house is intact, and the body, although unpleasant in appearance, has not decayed so much that examination is fruitless. If they have waited, and are here after more than a day has passed, then the body is quite ripe, and covered in flies. The house has been ransacked, and any clues are gone.

This small residence is on the second floor of an apartment block in the Trade Quarter. The building is average for the quarter, plastered white with colored borders painted around rooflines and doorways. Small windows overlook the street on the upper floors.



Terjhin's apartment appears relatively clean, except for the area around the corpse that you presume to be that of Terjhin himself. The body is contorted and the face is a rictus of pain. He apparently thrashed around quite a bit before dying, as a writing table is knocked over. Spilled ink, scattered papers, food and broken crockery litter the floor around the body. A few flies buzz around in the air.

Finding evidence for the investigation is now up to the PCs. They can search the apartment, speak to Terjhin's neighbors, and examine the body.

Looking at the corpse, a **Heal check** can determine the following:

- DC 10:** The death was painful and sudden. The dead man has a death grip on a broken writing quill. There is no sign of combat.
- DC 15:** The death may indeed have been by poison, as there is no sign of disease or injury.
- DC 20:** The poison was injected: a tiny puncture on the back of the neck shows where a needle impacted the flesh.

A **Search check** of the apartment will net the following:

- DC 10:** The deceased was apparently an adventurer, as there is a set of leather armor and a shortsword stored in a trunk.

DC 12: Many of his clothing items and mementos are southern in style or origin, many tending to be Myrantian. He appears very meticulous, with many folders of business papers neatly stacked on shelves.

DC 15: Several past volumes of Terjhin's diary are stacked behind other papers on a shelf. (Give out Player Handout C.)

A **Search check** of the exterior streets and the alleys around the apartment will reveal the following:

DC 10: There are no signs of forced entry into the apartment.

DC 17: A long, thin needle is caught in the branches of a scrawny bush next to the entryway.

DC 20: At the corner of the building is an ashy smudge on the wall, where someone was apparently leaning.

The papers Terjhin was evidently working on when he died include a diary, but the ink has spilled all over it. The last few pages are not completely obliterated, and include a few words scrawled in a shaky hand, perhaps as Terjhin was dying. Part of the entry can still be made out. Give out Player Handout B if anyone wishes to read it.

Talking to the neighbors, the PCs find that they will initially resist getting involved in this matter. In Nishanpur, sticking one's nose into someone else's business can be a fatal mistake. After a period of whispered discussion, especially if the neighbors are bribed or reassured that their information will

be kept confidential, the PCs can learn that Terjhin came home yesterday evening right before nightfall. He was alone, and none of the neighbors saw any visitors or other guests come to the house. It was not until later in the night that they heard a commotion, but even then, they saw no one coming or going.

If the PCs think to check, based on the position of Terjhin's writing desk and where the body fell, he had to have been facing then window when he collapsed. Therefore, the wound to the back of his neck had to have occurred before he sat down.

Examining the needle (if they find it) for information on the poison is difficult, but not impossible. To identify the poison, the PCs should make some sort of relevant skill check. The applicable skills are: **Alchemy (DC 20)**, **Craft (poison) (DC 17)**, or **Knowledge (poisons) (DC 25)**. If there is no party member with the appropriate skills, the PCs can attempt to find someone who knows about poisons. A simple **Gather Information check** or a **Knowledge (local: Nishanpur) check (DC 10)** will point them to Ezram's Apothecary in the Temple Quarter.

Ezram can tell the PCs that the needle is from a blowgun (if they hadn't guessed). For a modest 20gp fee, after an examination of the residue, Ezram will conclude that the poison was of a type frequently used in the south, mainly by Myrantian assassins. It is a slow-acting agent that takes effect some time after injection,

allowing the clever assassin to make a clean getaway.

Development: If the PCs read the diary entry and wish to speak with Endikal, they can find out where to contact him by examining the other papers around. They will discover from the family of Endikal that he died nearly a month ago, from a cart accident. Proceed to Encounter 8: Speaking with a Forked Tongue.

Encounter 6 The Sting

If the party is actually enterprising enough to attempt a sting to figure out who bought the slave girl Iole, they can proceed in one of two ways. They can use one of their own for bait, or they can use another slave Kharum has available for sale. Kharum will only offer the other slave if the party has no one he would consider attractive enough to lure the buyer (Charisma of 15 or higher).

The next day at the Flesh Market is one filled with activity. As the morning sales pass, you can begin to understand the routine of the Market. The slaves are tethered nude in the central ring, where potential buyers can inspect them. The bidding begins after the inspections finish.

After the luncheon break, Kharum comes to you with a smile.

"She has arrived, yes? It is time for your deception. The one who is the lure must be stripped and tethered."

If the party has previously spoken to Nefer-Ura in Encounter 8, seeking either Endikal or the missing dagger, then they recognize their quarry; she is the same woman. If they have already interacted extensively with Nefer-Ura, this may necessitate a sudden change of plans; she will certainly recognize any party member placed as bait if she has previously spoken to that person. The PCs will have to ask Kharum for an alternative. He will be annoyed, but will provide another slave for their usage (a very attractive human female).

Regardless of whether it is a PC or another slave being used as the bait, nearly a dozen bidders will carefully examine the "lure." Resistance to this will generally be met with derogatory laughter, and possibly a swat or two. There are five other slaves available at this time. After each has been looked over, the bidding begins. Unfortunately for the person in the spotlight, the intended buyer here is not the only interested party. If a PC is placed on the block and Nefer-Ura recognizes that PC, she will simply smile and refrain from bidding. This will leave the party in a bidding war to keep their fellow party member from being legally sold to another citizen of the city.

As the bidding moves to your party's entry in the ring, your hopes are well-founded. The woman Kharum pointed out to you indeed shows interest and places a bid. This is quickly followed by another bid from a competing buyer. And then another. As the auction continues and the numbers climb, Kharum frowns.

"This may not turn out as you intend. Usually there is not so much competition, no? That man there, he is not so usual a client. He must be after something special. Perhaps you should speak to him, he may cause you much grief, no?" Kharum indicates a large man with rolls of fat visible from beneath the robe of a Sarishan priest.

The fat man is Bethalic val'Mehan, one of the leaders of the Sarishan church of Nishanpur. He is searching for a new "pet." The PCs can convince him to give up the bidding in this instance with a bribe, though any attempt to intimidate this mountain of a man will only make him more determined to have his way. He is one of the Nihangs of Nishanpur, and not one to fold under pressure.

As a guideline for the auction, the average going price for a slave is anywhere from 50-100 Baht per class level. It will start at 35 Baht per level and go up from there. The NPC decoy slave, if used, will be a level 2 Expert. Therefore, her starting price will be 70 Baht.

GMs should roleplay out this negotiation, and not let it devolve into an exercise in die-rolling. Bethalic is a powerful man, of great means, and money is not necessarily what he wants. He will accept a sizeable total of gems or cash, but would prefer to elicit a "promise of a favor, to be determined in the future." If the party agrees to Bethalic's terms, they have earned the cert "A Favor Owed".

Development: Assuming that they can convince Bethalic to back out of the bidding, the PCs' intended buyer does close the sale. Fortunately (particularly if one of the characters is the "bait"), this particular buyer does not immediately brand her purchases, though several others do. After dressing, the slave will be manacled and led away with little fuss. Assuming some provision has been made for following the newly-purchased slave (any means of leaving a trail, or a PC with the ability to Track), it is not difficult to track the buyer. If they manage to follow the buyer, proceed to Encounter 9: Snake in the Garden.

Encounter 7 Wolf in Ashy Clothing

Your inquiries lead you into the Corpse Quarter, perhaps the least appealing part of the city. You are pointed to the hovel where Rhomas the Moneylender does his business. From what you can gather, he is one of the more infamous usurers in the city, along with being a fence.

Rhomas conducts his operations from a place on the waterfront. Flood Street bustles with the activities of dockworkers and carters. Rhomas himself sits on a stool, his feet propped up on a rain barrel outside his 'office'. A skinny Cafelan man, his clothes are a dirty nondescript grayish-brown.

He looks at you appraisingly. "Something you want?"

If the PCs want to find out about the missing estate goods, they will have to do some careful questioning. Here are some sample responses for various types of inquiries that might occur:

"We're looking for something..."

"Aren't we all?"

"We want to find out where some estate goods are that were stolen from the Factor's Guildhall."

"Everybody wants something, don't they?"

"We heard you might know something about that."

"Maybe. But even if I did, why should I tell you?"

Of course, this is where the PCs offer a bribe, or make a threat. A threat will bring out Rhomas' thugs, who will attempt to convince the party to be more polite with their employer. If the PCs instead offer a bribe, it won't take much to loosen Rhomas' tongue. However, if they threaten him first and then back down and offer a bribe after being menaced by the thugs, the price of Rhomas' assistance mysteriously goes up.

Of course, if the PCs beat his thugs senseless, or kill them, the attempt at intimidation on their part will be much more successful. Rhomas will not take part in the combat at this time. He hangs back to see the results. If it looks like things are going against his men, he will call them off and offer to negotiate with the party.

4 Moneylender Thugs

NE Human Warrior 1

Medium-size Humanoid (5'2")

CR: 1

HD: 1d8+3 (hp 11)

BAB: +2 (grapple +5)

Init: +1 (+1 Dex)

Spd: 30ft.

AC: 14 (+1 Dex, +3 armor); touch 11, flat-footed 13

Attack / Full Attack: Shortsword +3 melee

Attack / Full Attack: Club +3 melee

Attack / Full Attack: Unarmed Strike +3 melee

Damage: Shortsword 1d6+2 (19-20/x2), Club 1d6+2, Unarmed Strike 1d3+2 non-lethal

Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.

SQ: None

Languages: Cacerese

AL: Neutral Evil

SV: Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +0

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 11

Skills: Intimidate +4, Bluff +2, Search +1, Spot +2

Feats: Improved Unarmed Strike, Improved Initiative

Possessions: Shortsword, club, studded armor, 1 Triumvirate, 9 Asher each

Once the PCs have come to an accommodation with him, Rhomas will admit that did indeed offer to fence most of the estate goods, and he's been quite successful so far. He has a few of the items left, including a pair of silver candelabras, and a sealed bronze urn covered in patina. The other, more common, items are long gone, bought by various folk from the quarter. The dagger was not offered for sale.

The person who brought the goods in to be fenced was a thin, sallow human. He wore the typical garb of a follower of Neroth. His name was Shaketh-Ur. By the ash on his clothes, he lived in the quarter. Shaketh has not yet returned to receive his payment for the fenced items. He dropped them off and left them for Rhomas to sort through and appraise. He seemed to be in a hurry.

Development: The party can easily convince Rhomas to part with the few remaining goods – for a pittance if they bribed him, or for free if they intimidated him. Finding Shaketh-Ur is slightly more difficult, as Rhomas does not know where he lives. He simply doesn't ask those sorts of questions, as that sort of thing tends to be bad for one's health in the Corpse Quarter. However, Rhomas does expect his client to return eventually, to collect his share of the proceeds from the sale of the stolen goods. If the PCs wish to find Shaketh-Ur, they will have to set up a stakeout at Rhomas' shack. Proceed to Encounter 10: Stakeout.

Encounter 8

Speaking with a Forked Tongue

If the party wishes to arrange a meeting with Endikal (if they found the diary in Encounter 5), or if they are pursuing the matter of the stolen dagger from the Factor's Guildhall, they end up talking to the same person. Endikal died nearly a month ago, and his heir is still trying to resolve the matter of his estate. The heir in this case is a niece, named Nefer-Ura.

There are several possible outcomes in this encounter. If the party previously performed the sting to identify the buyer of Iole, they quickly realize that this is the same woman. Unfortunately for them, Nefer-Ura also has an excellent memory for faces. If one of the PCs was used as bait, Nefer-Ura may confront the party directly if that PC subsequently escaped or was forcibly removed from her possession. She will demand the return of her property and will then leave in a huff without revealing any further information. If some or all of the PCs have not previously encountered her, she will not know their faces, and this encounter may continue.

A lovely young Myrantian woman greets you. "I am Nefer-Ura, the heir of my uncle, Endikal. I am told that you seek information on his death and his estate?"

"What can you tell us about your uncle's life?"

"He was an adventurer for a time... he was a fighting man. After he retired, he married and moved here to Nishanpur in order to conduct trade. He died roughly a month ago."

"Did your uncle adventure with a man named Terjhin?"

"Perhaps. The name sounds somewhat familiar. But then, this Terjhin may have been a business partner... I do not know all of my uncle's acquaintances well."

"How did your uncle die?"

"His cart lost a wheel on a rough road. The cart fell on him and crushed him as he was repairing the wheel."

"Did your uncle have a special / magical dagger from back in his adventuring days?"

"There was a dagger in the goods from his estate. All of the items were delivered to the Factor's Guildhall to be appraised, but they were stolen! The Guildhall has yet to pay me reparations for the theft." (She is obviously very annoyed about this.)

"Tell us about the estate goods. What did the dagger look like? (Etc.)"

"The dagger was very old, a souvenir my uncle must have brought back from one of his adventures. I thought it might be magical. It was bronze, and was marked with a scarab. I brought it to be appraised along with many other less spectacular items because I wished to sell everything. I had no real interest in keeping the items, only in getting a fair price. That is STILL my intention. If the Guildhall cannot recover the dagger, they are obligated to pay a fair price to me in reparations!"

If the party is canny enough to use Sense Motive, or some other method to test the veracity of her statements, they will discover that she is telling the truth... mostly. An opposed Sense Motive check (against Nefer-Ura's Bluff check) may reveal that she did have an interest in the dagger other than its sale. If confronted about the matter, she will admit she thought that the weapon seemed well made and wanted to keep it. Another successful Sense Motive check will show that although this is technically true, it is nowhere near the whole story.

Nefer-Ura also knows more about her uncle's death than she is admitting. If she is aware of any of the PCs making use of truth-detecting enchantments, she will be very careful about what she says, in order to not be caught and forced to reveal her hand. If the party attempts to force her to speak, she will stalk out of the meeting and accuse the party of being dishonorable dogs.

In truth, Nefer-Ura is running quite a little scam. She had her brother Shaketh-Ur kill their uncle, poisoning him. The cart accident was a convenient coincidence. His death agonies knocked the block out from under the axle he was repairing and the falling cart crushed his body. Nefer-Ura then hired the thieves that stole the goods from the Guildhall, and now she

is trying to force the Guildhall to pay her reparations for her "loss." Meanwhile, her brother is fencing the remainder of the stolen goods with the help of a moneylender in the Corpse Quarter. In this fashion she intends to be able to keep the dagger, and receive double value for all the other goods: their fence price as well as the Guildhall's reparations. All of the money will be used to finance her part in the larger plot between the Nerothians and the Seekers of the Hidden Master. It is her job to provide the sacrifices needed for the ritual, which she is buying in the Flesh Market.

Nefer-Ura will try to act pleased (perhaps calling for another Bluff vs. Sense Motive check) if the PCs tell her that they are trying to recover her stolen goods on behalf of the Factor's Guildhall (she doesn't actually want them to succeed, of course, because she wants the Guildhall to have to pay her for her losses). She will consent to permit them to visit her at her villa in the Trade Quarter should they discover any relevant information. Nefer-Ura will not offer to give them any additional compensation for their efforts, as it's the Guildhall's responsibility, not hers.

Development: After the interview concludes, the PCs should have several open avenues of investigation. Proceed to the appropriate encounter based on the PCs' next steps. If at any time things seem to be falling into a lull, feel free to throw in Optional Encounter B or Optional Encounter C.

Encounter 9

Snake in the Garden

Following the Myrantian woman who purchased (the slave girl/your fellow party member) does not prove to be too difficult. She doesn't seem to be taking any pains to avoid being seen or followed. Then again, why should she? Buying slaves is a perfectly legal and normal activity for any person of means here in the city. Many wealthy persons can be seen walking down the streets followed by a veritable procession of their slaves.

In any case, the woman makes her way into the Trade Quarter, to a small villa near the wall of the Corpse Quarter. It appears the villa is a new purchase, or perhaps it is being remodeled. The walls are half-covered with a new coat of whitewash, and various crates are stacked here and there. She must be wealthy indeed, to afford even this small home in this city crowded by apartment-dwellers.



Inside the walls, there is a small garden, half overgrown with weeds. A bench sits beside the walk, and she locks the manacles to a ring there. Leaving her purchase, she heads inside, calling over her shoulder: "You will wait here a moment. I will return when I have cleared the passage to your quarters."

The PCs now have a brief opportunity to speak to the person in chains, if they wish. The person who has served as bait can inform them that Nefer-Ura has not spoken to him or her at all, not even to ask a name. If this person is a true slave from Kharum's market, then she has not tried to speak with Nefer-Ura. She has kept silent so as not to be troublesome.

If a PC served as the bait and has tried to speak to Nefer-Ura, she has responded to questions thusly: that her slaves do not need to know her name, and the first duty of a slave is to remain silent unless spoken to. If the PC continues to try and strike up a conversation, Nefer-Ura will become irritated and will say that a slave must remember his place, lest he have a very miserable life indeed. She does not know anyone by the name Iole (she doesn't ask slaves for their names any more than she gives out her own).

As a cultural note, Nefer-Ura's attitude of total indifference is a bit odd, particularly when speaking to someone who presumably has been bought as a "house slave." Usually a master will at least learn the names of his domestic slaves, though cruel masters may rename their slaves on a whim. This may be an indication to particularly perceptive characters that Nefer-Ura is not actually keeping the slaves that she purchases.

Have the PCs make a Spot Check (DC 17) when they enter the garden area. Any character that succeeds notices an ashy smudge on the newly whitewashed garden wall. This is similar to the smudges that may have been observed in several other locations.

Between the time Nefer-Ura leaves her "purchased" chained to the wall and the time she returns, the GM should count 5 minutes of real time. If the party has not concluded their conversation and retreated from the garden by then, Nefer-Ura will return and catch them speaking to her "slave." Depending on whether or not they have encountered her before, her reaction to them may vary considerably.

If they have not met her previously:

"Who are you?! Why have you invaded my house?!"

"We are looking for a woman named Iole."

"I am Nefer-Ura, the mistress of this house. I know no one by that name."

"We were informed that you purchased Iole as a slave a few days ago."

"I have purchased many slaves recently. I do not remember purchasing anyone by that name. Perhaps you are mistaken."

"Can we see your slaves, just to be sure she isn't one of them?"/ "Your new slave here says you haven't even asked his/her name. Isn't that odd? Perhaps you have Iole and don't know it?"

"You insult me. I say she is not here. Besides, whatever your business with this slave, it is irrelevant. If you say she was sold, then she is now someone else's property. You have no claim on her. Leave now."

"If you have her, we would be willing to buy her from you..."

"I have already said that I do not have her. Leave now — or shall I summon the Knights of the Red Fist?"

If they have met her in the matter of the dagger:

"Ah, I see you have found me. Good. Do not bother my slave. What news do you have for me regarding my uncle's goods?"

If the PCs offer to buy back the slave Nefer-Ura just bought (the PC or slave decoy), she will initially be resistant. However, if the PCs can offer her at least 50% more than what she herself paid, she will relent. Nefer-Ura is currently short on cash, and needs to continue purchasing slaves for sacrifice by her cult. It is more important to her to think of the long term, and she will sell this slave now, in order to have enough money to purchase more than one slave later.

If the PCs threaten Nefer-Ura or try to forcibly remove the slave from her garden, she will let them retreat with the slave, and then she will report them to the Red Fist. The PCs will have earned a point of Infamy with the Red Fist. Any party members wearing the Mark of Sarish will immediately lose it, as they have broken a law of the city by interfering between a master and her legally-purchased slave. Nefer-Ura will not fight the PCs under any circumstances, because she wishes to avoid injury at this time.

If the party lets her leave, Nefer-Ura will take her slave (assuming the PCs didn't purchase or take the slave back) and retreat into the villa. The PCs should leave, but if they think of it, they can hide in the neighborhood and watch the house. Around dusk, they see a grubby man (this is Shaketh-Ur, if they haven't previously killed him) enter the villa. No lights come on inside the villa after dark, and no one emerges. If the PCs want to snoop around at this point, proceed to Encounter 11: Into the Darkness. If the PCs hang around outside the villa for no obvious reason, they risk being apprehended by the Red Fist, particularly after dark (and note that violating curfew is a violation of the laws of Nishanpur, which means that any PCs with the *Mark of Sarish* lose it).

If for whatever reason the party allows a PC (posing as a slave) to remain with Nefer-Ura, that PC will be taken inside the villa, blindfolded, and led downward for a long time, through many twisting passages. The PC will then be stripped naked and manacled to a ring in the wall of a small cell. The PC can attempt to break out, but a nearly-impossible Strength check (DC 30) will be necessary to break the chains. The PC's cell is in the "Crypt of Creation". The slaves here are being held for a future attempt at creating a Deathgleaner later.

Development: There are a number of possible avenues of exploration and investigation following this encounter. Proceed to the appropriate encounter based on the PCs' next steps. If at any time things seem to be falling into a lull, feel free to throw in Optional Encounter B or Optional Encounter C.

Encounter 10 Stakeout

Rhomas' shack is in an area of the Corpse Quarter where traffic is frequent. It is easy for you settle in around the area and make yourselves reasonably unnoticed. Playing dice on the street corner, or hiding out in the shack down the way, you can easily watch the moneylender's activities.

Rhomas easily recovers from the run-in with your group; apparently he gets this sort of thing a lot. As the afternoon wears on, people come and go, some stopping to conduct business with Rhomas. Most seem to be here to make payments, not to accept them.

Finally, in the late afternoon, a grubby Myrantian man stops by. Rhomas nods to him, and conducts him inside. After several minutes, the Myrantian emerges, tucking a coin purse into his belt, and sets off out down Flood Street. Rhomas gives you a signal — this is your quarry.

This Myrantian fellow is Shaketh-Ur. The party can follow him to see where he goes, or confront him right away. Luckily for them, Shaketh-Ur isn't too terribly bright. If he notices people following him, he will assume he is about to be robbed. He will try to shake off any pursuers, but will not consider any other possible reasons why the PCs might be interested in him. You can resolve the PCs' efforts to tail Shaketh-Ur through the city using a series of opposed Spot and Hide checks, or a PC with a sufficiently high ability to track can follow him at a safe distance.

If they follow him without attracting undue attention to themselves, Shaketh-Ur will head for his sister's house in the Trade Quarter. If the party has already followed Nefer-Ura from the Flesh Market, then they have been here before. He reaches the villa just as dusk is descending on the city. The PCs can stake the place out or they can follow him into the building. If they decide to enter the villa, proceed to Encounter 11: Into the Darkness.

If the PCs choose to stay outside and watch, neither Shaketh-Ur nor his sister Nefer-Ura will re-emerge that night, and the party runs the risk of being caught out after curfew. If they instead attempt to confront him on the street, Shaketh-Ur will fight them. If they manage to kill him, on his body they will find a blowgun, along with a rolled leather case, containing a few needles that resemble the one found at the scene of Terjhin's murder.

Shaketh-Ur

CE Human Rogue 5/ Assassin 1

Medium-size Humanoid (5'7")

CR: 4 (normally 6)

HD: 5d6+5, 1d6+1 (hp 22)

BAB: +2 (grapple +5)

Init: +3 (+3 Dex)

Spd: 20ft.

AC: 13 (+3 Dex); touch 13, flat-footed 10

Attack / Full Attack: Blowgun +8 ranged (10')**Attack / Full Attack:** Dagger +3 melee or ranged (10')**Damage:** Blowgun 1d4-2+poison, Dagger 1d4 (19-20/x2)

Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.

SQ: Death Attack, Poison Use, Sneak Attack +4d6, Trap Finding, Trap Sense +1, Uncanny Dodge**Alignment:** Chaotic Evil**SV:** Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +1**Abilities:** Str 11, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 11**Skills:** Balance +3, Bluff +4, Disable Device +8, Disguise +6, Hide +9, Intimidate +4, Listen +9, Move Silently +9, Open Locks +7, Read Lips +7, Search +11, Sense Motive +9, Spot +8, Use Magical Device +6, Use Rope +5

Languages: Cancelese, Infernal, Low Coryani, High Coryani, Yhing-Hir

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (blowgun), Point Blank Shot, Weapon Focus (blowgun), Weapon Proficiency (rogue/assassin weapons),

Spells:**Base DC:** 13+ spell level**Spells Prepared:** None – he has already cast his one spell for today.**Possessions:** Blowgun, case of 5 needles, vial of poison (monstrous scorpion, Fort DC 18, 1d6/1d6 Con), dagger, disguise kit, lockpicks, death mask, 30 Triumvirates.

Shaketh-Ur is the brother of Nefer-Ura. Though he is indeed a devout follower of Neroth like his sister, he was not gifted in the priestly arts. Instead, he found his skill in bringing Neroth's touch to others. While his sister rose in wealth and prestige, he did not, a fact that she has always taken great care to remind him of on a regular basis. With his sister's involvement in the current plot, Shaketh-Ur has seen his value to her rise. She now needs his skills to aid in her plans. Shaketh will not let this opportunity slide by. He intends to blackmail his sister into paying him quite well when this is over...

Shaketh prefers to hunt from the shadows, and would rather avoid a stand-up fight. He knows where his skills lie, and street brawling is not it. If forced into combat, he will use his spells to obscure the area, and work himself into a position from which he can make a sneak attack. If things turn against him, he will run if he can.

Unfortunately for Shaketh, he got into a fight earlier today, when confronted by a rival. He escaped, but is rather injured and has not had a chance to heal. He has a hairline fracture in one leg, which makes it impossible for him to move quickly. This injury is already accounted for in his stat block, and some abilities he would normally have are reduced or eliminated. In order for him to use his poison darts, he will have to use a move-equivalent action to apply the poison.

Encounter 11 Into the Darkness

If the party followed Shaketh-Ur here, or if they decided to snoop around Nefer-Ura's home for some other reason, read or paraphrase the following:

Despite the overall appearance of neglect, the door to the villa is well-oiled and swings open without a sound. Inside it is quite dark. You can vaguely make out that the room is empty... Odd that there seem to be people living in a place that has no furniture.

Allow the party to search the rooms of the villa without incident. As long as they are at least attempting to be silent, it is highly unlikely they will attract any attention here, because the two Myrantians are not to be found within. At the rear of the villa is a passage that descends into the catacombs that stretch under the city. It is not until the PCs reach this area that they are at risk of discovery.

As you continue your search, carefully, room by room, you find that the entire villa is empty. No furniture... and no people. The only other exit is a worn trapdoor in the rearmost room. Unlike other rooms, this one is not dusty and shows signs of recent traffic.

After the PCs take whatever precautions they deem necessary:

Descending into the room beneath the trapdoor, you can see it is cut from the rock itself. Cool and musty, the passage continues onward into the darkness. After carefully creeping forward for a while, you come to a fork: the main passage divides into a pair of downward-sloping tunnels.

The passage on the left leads off into the main catacombs in the Corpse Quarter. The right passage leads off into the family crypts of the previous tenants of the villa. It is these crypts that are being utilized for the rituals of the Seekers of the Hidden Master. Have the PCs make a **Spot**, **Search**, or **Survival check (DC 15)** to recognize that the left passage is dusty and has not seen recent traffic.

If this module is used as part of a larger campaign, the GM can let the party explore the left passage. Perhaps it leads off into other secret lairs of the Seekers of the Hidden Master, or to ancient Nerothian tombs ripe for plunder. If this adventure is being run as an RPGA round, or a self-contained module, then the PCs simply wander around in the catacombs for a while, not really finding anything, until they realize that this seems to be the wrong direction. Or, if you want to hit them over the head with it, then the left-hand passage is simply blocked by a collapsed wall some 30 feet past the intersection.

Following the right-hand passage, you continue to descend into the earth. After a time, you begin to see light ahead; perhaps you are close to the heart of this mystery. The passageway curves out of sight, faint light creeping around the cut stone walls.

Suddenly, you hear a hideous rising shriek – almost like an inhuman scream – echoing faintly in the distance. What could make such an unholy sound?

Peering around the corner, the PCs will be confronted by the skeletal beasts placed here to ward off trespassers. If the party killed Shaketh-Ur earlier, among his possessions they found a mask. These undead are mindless, but have been commanded to allow passage of any humans wearing masks. If the PCs took the clue from Shaketh-Ur's possessions and wear masks, they can walk right by unmolested. Otherwise, the party is in for a fight.

Development: The shrieking from the demon in Encounter 12 continues throughout the combat, covering any noise that the PCs and the skeletal beasts make. If the adventuring party consists mostly of 1st-level characters, then there are only three skeletal beasts here (or even two, if the party is especially combat-light). If the party consists mostly of 2nd- and 3rd-level characters, then there are four beasts (or even five, if you really think they can handle it).

Skeletal Beasts (from 2 to 5)

hp 18 each; see Chapter 5 for full statistics

Encounter 12 The Crypt of Creation

Having defeated the undead guardians, you continue to follow the curving passageway around and see an amazing sight open up before your eyes. The walls lead to a huge, carved gallery, with columns spiraling around the outside. You find yourselves looking down into a large courtyard, almost like a posh underground villa.

The party can crouch below the level of the column bases to avoid being seen here. From this vantage point, they can observe the scene to determine what precisely is going on.

The courtyard presents a scene of gruesome carnage. At one end of the massive space, you see a human man, nude, chained to what appears to be a great stone table or altar. Next to this is another slab. This second slab contains the form of a stunningly beautiful female Infernal, also chained and nude.

Several Sarishans chant binding spells while another priest, this one apparently Nerothian, begins to cut the demon's flesh with a large dagger. The demon shrieks and spits curses, but it is unable to move as the Nerothian priest patiently flays the skin from its bones, inch by agonizing inch.

Meanwhile, the nude man's flesh is scrubbed raw and oiled by another priest. It is hard to tell if this victim is alive or dead; he lies completely unmoving, his eyes closed.

All the priests are masked: the Sarishans in demon-faced visages, while the Nerothians wear the jackal-face of Haranekunas, the guide to the dead.

At the other end of the chamber, a large sarcophagus sits open. A large bundled form is being carried towards the sarcophagus, and it seems to twitch in the hands of its bearers. It is obviously humanoid, and seems to have been wrapped with arms crossed, in the way the ancient Nerothians used to entomb their dead. Hundreds of yards of linen, each piece painted with symbols of protection and holy verses to Neroth, cover this struggling form – a person who is quite clearly not yet dead.

The priests force the wrapped body inside the sarcophagus, and bring forth a cauldron filled with some boiling substance. They ladle it onto the body, which lets out a shriek in a woman's voice! When the shrieking subsides, you see the priests lift another vessel, this one a clay pot, and shake out some small black forms from it, which quickly seem to crawl over the still-twitching form in the coffin and disappear. Another scream erupts as the priests lift the heavy stone lid into place and begin to chant.

The players should be starting to get the idea of what is going on now. If they want to bust in on the proceedings at any point, they will have to fight everyone in the room all at once, which is perhaps not the most intelligent thing to do. But, if they insist, they will fight some of the Sarishan priests, as well as Nefer-Ura and her acolytes. The other higher-level clerics will simply leave through other catacomb entrances, as once it has been disturbed, their complex ceremony is ruined. They will have to start again another night, and they have no wish to tarry here and run the risk of personal exposure.

If the PCs choose to wait, the weird ceremonies will eventually come to an end as follows:

As the Infernal loses the last of her skin, the priests change their focus. With carefully practiced strokes of a spoon-shaped ritual tool, they remove first one, and then the other, of her eyes. With a final agonized shriek, the Infernal seems to dissolve, leaving the lead Sarishan priest holding her gory remains in his hands. He then turns to the other table, where the nude man has been prepared. With equal care, the assisting priest takes the spoon and gouges out each of the man's eyes, replacing them with the bloody orbs ripped from the Infernal.

The Nerothian raises a ceremonial knife, and begins to carefully flay the man. Whatever spell or potion was keeping this poor soul silent and unmoving seems to wear off as the priest goes about his bloody work with ruthless efficiency. The man's screams rise, as the hide of the demon is rubbed with unguents, and laid over his bloody form, skin replacing skin. It seems that the group of priests works for hours, carefully replacing the man's skin with that of the Infernal. He mercifully succumbs to unconsciousness quickly, though you can see that he still breathes by the rise and fall of his chest.

After the priests finally finish with the mutilated and stitched-up man, they carefully carry him off into a cell. Once he has been laid to his painful rest, the priests depart through another exit in the floor of the courtyard. Only the bloody tables and the sarcophagus remain, the screams of those who have been horribly mutilated here tonight still echoing in your memories.

At this point, the PCs can safely descend into the crypt and look about.

The passageway spirals as it descends. The walls are set with a number of niches. The upper niches still contain a few fragments of pottery or other grave goods, though the bodies themselves are long gone. The lower alcoves have been converted into small cells, the rock being hollowed to form small chambers, covered by barred doors. All are dark, and most are silent. From a few, you can make out the sounds of breathing, or weeping.

The Sarishan priests (if the party did not fight and kill them already) have mostly dispersed through other tunnels into the catacombs. A small group of the cultists, including Nefer-Ura, will return this way shortly. The GM should count 5 minutes of real time, whereupon the smaller group returns and combat most likely ensues. Fortunately for the PCs, Nefer-Ura has spent a great deal of her physical and magical energies during the ritual, so the PCs have a chance to dispatch her in her weakened state.

If the PCs open the sarcophagus, they will release the new creation inside, a Deathgleaner. When the group of priests return their first action will be to immediately open the sarcophagus, if they can reach it and the party has not already done so. The priests will attempt to subdue the party, and if successful, they will imprison the PCs and use their bodies to create more

1 Sarishan Priest

LE Human Male Cleric 7 (Sarish)

Medium-size Humanoid

CR: 4 (usually 7)

HD: 7d8+7 (hp 39)

BAB: +5 (grapple +5)

Init: +0

Spd: 20 ft

AC: 16 (+6 Breastplate); touch 10, flat-footed 16

Attack / Full Attack: Dagger +5 melee or ranged 10'

Attack / Full Attack: Light Mace +5 melee

Damage: Dagger 1d4(19-20/x2), Light Mace 1d6

Space/Reach: 5ft. / 5ft.

SQ: Rebuke Infernals 6/day, Rebuke Undead 10/day, Spontaneous casting

Languages: Cancerese, Infernal, Low Coryani

AL: Chaotic Evil

SV: Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +8

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 16

Skills: Concentration +9, Diplomacy +11, Heal +3, Knowledge (arcana) +5,

Knowledge (Infernals) +2, Knowledge (religion: Sarish) +5, Sense Motive +14,

Spellcraft +5, Spot +6.

Feats: Alien Understanding, Armor Proficiency (all), Combat Casting, Empower Blood, Extra Turning, Shield Proficiency, Weapon Proficiency (simple), Skill Focus (Sense Motive).

Spells:

Base DC: 13+spell level (bold for domain spells)

Spells Prepared:

0-Level: ~~guidance, guidance, guidance, resistance, resistance, resistance~~

1st Level: ~~command, command, command, deathwatch, divine favor, sanctuary~~

2nd Level: ~~death knell, death knell, hold person, hold person, summon monster II~~

3rd Level: ~~animate dead, animate dead, animate dead, summon monster III~~

4th Level: ~~dismissal, summon monster IV~~

Domains: Daemonology, Oath

Possessions: Ceremonial Robes, Demonic Mask, Sarishan steel Dagger, Breastplate, Light Mace, 30 Triumvirates.

2 Acolytes of Sarish

LE Human Male Cleric 3 (Sarish)

Medium-size Humanoid

CR: 3

HD: 3d8+3 (hp 19)

BAB: +2 (grapple +2)

Init: +2

Spd: 30 ft

AC: 12 (+2 Dex); touch 12, flat-footed 10

Attack / Full Attack: Dagger +2 melee or +4 ranged 10'

Attack / Full Attack: Light Mace +2 melee

Damage: Dagger 1d4(19-20/x2), Light Mace 1d6

SQ: Rebuke Infernals 6/day, Rebuke Undead 10/day, Spontaneous casting

Languages: Cancerese, Infernal, Low Coryani

AL: Lawful Evil

SV: Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +5

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 16

Skills: Bluff +3, Concentration +5, Diplomacy +8, Knowledge (arcana) +3,

Knowledge (Infernals) +2, Knowledge (religion: Sarish) +3, Sense Motive +8, Spot +3.

Feats: Alien Understanding, Armor Proficiency (all), Empower Blood, Extra Turning, Shield Proficiency, Weapon Proficiency (simple), Skill Focus (Sense Motive)

Spells:

Base DC: 12+spell level (bold for domain spells)

Spells Prepared:

0-Level: ~~guidance, guidance, guidance, resistance~~

1st Level: ~~command, deathwatch, divine favor, sanctuary~~

2nd Level: ~~death knell, hold person, summon monster II~~

Domains: Daemonology, Oath

Possessions: Ceremonial Robes, Demonic Mask, Sarishan steel Dagger, Light Mace, 30 Triumvirates.

Nefer-Ura, Cultist of Neroth

LE Human Female Rogue 2/Assassin 1/Cleric 6 (Neroth)

Medium-size Humanoid

CR: 4 (normally 9)

HD: 2d6+4, 1d6+2, 6d8+12 (hp 56)

BAB: +5 (grapple +6)

Init: +7 (+3 Dex, Improved Initiative)

Spd: 30ft.

AC: 14 (+3 Dex, +1 Bracers); touch 13, flat-footed 11

Attack / Full Attack: Scythe +8 melee

Attack/Full Attack: Dagger +7 melee or +8 ranged (10')

Damage: Scythe 2d4 (x4), Dagger 1d4 (19-20/x2)

Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.

SQ: ~~Death Attack (DC 14), Death Touch 1/day~~; Evasion, Poison Use, Rebuke Undead 10/day, ~~Smite 1/day~~; Sneak Attack +1d6, Spontaneous Casting, Uncanny Dodge

Languages: Cincerese, Infernal, Low Coryani, Milandisian, Yhing-Hir.

AL: Chaotic Evil

SV: Fort +7, Ref +10, Will +5

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 19, Cha 16

Skills: Bluff +8, Concentration +8, Diplomacy +15, Disguise +7, Gather Information +7, Hide +11, Intimidate +10, Jump +10, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (thanatology) +8, Knowledge (undead) +8, Listen +8, Move Silently +11, Read Lips +4, Search +7, Sense Motive +9, Spellcraft +8, Spot +8.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (all), Combat Reflexes, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (hand crossbow), Extra Turning, Improved Initiative, Martial Weapon Proficiency, Shield Proficiency (non-tower), Weapon Proficiency (simple), Weapon Focus (scythe).

Cleric Spells:

Base DC: 14 + spell level (bold for domain spells)

0-Level: guidance, ~~guidance~~, ~~guidance~~, ~~resistance~~, ~~resistance~~,1st Level: cause fear, command, command, deathwatch, divine favor2nd Level: ~~death knell~~, ~~death knell~~, ~~hold person~~, ~~hold person~~, ~~undetectable alignment~~3rd Level: ~~animate dead~~, ~~animate dead~~, ~~deeper darkness~~

Domains: Death, Destruction

Assassin Spells:

Base DC: 13 + spell level

1st Level: ~~obscuring mist~~

Possessions: Bracers of Armor +1, MW Scythe, Ceremonial Nerothian Masks, 24 Baht

Nefer-Ura is a priestess of Neroth. She hails from that area of the Coryani Empire which was once known as the Myrantian Hegemony. Nefer-Ura moved to Nishanpur while tracking down the Dagger of Mahememnun, a lost relic of her people.

Her part in this scheme, besides being one of the practitioners capable of the complex rites needed for mummification, has been to procure the slaves used as victims. She has taken a sick pleasure in obtaining beautiful slaves, as she enjoys seeing their smooth skin destroyed by the knife.

Deathgleaners. Proceed to Ending B. If the fight seems to be going against the priests, however, they will flee into the catacombs, leaving their creation to its own devices.

It is possible that the party may simply sneak in, rescue either Iole or a captured comrade, and leave. If so, after the PCs have exited the underground tunnels, proceed to Ending C, although some of the "best" aspects of this conclusion will elude them.

If one of their party members was brought here, they PCs can find the missing person easily by searching the small alcoves, door to door. There are 24 carved cells, each with a locked wooden door. The prisoners, 8 in total, are kept in random cells. If the party calls out, the priests will hear, and will return in 1d4 rounds. The missing PC, when discovered, is unharmed. Two of the uninhabited cells contain failed attempts at creating the monstrous undead that these cultists are working on. One of the eight prisoners is the man they saw having his skin exchanged during the ritual; unless the party destroys him swiftly, his transformation will be completed in the next few hours, and he will become another failed Deathgleaner. Only the magic of a heal spell could restore this poor soul's flesh and purge the Infernal taint that has been inflicted upon him. Absent such powerful curative magics, the best thing the PCs can do for him is to put him out of his misery.

If the PCs are searching for Iole, they will also find her in one of the alcoves, but her discovery is not as pleasant:

Peering through the barred doors, you have found several people, in various stages of mutilation. They are all alive, but you aren't sure for how long some of them will remain so. One of them is a young woman with black hair and green eyes. One arm has apparently been flayed and replaced with the hide of a demon. She sits weeping silently, curled at the back of her cell. When you first approach her, she cowers, but then meekly submits to your ministrations.

Iole's arm is mutilated, and she has only partial use of it. The hit point damage she sustained is only partially healed, and she is definitely in terrible pain. The PCs can heal her damage, but the pain will continue, unless they remove the demon hide from her arm and cast a restoration spell upon her. Iole will not like the idea of being "operated on" again, but the PCs can easily subdue her to perform this operation, and she will be grateful afterward if they can restore her to health and save her arm.

Development: If the PCs have defeated the cultists, rescued as many of the innocents as possible, and otherwise followed up on all of the loose ends, their adventure has come to a successful conclusion. Proceed to Ending C.

Optional Encounter A: A Thief in the Hand...

The gibbet hanging high on the wall contains an apparently helpless man in rags, swatting feebly at a murder of crows that flap around him. It is hard to tell if he is trying to scare them off or to catch one...

The guards on the wall pay no attention at all to the man in the cage, although they do seem to give warning glares to anyone they see approaching the empty area surrounding the wall.

The man in the cage is Corlinth of Savona, a rogue who had the bad luck to try to steal from the wrong person here in Nishanpur. The guards are really not paying too much attention to the PCs as they approach him; death by exposure is intended as a sort of gruesome public spectacle. It is not unusual for passers-by to stop and stare at hanging criminals for a moment or two, although extended interest will be noticed. Yelling up to Corlinth will certainly garner the party unwelcome attention from the guards, as loud speech of any kind is abnormal in Nishanpur.

Creative PCs may find a way to help Corlinth. Use of teleportation or telekinesis-type effects could provide Corlinth with food, potions, lockpicks, or any number of other small items. If he is given food and water, he will scarf them down quickly, before the guards have time to notice. Given any means to open his cage door, he will, and then he will jump. It is a thirty-foot fall to the ground, but at this point he would rather take his chances on a clean death from the fall or from being shot by the guards than to perish slowly from exposure.

If the fall doesn't kill him, he will run for the Shanties. The guards will get off a few shots as he flees, and then raise an alarm, but finding him in the masses of dirty and unwashed people there will be nearly impossible by the time they can get down there. The party can easily follow his progress as he makes his escape from the cage, and meet up with him later to render any further assistance they desire.

If for some reason the PCs themselves come to the attention of the guards and need to flee, they too may end up among the shanties. It will not be at all difficult for the party to find an abandoned lean-to or other shelter here in which to hide. A Search check (DC 12) will suffice.

The ragged and exhausted figure practically collapses at your feet. "Thank you, friends," he gasps, "I do not know who you are or why you took an interest in me, but I am glad that you did..."

This is an opportunity for the PCs to introduce themselves. If any of the characters was sent from the Emerald Society to rescue Corlinth, and they use the proper pass phrase, he will noticeably brighten in mood. Regardless:

"I am Corlinth of Savona. I am grateful for your timely assistance. I'm not sure how much longer I could have lasted up there. How can I repay such selfless generosity?"

Corlinth has no equipment, other than what the party may give him. He does know the city, though, and will willingly act as a guide and informant, provided that the PCs can help him get cleaned up and in a fit shape to travel. Given a chance to change clothes and eat, he will use his Disguise skill to change his appearance sufficiently that the city guards will not immediately notice him. While the offer of any magical disguise assistance will not be turned down, he knows such effects are temporary. He will instead seek to dye his blond hair black, and take other more permanent measures to avoid getting caught again.

Although Corlinth will willingly accompany the PCs through most of the rest of this adventure, he is a non-combatant. The party can heal any hit point damage he has sustained, but they cannot cure the damage done by exposure and starvation. Only time will cure that. He is weak and tires quickly, although he will try to be helpful. Other than providing information, and perhaps giving them a nudge in the right direction if they need it, Corlinth is really of little assistance to the party on this adventure. If he is allowed to rest in their room(s) at the Ebon Steed, he will not steal from them, and if given equipment and comfort, he will be forever grateful, promising aid in the future when possible.

Optional Encounter B: Where, Oh Where?

The old woman makes her stumbling, halting way through the throng of people, and as you approach her, you can see that she is half blind, and her hands are twisted into claws.

Seeing your approach, she totters toward you, and lisps: "Oh, please, sir (ma'am/good folk), would you help an old woman? Please! They have taken my daughter! She's my only daughter, she takes care of me... and no one will help me find her. Please, will you bring her back?"

"Who has taken your daughter?"

"The Red Fist, the Red Fist took her. She had done nothing wrong, I swear it by Sarish. We are too poor to afford the Mark, so they just took her. Took her to sell in the Flesh Market. Just because we are poor and because she is beautiful."

"The Flesh Market?"

"The slave market, it's in the Corpse Quarter. Please, will you bring her back to me? I will do anything you ask, if you will only save my daughter."

"The Red Fist?"

"The city guard. They harass us, because we are poor and live in the Shanties. We haven't harmed anyone, we just try to do the best we can. We did nothing wrong, I swear. They just took her. Please..."

"When did they take her?"

"Three days ago. There may still be time to retrieve her. She may not have been sold yet. Will you help me?"

"What will you pay us?/Why can't you buy her back yourself?" (Or any other money-related question.)

"I am only a poor old woman. I cannot work any more, my hands are stiff and I can hardly see. My daughter was my only help. Please, bring her back to me. I have nothing to give you but my prayers to all the gods."

If the party agrees to help her, she will thank them profusely, give them a small toothless smile and beseech Sarish, Nier, and Neroth for their aid. Her daughter's name is Iole, and she has long black hair and green eyes. If they party proceeds on to the Flesh Market, go to Encounter 4: Flesh of My Flesh.

If the party does not agree to help the old woman, a single tear runs down her cracked cheek, and she continues to petition passers-by trying to find someone, anyone, who will help her. Her plaintive cries follow the PCs as they leave the area.

Optional Encounter C: Dangerous Beauty

If there are any PCs (male or female), who are neither Val nor natives of Nishanpur, and who have a Charisma of 15 or better, and who do not purchase the Mark of Sarish, they will certainly come to the attention of the patrolling Red Fist guards. The Master of the Flesh Market bribes them on a regular basis to bring him attractive young people that he can sell. Pretty slaves always bring a higher price than disfigured ones.

2 Acolytes of Neroth

NE Human Male Cleric 3 (Neroth)

Medium-size Humanoid

CR: 3

HD: 3d8+1 (hp 17)

BAB: +1 (grapple +1)

Init: +3 (+3 Dex)

Spd: 20ft.

AC: 16 (+1 Dex, +5 Breastplate); touch 11, flat-footed 15

Attack / Full Attack: Scythe +2 melee

Attack/Full Attack: Dagger +2 melee or +3 ranged (10')

Damage: Scythe 2d4 (x4), Dagger 1d4 (19-20/x2)

Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.

SQ: ~~Death Touch 1/day~~, Rebuke Undead 9/day, ~~Smite 1/day~~, Spontaneous Casting

Languages: Cacerese, Infernal, Low Coryani

AL: Neutral Evil

SV: Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +6

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 14

Skills: Concentration +5, Diplomacy +4, Heal +5, Knowledge (arcana) +3, Knowledge (local) +2, Knowledge (religion: Neroth) +6, Knowledge (thanatology) +3, Knowledge (undead) +2, Spellcraft +4

Feats: Armor Proficiency (all), Extra Turning, Lightning Reflexes, Martial Weapon Proficiency, Shield Proficiency (non-tower), Weapon Proficiency (simple)

Possessions: Breastplate, Ceremonial Nerothian Masks, Scythe, 24 Baht each

Spells:

Base DC: 13+spell level (bold for domain spells)

Spells Prepared:

0-Level: ~~guidance~~, ~~guidance~~, guidance, resistance

1st Level: ~~cause fear~~, ~~command~~, deathwatch, divine favor

2nd Level: ~~death knell~~, ~~death knell~~, hold person

Domains: Death, Destruction

1 Failed Deathgleaner

Medium-size Undead (Infernal, Evil, Lawful)

HD: 6d12+5 (45 hp)

BAB: +6 (grapple +7)

Init: +5 (+1 Dex, Improved Initiative)

Spd: 30 ft.

AC: 20 (+1 Dex, +9 natural); touch 11, flat-footed 19

Attack: Slam +7 melee

Full Attack: Slam +7/+2 melee

Damage: Slam 1d6+2

Space/Reach: 5 ft. / 5ft

SQ: Creature of Neroth and Sarish, Damage reduction 5/magic or Netherite or Sarishan steel, Immunities, Resistances, See in Darkness, Undead

SV: Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +10

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 12, Con -, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 13

Skills: Hide +11, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (any one) +9, Listen +12, Move Silently +11, Search +12, Sense Motive +14, Spot +12.

Feats: Alertness, Toughness, Improved Toughness, Improved Initiative.

Possessions: None

Note: See Chapter 5 for details on Deathgleaners. This one did not complete the transformation successfully, so it has only the statistics and special qualities listed above.

You see a contingent of guards wearing the insignia of the Red Fist march by. The contingent leader slows, and waves his companions to a stop. He turns to look at your group, looking each of you over slowly. Other folk on the streets pretend not to notice you, and seem to find all sorts of interesting business in other parts of the square.

"You there," the guard points (indicates the High-Charisma PC(s), "You're under arrest."

The PCs have several options, none of which look good. If they choose to fight, proceed with combat. Use the stats for typical guards in Chapter 2. They should encounter patrols of one less than their number if they are 1st level, an equal number at 2nd level, and one more than their number at 3rd level. Half of the guards are wardens with the Mark of Sarish. In ten rounds

another contingent of guards will arrive to assist. Unfortunately for the PCs, the guards are the law in Nishanpur, so their Marks do not fade just because they are trying to kidnap innocent people off the street and sell them into slavery.

If the PCs choose to run, the guards will pursue. If they can elude the guards for 3 rounds, the guards will give up pursuit. The PCs will not actually be pursued further, as they didn't really commit any crime (that those guards knew about).

If the PCs demand to know the charges, the guards will laugh: "Where do you think you are, Milandir?"

Again, combat will ensue, as speaking with the guards allowed them enough time to encircle the party. If the party manages to subdue or kill the guards, then they can escape. If they killed any of the guards, they have earned a point of Infamy with the Red Fist. On any subsequent encounter with Red Fist guards, roll a d20, and if the roll is equal or less than their Infamy rating, the guards have recognized them and will attack them on sight. Infamy points are cumulative.

If the PCs actually surrender, the PCs with a Charisma of 15 or better are taken to the Flesh Market to be sold. The other PCs are released and any complaints they might try to make to "higher authorities" are ignored (although they can learn that their companion's destination is the slave market in the Corpse Quarter). Proceed to Encounter 4: Flesh of My Flesh.

Conclusions

Ending A Death Awaits us All

Use this ending if the PCs are defeated in combat anywhere except during the final encounter with the cultists. The plots and intrigues of Nishanpur have proven too much for this band of adventurers. Perhaps another hero will rise from the turmoil of the City of Secrets some other day.

As your lifeblood runs out, it seems to you as if the ground itself is greedily drinking it up. The world slowly grows dark around you, and you wonder what will become of your body once you are gone. Will you become a mindless servant of the Nerothians? Will you be ignominiously consumed by the cleaner-demons that keep the city clear of rubbish? Or does some other fate await you? Nothing is as it seems in the City of Secrets, and things are often more dangerous than they appear. You learned this the hard way. Perhaps after passing through Beltine's Cauldron, your soul's next lifetime will be one tempered with more luck, or more wisdom.

Ending B The Agony of Defeat

Use this ending if the PCs are defeated in combat during the final encounter with the cultists. Their bodies will be used to fuel the next round of fiendish experiments. Perhaps a subsequent group of adventurers will be able to disrupt the cultists' operations, and rescue this group of PCs from a fate worse than death (and worse than undeath).

You awake to find yourself alone, locked in a dark cell. You can see flickering torchlight through a small barred grate in the door. A masked face blocks the light. "Ah, they are awakening. We can begin soon."

OPEN GAME LICENSE

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity; (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress, artifacts, creatures, characters, stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product Identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark,

sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game Content by the Contributor (g) "Use," "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License: Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content you are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of

Having already seen the ceremonies that this evil group practices, dread fills your heart. Soon you will find yourselves transformed, into something so unnatural you never could have imagined it before tonight.

Ending C Tying off Loose Ends

There are several possible matters that the party needs to resolve at the end of this module:

Leaving behind the dark catacombs, you can once again emerge into the light of the city. Colors return with the dawn, and the city comes to life around you. Now you only have to finish off what you started, and your part in this foul plot will be at an end.

If the party returns to the Factor's Guildhall, whether or not the party has been able to retrieve the dagger, Bethgeer will listen to their tale with interest. She will pay the agreed-upon rates for any items recovered. If they do not bring back the dagger, but can reveal that Nefer-Ura set up the theft, Bethgeer will be incensed. She will ask the party to make a sworn statement for her, so that she can pursue the matter in court. She will pay the party the 250 Baht each that was promised for the dagger's recovery if they agree to swear a Sarishan oath detailing their experiences and their conclusions.

Bethgeer will not agree to let the party keep the dagger under any circumstances, as she will need it for legal proceedings, regardless of whether or not the party defeated Nefer-Ura and her brother. If the PCs think to steal the dagger and keep it for themselves, they will be hunted by the Factor's Guildhall and (less overtly) by the Ratcatchers.

If the party discovered Shaketh-Ur's part in Terjhini's death, and killed him, Derhain will be very interested in hearing from them as well. If they show him the needles and describe the evidence that they found on his partner's body, Derhain will agree they have found the culprit. He will pay them 150 Baht each.

If the party did both of the above, then they also have earned the Favor of the Ratcatchers (or they cancelled out the ire of the Ratcatchers they may have earned in the Flesh Market by fighting with Kharum). On the other hand, if they knew that the Factor's Guildhall was seeking the dagger, and did not return it, they will have earned the ire of the Ratcatchers for certain.

If the PCs have rescued Iole and returned her to her mother, they are both grateful for the reunion, though they have no material reward for the party. If the PCs do not remove the demon hide from Iole's arm or the other prisoners they rescued, the damage will heal, but the pain will not recede. These poor souls will be mutilated for life, and socially will forever after be treated as a dark-kin. Eventually they will probably commit suicide.

In addition, Iole was used as an offering to lure in an incubus before she was flayed. She is pregnant, and in nine months will give birth to a cambion. If she is released, the Seekers of the Hidden Master will watch her from a distance, and after the child is born, will steal it.

In the event that the party elects NOT to stop the Nerothian/Sarishan cult activities, and leaves without being spotted, the cult will perfect its method of making Deathgleaners. This will no doubt have dire repercussions for the Swords of Nier and for the city of Nishanpur as a whole in the future, as the tension between the various factions continues to build towards a boiling point.

The End

that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. Copyright Notice: System Reference Document Copyright 2000-

2003, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, Andy Collins, David Noonan, Rich Redman, Bruce R. Cordell, John D. Rateliff, Thomas Reid, James Wyatt, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

Spear of the Lohjan, Copyright 2000, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Author Jared Fennell

Blood Reign of Nishanpur, Copyright 2001, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Author Jared Fennell

Codex Arcanis, Copyright 2001, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Authors: Henry Lopez, Scott Charlton, Matt Forbeck, Sean Hovanek, Eric Wiener, J. Brian Daley

Carnival of Swords, Copyright 2002, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Author Scott Charlton

Forged in Magic, Copyright 2002, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Authors: Scott Charlton, Roland Vanez, Rene Allorson, Peter Barnechea, Jim Beck, Duane Choquette, Rene Hidalgo, Edward J. Kopp, Henry Lopez, Charles Plemons III, Nelson Rodriguez, and Eric Wiener

Crack the Dome of Night, Copyright 2003, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Author Kimberly Wajer Scott

On the Red March, Copyright 2003, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Author Kimberly Wajer Scott

Unbridled Services, Copyright 2003, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Author Vincent Au

Live by the Sword, Die by the Sword, Copyright 2003, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Author Kimberly Wajer Scott

Heart's Blood, Fire's Vengeance, Copyright 2003, Paradigm Concepts, Inc.; Author Samuel Cluck

*"Nishanpur is not a city built of stone, instead
it is built of intrigues and betrayals, layer
upon layer, all set in a foundation of blood."*

Losknek, Prince of Hell



Nothing is simple in the *City of Secrets*. With the Swords of Nier in control of the city, a great unrest has settled over the population. The authoritarian regime of the Swords is beginning to destroy the commerce that has always been the lifeblood of the city.

While the citizenry suffers, the Nerothians, dark servants of the Lord of Death, scheme to overthrow the Autocrat of Erduk and return Nishanpur to Canceri rule. To this end they have found unlikely allies with the Seekers of the Hidden Master, devil-dealing Sarishans intent upon returning the dreaded and ancient Devil-Kings to their place of power. If left unchecked, this benighted coalition will bring forth a new abomination unto the world, and replace the foreign tyrant with an even greater evil.

Within this book one will find:

- A rich and detailed history of Nishanpur, from its birth in blood to the modern day
- Details upon the many orders, both secret and overt, which wrestle for control of this city of intrigue
- A detailed city guide including maps, perfect for running boundless adventures within Nishanpur's walls
- New spells
- New magic items
- New prestige classes
- Monsters that bring the horrors of Canceri home
- A guide to playing Nishanpur with LIVING ARCANIS players
- A complete LIVING ARCANIS adventure suitable for playing at home

Requires the use of the Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook, Revised Edition, published by Wizards of the Coast.



ISBN 1-931374-16-3
\$17.99

PCI 1007



Paradigm Concepts, Inc.
6800 S.W. 40 St. #638 • Miami, FL 33155
www.paradigmconcepts.com

