PCI 2606

ARCANIS 5E

THE WORLD OF SHATTERED EMPIRES

CODEX GEOGRAPHICA VOL. II
THE SSETHREGORAN EMPIRE

5th Edition Fantasy

Codex Geographica Vol. II
The Ssethregoran Empire

by Duane M. Choquette and Henry Lopez

Cover
Santi Casas

Interior Artists
Santi Casas, Donald Crank, Brian Dalrymple. Paul (Prof) Herbert, Pat Loboyko, Britt Martin, Glen Osterberger, Nakarin Sukontakorn, Ricardo German Ponce Torres, and Jason Walton

Cartography
Keith Curtis

Editors
Lucas Amodio, Paul Baughman, and Cody Bergman

Layout & Graphic Design
Brian Dalrymple

Game Mechanics
William Altizer, Lucas Amodio, Pedro Barrenechea, Cody Bergman, Kevin Grigsby

Art Director
Jimmy Beck

Additional Material
Jeffrey Witthauer

Ssethric Golem
Created by Jeff Scifert

Ssethric War Beast
Created by Eric Hughes

Special Thanks
To the 315 Kickstarter Backers without whose support this book would not have been possible.

Arcanis: The World of Shattered Empires created by
Henry Lopez

PARADIGM CONCEPTS

PCI 2606
ISBN 978-1-931374-80-4

All portions of this book are © 2019 Paradigm Concepts All rights reserved. Arcanis, Arcanis: the World of Shattered Empires, the Arcanis logo, and all related marks and images are © 2000 - 2019. Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC. Shattered Empires: Roleplaying in the World of Arcanis and Arcanis5E are © 2019 Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC. The mention of, use of or reference to any company, trademark or product in this book is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright in question.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: History of the Ssethric People 3

Chapter Two: Geography 29
- Blackroot Forest 30
- Central Basin 32
- The Coastal Swamplands 35
- Eastern Rainforest 37
- The Endless Dark 40
- The Northern Foothills 41
- The Southern Reaches 45
- Sseth, the Imperial Capital 48
- The Western Forest 56
- Other Areas of Ssethric Influence 60

Chapter Three: The Races of the Empire 63
- Iguadons 64
- Naga 66
- Ssanu 70
- Ss'ressen 80
- Allies of the Empire 90
  - Hylis 90
  - Pleisaurans 91
  - Sea Devils 92
- Slave Races 92
  - Elorii 92
  - Hussuma 93
  - Kobolds 94
  - Lophius 94
  - Rhamphorikes 94
  - Shell-Backs 95
  - Yissera 96
- The Varn 96
  - The Pacifiers 97
  - The Seekers of Enlightenment 97
  - The Speakers of Adulation 97
  - Architects of Light 98
  - The Obligators 98
  - The Emissary 98
  - The Presence 98

Chapter Four: The Pariah Clutches 99
- The Black Talon Ss'ressen 100
- The Ghost Scale Ss'ressen 126
- The Ashen Hide Ss'ressen 134

Chapter Five: Codex of Faith 137
- The Ssethric Gods 139
  - Kassegore 140
  - Yig 141
  - Jeggal Sag 142
  - The Fire Dragon 144
  - Wantiir 145
  - Korlak 145
- The Varn 146
  - Zedok 147
  - Sipta 148
  - Haulis 148

Chapter Six: Codex of Ssethric Lore 149
- New Race Options 150
- New Class Options 160
- Languages of the Ssethregoran Empire 181
- New Skill 181
- New Backgrounds and Variants 181
- New Combat School 186
- New Equipment 187

Chapter Seven: Codex of Magic 191
- Ssethric Magic 192
- New Spells 194
- Magic Items 199
- New Runes 210

Appendix A: Codex of Threats 213

Appendix B: Non-Player Characters 266

Appendix C: Dramatis Persona 276

Index 285

Chapter 1

The History of the Ssethric People

An ancient race, the reptilians known as ssethrics, dominated much of the continent for thousands of years and possessed an advanced society that held sway over the world with cold efficiency. Those that were not ssethric or failed to be of use to the empire were exterminated in Extinction Wars. Their advances in the arts, sciences, and sorcery were unparalleled. Their dominance over all was without question until their own creations overthrew the empire.

Exiled to a small corner of the Known Lands, the ssethrics waited and slowly rebuilt their power. They threw off the yoke of the old gods and accepted those of their new allies, the varn. Now, after centuries of testing the mettle of their enemies, the ssethrics are ready to once again become the undisputed masters of Arcanis.

What do I know?

When reading historical or background information, many have asked *"How much of this does my character know?"*This is a fair question. Throughout this chapter each section of history will be prefaced with a Knowledge Threshold that if met, grants your Hero knowledge of the information presented.

Some of the history sections have requirements, such as being a member of a specific race, have a level of fame within or membership in a certain secret society, require you to be proficient in **and** possess a passive value in a particular skill, which is calculated in the same way your passive perception is determined, i.e. 10 + attribute bonus + your proficiency bonus or possess a particular field of study (see the feat Sage's Insight, pg. 185).

For example, a section may require *ssethric, passive History 15 or History: Lost Civilizations*. To have this knowledge, your Hero must belong to one of the ssethric races or meet one of the other two requirements.

The exception to this is knowledge discovered during the course of play. In such instances, requirements do not need to be met.

Historical Dates

The dates associated with each of the historical entries before the Modern Age are approximated based upon educated guesses made by preeminent scholars in the field. The dates used are based off of the Coryani calendar, which begins with the raising of the Wall of the Gods and the End of the Time of Terror. This is considered Year 1 in the Coryani Imperial Calendar (I.C.).

The Great Migration

(Approximately -10,000 to -9500 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric or Followers of the Azure Way (10+ Fame), and Passive History 20

In ages past, farther back than even the oldest ssanu can remember, there was a golden age upon the world; an age so long buried under the weight of time that even the ancient dusty grimoires of power preserved in the Tower of Gettulus barely hint at its existence. In this forgotten age, the various ssethric races clawed their way out from the primordial ooze. There, in a fabled land far to the south, they were nurtured and evolved at the feet of their Gods. They existed in a warm, lush land where game was plentiful and one could bask all day in the warm bright sun. The Great Lord Kassegore and his mate Yig lived among their creations, teaching them, fostering them, and bringing the various races out of their infancy. Time had no meaning in this Golden Age of the Gods, and none can tell how long those early ssanu, ss'ressen, and iguadons basked in that primordial sun, under the watchful gaze of their deities. In their paradise, time immemorial passed, but it was not to last, for even paradise is not eternal.

Though the land was fruitful, slowly, almost imperceptibly, it began to grow cooler. Lakes began to dry up, jungles became forests, and lush plains grew cold with winds issuing from the south. The ssethric races became worried and turned to their Gods, begging them to banish the cold. Their cries fell upon unresponsive ears, for Kassegore would not be swayed by their pleas. The Great Lord told his creations that a new era had begun and that they must move to the north, to warmer climes. Kassegore promised his children that there they would find a new paradise better than the old – but only if they were strong enough to conquer it. Kassegore blessed his creations one last time and took a step to the north, his vast bulk depressing the ground where he strode. With that, Kassegore and Yig left their people to prepare the promised land for their coming, but at the last instant Yig turned and addressed them. The Goddess informed the peoples that to follow in their wake was the path to life, and to stray was to die.

Seeing no alternative and encouraged by their Gods' words, the ssethric peoples gathered their belongings and began the grueling trek northward. Their way was perilous, but the path was easy to follow, for it had been marked by the very footsteps of Kassegore, in the form of smoking craters upon the earth. Along the journey many of the ssethrics strayed from the path, growing tired of the constant toil, settling in tiny pockets across the land. What became of these lost souls was forgotten in the fog of time. The main body remained strong, however, and through a joint coalition of leaders from all three races, the

ssethric peoples persevered and arrived at their destination. Rounding an inland sea and striking north along a majestic river, the footsteps finally ceased and the last leg of their journey was complete. The ssethric peoples had arrived upon a fertile plain that stretched in all directions for as far as the eye could see. Here was to be the heart of their new kingdom, a warm and luxuriant land ripe with possibilities. The Gods had not deceived them; they had arrived upon paradise on earth. But, there was a fly in the ointment, for someone was already there.

The Gar Ormal and the Issoran War
(-9500 to -9474 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethrics, Emerald Society (12+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (10+ Fame), and Passive History 18, or History: Lost civilizations

The ssethric races soon set up encampments and built settlements along the southern edge of this vast and mysterious expanse, its waves of undulating grass stretching and dense forest extended for untold leagues in all directions. The ssethrics had barely settled in their new home when the native inhabitants of this new land were first encountered. As they explored the region, they discovered enormous mounds populated by an insectoid race and then, further to the west, a race of soft-hide giants with one eye. These giants lived in a marbled city, defended by thick walls and scores of winged reptilian beasts upon whose backs they rode. Oddly, for all their apparent power and mastery over the arcane arts, as the ssethric were woe to learn, the cyclopes known as the Eladru were few in number.

Rather than attempt to conquer their alien neighbors, the Eladru appeared to view the issori as allies and trading partners, bartering mundane commodities as well as wondrous items with the creatures. One of these commonplace commodities was another sentient race calling itself the Gar Ormal, or the People of the Land in their barbaric tongue. To the cyclopes, the Gar Ormal were a convenient form of slave labor, allowing their monocular masters the time to indulge in leisure or more scholarly pursuits. To the issori, the Gar Ormal were nothing more than a food source.

Whenever scouts of these races came across a ssethric community, they were viciously attacked and killed, lest the existence of the ssethrics become known to these powerful creatures before they had a chance to establish themselves.

Years passed before free members of the Gar Ormal approached the ssethrics with pleas of aid. These mammalian humanoids with thick muscles, gray skin, bestial faces and jutting lower tusks were looked upon as brutes by the ssethric peoples. The Gar Ormal came with offers of peace and alliance, claiming that a greater threat than the Eladru loomed on the horizon for the ssethrics. The Gar Ormal were a nomadic people with a proud shamanistic heritage; they worshiped primal nature spirits and lived in harmony with the world around them. Their territory was vast, stretching across the plains to the north. The Gar Ormal had watched the arrival of the ssethrics from afar, studied their hunting practices, and judged their use of the world around them as fair and good. The ssethrics accepted their neighbors with more curiosity than fear, and welcomed their offering of peace.

The Gar Ormal chieftain, a giant specimen named Rul Marrowdrinker, explained that a growing threat had appeared upon the

Issori battles Ssanu

region over a century ago. At first, these beings established only a minor colony on the outer edge of this land, but over time they expanded with alarming speed. The Chieftain called these invaders the issori, a race of strange insect-like beings akin to common ants and wasps, but larger in size and incredibly strong. The issori soon struck out from their strange city to ravage the Gar Ormal with surprising ferocity. The ssethrics heard the chieftain's words and indeed knew of the threat, for they had run across the bizarre insect beings themselves. The ssethric leaders listened late into the night as the Gar Ormal chieftain's story unfolded. By the light of the dawning sun, the ssethric leaders were resolute in their decision to ally themselves with the Gar Ormal in order to dispose of this mutual threat.

For twenty-six years, the combined forces of the ssethrics and the Gar Ormal battled the issori. Slowly, the alliance drove their enemy from their lands, causing the issori main force to retreat into its massive hive city of Dar'algah. The ssethrics and the Gar Ormal plotted and planned, scouting the enemy's defenses, preparing a final assault. It was decided that the Gar Ormal would attack from the east, with the rising sun at their backs. The Gar Ormal shamans called upon earth spirits to weaken the eastern walls of the great mound-city, but their primitive magic was no match for the power of the issori. Eventually, the ssethrics developed a plan to call upon the destructive powers of Kassegore to lay their enemy's city low. However, for this ritual to work, the blood of the innocent would have to be spent to slake Lord Kassegore's thirst. Convincing Rul that ssethric blood would not satisfy their Lord, Rul selected one thousand of his people—including his own mate and three of his children—as sacrifices to ensure the destruction of Dar'algah.

On that fabled morning over nine-thousand years ago, the fate of an empire was decided. A race would die and from its ashes a new dominion would rise, a dominion that would reign for untold millennia.

As the sun rose to the east, the horns of the Gar Ormal sounded with songs of war, and ten-thousand Gar Ormal set forth upon their riding beasts and charged the outer walls. Chief Marrowdrinker, mounted upon Scal, the greatest of the black wolves, gave the command and the shamans entreated with the earth spirits to release their magic. The ssanu sorcerers and priests completed the ritual, the very ground around the issori capital heaved as if it were the sea, crashing against the impregnable fortress of the issori. The eastern escarpment rumbled, began to crack, and slowly crumbled. The issori, realizing the threat, came boiling out of their city like a horde of angry termites. They poured onto the plain of battle, thousands upon thousands armed to the teeth with exotic weapons that glistened in the morning light. Chief Marrowdrinker looked upon their numbers and despaired, for the Gar Ormal and the ssethrics had vastly miscalculated the issori numbers. The horde of issori threatened to surround and engulf the entire Gar Ormal force. Still, the plan had worked. The issori were out in the open and the ssethrics were safely hidden to the south. With a loud cry and a blast of his war horn, Chief Marrowdrinker ordered his people to charge straight into the oncoming horde and the two great forces smashed together upon the grassy plain. Heavy war clubs cracked open ruddy exoskeletons, while tearing claws and sharp mandibles dragged down wolf and rider alike. The carnage was appalling. Both blood and limb were spilt upon the ground, as the sounds of war provided a final requiem for a dying people.

The issori were relentless, swarming around the smaller forces of the Gar Ormal and tearing at them without mercy. Chief Marrowdrinker raised his horn once more and gave the second signal. Looking to the south, he listened for the answering cry that would herald the arrival of the ssethrics and a hope for victory. No reply came. In vain he blew the signal again, and again, and again, but no answer was to come. The ssethrics were nowhere to be seen, and only the morning fog lay upon the plain. The chieftain quailed, for without reinforcements, the sheer numbers of the enemy would slowly overpower his valiant warriors. There was no retreat. The issori had completely surrounded the Gar Ormal with their unyielding force. As a final defiant act, the chieftain took up his mystic sword *Hearteater*, bellowed forth a stalwart war cry, and led his people into the teeth of the waiting fray.

For hours, the forces of the Gar Ormal were unmercifully ground into the dirt, until only a few hundred remained. No matter how many issori they slew, more would arrive, until it seemed as if the entire issori population had poured onto these plains of blood. All Chief Marrowdrinker could do was watch as the last death throes of his once-numerous people echoed mournfully in the breeze. Leaning upon his sword, he took a moment to wipe the blood and gore from his face, only to start an instant later. The morning air to the south had brought an unexpected gift, the deep resonant note of bronze horns.

The fog to the south, which had been steadily encroaching upon the field, suddenly vanished and in its place stood tens of thousands of ssethric warriors. Iguadons, ss'ressen, and ssanu stood in massive formations that stretched off as far as the eye could see, threatening to touch the horizon itself. Chief Marrowdrinker was taken aback by the sheer numbers of ssethrics that had arrived upon the battlefield. With a singular united roar of anger, the massive force banged their weapons upon their shields and charged the horde of issori. The insectoid creatures disregarded the Gar Ormal for a moment, and attempted to array their forces against this unexpected foe. The great wedge of reptilian might, spearheaded by a group of fearsome ss'ressen that stood over ten feet tall, shattered the enemy line. Chief Marrowdrinker watched

for an instant, for an instant was all it took to change the tide of battle completely. Green-scaled, ebony-clawed ss'ressen mixed with massive iguadons and the rest of the inexorable force, crashing through the issori ranks, leaving only carnage in their wake. The reinforcements had most definitely arrived! Raising his battered war horn, Chief Marrowdrinker rang forth a mighty call and his troop of ragged, blood-soaked warriors once again entered the fray. It was time to pay the butcher's bill.

Leaning upon a spear shaft to support his shattered leg, Chief Marrowdrinker stood alone, breathing the gore scented air. His gaze gently passed over the carnage wrought forth that day. Mountains of Gar Ormal corpses mingled with issori bodies and scaly reptilian cadavers to form a potent memorial to the dead. Victory had been achieved, but at what cost? Behind him, the few hundred remaining Gar Ormal warriors were helping the wounded into litters for the trip home and burning the bodies of those who would never ride again. Before him, the ssethrics, having annihilated the issori army, swept into the mound-city like a green flood, killing all they found there. Under the direction of the ssanu, the massive issori queen—her bloated body fully fifty feet long–was dragged from her palace and hurled down onto the battlefield, where she was slowly roasted over a massive bonfire and feasted on by the surviving ssethrics. Chief Marrowdrinker gazed upon the scene a final time before hobbling back to his trusty wolf. *"What horrors have I unleashed,"* he muttered to himself. Unbeknownst to him, his people would not be long in finding out.

The Great Betrayal

Barely one year had passed since the Issoran War, known among the later ssethrics as the First War of Extinction. The Gar Ormal returned to their old ways of life, dressed their wounds, and attempted to rebuild from the ravages of war. The surviving ssethrics usurped the ruins of the issori mound-city of Dar'algah, claiming it as their own and renaming it Yahssremore, named for the ssanu general Yass, who had led the ssethric peoples to victory with his flawlessly executed plan. The ssethrics had chosen Yass to serve as temporary governor of their new capital. His first task was to oversee the construction of a new city atop the ruins of the ancient mound. Yass was crowned the first ssethric emperor of Yahssremore less than two centuries later.

The Gar Ormal did not have to wait long for the prophetic words of the aging Chief Marrowdrinker to come to pass. The ssethrics of Yahssremore broke the truce and struck out in the night, simultaneously raiding all the Gar Ormal encampments. The Gar Ormal, their numbers reduced horribly during the Issoran War, were no match for the disciplined ssethric troops. One by one the encampments were ravaged. The weak were killed and the strong placed in chains, carted away to Yahssremore as slaves. Yass had a grand vision, and to implement it, he needed a labor force much larger than his current population could supply.

Inevitably, the ssethrics captured or killed the vast majority of the Gar Ormal, forming a pool of slaves that toiled to raise their capital and build their nascent empire's infrastructure. Under Chief Marrowdrinker, a few hundred Gar Ormal broke away from the plains and fled to the southwest. Their kind would not be seen again upon the Known Lands for many millennia to come.

The Black Coil (-8512 T.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric, Emerald Society (5+ Fame), Followers of the Azure Way (5+ Fame), or Sanctorum of the Arcane (5+ Fame) and Passive History 15

Under the leadership of Yass, the new empire slowly began to take shape. As the ss'ressen pushed for expansion, the inquisitive ssanu delved deep into the ruins of the their newly conquered capital. Within the city's deep, shadow-filled structures, the ssanu discovered highly advanced forms of sorcery, including the first Portal. The magically-inclined ssanu banded together under the direction of Gettulus of Pit Crotalus and manipulated raw elemental magic to raise the first Black Tower, which he named after himself. From the very heart of the mound they constructed an imposing structure with three spires designed to resemble coiled serpents reaching up toward the stars. In this early era, the mage guild known as the Black Coil first took shape. Headed by the wise Gettulus, the Black Coil began to establish the tenets of their society. Unlike all other ssethric organizations, the Black Coil was not race-specific, as the entire organization united under the auspices of the art of sorcery. All who could wield such power were allowed within those marbled walls, though it the latter years it would become the exclusive domain of the ssanu.

The Black Coil slowly built its power base. The mages held themselves separate, though allied with the bureaucracy of the empire. The members of the Tower bent all their energies into unlocking the arcane secrets of issori technology. In the process, they learned how to build portals of their own, as well as discovering the art of biomancy. Under the dexterous fingers of these inquisitive sorcerers, thousands of creatures of all sorts were put under the knife. Magic was combined with science and over the centuries the biomancers perfected their craft. Their early experiments birthed onto the world all manner of horrid aberrations, as well as many of the lesser sentient races of the empire, including the rhamphorikes and the kobolds.

To this day, the only native creatures of Known Lands with complete mastery of biomancy are the members of the Black Coil. However, in the modern era, the Ssethregoran Empire discovered that its current adversaries from within the Endless Dark, the dreaded Voiceless Ones, also possess advanced technologies that rival their own.

The Second War of Extinction

(-8400 to -7950 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric, Emerald Society (5+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (5+ Fame), and Passive History 20, or History: Lost civilizations

The era of the Yahssremoran Empire was a time of terrible wars, beginning with the Second War of Extinction, this one against the Eladru, the cyclopean allies of the issori, took hundreds of years. The length of time it took to win the war was not due to formidability of the cyclopes per sé, as their population was relatively small, numbering no more than a few tens of thousands. It was the fact that their territory consisted of disparate city-states scattered across the northern portion of the continent rather than huge swaths of land that they could be forced to defend.

Adding to the complexity of prosecuting a war over vast distances was the unexpected arrival of another ally of the cyclopes, a race of humanoids sharing many attributes with tortoises. Upon discovering these creatures many settlements dotting the shores of the Glowing Sea, the ssanu who encountered them were at first elated to find another ssethric race to ally against the cyclopes. They were shocked to discover that these creatures saw the Eladru as valuable trading partners, and fought with them against the Yahssremorans. To further complicate matters, these creatures used tactics that frustrated the ssethrics, employing lightning strikes against their targets before disappearing back beneath the waves.

These shell-backed beings were eventually defeated, though doing so took its toll on the number of trained sorcerers the ssethrics had at their disposal as their enemy possessed advanced knowledge of the arcane and used it to devastating effect. Realizing that the waves of the Glowing Sea acted like the walls of a great fortress protecting the shell-backed creatures, the mages of the Black Coil, led by the legendary ssanu sorcerer Gettulus, enacted a ritual that pushed back the many tons of water back from the shore. This left the underwater settlements vulnerable to attack from the ssethric war machine, who quickly made use of the disarray their foes found themselves and slaughtered them by the thousands. That night, ssanu, ss'ressen, and iguadon warriors alike feasted on the succulent meat ripped from the cracked shells of their defeated foes.

Trapping the lords of Eladru proved just as frustrating as the cyclopes used portals that enabled them to travel instantaneously from one gate to another with the same ease as moving from one's bedroom to the atrium. These portals seemed to be located outside the cyclopes' city-states in odd places such as desolate areas in the wilderness.

Luckily for the ssethrics, these same gateways were found in the mound settlements of the issori, especially in Dar'algah, leading some to speculate that the portals were either created by the issori and given as gifts to their monocular allies or vice versa.

It took the brilliant mind of the sorcerer Gettulus to unlock the secret of the gateways. The master of the arcane arts had a number of the artifacts brought to the Black Tower for study where it took him decades to discover the mystic principles underpinning the mechanics of the portals and another century to realize that an invocation to a higher power was needed to operate them.

Wars of Extinction

The ssethrics believe a War of Extinction to be a form of sacrifice and veneration to their deities. When a people are completely exterminated during these sacred wars, they believe that the gods also do battle with one another. As the Holy Canticle of the Pantheon of Man states, *"as above, so below"*. It appears that the ssethric religious dogma follows the same dictates. Just as the ssethric exterminated the issori, so too did Kassegore the Great Devourer and Yig of the Shifting Scales defeat and consume the deities of the insectoids, adding their power to their own.

Gettulus reasoned that if the gateways were the product of the issori, then one or both of their great Scaled Gods would know the secret of the portals and share them with their chosen children. For years, the master sorcerer acted as a relentless taskmaster, forcing the priesthoods to entreat their gods for the secret. Many died in meditative trances so deep that their hearts stopped, while others appeared to go mad when the divine touched them. This only made Gettulus drive them harder, whipping them into a zealot's frenzy, until at last Yig the Great Deceiver grudgingly shared the knowledge of the portals with Her priesthood.

Once the ssethrics were able to use the gateways with impunity, the doom of the cyclopes was only a matter of time. Unfortunately for the ssethrics, the Eladru had one last weapon to bring forth against them.

The Discovery of Psionics

(-7945 to -7915 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric and one of Passive History 20, History: Myths and Legends, or Psionics: Awakened Creatures

The final stronghold of the Eladru was surrounded by a few thousand of the Yahssremoran Empire's finest warriors and sorcerers. Given that the cyclopes within were estimated not to exceed a few hundred, and that the power of the ssethric priesthood had, to the best of their ability, shut down the gateway network, the ssethric had

little doubt that this would be the final battle against their monocular foe.

That was when the cyclopes let loose their final gambit. The first sign that they were under attack was when a few of the ssanu sorcerers complained of having difficulty concentrating on their spells. These complaints were followed swiftly by various ssethric warriors, regardless of species, going blind as the blood vessels in their eyes burst. Then came the screams; screams that could not be heard, and yet echoed loudly and piercingly within their minds. Some ssanu thrashed about in agony, while an Agamassi ss'ressen bashed her head against a rock to make the pain stop.

Seeing victory slipping quickly through his coils, the ssanu general Hosus ordered a full-out assault before his troops fully succumbed to the mysterious malady. Of the six thousand that surrounded the Eladru citadel, almost a third lay convulsing on the battlefield. Fighting through his own blinding pain, the general ordered the thick gates breached and quickly led a reckless charge into the fortress. There, the cyclopes unleashed a withering barrage of arcane might, whittling down the ssethric invaders with terrifying efficiency.

But the scaled legion's numbers and might were too much for the defending Eladru and they fell in the frenzied attack. And still the mental assault continued to decimate the ssethric forces, threatening to turn this into a pyrrhic victory at best. Finally, with only a few hundred of his soldiers at his side, General Hosus discovered the source of the mental assault.

Strapped to wooden chairs sized to accommodate a being the size of a gar child, were horrific caricatures of the gar species. But while the Gar Ormal had broad chests, thick limbs, and a sharply sloping brow, these creatures had wizened, emaciated bodies, with spindly arms and legs. Had they been standing, they would have barely reached the second coil of a seated ssanu. Yet it was their huge, misshapen heads that gave even the battle-hardened ssethric pause. Covered in a patchwork of wire thick tufts of hair with large, pulsing worm-like veins tunneling in and out of their skulls, the creatures stared blindly ahead, oblivious of the ssethric's entrance.

The cyclopes kneeling behind the dozen mammalian oddities jabbed thin, pointed needles deeply into the skulls of the shrunken creatures. They seemed to be channeling electricity directly into the creatures' brains, presumably to coerce them into attacking the ssethric.

Hosus ordered the cyclopes dealt with but instructed his soldiers not to harm the bizarre creatures yet. With the death of the Eladru torturers, the mental onslaught ended as abruptly as they began. Replacing it were the bubbling sobs of the misshapen humanoids, moaning from the slowly subsiding pain inflicted upon them.

After transferring the surviving mammals to Yahssremore, they were turned over to the tender mercies of Gettulus and the biomancers of the Black Coil. There, in the torch-lit vaults of the Black Tower, the secrets of psionic power was discovered. This knowledge was carved from the newly christened 'half-men' or 'halflings' by sharp scalpel blades. Before vivisecting them, the biomancers forced them to reveal that their race lived across the Aqtau Mountains.

Shortly thereafter, a short-lived War of Extinction against the half-men took place. While barely worth mentioning in the annals of the military juggernaut of the Scaled Empire, it resulted in the biomancers learning how to transfer the power of the mind to the only race deemed worthy enough to possess it - the ssanu. Though the knowledge of how to induce such an ability in others was lost when Yahssremore fell, to this day, many ssanu are born with incredible powers of the mind, to the woe of all the other peaceful races upon Arcanis.

The Era of Expansion

(-7915 to -6804)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric, Emerald Society (5+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (5+Fame), and Passive History 20 or History: Lost civilizations

For the next eleven hundred years, the Yahssremoran Empire flourished, advancing its forces the length and breadth of the Known Lands, meticulously expanding its borders. Advances by biomancers allowed them to create machinery that increased the temperature of those lands that proved too cold. This technology enabled a small fraction of one of the Planes of Fire to overlap with the Mortal Realm in which Arcanis spun. The warmth that bled in made even the most frigid environments comfortable for the ssethrics.

In the south, a vast swamp was first encountered and very quickly subsumed into ssethric domain. The regional governors of that area called it the Kraldjur Morass. Centuries later, the ocean to the east were found to be controlled by a fish-like humanoid race known as the sea devils. Diplomatic relations with these similarly-minded beings led to an alliance that is still in effect today.

Other races encountered by ssethrics, however, were not so fortunate. The first to feel the brunt of ssethric might were the peaceful merucks and the philosophical derleth. Both of these races were ground to powder beneath the empire's war machine and lost to the ages. The cities of the mountain-dwelling merucks were broken apart, the finely-shaped blocks of stone carted away by slaves to build ssethric settlements in other parts of the world. As for the derleth, all that remains of them are the various strange green stone ruins that crop up from time to time in the remote areas of the Known Lands.

The empire saw the benefit of strengthening their alliance with the sea devils and joined them in their

Il'Huan Warrior

ongoing war against the locanth, another aquatic race. The empire called upon the Black Coil to solve the problem of aquatic combat and within two years, the first cephalopodic gills and other water-breathing devices were developed and ready for mass construction. The biomancers also experimented with captured locanth and soon created the lophilus, a brutishly strong servitor race that could breathe underwater as well as exist for short periods on the surface. Along with hordes of bioengineered iguadons, the combined force made short work of the locanth, exterminating all their colonies in the Pale Sea.

The Yahssremoran Empire now had complete control of the Known Lands from the Pale Sea in the east, to the Vastwoods in the north, the jungles of Kraldjur Morass in the south, and the Glowing Sea, now known as the Sea of Lanterns, in the west. Ssethric settlements covered the land, from small military outposts on strategic rivers and mountain passes, to the largest cites on the Nardau, Harakhty, and Corvis rivers. The capital of Yahssremore was resplendent upon its plateau, its high-spired tower glinting in the sun for a hundred leagues in all directions. The Corlathian Mountains to the south were heavily mined, slaves constantly delving deeper and deeper into the mountains in search of rare ores and iron to fuel the empire's war machine. There were pockets of resistance, from time to time, from the native peoples of different regions, but these were utterly destroyed, subjugated and enslaved, or existed in such small remote areas that Yahssremore paid them little heed.

One such group were a type of softhides similar physiologically to the gar, but less robust. These creatures formed small tribes of hunter-gatherers, lived in remote places, and wisely avoided any and all contact with the ssethrics. Specimens were collected for study, but their small numbers and distant habitats made them unsuitable as slaves, though their flesh was considered a delicacy among the ssanu ruling class. In time there was discovered another offshoot of this species, slightly smaller and squat in frame living in the dry steppes of the east. These creatures called themselves the 'Pengik' in their own rude tongue and were of particular interest to the biomancers of the Black Coil due to their strange affinity to the elements. While care was taken not to use up this resource, countless generations of the Pengik were subjected to cruel experimentation and painful manipulation of their very essence. Eventually, the biomancers lost interest in the creatures, seeing their research as unproductive and consisting of little potential to enhance the ssethric race. They remained an oddity, contained within their habitat of the untamed Pricklespur Forest, like animals in a zoo.

Through this Age of Expansion, the ssethrics continued to advance with all the vigor and energy of a young civilization. They reached the heights of technology, mastering both science and engineering, while delving into the secrets of both arcane and divine magics. Their selective breeding programs flourished and all manner of

beasts were developed for various purposes. Eventually the gaze of the ssethric peoples would reach skyward – and not even the other planes of existence would be safe from their voracious appetite for conquest.

The il'Huan War

(-6804 to -6442 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, ssethric, Emerald Society (7+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (7+ Fame), and Passive History 17

During this period of relative peace, the Yahssremoran Empire reached the pinnacle of its power. Nothing was beyond the scaly grasp of its citizens. The empire's might stretched from horizon to horizon and there were none left to challenge its authority. The militarily-inclined ss'ressen commanded the combined ssethric armies, training iguadons and specially engineered slaves alike in the brutal art of war. The ssanu aristocracy controlled all levels of trade and commerce, doling out supplies to the various forces and requisitioning new raw materials. The priests catered to the masses, preaching prophecies of endless victory and conquest to the battle-hungry public. Sorcerers delved deep into the arcane arts, mastering the summoning of creatures from beyond the mortal plane and creating artifacts of immense power unparalleled even today. Deeper and deeper they delved into the mysteries of the world, searching for new challenges.

In this frenzy of exploration, the ssethrics uncovered something new in the Corlathian Mountains. Mineshafts had uncovered regions never before touched by the warm glow of the sun. Breaking through the deepest tunnel, the hapless miners and their iguadon overseers stumbled into a vast underground region unlike anything they had ever seen. Passages stretched in all directions for hundreds of leagues, carved into the very bedrock. The region came to be known as the Endless Dark. This vast network of caverns and tunnels stretched underground for untold distances. The ssethrics had found a new domain to colonize, and once again the drive for expansion gripped the empire. This time however, the ssethrics would discover that things would be different, for the depths were already ruled by inhabitants more powerful and terrible than anything the ssethrics had previously encountered.

It was not long after the first ssethric battalions were dispatched to explore this new region that they encountered the true masters of these depths. From out of the darkness came the il'Huan – hulking, insectoid monstrosities that stood twelve feet tall. Their iridescent exoskeletons glinting in the feeble phosphorescent light of the Endless Dark, the il'Huan came hurtling out of the tunnels to fall upon the ssethric columns. Two large multifaceted eyes reflected the surprise and fear in the ssethric faces as massive arms crushed scaled hides and scissor-like mandibles snipped away armored limbs as if they were made of paper. Worst of all, these creatures had a sort of hive mind that connected each individual to the race as a whole though highly advanced psionics. The ssethrics fought desperately, delivering crippling wounds to the il'Huan, but the creature's hive mind kept even the most grievously injured individual from dying until his entire unit was slain. In a rush, the ssethric column retreated, the few surviving stragglers reaching the surface to report their discovery to the emperor. With that defeat, a new chapter in ssethric history had begun.

The empire was not to be denied its conquests. In short order, a new War of Extinction was called and the bloodiest period in all of ssethric history was ushered in. For centuries, the two sides fought one another, each gaining ground only to lose it again. The Yahssremoran Empire consolidated its substantial resources; troops, technology, and sorcery were all focused on the conquest of the Endless Dark. However, the il'Huan proved to be a highly intelligent and resourceful people with a rich heritage and advanced technology that rivaled even that of the ssanu. Early on it was found that the il'Huan had highly advanced psionic abilities, relying on the powers of their hive mind much as the empire did magic, but they had relatively weak arcane capabilities. The il'Huan seemed to be the polar opposite of the ssethrics, who were masters of sorcery, but had only recently gained any ability at all in the realms of the mind.

The two sides battled constantly, neither gaining any lasting advantage. The ssethrics, looking for any advantage over their enemy, began experimenting on a species of aggressive, simple-minded creatures known as trolls who lived deep within the Vastwood. In the end, though formidable warriors, these resulting troll soldiers proved to be no less effective against the il'Huan's psionics than the ssethrics.

Further experimentation led to an unexpected epiphany. Elemental beings summoned from beyond the mortal plane proved to be highly resistant to the psionic abilities of the il'Huan. Unfortunately, the great amount of arcane energy required to summon and sustain these beings made using them in battle problematic.

Summoning the Elemental Lords

(-6773 to -6762 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, ssethric, Emerald Society (7+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (7+ Fame), and Passive History 17

Three decades into the war, the Emperor Sahktess commanded the Black Coil to bend all of its considerable power to the creation of a servitor race that blended the psionic-resistant qualities of the elementals with a more

permanent form that could exist indefinitely upon Arcanis. The leader of the Black Coil, a ssanu named Ss'koreth, argued vehemently against this route, claiming that the Coil's efforts should instead be focused on a way to counter the il'Huan's psionic powers.

Ss'koreth, considered a hero of the empire for his legendary accomplishments decades earlier, was given an unprecedented audience with the emperor to argue his case against this decision. In the end his words fell upon deaf ears as the emperor would not be swayed. With the threat of execution hanging above their heads, the members of the Black Coil strived to give birth to a new servitor race. The mages of the Black Coil applied it considerable knowledge to bind elemental energy to the essence of life. In the end, the breakthrough came with the discovery of an ancient stone tablet buried deep below the ruins of the Eladru. It detailed the cyclopes attempt at summoning of the most powerful beings from the elemental planes.

Forced by the emperor's impatient urgings, the ten most powerful sorcerers of the Black Coil combined their efforts and summoned forth elemental beings of such immense power that the mortals were awed at what they had wrought. The ancient rituals of the tablet had been correct, and the Elemental Lords, as they were soon to be called, were each bound within intricate circles etched in rare metals upon the floor. Unable to vent their wrath upon the mortals that had summoned them, they eventually calmed and consented to negotiating their release with the mages of the Black Coil and the Scaled Emperor.

No living being knows the precise compact that was struck that fateful night, but the Elemental Lords agreed to assist the ssethrics in their endeavor. The biomancers crafted new bodies for the power that these elemental beings deigned to expend in the creation of a new servitor race. The early experiments proved that reptilian bodies were resistant to the process, but those of gar stock proved to be susceptible to the magic. However, each time a body was infused with the energy of an Elemental Lord, it survived only moments before the raw power erupted out of the mortal vessel. The mages of the Black Coil began to fear that the effort to create a new servitor race infused with the power of the Elemental Lords was doomed to failure, and indeed the ssethric's history may well have ended here, save for the fateful efforts of one legendary sorcerer.

Ss'koreth's Quest

(-6762 to -6761 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, ssethric, Emerald Society (10+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (10+ Fame), and Passive History 19

An unexplained phenomena occurring in an unexplored region beyond the borders of the empire was brought to the attention of the head of the Black Coil, the ssanu Ss'koreth. Scrying the area, the archmage came across a vista that was wracked by uncontrollable winds one moment, a shattering earthquake soon after, and then torrential rain the next. These bizarre environmental conditions pulsed with an undercurrent of pain, which Ss'koreth drank in deeply even from a distance. The Pit Sseth ssanu sensed unbridled power surging within that region; wild, untamed, agonizing power, laced with madness. And if whatever was causing the erratic conditions was mad, Ss'koreth reasoned, then it must be sentient.

Ss'koreth set off to bend this being to his will. The archmage brought together the greatest heroes of the empire to join him on this odyssey. Vulpina the Cunning, Cergris the Bold, Opakum of the Keen Eye, Torgund the Massive, Selindris the Cold, and even the insipid kobold Noc became as legendary as Ss'koreth himself through the countless retellings of their tale.

After many a harrowing encounter with creatures and beings both wondrous and horrific, the group entered the endless corridors of the labyrinthine Endless Dark. Once below ground, the being they sought proved exceptionally easy to find as Her moans of anguish echoed incessantly throughout the vast grottoes and caverns.

Rounding a turn, the group beheld a sight that not even Ss'koreth could have anticipated. A being, nominally in the physical pattern of a soft-hide female, writhed upon the floor; each cry of anguish was answered by an equally tortured groan from the very earth itself. The creature spasmed and changed in form in an endless cycle; one moment She appeared as a humanoid female, then the body would shift violently, sprouting tree limbs from the torso, the flesh condensing into a hundred folds and darkening like bark. This shape did not hold long, for it appeared as if the trunk then cracked, and crashing to the floor became a multitude of flapping fish, gasping for air, until they were also transformed into glistening drops of water, which seeped into the ground, only to resurface as a rippling pool of magma.

Ss'koreth and his companions stared at the spectacle, but whereas the others with him were at a loss as to how to confront such a creature, the archmage had already begun to formulate a plan. The Green Moon circling high above them cycled through its phases more than once before Ss'koreth realized that what he first thought was a powerful unbound nature spirit, proved to be the very essence of the planet itself. This Life godling – for so great was its power that it could only be classified as a divine being, was exactly what was needed to accomplish what the Scaled Emperor demanded. By enhancing a mortal shell with the essence of this godling, the body would be able to withstand the pulsating force of the Elemental Lords.

Ss'koreth's exact ritual has since been lost, but the struggle to bind this strange godling cost the lives of the Black Talon Cergris and the Dark Crest Opakum.

And yet, it was their deaths that gave Ss'koreth the final key that he needed to bind the godling. The archmage had attempted to trap the spirit within flawless gems, an arcanely reinforced soul jar, and even within the eldritch blade *Korguse*, said to have been forged in the fiery breath of Kassegore himself, yet nothing could hold the godling's essence for more than a matter of minutes before it was utterly destroyed.

With two of his champions dead and the rest barely able to fend off the entity's unfocused attacks, Ss'koreth's mind raced. In a final act of desperation, he grabbed the luckless Noc and tore out the kobold's beating heart. Gore-covered fingers traced complex runes and symbols frantically over the still-twitching body as the vengeful godling, having dealt with his champions, turned Her attention to Her new tormentor. Ss'koreth could feel the breath being sucked out of his aged lungs. With black dots swimming before his vision, the ancient ssanu spat out the final words of his most potent incantation.

The effect was instantaneous. The roaring wind and bellowing of the being died to a low growl as Her essence was sucked through the chest wound of the kobold. With a final gesture, Ss'koreth scraped a yellowed and cracked talon across the open wound, sealing it and the godling within. Peeling back a torpid eyelid, Ss'koreth saw the wailing spirit reflected in the cold dead eyes of Noc. The archmage grunted, *"You have finally served a purpose worthy of the life given to you, even if it was in your last moments. What better way to trap a godling of life than within the cold embrace of death?"*

Turning to tend to his remaining champions, Ss'koreth heard the Life Goddess' wailings, even though they were muffled to a whimper, *"Taken from me! How could He have been taken from me?"* What that meant, the ssanu had no idea, and cared even less.

The Life Goddess

(-6761 to -6752 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, ssethric, Emerald Society (7+ Fame), or Followers of the Azure Way (7+ Fame), and Passive History 17 or Religion: Elorii Pantheon 18.

Back at the capital, Ss'koreth recounted his tale to the emperor and the four Elemental Lords, now treated as honored guests. These Lords demanded to speak with this godling, saying that only they could bring such a being back from the brink of madness. Ss'koreth had attempted many times to communicate with this creature and had failed. The great ssanu sorcerer advised the emperor that he should grant the foreign lords their wish.

For an entire year, the four great Elemental Lords retired to a colossal chamber, not emerging once during that time. The emperor grew more and more impatient with every passing day, cursing Ss'koreth and bemoaning the fact that these Lords had probably left with their prize, but the archmage assured his liege that he could still sense the elemental energy pulsing within the room and counseled patience.

Finally, one year and one day later, the four Elemental Lords came before the emperor with a subdued and seemingly lucid female godling at their side. In a booming voice, the one known as Keleos explained, *"We have succeeded in gaining Her trust and assistance in our mutual goal. She calls Herself Belisarda, and wishes only one thing in exchange for mating with us; she wishes to create a fifth breed from her essence alone. I suggest you agree to this, Sahktess."*

The emperor readily agreed to the bargain, seeing the ranks of his as-yet uncreated servitor race increasing in size and versatility, and quickly set Ss'koreth to the task at hand. The black sorcerer's biomancers wasted little time in crafting vessels from the freshest, purest stocks of gar tissue that could be found. In an uncharacteristic act, Ss'koreth commanded that the vessels be crafted to resemble the appearance of the Life goddess. On that fateful night, as the planets aligned, and the planes overlapped, the Black Coil sorcerers bent all their skill into infusing the empty bodies with the spark of life. Raw energies from the Elemental Lords were merged with Belisarda's essence, and then bound into fleshy vessels.

In that instant the elorii were born.

The Creation of the Elorii

(-6700 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, ssethric, or Passive History 17

At first glance the elorii were the perfect servitor race. They were long-lived, durable, intelligent, and malleable. The various types of elorii could survive and in fact thrive in a great variety of habitats, proving to be perfect troops in many adverse arenas. More importantly, elorii were highly resistant to mind-affecting influences and quickly found their way into the front-line ranks of the invasion force against the il'Huan.

Emperor Sahktess was elated over the success of the Black Coil and immediately ordered the creation of thousands of these new creatures through an accelerated breeding program. Once again, the Black Coil voiced caution, for the new race was far from perfected and had barely been tested. Ss'koreth suggested that the Coil should instead pursue the development of the hussuma, another race created as a byproduct of the elorii experiment. At least the hussuma were partly reptilian, cautioned Ss'koreth, whereas these new elorii were more closely related to the mammalian gar than their reptilian masters. Still, the emperor's orders stood, and over the next two centuries one hundred thousand elorii were created.

The elorii troopers proved to be as bloodthirsty as their creators. The infusion of raw elemental energy gave them

powers in battle unparalleled by other Yahssremoran slave races. The elorii showed themselves to be superb fighters and were the catalyst for the increasing supremacy of ssethric forces. Over the next century the tide of the war slowly shifted in favor of the ssethrics as the Yahssremoran forces began to push the il'Huan back towards their strongholds. The war itself was a dark era of history upon the Known Lands, for all the races of that ancient time were embroiled in war upon all fronts. The chull were the first to be destroyed, for these servants of the mighty il'Huan were quickly overrun and slaughtered by the ever-increasing numbers of elorii warriors. The bird-like plecotus were the next to feel the cold uncaring hands of extinction, as their aerial superiority was no match for the keen ears and sharp eyes of the elorii bowmen.

One by one, the elorii helped hunt down and destroy the various enemies of the Yahssremoran Empire, slaying foes indiscriminately both on the surface and deep in the dark pits of the earth. Twelve races in all fell in these genocidal wars at the hands of the elorii, while countless others were driven into hiding by their relentless pursuit. The ssethrics were delighted as they watched their enemies fall back before this new and powerful weapon they had created. Approximately three hundred years after their creation, the elorii forces and their ssethric overlords managed to drive the il'Huan back into their ancient capital. At last the empire was ready to deliver the final blow, a blow that would echo throughout eternity.

Not much is known about the final days of the il'Huan War, for the records were destroyed in the Great Slave Revolt. What little is known of this tumultuous time has been gleaned from the few golden scrolls of Ss'koreth, penned by the great wizard's hand over six millennia ago. The following fragment from those scrolls gives an account of the last great battle of that war, where the forces of Yahssremore poured into the il'Huan capital of Anax, eventually leading to the extinction of the most philosophically advanced race to ever walk upon the face of Arcanis.

"So it was that the forces of Yahssremore lined up rank and file in that cavern of amazing proportions. The slave hordes were foremost, whipped and cowed into place by the unfeeling hands of their iguadon and elorii masters. Next came the endless waves of elorii infantry, armed with both bow and sword. Behind them rode the elite Thulluss ss'ressen cavalry, each mounted upon a highly-trained mor'let, their spurs

glistening in that phosphorescent twilight beneath the ground. In the rear, protected by crack Agamassi berserkers, high upon their war wyrms, sat the ssanu elementalists, where their arcane arts could rain death down upon their foes. Ss'ressen priests of Kassegore strode through the ranks, granting blessings and chanting prophecies of victory. In the cold depths of the dark lake that bisected the cavern swam the sea devil auxiliaries, as well as pleisaurans and Berokene elorii. The entire force sat poised, looking across the vast hollow to the fine towers of the il'Huan capital and the massive force arrayed to defend it.

"Tens of thousands of il'Huan stood ready, their shiny carapaces glowing dully in that subterranean witch-light. Before them were the final survivors of the chull race that had escaped extinction. Also among the defenders were some number of captured ssethrics and other enslaved races, their minds wiped, and filled with only undying devotion to their il'Huan overlords. To the rear were entrenched the il'Huan Mindtamers, riding atop gargantuan beasts or commanding units of lumbering but deadly scissor-grubs. Overlooking it all were the Queen and her advisers, known as the Hive, the singularly most powerful group of psionic minds of that day. Perched within one of the tall towers, they were poised to oversee the battle, giving telepathic commands to the entire army. Every member of the il'Huan race was linked in a psychic net, enabling instant communication throughout the species.

"The two armies stood poised for what would surely be the final confrontation of the war, for whoever lost the battle here would be powerless to avoid utter annihilation at the hands of the victors. The strange calm before the onslaught was broken as the Warlord Salta lifted a bronze horn. A clear blast issued from that trumpet, a blast echoed by the exultant cry of the arrayed ssethric throats. The army began its final march. Not to be outdone, the hisses and clicks of the il'Huan rose to a frenzied pitch, and as the twelve-foot-tall behemoths began to scuttle forward. First at a walk, then a trot, and finally a charge; the two forces hurtled towards each other. Arrows fell from the above, a rain of feathered death, and psionic blasts mingled with arcane flux, leaving rivers of corpses in their wake. Like titanic waves, the two armies crashed together, bringing blood and ruin down upon all.

"The slaves were the first to die as each force was shoved inexorably forward by the press of the units behind it. In the blink of an eye, the first ranks were completely decimated, leaving the true combatants to do battle. Iguadons, ss'ressen, and elorii fought back-to-back, bringing sharp steel against the rending talons and cutting mandibles of their hated il'Huan foes. Blood ran like water, the cavern echoing with the feeble cries of the dying. The floor became slick with the offal and entrails of the dead. Grim-faced attackers peered above their shields into the alien visages of the defenders.

"As the battle raged, a thousand leagues away in a chamber deep within the bowels of Yahssremore sat a curious assembly. Ssanu, twenty-one in all, sat inside circles of powdered silver interconnected within an intricate eye-bending geometric pattern of lines and curves. The individuals in that chamber represented the most powerful of all the ssethric psions, the result of centuries of genetic manipulation and selective breeding. Unbeknownst to the il'Huan, the time of the battle had been planned for decades, for on this day the planets were in alignment and the boundaries between the planar realms were weakened. Much like their implacable foe, the ssethric psions pooled their power. Leaving their bodies, they ascended to another plane, where distance had no meaning, and in this fashion the troop of psions was able to race through the ether to the city of Anax. While upon this altered state, they spied the dark tower that held the Hive, shimmering with energy and surrounded by a protective bubble of psionic power. There lay the heart of the enemy, the link that coordinated the masses and held them all together. With the speed of thought the ssethrics struck. Too late did the Hive see them coming, for wielding a great wedge of psionic energy twenty ssanu psionicists struck the shield as one.

The shock of their impact was cataclysmic. Nine of the ssanu were killed instantly, their essences shattered by the reverberations. But their attack had an even greater effect upon the il'Huan, for the Hive had been wounded. The telepathic blanket that united all il'Huan wavered. The Hive turned its attention to these new attackers, but it was too late. The remaining ssethrics attacked once more. This time their psionic energy cut deep, shattering the shield and temporarily collapsing the Hive-Mind of the il'Huan.

"As I watched, the il'Huan wavered and suddenly fell into confusion. Realizing that the psionic attack had succeeded and the Hive was momentarily neutralized, I struck. Immediately, I ordered the slaying of seven ssanu of my Pit, their blood running upon the stones beneath my coils, for no blood holds more power than that of one's own kin. At that moment, I cast the most powerful rite I possessed, an arcane spell interwoven with elemental energy siphoned from the Elemental Lords themselves to power it. I launched the coruscating energy towards the now unprotected tower where the Hive was located. I lay there exhausted and watched as part of the city began to waver and distort. Like a magnet pulling at iron filings, the very fabric of the city was drawn inward, structures and beings alike, all collapsing into one point and utterly wiped from existence. An instant later it was done. A sphere fully five leagues in diameter, that had once been a city, was excised, the sides of the resulting crater perfectly smooth. Nothing remained at all, except a black mote of pure annihilation roughly six inches across at the exact center point of the spell.

"The Hive was destroyed, and with it the mindlink of the il'Huan. For the first time in their existence, the creatures found themselves alone, cut off from the mental hum of their fellows. Demoralized and terrified, their lines began to waver, and then broke. The il'Huan fell back. Their confused retreat became a rout. The ssethric forces cheered and pushed forward; sure that victory was ours. But then the tide of battle looked to be changed once more, as a figure emerged at the

rear of the enemy's ranks. The il'Huan general, huge and repulsive, strode forward. In one hand it held high the helpless grub of an il'Huan larva, in the other it brandished a massive sword. In the high-pitched whine of its race, it screamed, as if entreating the demoralized il'Huan to turn and fight for their very existence. Holding the larva aloft, the general strode forward, charging the ssethric lines. The il'Huan, though still dazed, rallied behind this familiar personage and the thought of their now unprotected offspring. With ferocity born of desperation, the il'Huan turned once more upon the ssethrics. This time it was the ssethric line that threatened to break.

"Warlord Salta watched from his position in the command center, as our hope for victory was threatened by the il'Huan general. He witnessed those of his clutch die and with them the hope of his people's continuation. This he could not allow. Mounting his mor'let and setting his shield, he gave the final order. Nodding once to his Matriarch, his black talons closed about the hilt of his blade, Anaksulay. *Drawing the eldritch sword and waving it high above his head, he charged. The Black Talon Warlord hurtled forward into the fray, his personal bodyguards forming a circle about him. Hacking and cleaving through the il'Huan, they fought their way toward the enemy commander, brazen horns blasting the challenge. The il'Huan general heard and responded, bellowing with a roar that shook the very foundations of the earth. Like a scythe through wheat the titanic il'Huan charged, cutting down elorii, iguadon, and ss'ressen alike without slowing. Warlord Salta set his feet into his stirrups and focused his steely gaze upon the closing il'Huan.*

"The two titans came together with a resounding crash. The il'Huan general stood a full fifteen feet tall and with his greatsword demanded a modicum of respect. Salta was no coward, having been a veteran of war before most of the troops here had been hatched. Two warriors, born and bred for the battlefield, clashed and for a moment the battle paused, awaiting the outcome. Warlord Salta charged low, his mor'let throwing up clods of blood-soaked mud behind it as it charged on sharp talons. As the Warlord closed, the il'Huan commander struck. For all his speed and riding skill, Salta was no match for the uncanny strength and reach of the il'Huan.

The il'Huan's sword ripped deep into the ss'ressen's body, severing his left arm and burying itself with a meaty thunk into the Warlord's side. This wound, a wound that would have killed any lesser being, had no effect on the grim determination of Salta. His charging mount continued full bore, plowing into the body of the il'Huan. With crimson blood spurting from severed arteries, the Warlord stood in his stirrups and looked down into faceted insectoid eyes. There he saw reflected fear and amazement, and with his breath rattling in his dying throat, the Warlord thrust Anaksulay *into one of those great eyes. With that final blow, Salta gurgled once on his own life's blood, and collapsed from his saddle, falling into the muck dead. The il'Huan stumbled back slowly, head upturned, the hilt of the eldritch sword protruding from its head. The blade was lodged deep in his brain, and with a brilliant flash of blue energy the warlord's weapon, known thereafter as* Anaksulay the Skullreaver *released its powers. With a blast that reverberated off the stalactites above, the il'Huan leader's head exploded, pieces of his smoking carapace raining down on the remaining il'Huan fighters.*

"The general was the last string holding the il'Huan together. With its death, the lines of insectoid warriors broke and routed. The ssethric forces hunted them all down, and those that crawled away into the darkness were leisurely tracked and slaughtered with great pleasure by the elorii rangers. No il'Huan was left standing, and over the course of the next two decades, the remaining small pockets of that race were totally destroyed.

"As for me, I stood there, leaning for support on my war wyrm and watched as the elorii scampered about the field, slaying the fallen, reveling in their prowess. Though we had carried the day, to my eyes, these slaves have too much pride and hold themselves too high, thinking themselves our equals. I must remember to speak to the emperor about them once more. I still believe they are a danger and may one day became a threat to the empire."

The Hylis (-5863 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric or Passive History 17

With the destruction of the il'Huan and the opening of the Endless Dark for colonization, the Yahssremoran Empire enjoyed a few hundred years of relative peace. Once again, the ssethric peoples spread out into the relatively unexplored reaches of their territory, forming new outposts and colonizing the depths of the earth.

Across the southern ocean, a race of amphibians were embroiled in a genocidal war of their own. These frog-like beings, the hylis, petitioned the ssethric empire for aid in destroying their hated foes. At first, the emperor was reluctant to expend any resources to help these creatures, as the land they possessed held little of value for the empire, but when he discovered that the hylis' implacable foe were the same shell-backed creatures that opposed the ssethrics during the early wars of extinction, he quickly changed his mind. Ss'ressen and elorii forces, led by sorcerers of the Black Coil descended upon the southern swamps en masse. Their unexpected arrival caught the shelled creatures unaware and unprepared to cope with the juggernaut that was the ssethric war machine.

In but a few years the forces arrayed against the Yahssremoran were annihilated and the remaining populace had surrendered. The hylis demanded their hated foe's complete destruction, but the emperor, counseled by the priesthood of Kassegore, was reluctant to eradicate another ssethric race, as the priests cautioned that this would be an affront to Kassegore. When the hylis disregarded the emperor's command and began mass extermination of their shell-backed foes, they were quickly

given a lesson in ssethric retribution. An entire generation of the amphibian creature's offspring were collected and consumed by the imperial court in far-off Yahssremore. The lesson was clear – the hylis were considered allies of the empire at the pleasure of the emperor, a status that can be removed at a whim.

The hylis contented themselves by following the letter, if not the spirit, of the emperor's command and the genocide they wished to inflict upon their conquered foes was instead visited upon their culture. All the history, religion, and values of this ancient culture were erased. Scholars, religious figures, and especially the potent sorcerers were slaughtered under the pretext that these leaders were fomenting an insurrection against their new masters. As a final act of spite, even the very name of the race was forbidden to be spoken, and within a few generations, faded from living memory, leaving them with only the derogatory term 'shell-back' as their only identity.

The Banishment of Pit Talasis

(-5845 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric or Passive History 14 or Religion 20

During the entirety of the Yahssremoran Empire, ssethrics venerated four deities, Kassegore, Yig, their offspring Jeggal Sag, and the God of Death, Wantiir. Pit Talasis took Wantiir as their patron deity and filled the Death God's priesthood with members of their pit until the two groups became synonymous. Death comes to all mortals eventually, and so the services of Wantiir's priests were sought by all, whether it be to stave off the god's touch or to prepare for their final rest. This gave Pit Talasis unprecedented access to the inner sanctums of the various ssanu pits, which allowed the cagey priests to uncover secrets that they either sold or used to their advantage. So wealthy and influential did they become that the emperor elevated Pit Talasis in the court and a priest of Wantiir served as his personal advisor and several successors.

Preening with pride, power, and wealth, Pit Talasis overplayed their hand by attempting to have Wantiir elevated above the other ssethric deities, with the goal of forcing all the other priesthoods to serve them. This so outraged the clergy of Kassegore and Yig that, for the first time in millennia, they worked in concert to undermine and utterly destroy Pit Talasis' power base and prestige.

It was not long before the worship of the death god, except when dealing with burial rites, was outlawed and the priests of Wantiir, along with the entirety of Pit Talasis, were banished to the furthest reaches of the Yahssremoran Empire, a place now known as the Hinterlands. The only exception to this was the archmage Sulmacet, a fervent worshipper of Wantiir. Yet even the most passionate arguments could not move the emperor to exile this ancient hero. None could deny that the sorcerer was loyal to the empire, even putting the needs of the ssethric people above the goals of his own Pit. Banishing this old ssanu would be an ignoble act. After Sulmacet's death, Wantiir performed a final miracle within the bounds of the empire and granted him undeath as a sign of His favor.

The Elorii Slave Revolt

(-5738 to -5710 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, ssethric, or Passive History 14

With the last vestiges of the il'Huan threat over and no further inimical species possessing psionic abilities, the Black Coil biomancers began introducing a parasite into the elorii food and drink that, over a few generations, removed their servitor races' ability to resist psionics. Though the rest of ssethric society had grown accustomed to the usefulness of their mammalian slaves, the sorcerers were not as complacent. The leader of the Black Coil, the wizened ssanu Ss'koreth, though ridiculed by the emperor for his warnings, never entirely trusted the elorii. By neutering this defense, it gave the ssanu an edge against them should the need ever arise.

As the Ssethregoran's complacency grew, the leash on the elorii became looser by the day. A select few elorii were granted a lower status of citizenship, gaining ownership of land, and even governance over their own people in recognition for their faithful service. The rest however, remained enslaved. As all those who opposed the empire were vanquished, a new purpose would need to be found for their former soldiers. Luckily, the elorii proved to be so skilled in a multitude of tasks that many were taken as personal household slaves. These elorii watched and learned, gleaning the secrets of their masters, for though some were treated as pampered servants, the atrocities that were being brought to bear upon many of their people began to plant the seeds of rebellion. As time passed, it became harder and harder for the elorii stand by and watch as their children were hauled away to the slaughterhouses and their friends were dragged down into the wretched Tower of Gettulus for perverse rites of power and experimentation. Whispers traveled in the dark and the elorii began to plot.

Some escaped, hiding deep in the Vastwood. From this woody sanctuary they planned and conspired. Under the leadership of Elthoras, the newly-founded rebel army struck the small logging town of Miless. As the rebels attacked the town, the enslaved elorii rose up and the

entire town was thrown into turmoil as shackle-wielding slaves dragged down their reptilian masters. The seeds of revolution had come to fruition and the empire teetered on the brink of civil war.

Word raced across the length and breadth of the land, carried on swift elorii feet. Revolts broke out across the empire, for the elorii had waited long and were ready when this spark lit the fires of rebellion. Iguadon and ss'ressen legions were called out to quash the pockets of rebellion, and succeeded to some degree, but the revolt had gained too much momentum. Still, the ssethrics might have stemmed the tide, if not for the events that occurred in the capital city itself.

Upon the news of the uprising, the ssethrics within the city began to purge the now dangerous elorii. Household slaves were put to the knife and orders came down from the emperor to exterminate all elorii in the slave pens. This did not have the desired effect for the elorii, seeing their imminent doom, fought back. Breaking out of the slave pens, many elorii found themselves free for the first time in their lives. As the mass of elorii swept out of the pens, other slave races watched. Deep in their tortured brains, a spark was lit. A mere thought of something lost long ago, a concept believed inconceivable by their degenerate state, permeated the darkness of their minds. Freedom, a feeling long forgotten, gripped the masses.

With a crude cry erupting from ten thousand throats, the slaves boiled forth. The elorii revolutionaries suddenly found their meager force bolstered by thousands of humanoid creatures from dozens of conquered races. Screaming for the death of their tyrannical overlords, the slaves swept through the city, killing and slaying ssethrics, razing buildings, and constantly bolstering their number by freeing many thousands of elorii. The mob surged through the greatest city in the Known Lands, destroying, burning, and laying waste to everything in sight. The ssethric military, vastly outnumbered by the slaves of the populace, were forced into a defensive posture, trying to hold strategic locations. It was too late, as the slave revolt became unstoppable. The emperor was killed before the palace gates; his head put on a pike and paraded around by the mob as a grisly trophy. The remainder of the emperor's bodyguard retreated before the mob and saw to the safe escape of the young ssanu named Sseth, who was in line to inherit the now-vacant Coiled Throne should he survive.

Salos, the Savior

Fueling the confidence of a successful rebellion was the surreptitious study of an elorii Kelekene slave named Salos, or as he came to be known, Salos the Savior. The most capable elorii slaves were assigned to the Black Coil, performing duties ranging from simple janitorial responsibilities to assistants to the magi themselves. It was in this capacity that Salos served the head of the Black Coil, the wizened Ss'koreth. As with many of their kind, the mage was covetous of his secrets, willing to share only the results of successful experiments with the rest of the sorcerous cabal. To keep his work secret, Ss'koreth required the use of an elorii slave, given that his advanced years made his eyesight weak and his scaled hands shake. While the ancient ssanu never fully shook his misgivings about the elorii, like many other ssethrics, he became accustomed to their presence, as one would any old tool. He, like the rest of the Black Coil, assumed that the elorii were incapable of understanding the intricacies of sorcery, let alone have the gift to master the arcane arts.

Unbeknownst to the master sorcerer, while he slept, something he did for greater lengths with each passing year, Salos poured over the texts he penned at his master's instructions. Here he learned the intricacies of manipulating the arcane energies that suffused the world and more importantly, taught it to other elorii that were similarly gifted. As the decades passed, a considerable number of elorii across the bloodlines mastered enough of the teachings to become powerful mages in their own right. The accumulated knowledge of the Black Coil lay bare before them and after learning all there was to know, they began to clandestinely practice the enchantment of armor, spell foci, and weapons.

It was while enchanting a blade with a ssethric bane rune that Ss'koreth, awakening from a fitful sleep, found Salos in his study. He violently shook his head, dispelling the soporific effects of the smoke he used to aid his rest, as he couldn't believe his eyes that an elorii was wielding the arcane. Flicking a quick spell meant to cripple the rebellious slave, he was further surprised that it was rebuffed by the rising elorii. A short, but terrible battle erupted as the elorii and ssanu tested each other's ability, knowledge, and strength. Though the chamber where they battled was a blackened ruin by the end, the outcome was never in question. Even wielding the ssethric killing blade and possessing a youthful vigor his opponent hadn't enjoyed for centuries, Salos was no match for the greatest sorcerer ever born. Ss'koreth finally smashed through the slave's shields and crushed his heart within a mystical fist, savoring the agony of this upstart slave.

It was only then that the archmage heard the sounds of battle from the streets below. With a wave of his hand and a whisper, Ss'koreth turned part of the wall transparent. There he saw flames rising from nearby towers and clashes between iguadon soldiers and armed elorii slaves. The ancient city of Yahssremore was in the throes of a bloody rebellion and appeared doomed if the uprising was not put down quickly. Gripping the beauteous face of the elorii so hard that his claws were soon crimson with blood, he spitted furiously, *"This rebellion of yours is doomed to failure. Once crushed, no one will argue against the complete extermination of your people, as should have been done once your purpose was fulfilled. Your flesh will fill our bellies for years to come."*

Teleporting quickly down to the entrance of the tower, Ss'koreth emerged onto the landing and faced a raging mob. Clutched in one taloned hand was the broken body of Salos, still gripping the enchanted blade in a death grip. Calling out, the archmagi's enhanced voice carried over the roar of the fighting. *"Here is your salvation,"* he snarled to the crowd. Raising the Salos' body high overhead the ssanu threw the elorii's corpse into the crowd. The body of Salos landed with a sickening thud, dead and cold. It tumbled down the ramp before coming to rest before the mob, at the feet of a soldier from the slave legion named Auros.

Silence fell over the assembled elorii, then sibilant whispers arose. *"That is Salos!"*, was heard. From another, *"Salos has fallen! We are lost!"*

Taxed from the arcane battle and the physical exertion of lifting and throwing the adult body of the elorii, Ss'koreth wheezed, *"Death is… the price… for defiance!"*

Staring down at the elorii, the sorcerer was gratified to see the fear and despair shining through their crude mammalian eyes. Then he noted one reach down and take the blade from Salos' cold hand. Tears of anger flashed in this slave's eyes as he raised the sword and yelled out, *"For Salos! For freedom!"* For the first time in centuries, Ss'koreth knew fear.

Enraged, the mob streamed forward, the sword wielded by Auros cut down the ancient ssanu. As the blood of the legendary ssethric hero dripped upon the flagstones of the ancient Tower of Gettulus, the preeminent sorcerer of the Yahssremoran Empire had one final gambit to play. The thought of the secrets and power held within the tower falling into the hands of these lesser beings fueled his will to live just long enough to scrawl one complex glyph upon the entrance of the Tower of Gettulus. With his final breath, he poured his will into the mystic sigil, and before the eyes of the amassed elorii, the tower was sealed behind a crimson sheath of impenetrable energy. Satisfied that the product of his life's work would never fall into the hands of the unworthy, Ss'koreth mercifully perished before being hacked apart by the fearful and enraged elorii.

The rest of the city fell in short order. The ssethric forces retreated to the plains outside the city. Word had come that the rebellion was sweeping its way across the empire, except for the swamps to the south, where the word had been slow in arriving and most of the elorii were slain before word of rebellion reached their ears. With a great shudder, the surviving ssethrics marched south, intent on gaining a stronghold in the southern swamps of their empire. Along the way, their numbers were bolstered by other contingents of troops and civilians leaving other major cities. The Black Talon, the Agamassi and the Emerald Scale ss'ressen volunteered for rearguard action and fought the pursuing elorii until eventually finding sanctuary at the edge of the Kraldjur Morass. In the safety of the swamp, they turned upon their elorii pursuers, slaying many of them. The once-great Yahssremoran Empire had fallen, and a new chapter of ssethric history was about to begin.

The Founding of Ssethregore (-5702 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, ssethric, or Passive History 14

Within the relative safety of the fetid swamps and the dense jungles of the Kraldjur Morass, the remnants of the Old Empire licked their collective wounds. The young ssanu Sseth quickly took advantage of the chaos and formed a new coalition of ssethric forces, while casting himself in the role as head of a new dynasty. Under his leadership, the enterprising ssethric people founded a new city on the shores of Lake Quesselan, naming it Sseth after their new emperor. Within these solemn swamps the empire of Ssethregore was founded. Still cold and calculating as ever, the Ssethregorans set about rebuilding what they had lost and securing a new power base in this vast peninsula.

For two hundred years they worked, building a new empire from the ruins of the old. The various ss'ressen egg clutches spread out, each founding a military citadel of its own and protecting the fledgling empire's tentative borders from elorii incursions. Slowly the shattered peoples of a once-great empire rebuilt, preparing for the day they would retake what was theirs. The city of Sseth became a shining jewel upon the warm waters of the lake; a center of military power and growing commerce. A new Black Tower was raised and the Black Coil once again began to grow in prestige and authority. The armies expanded, new generations of ssethric warriors were trained, and the most powerful and wily ssethrics consolidated their power. During these formative years, the emperor commanded the Black Coil to continue their work creating a new servitor race, in the hopes of using them to crush the elorii. This was a decision the sly Emperor Sseth would come to regret.

The Battle of Belestor (-5480 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, ssethric, or Passive History 14

After two hundred years of preparation, the Ssethregorans were ready to strike back at the elorii. The freed slaves had been busy; in the intervening time they had erected a city on top of the ruins of Yahssremore, building from those jewel-encrusted ruins the elorii city of Belestor. The elorii sat on the laurels of a newly built kingdom stretching from the fertile plains around Belestor to the vaulted hardwood forests of the Vastwood.

From their stronghold in the south, the Ssethregorans coldly watched and waited, until Emperor Sseth deemed his people ready. With the bronze gongs of war heralding the approaching storm, the Ssethregorans prepared for war. A large host was mustered, the first of three waves scheduled to attack the elorii. The first wave consisted of a horde of iguadons bolstered by three different ss'ressen egg clutches: the Dark Crest, Barbed Tail, and Venomous Scale. A cadre of ssanu sorcerers mounted upon their infamous war wyrms supported the entire force. In total this expeditionary force numbered two hundred thousand strong, twice the size of the elorii population inhabiting Belestor.

With grand words of victory upon his lips, the emperor ordered the first wave to invade. The second and third battalions of equal size were to be held back to protect against possible interception by elorii forces. By order of Emperor Sseth, the forces marched under the capable command of Warlord Haldane of the Dark Crest ss'ressen, an appointment that brought great resentment from the other egg clutches.

The best record for the strange occurrences of the battle of Belestor exists in the journal of Warlord Haldane, which was thought lost at the time, but was found centuries later when the Barbed Tails exterminated the Dark Crest egg clutch.

"As the morning light graces these pages I reflect upon the coming battle. I have positioned our forces on the western shore of the Ferilos River and now wait for the coming dawn to launch the attack. The elorii forces stand ready on the far side of the river, readying for our onslaught. I have to give them credit; we trained them well. Their lines are neat and crisp, and though we outnumber them two to one they show no fear. This day's dance shall be glorious, though I do have some trepidation about the battle. Last night, the priests of the Lord of Destruction, our esteemed Lord Kassegore, reported to me a disturbing fact. They felt a void or emptiness when they prayed to our deity. I have withheld this information from the troops for obvious reasons. Our potential to render medical assistance to the injured has been severely reduced and I fear many who fall in this battle will die for lack of healing

blessings to mend their wounds. Now, I put down my pen, for the battle will commence soon.

"By Yig's blessed fangs, how could things have gone so wrong? I find myself leading a ragtag force nearly one-third its original size back to the refuge of the Morass. Let me try to convey my thoughts for posterity so that others may learn from my mistakes.

"The battle started smoothly. With the coming dawn, our brazen horns rang clear and the first wave charged. The iguadons rushed forward through the shallow waters of the river to engage the elorii encamped upon the far side. A great grinding could be heard as our two forces slammed together, serrated blades cutting soft elorii flesh and keen poniards punching through scaled bodies. The elorii fought valiantly, but the sheer mass of the iguadons slowly forced them back and away from the river. As a space opened I ordered the drake riders into the fray. They were met with a withering hail of arrows from elorii bows. In response I gave them a taste of our own, for we are still the masters of the bow and they but our pupils.

"The elorii army shuddered, for now the Dark Crests had entered the battle, bringing our massive drakes to bear on the hapless elorii infantry. I could see the elorii General Relios, a pupil of mine, standing amidst a ring of tightly packed elorii, waving his flag in a vain attempt to rally the troops. In the course of less than an hour, victory seemed certain. I ordered the Barbed Tails to remain in reserve and committed the rest of the Dark Crest and Venomous Scale into the fray. The added forces soon whittled down the elorii, who were vainly fighting for their very existence. A futile attempt as the outcome was inevitable. The elorii lines began to buckle and break.

"Just then, a figure appeared to the east, riding hard from the city. It was the warrior Auros, and in his hands he wielded the dread sword Kelisar. *The Black Coil, who had scryed its creation, warned us of this enchanted weapon, crafted as a bane to all ssethrics. At the sight of its green flame the elorii rallied, and the accursed power of that damned sword began to consume the front ranks of iguadons. Being forewarned, I was forearmed. Signaling the ssanu, I ordered them to unleash a blast of arcane fire down upon the insolent Auros, annihilating him where he stood, but to my dismay, the blast never came.*

"I looked back to see the ssanu of Pit Aspis, the emperor's political enemy and rivals of Pit Sseth, standing unmoved. Immediately I saw their treachery, using the battle as a way of politically weakening the emperor's position and giving their own Pit a chance to stage a coup. Without hesitation, I ordered the vicious Barbed Tails to flank the elorii force and drive a wedge through the army. With a great cry they charged into the fray, but to my astonishment, I watched them fall not upon the elorii but upon the Venomous Scales! Without support, and facing the terrible consuming fire of Kelisar, *the iguadons broke. As they turned to flee, I saw that the battle was lost. I ordered a retreat and our forces fell back. The Barbed Tails broke off their attack and separated from our force, marching home with the treacherous ssanu of Pit Aspis.*

"As I sit here in camp, I look back upon the battle, one in which we should have regained our former glory. Instead, I find that once again our own nature betrays us. Now I must hurry back and report to Emperor Sseth, for I fear he is in imminent danger. If that great ssanu was to be overthrown by the treacherous curs I saw today, I fear for the stability of our newly formed empire. If they were willing to lose the most important battle of the last two centuries for the petty purpose of weakening the emperor, I fear for us all. I have gathered the two reserve forces and now we march home."

- High Warlord Haldane of the Dark Crests

The Naga Coup

(-5480 to -5478 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric or Passive History 14

During the Battle for Belestor, another war was being waged within the Ssethregoran Empire. The naga, a newly bioengineered race, were gifted with the power of the mind through a mistake. The naga were created by using the ssanu as a template and incorporating certain qualities engineered into the elorii. Their latent psionic ability had gone undetected when the first batch of creatures were bred and was quite the surprise to the biomancers of the Black Coil. Nevertheless, they decided to present the creatures to the emperor as a means of safeguarding the Imperial Family from treachery, as the naga mentally scan and unmask any would-be assassin or uncover plots against the throne. Emperor Sseth was enamored with the idea and gave the naga free rein in his court.

For many years, the naga presented themselves as stalwart protectors of the throne, all the while expending time and effort towards growing in influence. Towards that end, the naga began to hoard secrets effortlessly gleaned from the minds of those in the Imperial Court, as well as other dignitaries and emissaries. Soon, they began to barter information and favors from those they stole from to position themselves in places where they could gain even more information. Soon, they became an indispensable ally to every power block in the empire, including such disparate groups as the power hungry ssanu of Pit Aspis, iguadon anarchists, and ss'ressen rebels who wished to overthrow ssanu rule. The naga even counted the emperor as a client of their information brokering. Yet being the power behind the throne was not enough for these malicious beings.

Fascinated by the tales of the great hero Ss'koreth summoning powerful allies from beyond this Mortal Realm, the naga quickly mastered the art of high sorcery and searched throughout the planes for a powerful patron to help them in their quest for dominance. Contact was

eventually made with a being of supernal power who was venerated as a god by another ssethric race, which was ancient, extremely advanced, and willing to advance their goals with an alliance. Years passed as the naga consorted with the malevolent varn deities, plotting and planning, biding their time for the right moment. The opportune moment finally came with the disastrous war against the elorii and the silence of Kassegore and Yig.

As the bulk of the empire's troops left Ssethregore for the planned War of Extinction against the elorii, the naga struck, timing their attack with the fortuitous disappearance of the Gods Kassegore and Yig. The battle was horrid and bloody, with ss'ressen rebels and iguadon anarchists fighting against the loyalists. The naga were the most terrible, for they were supported by the varn, both the deities and their servants. The Sseth Dynasty was quickly overthrown and the Imperial Family slaughtered and then devoured, as demanded by the varn deity Hauliss.

The emperor was captured and imprisoned in a magically-sealed coffin filled with flesh grubs. Every day the grubs eat his flesh, driving him mad with pain, and every night the power of the coffin restores him to health. To this day, the coffin stands in the throne room with echoes of the mad emperor's screams ring out; sweet music to the nagas.

So swiftly did the nagas perform their coup, that in the end they gained supreme power over the empire in a matter of weeks. The returning ssanu forces saw there had been a shift in the political landscape, but the majority of the ss'ressen and iguadons didn't care who was on top, for they nursed a racial hatred against their own kin that was well beyond any loyalty they felt toward the old emperor. To most, one emperor was as good as another.

For their part in the battle, the Barbed Tail ss'ressen were granted positions of prestige within the empire, basing themselves in the city of Sseth. The other supporters of the naga were quick to adopt the new varn gods. Combined with the continued absence of Kassegore and Yig, the veneration of the ssethric deities waned.

There was one short-lived rebellion against their rule. Members of Pit Sseth and Crotalus put aside their differences and, along with their vassal ss'ressen, launched an attack against the naga and their allies. This was quickly crushed at the Battle of Vremi River, as the loyal ssethric forces were reinforced by the varn, whose annihilators crushed the nascent civil war. With the control of the empire firmly in the coils of the naga, worship of the varn deities became mandatory, and a dark era for the Ssethregoran Empire began.

Ss'koreth

The Influence of the Varn

It was not long for the impact of the varn's arrival to be felt across the empire. Undoubtedly reptilian in nature, yet physically different from the other ssethric races due to their hexapodal physiology, the varn were imposing in all ways. The

first varn to appear through a specially constructed gate was the varn emissary. Tall and regal, with an air of the divine about him, the emissary announced that he served as the voice of the varn deities. Much to the imperial vizier's consternation, the emissary immediately assumed the position as prime advisor to the naga emperor. Over time, the advice advanced, though unfailingly wrapped in respectful words and deferential platitudes, became unequivocal commands.

The emissary was not alone in his transition to Arcanis. Arriving in small numbers at first, the trickle of varn soon became a flood, with hundreds of the creatures arriving through the gate to assist their reptilian-kin achieve complete dominion over the world. Large construction projects began throughout the empire, as temples, large and small, were erected to venerate the trio of varn deities, to exacting specifications.

Varn known as 'seekers of enlightenment' were given unlimited power to root out heresy, stamping out any worship of Kassegore or Yig. Clashes between the varn and the Emerald Scale led to the deaths of many of these ss'ressen, who eventually began to pay lip service to these new gods, while the worship of the old deities went quietly underground. The purges of the iguadon was even more brutal, and many ssanu feared the entire race would be exterminated due to their bull-headed adherence to the worship of the proscribed gods. It was during this time that a segment of ssanu vowed to protect the teachings of Yig from the pogroms of the varn and created hidden enclaves where they might continue to commune with their still silent goddess safely.

One of the few places that resisted the varn's infiltration until just recently was the Black Coil. This group of powerful sorcerers first flatly refused, then stalled in allowing the varn access to their secrets. It was only when the emissary offered to teach the magi the secrets of chaos magic, that cracks within the unified front began to emerge.

Over the centuries, the varn cemented their hold on the Ssethregoran government and increased their influence over virtually every facet ssethric society. Entire ss'ressen egg clutches have wholly embraced the varn deities, with the sadistic Barbed Tails being the most zealous convert. The haphazard raids and incursions into enemy territories that once occurred are now pointed and exact, with clearly defined objectives. Gone are the days when attacks were instigated by ss'ressen egg clutches looking to bloody their hatchlings or just inflict pain on their hated foes. Now, the main purpose appears to be the acquisition of captives, and while some of these end up as slaves, the majority are sacrificed to the varn deities in their dark temples. The bloody nature of these gods pleases many of the ssethrics, though others wonder what the true nature of these rituals is. Few have any idea what the varn are actually doing, though the time of their grand plan is nearing completion.

The Age of Decadence

(-5478 to -3800 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric or Passive History 14

The Age of Decadence consumed nearly two thousand years of Ssethregoran history. During this time, the naga solidified their control of ssethric society and established the socio-political systems that govern it to this day. Virtually every aspect of ssethric culture is ruled through an authoritarian system of rank that places the current emperor and the nagas at the highest echelons of power, followed by the various ssanu pits, then the ss'ressen Warlords and Matriarchs, the ss'ressen egg clutches, the iguadons, and finally all the various lesser races that comprise the Ssethregoran Empire.

Varn worship became commonplace during this time, with only a few pockets of dissidents still clinging to the worship of Kassegore and Yig. Most notably among these groups were the Emerald Scale ss'ressen and the Cult of Hromu, neither of which lost their faith in the Old Gods.

Sorcery was now regulated, strictly controlled by the still-powerful Black Coil. This sorcerous cabal now makes it their practice to test each generation of ssethrics for some spark of sorcery, admitting any who show a talent for learning the intricate rituals of the arcane. It was during this time that the varn followers of Sipta began to infiltrate the higher echelons of the sorcerous cabal. These varn enticed many sorcerers away from the usual manner in which Elder Sorcery was taught and showed them new ways to power their rites. Though they were never able to usurp power from the three ssanu heads of the Black Coil, their followers grow with each turning of the world.

During this period, the Ssethregorans sought to protect their borders and rarely tried to expand their holdings. The varn deities, through their emissaries, made it clear that all their efforts were to be focused upon converting all ssethrics to their religion and all available resources were to be expended in building an enormous temple in their name. Any individual with revolutionary ideas or who chose to speak out against the ruling naga was quickly and quietly silenced as soon as they were discovered. In doing so, the naga went to great pains to avoid creating martyrs.

Over the centuries, after the consolidation of their rule, the various Houses of the naga turned from administering the empire to focusing on hedonism, excessive debauchery, and the infighting of courtly intrigue. They created elaborate rules and byzantine protocols that all of the leaders of the ssanu Pits and ss'ressen egg clutches had to adhere to, causing those figures to fight each other for these petty titles rather than plot against their rulers. This lust for petty power,

authority, and luxury led to the further corruption of ssethric society, causing them to focus inward rather than outward. To the rest of the Known Lands, the Ssethregoran Empire entered into a reptilian stupor once more. In this way they remained, until a single event brought them out of their reptilian stupor and made them look out upon the world once more.

The Arrival of Humans

(-3800 to -3790 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Elorii, Passive History or Religion 16, or Religion: Pantheon of Man

The singular event that drove the Ssethregorans out of their stupor and into the wartime fervor they enjoy today was the arrival of foreign gods upon the shores of the Known Lands. These gods were soon followed by advanced soft-hides that called themselves the Mandari. These humans proved to be powerful and highly adaptable. In short order they tore down the bright nation the elorii had erected.

At the time of the humans' arrival, the throne of Ssethregore was occupied by a naga named Spliss. This emperor, unlike his predecessors, was considered a great strategist and immediately identified the threat these humans posed to the empire. He quickly mobilized the empire's troops and over time managed to kick-start the slumbering Ssethregoran war machine.

His efforts were completed just in time, for it was not long before the soft-hides were encroaching upon the Morass. The Ssethregorans soon found themselves in dire combat once again, this time to protect their borders from the ever-expanding humans from the north and the displaced elorii who took refuge in the forest to the west. The constant state of warfare sharpened the minds of the Ssethregorans and once again they started to feel the pull towards greatness. For six centuries, they perfected their strategies and tactics, creating more and more strange beasts and pressed them into service. They experimented with new forms of biomancy, and regained knowledge of sciences and arts that had fallen out of memory since the collapse of the Old Empire.

War Upon all Fronts

(-3600's to -35 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 16

As the Ssethregoran military built up, so did the number of foes it faced. This has led to hundreds of wars and conflicts, which have raged on and off to the present day. The first war came with the re-opening of the Endless Dark. The Ssethregorans, once again falling into an expansionist mindset, began to colonize the dark ways deep beneath the mantle of the earth. For centuries they explored, raising cities in strategic locations, and creating highways in the vaulted passageways. These underground roads enabled them to move troops to any part of the empire without having to fight through the thick jungle on the surface. Once these passages were formed, the Ssethregorans let the jungle consume their surface roads, for without them the surface-dwelling humans had no easy way of invading their lands. The empire stretched its borders, extending deeper into the uncharted regions of the Endless Dark, taking over the entire cavern system under the peninsula and even tunneling under some of the human lands. It was during these explorations that the Ssethregorans first encountered the Voiceless Ones. These were hideous, gaunt humanoids with no vocal form of communication and who moved without making any sound. Much like the ancient il'Huan had been, the Voiceless Ones were a psionic race, and much like that insectoid race, the Voiceless Ones proved to be a powerful opponent for the Ssethregorans. Brutal wars were fought between the two groups for millennia without anyone on the surface world noticing.

The infamous Dragon War began roughly three thousand years ago, and lasted for centuries. This war affected the Ssethregorans only slightly. Though they revered the True Dragons of Arcanis, most of the battles were fought in the lofty mountain peaks of the world and remote valleys, far from the empire's current borders. It wasn't until the end of that war, when the human gods became involved, that the battle came to Ssethregore. The then-current emperor, at the urging of his varn advisors, offered refuge to all the surviving True Dragons. Many tried to reach this sanctuary, but few succeeded. The war itself ended in the eastern jungles, where the immortal Jeggal Sag was laid low by foul agents of the murderous human deities. A mound now exists where the first Primordial fell, a sacred place for the Disciples of Jeggal Sag, who, for reasons known only to the varn, remains the sole figure in the original Ssethric Pantheon whose veneration they allow.

Lights from the Sky

(-100 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Altherian or Passive History 12

The plateau situated at the highest point of the Luriane Mountains was of little interest for the ssethrics. The climate there tended to be cooler than they enjoyed and the Kraldjur Morass provided all the space they required at the moment. With nothing more useful than herds of goats, the Ssethregoran established but a small outpost there. The significance of the plateau quickly changed with the arrival of the Altherians.

As an enormous shadow passed overhead, a few ssethrics with an unobstructed view of the sky saw a wondrous sight – a large oval disk tearing across the sky crashing upon the plateau above them. Communications from the outpost reported what appeared to be a city had landed on the

far eastern side of the plateau. Ordered to investigate and plunder whatever riches they could, they returned with tales that the city was populated with mammals that numbered into the thousands. Greatly outnumbered, reinforcements was requested and before long, a small army of ssethrics scaled the Luriane Mountains to confront these trespassers. They were unprepared. The dark-skinned humans inflicted massive casualties, despite having suffered severe damage to their floating city. Those few ssethrics that retreated were allowed to do so and after reporting what occurred, were quickly executed for cowardice.

Over the next few years, the Ssethregorans continued their siege of the plateau without any significant victories. After repeated attempts at negotiation with ssethrics, an Altherian emissary was not killed on sight and allowed to address the emperor. After some tense diplomacy, an fragile peace was brokered, with both sides knowing that it would not last. Indeed, at least once a generation, some conflict between the two would erupt, but these localized skirmishes were contained and did not lead to all-out war.

The Ssethregorans now found themselves hemmed in on all sides, with the humans to the north and east, the elorii to the west, and the Voiceless Ones below. Skirmishes were constantly fought against the human threat, but total eradication of these hairless apes proved impossible, for before the ssethrics could mount a new War of Extinction, a new kind of terror swept over the world.

The Time of Terror

(-35 to 1 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Passive History 10 or History: Myths and Legends

The Time of Terror was a dark and hopeless period in the history of Arcanis. Due to an ancient curse laid upon the Sorcerer King of Ymandragore, a rift was opened to the Infernal planes and through it poured thousands upon thousands of fiends, devils, and demons. Hellish beings of corruption and destruction, the infernal horde spread across the continent, bringing death to all the races of the Known Lands.

The Ssethregorans—like most people—were caught off guard by the invasion of infernals. While they were masters at the discipline of summoning beings from other realms of existence, many master practitioners, from Gettulus to Ss'koreth, warned against dealing with these unholy creatures, whose numbers and abilities far outstripped the ssethrics at the height of their power. At first, peripheral cities and citadels fell silent, with messengers sent to receive late reports failing to return. Then urgent word came from Cognatus, the citadel of the Dark Crests, of a horde of creatures never before seen attacking and threatening to overwhelm the ss'ressen. While the naga emperor paid little mind to the missive, the varn emissary understood the threat posed by the infernals and roused the ssethrics to act quickly to stamp out this incursion.

Fully five legions of ss'ressen, augmented by iguadon auxiliaries, and led by ssanu generals marched quickly to the besieged Dark Crest city and were met by devastation not witnessed in generations. The Battle of Cognatus raged for months, a war of attrition that threatened to overwhelm the defenders. Across the vast jungle and swamp of the Morass other citadels came under attack from all directions, with even the capital city of Sseth reeling from an invasion of unstoppable devils and fiends. Losses mounted and entire settlements were left in ruins, their populations slaughtered.

It was not until the sorcerers of the Black Coil, galvanized by Ahidrosmal, a ssanu of Pit Maliss, delved into forbidden tomes locked away deep within the Tower of Ssatsaya that the ssethrics stood a chance of turning back the infernal tide. Within these banned works, the ssanu sorcerer discovered a storehouse of knowledge referencing the Lower Planes, plundered from the rotting corpse of the human empire. Here, she learned of the human god Sarish, and the ways His priests summoned and bound demons, devils, and other equally demonic creatures.

While unwilling to bow down to a human deity, Ahidrosmal did see how the technique used to bind these beings had a certain similarity to binding elementals and other lesser creatures from other realms. Quickly disseminating what spells she had formulated, sorcerers of the Black Coil spread throughout the empire, binding and banishing infernals back to the Abyss. These rituals were a not a perfect panacea, as the creatures still took a horrendous toll against the ssethrics, but they did give the embattled ssethrics a way to defeat the creatures. Eventually, the empire was proclaimed secure, but for a small number of ruins still haunted by infernals. These were located so deep in the black, fetid recesses of the Morass, that they were deemed not worth the risk in scouring the locale. The Black Coil wove wards of containment about these ruins and forbid anyone from traveling there, which satisfied the imperial elite.

Expansion and Exodus

(1 to 326 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric or Passive History 14

With the end of the Time of Terror, the Ssethregorans began to look once again across the devastated regions of the Known Lands for new spoils to reap. Increasing pressure from the newly formed human Coryani Empire and from Altherian raids constantly tested the Ssethregorans' mettle. The humans believed that the ssethrics were hemmed in an area of dubious value, whose borders could be easily patrolled. What the soft-hides did not realize was that by that time, the Ssethregorans had already expanded their borders, more

than doubling the size of their territory.

In their quest for resources, the ssethrics rediscovered a new land once controlled by their ancestors. The ssethric war machine turned its attention away from its current borders and focused on the lush forests and jungles to the south, across the Lauriol Sea. For three hundred years, while humanity fought over the region they called the Blessed Lands, the Ssethregorans spread and reconquered the vast region to the south. They discovered to their chagrin that their amphibious allies, the hylis, had spread throughout these ancient lands and quietly claimed it when the ssethrics abandoned it millennia ago. Here they continued to torment their enslaved foes, the shell-backs. Upon the ssethrics' return, the hylis claimed they were acting as stewards of this ancient ssethric homeland, merely awaiting their arrival to return control over to them.

Soon thereafter, great ships pulled by chelone crossed the sea, delivering massive numbers of troops and supplies to the ancient outposts that existed there. Shell-backs were driven to rebuild and reconstruct many of these ancient places, as well as erecting new settlements for the rapacious ssethrics. The twin port cities of Anuliss and Th'lathis were founded to act as a bridge between the two realms.

The southward expansion was an immediate success, though the natives of that land proved to be quite tenacious. Once such race appeared to be related to the Gar Ormal of ancient times, though they were much larger and far more savage. The tribal society of these creatures proved to be no match for the massive Ssethregoran military and they were forced back into the high cold mountain peaks that marked the southern edge of the empire.

Though they believed themselves free of the threats faced by the northern portion of the empire, even here the humans and elorii remained a thorn in their side. Strange mammals, appearing to be human but more akin to the elorii were as great a threat as their former slaves. Encounters with these kio proved to be infrequent, but inevitably deadly when they occurred. Elorii ships from Seremas, as well as vessels operated by the undir provided sport and the occasional rare goods that were viewed as delicacies by the ssethrics.

The southern expanse remains a vital source of food, minerals, and supplies for the rest of the empire and serves as a strategic stronghold should things on the mainland ever go terribly wrong again.

Extermination and Exodus (625 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric or Passive History 12

The final great upheaval to occur within the empire was the exodus of the Black Talon egg clutch and the extermination of the Dark Crest. The members of the Black Talons became disenchanted with the bloodthirsty and murderous ways of their kin. When ordered to eradicate the dishonored Dark Crest egg clutch, the Black Talons refused and rebelled against the ways of the ssethric society. Incensed by this affront to his authority, the dreaded Emperor Narthsslik ordered both egg clutches' wholesale destruction, sending the Barbed Tails to perform the twin tasks. Under the leadership of the clever Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus, the Black Talons embarked upon a great exodus out of the Morass and began a long exodus north. Eventually the renegades shook off their Ssethregoran pursuers and settled in the warm confines of the Sulfur Marsh. Though this was but a small event in the overall history of the empire, it led to the recolonization of the former ssethric city of Lanpeltis in the Sulfur Marsh, a region not controlled by ssethrics for over six millennia. More significantly, for the first time in the history of the ssethric races, one of its peoples formed a lasting peace with the mammals.

As for the Dark Crest egg clutch, the Barbed Tail ss'ressen, along with Venomous Scale inquisitors, were tasked with hunting down and exterminating them. Within their ancestral citadel of Cognatus, the Dark Crests made their final stand. As their numbers had dwindled to less than a few hundred, the defenders were overwhelmed, their hatcheries defiled, and the egg clutch's matriarch mother eviscerated and consumed in a feeding frenzy. With all the breeding age females slain and the eggs destroyed, the Venomous Scale Warlord reported that the Dark Crest egg clutch was no more.

The Battle of Semar (1025 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Altherian, ssethric or Passive History 12

In the last century, the Ssethregoran Empire has shown an amazing amount of growth and a push toward increased military preparedness. The ringing of hammers could be heard echoing from the city of Sseth, where the smiths are forging stockpiles of weapons for an upcoming war. The southern reaches of the empire have been settled and now resources flow across the Lauriol Sea in abundance. As the Ssethregorans see it, the humans and elorii along their borders have grown complacent and weak, writing them off as a minor threat. That is all about to change. Secretly, in the dark bowels of their realm, the Ssethregorans have begun their mobilization. Troops are being levied and trained, industry is booming, and the drake rookeries are full. Massive storehouses of supplies have been stockpiled to provide the support train for the moving army. In 1025 I.C., the Ssethregoran Empire, considered by the humans to be dormant for generations, made its first foray in living memory.

A small expeditionary force, designed to test the humans' defenses, was thrust up into the Altherian Peninsula, attacking the border city of Semar. The battle was intense, lasting for two days. The Ssethregoran forces were repelled, but just barely, by the combined forces of the native Altherians, volunteers from the multi-national Shining Patrol, and groups of stalwart mercenaries and adventurers. In the end, two singular events saved Semar. The first was an ancient ritual of binding invoked by a group of Encali dwarves that drove away the True Dragon Astinax. The second was a brave group of heroes who piloted a lone airship, known as *The Damned*, over the besieged walls of Semar. This airship was a decoy, and the ruse succeeded, drawing the Ssethregoran forces away from the true threat, a second airship carrying a full load of precious blast powder to the outnumbered defenders of the Citadel of Semar. That group of stalwart heroes died in their attempt, as they had known they would, but their lives bought the second ship the time it needed to deliver the blast powder and thereby turn the tide of battle in the defenders' favor.

The Cold War (1036 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethric, Myrantian, or Passive History 12

Another conflict pursued by the Ssethregorans, with the full support of the varn emissary, is their conflict with the newly formed Abessian Dominion where heretical ssanu still clinging to a dead religion have allied themselves with humans. Rather than initiate another costly attack, this conflict is being fought in the shadows, where the weapons of choice are assassination, infiltration, and misdirection. Both sides employ yissera as their primary agents in this cold war, though ssanu from the empire are sent as supplicants, wishing to reconnect with the old ways, just as their Abessian cousins cross the border and reintegrate into Ssethregoran society. Surprisingly, the humans remain unaware of the struggle taking place beneath their noses, consumed with their own byzantine politics.

For their part, the varn were content to let this heretical war simmer until a number of pacifiers were mutilated, their bodies carved with the holy symbol of Yig. Signs point to Yigites from Abessios as the perpetrators, though other subversive groups still exist within the empire that could also have committed the murders. Assigned to the task of uncovering those responsible are a group of varn obligators, who are prepared to turn the empire and the neighboring nations into a bloody abattoir to avenge their brethren.

"I believe the plateau that Altheria sits upon is actually an ancient il'Huan outpost. Unfortunately, the constant skirmishes with the ssethrics makes it difficult to uncover the entrance that I'm sure lies at its base."
- Ambassador Tukufu of Altheria

Three Sided War (1040 to 1043 I.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Altherian, ssethric, or Passive History 13

One of the major points of friction between the human Altherians and the Ssethregorans is the former's interest in acquiring a specific ingredient required for the alchemical mixture known as blastpowder.

This ingredient can only be found within the shells of ssethric eggs. While hatched-eggs have a small amount of this compound, it is far more concentrated in the shells of still-developing eggs. Due to the protective nature of the ssethrics over their young, the collection of these eggs is very dangerous and very lucrative for humans. While raids to gather eggs are usually small and consist of a small number of humans, elements of the Shining Patrol, an elite military force reinforced by soldiers from many of the human nations of the Known Lands, and others penetrated deep into Ssethregore, devastating one of the outlying villages of the Emerald Scale ss'ressen. The entire crèche of newly laid eggs was taken and many of the population slaughtered. Furious at this affront, Emperor Kahss the IV pulled troops back from the ever-tense front with the Malfelan elorii and amassed a force not seen since the Battle of Belestor, intent on wiping out the mammalians on the plateau once and for all.

Unknown to the emperor, a clandestine information exchange occurred through intermediaries, advising the Altherians that the village would be lightly protected and the specific time when the egg laying cycle would be completed. Ironically, this information was shared to an informant by members of the Venomous Scale ss'ressen, who sought vengeance against a rival egg clutch.

After the events of the Coryani Civil War, many of the nations that formerly contributed to the Shining Patrol experienced internal turmoil, forcing them to recall some or all of their troops serving in the Altheria. The resulting troop shortage spread the Patrol dangerously thin. As a result, the massive Ssethregoran invasion could not have come at a worst time.

With the ssethric war machine quickly overwhelming the Altherian defenses in Semar, a city that had twice in the past few decades rebuffed their assaults, the naga emperor eagerly awaited news that the human capital city had fallen. His hopes were stymied by the intervention of the Entaran elorii who came to the Altherian's aid. Within the year, the combined might of the humans and the Entarans rolled back the Ssethregorans, repulsing the invaders.

The fuming emperor did not have long to wait for revenge, as he received reports that the former allies had turned on one another. He was content to allow his two hated adversaries destroy one another, swooping in afterwards to deal with what was left. This tempered attitude was shattered when the emperor's own breeding mates were slaughtered while traveling outside the safety of the capital. The evidence collected implicated the Entaran elorii as the perpetrators, and though his vizier Ss'risek strongly advised against launching a reprisal attack, the emperor ordered a full assault. Within weeks the ssethric war machine was again locked in battle with their eternal foe, pressing the elorii's already weakened ranks.

Though the ssethrics scored many early successes, once again fate conspired against the Scaled Empire and victory slipped through their talons. Though locked in a vicious war, the Altherians inexplicably ceased attacking the Entarans and joined forces against the Ssethregorans. This alone might not have turned the tide of battle but for the news that their territories in the Endless Dark were under attack. Seeing the Servants of Oblivion as the greater threat, the varn emissary advised the emperor to withdraw from the Entaran theatre. The emperor wordlessly complied.

Though this war against the Entarans was short lived, the ssethrics did manage to achieve one of their long standing goals, the planting of a varn chaos seed deep within the elorii's territory. This large, hairy seed must be planted in soil saturated with the blood and life essences of those who died in terrible anguish. Upon the lands to the south-west of Seremas, the capital of Entaris, one of the largest and costliest battles of the war was fought. Over sixty thousand beings, human, elorii, and ssethric, lie entombed in the red soaked mud of that unnamed place. The dead so outnumbered the survivors that they were left where they fell, their bones eternally locked a horrible embrace of hate and rage, fear and loathing, agony and despair. In this festering ground, the priests of Zedok, the embodiment of Chaos, planted their vile seed and left it to flourish. A leafless, black tree continues to grow amidst the remains of this battlefield. Its roots digging deeply into the mantle of Arcanis, stretching its tendrils out to meet with others of its kind planted throughout the Known Lands.

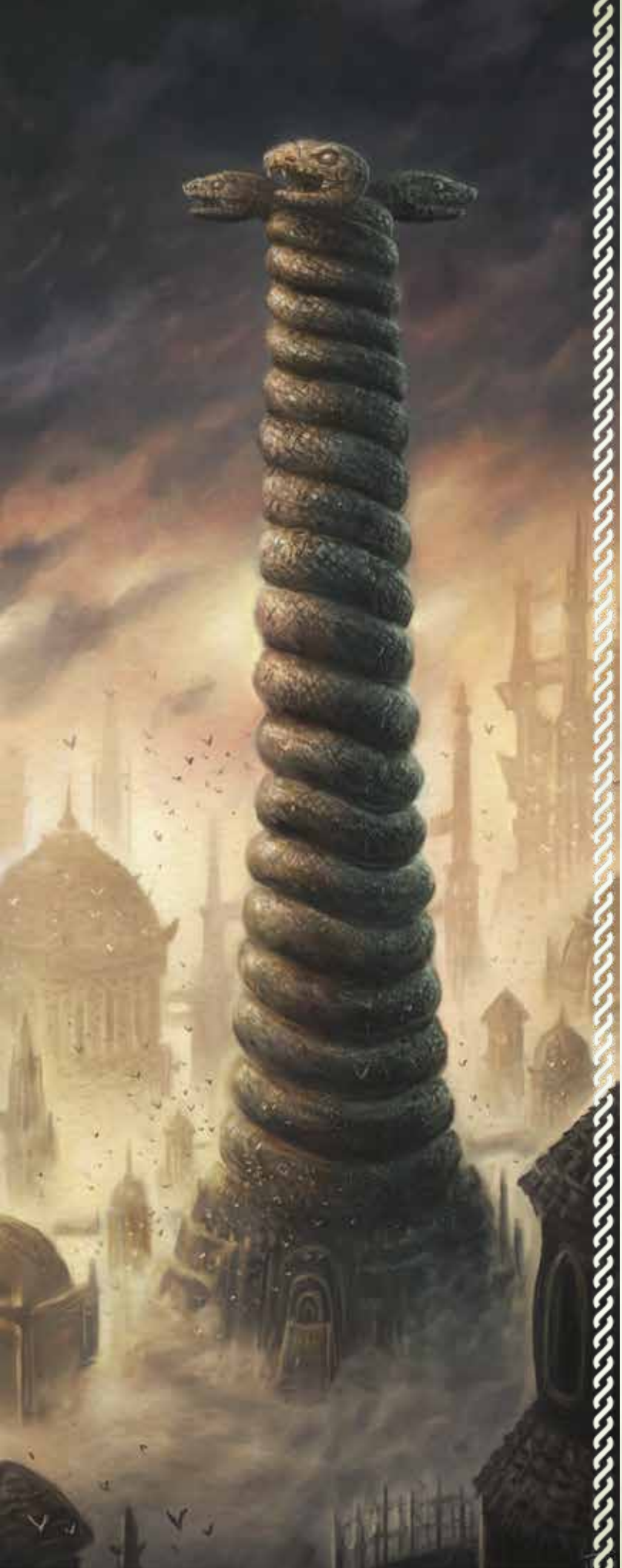
The War Against Oblivion (1041 J.C.)

Knowledge Threshold: Ssethregoran

Not long after engaging the Entaran elorii, the ssethrics found themselves embroiled in another war against an even more implacable foe, one who fought not for land or resources, but whose goal was to bring about the dissolution of all existence. Deep below the surface the caverns and passageways of the Endless Dark echoed with the clash of armies and the cries of the dying. Spearheaded by the ssanu Pit Coasca, the vaunted ssethric war machine was again stymied as it faced the otherworldly might of the Voiceless Ones and their unveiled masters. What began as a skirmish devolved into a decades-long slough through the phosphorescent lit hollows and fissures that honeycombed the mantle of Arcanis. Through these ancient il'Huan excavated tunnels, an endless horde of the servants of oblivion, armed with powerful psionics and a strange type of sorcery that dissolved magic like a salt lick beneath a stream of water. Since engaging in this seemingly unending war, the ssethrics have lost untold thousands, inflicting just as many casualties upon their silent foe.

The ssanu of Pit Coasca, already masters of psionic duels, renown as the most skilled martial combatants within the empire, risked losing the war when the underground city of Delendas was infiltrated by the Voiceless Ones. Had the city fallen, the soft underbelly of the Ssethregoran Empire would have lain unprotected and vulnerable to attack. It was only through the sacrifice of a cadre of Agamassi and an entire legion of Razor Claw ss'ressen that the attack was repelled. Combined with a fortuitous visit by a varn emissary and her honor guard of Chaoshammers, were the creatures repulsed.

Alarmed by the number of Voiceless Ones encountered, the varn advised the emperor that the city's defenders needed to be augmented with all available troops. The varn's previous encounters with the creatures concerned them as to the situation upon Arcanis, as a world infested by the servants of Oblivion did not survive for long. Acquiescing to the emissary, Pit Coasca was given command of four additional legions of ss'ressen warriors and iguadon auxiliaries. The naga emperor did this with trepidation, as such a concentration of power in the coils of one ssanu pit was a dagger pointed directly at his throat.



Chapter 2

Geography

The Ssethregoran Empire spans most of the lush tropical peninsula on the northeastern coast of the Lauriol Sea, though its influence extends well across the sea into the vaulted rain forests of the south. Its main power base is located deep within the peninsula. From the capital city of Sseth along the shores of Lake Quesselan, the empire's control extends north to the foot of the Altherian Plateau and west to the Bay of Melan. The well-guarded border swings south along the Kuthré River to Lake Khess, then southwest through Fellglade to the Bay of Laran. The southern reaches of the empire expand south and west into the thick rainforests uncharted by the people of the Known Lands and extends from the Taconis Mountains in the south, to the Pale Sea in the east, and the Taconic mountains in the west.

The weather within the Kraldjur Morass is oppressively hot and humid when it's not raining. When it does, it pours with heavy showers of several inches each day. The ssethrics are well adapted to this climate, but others may find it unbearable. Between the heat, the daily storms, and the swarms of biting insects, the Morass can be a very inhospitable place for humans and other races.

Note: Populations noted do not include the countless slaves that exist in these locations and are not included in the percentage demographics.

Blackroot Forest

The Blackroot Forest is considered the most dark, vile, and sinister landscape within the Ssethregoran Empire. Under its thick canopy is a twisted festering cesspool of disease and decay, which paradoxically is home to some of the most beautiful landscapes in all the Known Lands. Though its ground level is a worm-ridden bog, the canopy high above it is lush and vibrant with life. To understand the Blackroot Forest one must look at the plants that make their home in this area. Primordial hardwoods stretch up toward the heavens, towering three hundred feet or more above the marshy soil. These herbivorous behemoths were ancient before the discovery of the swamp by the

ssethrics and are perhaps the oldest living creatures on Arcanis. The upper layer of the forest is so dense that mosses and vines have woven through the titanic trunks, forming a layer of living vegetation more than fifty feet thick. This layer traps most sunlight falling upon the forest, keeping the earth below in perpetual twilight.

The upper canopy of the Blackroot Forest is vibrant and green. Sunlight bathes this surreal landscape in life giving energy and the clouds wrap the treetops in a perpetual fog. Rain falling upon the canopy is trapped in the thick moss layers, forming huge ponds in the sky. Much of this water is absorbed by the vines, orchids, and mosses, while the rest trickles through the vegetation system to fall on the cold dank marsh far below. The arboreal lakes are home to a myriad of creatures: rare orchids and lotus blooms are abundant in the cloudy mists. Pterosaurs swoop between the branches, while insects of all kinds abound. Odonatas dart between ponds catching unwary monkeys, while hylis can be found making their homes on the shores of these captured bodies of water, fishing for the strange insect larvae that live in the surrounding areas. Their position is so isolated that, unless an explorer can fly, it is almost impossible to contact the denizens of this miniature world.

The land below is a different matter. The filtered sunlight leaves the terrain locked in deep shadows. Along with the dim filtered light, an eerie phosphorescent glow fungus feeding on the rotting vegetation gives this area some additional illumination. Strange twisted beasts roam beneath the blanket of darkness, feeding upon the weak or unwary. Everything in this twilight world is in decay, from the plants to the animals themselves. Rot grubs pervade everything and hideous slimes, molds, and fungoid creatures slither through the tepid oily waters looking for their next meal. Warped mockeries of animals live here and being cut off from the light, are blind, hunting by sense of smell, hearing, or touch alone. In the depths of this swamp, only the bravest of ssethrics tread, and only the drakes dare call themselves masters here.

Blackroot Forest

Major Geographical Features

Lake Uleuth

Lake Uleuth is the largest of the treetop lakes in the Blackroot Forest, located about thirty leagues south-southwest of Lake Quesselan, as the crow flies. The lake is home to two of the largest settlements of hylis. Lake Uleuth boasts an amazing array of plants, flowers, and herbs along its sun dappled shores while its shallow waters are home to a myriad of aquatic delicacies, including a singular fish species called betta. The hylis here protect and manage this lake, for its life giving waters act as a hatchery for its next generation. These hylis also make quite a profit in harvesting small quantities of betta for sale in the city of Sseth, for the ssanu consider the rare fish a delicacy.

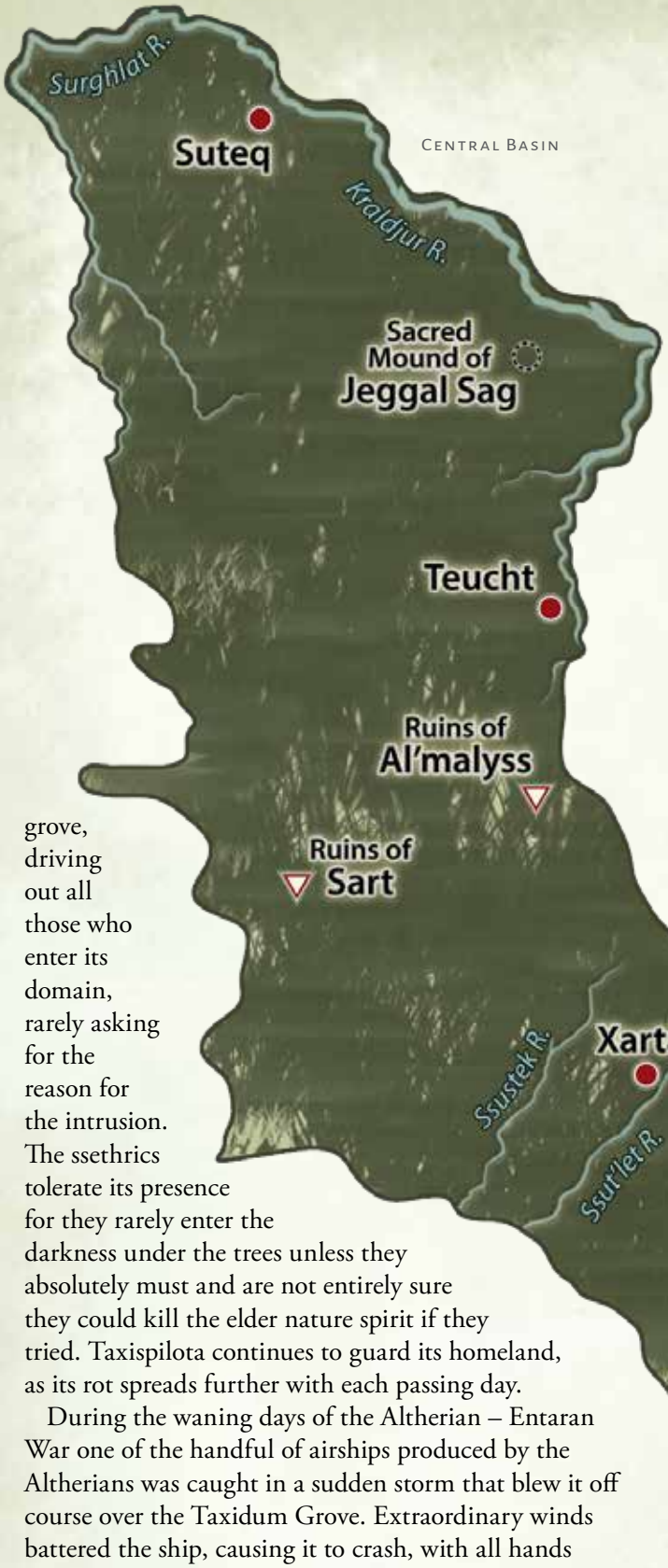
Important Features

Taxidum Grove

Taxidum Grove stands at the heart of Blackroot Forest and is home to one of the most ancient sentient creatures known, Taxispilota. This ancient nature spirit has manifested for so long in the form of an animate tree that it either can't or won't revert to a non-corporeal form. Some Disciples of Jeggal Sag believe that the spirit was cursed by Kassegore for some long-forgotten slight, and is now trapped within this rotting prison.

The spirit considers itself to be the guardian of Blackroot Forest, having personally watched every tree here germinate, take root, and grow into the giants of today. Keeping to its own devices, it has never become involved in the happenings of the races outside of its precious swamp. Over the ages, Taxispilota watched as the region grew and changed; observing the canopy filling in and the area below succumbing to darkness. All this was accepted as part of the natural cycle, but living in its corporeal form has begun to unhinge the ancient spirit.

Now ancient beyond description, it is said that Taxispilota has become dark and worm-ridden, its thoughts anchored in the doldrums of the eternal darkness, no longer able to comprehend the hope brought about by the warm rays of the sun. Taxispilota patrols the



grove, driving out all those who enter its domain, rarely asking for the reason for the intrusion. The ssethrics tolerate its presence for they rarely enter the darkness under the trees unless they absolutely must and are not entirely sure they could kill the elder nature spirit if they tried. Taxispilota continues to guard its homeland, as its rot spreads further with each passing day.

During the waning days of the Altherian – Entaran War one of the handful of airships produced by the Altherians was caught in a sudden storm that blew it off course over the Taxidum Grove. Extraordinary winds battered the ship, causing it to crash, with all hands presumably lost. Upon that ship was the daughter of a member of the Council of Wisdom, the Altherian Republic's governing body. Offering an astounding reward for the return of his daughter's remains, numerous mercenaries have attempted to penetrate the Forest, though none have returned. The Councilor remains hopeful that someone will one day bring his child home for a proper burial.

Ruins of Kal'thess

The ruins of Kal'thess are a jumbled pile of stones, half submerged in the swamp on the western edge of the Forest. Originally a small settlement with a temple dedicated to Kassegore, Kal'thess was abandoned four thousand years ago as it was swallowed by the ever-encroaching mire of the Forest. Recently whispers began floating through Ssethregoran society that a new group has taken up residence in these ruins, a group still believing in the old ways, but all attempts to find such a group have met with failure.

In truth, the iguadon Cult of Hromu views this ruined temple as an especially holy site, protecting the secret of its usage from all, even at the cost of their lives. The iguadon faithful claim that a holy relic lies buried somewhere in the rubble, a horn which will rouse Kassegore from His slumber to reclaim His position as the supreme deity of the ssethrics and depose of the hated varn.

Central Basin

Carved out of the very heart of the Kraldjur Morass, the Central Basin region of the empire is the thickest part of the rainforest. Lush vegetation creates an near impregnable wall of foliage, vines, trees, and roots that making traversing the area difficult. Most paths cut through the region are quickly devoured again by the rampant plant growth, making settlements problematic to erect in this region. Nevertheless, the ssethrics managed to do just that, with several cities breaching through the dense vegetation. As the empire went through spasms of contraction, many of these cities were abandoned, allowing the rapacious flora to reclaim the land. This area, more than any other, is littered with ruined buildings and other structures, vine-chocked and overrun with pant-life.

Once administered by Pit Crotalus, after the Naga Coup, the region was granted to Pit Coasca. Whether this was a reward for loyal service or out of fear from the martial might of the Pit, is unknown. It was certainly a move to curtail the power of Pit Crotalus, just as pushing out Pit Sseth from the Eastern Rainforest was meant to do.

Major Geographical Features

Ssustek River

The most northwestward of the twin rivers that drain the Central Basin, the Ssustek River is a slow moving, meandering waterway that winds its way in a southerly direction, eventually emerging at the coast. Renamed after a naga emperor who believed the many bends and turns the river took resembled its own majestic coils, the river hides many deadly predators under its deceptively placid surface.

Besides being home to the largest crocodiles in the Morass, the Ssustek is rich with aquatic life, including a species of fish known as the quandac. These terrible creatures appear to be a cross between flying fish and piranhas, attacking in a swarm by leaping out of the water and attacking unsuspecting animals slaking their thirst on the water's edge. After dragging their prey into the water, these piscine terrors go into a feeding frenzy, stripping the animal to its bones within minutes. Some Altherian scholars believe the quandac to be a creation of the biomancers of the Black Coil.

Ssut'let River

The Ssus'let River strives to be the opposite of its sister river. Quick-flowing, with few curves as it bores headlong towards the coastline, this waterway has signs of being artificially created as it looks and behaves more like a drainage canal than a natural river. Some posit that its path was cut through the Morass ages ago, before the coming of the ssethrics to the Known Lands. No serious scholar believes that the hylis could have engineered such a feat, so speculation turns to a lost race that once populated the region.

Due to its relatively straight cut through the Central Basin, the Ssut'let River offers the most direct manner in which to travel across the empire. Numerous villages act as rest stations along its hundreds of leagues of riverbanks, allowing the weary traveler a respite from the tedious journey.

Important Features

Ruins of Al'malyss

This once elegant city now lies in ruins, a burnt out shell that has never been rebuilt, its name synonymous with shame and betrayal. Al'malyss is the ancestral home of the Black Talon ss'ressen and the level of its destruction is more a testament to the bitterness of the Barbed Tail egg clutch rather than the fury of the fighting that took place here centuries ago. The only inhabitants of this once great city are a garrison of Barbed Tail ss'ressen, tasked with seeking the one prize that has eluded them since their failed attempt to eradicate the Black Talons, the fabled sword, *Anaksulay, the Skullreaver*.

Handed down to every Black Talon rising to the position of Warlord of the Egg Clutch, the wielder of *Anaksulay* during the Black Talon rebellion stayed behind with the Mother Matriarch to face the Barbed Tails sent to eradicate them. Knowing that the longer they held off those sent to execute them meant that the bulk of their fellow ss'ressen could get further away, the Warlord Suless and his forces sold their lives dearly. When the inevitable end began to close in, the warlord hid *Anaksulay* somewhere within the ruins of Al'malyss, along with a treasure trove of other artifacts and relics and returned to the battle, to perish alongside his fellow warriors.

The warlord of the Barbed Tail was furious at being denied the eldritch blade of the Black Talon, a prize he wished more than any other. In a rage, he ordered the entire city torn down, brick by brick if need be, until the blade was discovered. After some time, the egg clutch's Mother Matriarch ordered him to cease the useless destruction of the city. The Barbed Tail warlord had to content himself with the cloak he made from the flayed hide of his Black Talon counterpart, though he ordered a small garrison remain behind to continue the search, a task they continue doing to this day.

Ruins of Sart

Indicative of the many ruins scattered across the landscape of the Central Basin, the ruins of Sart is chock-full with foliage and arm thick vines that are simultaneously tearing down and holding together the crumbling structures. The tops of the half-toppled towers of Sart are festooned with thick sheets of webbing, a shroud upon the corpse of this city. These webs are the work of a species of extraordinarily intelligent spiders that have made their nests here for centuries. As large as a pony, these spiders lay in wait in their webs, awaiting the tell-tale sign of one of their strands vibrating, signaling that something or someone, is ensnared. While most of the time, it's merely a wild animal that stumbled into their snares, it's the occasional iguadon that is fated to become their next meal.

Iguadons from the nearby city of Suteq hunt these creatures as a rite of passage for those wishing to train as warriors. Those not brave or skilled enough to enter the ruins, survive for the three days required of them, and emerge with the carcass of one of these spiders will either spend their lives as laborers or as food for the spider's brood.

Sacred Mound of Jeggal Sag

Near the border that separates the Central Basin from the Eastern Rainforest, not far from the banks of the Ssus'let

River, is the holiest site known to a small sect of ssethrics. Beneath the small hillock is the resting place of the child of Kassegore and Yig, the first primordial, Jeggal Sag. There is no memorial built upon the mound. In fact, there is nothing that differentiates it from any other natural feature in the area, save for the extraordinary abundance of wildlife that resides on or near it. Yet, the Disciples of Jeggal Sag, a mystic sect of ssethrics, is inexorably drawn to this one particular hillock, like salmon swimming upstream to spawn.

Oddly, the varn have never interfered with the pilgrimages to the Sacred Mound, and any ssethric who hears the call of the Dreaming Wyrm is allowed to conduct whatever rites and rituals required, so long as it does not interfere with the veneration of the varn deities. Even Disciples from the Pariah Clutches are allowed their pilgrimage to the Sacred Mound, unmolested through under the constant watchful eyes of ssethrics loyal to the Scaled Throne. Any deviation from the well-worn path leading to the site invites a quick and sudden attack.

Suteq

Population: 135,000 (95% iguadon, 1% ssanu, 3% ss'ressen, 1% other)

The sole iguadon settlement in the empire, Suteq lies in the northern portion of the Central Basin, near the Kraldjur River. Unlike other ssethric cities, Suteq's architecture is squat and blocky, with the tallest building only four stories high. That building acts as the central building for the male iguadon leader known as the *natrix*. The current holder of that title, a bull called Akress, is an enormous example of the species, standing almost as tall and broadly as a Horned Jowl ss'ressen.

Knowing the iguadon's propensity for eschewing the state religion and stubbornly clinging to old ways, the naga emperor commanded that a temple to the varn deities be erected in the center of Suteq. Natrix Akress is in full support of this construction project, as he is a vocal proponent of the varn religion, following the path laid out by the Chaos God Zedok and is eager to prove that his people are loyal servants to the varn. Akress has gone so far as to become an anointed priest of Zedok, an act that has painted a target upon the brutish iguadon. Thus far the natrix has survived several assassination attempt by the Cult of Hromu, a fact that he proudly boasts. The heads of his attackers are held within pickled jars and kept in his personal quarters as a reminder of his prowess.

Teucht

Population: 90,000 (10% iguadon, 9% ssanu, 80% ss'ressen, 1% other)

Known as the City of Perpetual Clamor, Teucht is home to the Horned Jowl egg clutch, or the Agamassi as they prefer to be called. Adhering to ssethric architectural tastes, most of the buildings are round in nature, but much wider, to better accommodate the enormous size of these war-like ss'ressen. True to its sobriquet, the city rings with a cacophony of sound, from the bull-throated voices of the Agamassi themselves, who can't speak lower than a bull-roar, to trumpets blaring or gongs ringing at all hours of the day or night. Being the bonded egg clutch of the military-minded ssanu of Pit Coasca, the Agamassi train day and night.

A veritable horde of kobold slaves cater to the ss'ressen's every need, freeing them from mundane chores to better concentrate on their martial duties. Though almost any kind of ssethric may be found within the streets of Teucht, the one rarely seen is the iguadon. The Agamassi maintain the view that the brutish creatures are inferior to all ss'ressen, but there's just something about the iguadon that incenses them to the point that open conflict is common.

Deep beneath the city lies the Agamassi's darkest secret. At the behest of their ssanu masters, a series of large chambers have been built, simulating different environments, such as jungle, urban, and forested wilderness. Captives of various races are then released, fully armed and armored, and hunted to hone and develop new tactics to use in the battlefield. What is not commonly known is that the captives also include other ssethrics, including ssanu and ss'ressen of different egg clutches. The consummate strategists, the Coascan ssanu are always preparing contingencies for any situation, including the outbreak of a civil war within the empire. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of one's current allies are critical to victory.

Xartah

Population: 450,000 (23% iguadon, 56% ssanu, 19% ss'ressen, 2% other)

The second largest city in the empire, Xartah is located on the banks of the Ssus'let River, granting the ssanu of Pit Coasca the ability to quickly move and deploy across the lands of the empire. The martially minded ssanu spent years converting Xartah from a hub of commerce to the military command and control center, seeing their city as the last line of defense against invaders and themselves as the defenders of the Scaled Empire.

As in many other ssethric settlements, Xartah's architecture is similar aesthetically in its use of circular towers and other structures, eschewing hard edges. Where it differs is in its fortifications, with forty-foot thick battlements, and strategically placed sentry towers that create kill zones for anyone foolish enough to attack the city. Like the capital city of Sseth, Xartah enjoys the benefits of the technomantic spires, created by the sorcerers of the Black Coil. These spires channel energy, enabling the city to be lit in the night.

The Black Coil was permitted to erect a tower within

the city, this one to enhance the psionic and war sorcery capabilities of Pit Coasca. Given these ssanu's duties in repelling the Voiceless Ones in the Endless Dark, the continued education of each new generation of ssanu in these arts is seen as critical to the survival of the species.

The Coastal Swamplands

The coastal swamplands encompass a region of brackish mangrove swamps and pampas grasslands running along southeastern coast of the Kraldjur Morass, from the edge of the contested Fellglade in the west down to its southernmost tip. Here the last dregs of water flow off the end of the peninsula, mingling the peaty effluent with the warm shallow waters of the coast. The result is a nutrient rich bounty where all types of sea life thrive. The brackish marshes are home to a large variety of creatures, from marsh rhinoceros and browsing hippopotami, to immense serpents and crocodiles, with the occasional drake nesting near the warm coastal waters.

The port city of Anuliss sits upon the edge of the sea, catering to both the fanged denizens of the land and their nearby aquatic relations in the sea. Pleisauran villages dot the offshore coral reefs, managing huge underwater aquaculture facilities that provide fish and shellfish for the empire. Though it may look peaceful to most, this shore is dangerous to the unwary. For decades, pirates have attempted to hide in the many backwater coves that dot this region, but captains that follow that route swiftly meet their demise at the rending claws of the scaled inhabitants.

The Coastal Swamplands region is under the dominion of Pit Maliss and their bonded ss'ressen egg clutch, the Venomous Scale. The Pit was relegated to this region of the empire due to their perceived loyalty to the Old Gods, as well as for fear of their ambition to overthrow the current regime. Forced out of their well-established and lucrative mercantile hub in the Northern Foothills, Pit Maliss sought to develop the sleepy port town of Anuliss into a commercial powerhouse, importing goods from the Southern Reaches and the rest of the Known Lands.

During the recent war with the Entaran elorii, the coastline was frequently used as an invasion point, as the many leagues of coastline made it difficult to keep under constant surveillance. Alliances forged with the sea devils and pleisauran allowed the Ssethregorans to repel many of these incursions, resulting in hundreds of elorii finding a watery grave. The bones of those invaders that made it ashore litter the mangrove swamp, so much meat for the predators that call the marshlands home. Otherwise, but for the occasional brazen undir pirate or Malfelan elorii raid, the region is fairly peaceful.

Major Geographical Features

Fanx Islands

A chain of small islands off the coast of the empire, the Fanx Islands mostly consist of low lying marshland that flood regularly at high tide. Unremarkable but for the innumerable swarms of flying and biting insects, the only feature of note is the trading outpost of Maldruga on the largest island in the chain.

Unknown to the ssethrics, the Malfelan elorii have established an advance base on one of the islands. Finding a hidden cenote providing fresh water, the area is remarkably free of the ever-present insect swarms for reasons the elorii cannot discern. Using the base to move around the entrenched ssethric lines, the Malfelan are preparing to launch an attack on Anuliss, but the offensive has been delayed due to the disappearance of several of their soldiers. With desertion an impossibility and unable to discover the soldier's bodies, the elorii are mystified.

Coastal Swamplands

Mangrove Swamps

The mangrove swamps stretch for hundreds of leagues along the coastlines, giving way to endless seas of flooded grass as one works their way inland. These marshes provide a natural defense against any who attack by sea, for no sooner do they make landfall than they are swarmed by a veritable cloud of saltwater mosquitoes that infest the marshland. The thick scaly hides of the ssethrics protect them from the worst of these bites, making them a nuisance as opposed to the danger these mosquitoes pose to any soft hides. True to their devious nature, the ssanu have engineered acute viruses and introduced them into the biting insect populations of this region as a biological defense system. These virulent strains have spread and now can be found working their way into the southern borders of Malfela. Strangely, these viruses only seem to affect mammalian sentient creatures, causing horrible lesions, high fever, and hemorrhaging of the brain. The victim is driven into a homicidal, insane rage before death finally takes them.

Important Features

Anuliss

Population: 98,000 (2% hylis, 15% iguadon, 8% pleisauran, 42% ssanu, 32% ss'ressen, 1% other)

Anuliss, the domain of Pit Maliss, is a large port city situated at the end of a delta formed by the convergence of the Ssustek and the Ssut'let Rivers. Large stone ramparts surrounds the port, with the barricade extending out into the harbor and encircling the docking bays to protect it from raiders. At both ends of the stone walls, large fortifications look over the coastline, boasting of their impregnability to any and all ships that pass by. The original small domicile of Pit Aspis in this city was torn down and rebuilt to something similar to the grand palace they once enjoyed in their former territory. Yet even the grandeur of their new home could not assuage the bitterness they felt towards the ssanu that possessed their former citadel.

Dwarfing Pit Maliss' current palace in size is the temple to the varn gods located in the center of Anuliss. Meant to reinforce the dominance of the Varn Pantheon in the minds of the over-religious ssanu of Pit Maliss, services are held venerating all three of the alien deities, with attendance required for the current masters of the city. Priests of these other planar gods hold bloody ceremonies where hundreds of captured soft-hides are sacrificed late into the night.

Being the largest port city on the northern portion of the empire, Anuliss sees a large amount of trade pass through it, though it should be noted that very little of it comes from the human nations. Instead, goods travel from and to its sister city across the Lauriol Sea, Th'lathis in the Southern Reaches. What little commerce does comes in from non-ssethric markets, arrives from Maldruga and consists of mainly of exotic merchandise and slaves. From the swamplands along the coast, veritable armies of iguadons dredge through the peat harvesting amber. Sought throughout the Known Lands and beyond, the Coastal Swamplands is the only place where rare white and blue colored amber can be found.

Bryppt

Population: 7,000 (98% hylis, 2% other)

The hylis settled the shores of the Kraldjur Morass and the Southern Reaches long before the ssethrics migrated to the Known Lands. For the most part, the hylis forego building cities, preferring to keep their half-submerged communities small, although what they lack in densely populated urban centers they make up in numerosity. Hylis villages numbering in the hundreds dot both shores, with each settlement housing less than a few score of the amphibians

The exception to this rule is Bryppt, the lone city erected by hylis. It's construction was undertaken to counter a prevailing theory in the court of the naga emperor Nathoki, that the hylis were too primitive a people to be worthy of the status of ally and should be promptly enslaved. Panicked into action, the hundreds of hylis leaders gathered and elected one of their own as queen, tasking her with convincing the naga emperor of their worth and sophistication.

Queen Bryppt traded every favor her people had accumulated, as well as squeezing from them anything of value that could be used to purchase the materials needed to construct a city of such magnificence, that the ssethrics would have no choice but to recognize them as equals. Hylis sensibilities being what they are, when the naga emperor was invited to visit what he found was more of a crude palace surrounded by rock and mud hovels. Crafted from blocks of coral and polished stone, the palace was held together by copious amounts of daub and hope.

Determined to enslave the entire race in the morning, as well as having their slime covered, grinning fool of a queen vivisected, the emperor curled into a sleeping ball with seven of his mates. Nathoki was awakened by the most beautiful sound, the throat singing of a choir of hylis serenaded him throughout the night, giving him the most restful sleep he'd had in many years. Refreshed in the morning, he declared that to produce such beauty, a people required a level of sophistication that a primitive race could not achieve. While he still had Queen Bryppt executed, the hylis' status as an ally of the Ssethregoran Empire was never again questioned at the imperial court.

The queen of the hylis, chosen from among the numerous chieftains of the amphibians, resides within the city of Bryppt, acting as liaison and attending to any and all duties required of her people by the naga emperor. At the end of her ten year tenure, the queen is sacrificed to the varn deities at a small temple built across from the palace.

Maldruga

Population: 5,000 (24% iguadon, 14% pleisauran, 22% ssanu, 26% ss'ressen, 14% other)

Maldruga is a recent addition to the Empire's numerous settlements and was built less than fifty years ago. The chief site of trade between the Ssethregorans and non-ssethrics once occurred in Chelydra, a military outpost located in the northeast of the empire, under the administration of the commerce minded ssanu of Pit Maliss. With the founding of the Abessian Dominion by ssethric heretics still worshiping the Old Gods, access from the outside world to Chelydra became perilous.

Maldruga was created by Pit Maliss as a way to regain its wealth and prominence as the mercantile power within the empire, as well as providing a more circumspect way for ships from the League of Princes, Ymandragore, or as far north as the Pirate Isles to trade with and for illicit goods. The port is located on the largest land mass of the Fanx island chain.

Slaves, narcotics, artifacts, and other goods flow in and out of Maldruga. Being a port, the pleisaurans, a semi-aquatic ssethric race, were naturally given the task of administering the trading post's day to day affairs. Under Pit Maliss' keen sense of trade, they have prospered greatly as more and more slavers and unscrupulous merchants find Maldruga a safer and more profitable center of commerce.

Jahsak

Population: 120,000 (16% iguadon, 15% ssanu, 66% ss'ressen, 3% other)

Known as the City of Toxins, Jahsak is home to the Venomous Scale egg clutch, and is one of the most unique ssethric settlement in the empire. Erected far from the coastline, the builders of Jahsak allowed the thick flora to envelop the city walls, creating a natural camouflage. In addition, the environment permitted the ss'ressen to indulge in their favorite pastime, the cultivation and development of natural toxins, poisons, and venoms. The city's buildings are covered in a variety of vines, each with different blooms grafted upon them. Rare and lethal lotuses, bitter nightshades, hemlock, and other deadly flowering plants are cultivated similar to the way human peasants grow flowers in a garden. The premier botanists of the empire, the Venomous Scale produce a veritable cornucopia of herbs able to heal or kill. In fact, the ss'ressen's creations are the city's primary export and are highly sought after by the sorcerers of the Black Coil, as well as members of the imperial court.

It should not be assumed that Jahsak is overgrown and impassable, quite the contrary, the small city is quite orderly and laid out in a grid, making travel on its streets easy and quick. While this is of great convenience to the occasional visitor, heed should be paid to the numerous other hazards throughout the settlement. Besides deadly plant life, the Venomous Scale also maintain large hives of stinging insects, such as wasps and hornets, breed to increase the lethality of their sting. Scorpions, spiders, and other animals are kept for experimentation or to harvest any venoms they may possess. The Venomous Scale's immunity to most poisons makes handling these creatures less of a risk than it would to any other being.

Ruins of T'lek

A former citadel controlled by the Venomous Scale, T'lek fell into ruin during the Time of Terror when the veil between the mortal realm and the infernal plane was torn asunder. An entire generation of these ss'ressen were lost in battling the infernal horde before the Black Coil was able to turn the tide. Though eventually victorious, the area surrounding T'lek was so infused with the unholy energies of the demonic invaders, that it was not worth retaking. The area was left to the creatures, and bounded by powerful wards to keep them trapped within the ruins for ages.

Seen from the shore, the ruins of T'lek look abandoned and safe for the wayward traveler to seek shelter within. The devil-king and its minions trapped in the city take great delight in enticing those who wander nearby to find shelter from elements. The screams of terror of all who have done so still echo throughout the deserted streets.

Eastern Rainforest

The Eastern Rainforest represents the core of territory claimed by the Ssethregoran Empire, encompassing an area spanning from the Fellglade in the west, the Pale Sea in the East, Kraldjur Morass in the south, and the Altherian Peninsula in the north. The entire delta of the Kraldjur River permeates this swampland, flooding the region each spring with its rejuvenating waters. The position of the Eastern Rainforest ensures that it will always be inundated with rain, as warm moisture laden clouds collide with cooler northern breezes directly over the area and drop their watery payloads daily. The entire region is crisscrossed with a watery maze of rivers and streams, all tributaries or offshoots of the mighty Kraldjur River.

The entire rainforest is teeming with life seen nowhere else in the Known Lands. The foliage is thick, as to be almost impenetrable. Tropical hardwoods mix with palms and broad-leaf trees, incredible vines twist their springy lengths through the trees, while cycad, ferns and

thick palm undergrowth coats the soggy rainforest soil. Incredibly delicate flowers and orchids grow in abundance, feasted upon by an assortment of insect life. Fat nectar-laden fruits hang from every bough or lie rotting upon the leafy detritus of the rainforest floor. The canopy is lush and teeming with wildlife. Monkeys and colorful birds flit about the upper boughs of the trees, blissfully unaware of the winged vipers and dragonnels that stalk them in their leafy home. Huge semi-aquatic herbivores, obese hippopotami, and beaked hadrosaurs confine themselves to the relative safety of the river courses, venturing out under the trees by night to graze on the lush undergrowth. In the shadows of the palm fronds, cunning predators lie in wait: fast mor'lets, hulking carnasaurs, and wily drakes. In the waterways, crocodiles of titanic proportions lie in ambush, while serpents that could swallow a horse whole, glide silently through the shallows. Despite all this the empire has managed to carve itself a place in this wonderful diverse wilderness and bring it under its tyrannical control.

Major Geographical Features

Halikmir River

One of the tributaries of the Kraldjur River, the Halikmir River moves through the lowlands of the eastern-most portion of the Eastern Rainforest before draining into the Pale Sea. The river is home to a variety of fauna, including herds of large hippopotami and the red-spotted crocodile, a rare species of reptilian predator. Off the banks of this river are enormous trees whose branches create a thick canopy that shade many parts of the Halikmir. It is within the branches of these trees that the rhamphorikes mate and raise their offspring before they are forced to return to their scaled masters. Specially trained iguadons raise the hatchlings, training them to perform the tasks that they will spend the rest of their lives doing, as well as indoctrinating these young rhamphorikes to the ways of the empire.

Kraldjur River

The mighty Kraldjur River and its tributaries wind their way through eight hundred leagues of steamy jungle to end their journey in the brackish waters of Lake Quesselan. The slow meandering waterways are full of silt and debris, giving the river a dark muddy appearance with low visibility. The deep channels it has cut into the rainforest are home to thousands of different plants and animals, from tiny fish and crustaceans to gargantuan reptilian carnivores. Undercut banks hide predators at every bend, and intrepid explorers can dive down a hundred feet or more in the deepest pools. With the coming of the spring rains, the river swells and overflows its banks, flooding the Eastern Rainforest with one to three feet of water. During these times, it becomes impossible for any but the most experienced ss'ressen or pleisaurans to navigate the channels. The river provides a bounty of food in the form of fish and herbivorous mammals, which are harvested every year by iguadons to feed the ssethric population. The twisting waterways of the Kraldjur River also provide a means of overland travel throughout the Empire. Heavy barges ply the river, piloted by skilled iguadon or led by the aquatic pleisaurans.

Lake Quesselan

Lake Quesselan is the largest standing body of water in all of Ssethregore and one of the largest lakes in the Known

Lands. The lake is the endpoint of the Kraldjur River and the channels on the eastern edge pour freshwater into the sea. The lake itself is slightly brackish, due to backflow from the Pale Sea. At the great delta on the western edge of the lake, the capital city of Sseth stands like a glittering jewel, its tall spires reflected in its cool dark waters. The city regulates all traffic upon the lake; a fleet of strange subsurface crafts are moored on the lake's edge ready to travel out to the sea and to the southern reaches of the empire. Lavish taverns and inns dot the waterfront, ready to cater to visiting sea devil allies or the rare human smuggler willing to chance a visit to a city where he is considered a culinary delicacy. Pleisaurans call the lake home; their settlements built upon the lake bottom, where they farm huge kelp beds and raise hundreds of tons of shellfish every year.

The lake is also purported to be the legendary resting place of the God Kassegore, who supposedly threw himself from the heavens; the crater created from his impact forming the lake. This legend has yet to be proven, for this body of water is so deep that there are regions that even the pleisaurans have yet to explore.

Lüss River

Another tributary of the Kraldjur River, the Lüss River is a sluggish when compared to the other waterways within the Morass. The river is barely navigable, as its clogged with patches of sawgrass so thick that the waterway seems to disappear completely in places. Oddly, rather than draining out into the Pale Sea, the Lüss River sputters out and ends in a small lake. Explorers found this odd, as the size of the lake doesn't account for the amount of water emptying into it. They eventually discovered that the eastern edge of the lake bottom has a fissure opening up into the Endless Dark. In that underground environment, the waters of the Lüss River create a spectacular waterfall as it falls into an enormous lake below.

Important Features

Eeljit

Population: 57,000 (38% iguadon, 12% ssanu, 49% ss'ressen, 1% other)

Once the home of the Flaming Tongue egg clutch, Eeljit was given to the Long Claw ss'ressen soon after their creation. The Flaming Tongue had fallen in disfavor long before and were eventually relocated to the Northern Foothills. Since then, the once bright and colorful city has become muted, as if covered in an oily film. This is due to these ss'ressen's practice of burning a rare plant known as the *hunik root* from almost every street corner and home. It is said that the plant's vapors is what allows the Long Claw to mimic other egg clutch's so perfectly, though many dispute this tale. Regardless of the effect on them, the sooty, black residue coats every surface of the city, turning the red and orange hues that once graced the buildings to a dark grey.

Eeljit is also the smallest of the ss'ressen cities in population, due to both the relatively few number of years since the egg clutch's creation and the fact that the naga emperor has them infiltrating every egg clutch and iguadon population, both within and outside the empire, seeking out treasonous plots and heresies against the varn.

Given that it was the gift of the varn deity Sipta that allowed the biomancers of Pit Aspis to engineer the Long Claws, it's no surprise that the varn temple located in Eeljit is dedicated to that deity. Sacrifices are made on moonless nights, where captives, or slaves if necessary, are drained of their life force, their desiccated husks not even fit for the worms to feed upon. Those who channel arcane power are greatly prized as sacrifices to Sipta, leading the Long Claws to butt heads with Harvesters when hunting the gifted throughout the Known Lands.

Fallen Cognatus

The shadowy and mist filled ruins of the former city of the Dark Crest egg clutch are now home to arm-long carnivorous worms and a Barbed Tail garrison, though something else haunts these cracked and broken streets. With the escape of the Black Talon ss'ressen, the brutal Barbed Tail descended upon their second targets with a vengeance. This time, the traitors to the empire would be exterminated to last, with special attention being paid to the hatcheries and breeding age females, to ensure their complete extermination. With the Dark Crest's ability to bear future generations eradicated, their executioners turned their attention to the rest of the population. The heavy fighting devastated the city. Under a withering and frenzied assault, the last Dark Crests fell. In a final act of degradation, the bodies of the fallen were impaled throughout the streets, offerings to the flocks of crows so vast, that their arrival was signaled by the blotting out of the sun.

Never one to leave a resource unused, the empire's military use Fallen Cognatus as a training facility, training their troops in proper urban tactics. The population swelling and ebbing with the needs of the ssethric military commanders. Losses in these exercises are inevitable, but it is during the times when the soldiers of the garrison are the lone inhabitants, that the casualties climb alarmingly. The reasons for the deaths and disappearances are usually attributed to carelessness or natural predators, but even the staid Barbed Tail whisper of shadow demons stalking the dead streets or the ghosts of the massacred Dark Crests taking their vengeance. These suspicions are never spoken of loudly and certainly never to a superior officer, but with each cycle of unexplained deaths, being sent to Fallen Cognatus is viewed not a as a routine posting, but as a death sentence.

Ky'usk

Population: 350,000 (17% iguadon, 12% ssanu, 69% ss'ressen, 2% other)

A veritable assault upon the senses, the city of Ky'usk is a mélange of different architectural styles, colors, and shapes. Walls jut out at strange angles, some made of wood, while others, for no discernable reason, are made of stone or crystal. The concept of city planning is foreign to the designers of Ky'isk, as buildings are strewn throughout the landscape as if they were all collected into a bag and then shaken out, left where they fell. Roads start and stop abruptly, with it being said that one cannot travel in a straight line more than a yards in Ky'usk. This is the home of the Barbed Tail egg clutch, and the city's chaotic nature is due to the zealous embrace of these ss'ressen to the state religion, specifically that of the varn God of Chaos, Zedok.

Having the largest population of any other ss'ressen city, Ky'usk is one of the largest cities of the empire overall, a reward for the many years of fanatical devotion to not only the naga regime, but to the varn. Unsurprisingly, other than in the capital city of Sseth, there are more varn living here than elsewhere in the empire. Likewise, the largest varn temple dedicated to the Chaos Lord is located deep within the city, serving as both a religious center and the administrative hub. Both the Barbed Tail's Mother Matriarch and warlord call the temple home.

The naga emperor also uses Ky'usk as a form of punishment, sending those who displease him or fail the empire to Ky'usk. There, they are guided to the Temple of Zedok in the center of the maze like city and told that should they reach the city's edge, all transgressions will be forgiven. Thus far, no one has survived the gauntlet of blood-thirsty Barbed Tails.

Sseth, the Imperial Capital

Details on this city can be found on page 48.

Vy'lak

Population: 78,000 (22% iguadon, 53% ssanu, 24% ss'ressen, 1% other)

The home of the ssanu Pit Sseth since the founding of the Ssethregoran Empire, Vy'lak was given to Pit Aspis by the ruling naga as a reward for their assistance in overthrowing the former regime during the coup. Siding with the naga propelled the Pit's status to the pinnacle of ssethric society, but also made them a target of almost every other ssanu pit. The paranoia fostered by the numerous assassinations and plots to topple them from favor that is evident in Vy'lak, now known as the City of Without Secrets. Pit Aspis petitioned the imperial court for permission to breed a greater number of psionicists than normally permitted by the Coiled Throne. These additional psions are positioned throughout the city, constantly scanning the thoughts of its inhabitants for treasonous intent. Pit Aspis inquisitors are the most effective of that dreaded group due to their intense training and experience in sifting through the minds of hundreds of ssethrics a day.

Another prize taken from Pit Sseth upon their ouster is the Black Coil tower in Vy'lak, the Tower of Mysteries. Second only to the Black Tower of Ssatsaya in the capital in both size and prestige, this tower focuses on psionic experimentation and development. It is also said to house one of the few existing specimens of the half-men abominations that allowed the ancient ssanu to unlock the secrets of the mind. The creature's preserved body is contained within a glass tube containing a nutrient bath that keeps the thousands of years old cadaver from rotting away.

The Endless Dark

The Endless Dark is the empire's secret weapon against the other races. Excavated by the beetle-like il'Huan who lived deep within the bowels of the continent long ago, they expanded their empire, by using this extensive network of tunnels, cutting under mountains and sending tendrils that today exists under almost every major city of the surface world. This expansive network of twisting passages, caverns, and underground rivers fell into the hands of the Yahssremoran Empire after their long and brutal War of Extinction against the il'Huan. The Ssethregorans inherited this underground network upon the reestablishment of a ssethric empire after Yahssremore's fall.

Much of the Endless Dark remains largely unexplored and unknown to the surface dwellers who have only a vague notion of its existence. The ssethrics once claimed the entirety of the Endless Dark as spoils of war but today only control a very small portion of the entire network, primarily the portion that runs under the Fellglade, Kraldjur Morass, the Altherian Peninsula, and parts of the Coryani Empire. They use this massive system as a clandestine underground highway, able to ship troops and goods anywhere in the empire without having to clear paths through the thick jungle overhead. This network of passages works perfectly for the scaly denizens of the swamp, for as long as they control the Endless Dark, they can easily move about, but anyone trying to invade overland would have to spend an unimaginable amount of time and resources cutting trails through the impenetrable jungles of the Morass. Most ssethric cities have access nearby to an opening into the excavated tunnels below.

Control of the Endless Dark is being contested by a new adversary that roams its depths, beings of hate and destruction known to the varn as the Sil'hais, or to the ssethrics as the servants of Oblivion. These beings spread

quickly through the lightless depths, taking control of much of the old tunnel system and creating new byways of their own. The Ssethregorans are in a constant state of war with this race, fighting a grinding war of attrition. It is because of this conflict, spanning nearly nine hundred years, that the empire's holdings in the Endless Dark has been reduced to a fraction of what the ancient Yahssremoran Empire once controlled.

Important Features

Delendas

Population: 100,000 (13% iguadon, 28% ssanu, 58% ss'ressen, 1% other)

Delendas is arguably the most unique city of the Ssethregoran Empire, as from afar, the underground city appears like a huge maw, yawning open and ready to snap upon any invaders. This impression is made due to the city's structures built both on the ground and above on the roof of the enormous cavern in which it sits. Towers hang like stalactites from the upper portion of Delendas, serving as defensive emplacements from which arrows, ballistae, and sorcery can rain down on the enemy. The bottom portion of the city spans across the entire width of the cavern in which its located, acting as a gateway to the main network that runs beneath the ssethric empire. Geographically, Delendas lies just southwest of Lake Khess, and though technically under the Northern Foothills section of the empire, it falls under the control of Pit Coasca, rather than Pit Sseth. The militaristic ssanu command a vast coalition of different ssethrics, with almost every species of the empire represented in the ranks of soldiers and sorcerers tasked to defend the city.

Delendas' battered walls are pitted and scored by the numerous attacks launched against it by the creatures known as the Voiceless Ones and other servants of Oblivion, yet Delendas has never fallen. For centuries it has stood defending not only the empire, but the unwitting surface dwellers that would fall easily if not for the ssethric's sacrifice.

The Northern Foothills

The Northern Foothills encompass a region spanning from the Vremi River in the east to the contested shores of Lake Khess to the northwest. It's northern border abuts the foot of the Luriane Mountains from which rises the Altherian Plateau, its southern at the Kraldjur River. Rolling hills and crags, forested with a mixture of deciduous trees and dark conifers, characterize this region. Tall proud oaks and maples grace the valleys, while half-starved firs and hemlock eke out sustenance among the rocky heights. Dense layers of scrub bushes and briars coat the forest floor, with thickets extending for leagues along the banks of the Kraldjur River. Animals and beasts of all types roam throughout these hills, from wild deer and hogs, to herds of wild mor'let stalking the forested valleys. Escapees from the empire's cruel machinations hide within this area, with more than one explorer of this region meeting a slow death at the talons of an outcast. The entire area is under the jurisdiction of Pit Sseth and their rule is enforced by the Emerald Scale ss'ressen who call this region home. The Northern Foothills are also the main front in any conflict

with the Altherian Republic and the Abessian Dominion and is therefore constantly patrolled. It is said that no one sets foot within this region without an unblinking eye of a ssethric firmly locked upon them.

Major Geographical Features

Sakress River

A tributary of the mighty Kraldjur River, the Sakress River travels east at a languidly pace. Converging with the Vremi River, it feeds Lake Dororan, a significant site of the Old Religion, particularly holy to Yig. The Sakress can be used to quickly transport troops to the eastern flank of the Luriane Mountains during any assault against Altheria, specifically the large Shining Patrol fort located in the lower foothills.

Lake Dororan

The third largest lake within the Ssethregoran Empire, Lake Dororan was once held as holy ground by the Old Religion, said to be the site where the gods Kassegore and Yig mated, producing the titanic serpents known as the Daughters of Yig. Its ancient temple and shrines torn down by the ruling regime and replaced by a fane dedicated to the Varn Pantheon, the hatching of the giant serpents is now deemed to be of a strictly secular nature. Gone are the old religious trappings and fertility festivals that once seethed across the lake's islands, replaced with a mundane drudgery designed to inspire no one.

On the two main islands, Myrq and Lyrl, large hatcheries are maintained for the enormous snakes who instinctually return to mate and produce the next generation of terrors. The Emerald Scale ss'ressen tend to the serpents and their eggs, nurturing the hatchlings during the four years needed for them to become adults. The Emerald Scale attendees secretly still perform the old rituals of the Yiggite religion, bestowing blessings upon the serpents during their mating period, and upon their offspring. This must be done without the attendees of the varn temple, a pair of wizened Razor Claw ss'ressen priestesses, from uncovering their acts.

Lake Khess

Lake Khess is the ending point for the mighty Kuthré River as it pours off the Altherian Plateau. Its cool clear waters are said to be bottomless, for the lake extends deep into the bedrock of the earth. Acting as a massive natural drain, the waters of Lake Khess pour deep below the surface, where they form the headwaters of the Kusarnth River. The Kusarnth River, an entirely subterranean extension of the Kuthré River, flows due southwest and empties into the Bay of Laran through subsurface vents. The lake itself acts as a conduit, allowing the aquatic pleisaurans to travel from the warm coastal waters to the lake without crossing overland. Deep within the lake, the pleisauran population farm huge kelp beds and raise a myriad of cool water delicacies, such as pike, catfish and a unique species of monstrous crab. The giant catfish of Lake Khess are a prized delicacy within the empire and the ss'ressen will go to great lengths to acquire them.

Once uncontested as part of the empire, Lake Khess is now claimed by the Abessian Dominion, who view its waters as within their territory. This led to a brief period of open warfare between the two nations, but given that this occurred during the fiercest period of war against the Entaran elorii and the Altherians, few resources were expended to reinforce the ssethric claim to the body of water. Instead, diplomats from both sides agreed that the waters would be used by both peoples and that the lands up to the shore to the south remained under the control of the empire, while that of the north would be acknowledged as belonging to the Abessians. Ever able to turn a setback into an asset, the ssethrics use Lake Khess to smuggle their Yissera infiltrators into the Dominion.

Luriane Mountains

The most prominent feature of this region is the foothills of the Luriane Mountains from which rises the Altherian Plateau. These hills are rich with mineral deposits, prompting the Altherians and Ssethregorans to constantly battle over the richest veins of ore. From this region alone the ssethrics acquire more than half of its iron and silver ore, most of which is sent to the ss'ressen forges or the naga coffers. Battles over this region are bitter, with both sides sending excursions into the other's territory in search of new deposits or a chance to raid enemy supplies.

Thellis Hills

These rolling hills are situated on the eastern shores of the Kuthré River and are prized for their deposits of copper ore, which are readily available in the soft loamy hillsides. The river weaves through the western edge of the knolls, its fast-flowing waters releasing precious gold and the rare gems from the earth's grasp. The Thellis Hills are the northernmost point controlled by the empire and consequently the most heavily targeted by human raids and the Shining Patrol of Altheria. For a region so deeply engulfed in conflict, the Ssethregoran hold is remarkably strong, due to the subterranean connections, which allows them to re-supply the region quickly, efficiently, and most importantly, in secret.

Both sides have established forts in the hills to defend their holdings. Then largest Altherian outpost is Fort N'begga, located on the eastern side of the escarpment.

Manned by hardened veterans of the Shining Patrol, the fort has been assaulted numerous times over the decades. The current commander, General Duwlti, leads from the front lines and has personally slain many ssethric attackers, including an Agamassi ss'ressen in personal combat. This has made the general a folk-hero of the Shining Patrol and a target for the Ssethregoran Empire. The naga emperor has placed a bounty on the mammal, offering preferred mating rights and a chest of precious gems to whoever brings him the human's head.

Vremi River

The Vremi River marks the boundary between the Eastern Rainforest and Northern Foothills sectors of the Ssethregoran Empire. Another tributary of the grand Kraldjur River, this river converges with the Sakress River twice, once at Lake Dororan and again further east.

Though not fed by snow melt, the waters of this river are chillingly cold, leading many to name it the River of the Dead. Ironically, the northern portion of the river was the site of a small, but bloody uprising by ssanu and other ssethrics, against the naga coup. It marked the only time when the varn interceded militarily in ssethric affairs in large numbers. Along with the ssanu of Pit Coasca and Aspis, the varn's intervention turned what could have become a protracted civil war into a week-long massacre. By the end of it, the floating bodies of the rebellious ssethric were so numerous, it was said that one could travel down the river's course without getting wet.

Important Features

Amurshana

Population: 63,000 (21% iguadon, 47% ssanu, 30% ss'ressen, 2% other)

Amurshana, the City of Dragons, once the ancestral home of the ssanu of Pit Maliss, is now home to those of Pit Sseth. In an effort to keep the various ssanu pits from allying against their new regime, the naga played one against the other, forcing them to occupy each other's home, while blaming the move on the other Pit. Citing pressure exerted by Pit Sseth and implying that they used blackmail and threats to acquire Amurshana, the naga enflamed the rivalry between the two Pits. Expertly playing upon the rivalries of the groups of ssanu against each other, the thought of them establishing a coalition against the naga became absurd.

Amurshana's infrastructure consists of three massive rings of well-fortified circular walls that segregate the city's population. The outer ring houses the iguadons, slave pits, food markets, and entertainment districts (fighting pits, gambling dens, etc.), while the second ring contains all the military structures, guilds, offices, and businesses run within the city. The innermost ring is the original citadel and home to the ssanu of Pit Sseth and members of the naga of House Taricha. These naga, as well as visiting varn dignitaries, are there to keep watch over the manipulative ssanu of Pit Sseth, scrutinizing their actions for any signs of heresy or insurrection.

Besides the blow to their pride when they lost the city, the ssanu of Pit Maliss lost access to the dragon breeding grounds nearby. The nearby hills are riddled with caves that are the natural nesting place for the drakes. With the brooding period of these great beasts exceeding a year, their care and feeding of these creatures was an honor bestowed upon Pit Maliss by the first Ssethregoran Emperor, an honor they now believed was stolen from them by Pit Sseth. The care and instruction of drakes in the art of warfare is a time consuming endeavor, one which has drained the resources of the Pit considerably, though they are richly rewarded when a fully trained one is delivered. Recently, the varn have taken an interest in 'perfecting' the great beasts further, seeking to expose the incubating eggs to the chaotic power of Zedok. Thus far, no viable eggs have survived contact with the power, but the varn are determined to succeed.

Chelydra

Population: 16,000 (30% iguadon, 11% ssanu, 44% ss'ressen, 15% other)

The outpost of Chelydra resides along the southern shore of Lake Khess and is one of the oldest settlements in the empire. Once under the control of Pit Maliss, Chelydra is now administered by Pit Sseth and acts as place where the most desperate of slavers and smugglers trafficking in non-ssethric goods and human slaves pass into the empire. Prior to the Abessian uprising and establishment of a new nation secretly controlled by heretic ssanu and other ssethrics, Chelydra has become a place of clandestine meetings, where the trade of information and assassination are the most sought after commodity.

The imposing red granite citadel and other structures of Chelydra were constructed using blocks dug from the nearby Thellis Hills. The fortress is squat and massive, its thick walls extending deep into the earth. Garrisoned at all times by Emerald Scale ss'ressen, iguadons, and Pit Sseth sorcerers and officers, the fortress has repelled every assault launched against it by the mammals in the last five centuries.

One of the most unique features of Chelydra is the bazaar held in a tent city outside its walls where human smugglers and slave traders are allowed to present their wares to the throngs of reptilian buyers that flock there every few weeks. Remarkably, the human scum allowed to conduct business in the area left unmolested, carrying amber and other rare treasures coveted in the highest human courts. Chelydra is one of the few places in the empire where free humans are tolerated.

Since the establishment of the Abessian Dominion, travel by slavers and other traders overland has become more difficult, with the Abessians interdicting any commodities entering the empire. Smuggling across the waters of Lake Khess is rampant, though it has become so difficult to convey a large enough quantity of goods to make the ordeal worthwhile. Many instead use the trading port of Maldruga along the southern coast of the empire to trade their illicit wares.

Duriss Tower

A relic of an older age, the ruins of Duriss Tower stand atop the highest peak of the Thellis Hills. Legend has it that the ssanu elementalist Ss'kang constructed the tower three thousand years ago as an isolated location where the old serpent could practice his dark arts and summon creatures from the very bones of the earth. One night, as his experimentation neared fruition, something went awry within the tower. Whether it was a mistake of Ss'kang or the interference of a rival Black Coil sorcerer is unknown, but Duriss Tower exploded in a great gout of green flame visible from the walls of Veriss. Whatever the reason, the explosion unleashed all manner of creatures from the elemental plane of earth upon the region, where they remain, bound inexorably to the ruined husk of the old tower.

Rumor has it that Ss'kang's moldering tomes contain the arcane rituals required to contact a myriad of different planes aligned around the prime elemental plane of earth. For those whose avarice outstrips their mystic curiosity, there is said to be a realm where head-sized precious gems of all sorts lie strewn across this realm in plain sight. Others who wish to continue their mastery over the elements seek the tomes for their esoteric knowledge and would pay handsomely for anyone braving the raging earth elementals surrounding the tower and liberating a few of the Duriss' tomes.

Snosretep's Tavern

Perhaps the oddest place within Chelydra is Snosretep's Tavern. An eatery where soft-hides can come and go freely without fear of ending up as an item on the menu or at the end of a slave chain.

Formerly run by a gnome by the same name, Snosretep's Tavern caters to the human riff-raff and other scum that wash into the outpost, carrying illegal contraband for sale. Located directly on the waterfront, Snosretep's Tavern is considered a safe haven for smugglers that are looking to turn a profit by selling certain common goods in human lands that are considered treasures in Ssethregoran society. For merchants brave and unscrupulous enough to deal with their ssethric clientele, the profits can be astronomical. Anyone wishing to trade may either stay on with their caravan or seek out the relative comfort of a bed in Snosretep's Tavern.

Snosretep's is also a wretched hideout for criminals wanted in human lands and a meeting place for slave traders and seedy merchants alike. It is said anything can be bought or sold over the scratched wooden tables of Snosretep's and more than one life has changed hands there over a mere bag of coins.

Since the drop-off of trade crossing Lake Khess, things are relatively quiet at the tavern. Snosretep's grandchild, a gnome by the same name has taken drastic steps to buoy his fortunes. While fugitives are welcome in the tavern, they are no longer safe, as the small gnomish clan here now waylays and sells them to the ssethrics as slaves or for the larder. Rumors of this practice has circulated, creating a dearth of outlaws willing to risk hiding here. To counter this, the enterprising gnomes now travel throughout the Known Lands, seeking out others of their kind, promising them a safe haven, free from prejudice and persecution. The fact that Snosretep and his clan are preying on their own kind seems not to trouble the amoral gnome in the slightest.

Telith

Population: 32,500 (28% iguadon, 10% ssanu, 61% ss'ressen, 1% other)

The city of Telith is located on the mighty Kraldjur River and is currently the home of the Flaming Tongue ss'ressen egg clutch. These ss'ressen once lived in the jungles of the Eastern Rainforest, but were driven out of their ancestral home of Eeljit as punishment for their involvement in the short-lived rebellion shortly after the naga coup. With their proud city now in the talons of the Long Claw egg clutch, the ss'ressen were eventually reunited with Pit Sseth, themselves ousted from the rainforest and forced to relocate in the Northern Foothills.

Over the years, the Flaming Tongue ss'ressen constructed an impressive citadel to fortify their new home against Altherian raiders. Slowly, the city has taken on characteristics that were once unique to Eeljit, with the ubiquitous round buildings of Telith now painted in bright reds, yellows, and oranges. Fire sculptures crafted by Flaming Tongue sorcerers adorn every open square, though ssethric inquisitors posted in the city ensure that the works of art either venerate the varn or the naga rulers. Though centuries have passed since the uprising, the Flaming Tongue's population remains low, as the naga regime refuses to lift their edict of how many eggs may be hatched. Barbed Tail inquisitors delight in devouring the excess in front of the assembled matriarchs, as a reminder of their past generation's transgressions. Pit Sseth has petitioned the emperor to redress the loss of their subordinate egg clutch's ouster from their ancestral lands, as well as the artificially low birth rate, but thus far neither the naga nor the varn seem inclined to change the policy.

Veriss

Population: 160,000 (27% iguadon, 10% ssanu, 62% ss'ressen, 1% other)

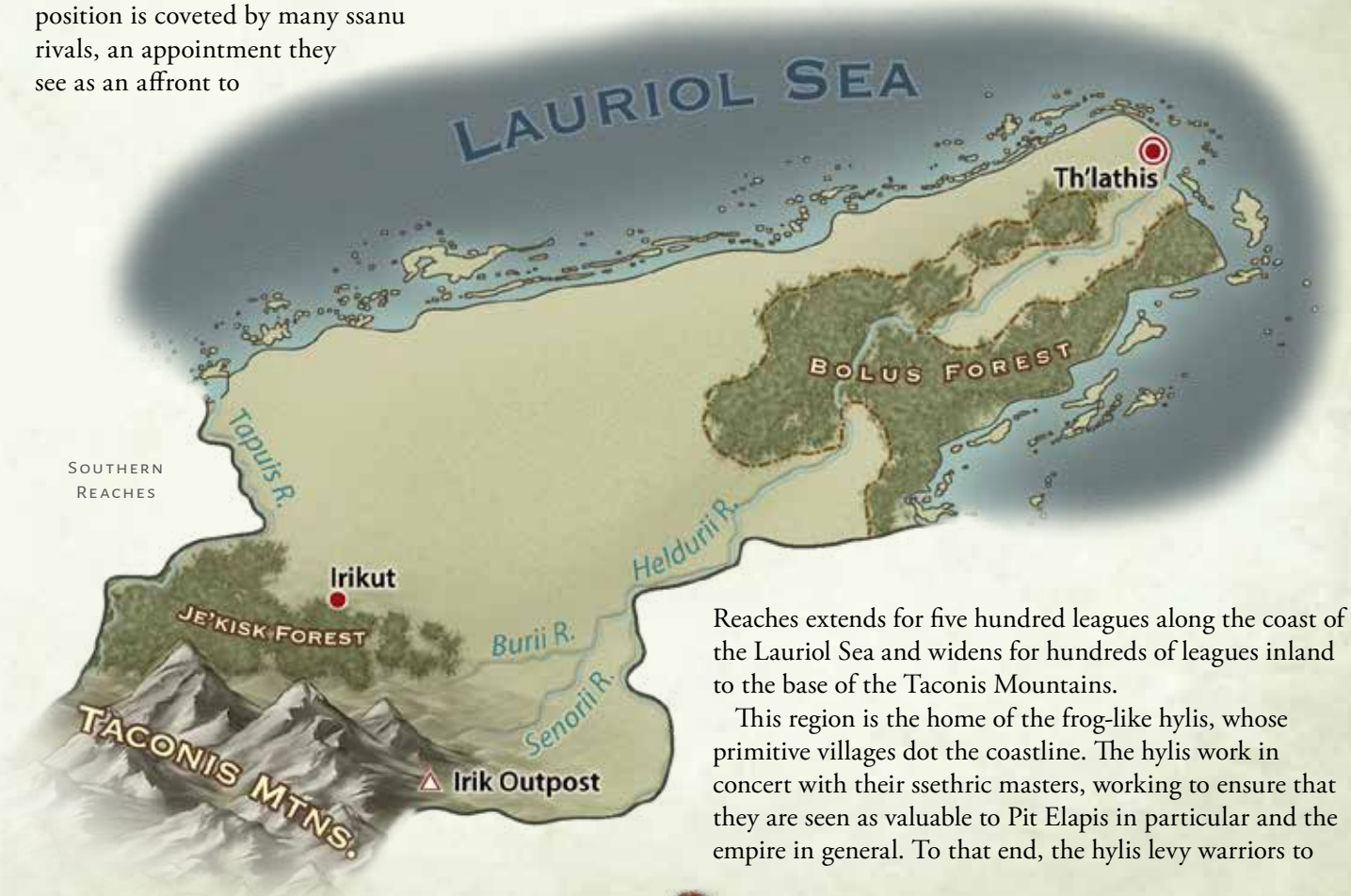
Located on the junction between the Kraldjur and Sakress rivers, Veriss retains the honor of being the second largest ss'ressen city in the empire. From its position on the river, it controls the gateway into the Northern Foothills and regulates all traffic flowing into that region from more southerly locales. The city's massive fortress is built from granite blocks dug from the nearby Luriane Mountains and dragged into place by thousands of toiling slaves.

While under the auspices of the ssanu of Pit Sseth, Veriss is the ancestral home of the Emerald Scales ss'ressen, having founded the city as a military outpost five thousand years ago, to protect against the elorii strikes after the fall of Yahssremore. Though they bow and scrape at the coils of their naga and ssanu lords, the Emerald Scales are the true rulers of Veriss, managing every aspect of the mighty city's existence.

The current High Matriarch Mother, Xantusia, governs the city while her warlord, Overlord Dracaena, maintains the defense and marshals the military force within its walls. Currently, Dracaena is the only ss'ressen to hold the rank of Overlord, commander of all ssethric forces within the empire, a position he earned through conquest and his exceptional tactical skills. Overlord Dracaena's position is coveted by many ssanu rivals, an appointment they see as an affront to their virtual monopoly over the highest ranks within the Ssethregoran military. His position also draws undisguised hatred from warlords of other egg clutches, especially the Barbed Tail generals, who are required to take orders from their higher-ranking counterpart. The militaristic ssanu of Pit Coasca appear to agree with the elevation of Dracaena to the position, as they have benefited from his genius strategies in defending the city of Delendas in the Endless Dark from the agents of Oblivion. From the high towers of Veriss, the High Matriarch Mother carefully watches over her egg clutch, seeing those secretly adhering to the Old Religion and those that have embraced the ways of the varn, among them Overlord Dracaena. She fears that the time may soon come when these two incompatible ideologies will clash and spell the doom of one or the other.

The Southern Reaches

The Southern Reaches portion of the empire lies across the Lauriol Sea in a wild and fell land untouched by the humans and elorii. This pristine grassland contains lacks the dense foliage of its northern counterpart, but enjoys just as much variety in the flora and fauna. The Southern Reaches extends for five hundred leagues along the coast of the Lauriol Sea and widens for hundreds of leagues inland to the base of the Taconis Mountains.



This region is the home of the frog-like hylis, whose primitive villages dot the coastline. The hylis work in concert with their ssethric masters, working to ensure that they are seen as valuable to Pit Elapis in particular and the empire in general. To that end, the hylis levy warriors to

garrison the various outposts in the area, fighting off the gar raiders, and the occasional elorii explorer from far-off Entaris. Here can also be found the enslaved creatures, the shell-backs, toiling away under the whip of their amphibian taskmasters.

Recently, a series of attacks upon a few outlying villages has sent shockwaves throughout the region. Each and every inhabitant of the small villages were not only killed, but there are apparent signs that they were fed upon by creatures with bone crunching jaws. Captured gar speak fearfully of a crocodile that walks upright and uses weapons. The Curled Tail ss'ressen scoff at these babbling savages, but the elder ssanu of Pit Elapis shiver at the stories and wonder, have the mythic chordata returned?

Major Geographical Features

Bolus Forest

Located just south of the city of Th'lathis, the Bolus Forest is covered in a mist woven shroud during the evenings and early morning hours, before the unrelenting heat of the sun burns it away. The Heldurii River runs through the forest on its way to the sea. The Bolus Forest is characterized by a variety of tall hardwood trees, devoid of branches for the greater part of their height and with their spreading crowns forming a luxuriant evergreen canopy at a height of 100 feet or more above the forest floor. The understory reaches a height of 30 feet, its thick foliage intertwined with vines and bryophytes. The forest floor is left relatively clear, populated by a thick layer of fallen leaves and detritus, interspersed with the occasional rotting trunk. Between the boles of the forest giants are patches of shrubs and bushes overhanging secluded streams meandering their way through the forest. Okapi and tapir root through the debris, feeding on fallen fruits and dodging the toothy maws of reptilian predators that roam this wilderness. The eastern portion of the forest abuts a long strip of marshy wetlands, that extends around the entire coastline.

The ssethrics are slowly clearing this once unspoiled wilderness, as the dark wood harvested from these large trees is in high demand in the empire. Colorful birds and tan colored deer live within the forest, as well as a humanoid species very similar in form, intelligence, and temperament as the trolls of the Vastwood before they were enhanced by the biomancers of the Black Coil. These thick-skinned trolls are very difficult to find, as the creatures flee long before a hunting party comes across their primitive encampments.

Heldurii River System

Comprised of three rivers, the Heldurii River system is a large triangular expanse of shallow flooded bogs created where it, the Burii, and the Sonorii rivers descend from the Taconis Mountains, cutting across the grasslands to plunge into the sea just east of Th'lathis. The two smaller rivers merge with the enormous Heldurii River, creating treacherous rapids that have claimed many lives. After a short drop in elevation, the river becomes relatively placid, supplying the city of Th'lathis with fresh water as well as being a convenient highway for transporting shipments of ores and timber from the mountains to the south.

Je'kisk Forest

This pristine forest is botanically rich in tree species and biological productivity, housing hundreds of different types of birds, reptiles, mammals, amphibians, and plant life. Brightly colored hornbills flit through the forest preying upon secretive frogs, which in turn fall prey to the crushing coils of emerald boas, or other scaly predators.

Within the Je'kisk Forest live the savage Gar Ichanti, an off-shoot of the gar primitives encountered by the ssethrics millennia ago far to the north. This tribe of gar are very aggressive and view the encroachment of the ssethrics into the mountains as an invasion of their territory. The small raids mounted by an individual gar families are more of a nuisance than a true threat, though that has changed of late. A charismatic shaman has galvanized the gar to work together to repulse the ssethrics. Iguadons have reported sighting creatures resembling the shell-backs directing gar warrior bands during attacks. The ssanu of Pit Elapis scoff at the thought of the painfully docile slaves having the nerve to lift a claw against them and dismiss these tales out of hand.

Taconis Mountains

The Taconis Mountains are part of the Ssethregoran Empire by decree and acts as its most southern border. In this case, the ssethic's claim is greater than its reach, as the empire currently only holds the northern slopes of these ancient cones with a single outpost. Partially volcanic, the entire range is rich in iron ore and seeded with dozens of other important mineral deposits, including magnesium, copper, and zinc. The Curled Tail ss'ressen control the slave camps that work these mines. The dangerous vapors of the area, combined with the shifting earth, make tunneling in the Taconis Range hazardous, but slaves are relatively cheap and plentiful.

The ssethrics have met with opposition in their mining efforts as a tribe of humanoids known as the Gar Ichanti have gathered en masse under a charismatic shaman. The gar are aided in their attacks by brutish giants and another group of large humanoids similar to the trolls of the Vastwood. The raids are launched from their villages in

the Je'kisk Forest, harrying ssethric outposts and attacking supply trains. The dense forest makes discovering the gar settlements difficult and the Curled Tail warlord has proposed burning the entire woodlands down, though cooler heads from Pit Elapis have prevented such rash actions from being implemented.

The Tapuis River

The Tapuis River's headwaters arise out of the Taconis Mountains and cuts through the western portion of the Je'kisk Forest on its way to the sea. The cool waters passing under the forest canopy are home to a group of undines, mischievous water spirits that frolic and play in the river. These undines are friendly to the gar and their allies, though they can be quite murderous to those that would despoil the forest or harm those that curry their favor. Somewhere within the shallow depths of the Tapuis River is a gateway to one of the elemental planes of water that the undines are able to call forth protectors to aid them should they be attacked. A hunting party of Curled Tail ss'ressen came across the water spirits and were confronted by a spear carrying warriors whose skin shimmered like water and rose out of the water to attack them. One of the ss'ressen managed to escape through the forest. The remains of his fellows floated down river days later, their corpses showing signs of being punctured innumerable times, as well as mastication.

Important Features

Irik Outpost

Population: 100 (30% iguadon, 20% ssanu, 50% ss'ressen)

Positioned upon an outcropping adjacent to the entrance of the main mining entrance, Irik Outpost is a small compared to other ssethric structures of a similar nature. Garrisoned within the fort are fifty heavily armed Curled Tail ss'ressen, thirty iguadon warriors, a score of Pit Elapis ssanu, and enough kobold slaves to tend to their needs. Though the ssethrics have dug numerous tunnels in the northernmost mountain of the Taconis Mountains, the fort is situated so that its soldiers can respond to an attack at any one of the mines within minutes.

The stone walls surrounding the outpost are crafted from stones carved from the mountain, a greyish rock with blue veins of minerals running throughout. Thus far, its thick stone has withstood several attacks launched by the gar and their savage allies.

Irikut

Population: 155,000 (12% iguadon, 13% ssanu, 74% ss'ressen, 1% other)

The city of Irikut differs from any of the other ss'ressen enclaves throughout the northern portion of the empire in that it is built to incorporate the large trees of the Bolus Forest into its architecture. When first founded, refined metal was a precious commodity and the imaginative ssethrics turned to what resources were plentiful. Biomancers bioengineered some of the trees to reinforce the stone of the walls that surround the city, acting like the metal reinforcing bars used in the other cities of the empire. This suited the city's primary inhabitants, as the Curled Tail ss'ressen are as comfortable in the trees as they are on the ground.

Irikut is not a splendorous or elegant city as Sseth or many of the other cities in the empire, but it does have a rustic grandeur all its own. Rather than the ubiquitous round towers found elsewhere, the ss'ressen dwell high up in the upper canopy of the forest, the thick tree branches acting as their home's foundations. The city of the Curled Tails does have certain structures common throughout the empire. Besides the thick protective walls, a temple to the Varn Pantheon was erected in the city's center, along with a citadel that acts as a final defensive bulwark against invaders breaching the outer wall.

Never an over religious people, the Curled Tail bow and sing the hymns required of them by the varn, then quickly forget about these foreign gods. A small number of the ss'ressen were identified as yearning for spiritual guidance by iguadon members of the Cult of Hromu and were slowly and quietly seduced back to the religion of the Old Gods. Deep in the Bolus Forest, a small shrine to Kassegore hums with songs of the old faith. Each time the service is held, the gathering grows larger. Thus far, the activities of this cult have gone unnoticed, but as the number of faithful swells, it will not be long before inquisitors begin to investigate.

Th'lathis

Population: 55,000 (3% hylis, 26% iguadon, 8% pleisauran, 36% ssanu, 26% ss'ressen, 1% other)

Th'lathis is the largest ssethric city in the Southern Reaches. Located at the mouth of the Heldurii River, the city lies southwest across the Lauriol Sea from its sister city of Anuliss. This southern city is responsible for the shipping of raw ore and lumber across the sea to the main cities in the northern part of the empire. Ruled by the ssanu of Pit Elapis, Th'lathis controls one of the most strategic points in the empire, for its location guards the entrance to the Lauriol Sea. None pass through that body of water without falling under the gaze of these ssanu overlords. The waters between the Th'lathis and Anuliss are patrolled by biremes and triremes, as well as the strange cargo ships made out of equal parts conch shells and mud that the hylis seem to favor. Sleek attack ships delight in running down merchant ships from Altheria and the League of Princes, though scatter when

convoys are escorted by warships of these nations. Given an equally wide berth are the ships from the Black Fleet of Ymandragore, who prey upon the ssethrics when given the opportunity.

The circular rings that make up Th'lathis vary from the other cities in the empire due to Pit Elapis' fascination, some say obsession, with breeding a variety of animals, many trained to fight as part of the ssethric war machine. Pens holding smaller beasts, such as the mor'let, cyclura and the sc'math, take up almost half of the city's space. Larger beasts, such as the large oniscus, are kept outside the city, for fearing of the damage they would do should they get loose. Many visiting ssethrics complain that the entire area emits a musty, choking smell, and call the ssanu of Pit Elapis 'farmers', derisively comparing them to the soft-hide mammals who rut about in the ground. For their part, the ssanu here ignore their fellows from across the sea and concentrate on developing and training new horrors to swell the ranks of empire's beasts of war.

A tower of the Black Coil rises in the northern portion of Th'lathis, eclipsing the lighthouse just off the coast. Its sorcerers experiment on the diverse and unique biological diversity of this land, warping and twisting the biology of the flora and fauna found here. Of special interest are the trolls that live in the Je'kisk Forest. The biomancers wish to see if they can recreate and improve upon the Singarthan Trolls created millennia ago during the reign of the Yahssremoran Empire. Thus far, the very few samples they've obtained have not survived the biogenic vats, but the experimentation continues.

Far from the shores of the northern portion of Ssethregore, the ssanu of Pit Elapis are an isolated empire unto themselves. This protects them from any retribution many of their brethren suffer at the coil of the naga emperor and his court. Yet, the one thing they cannot be free from is the inculcation of the new state religion. It was not long before the varn began to arrive upon their shores, proselyting their faith, and brutality executing any who clung to the Old Gods. The varn were delighted to see their religion spread to another land and spent a large amount of resources to create a temple spire so high that it can be seen by ships sailing past on the Lauriol Sea. Being a practical people, the ssanu, as well as their bonded ss'ressen, the Curled Tail egg clutch, bowed and chanted when required, but otherwise paid the varn priests little mind.

Though not an overly religious, due to their affinity for animals of all kinds, it should be of no surprise that the majority of ssanu that join the Disciples of Jeggal Sag come from this Pit. Each generation, a dozen or more ssanu hear the calling and make the trek out to the sacred Mound of Jeggal Sag to take on His mantle.

Sseth, the Imperial Capital

Population: 1,600,000 (24% iguadon, 8% naga, 12% pleisauran, 29% ssanu, 24% ss'ressen, 3% other)

Sseth is the capital city of the Ssethregoran Empire. Founded by the great ssanu emperor Sseth, the city is a relic of a forgotten age. It demonstrates the magnificence of reptilian architecture, and is home to technology and wonders undreamt of by the younger races. From its impossibly high towers which stretch to the heavens, to the twisting tunnels burrowed deep into the roots of the earth, Sseth is an immense city without rival. Not even the fabled Ethelios or the marbled facades of Grand Coryan approach the perfect curves and architectural wonders that make up this wondrous city.

Sseth extends far below the surface, its foundations taking root in the Endless Dark. Underneath he city, mighty armies assemble and march into the perpetual gloom, traveling for hundreds of leagues on immense subterranean roads. These routes are the lifeblood of Sseth, for they allow troops and goods to be shipped from the capital to outlying provinces without worry of attack or the bother of having to cut and maintain surface roads in an environment that floods every spring. The tunnels themselves are sealed through alchemical means or pumped by massive screw pumps turned by tireless constructs to ensure they do not flood.

The city itself is designed around the strict pseudo-caste system of Ssethregoran society, and its architectural layout reflects this mindset. The city is a set of five concentric rings in the form of great black basalt walls, each ring housing one caste. The more important the ssethric, the nearer to the innermost ring they reside. The innermost ring is reserved solely for the opulent palace of the emperor, the emperor's extended family, imperial functionaries, and visiting dignitaries. The second ring protects the various naga households and ssanu pits, along with the Tower of Ssatsaya and various military centers. The third ring is home to the ss'ressen who chose to take up residence in Sseth, mainly the Barbed Tail egg clutch, and houses the Blood Pit, an arena twice the size of the arena of Grand Coryan. The fourth ring houses the iguadon's, as well as other ssethric allies, and acts as the mercantile district for the city. The outermost ring is where the slave and food pens, warehouse district, and other less savory aspects of ssethric life are located.

Sites of Interest in Sseth

Walls and Watchtowers

The black basalt walls of Sseth are magically reinforced and carefully maintained, with towers placed at regular intervals. The outer wall has two gates, the Glorious Gate to the north and the Trade Gate to the southwest. Each inner wall has a single main gate, and except for the innermost wall has many lesser gates both above and below ground. The innermost wall, surrounding the Imperial Ring, has only the Emperor's Gate. Should the city be attacked, each ring can seal its walls completely with technomantic locks and reinforcing spells, though this has never been necessary. Each tower contains an alarm system magically linked to other alarms throughout the city with focusing crystals that empower any psion or elder mage, allowing them to act as living artillery should the need arise. The walls are ancient and decorated with murals, bas-reliefs, and statues. Some of these statues serve as gutters, funneling rainfall outside the walls, or boiling oil and molten metal in case of attack. Other figures are enchanted to animate in the city's defense.

The walls separating the Merchant's Ring and Ss'ressen Ring are usually lightly guarded, with a dozen iguadons at each gate and occasional patrols walking the walls consisting of an iguadon squad led by a ss'ressen. The wall protecting the Noble Ring is more heavily guarded, with ss'ressen, usually Barbed Tails, at each gate who challenge anyone except naga or ssanu to show they have official business before entry. Guards led by ssanu keep watch in the towers and patrol the wall. The single gate of the innermost wall, the Emperor's Gate, is kept heavily guarded by a ss'ressen and ssanu honor guard. The outer wall of the city is the most heavily guarded, with frequent patrols along its length and every tower operated by a Black Coil sorcerer or psion.

Technomantic Spires

Irregularly placed throughout the city are obelisks of black basalt, laid out according to an arcane plan designed by the Black Coil. These are the most visible of the ssethric achievements in biomancy. Channels cut into the spires glow green as they direct magical energy throughout the city, powering its many fabulous machines and constructs from a central generation point. Among other things, these spires power alchemical lighting for the inner four rings of the city, both above and below ground. These lights are hued red to suit the reptilian eyes of the ssethric races, casting Sseth in a hellish glow.

The Scaled Road

The main road through the city is paved with semi-precious stones, alchemically treated to increase strength and repel dirt, resulting in a path that shimmers like iridescent scales. This road begins at the Glorious Gate and travels straight through the outer three rings of the city, ensuring ssanu and naga do not have to linger long among their lesser. After passing through the gate to the Noble Ring, it takes a spiral path around it before reaching the Emperor's Gate. Within the Imperial Ring, it takes another spiraling path before ending at the gate of the Grand Palace of Sseth.

The Catacombs

Deep below even the lowest levels of the city lay the catacombs, a sprawling expanse of tombs from a bygone age. Before the collapse of the Old Empire, it was common practice for the ssanu to entomb their mummified dead in lavish crypts. With the naga takeover of the of the Ssethregoran Empire, the varn practice of eating the revered dead was soon adopted. This repulsed the staid ssanu, who began implementing an elaborate deception that allowed them to continue to mummify their dead and bury them in hidden tombs and crypts far below the city. Inanimate guardians, such as golems, as well as devious traps were installed to protect the remains and deter discovery.

Imperial Ring

The innermost ring of Sseth is well named, for the emperor holds it for himself and his royal family, House Kahss. The walls of the ring, the highest and most lavishly decorated in the city, are by law impassible without the express permission of a naga of House Kahss. The ssanu of Pit Sseth originally designed the district for their comfort, but since the naga coup, House Kahss has been renovating it to suit their needs. Much to the consternation of many ssanu, this process destroyed most of the ancient palaces and works of art hearkening back to the earliest days of the empire, with the Grand Palace itself a notable exception. The underground palaces of this ring are the deepest in the city, extending as far down as possible without breaking through to the Endless Dark. At its center, the naga raised a gigantic temple to their new masters, the varn deities.

Grand Palace of Sseth

The Grand Palace of Sseth is perhaps one of the greatest edifices still standing upon Onara. Modeled after the Grand Seat of Yahssremore, the sprawling palace dwarfs all other known structures. Its size is enormous and the population of the staff alone is enough to call the palace a city in itself. Its true magnificence is in its architecture. Massive fluted columns sweep gracefully upwards to support the ceiling in intricate carved latticework archways and delicate statuary support seemingly impossible structural loads.

The true beauty of the Palace is its throne room, where the vaulted ceilings could easily accommodate a fleet of ships with their masts never touching the mother of pearl

inlaid ceiling. The floors are inlaid with intricate murals of lapis and turquoise, polished to a mirror's shine by the hand of countless slaves. The spiraling columns seem to reach up and embrace the ceiling, their cylindrical turnings carved to resemble massive serpents or great heroes and emperors of ssethric lore. Placed in the middle of the chamber is a fixture of pure opulence, for centered on an opulent raised dais, forever resides the Coiled Throne. A reconstruction of the original, the Coiled Throne is a bowl-like structure suited for the serpentine extremities of the ssanu (or naga). The entire structure is meticulously carved out of ivory and gold with inlaid large rubies for eyes. It is said the gems alone from the gold throne would be worth more than all the riches in Milandir combined.

The Varn Temple

As near to the center of the city as possible, the naga ordered constructed an immense, three-sided step pyramid to serve as the grand temple for the varn deities. Each of the three sides represent one of the varn gods, while its central region represents their united goal to elevate the ssethric people to the next stage in reptilian evolution. Unlike those found throughout the empire, this temple houses priests or *Speakers of Adulation*, as the varn refer to them, of all three of the varn gods. Other temples raised are consecrated to just one of the gods of the Varn Pantheon.

At the very top of the temple is a structure that resembles a ssethric portal or Ansharan Gate, but much larger in size. It is through this gate that other varn are summoned to assist their reptilian brethren and through which the *Emissary* is said to communicate with the gods. The area before the gate is stained a dark wine color from the innumerable blood sacrifices that take place here several times a month. It is said that every sacrifice brings the gods closer to the ssethric people. How little do they realize the truth of this.

Noble Ring

The second ring of Sseth is home to the ssanu pits and naga houses, as well as the Tower of Ssatsaya. The ring is heavily guarded and patrolled, and entry is only allowed to naga, ssanu, and those with official business. While the towers and manors of the upper castes are awe-inspiring, the true magnificence lies far below ground. Here ssanu engineering has created vast underground palaces and thoroughfares deep beneath the surface, kept dry and well-lit by alchemical treatment and machines driven

by ssanu biomancy. Primarily for status reasons, the significant underground chambers are not as deep as those in the Imperial Ring. However, a tunnel broad enough for an army on the march extends even deeper, into the cavernous passages of the Endless Dark.

The Emperor's Beneficence

To appease the ssanu who often rankle under naga rule, Emperor Kahss the Second commissioned a magnificent theatre in the Noble Ring, grandly titled the Emperor's Beneficence. Here ssanu, naga, and their guests enjoy the finest of Ssethregoran art and culture, from ss'ressen throat singing to sorcerously enhanced operas. The structure is a covered amphitheater designed and enchanted for perfect acoustics. Each pit and house are allotted a certain number of seats according to their social status, which they may fill as they wish. Although mostly for artistic productions, blood sport is occasionally featured as well, though the restricted space limits these battles to small skirmishes and duels. The attempt to appease the ssanu has only been partially successful for two reasons: First, the naga houses set the program for the theatre and reserve the best seats for themselves. Second, the theatre is in the imposing naga-style, with giant and cruel statues venerating the emperor and the varn, continuously reminding the ssanu of their subjugation. Still, many ssanu praise the Emperor's Beneficence, for it does present the finest artists in the empire.

The Lower Gate

The humble title of 'the Lower Gate' does not adequately describe the size and grandeur of this vital defensive fortress. When the deepest tunnel pierced the Endless Dark, Emperor Sseth knew this passage, large enough for the mighty armies of Ssethregore, might also serve the empire's greatest foes as an invasion route into the heart of his city. To defend the empire, he commanded his finest architects, engineers, alchemists, sorcerers, and biomancers to create a mighty fortress, constructed around a massive gate of magically reinforced stone. Today, the outer face of the gate is pitted and scarred, and not just from enemy attack. Originally it was designed with many carvings and statues in honor of Kassegore and Yig, all of which were later removed by the naga leaving it an ugly, scarred surface. Unlike the Glorious Gate, no attempt was made to replace the decorations of the Lower Gate, which they see as a utilitarian defensive structure rather than a monument to their greatness.

No one alive today, save perhaps the oldest ssanu, remember a time when a true army assaulted the Lower Gate, but hardly a day goes by when the Endless Dark does not offer up hideous creatures such as fungus-infected zombies and even the dreaded Voiceless Ones. The Lower Gate has a sizable permanent garrison complete with barracks, training grounds, and other auxiliary buildings. Only the most watchful and wary of soldiers draw this duty, and a tour at the Lower Gate is considered a badge of honor. Few remain here very long. The constant darkness, coupled with the horrors of the deep, inspire fear and paranoia that can break even the strongest ss'ressen mind. Those who return from service here are never quite the same, something the ruling class observes with concern. It is not uncommon for such soldiers to later succumb to violent madness. Those who served too long there will often be sent out on dangerous expeditions, in the hopes that an Altherian bullet will end their potential threat.

The Palace of Pit Aspis

The Noble Ring is home to all the ssanu pits and naga houses, but none of their palaces are so grand as that of Pit Aspis, which dominates the district nearest to Lake Quesselan. With their relatively recent ascension in power by backing the naga during their coup, the Pit has gone out of its way to flaunt their newfound power and wealth, erecting huge monuments and buildings, ensuring that they are grander than the those of the older Pits.

Under the guidance of the venerable and wise *sistara*, or archmagi, of the Pit, it has continued to grow both in power and influence. Sistara Sselentys designed the city's technomantic spires, so it is no surprise that the Palace of Pit Aspis possesses the most advanced ssanu biomancy outside of the Imperial Ring and the Tower of Ssatsaya. Channels of sorcerous energy light the pit with an ethereal emerald glow, meeting and clashing with the ever-present red illumination of the city. There is a constant background hum of vast magical machinery automating light, heat, and sanitation, as well as powering many magical laboratories, including Sselentys' private suite of laboratories hidden deep underground. These mechanisms also control a complicated system of mirrors that reflect natural sunlight into a network of private atriums and greenhouses under the earth. Though all ssanu pits boast some such chambers, the underground gardens of Pit Aspis are the largest and most beautiful.

Legions of slaves handle the maintenance of the machinery. Those who possess the "gift" take to the work well, as it is one of the few ways they are allowed to learn some basic magical principles to assist with maintenance. However, this knowledge comes at the cost of ssanu paranoia. Pit Aspis is not so foolish as to allow another slave uprising, as occurred with the elorii. Any infraction, real or imagined, results in the death of the slave, their body sent to the larder.

Few outside the Pit realize just how deep the construction goes. Tunnels and warrens connect to underground sites all over the city, notably the Water Gate in the Ss'ressen Ring. There is even a hidden passage to the Endless Dark, kept sealed and secret from all but a

select few within Pit Aspis, that allows passage to the vast underground world without the knowledge of the naga. Also secret is the Pit Aspis treasure vault, which under Sselentys' direction has been stockpiling magical arms, armor, and artifacts, just in case the whisperings of an uprising against the naga comes to fruition.

The Sacrosanct Gateway

The Sacrosanct Gateway is the largest temple in Sseth, dwarfing the now abandoned temples to Kassegore and Yig. Dedicated to the varn deities, the Sacrosanct Gateway is more than a place of worship; it is a conduit unto the varn themselves. In its hallowed halls, one may call upon these powerful entities and draw one forth from their own realm and onto the world of Arcanis. Inside the temple, as nowhere else in the Known Lands, the power of the varn deities can be felt, radiating from the air itself and woe to all who enter the temple with thought of sacrilege upon their minds.

The structure lacks the elegance of old-empire ssanu architecture, but the imposing ziggurat inspires awe in its own right. The top of the ziggurat extends into a tower that stretches above ground, where it unleashes a bright, constant beam of sickly green light into the air. The naga believe this light to be a manifestation of divine favor, and note with reverent joy that the beam has been slowly, but steadily, growing wider over the millennia.

The Tower of Ssatsaya

The Tower of Ssatsaya is an imposing structure situated in the second ring of the city. This thirty-story tower was built to resemble the original tower of sorcery, the Tower of Gettulus, lost when Yahssremore fell. Three titanic serpents rise forth from the ground, intertwining one another until reaching the top. There the three serpent's heads meet at the top of the tower, positioned so that the heads stare out in opposite directions, their gaze capturing all of Ssethregore. The Tower of Ssatsaya is home to the Black Coil, a cabal of ssethric mages whose goal is nothing less than the total mastery of the arcane. None who practice sorcery in all of Ssethregore escape the notice of the Black Coil and those found worthy are brought to the Tower, or one of the other Towers of the Black Coil spread throughout the empire, to be trained in the mystic arts. The Tower is also responsible for supplying battle mages to the Ssethregoran military, though the mages are loyal to their sorcerous cabal first and foremost, a fact that makes the current emperor uneasy.

The surface levels of the Tower are reserved for arcane study, and the teaching of recruits. The upper floors are home to those of the Black Coil who wish to reside within the tower. The uppermost floor is divided into thirds, each section built into one of the great serpent heads of the Tower itself. Here, in these chambers the Sorcerous Council deliberates, a triad comprised of the three most powerful members of the Black Coil. Currently two members reside full time in the triad's chambers; The'ssoth of Pit Sseth and Ssremit of Pit Maliss. The third member is the archmage Sengal, who is rarely seen outside his laboratory deep in the bowels of Pit Crotalus and only ventures forth in person in times of great need or great peril. Sengal, The'ssoth, and Ssremit are all bitter rivals, as likely to kill each other as not, but put their differences aside to keep the unity of the Black Coil intact, for they see the power of the cabal as more important than their own personal squabbles.

Ss'ressen Ring

Despite being called the Ss'ressen Ring, the third ring is the innermost part of the city openly accessible to all ssethric races, regardless of status. It is also the outermost ring with a complete encircling wall. Indeed, the black basalt wall of the Ss'ressen Ring directly abuts Lake Quesselan and acts as a dam to keep the lake from spilling into the city. The ring is so-named because in times past it housed the warrens of all the ss'ressen egg clutches, though only the Barbed Tail and Horned Jowl ss'ressen maintained a large presence within the city. Although the underground chambers of the Ss'ressen Ring are not as grand as those of the Noble Ring, they connect to the Noble Ring at many points and form the main thoroughfares through the city.

The Blood Pit

An innocuous name for so vile a place, the Blood Pit is the main arena for gladiatorial games in the empire. Able to seat tens of thousands of howling ssethrics, the Blood Pit is a wonder to behold when full. The Blood Pit is built down into the ground, in a tiered style, each level being slightly smaller than the one above, descending until they reach the arena floor far below. Here, on the warm sands of the amphitheater, professional gladiators, pit fighters, and slaves are pitted against one another in the cruelest bloodbaths imaginable. Some participants are made to fight, while others are artfully executed for the sheer entertainment value. Fighters who perform extremely well can look forward to a pampered life and a quick death, for once a gladiator reaches a certain level of prestige, they are worth more on the ssethric meat market as a delicacy, than as a fighter in the pit.

All types of spectacles are created in the arena. Hapless unarmed slaves are purposely cast in hopeless match ups, their flesh to be flayed by the serrated edges of their opponent's blades or to be torn apart mercilessly by the jaws of some titanic beast. The Blood Pit can also be flooded via a subterranean canal allowing for naval battles and the importation of exotic sea creatures into the arena for the enjoyment of the bloodthirsty masses.

The Lost Warrens

The Lost Warrens is a poetic name, as they are not truly lost, just abandoned. As the ss'ressen egg clutches were granted lands in the various parts of the Ssethregoran Empire, defected, or were annihilated, the tunnels and chambers underneath their former homes were sealed off, but over time, careless tunneling and shifting geology have reopened and expanded these cramped chambers into a network of crumbling tunnels beneath the Ss'ressen Ring. When possible, the city reclaimed these tunnels for legitimate purposes, but many were left abandoned and became home to Sseth's escaped slaves, criminals, dissidents or the disgraced and homeless. The rulers of the empire have no tolerance for such things, and regularly send death squads to kill every living thing they find, but it is too easy for the underground underclass to lose themselves in the maze of tunnels for these purges to be entirely successful. Rumors abound of secrets hidden in the Lost Warrens, including everything from renegade ssanu plotting the overthrow of the naga, to a hidden temple to Kassegore, to the remnants of the annihilated Dark Crest egg clutch. For the most part, however, the crumbling, stinking tunnels are home to the dregs of ssethric society. However, if a visitor can avoid getting their throat slit, they can find many quality forgers, cutpurses, and murderers-for-hire, as well as a thriving black market that trades in contraband goods smuggled in from the farthest corners of the world.

Water Gate

Perhaps the city's most astonishing technical achievement is the Water Gate, beneath the ground on the shore of Lake Quesselan. Built into the wall of the Ss'ressen Ring, two massive metal iris gates flank either side of a small chamber filled with noisy technomantic pumps and coated with alchemical waterproofing. Those suited for underwater travel can step through the inner iris, which is then sealed tightly behind them. Next, the outer iris is opened, flooding the airlock with the waters of Lake Quesselan, and allowing access to the Pleisauran Quarter under the lake. Pit Sseth designed this marvel, and without it, trade between the pleisaurans and the rest of the city would be far more difficult.

Should the gate ever break down, the flooding would be disastrous. For safety, the pumps are always functioning, and shifts of slaves and engineers led by ssanu skilled in biomancy perform around the clock maintenance.

Merchant's Ring

Though officially the Merchant's Ring, many call the fourth ring of Sseth the Iguadon Ring, for it is here that these creatures make their home. Their warrens are shallow and cramped compared to those of the ss'ressen, but though there are fewer technomantic spires in this ring, they are sufficient to keep these chambers warm and lit. The Merchant's Ring is the busiest of the city, and home to the majority of the city's industrial and mercantile interests. Not only iguadons, but slaves frequent the ring to run the factories and shops, as well as ss'ressen overseers and the occasional ssanu or naga. The inlet of Lake Quesselan splits the surface of the ring and its wall and houses the underwater Pleisauran Quarter.

The Academy

After the naga conquered the empire, they quickly brought the ss'ressen and ssanu to heel. The iguadons, on the other hand, posed a problem, as they were clannish and unwaveringly loyal to their family units and matriarchs. They were also stubborn, refusing to give up their old ways, including their worship of Kassegore. After trying various methods to bring the adult iguadons into line, the naga realized the only solution was to indoctrinate them as children.

For this reason, they established The Academy, which became the template for similar institutions throughout the empire. The Academy is a complex of dormitories, rectangular one-story buildings with one or two subterranean levels, built around open-air courtyards and arenas for lessons, drills, and frequently violent recreation. Several administrative buildings, each three stories high with a bell tower, houses chambers and offices for the instructors, as well as subterranean classrooms. The only other building is an underground cathedral, where iguadons are expected to offer daily devotion at one of the foul chapels dedicated to one of the four varn gods.

As soon as they are able, iguadons are taken from their hatcheries and raised in the academy. Their ties to family units are broken down and replaced with faith in the varn and loyalty to the naga. It is the academy which assigns iguadons their life duty, and it is here that the most dominant bulls learn the skills needed to challenge the current iguadon patriarch, called a natrix. They are continuously drilled in both physical and academic education, and by the time they reach maturity they are ready to enter military service. The Academy has been so successful that favored iguadons have been allowed entry to gain a rudimentary education of their own. Ss'ressen mock the academy as little more than a factory for churning out mindless soldiers, far inferior to their creche training, but even they cannot argue with the results.

The Blackscales District

Blackscales is an entire district of tightly packed steel mills, forges, factories, and other industrial centers. The constant billows of smoke belched forth by great furnaces blanket the area, and only the poorest and lowest status iguadons live nearby, derogatorily called 'blackscales' due to the staining of soot and coal, which

gives the district its name. Without the Blackscales the war machine of the empire would grind to a halt, for it manufactures the constant supply of weapons, armor, and other metalwork needed to supply the mighty Ssethregoran army. A cluster of technomantic spires power the magical machines that function, with a great clamor, around the clock. Work is timed by shifts, with a series of signals blasted by horn through the district to mark the all-too-few shift changes and rest periods. As might be expected of an empire that has little value for its slaves and workers, accidents are high. Soldiers joke that blood in the forges makes the steel stronger.

The Great Market

Due to the ruling class's love of order and discipline, at least among their social inferiors, most of the commerce in the city happens in a single broad, open area called the Great Market. Though there are few permanent structures here, each day the market becomes a maze of brightly colored kiosks, with ssethric merchants and artisans, and their slaves, hawking their wares. Nearly everything found in the Ssethregoran Empire can be found for sale here, as well as many goods from outside the empire smuggled in by yissera, or humans greedy enough to betray their people for gold. Magic items are also available here, with one exception: the law strictly forbids the sale of anything that might be used to learn any magical art. After the elorii uprising, the Black Coil has no intention of allowing anyone to learn magic outside their supervision. Depending on the whims of the rulers, other things may be declared contraband for one reason or another. Iguadons, led by ss'ressen, patrol the market at all times, and are empowered to mete out immediate execution for anyone found to be selling contraband. For this reason, most smugglers sell their illegal goods in the Lost Warrens instead.

The Imperial Storehouses

While there are privately owned warehouses in the Merchant's Ring, and even more in the Outer Ring, the empire reserves the warehouses, granaries, and silos of this district for itself. The district stores weapons, clothing, food, and other necessities against the possibility of a siege or famine. Temperature controlled warehouses filled with frozen meat, preserve enough food for the carnivorous ssethrics to survive for years. Emperor Kahss the IV scoffs at such preparations. Sseth has never suffered a siege, and the idea of a famine seems preposterous. Thus far the ssanu, always more practical, have managed to stave off naga attempts to turn the district into another varn monument. Among other things, they have argued that should the army ever need emergency resupply, the stores are ready for shipping. This argument has placated the Emperor for now.

Pleisauran Quarter

Lake Quesselan may split the Merchant's Ring, but the city continues regardless. From the edge of the land, great piers jut out across the water, serving as loading bays for ships as well as chelone, the massive turtles raised in pens in the lake. However, the true majesty of Lake Quesselan lies beneath the harbor. The lakeshore descends steeply, plunging from city above to city below. On the lake bottom is the Pleisauran Quarter, home of the aquatic citizens, slaves, and allies of the Ssethregoran Empire. Advanced alchemy, biomancy, and biomancy have created a shimmering latticework of underwater platforms, domes, and spheres, where the ability of the pleisaurans to swim in three dimensions has given rise to strange and beautiful architecture. Dominating the quarter is the Administrative Palace, a series of platforms and domes made of magically reinforced crystal, lit by technomantic spires and the cold blue-green light of phosphorescent algae. Within this structure, the administrative work of the quarter is carried out, primarily quotas for the kelp farming and fishing that supply food for the city above. Beneath an opaque dome of the palace, pleisaurans plot attacks on human, kio, and elorii shipping.

Outer Ring

The outer ring of Sseth is often derisively called the Slave Ring, but although it houses the quarters for many Ssethregoran slaves, it also contains stables, warehouses, workshops, taverns, docks along Lake Quesselan, and the outer gates of the city. Technomantic spires are nearly non-existent here, only powering areas of importance like the gates, and there are no significant underground areas. A broad wedge of Lake Quesselan splits the southern end of the ring and contains kelp farms tended by the Pleisaurans.

The Choir of Agony

The majority of slave quarters are constructed far away from the main gates, primarily on the eastern side of the inlet of Lake Quesselan. The only structure of note rising from the hovels in this area is an imposing, buttressed three story arena of red stone, topped by a domed roof with wedge-shaped openings over each buttress. These openings are acoustic shafts, designed to project the constant cacophony of screams and cries from the slaves being punished, tortured, and creatively executed within. This instrument of psychological torture is the Choir of Agony, designed to keep slaves cowed and afraid of their masters, for they know any sign of rebellion will add their screams to the choir.

The ssanu who constructed the structure, efficiently designed a system of grates and pipes in the floor which, with the aid of technomantic pumps, funnels the blood of victims into reservoirs beneath the Noble Ring. Blood has a wide variety of sorcerous applications and is a crucial

component of the magic that powers the technomantic spires. In essence, the city of Sseth feeds on the blood of its victims. The Choir of Agony is not the only source of this precious fluid, but it is the primary one.

The Glorious Gate

The Glorious Gate is the main northern gate of the city and the beginning of the Scaled Road. It dates back to the founding of Sseth, and Emperor Sseth continued adding murals and statues to it throughout his reign. Although the original mosaics to Kassegore and Yig were stripped away by order of Emperor Causus, he charged the best artisans of the empire to create new murals and decorations which fit the style of the existing gate. The result is one of the few examples of art venerating the varn in the old ssanu style, with slender, bejeweled statues that seem to balance on impossibly thin supports, quite unlike the dark, imposing style of most naga-era construction.

The Judgment Pit

One of the few places ssanu and even naga frequent in the Outer Ring, is also perhaps the grandest structure in the district. From the earliest days of the city, there was an arena here where slaves could settle disputes. Since there is little law or justice governing slaves beyond the whims of their masters, those with personal grievances were encouraged to enter the Judgment Pit and fight to the death. These grudge matches proved so popular with the ssanu and naga that Emperor Thuss the Mighty ordered the old arena demolished and a modern one built, following naga aesthetics. It is now an imposing, black stone structure with stepped sides, much like an oblong ziggurat with the top scooped out to form a stadium, adorned with grotesque statues of reverence to the varn and the emperor on the upper wall.

Unlike the Blood Pit, there is no glory found here. The participants, no longer slaves but members of ssethric society, come here to find satisfaction for grievances, real or imagined. In one day, a full score of Emerald Scale and Barbed Tail ss'ressen perished as the two bitter enemies battled in a spectacle of blood and viscera that is still talked about to this day. A single technomantic spire powers a pipe and pump system beneath the arena, much like the Choir of Agony, piping spilled blood into reservoirs beneath the Noble Ring. The meat of the slain can be purchased just outside for reasonable prices.

Softhide Village

Hussuma and yissera require specialized training to infiltrate elorii and human cultures, and the Softhide Village serves that purpose. Hussuma and yissera too old to continue their espionage and have begun their metamorphosis, serve as instructors. The instructors divide classes by target culture, and students are expected to live as humans or elorii from their target nation. Most of the village replicates the style of foreign towns for this purpose, and the entire area is walled off from the rest of the city to prevent cultural contamination of impressionable slaves. An outsider walking through the streets would find it unsettling, with reptilian hybrids playing the roles of Coryani senators or Seremasi elders while disguised students try to ape proper etiquette. The naga insist teachers instill veneration of the varn, yet the many yissera who turn to the worship of Yig after leaving the village make it likely they somehow first encounter this heresy during training. Inquisitorial investigations have so far been unsuccessful, but the program is too vital to Ssethregoran espionage to shut down despite the clamoring of the varn priesthood.

Trade Gate

The Trade Gate to the southwest of the city is wide enough for mercantile traffic. The trade road here leads to the satellite village of Ankistron, and most goods shipped down the Kraldjur River enter the city by this gate. While nowhere near as grand as the Glorious Gate, the Trade Gate is still decorated with molded bronze bas-relief worked into the panels of the stone archway. These carvings depict the glories of the naga emperors, frequently shown personally leading the Ssethregoran armies, while patron varn deities watch over them with cruel eyes.

Outside the City

Although the outer wall of the city is the official limit of Sseth, as with all great cities there is much activity just outside the city limits. The farms and houses common outside the walls in every culture have taken a unique form outside Sseth. Since the surrounding rainforest provides natural protection, as well as many exotic plants and reagents, the masters of Ssethregore are reluctant to allow any of it to be cut down to make way for fields or houses. The sole exception to this rule is a bare stretch a single arrow's flight around the city on all sides. Denied the ability to clear cut land, the farmers of the empire have instead planted orchards of cultivated fruit trees, creative and beautiful arboreal gardens suspended between the foliage where they can catch the sunlight, and vast fields of mushrooms and creeping vines around and about the trees themselves. They have constructed elaborate treehouses and strung fencing between trees and branches to house herds of food animals. These techniques have, if anything, caused the foliage near the city to be even thicker and more varied.

Ankistron

Population: 400 (40% iguadon, 8% pleisauran, 22% ssanu, 28% ss'ressen, 2% other)

The city of Sseth lies near the Kraldjur River, but not immediately adjacent to it. For shipping along the river, it relies on Ankistron, a fishing village on the banks of

the Kraldjur. It is not self-sufficient settlement and relies on Sseth for almost everything. Its primary purpose is to outfit ships and chelone turtles with cargo heading upriver and to unload cargo coming downriver. While the iguadon residents of the village were hatched there, the handful of ss'ressen and ssanu administrators were assigned from Sseth, typically as punishment for some disgrace. The current ssanu overseer, Kalabaria, resents her posting and has become ever more tyrannical in her attempts to impress her betters and earn a return to the city.

The Serpent's Fangs

Population: 12,000 (22% iguadon, 18% ssanu, 59% ss'ressen, 1% other)

The Serpent's Fangs is a fortress an hour's quick-march outside the city, which would be easily visible if not for the intervening dense foliage. It rests in a broad clearing, one of the few parts of the surrounding rainforest that has been clear cut. Though the fortress is impressive, boasting crenelated walls, lookout towers, and a garrison, its purpose is not only a final defense but as a mustering point for the mighty Ssethregoran army. In this clearing, the terrible might of the empire congregates and receives its orders, before beginning the long march to their enemies' border.

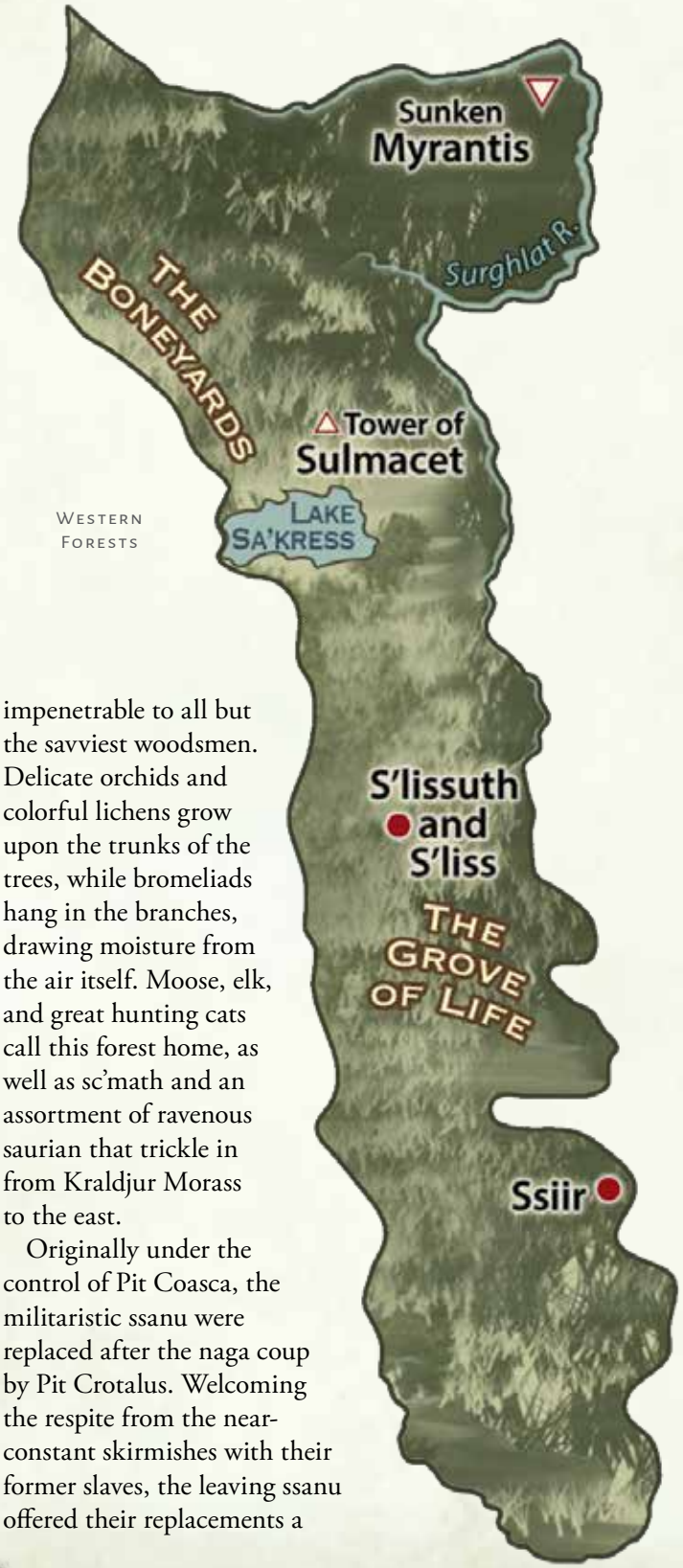
Ssethric Portal

Just outside Ankistron is a large ssethric portal that acts as the main hub for immediate transportation to the outer reaches of the empire, as well as a few areas scattered throughout the Known Lands. Located inside a small stone structure, the portal was raised well outside the walls of Sseth as a safeguard against small units of enemy troops infiltrating the capital. Originally overseen by ssanu priestesses of Yig, the portal is now controlled by the followers of the deity Sipta, the varn Goddess of Sorcery. A small group of varn emissaries can always be found within the structure, though their purpose remains a mystery.

The Western Forests

The Western Forests is the most contested zone of the Ssethregoran Empire. Constantly at war with the Malfelan elorii, the ssethrics have pushed their way deeper and deeper into the Fellglade leading to ever increasing skirmishes with their former slaves. The empire currently controls a section of the Fellglade extending from the easternmost edge of the forest to the Surghlat River, which forms the border between this region and Central Basin. Towards its northern portion, the region also includes the swamp that swallowed Sunken Myrantis, though this shift in the border was done to keep whatever secrets lie there away from Pit Sseth.

The Fellglade is a boreal cloud forest. Warm ocean breezes blowing north off the Lauriol Sea collide with cooler air over the continent, plunging the forest into a perpetual fog. Giant teak, mahogany, and eucalyptus bury their roots in a rich peaty loam and stretch their branches heavenward to touch the sky where they are wrapped in a soft white blanket of clouds. Abundant ferns and cycads dominate the forest floor, forming a thick leafy under story impenetrable to all but the savviest woodsmen. Delicate orchids and colorful lichens grow upon the trunks of the trees, while bromeliads hang in the branches, drawing moisture from the air itself. Moose, elk, and great hunting cats call this forest home, as well as sc'math and an assortment of ravenous saurian that trickle in from Kraldjur Morass to the east.



Originally under the control of Pit Coasca, the militaristic ssanu were replaced after the naga coup by Pit Crotalus. Welcoming the respite from the near-constant skirmishes with their former slaves, the leaving ssanu offered their replacements a

final piece of advice: Learn to sleep with your eyes open. Pit Crotalus, whose position in ssethric society consisted solely of venerating the gods of the Ssethric Pantheon and maintaining their temples found themselves having to quickly learn how to be soldiers rather than priests. To the invading elorii, they cared not which Pit they slew, only that they were killing ssethrics.

Major Geographical Features

Fellglade Forest

The second largest hardwood forest in the Known Lands, the Fellglade Forest represents one of the most important sources of quality lumber for the empire. The Malfelan elorii control the western half of the forest and both sides are constantly warring over the rich resources of this area. Woodland beings abound within the Fellglade and the great, sinuous wyrms that prowl under its shaded canopy probably gave rise to its ominous name.

Portions of the forest controlled by the ssethrics have not only been deforested, but drained of life. Sorcerers following the sorcerous art taught by the varn deity Sipta use the energies of living creatures to power their magic. These sorcerers are on the front lines in the wars against the elorii, draining the area of its essence and leaving a desolate land where once a thriving woodlands stood. These sorcerers take great pleasure in defiling the Fellglade, as the psychological effect on the elorii of seeing a portion of their home turn into a blighted land is as devastating as the magic hurled at them. Even so, the Fellglade is so large and vibrant that it would take centuries for the cadre of ssethric sorcerers to turn it into a wasteland, though they are prepared to do just that.

Grove of Life

Long ago, during the time of the Yahssremoran Empire, when the elorii were soldiers in the ssethric Wars of Extinction, it is said that the goddess Belisarda knelt at this spot and shed tears at the slaughter her children were carrying out against the sentient races of the Known Lands. Where Her tears fell, a strange white tree grew, with flowers of the palest blue that bloom once a year and only on the night that the green moon of Viridis was first full. The nectar from the Coiva Tree, the Tree of Tears in the elorii tongue, has a unique property that when distilled, can extend the life of the imbiber by decades. Ingesting the petals is said to cure disease or neutralize any poison and when crushed into a paste, can be used to heal the most grievous wound overnight.

To the elorii, the grove where these trees grow is considered sacred, one of the few places remaining where the goddess' divinity can be witnessed. Its loss to the ssethrics centuries ago is a sting without balm, one which haunts the Malfelan elorii to their shame. The fact that the ssanu did not order the orchard destroyed gives them hope that they may one day retake the grove.

The sorcerers of the Black Coil quickly realized the benefits inherent within the flowering plant and quickly ordered its care and preservation. The military minded ssanu of Pit Coasca used the flowers healing properties to care for its soldiers and built a series of fortifications meant to stymie any counterattack the Malfelan might attempt. The elorii tried hundreds of times to retake the orchard, but were repelled each time, though losses on both sides were heavy. Finally, to forestall any further attacks, the warlord of Pit Coasca sent a simple message to his foes: attempt to retake the Coiva Trees again, and he would burn it to cinders. To underscore his threat, a pair of mated fire-drakes were brought to nest among the blooming fields, the meaning of that act making it quite clear to the elorii that the ssanu was prepared to carry out his threat. The attacks immediately ceased and no further attempts to regain the grove has been made in the past century.

Lake Sa'kress

The muddy waters of this lake are stained brown from the heavy tannins imparted by the detritus of the surrounding soils. Lake Sa'kress is filled with a wide variety of fishes and crustaceans that Pit Crotalus exploits as a resource to feed the troops stationed along the border with the elorii. Each day a flotilla of fishing boats take iguadons and kobolds out upon its waters to cast their nets and return with its bounty. Scholars within the Pit have worried that this constant overfishing will quickly deplete the lake of its population of fishes, but even after centuries of plundering the lake's livestock, the quantity of the daily catch remains the same, to the scholar's consternation.

Tales have circulated of ruins lying far beneath the lake's surface. An iguadon that fell overboard and nearly drowned spoke of seeing broad, stone paved avenues, buildings, and statuary. At its center, a monument upon which a gem or pearl the size of her head gleamed dully, casting shadows of long sinuous creatures swimming below her. Subsequent investigations have failed to find these ruins, and the iguadon was promptly executed for wasting the empire's resources with her ridiculous lies.

Surghlat River

This southern tributary of the mighty Kraldjur River is longer than its parent waterway, driving directly south until it reaches the Lauriol Sea. Besides creating the majority of the border between the Western Forests and the Central Basin regions of the empire, the river acts as a north-south waterway allowing quick travel from the north of the empire to its southern coastline. Travel upon

the Surghlat River is generally smooth, with a swift but gentle current, but travelers should be wary of violent rapids where the river constricts or dips downward, creating turbulent waters that can be life threatening to the inexperienced or the unwary.

Besides an abundance of piscine and crustaceans living beneath its surface, numerous aquatic avian species can be found along the river's banks. Multi-colored birds, like herons and storks, along with pure white swans nest just off the river. They are highly prized for their soft and brilliant feathers, as well as the meat they provide. Predatory reptilians can also be found on the river's banks, feeding off the abundant wildlife, as well as enjoying an opportunistic meal from the occasional traveler knocked overboard.

Important Features

The Boneyards

The Boneyards is an area that extends north and northeast of Lake Sa'kress. As one travels through the forest, a proliferation of strange white rocks covered in a thick layer of bright green moss is noticeable. A closer examination reveals the rocks are actually untold thousands of moldering corpses, their remains slowly absorbed into the surrounding forest. The Boneyards has been the sight of hundreds of conflicts between Ssethregoran and Malfelan forces for millennia and the unburied dead of both sides litter the forest floor. All manner of undead stalk this unholy region, and the ssethrics and elorii only enter this area when bolstered by large numbers or due to great necessity.

Some claim that banished priests of Wantiir, the ssethric God of Death, came here rather than the arid region to the west of Yahssremore where the rest of their brethren were exiled. If true, members of Pit Talasis may reside within this region, hidden beneath the snouts of the descendants of those who banished them. This may be the reason why the undead ssanu sorcerer, Sulmacet, erected his tower on the edge of this remote region.

Ssiir

Population: 52,000 (35% iguadon, 40% ssanu, 24% ss'ressen, 1% other)

When first arriving in Ssiir, Pit Crotalus' first inclination was to tear down the ugly, blocky battlements and replace them with something more pleasing to their tastes, but the ssanu soon learned the value of the thick walls protecting their city and have since added further watchtowers. Fashioned with the same concentric ring architectural style as the other ssethric cities, Ssiir also boasts a moat, twenty feet deep that encircles the entire city. The bottom of the trench is filled with sharp metal spikes, while the waters are home to summoned water elementals, bound to those same skewers. These prongs are engraved with a rune that can be made to heat the metal red-hot, boiling the water surrounding it. This drives the water elementals mad with pain, but does not otherwise injure them. The ssanu elementalists do this to ensure that the elorii are not able to wrest control of the elementals and turn them against the ssethrics. Bellowing in pain, the creatures lash out at anyone they are directed against, knowing that doing so is the only way that the pain will stop.

Ssiir, as in the other ssethric cities, has temples erected venerating the Varn Pantheon, but unlike the others, this city has three, one for each of the alien deities, configured in a perfect isosceles triangle around the ssanu's administrative palace. Having been the predominant Pit filling the religious caste, the Crotalus ssanu are under constant indoctrination. After centuries, this reeducation has mostly succeeded, converting almost all of Pit Crotalus into zealots of the varn gods. Pockets remain holding out hope for the return of the old ways, but these grow fewer in number with each subsequent generation.

S'lissuth and S'lis

Population: 288,000 (16% iguadon, 20% ssanu, 63% ss'ressen, 1% other)

The city of S'lissuth, and its sister city S'lis which lies in the Endless Dark, are home to the Razor Claw egg clutch. S'lissuth is a surface settlement strategically placed at the southern portion of the region for two reasons. The first, as a staging center for attacks against the southern portion of the Fellglade, whether by land or sea. Secondly, the city sits over the largest access point in the empire to the Endless Dark. This opening, colloquially known as the *Yawning Maw of Kassegore*, is secured by a massive set of ornate iron doors, open only for the express purpose of sending or receiving troops and supplies to S'lis. Otherwise, the gateway is locked and barred to prevent any infiltration of S'lissuth by the creatures of the Endless Dark. The threat of its sister city being overrun by the agents of Oblivion is viewed as a real possibility, though S'lis has only seen a true assault once since its founding. That attack was sufficient to worry the Razor Claws' patron, the ssanu of Pit Coasca, to enact such drastic measures to protect the city. Wisely, Pit Crotalus has seen fit to continue this practice.

Attacks from below the surface are not the only threat faced by the inhabitants of S'lissuth, as the Malfelan elorii frequently target the city. Consequently, the citadel of S'lissuth is one of the most fortified in the empire. Thick granite walls are precisely stacked to form a twenty-foot high ramparts. Even if an invader were to take S'lissuth, they would not only have to worry counterattacks from villages in the surrounding forests, but would also have to contend with counter-assaults from S'lis below.

As fortified as S'lissuth is above, S'lis is even more so due to the ongoing war with the servants of Oblivion seeking to control the tunnels and caverns beneath the surface. While not upon the front lines of the war against these creatures like Delendas, the defenders of S'lis must still contend with raids from their silent foes, as well as other of the myriad subterranean creatures that inhabit the Endless Dark. Consequently, while the region above is controlled by Pit Crotalus, S'lis is administered by the ssanu of Pit Coasca. Given that the underground city produces little of economic value, Pit Crotalus are more than happy to allow their constrictor cousins sway over that city.

Sunken Myrantis

Lying west of the Kraldjur River are the ruins of the ancient human city of Myrantis, the former capital of the Myrantian Hegemony. Beneath the ruins of the city are twisted catacombs which once rang with the sibilant sounds of humans conducting blasphemous rituals to appease other-worldly entities, such as Tzizhet of the Many Limbs and the rest of the deities of the Myrantian Pantheon. Myrantis, once the jewel of the south, was swallowed by vast swamplands after the city was devastated by the Sorcerer King of Ymandragore. Millennia after its complete destruction, the unholy practices of the ancient Myrantians continue below the ruins. What little of Myrantis remains is now overgrown with thick jungle vegetation, with all manner of monsters have taking residence in its grand halls.

Rumors abound that besides the insane cult of humans seeking to free their trapped god, the never-ending catacombs running beneath the ruins hide a secret cabal of Yig worshipers seeking to subvert both human and ssethric alike to their dread cult. Those few that have witnessed the dark rites carried out by this Yigite cult claim that they worship a perverse version of the Mother Serpent, one more insect, than ssethric, with a carapace of stone. What aspect of the ancient Serpent Goddess this profane cult may be worshipping is unknown.

Kred'adraen

Tower of Sulmacet

Jutting out of the ground like the femur of a titan, the Tower of Sulmacet is bone-white in color. This pigmentation is not due to the color of the stone used to construct it, but rather because of a colony of mold that covers the structure and the grounds for hundreds of yards. The mold, similar to that blanketing the Boneyard, releases a narcotic spore if disturbed. When inhaled, the spores have a soporific effect on the victim, placing them in a dream-like state from which there is no return. Unwary trespassers or those wishing to disturb the ancient black sorcerer die drowning in their slumber, eventually joining Sulmacet's slave army of the dead.

The ancient sorcerer began studying the black arts after being blessed by the ssethric God of Death, Wantiir. Sulmacet's painful rebirth allowed him to continue to serve the empire with a zealousness that has only increased with the passing centuries. His mastery of necromancy is evident from the army of undead surrounding the tower. Sulmacet has no interest in using the mindless creatures to conquer, instead tasking them to maintain his hoary tower, or repel the rare elorii raiding party.

During his first life, his interests in the arcane revolved around the examination of parallel worlds and other planes of existence. His passion for exploration continues to this day with portals and gates to different dimensions accessible by passing through a particular non-descript doorway.

The only ornamentation affixed to the tower is a large bronze bell, surprisingly free of the white mold. Ringing it produces a light construct of the wizened ssanu that curtly demands their business. Those who fail to provide an answer worthy of disturbing the sorcerer will see the image of Sulmacet detonate with a radiant force strong enough to kill most mortals.

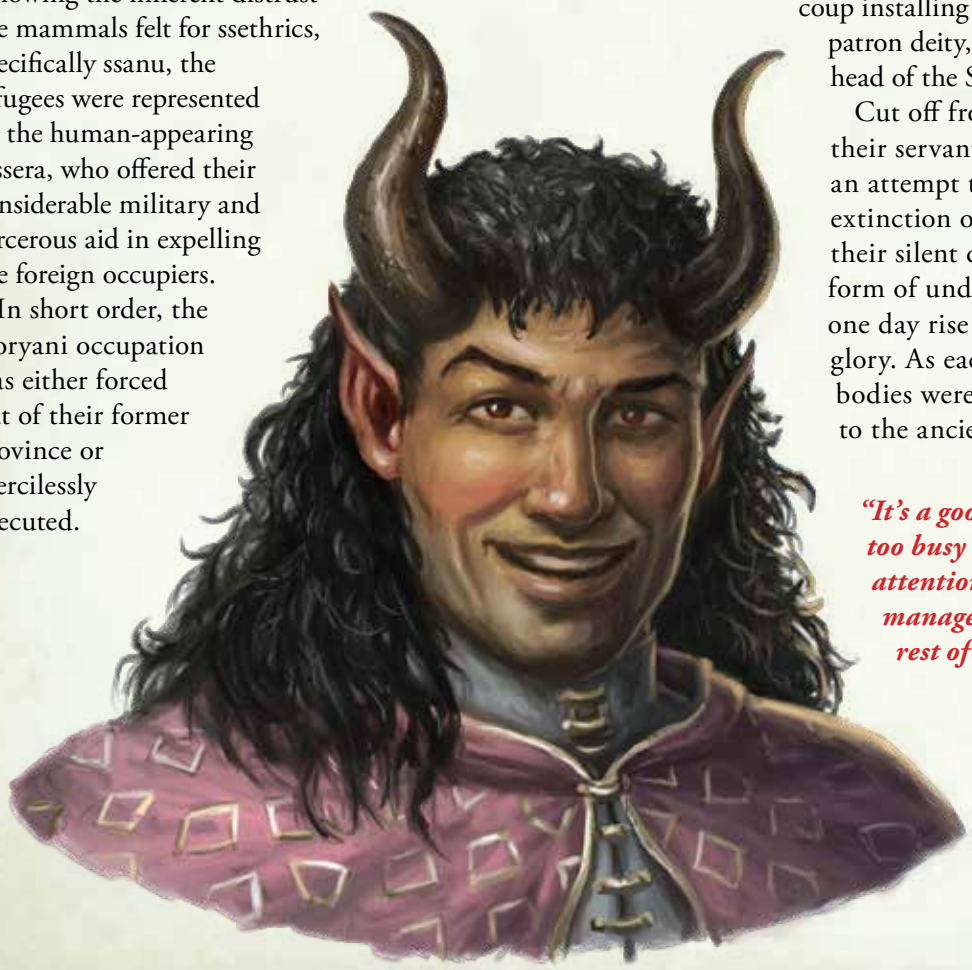
Other Areas of Ssethric Influence

Abessian Dominion

The region that the Abessian Dominion controls has a long and distinguished lineage, first as the Myrantian Hegemony, a group of cities ruled by the Necromancer Lords from the city of Myrantis before it was swallowed by the Morass, then as the Coryani province of Toranesta. The native Myrantians threw off the yoke of Coryani rule and established the Abessian Dominion, with the indispensable aid of ssethric refugees from Ssethregore. These refugees consisted of yissera, ssanu of Pit Crotalus, though other Pits were represented as well, and iguadons fleeing religious oppression as the varn religion began to exert its inexorable grip upon the empire.

These religious exiles at first hid inside long forgotten temples to Kassegore and Yig at the edges of the empire, but when the upheaval in the human lands occurred, they saw an opportunity to find a new homeland where they could practice their faith without fear of persecution. Knowing the inherent distrust the mammals felt for ssethrics, specifically ssanu, the refugees were represented by the human-appearing yissera, who offered their considerable military and sorcerous aid in expelling the foreign occupiers.

In short order, the Coryani occupation was either forced out of their former province or mercilessly executed.



For their invaluable assistance in restoring their freedom, the new ruler of the Abessian Dominion accepted the ssethrics into their community, and elevated one of the yissera as a co-ruler. In truth, the yissera Phaeron Nikara is a puppet of the ssanu that remain hidden in the shadows. Though known to the ruling class, the presence of the serpent-folk among the humans is not common knowledge, though iguadons and kobold slaves have become an everyday sight in the streets of the capital of Abessios.

Due to the presence of the ssethric ex-patriots, the Abessian Dominion finds itself locked in a cold war with the empire. Infiltrators from Ssethregore attempt to disrupt and assassinate those they see as heretics and a danger to their rule within the empire. Conversely, the exiled ssanu continue to feed whatever resources they can smuggle across the border to help those resisting the naga regime and its varn overlords.

For more information on the Abessian Dominion, see the ***Arcanis Campaign Setting*** book, pgs. 320 – 324.

Canyon of Zhu

In what was once the westernmost lands claimed by the ancient Yahssremoran Empire, an arid region now known as the Hinterlands, Pit Talasis and their bonded egg clutch, the Death's Head ss'ressen were exiled for their attempted coup installing a theocracy enshrining their patron deity, Wantiir, the God of Death, at the head of the Ssethric Pantheon.

Cut off from the empire, the ssanu and their servants began to slowly die off. In an attempt to stave off their complete extinction of their Pit, they prayed to their silent deity for a final blessing, a form of undeath from which they might one day rise and reclaim their former glory. As each of the ssanu died, their bodies were mummified in accordance to the ancient ways, and entombed in

"It's a good thing that the Abessians are too busy backstabbing each other to pay attention to the rest of us. If they ever managed to agree on a direction, the rest of the world could be in trouble."
– Anesche

crypts buried and hidden within a canyon system. Their ss'ressen servants, after placing the last of their masters in their sepulcher, remained as guardians over them. Isolated from all but the rare traveler lost in the maze like-canyon system, the egg clutch began to devolve socially, until they became a primitive, savage people, losing their ancient culture and tradition, but for the imperative that they guard the tombs of their slumbering masters. In time the area, known as the Canyon of Zhu, became a forbidden place among the Yhing hir tribes that called the Hinterlands home, with stories and myths growing out of what mysteries and dangers lie therein. Every season, explorers uncovering tales of the riches and artifacts that are hidden in the fabled Canyon of Zhu travel into that taboo region. Few return to tell of what they discovered.

First City

Once the proud capital of the Yahssremoran Empire, the partially ruined city now standing upon Mount Dagha is known as the First City of Man, and former capital of a glorious and powerful human empire that rivaled and in areas surpassed the former ssethric nation. Driven out of the region now known as the Blessed Lands by their former elorii slaves, it is no wonder that the ssethrics gaze upon what was once theirs and seethe at the sight of the mammals living there. Too well defended by the endlessly breeding humans to take militarily, the Ssethregorans are content with carefully exerting influence where they can.

To that end, they have carefully groomed and put in place a mercantile concern that they helped grow in power over the centuries. After a few false starts, the merchant cabal House Symesa established itself as a major player in one of the governing bodies controlling the First City. Through their yissera proxies, the ssanu of first Pit Maliss, then later Pit Crotalus, have used the mercantile concern to search for lost knowledge and artifacts from the Yahssremoran Era buried deep in the endless catacombs that riddle Mount Dagha. Of particular interest to the ssanu of Pit Crotalus are ancient religious relics and holy treatises, lost during the abrupt exodus from their capital. Many of these were burned or destroyed by the hated elorii, but many remain hidden beneath the First City. Recently, inquisitors from Pit Sseth arrived as rumors of heretical knowledge was being uncovered and smuggled into the empire. These ssanu, zealous converts to the varn religion, have yet to uncover the truth of these rumors.

For more information on the House Symesa, see the ***Codex Geographica, vol. I: The Blessed Lands***, pgs. 140 – 142. For the First City, pgs. 75 – 131 of the same product.

The Forsaken Wastes

The Forsaken Wastes is an inhospitable and bleak desert sandwiched between the Coryani province of Cafela and the Abessian Dominion. Vicious winds, blowing sand and crumbling rock dominate this desolate place, a harshness that is reflected in the few animals that live therein. Hidden deep within this unforgiving landscape are the sand apophics, a furtive and secretive ssethric race.

Outsiders venturing into the Forsaken Wastes rarely see the sand apophics. Those who do find a cautious welcome awaiting them. Despite their seclusion, the sand apophics are often willing to offer respite and succor to peaceful travelers. The exception to this is anyone from the ssethric races who are viewed with extreme distrust and often outright hostility. This loathing of their kin is firmly rooted in the oral history of their people. According to their legends, the sand apophics were created by terrible serpent-gods in ages past and careered to serve them.

These "gods" were ssanu biomancers seeking to create a race that was better suited to the desert environment. With the Myrantians encroaching upon the Ssethregoran Empire's border, a staging area to the north of their adversaries would prove advantageous. Using the iguadon as a template, the biomancers created the sand apophics in their biogenetic vats, but after numerous generations, the experiment was deemed a failure. They were seen as too weak and considered unsuitable for inclusion in the ssethric army.

Their encampment within the Forsaken Wastes was torn down and the remaining apophics used as the target of sport by the cruel Barbed Tail and other ss'ressen. A few were able to escape deeper into the desert, where they managed to eke out an existence and survive. The discovery of the ancient Myrantian Fortress of Secrets deep with the Forsaken Wastes increased the chances for their continued existence and gave them a home, safe from their fellow ssethrics.

The Sulfur Marsh

The Sulfur Marsh is a forested wetland in Milandir, roughly one hundred and fifty leagues long and forty leagues wide. Cradled in the north by the Tares River and giving way to the rolling plains of Milandir in the south, the Sulfur Marsh was considered wasted land by the Milandisians who colonized the area. The Sulfur Marsh's name comes from the steaming geothermal springs and geysers, which dot the swamp, spewing noxious vapors into the air. The area itself is almost uninhabited by humans. The constant assault of toxic fumes is enough to keep the Milandisians from draining the entire region centuries ago. The area is a mixture

of hardwood cypress swamps, peat bogs, and flooded grasslands. Home to crocodiles, serpents, and the fearsome cholepus—the dread iron sloths—this area is considered a dangerous wilderness region, explored only by the insane or fool-hearty.

This all changed over three hundred years ago with the emigration of the Black Talon ss'ressen out of Ssethregore. The ss'ressen found the noxious vapors and warm mineral laden waters a boon. In fact, it was the perfect place to settle and rebuild their clutch. The rich swamp that was so inhospitable to their human neighbors cradled the ss'ressen and provided a barrier from attack while the clutch concentrated on rebuilding their culture.

As the ss'ressen explored the marshlands, they discovered ssethric ruins of another age, dating back to the early days of the Old Empire. It seems that their newfound deity, the Fire Dragon, had led them to this promised land, a warm and protected region that was once controlled by ssethrics not unlike themselves. The Black Talons quickly settled into their new land, spreading throughout the swamp, and erecting their capital city of Lanpeltis from the largest ruin. Now, they have numerous settlements throughout the marsh, becoming a major power in the local politics of the region.

"I never believed the ssethrics were something to fear, until I fought alongside the Black Talons and saw their fearsome courage and ferocity. If there is an entire empire of creatures like these, then I am glad we have the Black Talons fighting for Milandir."

- Albrycht Gerard Loghin val'Holryn

Major Geographical Features

Ss'chan Geyser

Lying almost thirty leagues inside the Marsh's western border, the Ss'chan Geyser is the largest waterspout in the region. The ss'ressen use this geyser and the incredibly hot water in its surrounding pools as a therapeutic site of healing with entire units of Black Talons resting here after returning from battle abroad to heal injuries and relax sore muscles. The geyser is overseen by a small temple to the Fire Dragon, where an elderly priestess tends to the wounds of any who pay homage to the Fiery One.

Important Features

Fortress of Chi'gon

This small outpost in the rolling hills west of the human city of Ashvan overlooks the eastern border of the Sulfur Marsh. Its halls are home to a small group of Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrm who stand watch against any Cancerese incursions. Built into a shallow cave system and harboring just over fifty warriors, the fortress is a highly defensive structure.

Lanpeltis:

Population: 15,000

Acting as the capital for their small society, Lanpeltis is the military and religious center for the entire Black Talon egg clutch. Ruled over by the High Matriarch Mother, the city remains a bastion of strength and a symbol of hope for the ss'ressen who call it home. Lanpeltis was built upon the ruins of an older ssethric city, its great basalt blocks reshaped and stacked to create structures of phenomenal strength and eerie beauty. The most prominent feature of the city is the stepped ziggurat temple dedicated to The Fire Dragon. Untouched by the ravages of time, the temple was the only edifice found intact in the ruins. This was seen as a good omen for the Black Talons, representing the strength and tenacity of their newfound god. For details on Lanpeltis, see *Chapter Four: The Pariah Clutches*.

Chapter 3

The Races of the Empire

The Ssethregoran Empire consists of several different species and cultures, all co-existing in a single hegemony with a strict social hierarchy. From the lowliest slave to the highest ranked member of the imperial court, everyone knows their station in life. In this most ancient of empires, manipulation and duplicity is its currency and life blood. Nobles scheme in back alley taverns, assassins pad silently down opulent palatial corridors, and generals along the border plot against rivals in the capital itself. For all its apparent stability, it is the constant struggle between the various ssethric races that keeps the empire's great war machine from overrunning the other races of the world.

Iguadons

The Iguadon That Sought God

Twilight settled upon the dark waters of Lake Quesselan. The myriad of stars hanging in the sky overhead painted the cool waters of the lake, leaving a silver speckled canvas akin to the shining scaled denizens that live in that water. Centermost upon the water, floated a wooden boat, the tiny abandoned craft bobbing in the waves created from a nearby splash. If one were to look hard enough under that murky surface a powerful tail could be seen propelling the owner into the depths.

Eumeces was a hatchling again, the warm security of the egg torn away by cruel sharp talons, pulling him into the world of light. His eyes opened and met their first sight: a scaled face with its twin cold pits delving mercilessly into this being. He tried to twist away from the apparition, but the talons cut him painfully. From that ss'ressen long ago, he learned his first lesson…. obedience.

The water grew colder around the swimmer; the feeble light of the twin moons overhead barely penetrated the warm summer waters of the lake. Still deeper the iguadon swam…searching.

Eumeces was a youngling, in his hand was his first weapon, a short wicked barbed spear. Looking to his right he saw others like him, clutch mates, lined up in perfect formation. Along their line strode the bull ss'ressen, his cruel lash biting into young scales wherever he found imperfections, real or imaginary. Second lesson…discipline.

It was completely dark now; the swimmer's reptilian gaze could barely penetrate the murk. Well down past the dwellings of the pleisaurans and heading into untamed depths. Still the lone figure swam on…seeking.

Eumeces was an adult, placed in his first battalion. Other iguadons milled about the barracks; the ss'ressen captain was currently out. Enjoying his few moments of respite from the grueling routine Eumeces wandered over to a group of iguadons having a quiet discussion in the corner. What he heard intrigued him. A god existed, one for his kind alone, which would rise again to lead his chosen people to victory. They would cast down their servitors and take their rightful place on top, making the ss'ressen grovel in the dirt for their scraps. From those first few whispered words Eumeces learned hope.

The pressure was getting worse. The swimmer's lungs burned for wont of oxygen. Spots swam before his eyes, blood pounded in his head. Still further down he dove…seeking truth.

Eumeces was an old iguadon. His scales were patchy and graying. Youth had slipped through his fingers. Over the decades, others like him were gone, died for their beliefs, been slaughtered for their "heretical" outlook, for belonging to the Cult of Hromu. Now he was one of the last, one of a handful left fighting, hoping, for Eumeces held to the faith…

The deep waters were dark and cold; they leeched life from the swimmer. Lungs strained to the bursting point, then collapsed in pain and torment. Deeper, faster, just a bit further; he swam on, the bottom was so close. There, that ridge, Could it? Was it? The pressure…silence.

Two kobolds skittered along the shores of Lake Quesselan in the early morning light. One turned and hooted loudly at the sight of its find. Breakfast had washed up on the shore, a bloated corpse of an iguadon. The kobolds swarmed over the corpse, biting, gnawing, and tearing at the soft pulpy flesh. If they had cared to look one would have noticed that curiously the old iguadon had a euphoric smile etched across its face, frozen in death…

Description: Iguadons are heavy-bodied humanoids, standing about five and a half feet tall and weighing about two hundred and fifty pounds. Their long, heavily muscled arms and short thick legs are tipped with claws. They have a long thick tail and a frill that extends from the forehead to the base of the neck. Their hides are covered in fine greenish-yellow scales, contrasted with dark blue-black mottled spots along their back and forearms. An iguadon's lower jaw is heavily built and juts out beyond their upper jaw, exposing canines that can reach up to their nostrils.

Iguadons are the workhorses of the Ssethregoran Empire. Occupying the lowest rung of ssethric society, they are held in low regard by their betters. The naga, ssanu, and the ss'ressen lord over the iguadon, while they, in turn, lord over the slaves. Even ssethric allies, such as the pleisaurans and the hylis, command more respect. It is for this reason that every iguadon is born with hate and resentment in its heart. Some turn to stalking lone ss'ressen and ssanu in the winding streets of the empire's cities as an outlet for their pent-up aggression. The group then brutally murders their target, making sure that the evidence either points to the victim's political rivals or to a disgruntled slave. Others turn to the new Varn religion, believing the honeyed words of varn priests that they shall be given a higher place in the new society they are forging. A small number reject the varn and return to the old ways, seeking solace in the teachings of Yig and Kassegore by joining the Cult of Hromu.

Iguadons are an omnivorous race, eating equal parts of meat and vegetable matter, though they prefer meat when they can acquire it. Like the ss'ressen, iguadons consider the soft-hides prey, but prefer the taste of humans to that of elorii. Within the bounds of the Ssethregoran Empire, iguadons have an exceedingly short lifespan. The average iguadon lives about twenty years before it is killed in battle or slain by rivals. The rare individual that survives these ordeals may live close to three times as long before succumbing to the rigors of old age.

In the era of the Old Empire, iguadons were family oriented, mating for life and living under a matriarchal clan structure. With the ascension of the nagas to positions of power, the iguadon social structure was radically altered and their family units broken apart. Within the rigid confines of this new ssethric culture, iguadons were forced to accept a patriarchal social structure, controlled by the largest and strongest bull iguadon of the community. These leaders, known as the *natrix*, hold sway over many aspects of iguadon society, from dispensing justice, granting breeding rights, to ending disputes though even they must report to their ss'ressen superiors.

The city of Suteq is the only settlement controlled by the iguadons and is ruled with an iron fist by the natrix. Other iguadons live in small communities within the bounds of a ss'ressen or ssanu controlled city. The ss'ressen or ssanu masters control all aspects of iguadon life within their communities, yet they also struggle with their own issues, leaving the iguadon to feed and care for themselves.

The natrix picks the most skilled iguadons within the community and grants them the right to breed. Any resulting eggs are immediately taken from the female and sent to special hatcheries run by ss'ressen. The iguadon hatcheries are areas of true cruelty and malice. These hatcheries are a special branch of the Ssethregoran military where the young iguadons are schooled in military discipline and combat techniques. The ss'ressen overseers feel no kinship toward the small iguadon hatchlings and put them through brutal training regimes where as many as twenty-five percent die within the first year. From the first moments of emerging from the egg, iguadons are taught one overriding concept: obedience to their superiors, their life's work as foot soldiers and place upon the lowest rung of ssethric society. The ss'ressen do their best to eradicate any sense of unity the iguadons might feel as a race, instead instilling the ideal that the empire is their only family and advancement in life can only be achieved through the ranks of the great military machine of Ssethregore.

When an iguadon reaches the age of five, it is assigned its life duty. Each successive batch of young iguadon is separated into three groups by the criterion of physical strength, mental aptitude, and technical skills. The cruelest, most bloodthirsty, and combat-inclined iguadons are sent to the military where they spend their lives as soldiers in the Ssethregoran armies. Their lives given in glorious combat for the greater good of the empire.

The smallest iguadon units are comprised of nine iguadons overseen by a single iguadon lieutenant. Ten such battle groups are combined into one division consisting of one hundred iguadons and overseen by five ss'ressen. These ss'ressen in turn answer to the battalion general, almost always another ss'ressen or ssanu.

Iguadons that show technical aptitude are sent to work in military logistics, where they work as combat engineers, in charge of siege equipment and the movement of the army's supply lines. A division commander, one ss'ressen per twenty iguadons, oversees iguadon engineers. These iguadons are the backbone of the army, directing slaves to move the enormous amounts of food and supplies necessary to fuel the Ssethregoran military machine. These iguadons also serve as craftsmen, many setting up permanent structures in major towns and cities to produce weaponry and other devices needed.

The best and brightest iguadons of each generation are trained to enter the Guild of Procurement. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the iguadons' role in ssethric society. The Guild of Procurement is responsible for the production of foodstuffs, the capture and dispersal of slaves, the raising of beasts, the collection of minerals, and other necessities of society. As such they are given more freedom than most iguadons. They are still required to answer to ss'ressen overseers, but are given slaves of their own to work the fields and mines in the name of the empire.

These iguadons act as the merchant class for the empire, trading and selling goods between different cities, clutches, and communities. They control large farms where food animals are raised and organize mining operations throughout the empire. Through this guild, the lifeblood of the Ssethregore flows.

Many see the iguadons brutish countenance and think they are capable only of cruelty and brutality. In actuality, iguadons are a religious people, seeking wisdom and meaning in the teachings of the divine. Since the Naga Coup and the institution of the Varn religion, many iguadons were inculcated into this new state religion. Steps were taken by the varn clergy to seduce the iguadons by listening sympathetically to their grievances and with promises to elevate them to a social standing more in keeping with the many services and sacrifices they make to the empire. Others, specifically the priests of Haulis, stoke the flames of hatred by promising and granting powers to exact their vengeance over their cruel taskmasters, but only those approved of by the priests, of course. Because of this, many have embraced the new Varn religion, but some have stubbornly hung onto the worship of Kassegore, who they believe saved their people millennia ago from the twisted machinations of the goddess Yig.

At first the naga could care less over which deity the lowly iguadons worshiped, but five hundred years ago that changed. From the ranks of the Guild of Procurement there appeared a strange iguadon by the name of Hromu. Hromu had vanished on a slave raid into ancient ssethric ruins and emerged ten years later…changed. It was said his eyes were a stunning gold and the pupils appeared in the shape of the black serpent ring of Kassegore.

Hromu spoke and the iguadon masses listened, taking him for a prophet of their god. Hromu did not preach obedience but instead an overthrow of Ssethregoran society, specifically the corrupt and perverse rulership of the naga. For two decades Hromu spread his teachings, his words seeping into all levels of iguadon society. For those twenty years, the naga searched for him, but to no avail, for he was hidden among the uncounted multitudes of iguadons spread throughout the empire.

In the end, a ssanu sorcerer of the Black Coil named Kess'leth, transformed himself into an iguadon, and managed to penetrate the so-called Cult of Hromu. After killing Hromu, he displayed the head proudly above the main gate of the capital, Sseth, as a warning to those who opposed the naga. Nevertheless, despite all the empire's efforts, the Cult of Hromu continued to grow.

In secret its numbers swelled; for every iguadon slain another would be subverted to the cause. New prophets emerged, almost upon the footsteps of the death of the previous one. Only one such prophet exists at any one time, but all are marked with the strange eyes of Hromu. The iguadons of the Cult believe each subsequent prophet be possessed by the spirit of Hromu himself, sent back to herald the return of that which they hold most dear: the awakening of the Sleeping God, the Great Lord Kassegore. With his return, they believe, the iguadons will be raised to new heights and set as lords above the ss'ressen, ssanu, and nagas.

Naga

Kahss, dark overlord of the ssethric peoples and emperor of Ssethregore was in an unusually foul mood this morning. He was rudely awakened by a gurgling scream while lounging on his favorite divan, the one flamboyantly covered in the supple tanned skin of elorii. Instantly alert, his silver eyes snapped open and their gaze fell upon his most prized bodyguard, now a bubbling puddle of putrescence, and the interlopers that had dared to enter his inner sanctum. "Ah, there you are. Just as Saruteth said you would be."

Four ssanu stood before him, their black banded bodies and tail rattles marking them as members of Pit Crotalus. The intruders were chanting in unison, incantations foul and dark rolled off their forked tongues, waves of power flowing out before them. With a snarl at this indignity, Kahss lashed out with his mind. With but a thought, the emperor liquified the brain of the ssanu on the left with an intense psionic blast, while a single arcane-powered word snuffed the life force of the pathetic serpent man on the right. Their two compatriots summarily slain and their ritual unraveling, the two remaining ssanu turned tail, but not before Kahss incapacitated both their wretched forms with another lightning-quick spell.

The naga sat upon the Coiled Throne and surveyed the scene before him. In the most opulent chamber of the empire, stretched between two pristine marble columns cut in serpentine bas-relief, hung the two ssanu. Their tortured forms suspended from intricately carved gold chains; chains on which deadly rot grubs were slowly crawling, slick bloated larvae intent on the proffered meal. Kahss' scaly countenance slowly broke into a hideous grin, as he watched the worms bore their way into the helpless victims, digging into their flesh towards their hearts at an inexorably slow pace. As the agonizing screams of the two ssanu being slowly eaten alive echoed through the massive mother of pearl inlaid chamber, a glint of perverse pleasure flashed in the cold emotionless eyes of the Emperor. A wide wicked grin broke Kahss' stony countenance; the old serpent couldn't help but think that perhaps the day was turning out rather enjoyable after all. Whispering a sibilant prayer to Sipta, Kahss reclined in his throne and enjoyed the show.

All the while Ss'risek, the Emperor's Vizier, watched impassively from the side of the Emperor's throne, his violet eyes full of malice and evil, but as the naga whispered his prayer, the corners of the Vizier's mouth rose to the hint of a smile.

The naga are the twisted leaders of all ssethric society… for the time being. Naga are carnivorous, preferring a diet of living flesh to all else. Each naga household supports cruel farms where sentient humanoids are fattened like cattle before meeting their final resting place in the larder. Naga warrens reek of stale carrion and at mealtimes echo with the pain-wracked screams of the dying.

Of all the ssethric races, the naga are the most duplicitous and cruel. While the other races may dine on lesser prey when the slave trade slows down, the naga insist on only the most succulent and tender form of sustenance: young human or elorii children. The nagas employ a cadre of agents for the specific mission of purchasing human orphans under the guise of "foster parents". These unfortunates are doomed to a shortened lifespan and their eventual demise at the hands of skilled ssanu torturers, for the naga like a show while they dine.

For all their physical prowess and political power, the three naga Houses are dwindling in numbers and maintain their hold only with the help of the Varn deities they revere. All naga are incredibly long-lived, easily surpassing the eight-century mark. Though graced with long life, most never live to see a ripe old age, as they usually meet their end due to the schemes of younger house members intent on improving their rank and station

in life. Even the emperors are not safe from these patricidal practices, as the current emperor spends as much time worrying about the murderous instincts of his own sons, as he does about foreign threats.

The naga, though long lived, reproduce infrequently. Female naga can expect offspring no more than once or twice a century, giving birth to eight to twelve hatchlings at a time. Due to this low rate of fertility combined with the current practices within the empire, the numbers of naga are slowly dwindling. The nagas of House Kahss have decreased to the point where only about twenty individuals remain. The other naga Houses are better off, numbering a few hundred each. Naga are extremely difficult to kill, and assassination attempts by non-nagas are rarely successful. The penalty for attempting to harm a naga of any house is the death of five hundred members of the assassin's race beginning with the assassin's family and all blood relations.

The naga are currently hold the top position of power in the Ssethregoran Empire, though this was not always the case. After the elorii revolt and the subsequent forced exodus to the Kraldjur Morass, the newly crowned Emperor Sseth demanded that the Black Coil correct their mistakes by creating another, more powerful servitor race, but one that could be controlled by the ssanu. With great reservations, the serpent sorcerers went to work.

They experimented on hussuma slaves, using them as a mold for their new creations, but after numerous failures, gave up on that avenue of research. The lack of archmage Ss'koreth's brilliance in the field of biomancy was sorely missed and without his guidance, the project floundered. Eventually, a young and reckless ssanu of Pit Elapis began experimenting on the lesser members of his own pit, seeking to create a new hybrid race that would be susceptible to psionic domination by the serpent men. In that respect, the experiments were a complete failure.

The first hatchlings of this new breed of ssethric proved to have potent psionic abilities, rivaling that of the ssanu, but lacked any sort of appendages, resulting in a sleek, serpentine body. At first thought to be a useless mutation and unsuitable as a warrior race to combat the elorii, their mental prowess and abilities proved to be an unexpected boon. Though many believe that these first naga were able to mentally dominate the Black Coil sorcerers into keeping their existence a secret until they were fully matured, others, notably those same sorcerers, dismiss the idea as ludicrous. It is curious that these same sorcerers continued perfecting their creation, resulting in three distinct breeds of the species.

The naga were presented to the emperor as solution to the problem of the numerous assassination attempts that were frequently made on his life. Again, there is some speculation that the naga mentally pushed Emperor Sseth into accepting them into his court and abandon his demands for a new servitor race with which to crush the elorii. Still smarting from their defeat during the slave revolt, the ss'ressen pressed their belief that it was the failures of the Black Coil that led them to their current situation and that only true ssethrics, such as the loyal egg clutches, could return them to their previous position of power.

As the various ss'ressen clutches maneuvered against their rivals and ssanu Pits jockeyed for position in this new empire-in-exile, the naga grew in number and cemented their position as the power behind the throne. They were the ones whispering into the ear of the embattled and increasingly paranoid Emperor Sseth, as well as maneuvering the various pits to suit their needs. It was during this time that the naga were beginning to split into their own discrete groups, when one of the members of House Kahss began researching the achievements of the hero of the Old Empire.

Ss'koreth's mastery over the arcane forces of the universe and ability to breach the barrier between realms fascinated this naga and he proceeded to piece together the methods the ancient ssanu used and eventually contacted a group of powerful beings calling themselves the Varn. Decades passed as the naga made numerous pacts with the Varn, biding their time to overthrow the current political order and establishing their own rule. Silently and patiently, they nudged and pulled key members of the Ssethregoran military and the imperial court into deciding to attack the elorii, decades before the ssethric forces were truly prepared. As expected, the counterattack was a disastrous defeat for the ssethric forces, claiming the lives of the most powerful and cunning members of the empire, just as the naga had planned.

Like lightning the nagas boiled forth, striking down all the important dignitaries and assaulting Pit Sseth itself. With the disappearance of Kassegore, the priests' faith was shaken to its core, leaving them ineffective and in complete disarray. Into this void the naga slithered, with their new varn patrons granting them unprecedented powers, allowing the wily creatures to sweep in and depose the old government. House Kahss took the reins of power and installed one of their own, Causus I, as emperor. Emperor Sseth was captured and imprisoned in a coffin of pure crystal where he would be tormented, his body wracked with pain, for all eternity. This grisly ornament is kept in the throne room, a constant reminder of the naga's great power.

With the overthrow of the ssanu emperor and a purge of those identified as a possible threat to their rule, the nagas completed their coup and now controlled the empire. For millennia now, the naga have continued to turn the various ssethric races against one another, weakening them so that they would be unable to pose a threat to their

naga rulers. This constant hatred and rivalry fueled by the naga is the primary reason why the ssethric races have not united under a common banner and boiled out of their swampy domain to conquer the world beneath their coils.

The various naga Houses hold sway over most every aspect of the government, from military to civilian life. Their dark gods have spread throughout the populace, and almost all the ssethric races now worship the Varn deities. Though seemingly in control, the naga have been losing power over the last few centuries. Their patrons, the varn, first came bearing gifts of arcane secrets and techniques unheard of by any in the Known Lands. Utilizing these favors, the naga wrested power from the ssanu and in return the varn wanted very little. The ability to send priests to teach their reptilian brethren on the proper way to worship their deities and perhaps an advisor or two to help keep the naga in control. This handful of advisors grew each year until now they can be found in almost every echelon of ssethric society.

At present, the varn have insinuated themselves in every aspect of ssethric life within the empire, their emissary's words couched in requests, but concealing the unbending steel of a command. Every important decision, every strategic maneuver is either instigated by a varn delegate or approved of by one. The emperor and other members of the royal court are allowed the illusion of power, but these are mere trappings now, enough to give the populace that their naga ruler is in complete control.

Few beyond the vizier and the emperor's closest family members realize how hollow their positions are, though many of the ssanu Pits' leaders are beginning to realize the weakness in the naga's position. The younger members in the various naga Houses care less about the responsibility of governance, but rather about enjoying all the perks and privileges of their position. These naga have grown slothful and decadent, drunk on the power they hold. With the passing of the years with more idle time to pass, they have grown bored of the simple pleasures of life. To overcome their increasing lassitude and boredom, they have turned to more and more perverse forms of entertainment, including public torture and carnal pleasures with the lesser races. Only the most potent and exotic drugs are powerful enough to satiate their lusts and cravings.

Naga Houses

Each of the three naga sub-species banded together in social groups known as Houses. These Houses protect the individual members from the instinctual need of the species to exert dominance over others, through either guile, intimidation, or outright assassination. Seeing the wisdom in the adage, 'safety in numbers', the naga Houses provide a modicum of protection against their deadly cousins.

House Kahss

Description: Nagas of House Kahss have a smooth serpentine body, topped by a round human-like head with very large, reddish eyes. Their scales range from a light lavender to a deep and dark purple.

House Kahss is currently the most powerful of the naga Houses. Over the centuries they have dwindled, reduced in number to a little over two-dozen individuals. Despite this, House Kahss still possesses immense political power, with well over half the naga emperors stemming from their noble line. The current ruler of the empire is Emperor Kahss the IV, son of Thuss the Mighty. Emperor Kahss has held the Coiled Throne for six hundred years, ruling the ssethric peoples with an iron coil of tyranny and brutality. His reign has been long and fruitful, but it is approaching its end. The venerable serpent spends most of his waking hours plotting and scheming against his various relatives, whom he is positive are bent on overthrowing him. He is correct. Kahss knows he has lived out his usefulness to his House and the varn. He sees assassins in every shadow and schemes to overthrow him in every whispered exchange, summarily executing underlings for crimes real and imagined. The sad fact is that if Kahss was to stop plotting against his fellows, even for a moment, he would be dead within days, for any weakness shown would be a death sentence.

The three main contenders for the Coiled Throne are fittingly the emperor's three surviving offspring who see the throne as their birthright. To them, the Old Serpent has outlived his time and it is Kahss' time to die, whether naturally or not. Any blatant attempts at his life would cause Kahss to rescind any perceived favoritism with his dying breath. This keeps his three heirs in the uncomfortable position of constantly having to work for the favor of their father, while secretly planning his assassination at the precise moment when Kahss happens to favor that particular son. This is exactly how the wily Old Serpent prefers it.

Kressek, the eldest, is responsible for the empire's treasury and consequently has the greatest resources at his disposal for the elimination of his hated father. Kahss relies upon his son's ambitions for the throne to keep him from stealing too much from the treasury, for why would the greedy Kressek want to steal from his future wealth. He uses this vast wealth to fund a network of spies throughout the empire, ensuring that he is aware of every plot before even the conspirators.

Kllahss is the second born of the three princes and commands the Ssethregoran war machine as overlord of all ssethric military forces. Kllahss is unique among his generation of naga, for though he aspires to the Coiled Throne, he enjoys the intellectual art of military tactics and has become a great martial leader in his own right. He may be hated by his underlings, but they all hold him

in high regard for his obvious talents and skills in the art of war. Most see the military backing Kllahss as the key to the throne, for it said that if Kllahss does not receive what he wants, then he has the force to take all he desires. Unfortunately for Kllahss, his brothers constantly work to undermine his authority and power. Both have a network of spies insidiously planted close to the naga overlord and it is assumed that if either makes a move on the throne, Kllahss will die the same day.

Ss'rog is the youngest of the three, but perhaps the most formidable, for he is a sorcerer of immense power, having spent his youth in the arcane halls of the Black Tower of Ssatsaya. Ss'rog has amassed great power through his magic and is responsible for the spellcaster brigades that augment the ssethric war machine. Ss'rog's greatest joy is drafting the various wyrms and drakes to the Ssethregoran cause, to serve as they did in the golden days of ssanu rule. The very sight of one of these terrible wyrms near the border is enough to send the most stalwart Altherian patrolmen running for their lives. Ss'rog's plan for seizing the throne has always centered on taking control of the great dragon Astinax and bending the creature's will to serve only Ss'rog.

Most believe he has succeeded, as he is sometimes seen riding the dragon, but the truth is far from that. In reality, Astinax is one of the last of the True Dragons on Arcanis and she sees Ss'rog as the means to an end. The dragon covets the power of the Ssethregoran throne and intends to set Ss'rog upon it as her personal puppet, for Astinax long ago imprisoned the mind of the cowardly Ss'rog and replaced his intellect with a part of her own, actively controlling the mortal shell like a demented puppet. With Ss'rog as an unwilling tool, she intends to spread her influence over all Ssethregore and seize the throne out from under the snouts of the naga who 'protect' her. The only thing that has stopped her from carrying out her plans are the varn. As for everyone else, Ss'rog appears as he has always been, a powerful sorcerer who covets his father's throne; exactly how Astinax wishes him to seem.

House Taricha

Description: House Taricha's nagas have fine black scales across the entirety of their serpentine body. Their head is human-like in appearance, but have a greater protrusion, like that of an ape. Most striking is their neck hood, similarly to those of Pit Sseth, but much thicker in nature.

House Taricha is second only to House Kahss in power and influence. This House consists of naga that can boast that they were the first hatchlings of the newly created naga species. House Taricha has had its share of emperors, though not for many centuries. Currently led by an elder female named Heruss, the House has ambitions of an imperial nature. With their coils wrapped around every aspect of ssethric commerce, House Taricha has amassed a fortune over the millennia that would outweigh the treasuries of most human kingdoms. Their power and prestige grant the House the most powerful allies and loyal servants, a luxury not often seen in Ssethregore. All the House's resources are currently fixated on a single goal: ascension to the Coiled Throne.

House Taricha has watched the numbers of the naga of House Kahss decline and have contributed to many of the murders themselves, though the House was careful that House Kahss could never prove it. With the diminishing of the line of Kahss, House Taricha has decided to reclaim the throne once again.

To further their goals they have recruited the help of some of the lower ssanu pits, most noticeably Pit Crotalus. House Taricha's goal is to use the ssanu as fodder to distract House Kahss, while they swiftly and silently close in for the kill. Yet, for all their planning, House Taricha's ambitions have one major flaw: Pit Crotalus is in fact working for the Varn Emissary who promised the ssanu the throne in exchange for their loyalty and support in winning over the masses. Given Crotalus' original position as guardians of the Old Faith, the varn hopes to sway those continuing to worship the ssethric deities or at least expose themselves so that they may be eliminated.

House Sardatis

Description: The most unusual of the naga in appearance are those of House Sardatis. While retaining the long serpentine body and human-like head like all their species, these naga have long and voluminous wild black hair. Their scales form a banded pattern, alternating between black and red, ending in a large scorpion's stinger at the tail.

Known as the *mad nagas*, House Sardatis leave the political machinations of the imperial court to their cousins, being more concerned with the mystical facets of life. Led by Govaj, a female of advancing years, the naga of this House seek to transcend the confines of the physical by using psychotropic drugs, extensive meditation, and mysticism. Many of this House believe that all of reality is but an illusion, that time and space are constructs that bind the mind and prevent their ultimate evolution, becoming a being of pure thought and consciousness.

The techniques used to achieve this goal leave them open to ridicule and derision by their cousins, but no one can argue with their achievements. A few of these naga are able to pierce the veil of time, perceiving the past, present, and future occurring simultaneously, with cause and effect being interchangeable. This allows certain members of House Sardatis to predict future events with astonishing accuracy and even bypassing increments of time, effectively moving forward and backwards through space and time.

One should not assume that the nagas of House Sardatis are not dangerous. Besides the potent psionics and arcane

abilities common to all naga, these naga were bred by their ssanu creators with a deadly scorpion's stinger. Able to inject their victims with a potent venom, a single stinger strike alone can kill an adult human. Combined with their singular ability to briefly shift through space and time, these naga are arguably the deadliest of their brethren.

House Sardatis has aligned itself with the varn priests of Zedok, owing to their chaotic philosophy. From their enlightened perspective, the naga see chaos and order as one in the same, with the ever-changing fluidity of reality extolled by the varn priests of Zedok following a complex orderly pattern. Some of the varn are growing concerned as the naga of this House are taking the teachings of Zedok into new and as yet unforeseen conclusions. Ironically, it may be these insights that may lead to the naga's extermination at the hands of the varn they follow.

Ssanu

Ss'ameth slowly wormed his way down the dank passageway, his serpentine body gliding easily over the sandstone floor worn smooth by uncounted scaly coils. The cold moist air reeked with strange and repellent odors wafting up from the dark depths below. The only sound at this depth was the slow, dry rustle of his scales sliding across the floor.

The ruddy torchlight illuminated his figure as he descended into the chamber deep below the surface, well away from prying eyes and the warm caress of the sun. The chamber before Ss'ameth was vast; sandstone blocks the size of oxen were meticulously stacked and shaped to form the chamber's interior. Large fluted columns rose gracefully to support the domed roof high overhead. Carvings and frescoes of serpent men engaged in all manner of ungodly dark acts adorned the antiquated architecture. The sputtering light of the torches and the red glow of the furnace gave the chamber a resonating feeling of palpable evil. Before him rose the chamber's guardian, a serpent of elephantine proportions, with a head the size of a horse and glistening fangs like sabers. The monster's saucer sized orbs regarded Ss'ameth with an unblinking, unfeeling stare. A steely glance from the ssanu's golden, reptilian eyes set the great serpent back to its timeless vigilance. Ss'ameth's cold calculating gaze swept the room, his eyes falling upon the instruments of his trade: various and assorted scalpels, razors, prods, hooks, and hundreds of unnamed serrated tools whose only purpose was causing pain and torment with precision and efficacy.

As the ssanu entered the chamber, the moans of the pitiful wretches, naked and chained, arose to greet him from the alter-like slabs of sandstone they were affixed to. Between them, moved the keeper of this place, an enormous brutal Barbed Tail ss'ressen named Koth, whose scaled arms lashed out with a cruel barbed black whip administering pain; harsh guttural curses escaped between the razor-sharp teeth of his maw as he plodded among the rows of the dammed upon taloned feet.

Ss'ameth's gaze stopped upon the newest guest of this unholy palace. It appeared to be a strange new animal, the first of its kind encountered by his people. A scouting party investigating a recent earthquake to the north had

captured the brute and brought it here. Ss'ameth discarded his ceremonial robe; it would be a hindrance for this sort of work. With his flexible torso garbed only in a tool harness, he glided forward on his coils to the specimen's table. Long slender arms snaked out and delicate fingers that had never known manual labor lifted a thin scalpel from the tray proffered by a kneeling Koth. Ss'ameth's forked tongue could taste the sweat and fear emanating from his subject. Looking over the creature, now howling and cursing at him in an unknown tongue, Ss'ameth couldn't help but notice its similarities with gar and apes he had encountered before. Then again, it's mostly hairless form, lack of claws, fangs, or other natural weaponry, and exceptionally large braincase classified it as something new and exciting. Still, glancing at the pile of discarded raiment nearby where an amulet in the shape of an open book lay, the creature seemed to be rather intelligent, perhaps even cultured. No matter, he would get to the bottom of this eventually. As the razor descended to the prone form, and the pain began once more, a scream of infinite anguish and loss rose to a crescendo, and for the first time that day Ss'ameth smiled.

Ssanu, or serpent men as they are referred to in the human tongue irrespective of their actual gender, represent the pinnacle of reptilian evolution upon Arcanis (or at least that's how they see themselves). As a race, they are devious and cunning, preferring to strike for the shadows than to confront an enemy face to face. There is a saying amongst the ss'ressen, '*Never trust the forked tongued speech of the ssanu*'. More foes have fallen to the soft sibilant whispers of the serpent men than their swords could ever take. Yet, if one were foolish enough to confront a ssanu directly they would discover, quite painfully, that they are not to be trifled with. Possessing potent venom, some paralytic in nature, or deadly enough to kill an adult human in minutes, many are powerful sorcerers, psionicists, or both. Stories of the ssanu's ability to trap the weak minded in their gaze is not without merit.

Physiology

Ssanu are cold hearted and stoic, rarely displaying any emotion except for the strongest, most base ones. Concepts such as love or compassion are foreign to them. Feelings of lust, passion, hate, jealousy, and anger are the fuel of their cruel society. Ssanu delight in the pain and suffering of others, for this is an emotion they can understand and relate to in others. Within the glare of civilized society, the ssanu openly obey the laws set down, but once in the darkness these creatures of shadows will do everything they can to undermine those above them in power or station, in order to increase their own standing. For all their infighting and backstabbing, the ssanu can put aside their differences and present a united front against a common foe. They are ruthless opponents, having no problem allying with their lesser or enemies to overcome a common foe, so long as their interests are advanced in the process.

A ssanu's natural life span ranges from four to five centuries, depending on the individual and their breed. Few, whether due to attacks from foreign enemies or an assassin's blade wielded by a rival, live longer than three centuries. There are rare exceptions, such as the legendary Ss'koreth, who is purported to have lived for more than eleven hundred years and the former ss'hok of Pit Crotalus who is said to have lived for over one millennium. Many believe that either some dark sorcery or secret alchemical concoction extended their lives unnaturally, but no one can say with certainty.

Ssanu appear as tall serpentine humanoids standing from five to six feet tall. The lower half of their bodies is the writhing coil of a serpent, and their upper bodies are flexible as well. They sport two long lithe arms, which end in thin agile fingers, as adept at casting a spell as holding a weapon. A ssanu's head is that of a serpent, with lidless eyes, cold and emotionless. To protect their eye, they possess a translucent nictitating membrane, an evolutionary advantage they bestowed upon the elorii. The exact shape of the head and overall coloration of a ssanu's scales are dependent on their breed and vary between the various Pits.

All ssanu sport two large folding fangs, which are not visible unless the ssanu has opened their jaw; most that see the gruesome sight do not live long enough to speak about it. Ssanu take full advantage of their dexterous forms and wear minimal garments, preferring easily shed robes and specially made leather harnesses to hold tools and important items. They prefer light armor, but ssanu holding military rank or taking part in a military campaign often orders suits of custom-made plate armor. Lastly, they are vain creatures, always attempting to look their best whenever in public view, wearing chains of gold or other precious metals and rare gems.

Being true carnivores, ssanu never eat any sort of vegetable matter unless to induce some drug filled haze. They cut their prey into large chunks, swallowing them whole, for they are without teeth for chewing their food. Entire ranches exist in the ssethric territories where buffaloes, capybaras, goats, humanoids, and other warm-blooded prey are bred for the sole purpose of feeding the various serpent Pits. A ssanu's natural resistance to poison makes them extremely hard to murder through their meals, therefore only the richest and most extravagant Pits, or extremely paranoid individuals, bother to employ taste testers. Some of their favorite delicacies are eels, rare open water fish, and of course, the quaint and delicate flavors of the various human races across the Known Lands. Many slaves sold to the Ssethregoran Empire are destined for either the breeding pits, mining camps, or to the larder where they provide premium fare for a ssanu's table.

For all their powers and abilities, ssanu's have one general weakness compared to the other ssethric races: they breed slowly. An individual ssanu may live for four hundred years, although few manage to avoid the assassin's knife that long. Ssanu females only become fertile during one to two weeks a year for only a decade after reaching adulthood. All females in a clutch typically become fertile upon the same four to five-day period each year. During this period, most work in the ssanu cities grind to a halt, as all ssanu of the appropriate age, who have been granted mating rights, take part in massive breeding orgies. These opulent affairs consist of twisting, writhing balls of coupling serpents, and are the most important event of the year. No expense is spared: rare delicacies are imported from across the continent, and the participants fall into a euphoric state where all rational thought is lost.

The breeding parties commonly last for a few days. During this time of revelry, each Pit enters a state of heightened alert, and all ssanu not participating take up guard duty to repel raids from rival Pits. It is not uncommon during this crucial time for Pits to raid another in attempt to disrupt the ritual mating, and hence ruin the target Pit's chance to produce offspring that year. Successive successful raids can severely weaken a Pit's strength, as entire generations of hatchlings can be lost.

Once the mating rituals are concluded, life returns to normal in the Pits. The females lay from twelve to twenty-four eggs and surround themselves with loyal supporters, watching rivals carefully. After a six-month incubation period, the eggs hatch. These hatchlings are immediately removed from their mothers and taken to a communal nursery where they are combined with others of their Pit. Within the relative safety of these nurseries, the hatchlings will be raised and educated for roughly ten years, upon which they will reach full maturity and allowed to participate in the machinations of their Pit. The young are apprenticed to an adult ssanu in the Pit for a position best suited to their talents.

The most vulnerable time in any serpent man's life occurs during the *Shed*. Once each year a ssanu must shed their old skin in order to make way for new, stronger scales. The Shed takes three days to complete, leaving the ssanu vulnerable as during this time they are left completely blind. In the weeks leading up to the Shed, the average ssanu becomes very agitated and paranoid, and for good reason. Throughout the history of the race, more ssanu die during their shedding cycle than at any other time. Rivals perceive this as a golden opportunity to send assassins and the like to settle bitter feuds and underlings recognize it as an occasion to advance above their current station. In order to protect themselves from betrayal or attack, most ssanu attempt to hide the fact that their shedding period is approaching, sometimes barricading themselves far away from enemies. Most do not trust anyone during these difficult times, not even their own aides or family, preferring to rely on summoned beings or constructs to protect them.

Ssanu Society

Ssanu segregate themselves into Pits, with each Pit consisting of an entire subspecies of the race. An individual ssanu is also tied to his Pit through politics, whether they play the intricate game or not. The secretive nature of the Pits has led to massive inbreeding troubles. Established Pits have become so genetically distinct from one another that if ssanu from different Pits were to breed, it would rarely produce viable offspring. Where there were once dozens, the number of Pits has dwindled down to a mere six. Internecine wars, attrition from the fall of Yahssremore, and the numerous subsequent conflicts reduced this once vibrant people to a mere shadow of their former selves.

A healthy ssanu Pit consists of hundreds of individuals, while the most powerful ones, like Pit Coasca and Sseth, number in the thousands. The ssanu live in a meritocracy-style society, governed by the most influential and skilled member, called the *ss'hok*. This individual oversees all the machinations of their individual Pit and represents their Pit at the Imperial Court. Assassinations of a ss'hok are infrequent. If the individual is powerful enough to keep their allies and adversaries from killing them on the way to the top, then they probably have the resources to hold the position once it's achieved. Ruling ss'hok tend to remove rivals who are growing in power before they have the chance to stage a coup.

Three other positions exist within all the ssanu Pits, that of *sohenj* or champion, *sistara* or grand magi, and the *sentraka vech* or brood mother. The head of each Pit's military might and most experienced tactician, the sohenj is also tasked with defending the Pit's prestige or any threats to its members. The sistara is the Pit's greatest sorcerer or psionicist, or sometimes both, and is usually a high-ranking member of the Black Coil. Lastly, the brood mother ensures that the Pit's population is maintained. Along with the ss'hok, the sentraka vech determines who earned mating rites for that cycle, a prize highly sought after by the males of the species.

At the height of their power, the ssanu sat on the throne of the empire, but were displaced by the naga, mainly due to the varn support. Regardless of their loss in station, all the major Pits maintain a presence in the capital city of Sseth. The Pits each have their own palace complex, which exerts influence over a region of the city, except for the innermost ring, where the imperial palace and the naga reign supreme. The ssanu complexes extend from the surface to deep underground, extending for miles in some cases. Most pits have a myriad of tunnels connecting them with allied Pits and the Pits of rivals as well.

The ssanu hold power over practically all aspects of life in the Empire. They rule over all other ssethric races, except the nagas, with an iron fist. They are universally feared and loathed by the other races, and the naga keep a close eye on them out of fear of an uprising. Many serve as generals and political advisors to the emperor, often dictating foreign policy by default. They also act as the overseers of the day-to-day activities within the empire, monitoring food shipments and keeping the wheels of the great Ssethregoran war machine well oiled. The nagas may make the rules, but it's the ssanu that administer the law and run the government.

As scholars and sorcerers, the serpent men govern the institutes of science and sorcery, from where the wonders and abominations of millennia have taken shape. Their mastery over the elements is legendary and many of these adepts excel in the summoning and control of elemental beings. The blending of sorcery and technology, known as biomancy, led to the creation of many of the slave races present in the empire today, such as the rhamphorikes, hussuma, and yissera. This discipline also led to the development of the advanced biotechnology many Ssethregorans exhibit.

The richest Pits have massive underground arboretums, supplied with sunlight by a cunning system of polished mirrors and lenses. In these well-lit chambers ssanu retire to bask in the noonday sun. It is also here that many of the strongest opiates and lotuses are grown and consumed. Certain individuals have their own private atriums where they grow all their rare and exotic plants. Those without the resources to own such a luxury are forced to make do with what the Venomous Scale ss'ressen cultivate.

Ssethric Communication

Many scholars point to the fact that all ssethric writings discovered thus far deal predominately with mundane records, mathematical and alchemical formulae, sorcerous treatises and historical recollections. They do not seem to record poetry, dramas or prose. This has led human scholars to conclude that, like the reptiles they so resemble, ssethrics lack the emotional complexity of humans. Nothing could be further from the truth. What most mammalian races do not understand is that ss'ressen convey their emotions primarily though the release of pheromones. Lacking this capacity, the ss'ressen believe that it is the mammalian races that are stunted in their ability to convey emotions.

Humans communicate using speech and body language such as gestures and facial expressions. The ssethric races also exude pheromones that deliver additional information that humans are incapable of detecting. From this information, ssethric races are able to gain far greater nuance than the more limited senses of the mammalian races. These pheromones are also used to coat certain writings, conveying information beyond the words or artwork. Long ago the ssanu developed a sealer that allows the faint aroma of these scents to linger for millennia after they have been applied. Due to their limited senses, humans that lack the depth and sophistication to fully appreciate any of the ssethric languages.

Religion

Once a pious people, each ssanu Pit had a designated group dedicated to venerating and performing the necessary rituals and sacrifices required by the ssethric gods. Throughout the empire, the priesthood was a position of prestige and power. This ended when Pit Talasis attempted to use their amassed influence to foist Wantiir, the ssethric God of Death, as the head of the Ssethric Pantheon, forcing all other priesthoods to bow to them. The resulting silent war among the Pits ended with the death of hundreds and the eventual banishment of Pit Talasis to the furthest reaches of the Yahssremoran Empire. From that point forth, the priesthood was viewed with suspicion. The silence of their gods during the elorii revolt further reinforced the belief that their gods could no longer be counted upon and that they were better off relying on their own abilities. Only Pit Crotalus remained fervent in their worship of ssethric deities, their influence and status within the empire dwindled as a result.

The Naga Coup and the subsequent demand that all citizens of the empire pay homage to the varn gods has rankled many ssanu, with some, such as Pit Sseth and Crotalus initially resisting the new state religion, until their subjugation by the new rulers of the empires. While most of the Pits begrudgingly bow before the new varn deities, Pit Aspis fully embraced this new religion with the passion of zealots. The ssanu of this Pit watch the rest for any signs of dissension or heretical acts and punish any found with relish. They stand alongside the varn priests during the frequent, bloody sacrifices demanded by the varn, hoping to cement their position just below the naga in the empire's new hierarchy.

Ironically, forcing the ssanu to accept this new state religion has rekindled their veneration of the Old Gods. Members of rival Pits join together in the adoration and worship of Yig and Kassegore in ancient, crumbling temples, hidden away from prying eyes. The rebellion of the Abessians enabled these ssanu to find a place where they could practice their religion without fear of persecution, though it meant living in exile in a foreign land. Another silent war is being conducted by the inquisitors loyal to the varn against this group, seeking to exterminate any who challenge the grand divinity of the Varn Pantheon. Thus far, this conflict has not spilled out into the open, mostly due to the efforts of the ssanu's agents, the yissera.

Ssanu Pits

Where once many different ssanu Pits existed, now only six remain. Each Pit has carved out its own niche in ssethric society, some thriving in the current political climate, others keeping their collective heads down to avoid notice, while another withers under the new regime.

Pit Aspis

Description: Slender in form, the ssanu of this Pit have a distinct scale coloration, yellow and black bands, across the whole of their bodies. Their heads are rounded and tapered, without any demarcation of where their neck ends.

Once viewed as the weakest of the Pits and relegated to the lowest rung of the ssanu's social hierarchy, Pit Aspis has elevated itself through cunning and the good fortune to be chosen by the naga as their co-conspirators to instigate their coup. For years, this Pit remained relevant by making themselves a thorn in the emperor's side, verbally opposing every edict without actually defying imperial law. This brought them in conflict with the mighty Pit Sseth, who after assessing Pit Aspis' potential threat, determined that they were more like mewling hatchlings than a raging sc'maths. This constant impotent agitation against imperial rule brought them to the naga's attention, seeing them as the perfect cat's pawn in their plot to overthrow the ssanu emperor and install themselves as rulers of the Ssethregoran Empire.

After betraying the ssethric forces at the Battle of Belestor, Pit Aspis was rewarded with a position of honor within the imperial court, first among the ssanu, and favored of the new rulers of the empire, the naga. Yet in a species boasting supernal genius, cunning, and insight, even the most intelligent of Pit Aspis appeared incompetent when compared to the master political manipulators of the other Pits. Their failure to anticipate the rebellion by members of Pits Crotalus and Sseth shortly after the coup led to the installation of the ss'hok of Pit Coasca as the imperial vizier at the immediate ouster, and summary execution, of the Pit Aspis leader that previously held that position. Over the centuries, while still maintaining their favored status among the ssanu, the naga never again installed one of their own as vizier. The ultimate insult came centuries later, when a member of Pit Sseth was selected for that position, despite leading the insurrection against naga rule.

The constant humiliation and degradation within the imperial court has led the members of Pit Aspis to suffer from a paranoid delusion that all, even their naga patrons, are working to see their ultimate destruction. Many feel that no matter their achievements, the ssanu of this Pit are somehow flawed and lesser than their brethren. This has led to these ssanu overcompensating for their perceived short-comings by zealously embracing the varn religion and their teachings, hoping that these other-worldly beings will see their true worth. For their part, the varn see Pit Aspis as a useful pawn in their plans. Always so eager to please, these ssanu never question or hesitate to perform whatever deed is asked of them. Along with their sadistic vassals, the Barbed Tail ss'ressen, Pit Aspis is a ready substitute should the naga prove to no longer be useful.

Pit Aspis count among their bonded egg clutches the Barbed Tail and Long Claw ss'ressen. In the years of the Old Empire, this Pit lacked the resources to create multiple egg clutches, but their one contribution to the ssethric military apparatus was hailed by even their rivals as the perfect killing machine. Following the Pit's elevation by the naga, they finally possessed the wherewithal to engineer a replacement for the loss of both the Black Talon and Dark Crest ss'ressen. Though quickly coopted by the naga, the Long Claw ss'ressen are the ultimate infiltrators and assassins in the ssethric arsenal, and tacitly under the control of Pit Aspis.

Pit Coasca

Description: Easily the most muscular and powerfully built ssanu of the species, those of Pit Coasca can be identified by their large lower coils that can crush even armored victims effortlessly. They have large, narrow heads with a fine scalation of pale green with small darker spots along their sagittal side. Those hatched in their demesne of Delendas located in the Endless Dark, tend to be devoid of any coloration, leaving their scales pure white in coloration.

Militant by nature, the ssanu of Pit Coasca have long been the backbone of the Ssethregoran war machine, spearheading many of the empire's wars. Before the Naga Coup, these ssanu formed the bulwark against the Malfelan elorii of the Fellglade. Here, they battled their former slaves in bloody and pitched skirmishes on an almost daily basis in this hotly contested region. After the coup, they were rewarded by being granted governance over the Central Basin region of the empire. It was reasoned that being located in such a pivotal location, they could move troops quickly and easily by way of the rivers crisscrossing the empire. For their part, Pit Coasca welcomed the respite, as this allowed them to focus their efforts and resources on what they believe is the true existential threat to the ssethric people, the servants of Oblivion.

Those believing that these ssanu, so focused on their martial prowess, are easily overcome by arcane or psionic might do not usually live long enough to learn from their mistake. Due to the many years of battling the psionically active agents of Oblivion, Pit Coasca has a greater number of their population trained as psionicists than any other Pit. While these numbers fluctuate greater, as the survival rate is quite low due to the deadliness of their opponents, these psionicists still outnumber any other ssanu Pit.

Arcane casters are also in high demand in the conflict

zones, with the ssanu of this Pit placing all their efforts into mastering the art of combat magic over other disciplines. Those few that have mastered both the arcane arts and the power of the mind are elevated to command positions, leading their less experienced brethren in battle against the empire's foes.

Females outnumber males as the need to replenish the losses sustained by the Pit in their various military engagements is paramount. After their breeding years, a handful of females are selected by the Pit's brood mother to help with the hatching and initial teaching of the young, while the rest join the ranks of the military. The Pit's current champion is a female, Sohenj Feliset, a two-hundred-year-old veteran of countless engagements. She personally leads the troops defending the city of Delendas, acting as de facto governor of the ssethric territory in the Endless Dark. She answers only to the leader of the ssethric forces, the Emerald Scale general, Overlord Dracaena, in military matters, and to Pit Coasca's ss'hok, Irtalak, in all other issues.

Ss'hok Irtalak is considered one of the safest leaders of any of the ssanu Pits, having not had an attempt made on his life for over a century. The lack of assassination attempts has less to do with how beloved Irtalak is than the fact that no one would want his responsibilities and position. Rivals from the other Pits are more than happy to let Pit Coasca handle any external threats to the empire, allowing them to expend their efforts on the deadly game of imperial intrigue that they obsess over. Those from within the Pit realize what a thankless job Irtalak has, juggling the needs of the military with the political jockeying in the naga court he must endure to ensure that the proper resources are funneled where they are truly needed rather than wasted on another monument or extravagant celebration honoring the emperor. Irtalak must also placate the varn by saying just the right things and observing all their religious requirements. Lastly, the leader of Pit Coasca must appear competent enough to have the full confidence of the emperor, while not showing himself to be too formidable as to be a threat to his reign.

Thus far, Irtalak has managed to maintain this precarious balancing act, allowing his Pit to do the important work of defending the ssethric people from all external threats. Of late however, he has begun to think that an even greater threat than the agents of Oblivion may the serpent nestled in the empire's bosom, the varn.

Pit Crotalus

Description: A ssanu of Pit Crotalus' scales are light brown or grey with a black diamond pattern along the sagittal side of their body. Their scales are rough and keeled, each having a small ridge running down the center, giving them the feel of sandpaper. Their heads are broad and arrow shaped upon a thickly muscular neck. The most unique and striking feature of a member of Pit Crotalus is their rattle-like tail, which grows with each shedding period. When sensing danger or taking an aggressive stance, most of these ssanu will unconsciously shake their tail, either alerting those about them that they are aware of their presence or as a warning.

The ssanu of Pit Crotalus trace their origins back to the time before the founding of Yahssremore, where the mere mention of their name would send shivers down the spine of the listener due to their position as the Yahssremoran Empire's inquisitors. Regarded as the most pious of the Pits, they were given the honor of being the caretaker of their people's religious artifacts and relics. When Pit Talasis attempted to supplant the veneration of the other ssethric deities with Wantiir, the Death God, it was Pit Crotalus that approached their rivals in Pit Sseth to join forces in destroying Pit Talasis for this effrontery.

After the fall of Yahssremore, Pit Crotalus continued to enjoy the former high status, being granted the Central Basin region to administer. When the rest of the Pits become disinterested in upholding their religious obligations, Pit Crotalus took it upon themselves to ensure that the proper rituals continued to be observed. This piety led to their downfall when the naga and their varn patrons overthrew the old order.

Upon the order of the varn, the naga initiated an immediate purge of the entire priesthood of the Old Gods, executing hundreds, including a disproportionate number of ssanu from Pit Crotalus. Those that survived the pogrom, as well as the other members of the Pit, were then scrutinized for any signs of heretical acts. Over the centuries, these ssanu were ordered to undergo a more intensive indoctrination into the varn religion than any other ssethrics. For their part, many in Pit Crotalus do everything they can to show their adherence to the new order, practicing the new religion with a zealous fervor.

Ironically, this same crackdown on their culture spurred an underground movement that preserves the teachings of the Old Gods. Given their long life, many of the older generation imparted their knowledge and passion to a few trusted members of the newer generation. Members from other Pits joined in, and together met in secrecy in ancient, abandoned temples. This group eventually chose to exile themselves in the neighboring human nation of the Abessian Dominion rather than risk annihilation if they were betrayed or discovered.

When reorganizing the empire, the newly installed naga emperor ordered Pit Crotalus out from the Central Basin region and into the Western Forest, replacing Pit Coasca as the defenders of the western border. Even with their formidable bonded ss'ressen, the Razor Claws, the ssanu were wholly unprepared for the aggressive attacks by the Malfelan elorii. Hundreds died in the first month alone as the Pit's ss'hok and sohenj desperately sought

to adapt to their new environment. Sensing the shift in their foe's strength, the elorii massed on the border and quickly overran the ssethric fortresses near the Boneyard. If not for the rare intercession of the undead archmage Sulmacet, the Malfelan may well have entrenched themselves in the area.

In the time since their relocation, Pit Crotalus has adapted to their new station within the empire. Their current ss'hok, Seventus, is an erratic leader, having taken Zedok as his patron varn deity and wholly embracing the chaos the god's priests preach. As a show of faith, Seventus' form is almost unrecognizable, with long quills and multiple arms projecting from his body. His mind is as chaotic, which would lead to disaster were it not for the secret hand that guides the Pit.

The former leader of Pit Crotalus is the wily old serpent Sengal. Ancient by ssanu standards, Sengal is said to have witnessed over one thousand years of the empire's history. Few know the secret to his longevity, an alchemical formula found in a secret cache of scrolls written by the archmage Ss'koreth. To obtain the key ingredient necessary for the brewing of the potion, Old Sengal employs a cadre of expert torturers specializing in causing excruciating agony in elorii. It is the former slave's tears that are the key ingredient in making the longevity elixir that account for the ssanu's extraordinary age.

Naja'haje
The Viper Crown

Sengal may be ancient, but his mind is still sharp as a razor and his arcane might is unrivaled in all of Ssethregore. Nevertheless, the old ssanu retired from his position as ss'hok of the Pit three centuries ago to pursue the dark arts. He is the only ssanu to have ever held the position of ss'hok and survived long enough to retire. The skulls of hundreds of rivals decorate the long hall that leads to his private palace. This palace is ringed with deadly traps and horrid spells and boasts to have never had a thief survive an attempt to penetrate his inner sanctum. Sengal never leaves his palace anymore, but uses an army of constructs and mindless slaves to attend to the mundane daily routine.

Even though he is no longer ss'hok, his position in the Pit is one of great influence, commanding unfailing respect. To the dismay of many new ss'hoks, upon attaining the position they discover that the Pit is truly ruled by the ancient Sengal and their title is merely meant to turn the assassin's blade away from the old serpent. The current ss'hok is relived that Sengal is present, as that allows him the freedom to plunge further into the mysteries of Zedok, the Lord of Chaos.

Pit Elapis

Description: The most colorful of all the ssanu, the bodies of Pit Elapis are covered with long, heavily keeled sagittal scales, which give them a bristly or shaggy appearance. The scales are brightly colored in blues, greens, and reds hues. Ssanu of this Pit also possess a very short snout that tapers to a point.

Pit Elapis was once one of the great Pits of the Old Empire, yet it has now been reduced from its former glory. During the middle ages of the Yahssremoran Empire, Pit Elapis boasted a dynasty of emperors that lasted for two thousand years. These ssanu once enjoyed immense wealth and prestige, lording their power over their rivals. The sorcerers of this Pit crafted the famed Serpent Crown, *Naja Haje* and used its power to quell uprisings and force their rivals into submission. Their grip on the empire was finally broken when their last emperor, Sskathra, was beheaded for excesses that made even the decadent ssanu blanche; the Serpent Crown he wore lost to history.

During the dynasties of the previous ssanu emperors, dissent over policy and actions taken by the state were tolerated and even encouraged as a way of promoting critical thinking on actions that affected the empire. Under the rule of the naga, this was no longer the case. Manipulated by the Sseth ss'hok to voice her displeasure at the current reapportionment of power within the empire, the Pit Elapis ss'hok found that her arguments were not well received. After her execution for

questioning the infallibility of the emperor, the entire Pit was removed from the main body of the empire and transplanted to the less hospitable southern region across the Lauriol Sea. In retrospect, it may have saved this Pit from extinction.

Far from the swirling chaos that is the imperial court, Pit Elapis was no longer viewed as a rival or threat to anyone's powerbase, allowing them to thrive in their private fiefdom. Their rule has not been without its setbacks. After expanding the small town of Th'lathis into a port city rivaling Anuliss across the sea, their coffers slowly filled from the export of lumber, ore, and other exotic goods, allowing them to build a fleet of ships that are the terror of the waterways.

Their territory also came with the most diverse group of species to rule than any other region within the empire. From the amphibian hylis, sea devil, and pleisauran allies to the enslaved shell-backs, the ssanu of Pit Elpis must use all the means at their disposal to ensure that none undermine their authority or pose a threat to the reaping of natural resources from the region. Given their isolation and distance from any reinforcements, their bonded egg clutch, the Curled Tail ss'ressen, and the iguadon are treated better than their counterparts on the mainland to secure their loyalty. Even so, every few years a rash of murders take place where individual ssanu are targeted and quietly assassinated, the only thing taken are their scimitars, an heirloom that all members of Pit Elapis keep with them at all times. No clue as to the identities of the killers have been found, making the naturally paranoid ssanu even more so.

One thing that these ssanu did retain from the years before their exiled is their love of beasts and creatures of all sorts. Biomancers of this Pit focused their art on the creation of unique and bizarre beasts of war. Their experiments yielded quite a few successes, such as the rhamphorikes and the so-called ssethric war beast, along with an equal number of abominations. Ironically, it was one of their own that created the race of naga that now subjugates their species.

Never an overly religious Pit, their members nevertheless account for the largest percentage of ssanu taking on the mantle Jeggal Sag. Each generation, a number of ssanu hear the call of the slumbering divine dragon and take the pilgrimage to the Sacred Mound where He rests. Those who are not chosen by the deity are tasked with protecting those who take the pilgrimage. Strangely, these ssanu are permitted to remain and perform these tasks by the varn, who otherwise seek to stamp out any and all signs of the Old Religion.

Their current ss'hok, Sstrak, was once a general who amassed a reputation as a gifted tactician and warrior due to her campaigns against the gar and trolls infesting the region. After sustaining injuries in a conflict where she lost her left arm, Sstrak claimed the position as head of the Pit when she ousted the previous holder of the position for gross incompetence. Sstrak's interests lie mainly in growing the Pit's military capabilities on land and on the sea.

Pit Maliss

Description: Covered in a fine mesh of pitch-black scales, the ssanu of Pit Maliss are practically invisible in shadow. Even the interior of their mouths are pigmented black, with only their yellowed fangs breaking their monochromatic appearance. These ssanu have rounded heads and the longest lower extremity of any of their species.

Although Pit Maliss is ancient by any standard, it has only come into political power relatively recently. The Pit's recent surge of influence is due to a policy set down five hundred years ago by the late Ss'hok Carphophis, who recognized the advantages of a stable trade route connecting the empire with the lands of the soft-hides. Through the use of merchant caravans of disguised ssanu and yissera, Pit Maliss has managed to not only establish secure trade corridors, but have also recover dozens of ssethric relics lost in ancient Yahssremoran ruins scattered throughout the continent. The Pit has even managed to infiltrate human organization such as the Emerald Society and the Followers of the Azure Way, placing spies in positions of influence.

Carphophis' policies established a thriving trade route into Ssethregore coming down the Vekthy River in Abessios and another more secretive route along the Altherian border. Nearly ten percent of the trade goods protected by the Altherian Shining Patrol are actually destined for secret rendezvous with the agents of Pit Maliss. Unscrupulous human merchants float entire shipments of slaves to Lake Khess then march them overland to the northern portions of the empire.

The ssethric outpost of Chelydra, an imposing structure of red granite built on the lake's edge is controlled by Pit Maliss, who came to a financial arrangement with Pit Sseth over its administration. Chelydra is one of the few areas in the empire where soft-hides visit without fear of capture or death. Non-ssethrics are not permitted within the fort and all transactions take place outside the inner walls in a specially constructed square designed for the displaying of slaves. This constant influx of human cattle and exotic human goods has allowed Pit Maliss to amass a substantial fortune in a relatively short time. This all came to an abrupt halt with the revolt and subsequent creation of the Abessian Dominion.

With the rise of the Abessian Dominion and its secret and heretical ssanu masters, the passage of illicit goods in and out of the empire became problematic. The Abessians interdicted caravans and even single merchants moving across the empty frontier, causing the trade route to wither.

With the loss of revenue and the cost of maintaining an ever-larger garrison rising, Pit Maliss cut its losses and ceded control of the outpost back to Pit Sseth.

Quickly adapting to the shifting situation, the cunning ssanu turned their attention to the assets they already controlled. Just off the thin strip of coastline they administered for the empire were a series of insect infested islands known as the Fanx Islands. Never exploited due to their control of the largest port city in the empire, Annuliss, these islands represented the opportunity to hide a new smuggling point right under the empire's nose.

The port city of Maldruga was explained away as a place to handle the overflow of goods and materials from the Southern Reaches. Word quickly spread to the slavers and smugglers that the Ssethregoran Empire was once again open for business. More slaves pass through Maldruga's pens than in Annuliss and Th'lathis combined, all without paying a copper to the empire's tax collectors. Besides slaves, illicit and exotic goods pass in and out of Maldruga, with even stolen biomancy items making their way throughout the Known Lands to as far north as the Pirate Isles. Recently, enterprising human merchants have begun transporting captured infernals from the Fiendish Expanse. Pit Maliss makes a huge profit selling these creatures to fight in the Blood Pit, giving jaded audiences a spectacle unlike any they have previously witnessed.

The current leader of Pit Maliss is an imposing ssanu named Ssuun, who rose to power quickly through guile, murder, and the amassment of wealth. With the vast majority of his rivals dealt with, the cunning serpent man has set his sights on the position of vizier to the emperor. Such a move would elevate his Pit in the imperial court, rivaling the influence of Pit Aspis and eclipsing the hated ssanu of Pit Sseth.

Ss'risek, Imperial Vizier

Pit Sseth

Description: The ssanu of Pit Sseth sport collapsible fleshy flaps on the sides of their necks that can be extended like that of a cobra. The coloration of their scalation varies slightly from a light green to darker shades. Regal in bearing, what the other Pits deride as arrogance, they proudly describe as ultimate confidence.

The first ssanu created by the hand of the ssethric gods were those of Pit Sseth, a claim that the other Pits scoff at whenever it's mentioned. Nevertheless, the ssanu of this Pit hold their accomplishments as proof of their superiority over the rest of their species. None of the others have had more emperors, overlords, or archmagi than Pit Sseth. During the time of Yahssremore, the greatest hero of that empire was the legendary Ss'koreth, and when the old empire fell, it was the aptly named young ssanu Sseth that saved their proud heritage and forged the Ssethregoran Empire. No other Pit can boast so many achievements and no other Pit has lost so much because of it.

After the Naga Coup and the subsequent doomed rebellion against it, Pit Sseth suffered serious setbacks, being stripped of their holdings, wealth, position, and prestige. During the purge that followed, Pit Aspis nearly eradicated the line and were only prevented from accomplishing this due to the intervention of the naga and their varn masters who felt they were too valuable a resource to waste. Slowly, the Pit rebuilt, able to claw their way back up the social ladder through dedication and

complete surrender to their new overlords. Ever pragmatic, Pit Sseth groveled when needed, suffered humiliation when required, and licked the lower coils when necessary. All the while, beneath their guise of obsequiousness, they seethed and bided their time to enact their revenge.

After preventing an assassination attempt upon the Varn Emissary, one which they secretly orchestrated, they were rewarded with the administration of the Northern Foothills Region. After an absence of a few centuries, they used their recovered influence to propel one of their own to a leadership position within the Black Coil, where a member of their Pit has always presided. Along with their bonded egg clutches, the Emerald Scale and Black Talons, they made themselves indispensable to the empire, repelling attacks by the Malfelan elorii and incursions by the new human upstarts. They even negotiated a non-aggression treaty between the empire and the Imperium of Man, a feat thought impossible due to the savage border wars that preceded this diplomatic achievement.

After a few more centuries, Pit Sseth had once again entrenched itself in the fabric ssethric society and became a fixture in the imperial court. Their value as a loyal member of the empire was so engrained in the minds of the naga and varn that even the betrayal of their bonded egg clutch, the Black Talons, did little to endanger their position, though the other Pits certainly tried. Their influence has grown so much that one of their own was appointed vizier to the naga emperor, a position of great power and influence.

The goal of overthrowing the rule of the naga and the varn is one held by the leaders of the Pit, but not universally known within their family for obvious reasons. This has led to an invisible schism within the Pit, with some enthusiastically venerating the varn deities and following their blasphemous teachings. Those who are still loyal to the Old Religion must now guard their words and actions from those within their own Pit, making a difficult subterfuge even more so. This varn worshipping group is led by a sorcerer named Ehuss, who constantly demands that the sorcery taught by the Black Coil follow the instructions of Sipta, the varn deity of the arcane. This has been diplomatically rebuffed by the Black Coil, who counter by saying that all techniques have their place in their teachings. Ehuss is not placated by this argument and is determined to be appointed sistara of the Pit, so that he can be installed as one of the three leaders of the Black Coil.

Currently, one of the three leaders of the Black Coil is Th'ssoth, a member of Pit Sseth. He is assisted by another prominent practitioner of the arcane, Ssremit, a broodmate. They tend to distance themselves from the day-to-day politics of the Pit, preferring to spend their time exerting their influence over the other members of the Coil. Yet, the two remain loyal to Pit Sseth, lending their arcane might where necessary. They are concerned at Ehuss' growing influence within the Coil and have had to begin teaching the life draining arcane technique favored the Sipta's adherents to mollify him and his varn patrons.

The other heads of Pit Sseth are the young ss'hok, Ssalis, Sohenj Ssaska and the sentraka vech of the Pit, Yisleth. Less than a century old, Ssalis' meteoric rise baffled many within and outside the Pit, yet the ssanu has demonstrated himself to be a consummate politician, diplomat, and tactician. Many believe him to be a once in a millennia prodigy, but the reality is that Ssalis has a secret patron that guides his every move. This patron has revealed themselves to the heads of the Pit and to Sistara Th'ssoth, ensuring their support behind the young ss'hok. The advantage of having such a young ss'hok is that he is invariably underestimated and overlooked by the elders of the other Pits as well as the naga.

Under a veil of extreme secrecy, Th'ssoth and Ssremit have crafted an item to defeat the potent psionic abilities of the naga that shields their minds, keeping anyone from discerning their thoughts. This artifact, known as the Mind Thorn, can gently slide through these mental defenses and lay their surface thoughts to bear, if one can get close enough. Only Ss'hok Ssalis, due to the naga's habit of dismissing the ssanu because of his inexperience, is able to remain within range of the device, giving Pit Sseth unprecedented access to information and plans being considered by the naga emperor.

Pit Talasis

Description: Originally the scales of this Pit were a uniform brown, but after completely devoting themselves to the ssethric Death God Wantiir, the petitioned the biomancers of the Black Coil to mark future generations with a distinctive skull pattern on the top and back of their heads. This bone-white coloration also extended to their hands, which were a ghostly white.

An example of the many ssanu Pits that no longer exist is Pit Talasis. Once lauded as the most pious and divinely blessed of the Pits in the Yahssremoran Empire, their lust for power eventually led to their downfall. During this time, all the various Pits had members designated as clerics leading religious ceremonies for the deities of the Ssethric Pantheon. Over time, Pit Talasis chose to worship Wantiir over the other ssethric gods, eventually filling this deity's clergy exclusively.

Death comes to all mortals, and so the services of Wantiir's priests were sought by all other pits. This unprecedented access to the inner sanctums of the various ssanu pits allowed the cagey funerary priests to uncover secrets that they sold or used to their advantage. So wealthy and influential did they become that the emperor elevated Pit Talasis in the court and a priest of Wantiir served as personal advisor to him and several of his successors.

Preening with pride, power, and wealth, these ssanu overplayed their hand by attempting to elevate Wantiir above the other ssethric deities. This change in the ecclesiastical hierarchy would require the rest of the other priesthoods to serve with Pit Talasis as their superiors. So outraged were the clergy of Kassegore and Yig that, for the first time in millennia, they worked in concert to undermine and utterly destroy Pit Talasis' power base and prestige. In a bid to quash the other clergy from denying them their place as the leaders of the ssethric religious organization, Pit Talasis sought to blackmail the current emperor. This ploy backfired horrendously, leading to the execution of the Pits leaders and the banishment of these ssanu to the furthest reaches of the Yahssremoran Empire, the barren wasteland far to the east.

With only their bonded egg clutch, the Death's Head ss'ressen, by their side Pit Talasis tried to make a home in the dry canyons of the region, but cut off from their people and stripped of all their wealth and power, they slowly died off. With each death, the remaining worshippers of Wantiir performed unholy rites upon their dead, so that they might rise when called upon to serve their descendants and regain their seat of power. Centuries passed until the final priest of Wantiir, the ssanu Herekza, felt the Death Lord's coming. He instructed the loyal Death's Head ss'ressen to entomb him upon his death and performed the ritual of undeath upon himself with his last breath. Thus, they remain sleeping, awaiting the time when they will rise once more and take their place of honor in the ssethric empire.

Ss'ressen

The scaled shapes passed swiftly in the night, their bodies scarcely making a rustle in the thick forest foliage. Fifty they numbered, armed to the teeth with wicked curved blades and barbed spears. Their leader, a great hulking shadow, raised a clawed hand in the air signaling a halt. The troops immediately fell to the forest floor, taking cover behind stump, bramble, and bush. Their quarry was in sight; the smell of their prey was on the wind. Ahead in a clearing stood a large complex of wooden buildings, an outpost of their enemy. Approaching downwind, the invaders circled the camp and slowly stole into the heart of the compound. Sentries were met with a feathered shaft in the darkness, their bodies left to lie in their pooling blood. With the skill of forest ghosts, the intruders glided into the village and as one attacked.

Clawed heels kicked open locked doors and gray-scaled bodies rushed to slaughter the sleeping victims inside. No quarter was given as warriors, females, and the hatchlings alike, all fell to the sword or axe that night. Taloned hands slashed the throats of the sleeping, burning brands were thrust into the thatch, and wicked barbed blades tore at the flesh of their hated enemies. As the shouts and screams of the dying filled the air, the remaining defenders shook off the night's peaceful embrace and rushed the attackers. Under the cold moonlight, raider met prey. Soot covered ss'ressen, their hides punctuated with long spines and their weapons dripping clots of gore, faced off against deep black ss'ressen, their large purple crests erect in the heat and confusion of battle. The two lines held for a moment, then the large Barbed Tail leader raised his axe to the sky and yelled, "Death to the traitors!" With guttural cries the two lines fell upon each other hacking and slashing, tails smashing bone, and talons rending flesh. A frenzied orgy of blood and death engulfed the camp and when it was over the invading Barbed Tail ss'ressen stood over the fallen village of Dark Crests, their homes burning behind them with lurid light. Turning to his troops, the large Barbed Tail grinned evilly, showing his serrated teeth and pointed to the nearby hatchery. "Let us feast on their future."

Among the ssethric people, the ss'ressen are the most diverse. In the age before the Great Migration, it is said that there existed only one ss'ressen egg clutch, but the ssanu began experimenting upon them with their nascent biotechnology, seeking to improve the species. By the time of the ssethric march to the north and the establishment of the Yahssremoran Empire, over a dozen different egg clutches existed. Regardless of their unique gifts, all ss'ressen tend to be militaristic, delighting in the intricacies of the battlefield and the strategy of war. They are creatures of rank and station, with a natural respect for authority. Though they may chafe under an abusive or incompetent superior, most ss'ressen never question their position in life, carrying out orders without a thought as to their righteousness or morality. They are the perfect soldiers, bred for war and conflict, and remain the backbone of the great Ssethregoran war machine.

Physiology

Regardless of what egg clutch they belong to, all ss'ressen have certain physiological traits in common. They are reptilian humanoids covered in thick scales, have an elongated skull akin to that of a lizard, with enlarged jaws and flaring nostrils. Some clutches sport intricate cranial ridges or spikes along the tops of their heads, on thick brow ridges or along jaw lines. Ss'ressen do not have external ears, only a small round hole above and behind their great cold eyes. Their eyes have a nictitating membrane, essentially a transparent additional eyelid, allowing them to see clearly underwater.

All ss'ressen have tails. Some sport a sagittal crest that runs from the base of their skulls, along their spine, and out to the tip of their tail. Their hands and feet are adorned with reinforced talons, able to rend and tear through most hides and armor. These claws constantly grow and are slowly replaced if torn out. Thick scales cover their backs and chest, giving way to small, finer scales on their abdomen and along the underside of their tails. Their scalation range in color from bright greens

and purples, to sandy browns, grays, and even black. Many ss'ressen are dual tone in color, having a dark patterning along their back and a lighter shade of the same pattern along their chest and stomach. Some of the more exotic clutches, like the Flaming Tongue, have bright clashing colors on their sagittal crests, using these as displays when agitated or angry.

All ss'ressen have the ability to regrow their tails should they be torn or cut off. The process takes almost a year to completely regrow the tail and during that time the ss'ressen's equilibrium and sense of balance are compromised. Contrary to human belief, a ss'ressen cannot regrow other severed or damaged limbs.

Ss'ressen are omnivorous, but prefer meat to other food sources. Eighty percent of a ss'ressen's diet is comprised of fresh meat or fish. They prefer their food raw and only cook it for preservation purposes. Ss'ressen will eat almost any creature through most prefer mammalian prey to birds, reptiles, or fish. This fact often makes negotiations between ss'ressen and humans difficult, considering that ss'ressen view humans as just another tasty morsel for their plate. Situations where the two species have reached some sort of agreement are strained at best, as ss'ressen prefer to interact with other ssethrics rather than live among prey. The Black Talons have managed to overcome this mindset, seeing themselves as more enlightened than the rest of their species.

The average ss'ressen reaches sexual maturity at age eight and lives for fifty to sixty years. Each year the ss'ressen must go through a sloughing period where their outer layer of skin is shed off, revealing new lustrous scales beneath. Sloughing usually lasts for a week or more, and during this time ss'ressen are extremely itchy, agitated, and surly. Many ss'ressen take to heavy drinking during this time, preferring alcoholic oblivion to the constant irritation. Consequently, sloughing ss'ressen are shunned by their clutch mates. Iguadons refer to their taskmaster's slough as *the flaying time*, for during these periods more iguadons feel the lash of their masters than at any other time.

Ss'ressen females become fertile once every eight years and may produce two to four eggs each. These eggs are nearly the size of a newborn human's head and have the consistency of a tough leathery shell. The eggs are laid in a communal hatchery that is heated by an open furnace or a fire pit in the less advanced clutches. Proximity to the heat source during the first three weeks of development determines the sex of the hatchling, while overall exposure to heat over the entire two-month development period determining other key factors, such as intelligence. Setting freshly lain eggs closer to the heat source produces females, while eggs destined to be males are places in the mid regions. Those of the neuter or worker caste are set in the coolest region of the hatchery. After the first three weeks, if more intelligent males are needed for leadership positions, some of the male eggs are moved closer to the fire to promote greater intellectual capabilities. Consequently, females are invariably smarter than their male counterparts due to the longer exposure to the higher temperatures. This arrangement suits the ruling Matriarchy just fine. After hatching, the newborn ss'ressen are raised together in communal areas in other parts of the hatcheries.

Most egg clutches feed their hatchling the bare minimum sustenance needed to survive and siblicide is common to weed out the weak, for only the strongest individuals in ss'ressen society are granted the privilege to propagate the species. Eggs from any non-condoned mating between clutches are routinely destroyed to preserve the purity and quality of the overall clutch. Males often participate in gladiatorial games or fights of supremacy to gain the right to mate. A general who proved himself physically and mentally superior may be granted mating rights several times over, allowing him to pass on his greatness to subsequent generations of ss'ressen. The ruling Matriarchy has the final say in which males may breed.

Society

Each egg clutch is controlled by a matriarchal oligarchy made up of a group of elder females that also act as the high priestesses of the clutch. Ss'ressen are highly religious, as it meshes perfectly with their lawful and organized society. The females establish all the laws and policies for the clutch and only they are allowed to enter the clergy, though highly religious males often become templars and Holy Champions. The ruling matriarchy of each clutch is comprised of a group of elder females, steeped in the lore of their religion. Originally this pertained to the ssethric pantheon of the Old Empire, though now they are versed with the rites and rituals required by the Varn Pantheon. This ruling matriarchy is headed by a single female known as the Matriarch Mother, who has final say in most every matter impacting the egg clutch.

Each clutch has a central community that the ruling matriarchy controls, usually a large town or small city somewhere within Ssethregore. Outlying settlements are governed by their own Matriarch; a lesser priestess that answers to the main ruling body. The laws of the Matriarchy are absolute, and their word is law in ss'ressen society. Those that displease the Matriarchy are summarily executed by the merest gesture of a taloned claw. Touching a priestess of any level without her permission is cause for punishment and in the rigid society of the ss'ressen, the punishment for any crime is at minimum dismemberment and most often death.

Ss'ressen society is divided into two main factions: religious and military, with slaves overseen by retired males are tasked with attending the menial tasks once performed by the Worker Caste. The priesthood of any ss'ressen society

functions as a hierarchy. The lowest levels are comprised of acolytes charged with caring for the hatchlings and attending public functions. As a ss'ressen priestess increases in power, she is brought into higher levels of secrecy and intrigue. Only those within the highest levels of the Matriarchy are trusted with the secrets of the clutch. These Matriarch Mothers are also given the power of managing the temperature of each new generation in the hatcheries. Females that attain the rank of High Priestess or higher are automatically granted the right to mate. All other females are denied this right unless, like the males, they earn it through combative trials. Currently, priestesses act as the conduit for the sermons given to them by the varn priests. Worship of the old gods is forbidden. In times of conflict, the priestesses rally the masses for greater glory of the empire and the varn deities. There is no specialized rank of priestess for war, for all females are trained with martial skills and fight alongside the warriors in any given encounter. These females, usually belonging to the lower ranks of the Matriarchy, are pivotal in preserving morale of the troops and healing battlefield wounds. In this way, the Matriarchy of any given clutch is essential to the Ssethregoran war machine.

Ss'ressen are the elite of the Ssethregoran military. Almost the entire officer caste of ssethric society is made up of ss'ressen. Ssanu still hold the higher positions of power, as commanders of the military forces, acting as generals or taskmasters. An exception to this rule exists in this generation, as an Emerald Scale ss'ressen, Dracaena, holds the title of Overlord over the entire ssethric war machine. The highest social position available to the males of the clutch is that of Warlord. Though still answerable to the Matriarch Mothers, the warlord is the undisputed master of the clutch's warriors on the battlefield. When working as part of a larger force, warlords must accede to the commands of ssanu or naga generals, though most of these generals are intelligent enough to allow the ss'ressen warlords great latitude in the field.

Ss'ressen officers are placed as overseers of iguadon battalions or as commanders of ss'ressen troops. A ss'ressen officer always commands members of his own egg clutch, as the pheromones engineered into the species makes the very scent of another member of a clutch causes them to fly into a frenzy few can control. Only the pheromone exuded by the ssanu can negate this reaction, thus ensuring that the egg clutches can never unite to overthrow the serpent-men.

The officer class is given greater latitude on the battlefield than the common foot soldier and will order retreats instead of risking the loss of an entire battalion. Yet, if the loss of that battalion will give the ss'ressen some strategic advantage over their foes, an officer will not hesitate in sending the entire unit to their doom, though for obvious suicide missions ss'ressen officers prefer to use humanoid slaves or iguadons.

The Worker Caste in ss'ressen society is almost nonexistent. All foodstuffs and supplies are grown and harvested by slaves, overseen by their master's cruel whip. Kobolds make up the majority of slaves found inside the fortifications of the clutches, while iguadons act as builders and overseers on the large plantations that provide meat and forage for the various ss'ressen egg clutches. Armor and weapons are constructed by a special order of smiths known as the *declawed*. These are ss'ressen warriors who were so crippled or maimed in battle that they would be a hindrance to their own troops in the battlefields. These ss'ressen are a rarity, considering most die in battle, but through some unforeseeable circumstances survive. The declawed are treated with respect and are taken under the wing of a veteran declawed to learn the ways of smithing. For all their hardships, the declawed create some fantastic and highly prized pieces. They are attended to by a host of personal slaves, but most shun them and learn to move about and function without any assistance. As a final insult for their sacrifice, the declawed are not allowed to breed.

Ss'ressen life isn't composed entirely of rigid military doctrine, for most possess a surprisingly lusty attitude toward leisure time. Ss'ressen spend their down time when not on military duty drinking, gaming, and participating in religious observances or gladiatorial games. All types of ss'ressen have developed a taste for exotic liquors and beers, the alcohol having a stimulating effect on their system. Unlike in humans, alcohol of any type raises a ss'ressen metabolism far above its normal levels. This results in a euphoric state similar to hallucinogenic condition caused by certain plant compounds.

Ss'ressen take great enjoyment from watching the various gladiatorial games held throughout the empire. Some ss'ressen even participate in such games to hone their combat abilities. Ssethric gladiatorial games are pit fights, held in circular amphitheaters or more often smooth walled pits cut into the earth. These combats have no rules as anything goes and are always to the death. Most often slaves and prisoners of war are cast into the pits to fight for their survival while the ssethric audience looks on, gambling on the outcome. Fallen warriors of any race are considered delicacies in the marketplace, the more victories a fallen warrior had under his belt, the more the carcass is worth.

The remainder of a ss'ressen's leisure time is spent in religious observance. The Matriarchy holds daily services, in which animals, slaves, and captured warriors are sacrificed. When the Ssethric Pantheon was venerated, the ss'ressen didn't expect the deities to help them in their daily struggles, nor would they want their help. They recognize that Kassegore, Yig, and the rest of the Pantheon granted them strength and courage upon their birth and that is all they could ask for. Only in times of great turmoil or threats to the very existence of the clutch did the common warriors implore the Old Gods for aid.

Those days are now long gone with the coming of the varn. Though all of the egg clutches within the empire are commanded to venerate these new deities, some do so simply to placate their masters and forestall the lash. Those that have wholly embraced the varn religion are said to hold perverse rituals deep below the surface where they conduct heinous acts in the name of the Varn Gods.

Egg Clutches

Barbed Tail Egg Clutch (Sspiniferous)

Description: Barbed Tail ss'ressen stand between six and seven feet tall and sport twin rows of thick spines down their back rather than the usual sagittal crest seen in most other ss'ressen. The coloration of their hide is a burnt orange and brown. The Barbed Tail receive their name from the clutch's natural weapon, a thick, heavily spiked tail.

The Barbed Tail are the most populous egg clutch within Ssethregore. Brutal, barbaric, merciless, and cruel, these ss'ressen are the hammer the empire utilizes to grind its enemies to pulp. Bred to be stronger and more savage than the average ss'ressen, members of this egg clutch delight in brutal warfare, and in tormenting their victims.

Barbed Tails can be found throughout the empire, from the embattled frontier with the Fellglade to their chaotic city of Ky'usk. Originally bred as shock troops by the biomancers of Pit Coasca, as the ssethric empire lurched from one battlefront to another, this egg clutch found itself under the control of almost every ssanu Pit at one time or another. In the aftermath of the Naga Coup, dominion over the Barbed Tail was consolidated and placed under the coils of Pit Aspis as a reward for their show of loyalty. These ssanu delight in using their ss'ressen as a hammer to cower others or simply as currency, bartered to other Pits who are in need of a brutal and relentless weapon.

The Barbed Tails have embraced the new state religion with a fervor unmatched by any other egg clutch. Though they pay homage to all the varn's deities, it is the Chaos God Zedok that truly resonates with them. Many undergo painful and unholy rites to enjoy the gifts granted by this dark god. Their current High Matriarch Mother is the infamous chaoshammer Neoseps, whose acts of perversion and depravity would make a Larissan priestess blush.

Untold numbers of sacrifices have met the knife upon the blood-soaked altars dedicated to the Varn Pantheon and no egg clutch has been more complicit in these savage rituals than the Barbed Tails. Fervent in their beliefs, the Barbed Tails have no compunctions in killing any that they find straying from the path. Their inquisitors constantly hunt down infidels among the other ssethric races, taking delight when they find heretics among the other egg clutches.

Universally reviled by all other ss'ressen, the Barbed

Tails retain their power through fear, cruelty, and malice. The iguadons hate no clutch more and along the lesser slave races, a sentence of being sent to the Barbed Tails as punishment is considered worse than death.

The Barbed Tails harbor a special hatred for the Black Talon ss'ressen, as their continued existence is a painful reminder of one of their greatest failures. Barbed Tail inquisitors travel into the human lands to learn of the Black Talons' current disposition as they yearn to bring about their complete annihilation. In the First Battle of Semar, a special contingent of Barbed Tails was held in reserve to counter the Black Talons should they come down to join the battle. Their other failure, the complete extermination of the Dark Crests, is a closely held secret known only by the Matriarch Mothers and the clutch's Warlord.

Currently the Barbed Tails are entrenched in the highest positions of power in the empire, constantly vying with the more intelligent Emerald Scales for political positions and military roles. Their cruelty and malevolence permeate through to the forces under their control, creating the perfect weapon for the plotting leaders of the Ssethregoran Empire.

Curled Tail Egg Clutch (Barbatus)

Description: Raised to fight in the vaulted coastal rain forests of the Southern Continent, their bodies are lithe and wiry with a mottled light green coloration. Standing between five to six feet tall, Curled Tail ss'ressen are aptly named for their impressively long tail that they tend to keep curled behind them. This tail is prehensile and capable of supporting the ss'ressen, lifting objects, or even wielding a weapon. The hands of a Curled Tail do not sport the long talons seen in other ss'ressen; instead their digits are short, thick, and covered with adhesive pads made from millions of tiny hair-like protrusions. These pads allow them to climb any surface at a surprising rate.

The Curled Tail Egg Clutch is an unfamiliar sight to most travelers from the Known Lands. Hailing from the Southern Reaches across the Lauriol Sea, the Curled Tail ss'ressen call the forested city of Irikut, as well as the grand port city of Th'lathis, home.

The Curled Tail ss'ressen are the bonded egg clutch of Pit Elapis, the true rulers of Th'lathis. With the Curled Tails acting as their enforcers and defenders, Pit Elapis governs the city and surrounding region, controlling the mining outposts in the mountains to the south and the shipping across the Lauriol. Both groups give the varn deities the exact amount of veneration required of them by their otherworldly allies and no more. It is suspected that in the more remote outposts Curled Tail ss'ressen still worship Kassegore and possibly even Yig. The ruling naga have far greater concerns than who the Curled Tails worship, though the *Speakers of Adulation*, priests of the van deities, view this issue with growing concern and have requested that the *Obligators* increase their numbers in the region.

Having fully acclimated to the Southern Reaches, the Curled Tail ss'ressen have adapted their warfare tactics to the jungle region. They have become masters of guerrilla warfare, often conducting attacks from the trees above their opponent's forces, dropping down into their midst before the enemy has realized that the ss'ressen are among them.

Dark Crest Egg Clutch (Acerbuss)

Description: The matte-black scales of the Dark Crest allow these ss'ressen to lose themselves in the shadows, while their sharp talons are ideal for eviscerating targets. A large sagittal crest that runs laterally from their head to tail gives the egg clutch their name and grants them the ability to diffuse their body heat, making them difficult to discern by heat signature.

Bred by the ssanu biomancers of Pit Crotalus to counter Pit Sseth's Black Talons, the Dark Crest ss'ressen excel in stealth and assassination missions against all the enemies of their patron Pit, including other ssanu. To infiltrate their serpent brethren's strongholds, usually replete with the ss'ressen guards, the Dark Crest's gland that exudes the pheromone causing frenzy was removed.

During the ssethric migration north, the Dark Crests were at the forefront of the battles against the issori that founded the Yahssremoran Empire. Later, during the various Extinction Wars, they served their ssanu masters well by destroying or subjugating the various races that fell before the ssethric war-machine. With the creation of the elorii, many of the ss'ressen egg clutches withdrew from all but the direst of wars to pursue other activities, leaving the bloody battlefields to the servitor races. With the end of their full participation in the Extinction Wars, the number of Dark Crest eggs hatched dropped substantially. Subsequent generations took on other roles in society as their focus shifted from constant warfare.

After the fall of Yahssremore and the subsequent exodus and exile to the Kraldjur Morass, the Dark Crest fell from their position of power to become a peripheral egg clutch. They attempted to rebuild their broken clutch's power but political intrigue and pressure from rival ss'ressen forced the Dark Crests to lead risky military ventures, foremost of which was the attempt to retake Yahssremore from the elorii. The result of that disastrous campaign, as well as a string of defeats over the next dozen centuries, caused the Dark Crests to fall even lower in the eyes of the empire's ruling caste.

Although all ss'ressen during that period venerated the deities of the Ssethric Pantheon the Dark Crests, along with the Emerald Scale, were especially devout, bordering on fanaticism in their worship of Kassegore, He Who is the Beginning and the End. After failing to retake their former capital, the naga took power in a coup and supplanted the ssanu as rulers of the Ssethregoran Empire. These malevolent creatures instituted a new state religion,

one that did away with the ancient, ineffectual ssethric deities and replaced them with the Varn Gods. Though many ssethrics resisted such a move, the dissenters were given a simple choice – convert to the new religion or be destroyed. Many did just that, while others were either driven underground or exiled.

The Dark Crests resisted this new institutionalized religion and refused to convert. After centuries of refusing to convert, the naga emperor Narthsslik chose to make an example of them and ordered the Black Talon ss'ressen to exterminate their longtime rivals. The Matriarch Mother of the Black Talons refused to carry out the order. The naga took their refusal as a sign of a possible rebellion against their rule and ordered the Barbed Tail ss'ressen to exterminate both egg clutches.

The Barbed Tails fell upon the Dark Crests' city of Cognatus will relish, feasting upon their eggs and stamping out any evidence of the condemned egg clutch's existence. They returned to the emperor victorious and declared that the Dark Crests were no more, which is just what the black scaled ss'ressen wanted. It had cost them a third of their population and dozens of hatchlings, but the sacrifice had saved the Dark Crests from total extinction.

This deception gave the Dark Crests time to move south across the Lauriol Sea and through the southern portion of the empire. Finding their way through the Taconis Mountains that served as the southern border of the Ssethregoran Empire, the exiled ss'ressen discovered an unknown basin filled with lush vegetation and a warm, wet environment filled with prey to hunt. Here they began a new settlement which they named after their ruined city and began anew.

Over the intervening centuries, the Dark Crests discovered other threats to their existence, old and new. Tribes of savage gar and animal totem-worshiping humans compete for resources in the basin, while out towards the edge of the shoreline, mages in black ships arrived taking the ss'ressen as either slaves or fodder. These powerful sorcerers forced the Dark Crests into an alliance with a human nation known as the Kobian Timal, a confederacy of clans and city-states.

Death's Head Warrior

The Dark Crests could not keep their existence hidden forever from the Empire. The Barbed Tail are now aware that they escaped and are desperate to find the Dark Crest settlement and annihilate it before their error is discovered by anyone else. This is proving even more difficult since the Dark Crests are now traveling north and into the human lands hoping to acquire knowledge or allies against the seemingly unstoppable sorcerer invaders. News of the Abessian Dominion's acceptance of Yig has given them hope that the Kassegoran religion survives there, as well. Small groups have made their way there to verify this and to see if their egg clutch can find a safe haven in the Known Lands.

The Dark Crests often travel into the empire to exact vengeance against the hated Barbed Tail as well as assassinate whatever varn they can target. They find this alien religion to be a cancer at the heart of their once beloved empire, and are determined to cut it, and those propagating its acceptance, out. Balancing this mandate with the need to remain hidden from the powers that be is precarious. All Dark Crests are aware that should the fact of their survival become known to the naga, their former masters will stop at nothing to wipe them from existence.

Death's Head Egg Clutch (Capumors)

Description: These ss'ressen are smaller than average, reaching a maximum height of five and a half feet and their wiry frame weighs less than two hundred pounds. Their hide is black with white bars across much of the body, but predominantly on the face, which also sports a halo of long spikes. Death's Head ss'ressen sport very long tails that taper to a fine point, which they can use with devastating effect.

Created ages ago by ssanu biomancers in the employ of Pit Talasis, the Death's Head egg clutch, as with other ss'ressen, were hatched to serve their serpent men masters. Like their bonded Pit, Death's Head ss'ressen are fervent worshippers of the ssethric god of death, Wantiir. When Pit Talasis was banished, the entire clutch joined

them, protecting their lords throughout the arduous journey to the east and throughout their exile. Across the intervening millennia, the ssanu population began to die out. As taught to them by Pit Talasis, the ss'ressen priestesses of Wantiir performed the rites that extended the serpent men's existence by placing them in a death trance to await the time of their reemergence. They remain in the canyon region, guarding thousands of tombs, crafting weapons and armor from bone and stone while revering the few remaining enchanted metal weapons in their possession.

Ordered to protect the Pit's tombs, the clutch, along with thousands of kobold slaves, attempted to recreate their society, but over time and without the guidance of the ssanu, the ss'ressen began to degenerate into a more primitive and savage version of their former selves. Isolated from other ssethrics, the Death's Head ss'ressen have made the Canyon of Zhu in the Hinterlands their homeland, one that they protect fanatically. Any sentients trespassing into their territory are either killed outright or captured and gruesomely sacrificed before an effigy to Wantiir, after which they are consumed. These effigies, crude representations made of stone and wood, vaguely resemble a coiled serpent with two arms. Whether this is how Wantiir was once symbolized or the ss'ressen are melding their memory of the ssanu of their bonded Pit with the deity is unknown.

Emerald Scale Egg Clutch (Viridiss)

Description: These regal ss'ressen stand between five to six feet tall and sport a small sagittal crest made up of triangular plates that runs to the tip of their tail. Two more heavy ridges of triangular plates run along their brows. Emerald Scale ss'ressen are named for their vibrant green scalation that cover their heads, shoulders, back, and arms, giving way to a lighter mottled green along their chest, abdomen, and legs.

The Emerald Scale Egg Clutch believes itself to be the quintessential ss'ressen that all other egg clutches should strive to emulate. Indeed, they fervently believe that theirs was the original stock from which all other ss'ressen were created from by ssanu biomancers. Imperious and militaristic to the core, their city of Veriss is the second largest ss'ressen city in Ssethregore, eclipsed only by the Barbed Tails' city of Ky'usk.

The city of Veriss, which has been under Emerald Scale's control since the formation of Ssethregore, was originally a small military outpost. The city has grown as the clutch increased their power and prestige in the eyes of their masters and peers. From Veriss the Emerald Scales have expanded their reach, spreading over the northern territories of the empire, always at the forefront of any large military engagement or when Pit Sseth needs to flex their martial power.

The Emerald Scales preeminent position as master tacticians and disciplined soldiers originated from an experiment the Matriarchs orchestrated thousands of years ago. At that time, the clutch was already considered ancient by ssethric standards, but their power and influence were waning as new clutches appeared, created by the ssanu's biomancers. The High Mother Matriarch, Ss'nutum, descended into the dark depths beneath their mighty Kassegore's temple. Before the altar of the Great Devourer, she prayed, imploring Him to advise her on how to regain their hold over the empire's military forces. In a vision, Ss'nutum received her answer.

Ascending from the temple, the High Matriarch Mother proceeded to the clutch's hatchery. In compliance with the vision, she moved the eggs proportionately closer to the sacred fires. Weaving an incantation of power over the eggs, she protected the closest ones from the imminent destruction from the deadly temperatures, then charged that three priestesses be on hand to renew the incantation.

Through this act Ss'nutum raised the overall intelligence of the clutch profoundly. Succeeding generations of Emerald Scales were more cunning and intelligent than their rival egg clutches. Where Barbed Tails gain position through ruthlessness and brute force, the Emerald Scales rise through their own cunning and tenacity. In a few generations, the Emerald Scales had regained their position of leadership of the empire's war machine.

Though the worship of Kassegore was prescribed after the Naga Coup, the Emerald Scales continued to worship the Great Devourer in hidden temples deep below the city of Veriss. This clandestine worship of Kassegore is no secret to the ssanu leaders of Pit Sseth, who protect their bonded egg clutch from varn obligators and members of their own Pit who have wholly accepted the new state religion. However, the naga and varn have made some headway in instilling religious fervor in the younger generation of hatchlings. This has caused some consternation within the clutch's Matriarchy who see the day coming when they may have to make the fateful choice of venerating the Varn Pantheon or follow the path taken by the Black Talons and seek asylum outside the empire they so love.

Flaming Tongue Egg Clutch (Pyrolengus)

Description: Flaming Tongue ss'ressen stand between five to six feet tall and their hide is a burnt orange in coloration mottled with dusky brown or red bars. Flaming Tongue ss'ressen sport a crimson red sagittal crest that lies flat against their back. When agitated or in preparing to use their special attack, the crest is raised to display its vivid coloration.

The Flaming Tongue Egg Clutch was bred as ranged support for the ssethric forces but still maintained the

capability for melee combat. These ss'ressen received their name from two specialized glands found in the rear of their jaws. When their facial muscles are contracted a stream of viscous oil is forcibly ejected from the glands and spurts out of its mouth in a tight stream. This oil ignites upon contact with the surrounding air, creating gout of sticky flaming naphtha. Knowledgeable opponents may gain a moment to prepare themselves by watching for the telltale crest movement just prior to the release of liquid fire.

The Flaming Tongue ss'ressen once controlled the city of Eeljit in the Eastern Rainforest, but were expulsed from their ancestral home after participating in the failed rebellion against the naga. For some time they were relegated to serve under Pit Coasca in exchange for some land where they could construct hatcheries. For generations the clutch lived a nomadic life, moving from area to area, but forbidden from returning to their ancestral home.

Eventually, Pit Sseth, who had participated in the rebellion, managed to regain their previous position of prominence within the empire and petitioned the emperor for the return of their bonded clutch. Having permanently lost Eeljit to the Long Claw ss'ressen, the Flaming Tongue were permitted to construct a new home, the city of Telith. This impressive fortress is a bulwark against Altherian raiders was located in the perfect position for ambushing rich caravans moving along the Shining Way to vaulted Althré.

The protection of Pit Sseth is greatly welcomed by the Flaming Tongues as they were viewed by the other egg clutches as weak and easy prey, especially by the Long Claw and the Horned Jowl ss'ressen.

The Flaming Tongue are zealous advocates of the varn religion, believing that their ardent veneration for the new gods will elevate them to position they once enjoyed. They have taken the goddess Sipta as their patron, to the delight of the varn. The Flaming Tongue consider any females born with the talent for sorcery to be blessed by this goddess. The Matriarchy ensures that a number of arcanely gifted ss'ressen are hatched each generation. These hatchlings are then given to the varn as tokens of the clutch's fealty and who are then trained as battle mages. Those members of Pit Sseth that still harbor hopes of overthrowing the naga and their varn masters see the Flaming Tongue's willingness to submit to the varn as a liability that will need to be addressed before the final rebellion can take place.

Horned Jowl Egg Clutch (Agamassi)

Description: The average Horned Jowl stands between nine to ten feet tall and weighs in at an incredible five hundred pounds. Testaments to the skill of the ssanu biomancers, the Horned Jowl are huge brutish ss'ressen, meant to serve as heavy shock troopers. They are massive hulking brutes with a short snout and wide jaws. The head of a Horned Jowl ss'ressen, or Agamassi as they are commonly called, is covered with numerous long spines running along its jaw line, brow ridges, and cranium. These ss'ressen have overly

long arms and wide splayed feet. Their tails are shorter than that of an average ss'ressen and their thick horny hide offers superior protection from all but the most devastating of blows. Their claws are short and Agamassi prefer to strike with their horny fists rather than slash at their opponents.

The Horned Jowl ss'ressen, represent a highly specialized egg clutch. These ss'ressen have never been numerous, being the slowest ss'ressen to reach sexual maturity. The average Horned Jowl requires twenty years to attain full growth and arrive at full sexual development; more than twice as long as most ss'ressen. These additional years allow these ss'ressen to gain the mass their clutch is known for, but lowers the number of eggs hatched each year. The reason for this is that though the Agamassi are not true adults, they are still put out in the battlefield to learn from their elders. The rate of attrition during periods of intense warfare means that there are fewer adults able to return for the mating cycle.

The Horned Jowl are not to be taken lightly as armored regiments of these massive brutes can carve through opponents like a warm knife through butter. The most stalwart and brave warriors quail when they see a wedge of Horned Jowl ss'ressen barreling their way across the battlefield, spattering brains, entrails, and blood across the theatre of war. The Agamassi often find themselves in important positions, such as being assigned as bodyguards to the ssethric elite and scores make it to the position of emperor's personal honor guard. Those not protecting important personages find themselves in the army as shock troopers or heavy assault squads, designed to tear through enemy formations; a job that the Horned Jowl accomplish surprisingly well.

The Agamassi worship the varn deity Haulis, the embodiment of rage and destruction, a towering force deemed to destroy all that is before him. The Horned Jowl Matriarchy embraces these views and breeds berserkers among its ranks. Nothing on the battlefield is more intimidating than an Agamassi berserker wading through the fray, bloody crowsbeak in hand, dangling globs of an opponent's flesh from blood-smeared spines. Though the Matriarchy adheres to the varn tenants, it does not create abominations to appease the Varn Pantheon, like some of the other egg clutches. The Agamassi are too proud a race to taint their blood, believing they are already the perfect embodiment of strength and rage. To corrupt the next generation with the essence of the varn would be to lose themselves as a race.

Ss'Kaleth-Khaht, Champion of the First City's gladiatorial games

The Agamassi are notorious for a peculiar trait - its rich oral tradition, passing along much of what they know though songs and stories. Virtually nothing in their culture is written down or recorded. Consequently, a warrior bard heritage has sprung into existence within this egg clutch. Usually derived from the priestesses, but not limited to them, the warrior bards entertain the masses and hatchlings by regaling them with tales of lust, battle, and courage. These tellers of tales and recorders of history often become a *plethorax* and accompany their comrades into battle singing hymns in a rich baritone or keeping beat with huge copper kettledrums.

The Long-Claw Egg Clutch (Ungoi)

Description: The natural appearance of the Long Claw egg clutch is of a long snouted, lithe ss'ressen with iridescent scales and one enormous claw

on each hand which they use to eviscerate their victims. They stand between five and a half to six feet tall and their hide exhibits an iridescent sheen, changing its color depending on the light source.

Designed by the ssanu to fill the niche once held by the Black Talons and the Dark Crest ss'ressen, the Long Claws are master assassins, able to slip pass guards and other defenses due to their ability to change their form to perfectly mimic any other ss'ressen egg clutch. Even their scent is masked so as not to incite a frenzy with their pheromones.

Being one of the newer egg clutches bred, the Long Claw ss'ressen have only known the Varn deities and their form of worship. The fact that their very existence is thanks to the gifts of Sipta, the varn god of sorcery, has made the Long Claws especially fanatical to the cause of the naga and their alien masters. One other byproduct of the varn deity's gift is the ability to produce a natural acid. This not only allows them to have an acid bite, like the Dark Crests, but it also provides a potent defense as any wound caused by a weapon causes it to pit and corrode quickly.

Created by the biomancers of Pit Apsis these ss'ressen are technically bonded to them, though the naga emperor recently become obsessed with the iridescent scaled ss'ressen and their shape-shifting ability. The Pit believes that many of the assassinations of the emperor's enemies over the years were at the claws of their creations, and completely without their knowledge. This has caused the Pit Aspis to keep a wary eye on the Long Claws, lest they be used against them.

For their part, the Long Claws enjoy their unofficial status as the assassins of the emperor, reveling in their natural sadistic nature, delivering death and chaos to those marked for execution. As a recent addition to the Ssethregoran Empire, the Long Claws have not had the time to create their own unique culture within ssethric society, but have learned their history and of those they were created to replace, the Black Talons and the Dark Crests. Their intense hatred and need to completely eradicate these two egg clutches from the face of Arcanis is almost overwhelming. Their leader, the Long Claw priestess of Sipta named Hastek, keeps the younger bulls in check, patiently waiting for their time to strike.

It has only been in the past few decades, during an ill-advised incursion by the Black Talons into the empire that the Long Claws were able to slip in a few of their own into that egg clutch, replacing casualties and traveling back to the Sulfur Marsh without anyone's knowledge. Many of these assassins have risen to positions of power within the pariah egg clutch and are prepared to execute their orders at a moment's notice.

As for the Dark Crests, the Long Claws know the truth. While everyone else believes the Barbed Tail ss'ressen completely destroyed the rebellious egg clutch, they know better. During their sweeps south of the empire, they have come across remnants of battles and mounds of corpses, followed by a flash of shadow where none should be. None have ever been seen, but the Long Claws have identified an odd scent and believe it to be that of the Dark Crests. Knowing that they will be ridiculed without concrete proof, the Long Claws hunt their elusive counterparts throughout the jungles of the south in the hope of gaining evidence of the Barbed Tails utter failure.

For their exemplary service, the Long Claws were granted the former city of the Flaming Tongue ss'ressen who had fallen out of favor with the emperor. The city of Eeljit is located in the heart of the empire and near the imperial capital city of Sseth. Here they move undetected and with impunity throughout the empire, easily traveling to wherever their duties require.

Razor Claw Egg Clutch (Sulsellous)

Description: Razor Claws are the shortest of the ss'ressen, standing about five feet in height. They sport dark green bars of color running from their snout to the tip of their tail atop a sandy tan to muddy brown hide. A single row of cranial spines leads into a sagittal crest devoid of webbing between spines. Their most prominent feature is their extremely long talons, thick and sharp, sprouting from each hand. Their arms are short and bulky, built to absorb the shock from the tremendous blows these claws can deliver. Each scale on their bodies tapers into a sharp point, with an edge like a razor.

Masters of melee, the Razor Claws sport an impressive array of spines and ridges along their bodies ideal for tearing an opponent's flesh to shreds. A favorite tactic of the Razor Claws is to close in and grapple with a foe, using his claws to eviscerate the opponent while their scales tear at the foe's flesh.

Razor Claw ss'ressen can be found throughout the empire, but are concentrated within the Western Forests on the border with the Fellglade. They call the city of S'lissuth and its underground sister city of S'lis their home, both acting as staging grounds for the battle against the agents of Oblivion in the cavernous Endless Dark. Led by the ssanu of Pit Coasca, the Razor Claws are a formidable force, just as sadistic as the Barbed Tails, but less prone to uncontrollable and mindless violence. The orderly mindset of Pit Coasca has, over time, tempered the Razor Claws' innate chaotic nature, turning them from a frenzied mob to a disciplined force. This social evolution has begun to unravel thanks to the arrival of the varn. Since the initiation of the varn religion, the Razor Claws have migrated towards the teachings of the varn deity, Zedok, as this dark deity best personifies the chaos that grips them in battle. The varn Speakers of Adulation's teachings resonate with these ss'ressen, often whipping them into a battle frenzy that the ssanu can barely control. Given the Razor Claws position as the tip of the spear against the agents of Oblivion, this has caused concern among the generals of Pit Coasca.

Razor Claws hold a special hatred for the elorii and any captured can look forward to a long, torturous flaying by the Razor Claws upon the alter of Zedok. These ss'ressen find elorii to be a special delicacy, having never lost the taste since acquiring it under the Old Empire. They often keep Osalikene slaves in pits deep underground, feeding off them like some perverted cattle. Squads of Razor Claws are constantly patrolling the border with the Malfelan, looking for captives and itching for a chance to wet their talons in the warm blood of the dying.

Venomous Scale Egg Clutch (Venaris)

Description: A Venomous Scale ss'ressen stands between five to six feet tall and contains a speckled hide in hues of light gray and purple, with a slightly yellow underside. Large sacs of venom rest bloated on either side of their neck, which deflate as the venom is expelled in a fine mist. Their claws are not as prominent as those of other egg clutches, but they make up for that with a razor-sharp bite and extra thick hide.

The Venomous Scale Egg Clutch are truly the most despicable of that breed. These ss'ressen use their ability to spit forth a paralytic poison to capture prey wanted for questioning by their superiors or for preserving food for their macabre living larder. They ruthlessly torment and torture victims and take special joy in knowing that though they inflict terrible wounds upon them, their captives can only stare back in mute horror.

The Venomous Scale are one of the least numerous of the ssethric egg clutches. They trace their heritage to the Old Empire, long before the appearance of the elorii, and possibly even back to the Great Migration over ten thousand years ago. Though their numbers are small, they are the finest interrogators in the empire. Using a combination of psychological techniques honed over the centuries and concoctions of finely cultivated herbs and toxins, they are able to break even the strongest willed sentients within days.

Their city of Jahsak is a horticultural wonderland where these ss'ressen indulge in their favorite pastime, the cultivation and development of natural toxins, poisonous herbs, and venoms. These are traded throughout the empire and beyond as raw goods or as exotic potions and blends crafted by these masters of toxicology.

Many of the Venomous Scale have left behind their ancestral worship of Kassegore and venerate the varn deities as ordered by the naga. Never being a particularly religious clutch, they do not feel the religious fervor certain other ss'ressen do, but do what is required to curry favor with the ruling caste. It should be noted that their city of Jahsak is one of the few major settlements in the empire without a varn temple. Every time such a structure was scheduled to be built, the Venomous Scale, through their bonded Pit, Pit Maliss, applied whatever influence they could with the Imperial Court, to forestall such plans. In addition, *Architects of Light*, mages who follow the varn god Sipta's teachings, are strictly forbidden entrance into Jahsak due to their penchant of draining the life force of lesser lifeforms, like plants, to power their spells.

Allies of the Empire

Hylis

Description: Appearing as small humanoid treefrogs, the hylis are perfectly adapted to an arboreal lifestyle high up in the forest canopy or deep in the swamps and marshlands. Hylis stand about 4 feet tall, but their slouched posture and tendency to walk using their hands reduces their overall height to roughly three feet tall. Their skin is a multihued mottle arrangement of splotches, bars and blotches, perfectly designed to break up their outline when creeping through the jungle.

The hylis are the most enigmatic and secretive members of the Ssethregoran Empire. Like a chameleon, the hylis possess the ability to alter their skin tones from a bright vibrant green or red to almost pure black, allowing them to blend into almost any surrounding. Their skin is smooth and slick with a protective slime coating that is also deadly poison. Hylis tend to be wiry lithe figures, with long limbs and strong legs for leaping. They prefer to move through the trees with a series of short jumps as opposed to walking. The hands of a hylis have no claws, but are instead tipped with sticky pads, allowing them to adhere and climb all natural surfaces. Their heads are short and broad, with two bulbous golden eyes perched atop its head.

Hylis females are almost twice the size of males and dominate hylis society. They become fertile once each year and are courted by singing males. The better the performance the more likely a female will choose a specific male. It is said that hylis bards are perhaps the best in all the Known Lands, for the proliferation of the next generation relies on their skills. Once the females find a mate, they proceed to a staging point above the surface of a breeding pond, where in a massive amphibian mating ritual, hundreds of jelly-coated eggs are laid, then whipped into froth by the kicking of the adults. This foamy mass hardens into a ball, where the developing eggs remain for two months. After this two-month incubation period, the mass starts to dissolve and the larval young, called *wogs*, fall beneath the clear waters of the breeding pond. There they are fed and cared for by the females and zealously guarded by the males for another four months, after which they metamorphosis into young hylis and are accepted into the community.

Though amphibians rather than ssethics, the hylis have managed to retain their freedom from the usually xenophobic ssethrics. This is partially due to an alliance forged against the shell-backs, a ssethric race who once

warred against the Ssethregorans ancestors, a slight that was never forgotten. Keeping primarily to the Coastal Swamplands and the Blackroot Forest in the Morass. In actuality they are the only sentient beings to habitually live in the dreaded Morass and do so only by the virtue of their arboreal nature. Though the lightless depths of the Morass are a festering mire of unspeakable horrors, the immensely thick canopy that captures the light high above is a place of uncommon beauty. Huge thick mats of moss a mile or more in diameter clog the treetops, blocking out all light from the under story, but making the canopy above rich and vibrant with life. The constant rain forms small lakes in the treetops. It is around these lakes that the hylis make their homes, living in small communal villages. Their largest cultural center is Grylio, found in the trees around the floating Lake of Uleth.

A single female, bigger and stronger than all the other females, rules over a hylis villages as chieftain but holds very little power or allegiance to the hylis from other villages. This lack of a centralized government makes the hylis more than happy to ally with their ssethric neighbors, for the order and security gained from being part of a greater society heavily outweighs the slight loss of freedom. The hylis are commonly recruited into the Ssethregoran army, but their low numbers limit them to special roles; there are no battalions made up entirely hylis. Their natural stealth makes them excellent commandos and assassins, a role the empire is more than happy to grant to them. A preferred tactic is to wipe their weapons along their poisoned skin just prior to battle, ensuring that wounded opponents will not rise to see another day.

The isolation of the hylis has allowed them to keep their religious structure intact, despite centuries of effort by their ssethric allies. Hylis worship a strange deity and erect shrines dedicated to its worship. These shines consist of large stone blocks that encircle a rough-hewn black rock of indeterminate origin. It is rare to find a female hylis chieftain who is not also a priestess of this deity, though they refuse to explain or describe who their deity is and what rites are required to appease it.

Pleisaurans

Description: Standing roughly eight feet tall, pleisaurans are all sleek muscle wrapped around a humanoid frame. Short compact limbs ending in long webbed digits compliment a thick laterally compressed tail ideal for powering a pleisauran through their watery domain. A pleisaurans' head is perched atop a snakelike neck, where it darts about with lightning speed. Two forward facing eyes look down the length of its long thin snout, to the upraised nostrils at its tip. Their snout is full of needle-like teeth and tapers out up to four times the length of the head and is ideal for slashing through the water for devastating strikes.

Found in the warm, shallow waters in and around the Kraldjur Morass, the pleisaurans are the aquatic taskmasters of ssethric society. Pleisaurans are piscivorous, eating a diet consisting of fish and shellfish. Pleisaurans do not have gills, but have the ability to hold their breath for hours on end. This allows them to remain submerged for long periods of time, swimming up to the surface just long enough to suck in a new lungful of air through the tip of their long snout. These semi-aquatic creatures give birth to live offspring and live for eighty to one hundred years.

Pleisaurans entered ssethric society approximately eight thousand years ago when they were discovered by an enterprising group of ss'ressen scouting the coastal waters near what are now the modern-day League of Princes. It was soon discovered that their simple patriarchal society venerated an unknown version of Kassegore and were soon absorbed into the expanding empire. With the collapse of the Old Empire, the pleisaurans retreated along with the rest of the ssethric forces to their strongholds in the Kraldjur Morass. They have currently colonized almost all the shallow water refuge along the mangrove-studded coast and have penetrated deep into the interior by traveling up the Kraldjur River.

The pleisaurans function as farmers and soldiers for the empire, protecting the coastline of the Kraldjur Peninsula and governing the lophius who farm the seafloor. The entire bottom of Lake Quesselan is nothing more than one huge agricultural bonanza of kelp farms and fish hatcheries designed to feed the ravenous hordes of ssethrics. The pleisaurans also serve as taskmasters over the empire's aquatic slaves, their sheer size and majesty sowing fear in all but the strongest of hearts. They also serve as ambassadors or messengers to Ssethregore's other aquatic ally, the sea devils.

The Ssethregoran Empire nominally controls pleisauran society but the aquatic ssethric race has their own system of regional governors to oversee day-to-day tasks. These governors, called *Li'quas*, answer to specially chosen imperial envoys, usually ssanu held in high favor by Emperor Kahss. Although the government does hold sway over the pleisaurans, the aquatic nature of the pleisaurans makes it exceedingly difficult for the empire's tax collectors to police all the goods trafficking conducted by the pleisaurans. This inability to exert its imperial will is most evident in the inability of the naga to stamp out Kassegore worship and convert the pleisaurans to the varn's religion.

Pleisaurans build their cities on rocky outcroppings in shallow water (usually ten to twenty feet deep). Other than their settlements in in the empire, their two other largest settlements are Lykuch of the shores of the Dragon Archipelago and Fluvius offshore the Isle of Teeth. All pleisauran communities have large sealed buildings that serve as air chambers and are constructed of coral and other material found on the seabed.

Sea Devil

Description: Appearing as a strange hybrid between a heavily scaled fish and a humanoid, these terrors of the deep have scalloped scales that range from a deep green to black. Males have elaborate fins and scales surrounding their heads that can be fanned out to show dominance or flushed red with blood in mating rituals. They have large webbed hands and feet, all four tipped with long claws.

Sea Devils are the deep-sea aquatic allies of the Ssethregoran Empire. They roam the deep dark places of the oceans of Arcanis, imposing their cruel regime on any being unfortunate enough to cross their path. They are malicious and cruel, taking base pleasure in the torture and tormenting of captives and foes. Sea devils emerge from the briny surf on dark moonless nights and raid coastal villages and other human settlements along waterfronts, dragging their victims down into the swirling foam. These aquatic predators also make their home in the Endless Dark colonizing ancient underground waterways that have never been graced by the warm light of Illiir's golden orb.

Ardakene Elorii

Sea devils are patriarchal with each settlement overseen by a council of elder males that control all aspects of daily life. Each sea devil council is in turn controlled by one or more aboleths, slimy horrid creatures that the sea devils venerate as gods. The sea devil deity, Anguillizrass, is thought to be an immense aboleth that is as old as the seas themselves. All the aboleths claim to answer to Anguillizrass and use their positions of power to dominate sea devil society. Victims captured by sea devil raids often find themselves dragged into the deep and tossed into a crevasse in the sea floor to be a sacrifice for the local aboleth lord.

In the early days of the Old Empire, before the creation of the elorii, the ssethrics allied themselves with the sea devils to help with the empire's conquest of the Known Lands. The combined might of the Yahssremoran military and the sea devils overpowered the other major aquatic race and utterly exterminated many of those races from the face of Arcanis. With the ssethrics' help, the sea devils colonized the deep places of the planet, preferring the deepest oceans or the lightless depths of the Endless Dark to the cool lighted shallow waters of the world. When the Old Empire crumbled, many sea devil colonies in the Endless Dark were cut off from their allies and kin, and while their ultimate fate is unknown, some may yet exist there today awaiting the unwary.

The sea devils' main power base is the Lauriol Sea, though their settlements the entire coast of the Known Lands. There they built massive cities along the geothermal vents that dot the seabed. From there they prey on the human shipping lanes and raid into the nearby lands of the Coryani Empire and Entaris with alarming frequency. The sea devils swim deep beneath the vessels targeted for attack and once reached, they swarm over the railing and drag all the hapless sailors into the sea for the bellies of their profane gods. The ship is towed and then sunk over a sea devil city, where the sailors are eaten, and the cargo stolen. Anything that is not used by the sea devils is traded to the pleisaurans.

Slave Races

Elorii

Description: Elorii are lithe, beautiful humanoids, with eye and hair color dependent upon their particular subspecies. They average six feet in height and there appears to be no appreciable difference in either stature or weight between males and females.

The elorii were created as a servitor warrior race as a solution to the Yahssremoran Empire's brutal war with the

il'Huan some seven thousand years ago. Using the gar as a template for the body, ssanu biomancers enhanced the specimen by making the body more metabolically efficient, allowing it to act as a repository for the elemental energies that would course through them. With the power gifted to them by the four Elemental Lords and bonded to the life-giving energy of the goddess Belisarda, five different types of elorii were birthed deep beneath the Black Coil's tower.

The air aspected Osalikene, the water aspected Berokene, the earth aspected Mârokene, the fire aspected Kelekene, and the life aspected Ardakene were further modified to mature quickly, reaching adulthood in a mere decade. Designed to be relentless warriors, the elorii were further gifted by a type of immortality through the power of the Orumar, a place of reverence for this race, where they say that the souls of the dead rest until reborn in a new body. Whatever the religious significance of the Orumar may be, it is true that the memories and even muscle memory of an elorii reborn are quickly regained. This was essential as the rate of attrition during the war with the il'Huan required that trained and experienced troops be replaced. By having this unique ability, an elorii warrior could be replaced by an equally experienced and trained soldier in a matter of years, rather than decades.

As warned of by the sorcerer Ss'koreth, the elorii eventually rebelled against their ssethric masters, resulting in the destruction of Yahssremore and the current empire-in-exile that exists today. It was a bitter-sweet turn of events that saw their hatred former slaves themselves toppled from their perch as masters of the Known Lands by the humans. This had the unexpected consequence of forcing a group of elorii, known as the Malfelan, to take up residence in the large woodland region of the Fellglade, bordering the empire's western region.

The constant battles with the Malfelan, and occasionally the Entaren elorii, has resulted in an unexpected windfall – the capture and enslavement of the elorii once again. Too unruly to keep safely within the borders of the empire, the biomancers developed a way to lobotomize the former elite warriors, turning them into docile, pliable slaves. This procedure destroys the elorii's ability to make a conscious act of their own volition, able only to comply to the best of the abilities whatever is ordered of them. This mental neutering was not enough for the cruel ssethrics who wished to revisit upon their hated foes every humiliation, degradation, and pain they suffered when thrown into exile. In a sadistic flash of brilliance, the biomancers were able to block off the consciousness of their victims, trapping them in a mental cage where they could feel and witness everything that they were forced to endure without being able to lift a finger in resistance. The ssethric's only regret is that they cannot hear the screams of impotent fury and anguish of their slaves.

Hussuma

Description: The Hussuma are one of the earliest experiments in the ssethric's quest for the ultimate slave race. They appear, for all intents and purposes, like a modern day elorii as the flesh shell that was used in the creation of the hussuma were the same that was eventually used for the elorii, those of the bestial gar. They are tall lithe humanoids with long pointed ears, feral teeth, and almond shaped eyes.

Hussuma were not initially infused with elemental energy like their elorii cousins, instead they were given life through the divine powers of Yig. When they were eventually used to spy on the elorii, the biomancers were able to grant them the ability to shift their body to resemble any of the elorii types and mimic their base elemental abilities, without which they would be easily uncovered. This amazing ability is possible only due to their initial infusion power by the goddess Yig, who not only granted them life, but shared Her gifts as the divine deceiver.

This reptilian origin manifests slowly as the hussuma age. As they grow older, they begin to lose their eloran features and gain a more reptilian aspect: slit pupils, nictitating membranes, and rough scaly patches of skin appear on their bodies. These features become more and more pronounced as the older they get, until eventually they are hardly recognizable as their younger selves. An elder hussuma's skin turns pale white, cracking and flaking, giving them a desiccated appearance. Hussuma are long lived and reproduce infrequently, only fertile for the first century of life. After that, males become impotent and the females barren, perhaps due to their changing biology.

Currently, the hussuma act as spies for the empire, infiltrating Malfea to the west and spreading throughout the human lands. Each ssanu Pit and naga House have cadres of hussuma working for them, gathering rare items from outside of ssethric lands as well as intelligence on the machinations of the elorii political arena. The remaining hussuma work directly as spies for the military, gathering information on troop movement and positions, aiding the constantly grinding gears of the Ssethregoran war machine.

With the advent of the Yigite dissidents living in the Abessian Dominion, some hussuma still loyal to the old ssethric gods have made their way there, seeking asylum. Most are accepted, though the yissera put them through a grueling interrogation process designed to ferret out any spies sent by the Ssethregorans. Though a handful of infiltrators have been detected and summarily dealt with, the chance of varn loyalists slipping through this safeguard is high, placing the entire hussuma population under continued scrutiny.

Kobolds

Description: Kobolds are the smallest of the sentient ssethric races, standing an average of two and a half to three feet in height, with females being slightly smaller, averaging two feet in height. Though reptilian, the race has a head that strongly resembles a dog with a maw filled with serrated teeth. Their hide ranges from a burnt orange to a reddish color, thick and leathery, offering protection from both the brambles and sharp rocks of their underground burrows, as well as the sting of their master's lash.

Created by the ssanu primarily as a labor force, the kobolds of the Ssethregoran Empire have proven to be a pestilence on Arcanis. To ensure that there were sufficient numbers of the creatures to meet their needs, the ssanu manipulated them to breed in large numbers and mature quickly. A female can lay up to fifty eggs a season, with the hatchlings maturing into full adults within two years.

Males are bred to act as the work force for the empire with the enormous structures and elegant towers that grace the various cities of the Serpent Empire a testament to their many years of hard labor.

Females are tasked with the care and rearing of the egg hatcheries and hatchlings for the naga, ssanu, and ss'ressen. To aid them in protecting the egg clutch, females are bred with poison gland sacs that they can use to spit poison into the eyes of their victim up to a range of fifteen feet.

Unfortunately, the ssanu did their work too well and the population of kobolds exploded beyond expectations. Frequent purges are enacted to cull the populace, but many of the cruel creatures escaped beyond the border of the empire. Now, their burrow-nests can be found in all but the most frigid regions of Arcanis, a perpetual danger to travelers and small settlements.

Kobolds tend to attack in mass, with one of their number acting as a distraction, while the others circle to surround their prey. Unarmed males attack with their claws and toothy maw, making hit-and-run attacks until their victim succumbs to wounds and blood loss, though they also make use of scavenged weapons whenever possible.

Lophius

Description: Sometimes mistaken for other aquatic humanoids, Lophius are large hulking fishy brutes, standing well over eight feet tall and weighing over four hundred pounds. Lophius are a batrachian nightmare, with a laterally compressed head and bulbous froglike eyes and fishlike jaws and gill plates. Their bodies are covered in shimmering silver scales lathered in a slippery mucus coating produced by copious oil glands. These brutes do not possess a tail and propel themselves through the water in a frog like fashion; using powerful kicking strokes from their webbed feet and claws.

Lophius are a throwback to a bygone era, when the Yahssremoran Empire was attempting to create an aquatic race to aid the sea devils in their undersea conquests, long before contact with the pleisaurans was made. A dim-witted race, they were created to be obedient slaves, but their very aggressive nature makes them difficult to control. In modern times, they serve the empire as undersea farmers in immense kelp beds or erecting structures as laborers beneath the watchful eye of the pleisaurans. Numerous rebellions have taken place, not due to a fundamental grievance, such as being an oppressed people, but rather due to insufficient food distributed to them one morning, or a pleisauran's overzealous use of a truncheon. One small fight can quickly get out of hand, with others joining in for no other reason than indulging their belligerent temperament.

Lophius can be found outside the waters surrounding the empire, as scores of the creatures have wandered off over the centuries, making them a hazard to ships and coastal settlements throughout the Known Lands. These creatures are carnivorous and see no difference between animals and sentient humanoids when it comes to feeding. Lophius can also be found as slaves in sea devil society and it is a well-documented fact that the two can interbreed, creating horrid twisted mutants of the vilest sort.

Rhamphorikes

Description: Rhamphorikes are ssethric beings akin to a cross between a kobold and a pterosaur. Their small light bodies are covered in fine reddish hued scales and their wings are a translucent tan membrane of uncommon strength. Their necks are short, while their whip-like tail acts as a rudder during flight. A rhamphorike's head is blunt with two large eyes set on the sides of its skull and a pair of nostrils set above a maw of razor sharp teeth. The front arms of a rhamphorike are short, heavily muscled and anchored to a heavy breastbone providing the power for flight. The first three fingers and thumb are tipped with sharp talons, while the outside finger is thickened and extended to about four feet in length. This enlarged digit forms the front edge of their wings, which are a taunt membrane stretched along the surface of their arm, to the tip of their extended digit, and attach to the lower back. When extended, they have a nine-foot wingspan, more than enough to fly through the forests of Ssethregore. When walking, their wings are folded back along their arms. Rhamphorikes may use their claws to hold items or to climb difficult surfaces.

Rhamphorikes were created by the Black Coil's biomancers of the Yahssremoran Empire to create an intelligent ssethric creature with the capability of flight. They succeeded in the winged rhamphorike. Their sole purpose was to be part of an aerial unit capable of combating flying foes and to rain death down upon land

bound enemies. To this task they have proven exemplary, becoming the deciding factor in dozens of battles over the centuries. In modern Ssethregore, they still maintain their position as aerial shock troopers, but now also find themselves acting as scouts. A rhamphorike's red tinged body reflecting the setting sun as it rises above the tree line is a common sight from the walls of Altherian outposts.

Rhamphorikes have no real society of their own and know nothing but the military lifestyle they were created for. These creatures are not overly religious, finding more solace in the clouds above than in philosophical debates on the merits of the different gods. If they view anything as a deity, it would be their creators, the ssanu.

Rhamphorikes are particularly fertile and mate twice a year in the trees hanging over the Halikmir River. There, they mated pair remain until the eggs hatch, whereupon they return to their assigned posts within the empire. Specially trained iguadons teach the rhamphorike hatchlings the rigors of aerial combat. Squadrons of rhamphorikes are commonly teamed up with drakhen dragonnel riders to form precision units for nighttime raids up on Altherian outposts and Malfelan camps.

Shell-Backs

"In war, the conquered lose property, lives, and freedom. We lost more, my children. We lost ourselves."

Description: Shell-backs are sentient reptilians resembling anthropomorphized turtles and may be one of the oldest races upon Arcanis. An ancient race, these creatures' culture, religion, history, and even their name, has been obliterated, purposefully destroyed by the frog-like hylis whom they warred with for centuries. The hylis allied themselves with the Serpent Empire in exchange for their aid in defeating their ancient foes. Yet, victory and subjugation was not enough. The hylis annihilated the shell-backs' cities, along with all written material recording their history, culture, and philosophy. They rounded up and executed their scholars, priests, and loremasters to deprive their hated enemy even the comfort of who they were. Temples and idols were burned so that knowledge of the shell-back's deity was lost as well. Even their species' name was erased, and the creatures were forced to use the derogatory name given to them by their oppressors – shell-backs. The hylis' genocidal actions were eventually ended by the ssanu, who saw the shell-backs as a resource, either as slave labor or food, and forbid their complete extermination. The hylis' relented and content themselves by being their hated foes' overlords.

The few thousand surviving shell-backs are contained in a small area located in the southern portion of the Ssethregoran Empire, across the Lauriol Sea. Here, hope among the creatures is fanned by shamans who tell what stories they can wrest from primordial spirits. These spirits speak of elegant domed cities, dotting the coastline and waterways across the continent, trading with fabled creatures, like the one-eyed Eladru and the insectoid il'Huan. The knowledge of their past glory and the promise that they shall one day reclaim their society is the only thing that keeps their spirits from being completely crushed.

The shell-back society has adapted to their harsh reality as slaves of the ssethrics. Though given names by their overlords, they refuse to use them among themselves. Since they have no knowledge of what naming conventions were used in the past, they instead refer to themselves by titles, such as Seeker, Elder, or Defender or descriptive ones, like Cracked Shell or One-Eye. Some take an act performed as their name, such as the shell-back who survived an interrogation by the hylis called No-Speak. The usage of these descriptive appellations can get confusing as the various communities may use the same, identical ones, but the shell-backs are able to distinguish one another easily.

Tasked with providing food for the ssethrics, the shell-backs fish using nets. They have ingeniously turned this simple tool as a way of communicating surreptitiously with one another. They've developed a rudimentary language using the placement, type, and frequency of knots on a rope line, something so innocuous that the hylis and other ssethrics completely overlook it. A rope left dangling with a single knot could warn of an inspection for contraband or a line with a knot painted red of a culling raid.

Besides being used for fishing and arduous labor, the shell-backs are also tasked with manufacturing pigments for dyes and paints, as they seem resistant to the fumes generated in its creation. The resourceful amphibians turned their forced labor into something that can be used against their taskmasters. Shamans are able to infuse specially prepared pigments with enchantments able to imbue those marked with the paint with fantastic abilities, such as heightening senses or toughening their shells against attack. These rare items are given to those who are sent to seek remnants of the shell-back's ancient culture.

Every generation, a group of shell-backs are selected as candidates to leave the community and search for anything that could shed light on their lost culture. After rigorous training, including a rudimentary instruction of the foreign trade language known as Low Coryani, the candidates are given one final test – the assassination of a Pit Elapis ssanu. This Pit oversees the territory that includes most of the shell-back community and regularly orders raids against them for the express purpose of filling their larder, as the serpents find the meat of hatchlings a delicacy. Marked by their brightly colored, bristling bodies, the ssanu of this Pit favor scimitars as their weapon of choice. To prove that they succeeded in their grisly task, the shell-back is required to return with their target's scimitar. This weapon, along with a lantern set upon a staff, are symbols of the Seekers, the final hope of a people searching for their identity.

Yissera

Description: Yissera are indistinguishable from the humans they were bioengineered to mimic and infiltrate.

Yissera are a recent addition to the ssethric arsenal. Shortly after the arrival of humans on the continent from across the eastern sea, the naga and ssanu quickly saw the need for spies that could move through the new human controlled lands with impunity. Once again, the arts of the biomancers were called into action and, using the hussuma as a template, created the yissera.

Bioengineered to infiltrate the human nations of the Known Lands, the yissera are indistinguishable from humans until they reach the age of fifty or so. At that time, they begin to display signs of their ssethric heritage, from exhibiting scaly skin to their faces elongating outward like a snout, or other, more horrific traits. This mutation is more ghastly and random than that of the hussuma, with many yissera ending their lives with a human body and a head of a serpent or snakes for limbs.

Once inculcated within their target group, they gather information for the empire about military advancements, political maneuverings, and keep watch on the renegade Black Talon ss'ressen. Yissera also function as merchants, bringing slaves and other rare trade goods into the empire. Many a caravan that was declared destroyed by Ssethregoran border raids simply took a turn south and rode off into the jungle to be greeted warmly by their reptilian cohorts.

Many yissera are fitted with biotech by their ssanu masters. The most common of these bio-modifications is the placement of a small venom sac and retractable fangs in their mouths, allowing them to spit their venom a small distance. All yissera are bred with a unique ability allowing them to change their skin tone, hair type and color, and even facial structure. While this ability doesn't allow them to impersonate a particular person, it does allow them to blend in as a native of the ethnic group they were assigned to infiltrate. They can change from a blonde haired Illonian to a dark skinned Altherian with no more effort than anyone else would expend changing clothes. There are numerous sleeper cells of yissera nested throughout the human nations, sending intelligence and eliminating threats to the empire quickly when need be.

While the most yissera call the empire home, others who still worship the Old Gods, specifically Yig, have begun to migrate to the Abessian Dominion. The average Abessian believes them to be a faction of human worshippers of Yig who fled the Ssethregoran Empire a generation ago and assisted them in throwing off the yoke of Coryani tyranny. One of these yissera rules alongside a native Myrantian as co-Phaeron and while the average citizen is unaware of their true nature, the human ruling class does know their true nature and are willing to keep this secret for the good of their fledgling nation.

Yet even within the Abessian Dominion, the yissera are servitors to the ssanu, representing their interests and pushing forward their agendas, while their scaled masters plot and scheme in the shadows. All yissera, regardless of their status in the nations they infiltrate answer to a ssanu master, to whom they send periodic reports and receive instructions that they are expected to carry out without delay or hesitation.

As refugees from the Ssethregoran Empire, because of their continued veneration of Yig, the Mother Serpent, some yissera females become priestesses of Yig, given that Her clergy is restricted to solely females. The ssanu allow these yisseran priestesses to venerate only the goddesses' aspect of *Yig the Deceiver*, which restricts their power somewhat. After all, it is the ssanu and not their creation that are the favored of She of the Shifting Scales. Any yisseran priestess that grows too popular or powerful tend to vanish, so care is maintained to always appear subservient and weaker than their scaled masters.

Male yissera who have a strong calling to serve Yig become holy champions, fighting in Her name. The Order of the Fang is made up primarily of males, though female yissera can also be found within its ranks. The elite ranks of the order are filled by male ssanu who act as its commanders. The Order of the Fang's primary mission is to smuggle out dissidents out from Ssethregore and into the Abessian Dominion, as well as protect those that have already found succor in the nation from imperial spies and assassins. Their secondary task is to undermine the varn and their foul religion any way they can.

The Varn

Description: All varn have a humanoid torso atop a quadrupedal body, giving them a centaur-like silhouette. A long, thick tail, used both for balance and attack, comes to a slender tip. Their hands end in slender digits, like a human, but are tipped with sharp talons, while their feet are large and end in a set of sharp claws. A fine mesh of scales adorn their bodies, ranging in color from a light or bluish-green blue to a deep purplish-black. Oddly enough, their faces do not possess a pronounced snout like the ss'ressen nor are arrow shaped like many ssanu, but instead look astonishingly human, though covered in small scales. The creature's mouth is filled with sharp, needle-like fangs that grow back quickly when lost. A varn's scalp is capped with thick-scaled plates, providing excellent protection. All other variations to the form are gained as a varn rises in social stature.

Deep within the region of the multiverse known as the Mortal Plane, are a number of dead mortal realms, their husks floating silently in the ether, drained of their life-giving energy by the foul trio of varn deities. These gods, Haulis, the Bloody Maw, Sipta, the Arcane Sovereign, and Zedok, the Universal Chaos, are served by the varn. This species has transformed itself over the ages to reach the

pinnacle of reptilian evolution, or so they claim.

Oddly enough, varn have no gender with all adult members of the species acting as both the egg fertilizer and carrier. After a short mating and gestation cycle, the varn extends an ovipositor and injects their eggs in a living creature, preferably a sentient one. During the six months it takes the eggs to hatch, the host experiences constant agony, welcoming their deaths as the hatchlings eat their way out of the body. These hatchlings quickly mature and know much about their place within the Collective and what is expected of them. Whether they are able to do this is due to some collective memory or because the varn are a psionically active race, the biomancers of the Black Coil remain unsure.

The varn have a complex society tied inextricably to a social caste system that rewards exemplary action and accomplishment with advancement up the societal hierarchy. As a varn increases their standing within the Collective, they are gifted with biological enhancements, such as the ability to sprout wings or adapt their bodies to defend against a particular type of attack. Failure is equally rewarded with the stripping of titles and biological gifts. So important is a varn's standing in the social pecking order that they do not have proper names, but rather titles, such as Obligator, Speaker of Adulation, or Emissary. As there are quite a few of this type of varn moving throughout the empire, there is considerable debate among ssethric scholars and thinkers as to how they now which individual is being addressed or being referenced. Some within the Black Coil postulate that if all varn are psionically active, there must be an additional component to the title that tags each individual uniquely and is transmitted along with the spoken word, much like the ss'ressen use pheromones when speaking to give additional context and meaning.

To the varn, evolving to become a higher life form is the ultimate goal of their existence. They view their deities as not divine, but rather highly evolved beings with knowledge and power far above that of a mortal being. According to the teachings of the Speakers of Adulation, each one of the deities were once mortal and ascended to their current form. Once they are hold enough to understand their role in varn society, hatchlings are told that attaining godhood should be their life's objective, one that can only be met by faithfully serving the Collective.

While each individual varn has a set duty and goal, so too does the Collective as a whole. Its sole purpose is to find, infiltrate, and subjugate a vibrant, thriving mortal realm, build a bridge for their gods to manifest there, and drain it of every last iota of life leaving it an empty husk of a world. While there, they select appropriate candidate species, all biologically reptilian, and add their uniqueness to the varn genome. Unfortunately, the candidate species does not survive, though they can take solace in knowing that their sacrifice made the varn a better species.

The number and types of positions within varn society is unknown, but must be much greater than the few that are present within the empire. Thus far there are six different types of varn on Arcanis, each doing their part to build the bridge of souls to connect this mortal realm to their rapacious deities.

The Pacifiers

The most commonly seen varn in the empire, the Pacifiers are the enforcers of the Emissary's edicts. While they will be seen to follow the commands given to them by the naga emperor or the overlord, in truth they do so when given the order to do so by their superiors. Pacifiers are implacable warriors, the equivalent of a veteran soldier anywhere else upon the Known Lands. They have no sense of self-preservation and instead seek to ensure the well-being of their unit, even at the cost of their own lives.

The Seekers of Enlightenment

Wherever the varn appear, there will always be those that spurn them, rejecting their gifts, and wishing them gone from their realm. These rebels can be dangerous to the varn's ultimate goals and need to be rooted out and eliminated. Seekers of Enlightenment are very powerful psions trained to rip into the strongest minds and taking what information they need to ferret out their victim's co-conspirators, leaving them a drooling vegetable.

For those with formidable mental defenses, Seekers are able to create nightmare mindscapes manifesting in their target's psyche, turning whatever phobias or deep-seated emotional fears they may possess and heightening them until the victim is happy to divulge whatever information the Seeker wishes to know. In the end, the Seeker will get whatever information they desire, delighting in causing as much mental trauma as possible.

The Speakers of Adulation

The second most commonly seen varn are the Speakers of Adulation, the priests of their foul deities. These priests present themselves as the most sympathetic of the varn, willing to always listen to any ssethric's concerns or desires, giving hopeful and lifting advice, while laying the foundation for grooming the being for conversion to the religion. The Speakers have two main goals: to convert as many ssethrics to their faith and to dot the empire with temples to the gods. They have been diligently working towards these goals with the aid of the naga, who imposed the varn faith as the state religion and have poured both money and manpower in raising as many temples as possible.

The priests are a rank higher on the evolutionary scale than the previous two groups, as they have the ability to channel the divine power granted to them by two of the varn deities, specifically Haulis and Zedok. Priests of Sipta belong to the Architects of Light, as they can manipulate arcane energy innately.

The Speakers of Adulation are seen by the ssanu who wish to overthrow the current regime as a chink in the otherwise unified varn armor. Contrary to what they may present, the Varn Pantheon is not a monolithic organization. Each of the three deities have their own clergy and tenets, which conflict and vie for power against one another. The three different sects of the varn religion compete for converts, resources for their temples, and influence throughout ssethric society, doing so often at the detriment of the other two. While this competition has not flared into open conflict among the priests, ssanu from Pit Sseth have manipulated events to pit followers of Haulis and Zedok against one another as a test. The resulting blood shed was a wonder to behold, giving the rebels hope that the varn rule can be toppled.

Architects of Light

Priests of the varn deity Sipta, the Architects of Light are varn who are able to channel arcane energy and manipulate it as do the sorcerers of Arcanis. However, unlike other magi, those who follow Sipta's teachings drain the life energy of the surrounding are to empower their spells. Architects are known among the sorcerers of the Black Coil as *death-walkers* due to their unconscious ability to bleed the lifeforce of any insects, small creatures, and the plant-life around them.

In battle, the Architects are a terror as they are not only able to cast devastating spells, but they have the ability to drain the life from their opponents and heal themselves in the process. They have been willing to share this technique with members of the Black Coil in the hopes of enticing these exceptional sorcerers to join their ranks in earnest, but thus far most have resisted. Interestingly, the rare non-ssanu members of the Black Coil appear more receptive to these entreaties and have accepted training in this technique from the varn in exchange for their embracing Sipta's other teachings.

The Obligators

These hulking brutes tower over even the massive Agamassi ss'ressen. Covered in a thick layer of scales with the same strength and durability of the finest dwarven steel, these creatures are living siege engines, able to barrel through enemy lines with ease. In some respects, they resemble the Razor Claw ss'ressen, as their scales are equally as sharp, making their hand-to-hand attacks even more devastating.

Obligators are also known as the *Children of Zedok*, as the creatures are blessed by the Lord of Chaos with a variety of gifts, such as the chaos orb, a coruscating ball of chaotic energy that when launched against a target causes them to undergo agonizing bodily transformations, rendering them easy prey to the Obligators fearsome attacks. Against an array of foes, they may call upon its lord's ability to cause the landscape to shift and alter beneath their enemy's feet. While their opponents are struggling to maintain their balance and avoid the quickly sprouting hazards, the Obligator can traverse the chaotic terrain as if they were strolling down a Coryani boulevard.

Though connected to Zedok, Obligators may be called upon by any of the varn of sufficient standing to deal with any threat that may endanger the varn's cause. The first and last time Obligators were summoned in numbers was during the ssanu rebellion against the naga not long after their coup. The battle did not last long, but when over, the number of the dead numbered into the thousands, many credited to the Obligators.

The Emissary

When the varn arrived there were many of each type except for their leader, the Emissary. This unique being is a true monstrosity, immense in size, yet so well-proportioned that the extent of its mass is not immediately evident. Horrifically beautiful by ssethric standards, the Emissary is the most perfect reptilian being upon the entire world of Arcanis, filling any who see it with the awe usually evoked by valinor or the Gods themselves. Its melodic voice is a serenade when calm and a terror-inducing sound when angered.

Yet what makes the Emissary truly terrible to behold are its three heads, each magnificently dreadful to behold. The Emissary is the herald of the varn deities, as well as their representative on this mortal realm. When necessary, it can split apart into three separate entities, each body controlled by one mind, yet completely independent of one another.

It was the Emissary who first translocated to Arcanis at the behest of the varn deities to speak with the naga and plan their overthrow of the unworthy ssanu. When the final compact was struck, the Emissary gated in a number of varn to aid the naga in their coup and to build the central temple in the heart of the empire's capital of Sseth.

Possessing a towering intellect and abilities that dwarf the rest of the varn in the empire, the members of the rebels have prudently not attempted any assassination attempts against this creature, knowing that it would likely end in failure and in their ultimate destruction. Instead, these rebel ssanu bide their time, observing and waiting for the right opportunity to destroy this monster. All the while, the Emissary orchestrates the domination of the ssethric races and the building of the bridge of souls that will deliver its gods to Arcanis.

The Presence

A final being has been whispered of by the varn, but has not yet made an appearance upon Arcanis. The Presence is a varn higher up the evolutionary ladder than even the Emissary, who will only come when the time is right to receive the varn deities. When the time is right, the Presence will be summoned by the Emissary to cross the bridge to Arcanis. Once here, it will open the way for the gods to come and drain the planet dry, ending all life upon it.

Chapter 4

The Pariah Clutches

Of the many egg clutches created by the ssanu technomancers of Yahssremore, only the Black Talons were able to throw off their yoke of servitude and strike off on their own. Long they travelled within human lands, seeking a new home among Mankind. Despite many troubles, they found a welcoming place within the human lands. There they have created a unique culture, living in relative peace and prosperity in the Sulfur Marshes.

Not all was perfect in this newly formed realm for these ss'ressen. Since their exodus from Ssethregore, two different schisms cracked these otherwise unified people: one due to the lack of faith in their new patron deity and the second due to a long-held secret by the Matriarch Mothers. These schisms led to the creation of two new branches of the egg clutch, the Ghost Scale and the Ashen Hide. Along with the Black Talon egg clutch, these new groups are also seen as traitors by the Scaled Empire, to be hunted down and executed on sight.

The Black Talon Ss'ressen

The egg clutch known as the *Thulluss*, or Black Talons, are, like all other ss'ressen, bred for war. They have fought and died for the serpent masters of the Yahssremoran Empire and its successor state, the Ssethregoran Empire, for millennia. The Black Talons excelled at reconnaissance, infiltration missions, and assassination of enemy leaders.

After many centuries of blindly serving their masters, something unexpected happened to the Black Talons – they developed a conscience. After the teachings of the Fire Dragon, a minor member of the ssethric pantheon, were revealed to the High Matriarch Mother, her consciousness expanded and she, in turn, enlightened the rest of the clutch with His words of wisdom. Unable to continue to serve their evil masters, the clutch fled the Kraldjur Morass on a divinely inspired exodus to the north, into the lands of the humans and to freedom.

Physiology

The Three Sexes

All Black Talons have the same hide coloring, a stippled green and grey with a gradual darkening to black scales upon their extremities. Both the males and females have a non-webbed sagittal crest along their spines which runs from their tails up to their foreheads. The Black Talons have a longer snout than most other ss'ressen, though its end is blunted.

The natural life expectancy of a Black Talon is about eighty years, but given their warlike and dangerous life, few attain that venerable age. Astoundingly, the current Warlord of the Clutch, and King's Champion, is close to eighty years of age, but does not show signs of his advanced years.

When eggs are laid by females, certain matriarch mothers who are priestesses of the Fire Dragon, are assigned to distribute the eggs about a furnace in the hatchery. The ssanu bioengineered the various ss'ressen egg clutches so that heat would determine the sex of the hatchlings, among other traits. Depending on the needs of the clutch the matriarch mothers will place more of the eggs at specific distances from the heat to produce more of one group or another.

Those eggs placed closest to the heat source will hatch females, most of which will join the religious caste and become priestesses. The females are generally more intelligent than males, though this does not imply that the males or neuters are dim-witted. Females stand between five and a half to close to six feet in height and weigh between one hundred and fifty to one hundred and eighty pounds. Those eggs placed even closer to the heat than the others also have a greater chance of creating ss'ressen females born with the arcane spark necessary to manipulate arcane energies.

The next tier of positions, approximately halfway between the hottest and coolest spot in the hatchery, are for those eggs designated to hatch male ss'ressen. Typically taller and stronger than the females, these males, should they survive their Rite of Passage, are destined to join the warrior caste of the clutch. On average, the males stand approximately six feet and weigh between two hundred fifty and three hundred pounds, although there are instances of even larger males. The current Warlord and King's Champion, Salakis, stands over six and a half feet in height and weighs close to four hundred pounds of solid muscle and scales. Besides height and weight, males look similar to females, except for a neck pouch, which grows red and extends when angry or during the mating cycle.

Eggs placed furthest from the furnace mature into the final ss'ressen sex, the neuters, which were rarely, if ever, hatched during the time the Black Talons were citizens of the Ssethregoran Empire. All neuters are inducted into the worker caste and tend to stand a few inches short of six feet and weigh approximately two hundred pounds. Rather than the genitalia common to the male and female of the species, the neuters do not have reproductive organs and instead have a cloaca with which to excrete.

All hatchlings, regardless of sex, reach adulthood in eight years. Both males and females become sexually viable at this age and, should they be granted breeding rights, may mate and produce offspring. Females are fertile three times in their lives, in eight year increments, at ages eight, sixteen, and twenty-four and typically lay between two to four eggs each. Not all eggs are viable, regardless of how much care and heat they receive.

History

The Black Talons believe themselves to be one of the oldest ss'ressen egg clutches. Their lineage stretches back to the glory days of the Old Empire, where serpentine masters ruled over all of the Known Lands from the great city of Yahssremore. The Black Talons were a major military and political power within the Old Empire, always having at least one general on the Ji'hass council to the emperor. The Black Talons were their elite force, bred for especially tough missions that required stealth and cunning as well as marital prowess. They demonstrated their exemplary skills during the Terkas and Locanth Campaigns, and displayed unparalleled bravery during the great il'Huan War, where entire battalions of Black Talons fearlessly descended into the Endless Dark to hunt down and destroy the hated insectoids.

This heritage of greatness made the Black Talons an extremely proud and arrogant clutch that deemed themselves the pinnacle of Yahssremore's warrior caste. When the ssethrics created the elorii, the Black Talon matriarchs and high-ranking generals vehemently opposed their creation and use as warriors, arguing that it demeaned the proud ssethric peoples to rely on a lesser race to fight for them. The ruling council and the emperor did not agree and used the newly created elorii as expendable troops to be thrown at the enemy before the more valuable forces, such as the Black Talons, would be committed to the fray. The Black Talons shunned keeping elorii as slaves, but did keep other races to perform menial tasks within their fortifications.

Following the elorii revolt and subsequent fall of the Old Empire, the Black Talons migrated with the rest of the ssethric forces to the Kraldjur Morass. The Black Talons, along with the Horned Jowl and Emerald Scale egg clutches, formed the bulk of the rearguard of the army, fighting the elorii until finally reaching the swamplands. There they built a stronghold and named it Al'malyss. The Black Talons held this post with honor, proving time and again that the ssanu-created elorii warriors were no match for the ss'ressen.

The Black Talons remained at this fortress for over six thousand years, gaining power, prestige and the respect of their peers. Under the rule of the naga emperors, the Black Talons were chosen for the most dangerous missions into enemy territory. They performed missions believed impossible, and with each victory, more and more honors were heaped upon them. Their prestigious position earned them the favor of the nagas and made them enemies with the other clutches, especially with the newly created Barbed Tails.

Due to their often-hazardous missions, the Black Talons had an alarmingly high rate of attrition, preventing them

from becoming as numerous as some of their rival clutches. Time and again they saw their comrades die in more and more desperate undertakings under the incompetent command of the ssanu and other clutches. They watched the cruel and unspeakable acts that the other ssethric races committed and were often ordered to engage in barbarous acts against captured enemy forces for the viewing pleasure of the ruling class. With the rise of the worship and dark rites of the varn gods, the Black Talons foundered as they took no pleasure in such petty cruelties, watching rival clutches gain more power as they reveled in the blood and agony inflicted by those rituals. As the centuries passed, the Black Talons became increasingly despondent under the naga regime and the slow decline of the ssethric people. What had once been a glorious empire of courage and honor devolved into an opulent, decadent society that was only entertained by the bloodiest and most brutal forms of cruelty. The Black Talons arrogantly identified themselves as the pinnacle of ssethric martial prowess, and as the empire slid into decadence and heinous rites they found that their dedication to advancing their race took a second-seat to the bloody worship around them. Caring little for the lives of the ssethric peoples, the nagas and their supporters began wasting the lives of their troops in ever more petty and pointless conflicts. In this orgy of wasteful violence, death, and debauchery, the Black Talons did something unprecedented in the reptilian ranks… they developed a conscious.

Four hundred years ago, a new High Matriarch Mother rose to power in the Black Talons. The young ss'ressen, named Scaphiopus, had ascended to the position after the passing of the previous holder of the title. At that time the Black Talons were in a state of turmoil, lost and without guidance. The varn deities were perverse and corrupted, while the old gods such as Kassegore and Yig had gone silent in their greatest moment of need. The Black Talons stood on the edge of a knife, their numbers spent in wasteful military excursions, questioning their very existence and purpose within the empire.

Seeking answers, High Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus retired deep into the heart of the clutch's territory, into their great fortress of Al'malyss. She avoided all of the old altars and wended her way deep into the core of the fortress, through the hatcheries, to the great furnaces that granted life to each new generation of Black Talons. For an entire year, Scaphiopus fasted and meditated, growing gaunt and thin, her reptilian body barely able to maintain life. Before the roiling furnaces, the High Matriarch Mother felt her life force gently slipping away. In her final moments, all became hazed, then clear as a single vision sprang into existence in her mind. Empowered by this vision, the Scaphiopus rose and left the furnaces. As she walked her body was miraculously restored, and she arrived on the surface hale and whole. The other matriarchs were astonished at her transformation.

Scaphiopus summoned the ranks of Black Talons present in the fortress to assemble in front of the hatcheries. That evening, with the setting sun glowing at her back, she spoke of her vision, of a flaming deity she called the Fire Dragon. Within the sacred flame that nurtured the eggs of her people, the High Matriarch Mother had seen a burning wyrm, small in stature, yet wielding great power. It whispered to her of a different life for her children, away from the tyranny of the loathsome ssanu and nagas, where they could live under the ideals of honor and compassion. Scaphiopus also told of a warning that if she and her people followed the words of this Fire Dragon, great sacrifices would be required before deliverance would be granted. Should they be worthy, a new and better life would be the right of all those who would follow.

Scaphiopus began to teach the words she had heard and a change slowly rippled through their ranks. Ss'ressen flocked to the hatcheries to gaze into the sacred flames and left with a new feeling of spirituality, as if a veil had been lifted from their eyes. Though still as aggressive and menacing as ever, the Black Talons began to take a more thoughtful approach to tasks rather than blindly following orders.

For five years, Scaphiopus taught the words of the Fire Dragon to her people and to the new generations born in the heat of their Fiery Lord's sacred flames. Visions which she wrote down for those that would follow spoke of their deity's plans for them in the near and far future. In one of the most hotly debated by the priestesses of each generation is the prophecy of the Pyros Morelia.

"In the Years of the Smoking Cone, a dark shadow shall rise from the west. When the mammals reduce their kingdoms to ruin and ash, and the Sunderer who defies death is revealed, the Great Destroyer shall be freed. All will quail before it, for none can stand before its presence and remain unconsumed. In such desperate times, look for the coming of the one I shall send. With steel grey eyes and bearing my mark upon his face shall he arise anew from the fires of his destruction. Look upon him and rejoice, for he is Pyros Morelia, the ss'ressen born of flames. Though his appearance marks the coming of an ancient evil, within his blood lies hope. For from his loins shall a new generation of Black Talons spring, ones whose abilities will turn the tide of disaster and bring about victory."

The Black Talon's new attitude did not go unnoticed by the ssanu and nagas. The emperor on the Serpent Throne at that time, the dreaded Emperor Narthsslik, saw the Black Talon's new spirituality as an affront to the naga-imposed varn religion and their growing insubordination as a threat to the reign of House Kahss. To test their loyalty, the emperor ordered the Black Talons to exterminate a rival egg clutch, the Dark Crests. The Dark Crests had recently suffered a string of defeats at the hands of the warm-bloods and were old and bitter rivals of the Black Talons. The Black Talons were ordered to exterminate this rival egg

clutch, feast upon their hatchlings, and bring the head of the Dark Crest High Matriarch Mother before the emperor as proof of their loyalty.

For the first time in its millennia long history, the Empire of Ssethregore was denied by one of its own.

In a tersely worded message sent to the emperor, the Black Talons refused, stating that the complete extermination of a people was an act of thoughtless brutality and waste of military resources. Enraged, the emperor sent the bloodthirsty Barbed Tail egg clutch to eradicate both groups. As an afterthought, he also sent Venomous Scale inquisitors to bring the matriarchs of both clutches before him.

When the Barbed Tails arrived at Al'malyss, the Black Talons were ready. They had sent word to the Dark Crests and told them of the plot, though they would never discover the ramifications of that message. Scaphiopus and an entourage of heavily armed Black Talon greeted the Barbed Tails upon their arrival, holding a prohibited biomantic talisman that would stave off the frenzy that would normally overtake them. Scaphiopus attempted to explain their reasons to her fellow ss'ressen and suggested that the two clutches band together against their serpentine oppressors. She spoke passionately of the Fire Dragon's words, promising a better life for both of their peoples.

The leader of the Barbed Tail forces, a chaoshammer of Zedok, took just one brief instant to reply. Her retort took the form of a heavy spiked tail whistling through the air. In one split second, all that remained of Scaphiopus, High Matriarch Mother of the Black Talons, was a headless corpse spurting its crimson lifeblood onto the cold hard ground.

Shock and then rage gripped the Black Talons as their spiritual leader fell. They swarmed the Barbed Tail murderers and fought heroically, with three of the enemy falling for every Black Talon lost. Yet, they were heavily outnumbered and in moments the battle was over. Not a single Black Talon remained standing. This confrontation, however, was merely a diversionary tactic. The High Matriarch Mother had foreseen this possible outcome, knowing that refusing the emperor was a death sentence and that she would most likely not survive the encounter. She ordered the majority of the Black Talons, about fourteen thousand strong, to march north as fast as they could and take their recently laid eggs with them. The Fire Dragon had promised that the eggs would remain warm and protected throughout the journey. Traveling along with the exodus was a very young matriarch named Ss'lessis Tel, who had been groomed to assume the position High Matriarch Mother, a role she took upon leading the Black Talons out of Ssethregore.

The pariah clutch marched north, dodging Ssethregoran patrols whenever possible, while eliminating others when not, in their headlong rush to freedom. Their great migration took them fifty years to complete, for at each suitable location they found, humans would soon appear and drive them still further north. Through sweltering Toranesta, then rolling Illonia they traveled, never finding peace or respite. Hundreds of their number died, but Ss'lessis Tel led them on, for the Fire Dragon had revealed to her a place of safety and protection that lay still further north. The *Vision of the Dragon* led them ever northward and as the years rolled on, the determination of the Black Talons began to waver. The winter season was quickly approaching and many believed they would perish in this hostile climate, for every step further north brought harsher and harsher winters to which her people were unaccustomed, but the Fire Dragon did not forsake His people.

In another vision, He appeared to all His chosen and roused them from their lethargic state, bringing fire to warm their sluggish bodies. He told them only the weak and unworthy would lay on the cold ground and die, while the strong would let the fiery passion in their hearts drive them to the Promised Land. Through sheer force of will, the ss'ressen plodded forward, league after excruciating league, with the strong dragging or carrying the others as best they could. Soon they came across a frozen wetland, deep within the lands of the Coryani Empire. As they entered, the snow of the lands around them turned to slush, and the air warmed considerably. As they penetrated the wetland further, the air grew ever warmer, removing the chill from their bones. They had found a swamp, fetid and warm, where hot springs bubbled up from deep within the earth to take the bite from the cool northern air. The warm miasma of the swamp was a welcome change from the cool winds of Milandisia. The ss'ressen basked in the heat of this new land, reveling in the lush vegetation and soothing waters lapping about their waists. The Fire Dragon had been true to His word - paradise had been reached; the Black Talons were home.

At the center of the swamp, they discovered the ruins of an ancient city. The architecture was ssethric, obviously ssethric in nature, from a time long forgotten. Dark basalt dominated the scene, the black rock drawn up from deep beneath the earth to create dark edifices of unsurpassed beauty. All the structures were low, sprawling, and lined up in neat rows. The buildings were thick-walled and heavily defensible, extending deep underground, where natural springs and geothermal vents heated them. The marsh had reclaimed much of this city, with vines and vegetation covering every surface from the sun-dappled walls to the still flowing fountains and luxurious pools.

The Black Talons studied these marvels, for they had seen nothing like it except for the cities in the Ssethregoran Empire. The masses traveled on, drawn inexplicably toward the city center where there stood an immense ziggurat, its stepped sides overgrown with thriving plant life. At the foot of the stepped pyramid the Black Talons stopped and the High Matriarch Mother Ss'lessis Tel ascended the steps. She tore down the vines overhanging

the entrance, revealing a symbol above the door. Inscribed over the massive portal, was a rearing draconic image, its long tail creating a circle on which its haunches rested; the circle was of pure roaring fire. The Black Talons had found their God and named the city in his honor, Lanpeltis, City of the Fiery Wyrm.

An Oath of Fealty

With so few of their numbers surviving their exodus to the Sulfur Marshes, it took generations for the Black Talons to establish themselves in the area. For decades, they remained effectively unknown to the humans of Milandisia, as the Black Talons rarely ventured outside of the swamp. It is likely that the Coryani would have sought to dislodge them from their new homeland, but the Black Talons were lucky to arrive when they did. The Eighth Century I.C. was the era of the Mad val'Dellenov Emperors of Coryan, and was a time of great strife. Some sixty years after the Black Talons settled in Lanpeltis, the human empire was plunged into the bitter half-century long conflict. The Second Coryani-Khitani War led to the to the shattering of the empire's economy, with thousands of its citizens dying from plague and famine. Due to the mismanagement of the war by the val'Dellenov emperors, the province of Milandisia seceded in the year 803 I.C.

Seeking to secure their new borders, men were quickly levied and a force of knights and cantons rode out to the marsh to confront the newly discovered ssethrics that had taken up residence there a century before. Led by Duke Artur val'Holryn of the Order of the Phoenix, the knights descended upon the marsh, seeking to engage this potential menace to the newly formed Duchy of Tralia. However, the duke was a thoughtful man and did not blindly attack these strange beings. Instead he observed them from the edge of the Sulphur Marsh and saw them caring for their young and showing no interest with making war upon his lands.

Against the advice of his fellow knights, the duke waded out into the marsh with just two men, forbidding his forces to show any hostile intent. After a few tense moments, and a subsequent repast that evening, Duke Artur and the High Matriarch Mother came to an agreement. The duke would grant the land of the Sulfur Marsh to the ss'ressen, a property he considered worthless at best, in exchange for their oath of fealty to him and the Crown of Milandir. By the authority of the Crown, they would be left to their own devices, unmolested by all, but would be expected to levy warriors in times of need. Since that day almost three centuries ago, the Black Talons have been an invaluable ally to the Kingdom of Milandir. In return, the ss'ressen have gained a wealth of knowledge, new technologies, the friendship of the humans, and protection from any ssethric force that may wish to do them harm.

Pyros Morelia

The Black Talon named Ven served proudly as a member of the warrior caste since his hatching, but after the required number of years defending the Sulfur Marsh a wanderlust to see the rest of the world came over him, like many others. Leaving the warm lands of the Sulfur Marsh for adventures abroad, Ven joined a group of adventurers, who's adventures spanned the Known Lands in a series of ever more perilous encounters.

In the year 1025 I.C. the group was drawn into conflict with the Harvesters, a group of mages that enslaved others with the arcane gift becoming enmeshed in the machinations of the sorcerer Lucias Orata. This culminated with Ven and his fellow adventurers taking part on an assault upon the Isle of Tears and facing off against

the power-mad sorcerer. In his villa, Orata was attempting to attain divinity by vivisecting a weakened valinor known as the Serenity of Beltine and enacting a profane ritual taken directly from the Black Book of Ymandragore.

After a fierce battle, Lucias Orata was slain, but the valinor was in too weakened a state to survive. Imparting the last of her essence to the group of Heroes, Ven and the rest became the first new val family in millennia, the val'Sosi, scions of Beltine. While a cause for jubilation among the others, Ven was conflicted, believing that his soul, a gift from the Fire Dragon, was now tainted by the essence of this servant of a human deity. Would this bar him from the glory of his god's paradise? Did this make him unsuited to mate in the eyes of the matriarchs? Ven had to know.

Now known as Ven val'Sosi, tales of the ss'ressen warrior with strange gray eyes soon traveled back to the Sulfur Marsh. Ven was summoned to Lanpeltis by High Matriarch Mother Ssvesh to determine the effect this divine essence had upon his soul. Beneath the Temple of Cinders, Ven underwent a series of trials, both physical and mental, and was subjected to a number of purification rituals, taxing the stamina of the mighty ss'ressen warrior. Finally, Ven was allowed to stand before the altar of the Fire Dragon and be judged. Wreathed in the searing, sacred flames of the Black Talon deity, Ven was consumed by the incandescent flames and reduced to a cinder, stunning those who witnessed the immolation.

His comingled soul now free of its fleshy prison, Ven found himself before the glory that is the Fire Dragon. The disembodied ss'ressen peered into its divine essence and was in turn scrutinized, dissected, and analyzed. Whatever now constituted Ven val'Sosi's soul was deemed worthy by the Black Talon's deity and It revealed that all that had occurred was in accordance with the vision It presented to High Mother Scaphiopus centuries ago. It then revealed to Ven Its true nature and his destiny.

On the Mortal Realm of Arcanis, mere moments had passed. Before the shocked assembly another miracle was unfolding before their eyes. A swirling whirlwind of flames arose, obscuring the pile of ashes from sight and when it subsided, the mortal form of Ven stood remade, as healthy and hale as when he first entered the temple.

Ven val'Sosi

But something about him had changed. His bearing and demeanor now had a worldliness to them, as if he had lived a hundred lifetimes and seen all there was to see. Physically, though his eyes remained the same grey color, around his left eye was inscribed a circle of ever-flowing flame, the living symbol of the Fire Dragon. From the ashes of the fallen warrior, another had risen anew.

Ven val'Sosi was dead and gone. It was Pyros Morelia that now walked among them.

In light of the obvious miracle that they had all witnessed, High Matriarch Mother Ssvesh had no choice but to acknowledge that Ven was the chosen of the Fire Dragon. Pyros Morelia stated that their god had seen fit to allow him to retain the unique abilities the essence of the Serenity of Beltine had granted him and would take part of the next mating cycle without delay.

The Fire Dragon had plans for his brood.

This entry is in tribute to Ven val'Sosi, played by Mark Fischer. Through exemplary heroics and self-sacrifice shown in the Living Arcanis Special Mission of Gen Con 2002 and Special Event of Gen Con 2003, Mark's character left his mark upon the Shattered Empires forever. In the world of Arcanis the actions of a single player can change the entire world.

The Brood of Ven val'Sosi

Bearing the offspring of Ven val'Sosi is a harrowing and often fatal endeavor, one which the females of the Black Talon undertake with the same bravery and determination as the most honored members of the warrior caste. The first mating cycle proved disastrous, as all the females chosen perished in agony, just before laying the eggs. In the time before the next cycle, the most knowledgeable priestesses spent every waking moment attempting to uncover the reasons for the deaths. Some feared that none could survive the unforeseen pain of pregnancy. These priestesses discovered that while there was no way of dampening the pain, the females could be placed in a coma, dampening all feeling and allowing them to survive. The egg laying process would have to be assisted by others, but the carrying females' survival rate rose significantly, though some still perished.

Of the first hatching of Pyros Morelia's brood, twelve of the sixteen eggs proved nonviable, three hatched as misshapen and malformed, while one looked like a perfectly formed Black Talon save for its hide coloring and large, throbbing cranium. All of the hatchlings immediately exhibited powerful psionic powers, and sent out a combined mental scream that killed the attendant Matriarchs and stunned all inside the hatchery. A magitrix was called to place the hatchlings in a mystically induced sleep to stop their unfocused mental attacks.

Unprepared to deal with powerful psionic hatchlings, the High Matriarch Mother petitioned the Duke of Milandir for assistance, which quickly arrived in the form of Idan val'Holryn, the Cognetitio Basilios of the val'Holryn family and his young apprentice, Arnous. Master Idan, the most gifted psionicist in Tralia quickly assessed the situation and through trial and error, managed to sooth the hatchlings. After consulting with the High Matriarch Mother, they agreed that someone from the Cognetitio of Tralia would need to be present until the hatchlings could be trained not to harm those about them.

To further safeguard the ss'ressen, the hatchery that would hold the Ven val'Sosi's brood would be relocated to the small village of Lor'sül, located on the western edge of the Sulfur Marsh. Years of practice refined the techniques needed to control the psionic outbursts and further years of training in Tralia to allow the psionically awakened ss'ressen to reach their full potential.

Physiology

The brood of Ven val'Sosi all share the same characteristics possessed by the Black Talons. It is their pale white to light grey hide and domed cranium that differentiates them from the rest of their clutch mates. Members of this brood are the only known ss'ressen to possess psionic abilities, though none inherited Pyros Morelia's val'Sosi bloodline powers.

The Abessian Exodus

In 1027 I.C., a rumor was circulated by way of the Disciples of Jeggal Sag that a shell fragment of the legendary *Miral Ova*, the 'First Egg', from which the Black Talon was hatched, had been discovered in the Ssethregoran Empire. The possibility that ssanu biomancers would be able to use it to recreate the egg clutch, one under the empire's control, chilled the

Black Talons to their bones. This could not be allowed and so they launched a massive expeditionary force back into their former nation.

In reality, the rumor of the relic was a ruse designed to provoke such a response from Black Talons. The Ssethregorans did not have any such remnants, but they did intend on recreating their own egg clutch. The ssethrics hoped that they could draw the invading force into an ambush, destroying the bulk of the Black Talon army, while launching their own attack on Lanpeltis to capture as many breeding age ss'ressen as possible. With this breeding stock, the ssanu hoped to recreate the egg clutch as the perfect infiltrators and spies that would be welcomed with open arms by the hated Altherians and other human societies.

Through sheer ferocity and tenacity, the Black Talon force, led by the Warlord Salakis, uncovered the ambush and escaped only to discover the attack on Lanpeltis. Though the casualties had been heavy, the Ssethregorans were repelled and had retreated to the caverns of the Endless Dark. Had it not been for the bravery and sacrifice of many members of the Worker Caste, the outcome would have been quite different.

While many were killed, the only one unaccounted for was the High Matriarch Mother, Ssvesh. At first it was believed that ancient leader had been taken to the empire's capital, but month's later, a message was delivered stating that she had been rescued by a dissident group of ssanu and yissera and was now their guest in Abessios.

Unknown to the Black Talons, those many weeks in their care allowed the ssanu priestesses of Yig to pour their poison words into old High Matriarch Mother's ears, convincing her that her people were being used as little more than cannon fodder by the humans. The Yigites showed her how the ssethric and humans in the nascent Abessian Dominion had created a new society, where both groups could coexist peacefully, and where the fickle human deities and the horrors of the ancient Myrantian gods were replaced by the loving care of Yig.

To show her that the Black Talons were welcomed here, they made a gift of one of Yig's unique blessings, a cant that encased her in a cocoon. When she emerged, the High Matriarch Mother was youthful and revitalized, her body rejuvenated to when she was in her last cycle of the breeding age. The blessing would have to be given periodically so that she could retain her youth, but by ordering the clutch to leave Milandir and make their home within the Dominion, she could remain young forever.

Whether she was convinced by the ssanu's words or drunk on the power of her regenerated body, Ssvesh became convinced that the Black Talon's place was in Abessios. She returned to Lanpeltis and ordered the entire clutch to prepare for the Great Migration south to their new homeland. Many members of the clutch, including the warlord, immediately rejected this lunacy. Normally submissive to the Matriarch's orders, the males, led by the warlord and emboldened by the mostly patriarchal society of Milandir, confronted the High Matriarch Mother and postponed the start of the Great Migration until time could be given to study and understand the implications of such an action.

Realizing that she simply could not order her people to blindly follow her, Ssvesh compromised. She decided that she, along with a quarter of the egg clutch, would travel south and begin making the preparations for their eventual exodus to the Dominion. She gave the warlord and the rest of the clutch a season to follow suit.

After consulting Duke Victor val'Holryn and King Osric, the warlord agreed to lead a small contingent to Abessios to uncover the truth behind the High Matriarch Mother's miraculous rejuvenation and her order to move the entire egg clutch. The contingent arrived at Abessios at the same time that a group of adventurers dedicated to stopping the mad valinor Manetas from ruling the Coryani Empire and instituting his divine rule over all of the Known Lands. The adventurers sought an audience with the ruling Phaerons of the Dominion, the human Khendu and the yissera, Nikara, for their assistance in recovering venom from a gigantic serpent, known as the Daughter of Yig, located in an ancient temple called the Coiled Temple of Yig.

Phaeron Khendu did not want the Black Talon ss'ressen to migrate to the Abessian Dominion, for while they would be a great asset militarily, he feared that their numbers would tip the delicate balance of power in favor of Phaeron Nikara and her ssanu masters. However, he lacked the power to blatantly overrule his co-Phaeron and forbid them from settling in his territory. Sensing resistance by the warlord and his contingent, he set in motion a bold plan.

The eggs of a Daughter of Yig are considered sacred to the ssethric people. While on their quest for the venom they require, the Phaeron engineered a test to see if the ss'ressen were truly welcomed in his lands. Playing on the same omens that were so frequently used against him by Phaeron Nikara, Khendu convinced them all that these adventurers were to retrieve the eggs of a Daughter of Yig. Should the great serpent's eggs be intact, then it would signal the goddess' consent to allow the Black Talons to reside within their borders. However, should they return with broken shells, then this would show Her displeasure at their migration.

Upon their return, the adventurers turned over cracked and brittle shells to the assembled host. Grabbing the remnants of the eggshells and displaying them for all to see, Phaeron Khendu exclaimed, *"See before you that the omens could not be clearer. Those not of Myrantian birth or not blessed by the Scaled Goddess Yig are not welcome in the Abessian Dominion."*

Turning to the Matriarch Mother, he proclaimed, *"And that includes the scions of Kassegore. You and your egg clutch are not welcome here, Black Talon."*

A look of desperation sprang to life in the wide eyes of the High Matriarch Mother. *"No, I was promised…we were promised salvation and a new Promised Land. This is a trick by these mammals to keep my clutch from its rightful place besides their ssethric brethren!"*

Growing more agitated, she sprang towards Yigite high priestess and ripped the Sacred Chalice of Yig, a large golden goblet used in sacred ceremonies to Yig, from her grasp. Snatching a skin of wine from one of the ever-present servants, she filled the chalice and raised it before her, while becoming more and more hysterical. *"I will prove that we hold favor with the Scaled Goddess. Here… this…this is Yig's chalice…sacred to her and her priestesses. See how she anoints me as her voice – her child."*

Tossing the bitter wine down her gullet, Ssvesh drank deeply and smiled a toothy grin just before her eyes glazed over. The chalice tumbled from her numb hands. A chalice used to milk the deadliest of serpents over countless sacred ceremonies can never be completely washed and cleaned, and even the residue is enough to kill a man in seconds. A man…or the High Matriarch Mother of the Black Talons.

Without a glance at the stiffening corpse, the warlord nodded wryly to Phaeron Khendu. *"My people shall be out of your territory and on their way to Milandir immediately, your Excellency. My compliments on an excellent vintage."*

The Crusades of Light

The Black Talons fought bravely in both the fifth and sixth Crusades of Light, where the Milandisians led the peoples of the various nations of the Known Lands against the invading Infernal Horde from the Fiendish Expanse. The fifth crusade faced a small, expeditionary force whose true objective was to test the mettle of the present generation of mortal men and the Devil King Uhxbractit happily sacrificed a few thousand of his infernals to that end.

The ss'ressen fought a few minor skirmishes during this war, but took substantial casualties during the battle at the gates of Censure, the Jewel of the Hinterlands. It was there that the warlord Salakis gained the painful scars that still mar his countenance, while defending King Osric from the onslaught of a group of infernals. Though wounded, the king survived that skirmish to return to his throne.

The true invasion came years later, when the full might of the Devil King was

brought to bear. Once again, the Black Talons fought side by side with Milandisian knights and others, carving a glorious swath through the invading demons. At the final battle at the Unyielding Gate, they sacrificed themselves in droves, to give the Milandisian king and champions the chance to strike down Uhxbractit and end the war. Over one hundred thousand crusaders died during the war, with the ss'ressen making up a large number of the casualties.

Present Day

Relations with Milandir are at an all-time high, something that those not intimately familiar with the ss'ressen culture would not expect given the heavy losses sustained during the Crusades. The Black Talons are grateful to the Crown for the opportunity to die with honor, battling a worthy foe, and to achieve a noble quest. Repelling the Infernal Horde and safeguarding the Hinterlands, and with it the rest of the Known Lands, is a feat worthy of song, ensuring that the ss'ressen that fell are now basking in the radiance of Fire Dragon.

The only wrinkle in the otherwise unblemished relations concerns the continued position of the warlord as the King's Champion. The High Matriarch Mother has made repeated requests that he be released from that position and return to his duties in the Sulfur Marsh, but thus far, King Gerhardt has declined to honor the request.

Of greater significance is a troubling report recently made by an elite unit suggesting that the ancient ssanu sorcerer Ss'koreth has somehow managed to survive, no mean feat as the elorii claim to have killed the ancient creature thousands of years ago. The ss'ressen who discovered this fact recounted how they discovered a large number of cloning vats containing strong and healthy bodies of the sorcerer, presumably for Ss'koreth's use. They promptly destroyed them all, perhaps leaving the archmagi vulnerable to a final death. If indeed this monster out of legend still slithers upon the face of Arcanis, then the future holds more menace than all the terrible years that have passed combined.

Culture

Matriarchal society

Like all ss'ressen egg clutches, with the exception of the Ghost Scale, the Black Talon society is ruled by the female of the species. Females are held in reverence, with the males deferring to them in most matters. The exception to this rule being issues of warfare, where the warlord has final authority, though High Matriarch Mother is usually consulted. Each village of the Sulfur Marsh is ruled by a matriarch, who handles the day-to-day administration of their village. Trade and all matters beyond the borders of the Sulfur Marsh falls under the purview of the High Matriarch Mother, who resides in Lanpeltis.

Matrons, Matriarchs and Matriarch Mothers

Once the females have completed their third mating cycle they are released from their seclusion and they are addressed as *matron* by the males. Females call each other by their given name in all but formal settings or when addressing a person of a higher station as a sign of respect.

Matriarch Mother is a title given to those in positions of authority and is synonymous with the title of *high priestess* in human culture. Unlike a simple priestess, Matriarch Mothers also hold absolute secular power within their domains as governors of the various Black Talon settlements throughout the Sulfur Marsh.

The Crèche

Unlike many of their human allies, a Black Talon will never know who their parents are as they are raised in a communal environment. They are taught that their mother is the current High Matriarch Mother and their father is the Fire Dragon, and that the community as a whole is their family. This upbringing forges strong bonds of loyalty and identity within the egg clutch.

Yet inside of each communal dormitory, a different and closer bonding takes place between the hatchlings of a spawning. Months after hatching, the ss'ressen are broken up by sex into smaller groups and housed in a circular structure, very similar in style and construction to the hatcheries, known as a crèche. It is here, while learning, growing, and fighting together, the hatchlings form their strongest bonds as crèche mates.

Within the crèche, their body chemistry changes slightly so that the hatchlings emit very similar pheromones, allowing hatchlings from one group to be easily identified by smell. This bonding is important to the females, as they rely on this connection to learn how to build trust between each other, which will later serve them when they are required to be the glue that holds the society together. This bond is just as important to the males, whose very lives will depend on their ability to trust and rely on one another during their rite of passage.

The bonds of crèche mates remain for the rest of the ss'ressen's life and are difficult to break. Given the high mortality rates among the warrior caste, the death of one's bond mates is a common occurrence, leading to severe psychological shifts, especially when the ss'ressen who is the lone survivor. This shift in personality can manifest in the ss'ressen as seeking more dangerous missions or developing homicidal or suicidal tendencies. This survivor's remorse is difficult to overcome, as the Black Talons, while compassionate compared to other egg clutches, lack the sensitivity and empathy to help their fellow ss'ressen readjust.

Meeting a solitary ss'ressen, regardless of egg clutch, should be seen as a potentially dangerous encounter. Those ss'ressen who choose or are forced to live alone may

have succumbed to their psychological trauma, in effect becoming a crèche of one, where all others are seen as threats to be avoided or eliminated.

To combat this condition, some ss'ressen, especially when forced to travel abroad and without another Black Talon, form lesser, but no less true bonds with those with whom they travel. After a time of working together, and if the ss'ressen finds one or more of them worthy of his trust and protection, the Black Talon will insist on performing a ritual consisting of the symbolic shedding of blood and the marking of companionship, This marking, similar to a runic symbol, is etched upon a prominent scale, while on a *"soft skin"*, it results in painful scarification.

Naming Ritual

Black Talons remain unnamed until they pass their rite of passage and become adults in the eyes of the clutch. Females receive only one name and are usually named after other matrons or Matriarch Mothers, such as Jasneth, Sedturoc, or Sileth. Males receive two names; a *"war name"* after completing their rite of passage and their true name, should they reach their twenty-fourth year.

A warname is a simple, short, but unique label that can be spoken quickly by a leader during combat, such as "Broken Nail", "One-Eye", or "Scarred". Should a warrior survive fulfilling their obligations to the clutch, they may take on a formal name, such as Surgot, Senek, or Tellas. Those that choose to remain in the Sulfur Marsh or return years later, may continue to be known by their warname, or may be given a new one, such as "Old Scale" or "Limb Ripper".

Lastly, both males and females may be granted titles by their superiors, such as Matriarch Mothers for the females and Warlord for the males. These ceremonial titles can be either functional, such as Keeper of the Holy Fires, for one who is tasked with tending the braziers during religious ceremonies in the Temple of Cinders, or the Defender of Hatcheries, for a warrior whose duty is to ensure that the hatcheries are not breached by the enemy, or honorary, such as the Breath of the Fire Dragon or the Blade of the Black Talons. With the exception of the High Matriarch Mother and recently, the Warlord, Black Talons do not acknowledge titles given to them by humans. A ss'ressen who insists on being called 'Sir' or 'Lord' will be ridiculed by their fellows.

A Caste Society

With few notable exceptions, the Black Talon society is divided into three separate castes, each with its own level of seniority. In order of importance and prestige within the society, the religious caste sits at the pinnacle, followed by the warrior caste, with the worker caste at the bottom. Within each of these clearly delineated cultural strata, there are certain nebulous designation that sit astride the castes, such as the templars, holy champions, inquisitors, and the disciples of Jeggal Sag.

Religious Caste

The religious caste leads and governs the egg clutch in all essential matters, with even the warlord requiring their approval before launching any major campaigns, even if the details of such are left to the warriors. Only females who successfully complete their rite of passage can join the caste's ranks, with males and neuters barred without exception.

Besides being responsible for the ss'ressen's spiritual wellbeing, the religious caste is the de facto leader of the egg clutch and act as the administrators and diplomats of the society. The other two castes regard their members with automatic deference, even when the priestesses' decisions have a direct and possibly negative impact on the other two castes.

As an example of the religious caste's authority, soon after their arrival in the Sulfur Marsh, the matriarch mothers decreed that a number of males hatched would need to be decreased substantially to increase the number of neuters in the worker caste. The matriarch mothers reasoned that with the lack of slaves so prevalent in the Ssethregoran Empire, they would be required to have their own numbers take on that duty. This rationale was never explained to the warrior caste as their trust in the religious caste's judgment was so absolute, that none was needed.

Religious Caste Rite of Passage

After their eighth year of life, the females are removed from the communal dormitories and sequestered from the rest of the society in the Temple of Cinders. Here, before being given mating rights, they must complete a rite of passage. Standing before the Idol of the Blazing Wyrm, they must recite the forty-seven stanzas of the *Litany of the Fire Dragon* from memory, explaining the significance and meaning of any line, when questioned. Besides testing their understanding of the religious text, it takes the measure of the females' memory and intelligence, traits highly valued by the Black Talon matriarchy.

Those that are able to perform to the attending Matriarch Mother's satisfaction, are allowed to mate. Afterwards, these females begin their training as priestesses of the Fire Dragon. This role encompasses more than attending the spiritual well-being of the faithful and the performance of the rituals to appease their deity, like human priests. The role of a Fire Dragon priestess is also part politician and administrator. Oratory skills must be mastered to inspire and motivate, along with proficiency in basic mathematics, logistics, and the law.

Those rare individuals who were bred to master the arcane arts are trained by both ss'ressen and human mages of the Order of St. Armon in eldritch sorcery. These special individuals are not trained as priestesses, given the rigorous training regimen required. Due to the dangers inherent in wielding mystical energies, these females are

often trained away from the Sulfur Marsh, an exception to the usual sequestration imposed upon their gender. Great pains are taken to ensure that these females are not near any ss'ressen males during this time. This training continues through their third breeding cycle at twenty-four, after which they are given the title of *Magitrix*.

Those females that fail the rite of passage are forbidden from mating, as they are seen to have traits that the Matriarch Mother deem undesirable or unsuitable to hand down to the next generation of Black Talons. These females are branded with a mark, a broken circle, on their forehead and are not trained as priestesses. Instead, they are given other, specialized training that compliments their talents and desires. A few join the warrior caste, others become traders, while those that show an aptitude for subterfuge are trained as part of an elite group of infiltrators.

Ss'arseth, priestess of the Fire Dragon

It should be noted that this brand is not a mark of shame. The Black Talon are a pragmatic people, and to them the symbol is a practical way of ensuring that only those selected by the matriarch mothers are allowed to propagate the race. Even so, there is some stigma associated with the mark, though it hardly ever manifests in an overt manner. However, just because they are not selected to mate does not mean that they cannot. Because their bodies are still producing the pheromones that can incite males into a sexual frenzy, they are still sequestered in the Temple of Cinders with the other females until after their twenty-fourth anniversary of their hatching.

Duties and Obligations

The religious caste has several duties, with first among them being the spiritual guides for the Black Talons, ensuring that they follow the teachings of the Fire Dragon in leading noble lives that will see them enter His paradise. This is achieved through a combination of religious instruction and philosophy that is instilled in all the ss'ressen from a very young age and throughout their lives.

Just as importantly, the priestesses act as guardians of the egg clutch's culture and history. Since settling in Milandir, the matriarch mothers were determined that the ss'ressen would not lose their cultural heritage and be subsumed by human culture. They took great pains to ensure that the ancient legends were retold, that the traditions were observed, and that social cohesion remained intact and untainted by foreign influences. While they succeeded in the first two, they appear to have failed in the last as the humans' propensity for forging stronger ties has led to a knightly order made up of only Black Talons and the king elevating Warlord Salakis to the role of King's Champion.

Lastly, and of the utmost importance to the survival of the clutch, it is the religious caste that controls the breeding rights, choosing who may mate and eventually, how many of the eggs laid are allocated to each caste. The eggs allotted to each caste is based on the needs of the clutch as a whole and while both the warrior and worker caste may petition the priestesses for additional members, the final decision rests with the females.

Following Milandir's crusade against the Infernal Horde, the warrior, and to a lesser extent the religious

caste, suffered dire losses resulting in the first dramatic dip in the Black Talon population since the end of their exodus. The religious caste's pronouncement that the female population should be increased first has caused some resentment among the members of the warrior caste. The priestesses are looking to resolve the long-term problem, reasoning that more fertile females will alleviate the issue and with no immediate threat to the clutch, an increase in the warrior caste is not as urgent. The males disagree, believing that threats emerge when least expected and their numbers may prove insufficient to the defending the clutch, but as usual, acceded to their wishes.

Structure of the Religious Caste

The Black Talons are governed by a priestess known as the High Matriarch Mother. Upon the death or incapacitation of the previous holder of the office, a congregation of all the Matriarch Mothers are assembled to select one of their own to ascend to this position. She is assisted by several matriarchs that form an advisory council that can number as few as two to as many as six. Within the hierarchy of the Milandisian court, the High Matriarch Mother holds the title of nobility of countess within the Duchy of Tralia and is a vassal of the Duke of Tralia.

The religious caste is divided into two groups, one which is responsible for the culture, history, and administration of the clutch, while the other deals strictly in the realm of spiritual enlightenment. To those outside the caste, the religious caste is seen and understood to be an undivided whole, partly because both divisions report to and are led by the High Matriarch Mother.

The Ecclesiastical Order

Though the High Matriarch Mother is the high priestess of the Fire Dragon, her position rarely requires her to preside over religious ceremonies, with the exception of the observances of the holy days. The priestess in charge of ecclesiastical matters is the *Derga*, the high priestess of rituals. This priestess leads a small group of elder priestesses dealing with dogma, scriptural interpretation, and heretical expungement. The inquisitors, a small but effective group that straddles both the religious and warrior castes, report directly to the derga.

Most priestesses fall under the category of the *Keepers of the Flame*. They are the ones who tend the sacred fires in the Temple of Cinders, teach the cants used by the adherents of the Fire Dragon, and care for the eggs in the hatcheries. These priestesses are the ones most likely encountered outside of the Sulfur Marsh, usually accompanied by those of the warrior caste, whom they guide spiritually as they travel throughout the Known Lands.

The final segment of this order are the mystics, those priestesses that believe that the teachings of the Fire Dragon can set one upon the path of enlightenment. To truly understand the deity's teachings, a priestess must commune directly with the Fire Dragon through fasting and intense meditation. There are only a handful of priestesses who have the sort of fanatical devotion needed to become a mystic, but they are held in special reverence due to their unswerving dedication.

The Cultural Order

While those priestesses of the cultural order are no less devoted than those of the ecclesiastical, they tend to be pragmatic, and are more concerned with the tangible aspects of the clutch, such as its history, culture, and other teachings. The high priestess leading this group is known as the *Senkata*, or the knowledgeable one. She oversees those teaching the hatchlings the history and culture of the Black Talons. Those ss'ressen under the senkata have incredible memory and the oldest among them can recite the entire oral history of the clutch from memory.

Older priestesses of this order are placed in charge of the care and education of hatchlings from the time they are hatched until they take their rite of passage. They are first called *mother* by their charges, but it is a title that will follow them throughout their lives. Of all the ss'ressen, they are the closest thing a hatchling will ever have to a parent.

The *Srel* or 'learned ones', are generally the most inquisitive priestesses, seeking out any knowledge of interest to the clutch, be it historical, academic, or scientific. The srel are trained as healers, through cants and practical healing techniques, though relying on their skill to treat races other than their own a risky proposition. Srels are interested in retrieving bits of their ancient past, both from their time in the Ssethregoran Empire as well as artifacts from the ancient times. Due to this fascination, these ss'ressen can be found as members of the Emerald Society or less frequently in the Followers of the Azure Way.

Magitrix and Rune Masters

Those rare eggs placed closest to the fires of the hatcheries are destined to be able to manipulate the mystical, arcane energy permeating the planet. The incubation of these eggs is tricky, for they have to be as close to the heat source as possible, without cooking the embryo. Their blackened shells are monitored closely for any signs of damage. The intense heat means that all ss'ressen hatched in this manner are females, but other than the most rudimentary instruction on religion and history, their upbringing is very different from the other females of the clutch.

Given the secretive nature of the ssanu, all ss'ressen's gifted with the ability to manipulate arcane energy can only master the most vulgar of means to do so - eldritch magic. This has turned out to be a boon for the

Black Talons, as there are not enough ss'ressen arcane practioners able to teach the young magitrixes. Luckily, their alliance with Milandir has allowed the more numerous human mages to aid in teaching the gifted. It takes a ss'ressen student over a dozen years to become proficient in their art, and when their masters feel they are ready, they are attacked by one of their teachers when they are not expecting it. This magical sneak attack is the magitrix's rite of passage, and while her teacher does not bring their full power to bear, the test can result in death, should the ss'ressen fail. While this may seem a terrible waste of resources, after training someone for years, the Black Talons trust the judgment of the magitrix's master in knowing when to administer the test. If the student fails, it was better that it occurred now rather than in the heat of battle, when the clutch's very existence can hinge on their abilities.

After their third breeding cycle, young magitrix are encouraged to travel the world, seeking out new knowledge and experiences, before returning to the Sulfur Marsh, where they spend the rest of their years protecting their people and instructing new females in utilizing their talents.

Of the small number of magitrix, an even smaller percentage dedicate themselves in the study of rune magic and how to etch them onto weapons, armors, and other items. Currently, there are only two Black Talon rune masters, a master and an apprentice. Both are located in Lanpeltis and have a small structure adjacent to the Temple of Cinders, where they ply their craft.

Disciples of Jeggal Sag in the Black Talons

Like all the various ssethric races, with the exception of the Ashen Hide and Ghost Scale egg clutches, the Black Talons welcome the Disciples of Jeggal Sag within their territory. The disciples make themselves useful by assisting in the care and handling of livestock as well as raising and training sc'math and the few morlet the Black Talons possess.

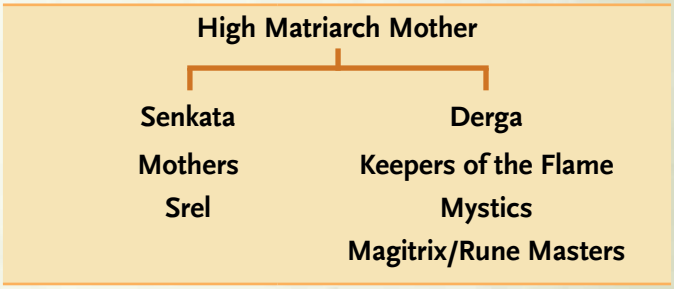
The disciples also act as couriers for the Black Talons, specifically to those within the Ghost Scale egg clutch seeking to escape the madness of their 'deity'. Working with the inquisitors, the disciples smuggle out those who doubt the divinity of Herka to the waiting inquisitors who, once they are assured of their sincerity, take them north to the Sulfur Marsh.

Inquisitors

This small group is made up of both males and females who enforce the dogma of the Fire Dragon and ensure that Black Talons remain faithful to those teachings. Since the discovery of the Ghost Scales and the schism that resulted in the Ashen Hide, inquisitors have redoubled their efforts to bring their errant clutch mates back into the fold or eliminate them when no other option appears possible.

When those who have strayed, whether from within the clutch or from the splinter groups, are found, they are given a choice – answer the *question* or perish. Those who answer correctly are warmly reintegrated into the Black Talons. What the *question* is, is unknown. Even those who have been put to it are unwilling, or unable, to repeat it. Whatever it is, the inquisitors are absolutely sure in its infallibility to determine those who truly wish to rejoin the Clutch and those that are trying to deceive them.

Religious Caste Structure



Favored Weapon

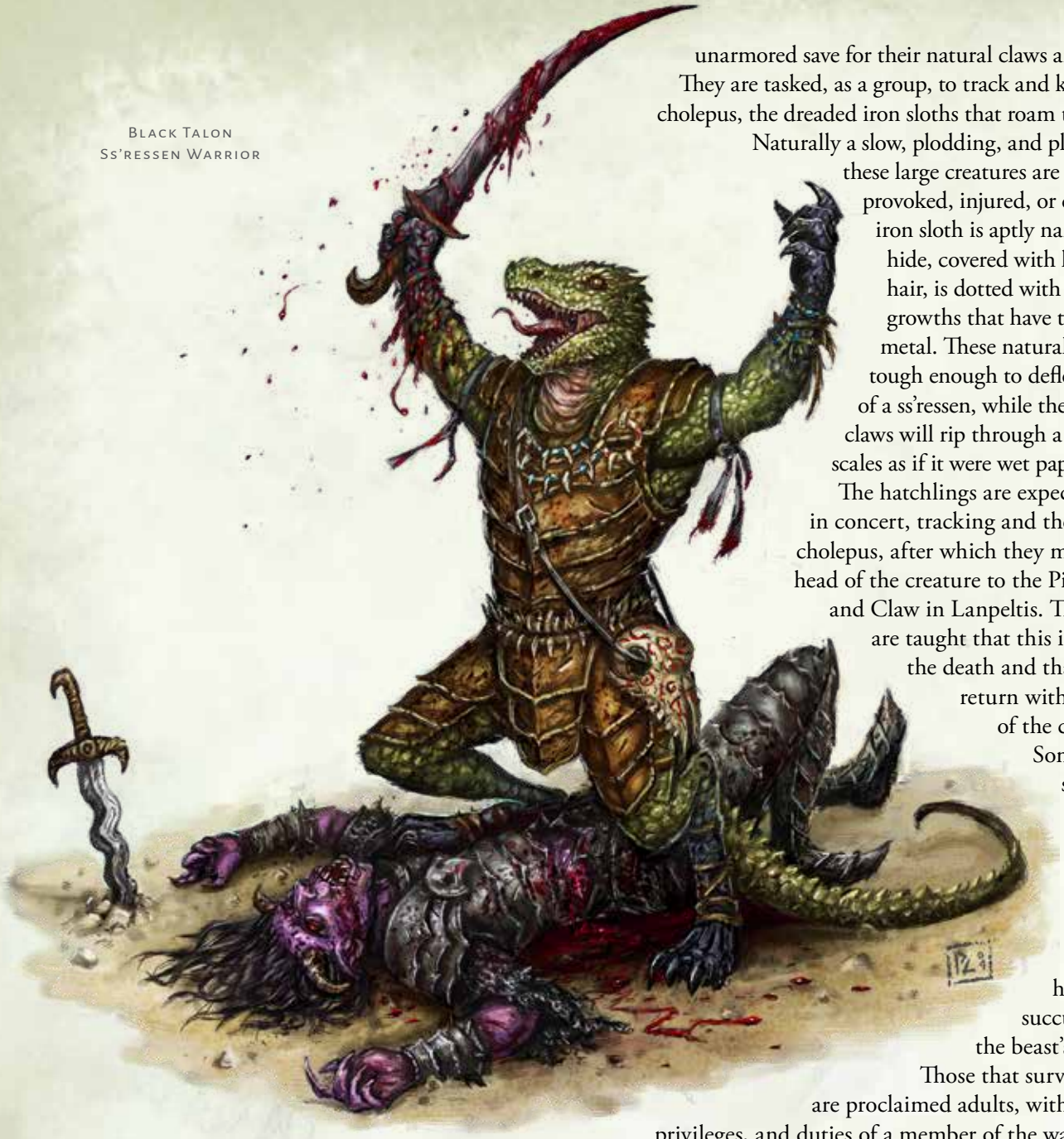
The priestesses prefer employing a flail above other weapons as the swinging spiked ball or mace-like head resembles the sinuous movements of the Fire Dragon's body. The priestesses also see their talons and tail as gifts from the Fire Dragon and practice the art of unarmed combat as a way of thanking the deity for providing the Black Talons with the means to protect themselves.

Warrior Caste

The Black Talons were bred by the ssanu biomancers to be elite infiltrators and warriors, using stealth as well as force of arms to advance the objectives of the empire. During the time of the serpent empires, the warrior caste was the largest group by far and consisted solely of males. This was required due to the unending wars prosecuted by the ssanu.

Life for the Black Talon warrior caste after their exodus to the Sulfur Marsh has eased. Though the humans engage in wars almost as incessantly as the Ssethregorans, their battles pale in comparison to the Wars of Extinction. The relentless attrition of the warrior caste has now abated, allowing for their reformation into the new society being crafted by the wise Matriarch Mothers.

In the Modern Age, the warrior caste is no longer solely the province of males, as in a few rare occasions, females and neuters have been allowed to join their ranks. The caste's numbers have fallen to approximately one-third of the eggs hatched per breeding cycle as opposed to a high of ninety percent during the Wars of Extinction.



Black Talon
Ss'ressen Warrior

Training for males begins almost from the moment they are hatched. The male hatchlings learn about their people's culture, history, and religion from their assigned matron before their mid-morning meal. Afterwards, an older bull veteran begins their training as potential warriors. The crèche mates are broken up into smaller groups that will train together throughout their adolescence. Black Talons pride themselves on their ability to work as a cohesive unit. While singly, each one is deadly in their own right, as a group they are virtually unstoppable. This type of cooperative training is crucial if they are to survive their rite of passage when they reach age eight.

Warrior Caste Rite of Passage

After almost seven years of training in the Black Talons' martial techniques, each of the smaller combat groups are sent into the depths of the Sulfur Marsh, unarmed and unarmored save for their natural claws and scales. They are tasked, as a group, to track and kill an adult cholepus, the dreaded iron sloths that roam the swamp. Naturally a slow, plodding, and placid animal, these large creatures are a terror when provoked, injured, or cornered. The iron sloth is aptly named as it's hide, covered with long, matted hair, is dotted with large scabrous growths that have the hardness of metal. These natural iron plates are tough enough to deflect the talons of a ss'ressen, while their razor-sharp claws will rip through a Black Talon's scales as if it were wet paper.

The hatchlings are expected to work in concert, tracking and then slaying a cholepus, after which they must bring the head of the creature to the Pit of Tooth and Claw in Lanpeltis. The ss'ressen are taught that this is a fight to the death and that they cannot return without the head of the creature.

Some groups are slaughtered entirely, while most return with one or two of their number having succumbed to the beast's iron claws. Those that survive the hunt are proclaimed adults, with all the rights, privileges, and duties of a member of the warrior caste. Any Black Talon that is hale enough to participate are immediately granted breeding rights and escorted to a hatchery, where they indulge in days of unbridled mating.

Those that fall in a successful hunt are returned by their crèche mates and after the proper rites are performed, buried beneath the earthen floor of the Pit, sacred ground of the warrior caste. Those groups that fail to return at all, are left for the swamp to devour. Entry into the egg clutch as an adult is only for the strong; the weak are not worth remembering.

In some rare instances, an individual fails in the hunt, but is not killed in the endeavor. No group in living memory has returned to Lanpeltis without their trophy, but there have been occasions where a ss'ressen, due to cowardice or incompetence, are singled out by his crèche mates. The individual has the choice of accepting his

shame or challenging the charges. Should the accusation be challenged, the sole ss'ressen must face his accusers immediately in a trial by combat to the death. If successful, his accusers are unceremoniously dumped in the swamp, and the lone ss'ressen is inducted into the clutch.

If the accused accedes to the charges of cowardice or incompetence, the Warlord immediately slices off offender's tail with his ceremonial blade and orders the wound be immediately cauterized so that it may not grow back. The hatchling is then taken to the edge of the Sulfur Marsh and banished from the Black Talons, never to return under pain of death.

Duties and Obligations

Until the age of twenty-four, members of the Warrior Caste are expected to remain within the Sulfur Marsh, unless specifically ordered to travel outside of it by their superiors. During these years, the warriors continue to train and are expected to defend the sovereign territory of the Black Talon from any and all invaders.

An exception to the travel ban is when a levy is called by the Duke of Tralia for a specific purpose, usually either to repel attackers or to strike against the enemies of the Crown. The last such levy occurred during the Sixth Crusade of Light, when the Kingdom of Milandir went to war against an incursion of infernals from the Fiendish Expanse. This war took a heavy toll on both the humans and Black Talons, with a casualty rate of over 60% among the mortal defenders. This left the population of the Black Talons at an all-time low, one from which they have yet to recover.

Apart from these notable exceptions, the Black Talon's territory has been remarkably safe, understandably given that they are surrounded by friendly human territories that act as a buffer against all possible enemies. Even the Cancerese, were they so inclined, would need to travel through most of the Duchy of Tralia before posing a threat. As they no longer need to fear reprisals from a neighboring egg clutch or attacks by the Malfelan elorii, the Black Talons have had to create new enemies to keep their warriors battle hardened and ready. To this end, the ss'ressen, with the blessings of the Milandisian nobility, stage hunting parties to cull the number of ratmen in the Faerdwalden. Black Talon warriors likewise roam the northern portions of the Hinterlands, part of the newly proclaimed Milandisian Protectorate, eliminating any hyena-men or errant infernal they may find. These Black Talons earn their clutch money from the scalp bounty on every hyena-man killed.

A spot in these hunting expeditions is highly coveted and hotly contested, as it allows these Black Talons the chance to face even greater foes, such as infernals, human raiders and bandits, and even the rare giant. The belief that battles purify the soul and death at the hands of a worthy adversary earns them entry into an afterlife where they bask in the glory of the Fire Dragon, makes these treks very appealing. In recent times, due to the drop in the warrior caste population, these expeditions have become rarer, leading many to seek out adventure and worthy adversaries after their initial duty is met.

With the exception of those few selected for these hunting expeditions, young Black Talons have experienced very little of the world outside the swamp. It is for this reason that they are encouraged to travel beyond the Sulfur Marsh after their duties to the clutch are completed. Upon their twenty-fourth year, Black Talons may choose to continue in their current position or seek to discover the wonders of the outside world.

As Warlord Salakis is frequently heard saying, *"A Black Talon's obligation to the clutch ends only after death"*. Should the clutch find themselves in need, all Black Talons, regardless of age or other responsibilities, are expected to return to protect the Motherland.

Military Organization

The Warrior Caste is led by a ss'ressen selected by a consensus of the active *taghas*, or generals, and approved by the High Matriarch Mother. This ss'ressen is given the title of Warlord and retains in this position for life. The Warlord is advised by the clutch's taghas, each of whom command one of the five *sarskas* or roughly one-fifth of the current members of the warrior caste.

Each sarskas is further divided into smaller groups, known as *sasmaks*, and are commanded by a *gazichk* or commander. A sarskas may have as many sasmaks as the taghas and warlord feel necessary to successfully achieve an objective. The orderly military of Milandir is a sharp contrast against the malleable organization of the Black Talons. While the amorphous nature of the structure causes pause in Milandisians, it allows then Black Talons to react with versatility, quickly bringing to bear the numbers and specialized units needed to succeed.

The smallest unit, usually consisting of five to seven warriors, is the *tinanc*, led by one of their number who is given the rank of *silagha*. A tinanc can consist of standard warriors, or be a specialized strike team, made up of those trained in assassination, infiltration, or sappers. A tinanc can also consist of warriors coupled with priestesses and magitrix. In such a unit, one of the females, usually the highest-ranking priestess, is given the rank of silagha, though males are more deferential to her for being a priestess than for the rank within the unit.

Military Organization of the Black Talons

Commanding Officer	Military Unit
Warlord	Entire Warrior Caste
Taghas	Sarskas
Gazichk	Sasmak
Silagha	Tinanc

Favored Weapon

The Black Talons are trained extensively in the use of their natural weapons, their claws, teeth, and tail. They believe that sole reliance on an external weapon will ultimately be a weakness that a foe can exploit by disarming them. A Black Talon who has mastered the natural gifts granted to them by the Fire Dragon is never defenseless.

This does not mean that the ss'ressen disdain the use of forged weapons. During their years of training, they become well versed in the use of various swords, axes, and flails. Their claws make it difficult to use human bows without special modifications to the equipment. For ranged weapons, many prefer the crossbow, a Milandisian staple that they quickly adopted after their integration with human society. A Black Talon will never use or own a flintlock, as they know full well the despicable practices associated with the creation of the blastpowder required to fire the weapon.

Ss'ressen use one weapon which is unique to their species, the tail bracer. This weapon is a metal covering that straps onto their tail and is affixed with various blades, making the tail swipe even more dangerous.

King's Champion

Due to the Milandisian culture's obsession with their sense of honor, duels are as common in Naeraanth as they are in the streets of any Cafelan town. The difference is while the Cafelan's are inclined to bare steel at the slightest affront to their honor, the Milandisians have a strict code that dictates which offenses should be answered with combat and which should be ignored, showing who is the better person. In cases where Crown has wronged a person or people and satisfaction is demanded of the monarch, the King's Champion is obliged to defend the kingdom's honor. The champion also acts as a bodyguard, standing as a living shield against any assassins. The King's Champion is also required to dispense justice during a Trial by Combat, but only in those instances where the offense is treason or high crimes against the Crown and the accused demands to prove their innocence in this manner.

King Osric IV selected the Salakis, Warlord of the Black Talons as his champion when the previous holder of that title, Gerhard val'Holryn died in his defense. Osric shrewdly chose the warlord for he knew the imposing figure would cause any of those who sought to dethrone him to reconsider their actions. Never before had a ss'ressen held the position, and many in the Milandisian court believed that the High Matriarch Mother would not grant the Warlord leave to assume that responsibility. To everyone's surprise, the Warlord, in an unheard of breach of custom, did not consult with the leader of the Black Talons before accepting the king's offer. When questioned, he stated that the High Matriarch Mother was a subject of the Crown and it would be a grave breach of etiquette to presume she could deny his lawful decree. It seemed that the Warlord had learned the ways of the humans well.

The High Matriarch Mother, having been recently elevated to the position, did not have the political clout to deny the king his champion. She saw the Warlord's disregard for her position as further evidence of his disdain for the female oligarchy that began when the previous High Matriarch Mother caused a schism that attempted to move a number of Black Talons to the nascent Abessian Dominion and seceding from Milandir.

For his part, Salakis retains his position as Warlord of the egg clutch, though he has transferred the day to

day administration of the warrior caste to his taghas. He long harbored a seditious belief that the males are the equal of the females of the clutch, and that the priestesses use their position as the voice of the Fire Dragon as a means to control the males. While he presently doesn't have any intention of overthrowing the societal order of the clutch, he is enjoying his freedom in what he calls the 'Man's World'.

Salakis and Osric were inseparable and the ss'ressen saved the king from numerous assassination attempts, as well as safeguarding him during the Fifth Crusade of Light. Sadly, King Osric died while in battle against the Devil King Uhxbractit, while the Warlord was being overwhelmed by infernals. The current King of Milandir has retained Salakis as King's Champion, having grown fond of the monstrous ss'ressen of his childhood.

Worker Caste

The Yahssremoran, and subsequently the Ssethregoran, Empires employed large numbers of slaves to perform everything from the most menial tasks to those requiring hard manual labor. The small number of ss'ressen bred for the worker caste were trained as artisans and master craftsmen, etching and engraving the arms and armor of their masters. With the enlightened teachings of the Fire Dragon, the Black Talons now view the ownership of sentient beings as immoral, a philosophy that has meshed well with the Milandisian viewpoint.

Upon their arrival, the ruins that they decided to settle in needed to be cleared and required that new structures be built. Very few of the neuters survived the exodus from Ssethregore, necessitating the warriors and priestesses to work under the watchful eye of the handful of surviving worker caste members, until the first mating cycle began. Even then, it would take nearly three decades before the work force grew large enough to completely take over their traditional duties. During this period of time, the warrior and religious caste's opinion of the workers was elevated, seeing them as an important part of ss'ressen society. While never accepted as true equals, their contribution to the clutch was no longer taken for granted.

Neuter hatchlings begin working almost immediately, cleaning tools and other implements. As they get older, they do more physically demanding tasks, such as ditch digging, lifting heavy objects, etc. The worker caste does not have a structured rite of passage. Instead, those viewed by their elders to have the patience, intelligence, and skill to learn a craft, such as masonry, blacksmithing, or animal husbandry begin training in that area. Those that don't continue doing the tasks they did during their first eight years of life, often leading other hatchlings in these less mentally taxing, but no less important duties.

Those viewed with the greatest potential eventually become highly trained artisans, creating works of art in their chosen medium. Statues and other works of arts made from the amber found in the Sulfur Marsh are high prized and valued by both ss'ressen and human collectors across the Known Lands.

Religion

The Fire Dragon, the Blazing Wyrm, the Fiery One, Lord of the Inferno. In all of these aspects and more does the Fire Dragon embody His tenents as guardian to his chosen peoples and a deadly adversary to His foes. To His chosen, the Fire Dragon is considered a kind, yet unwavering god. He watches over His people, but rarely intervenes, preferring to let them learn their lessons the hard way and thereby grow stronger as a result. Followers of the Fire Dragon consider life a series of trials, where success in your endeavors leads to the betterment of yourself and prosperity for the entire clutch. The Fire Dragon is revered by the Black Talons, as they consider Him everything Kassegore is not. To them the Fire Dragon represents loyalty, honor, bravery, and compassion, sentiments absent from ssethric society. Through the teachings of their Lord, the Black Talons seek to better themselves, both physically and spiritually, determined to never again sink into the mire of hate and destruction that was their way under the ssethric empires.

Religious tenets

When the Fire Dragon revealed himself to High Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus, she was given visions where the deity unveiled the tenets that He embodied and cherished. These are referred to as the Five Scales of Enlightenment by the priestesses and consist of the concepts of unity, strength, respect, honor, and faith.

Unity: *"The leaders of Ssethregore believe that a divided enemy is always easier to defeat. This is why they bred the ss'ressen so that the very smell of another egg clutch would drive them into a mindless frenzy. They also created strife between the castes, by elevating one above another, so that envy and jealousy would fester and distrust would cleave brother from sister.*

"The three castes exist to support each other and while one may lead, none are superior to another. By following this tenet, the clutch is like a solid stone wall, indivisible and unbreakable."

For this reason, the concept of unity was the first spoken of by the Fire Dragon and it remains the important underpinning of the Black Talon society.

Strength: *"All ss'ressen are born with weapons and defenses with which to hunt and protect themselves. Battle is in their heart and in their very blood, but killing for the sake of slaking their bloodlust reduces them to the level of a mindless animal. Ss'ressen, by nature, are a warlike race, but that natural aggression must be channeled in productive ways.*

"Destruction and mindless savagery for its own sake is the way of Kassegore and the varn. Using these gifts for the protection of one's clutch mates, companions, and allies is the noblest of pursuits. Those that lack the strength to protect themselves against the powerful, if worthy of respect, should be defended. Not all creatures were created equally; some have gifts that can benefit the Black Talon and the world as a whole.

"There are those with powers greater than that of a single ss'ressen. This alone does not make them worthy of worship or servitude. Those who rule through power alone, rule through fear. The clutch's strength come from unity, for a united Black Talon clutch can defeat the most powerful of opponents.

"Fear not death at the hands of your opponent. Battle purifies the soul and a death protecting those in your trust, be they clutch mates, allies, or any placed under your aegis, means that your soul is cleansed when it stands before the flame of judgment that guards the gate of my paradise."

Respect: *"Regarding another sentient as an equal, or at least conceding that they have the right to coexist, is the first step in broadening your understanding of what respect is and should be in the lives of the Black Talons. The ssanu and naga teach that one should only respect force and power, but respect must be given, never taken from another.*

"The first one must learn to respect is your elders, for they will teach, feed, and protect you until you can do so yourself. Next, learn to respect your crèche and caste mates, for they are the first to stand with you in times of hardship and adversity. Respect then grows to include the other castes and the clutch, for all must work as one to thrive in the harsh world into which you were born. In turn, you will be respected for your actions and sacrifices on behalf of the clutch.

"Lastly, respect the others that inhabit this world alongside you. There will be times when you will need to take arms against others, but alongside allies and your clutch mates, you will persevere. Know no master, but be not one as well. Know that it is repugnant to Me to eat the flesh of another sentient for this befouls the natural order of the world."

Honor: *"The mindless beast is driven by instinct. It is hungry and so it hunts and kills. It is cold and wet and so seeks shelter beneath the ledge of a rock. By acting on instinct alone, it cannot know right from wrong or what is an honorable or dishonorable action. When an action is valorous, requires sacrifice, tests your resilience or feels* right *in your heart, be assured it is an honorable act and know that I am pleased by it.*

"Lies, deceit and duplicity for personal gain tastes like ash upon the tongue. These are the fangs of Yig spreading her poison into your heart. Follow not the words of the serpent, for they seek only to enslave you with chains of honeyed words and empty promises. Once the first lie leaves your mouth, Yig's coils wrap around your soul and constrict. Only truth can free you from her grasp."

Faith: *"There will always be dark days for you, my children, for how else can you appreciate the light without the darkness. During these cold, hard days, let faith sustain you and give you the courage to persevere. You must have faith in yourself. You have been given claws, teeth, and a tail to protect yourself and others. Have faith in your clutch mates. The priestesses will look ahead so that you do not stumble. The warriors will sharpen their talons, to rend those who stand against you. The workers will build shelters so that you will know comfort at night. Lastly, have faith in Me, for I am the one who filled your heart to bursting with courage.*

"And when the long night comes and you close your eyes for the final time, if you have been true to yourself and My teachings, you will know the warmth of My glow in the paradise I have prepared for you, until the it is time for the cycle to begin again.

"This is the sacred pact I make with all Black Talons and those who follow in your ways."

The Hidden Truth

There is a terrible truth known only to the only the ruling Matriarchy, one which concerns the actual nature of the Fire Dragon. It was High Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus who convinced her people to accept the Fire Dragon as their god, knowing full well the true identity of the Blazing Wyrm. What needs to be understood is that she did this out of love and compassion for her people and by doing so saved them from annihilation at the hands of the Ssethregorans. The problem lies that her people hate the god Kassegore with such vehemence that it was impossible then and still impossible now, to reveal the true identity of their savior to the masses. Doing so would rip the foundations of their clutch apart at the roots. Fear and ignorance would race through the masses, destabilizing the entire culture. Scaphiopus knew this and the current ruling Matriarchy realizes this as well. To understand this situation from their point of view, it is necessary to start at the beginning, with Scaphiopus.

Scaphiopus knew the Ssethregorans would eventually come for them. The Black Talons had fallen in disfavor with the emperor and their rivals were taking this opportunity to exterminate them in one fell swoop. Both the Dark Crests and the sadistic Barbed Tails pressed for the stripping of their privileges and lands for disobeying the emperor and forsaking the rites and rituals of the new state religion.

Locking herself deep within the fortress of Al'malyss, she sat before the life-giving furnace and prayed. She prayed for salvation, pouring out the emotions that filled her heart, with all the compassion and goodness that is now a part of the Black Talons. For days, she remained in front of the life-giving fire, praying, imploring any god that would listen for guidance and aid. In the darkness lit only by the eternal hatching fires, her prayers were finally answered.

With a sudden roar of flame, a heavenly figure appeared before her. Girded in crimson scales and wreathed in

white-hot fire stood a deity unlike all others. The polar opposite of the ssethric deities that now controlled Ssethregore, the omnipotent figure before her radiated a sense of purity and goodness Scaphiopus had never felt in her long life. Overjoyed she prostrated herself, willing to give anything if this god could save her people.

The draconic face turned towards her and in her mind, it spoke. In that single instant Scaphiopus reeled, her hopes crashing, for she had heard that commanding tone before. In her youth, she had worshiped the Dread Lord Kassegore before forsaking his evil ways. As the being spoke, she realized that this new god and her old patron were one and the same. In hopeless agony she cried out, trying to pull her mind away from what she knew must be the end, but Kassegore was not one to be denied, and his thoughts flooded into her mortal mind. Images flashed before her, ideas flowed and in the blink of an eye she understood. The one universal truth had been revealed to her, one so fundamental, yet simple, that she was amazed that she had never thought of it herself. The truth reenergized her shrunken form and she gladly embraced the ssethric deity once more. The two formulated a plan, one that would save the Black Talons and change the face of Arcanis forever. The next morning Scaphiopus emerged from the temple and the Fire Dragon was born. Soon thereafter, the Black Talons fled the empire, branded pariahs and traitors to the ssethric people and marked for extermination.

In that shadow dappled hall centuries ago, Scaphiopus realized that Kassegore as she knew him, a reaver and destroyer, was just one aspect of the deity. It was His darker aspects that the evil beings of Ssethregore once chose to embrace and by doing so it was mortals who created the perversion that was the worship of Kassegore. The Fiery Lord revealed to her His other face, a face representing a better time, one forgotten long ago. At one time both of His aspects, one championed by light, the other by darkness, were revered in ssethric society, but the noble aspect was lost, as its worshipers were slain by rival factions who disagreed with the ideals embodied by the Fire Dragon. In the end only the aspect of the Great Devourer remained in the minds of mortals.

This is the hidden truth behind Black Talon society. The Matriarchs are wise and realize that most of their people would not understand such a revelation and wisely kept it a secret. Only the head matriarch of each community and the High Matriarch Mother know this truth. Whenever one of these prestigious individuals die, their replacement undergoes a vigorous test deep beneath Lanpeltis in front of the ancient alter of the Fire Dragon. They are tested by fire and the truth is revealed. If they cannot handle the truth, they are deemed unworthy and are consumed by the holy fire of the Blazing Wyrm. If they are rational and wise, and see that the lie is a necessity for their society to continue, they are elevated to the rank of matriarch.

Silver – the Sacred Metal

When the Black Talons first discovered the statue of the Blazing Wyrm deep in the bowels of the ancient ziggurat, they found it made of silver, a metal that tarnishes easily. To their astonishment, this idol remained unblemished, gleaming with an afterglow as if it had just emerged from the kiln whole. Seeing this as a sign from the Fire Dragon, the priestesses declared that this metal was favored by their deity and immediately melted down any of the metal they had brought with them and forged the first holy symbols to their god. These holy symbols were crude, as few workers had survived the exodus, but the priestesses claimed that the Fire Dragon was pleased by their creation and blessed them.

Silver is used sparingly and never as a simple adornment. The most devout of priestesses have the scale that lies over their heart covered in silver, with the holy symbol of the Fire Dragon etched upon it before it cools. This painful act shows their eternal fidelity to their deity.

Cants

The cants, the divine spells taught to the ss'ressen priestesses, were considered unclean and tainted by the teachings of Kassegore, Yig and the varn. It is said that the Fire Dragon instructed the High Matriarch Mother with new cants during the long exodus and continues to do so through epiphanies.

Being the divine words of the Fire Dragon, the priestesses jealously guard them, stating that the cants are the province of religious caste. While cants can be cast by practically anyone who has the faith to enact them, those wishing to do so must first be taught the proper gestures, mindset, and invocations. These teaching are sparingly doled out by the priestesses and only to those completely devoted to the Fire Dragon. The only males deemed to possess sufficient religious fervor to learn a select group of cants are the templars and the holy champion order of the Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrm. Even then, these males are taught only the least powerful cants. All other males are strictly forbidden from learning any divine spells, having been taught since they were hatched that it is not the divine will of the Fire Dragon that they do so.

Souls and the Afterlife

Contrary to the more humancentric members of Milandisian society, the Black Talons have a soul, albeit one created and claimed by a non-human deity. According to the teachings of the religious caste, all ss'ressen souls were created by Kassegore who instructed the Fire Dragon to keep them warm and breath courage into their hearts.

These were the only creatures that Kassegore tasked the Fire Dragon to specifically imbue with a small iota of His power and this created a link between the

ss'ressen and this divine being. Over the ages, the Fire Dragon tried to commune with His special charges, but the connection to the other, more powerful ssethric deities made His entreaties impossible. It was only when the Black Talons lost faith in the ssanu teachings that He was finally heard by a lone female Black Talon. Among other things He explained that while Kassegore intended for all unbroken souls to immediately be swallowed whole by Him and remade anew, the Fire Dragon offered a paradise of warmth and hunts, for a while at least until the need for more Black Talons souls arose. They would then fall asleep in His embrace, only to awaken as hatchlings once again.

Yet for those who shunned His words and spurned His gifts, only the frigid hell of the broken, those souls that even Kassegore found unworthy of life reborn, awaited them. They would be condemned to roam this frozen wasteland of Corroko until the final darkness fell upon eternity.

The promise of this paradise is why the Black Talons consider raising or being raised from the dead such a blasphemous act. Causing a Black Talon to rise as an undead creature is damning him from their just reward, as all know that the catalyst used to raise the dead is that creature's immortal soul, which is consumed as it fuels the unholy metamorphosis. Necromancers and Nerothians are viewed with equal parts revulsion and apprehension due to this belief.

Burial Rights

Once a Black Talon dies, their soul stands before the flame of judgment before being allowed to pass onto the Paradise of the Eternal Hunts or consigned to the cold, windswept plains of Corroko. To the ss'ressen, the corpse is merely a husk, empty of all life and meaning. Those egg clutches still in the Ssethregoran Empire feast upon the flesh of their greatest members, while those found wanting are butchered and given to the animals and slaves to consume.

Turning their backs on all the traditions of their former masters, the Black Talons burn their honored dead upon a raised pyre and then scatter their ashes. In times of war, when the dead are too numerous to honor with a dedicated funeral bonfire, such as during the Sixth Crusade of Light, a long and deep trench is dug, with the bodies of the dead carefully placed therein. After the proper rites, the trench is set alight, and after allowing it to reduce the flesh to ash, the remains are buried where they lay.

The Milandric Orthodox Church

Until recently, the worship of the Fire Dragon was seen as something the ss'ressen did in their fetid swamp, while the Milandisians bowed their heads to the true Gods, those of the Pantheon of Man. When the first Primarch of the Milandric Orthodox Church, Sabinus val'Assanté, decided to admit the Fire Dragon into this august and divine assemblage, the Milandisian people were aghast, some even said out loud that the Holy Primarch was mad.

The matter eventually settled down when the wily Sabinus informed the nobles that after many days of fasting and mediation, it was revealed to him that the Black Talons were merely worshipping another, more noble aspect of Nier. This delighted the Milandisian nobility as it depicted the blasphemers of Canceri, specifically the Nierites of that land, as less enlightened than a group of overgrown lizards.

This viewpoint is never spoken aloud in the presence of a Black Talon. To them, the Milandisian clergy nod knowingly, saying all the right things, such as acknowledging that the Fire Dragon is a deity worthy of inclusion in its own right, though among themselves, they nod and wink knowingly.

For their part, the Black Talon priestesses are not blind to the human hypocrisy, but they tolerate it as it doesn't affect their form of worship and removes any threat of over-zealous inquisitors seeking to burn the lot for heretical beliefs. So they allow the representative of the Milandric Orthodox Church to maintain a ministry in Lanpeltis, listen to his lectures on the Pantheon of Man and see the poor priest struggle to somehow fit the Fire Dragon into the lessons and parables of the Pantheon.

Holy Days

Ask any member of the clergy if today is a holy day and odds are that they will refer to some obscure observance that falls on that particular day. The Black Talons are no different but there are three holy days that the entire clutch observes without fail.

Day of Revelation

This holy day celebrates the day that the Fire Dragon revealed itself to High Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus and opened her eyes to the truth. This day-long holy day, while not a somber one, is not celebrated with revelry. Instead, all the members of the clutch congregate in the subterranean level of the Temple of Cinders and while kneeling before the Idol of the Blazing Wyrm, contemplate teachings of the Fire Dragon through hours of sermons by the priestesses.

Day of Deliverance

The Black Talons see the Day of Deliverance, the holy day commemorating their arrival at the Sulfur Marsh, with great jubilation. The day is filled with feasts, non-lethal combat games, throat singing contests, and of course, debauchery, for while the females are fertile only once every eight years, they indulge in recreational mating this day of the year.

Day of Contrition

During this, the most solemn of their holy days, the Black Talons fast, abstaining from food and drink, and unless necessary, refrain from speaking until dawn the next day. The unnatural silence throughout the region is broken only by the striking of the gong atop the Temple of Cinders. The day is focused on doing penance for the horrors they, as a people, committed in the name of the Scaled Empires. To atone for their sins and transgressions, they perform whatever menial task is available, the more humiliating and beneath their station, the better. Human companions are often perplexed, not understanding why their proud ss'ressen companion is suddenly servile and humble and the Black Talon generally refuse to share that the reason is the shame of their ancestors' actions.

Commerce

Prior to their inclusion into Milandisian society, the Black Talons had no concept of commerce or the intricacies of a monetary system. All of their needs were met by the Ssethregoran Empire's complex and byzantine administration, and when something beyond the necessities of serving the needs of the empire was desired, a crude system of bartering sufficed.

Needless to say, the ss'ressen had to learn fast when dealing with merchants that habitually took advantage of their inexperience in buying and selling commodities. Thousands of gold crowns worth of amber and bog iron was traded for goods worth a fraction of the cost before the situation was remedied. After the Duke stretched a few necks and sent advisors to the Sulfur Marsh to teach the priestesses on the basics of economics, the fleecing of the Black Talons ceased.

Because of the communal nature of the Black Talons, the proceeds of their labors rarely go directly to the individual, but to the community as a whole. All resources of the clutch are brought to Lanpeltis, catalogued, and distributed to the matriarchs of the Sulfur Marsh as needed. Metals and finished weapons are distributed to the warriors, foodstuffs are parceled out to supplement those produced by the individual villages, and so on. Should a ss'ressen produce their own good, such as a worker artisan creating a work of art that is sold on the markets of Milandir, that worker does not see the proceeds of their labor directly as the monies earned would go to the matriarchs to reinvest in other goods, but a skilled artisan may see their rations increased as a reward for their contribution to the clutch.

The Arts

To the surprise of many, the ss'ressen, and indeed most ssethrics, have a rich culture with a robust tradition in the arts. Each of the Black Talon castes indulge their creative impulses in different and unique ways.

The females prefer to create impressionistic paintings using dyes upon a semi-dry mud as their preferred medium. These works rarely, if ever depict still life or portraits, but instead these abstract renderings are meant to invoke moods or concepts. To non-ss'ressen, they appear to be multi-colored swirls fixed in dried mud, but to another ss'ressen, they evoke memories or an emotional response. This is due to the artist's application of pheromones, giving the paintings a dimension that is beyond the ability of non-ssethric beings to detect, let alone appreciate.

The ever-practical warrior caste's preferred creative outlet is throat singing, which they use to practice subvocalized orders while in combat, as well as serenade the females during mating season. Their physiology allows them to create deep rumbling sounds in their throats, which to the ss'ressen ear, is melodic and soothing. In throat singing the singer creates a low, throbbing pitch and then simultaneously adds additional pitches that overlay above the underlying one.

The worker caste, as would be expected, create beautiful pieces of art from various mediums, such as wood, amber, and clay. Some of these pieces, especially those crafted by master artisans, sell for thousands of gold crowns, though most examples are given as either gifts or sold for a modest amount. The statue of High Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus kneeling before a coiled pillar of flame located in Lanpeltis was crafted by a number of artisans and presented as a gift to the entire clutch.

Lanpeltis – The City of the Fiery Wyrm

The Sulfur Marsh was once an uninhabited swampland in the Duchy of Tralia, but the relocation of the Black Talon egg clutch to the area and their subsequent alliance with the Duke of Tralia, created a new domain in the area. Vassal territories are usually ruled by a count or countess of the ruling family, in this case the val'Holryn, but a special exception was made in this case with the High Matriarch Mother holding the title of countess and answering directly to the duke. While still known as the Sulfur Marsh by most, officially, the area was renamed Surigar, meaning *"place of hot springs"* in the tongue of the ss'ressen.

Situated roughly in the center of Milandir's Sulfur Marsh, Lanpeltis is the center of the Black Talon ss'ressen civilization in the kingdom. At its height, the ss'ressen communities numbered twenty-one, but at the present time, this number has been reduced to eighteen, with two having failed due to biological weakness and the population of the other migrating to the north and into Canceri.

Though the inhabitance of Lanpeltis is relatively recent, the origins of the city is ancient and is believed to be one of the many ssethric cities that once dotted the Known Lands during the height of the Yahssremoran Empire. After arriving in the area, the Black Talons discovered a large black ziggurat in the center of a ruin littered with black basalt blocks. Emblazoned above the doorway was a carving of a fiery wyrm, its tail coiled about its form, framing it like a holy symbol. Declaring it a sign from their god, the Fire Dragon, the ss'ressen proclaimed the swamp as the *"promised land"* and rebuilt the city around the ziggurat.

Lanpeltis
Type: Medium City
Population: 15,000 Black Talon ss'ressen
Ruler: High Matriarch Mother Scorpara
Government: Matriarchal Oligarchy
Military Force: Warrior Caste
Export: Amber, bog iron, unhatched ss'ressen eggs.
Import: Food (cattle), metal tools, weapons and other sundry items.

The city of Lanpeltis sits on a raised hillock above the quagmire of the Sulfur Marsh. Even so, its roadways were raised a few feet, as the rainy season tends to flood the city. Only the most important buildings, like the hatcheries and the female dormitories, were constructed using the large black basalt blocks found within the Marsh, as many of the original stones were badly cracked and chipped.

Import and Exports

A ss'ressen's diet consists of meat and lots of it. Though their digestive system can process vegetable matter, they require a daily intake of ten pounds of meat to meet their required nutritional requirements. Initially, this forced them from the Sulfur Marsh and into the pastured lands of their human neighbors, creating friction between the two groups.

To counter this, the lords of Milandir sell hundreds of heads of cattle and other livestock to the Black Talons. In return, the ss'ressen trade their amber, bog iron ore (a type of impure iron deposit that, when refined, creates an iron metal that resists rusting due to residual silicates impurities) and, sadly, unhatched ss'ressen eggs.

The shells of unhatched ss'ressen eggs contain a chemical ingredient necessary for the creation of Altherian Blastpowder, a rare and very expensive commodity valued throughout the human nations of the Known Lands. Their acquisition has created the great animosity between the ssethric races and humans for generations. Acknowledging their value, the Black Talon Matriarchs designates a small percentage of the eggs laid annually as "nonviable" and sells them to Altherian merchants for a princely sum, more than enough to pay for the meat necessary for their daily intake. This practice causes resentment in those females of breeding age, but they a reminder that their sacrifice is necessary for the survival of the egg clutch serves to salve their bitterness.

Important Locales

Animal Pens and Slaughterhouse

Towards the interior of the city, a number of animal pens have been erected to contain the many hundred heads of cattle, pigs, goats, and other beasts necessary to feed the populace of Lanpeltis. Two slaughterhouses are strategically placed so that the livestock doesn't have to be moved across long distances.

The clutch's butchers are either older ss'ressen, usually from the worker caste, or those warriors who are permanently injured or maimed and can no longer fight or hunt. Many of the warrior caste see this assignment as beneath their dignity and a stain upon their honor, preferring to take a final warrior quest, rather than endure this ignobility.

Hatcheries

Central to the prosperity and prestige of any ss'ressen municipality are their hatcheries. Smaller settlements may only have one, while larger ones, like Lanpeltis, boasts a half dozen of various sizes. These hatcheries are spread out around the Temple of Cinders in a rough circular pattern. This is done both as a symbolic as well as practical reasons as defending the hatcheries from rival egg clutches is something all ss'ressen have ingrained into their very core. Given that females only able to reproduce once every eight years, rival egg clutches attempt to destroy their enemies at the source, by destroying their eggs and hatchlings. By placing the hatcheries as near the center as possible, allows defenders to react to an attack against these targets as quickly as possible.

Hatcheries are built almost entirely underground, with only a small entry level with a domed, usually thatched roof, above ground. The circular hatchery is built to a depth of twenty feet, with a large furnace constructed in its center. Specially trained workers maintain the fire so that the ambient temperature within the hatchery is a sweltering 120 degrees Fahrenheit. The eggs are placed in rings about the furnace, depending on the needs of the egg clutch. Should the ranks of warriors need to be replenished, more eggs are placed in the middle range about the heat source. To incubate females, the eggs are placed even closer to the fire. Those destined to be workers are placed in the outer ranks.

Hatchling Communal Dormitories

For the first eight years of life, all ss'ressen hatchlings, a designation they will have until they reach adulthood, will live in a communal dormitory, segregated by gender. These buildings are similar in size and shape to a hatchery, but are not kept at a stifling hot temperature, though it would be considered uncomfortably warm for a human. The young are looked after and instructed by older matriarchs, who teach them of the egg clutch's history, and religion.

While the Black Talons have turned their back on Kassegore's philosophy and teachings, there is one aspect that still remains, though the society as a whole turns a blind eye to it. Hatchlings are born with the instinct to seek out the weak and imperfect among their siblings and eat them. Originally bred into ss'ressen by the ssanu to ensure that only the strongest would survive to serve them, this practice is allowed to continue within the Black Talon egg clutch for similar reasons. Due to this, those hatchlings bred to be workers are quickly separated and placed in segregated dormitories. Warrior and female hatchlings remain together, pitting brains versus brawn for the first few months of life.

Milandric Orthodox Church Ministry

Under Primarch Sabinus val'Assanté, the Milandric Orthodox Church, the state religion of the Kingdom of Milandir, negotiated with the High Matriarch Mother for a parcel of land in the city to build a small ministry. With the inclusion of the Fire Dragon into the pantheon of Gods venerated by the Church, Sabinus felt it important for the ss'ressen to be schooled on the basics of Milandric Orthodox doctrine.

The building of the ministry progressed slowly, but compared to the selection of a priest to instruct the ss'ressen, it was lightning fast. Though the plot of land given to them was small, the structure was built three stories high and is easily the tallest building in Lanpeltis. In a gesture made so as to not to offend their scaly allies the building was designed not to exceed the height of the Temple of Cinders. When completed, the Ministry remained unoccupied until shortly after the unexpected death of Primarch Sabinus.

Following the ascension of Ferric val'Ossan to the primacy, the question of who should lead the Ministry was quickly answered. A priest by the name of Harwick Syms was chosen. Syms was a favorite of Sabinus, not due to his ecclesiastical acumen or wit, but because the gangly old fool amused the primarch with his bumbling and terrible stuttering. Ferric, however, couldn't stand the man, finding his speech impediment irritating and his yellowed and crooked teeth disgusting. Most of all, he loathed the repugnant smell of garlic that permeated everything from his clothing to his breath. The odor was hardly Harwick's fault. He came from a very poor village in the Eastmarch, where only potatoes and garlic grew. The children were raised eating the pungent vegetable as a snack, a habit the priest has carried with him into adulthood. However, this fact did not move Primarch Ferric, so days after taking office, the newly installed primarch sent the old "Garlic Priest" off to the Sulfur Marsh.

At first, Harwick was deathly afraid of the ss'ressen, unnerved by their cold and unblinking stares, expecting to be butchered and eaten before the dawn. Slowly, his fear turned into admiration as he saw the forthright way in which the ss'ressen treated each other, from those in the highest station to the lowest, all were treated with decency and respect. Over time, his unease abated and a position that he believed was a death sentence became one that he has come to appreciate.

Harwick enjoys the confidence of the High Matriarch Mother and meets with her weekly to discuss theology, as well as the finer points of human nature and etiquette. Once a month, he holds services for the few ss'ressen that attend, most of which are priestesses of the Fire Dragon. He makes sure that none of his sermons conflict with the religious teachings of the Fire Dragon, especially foregoing any mention of this deity being a nobler aspect of Nier.

When the rare human traveler visits, Priest Syms invites them to stay in the Ministry during their visit and while the meal is meager, the wine flows like water. Harwick is very solicitous of guests as he misses human company, though his fawning does seem to eventually grate on most. Those looking for information on the current gongs on in Lanpeltis can find no better resource than this priest. Having little else to do, he roams about the settlement, talking to anyone who will listen and, in turn, listening to all that will speak with him.

Pit of Tooth and Claw

This earthen amphitheater lies on the edge of the city proper. Its oval shape and tiered seating remind many of Coryani arenas. Whereas those are used almost exclusively for entertainment, the Pit of Tooth and Claw serves a number of purposes, from ceremonial to the adjudication of laws.

At the age of eight, all males take part in a rite of passage where they must hunt and kill a cholepus, the iron sloths of the Sulfur Marsh. If successful, the head of the creature is brought to the Pit with great fanfare. Here, the hatchlings are declared adults and inducted into the warrior caste as adults. Those that do not survive are brought here as well, and after the proper rites are performed over their bodies, they are buried beneath the earthen floor of the Pit.

The Pit is also where the warrior caste trains daily, honing their fighting skills. The warlord of the clutch also holds court here, overseeing the progress of the warriors

that defend not only the Sulfur Marsh, but the Kingdom of Milandir. On rare occasions, usually when war is imminent, Tralian knights are sent to Lanpeltis to train with the Black Talons in the hopes that they will work as a cohesive whole on the battlefield. This practice has garnered mixed results as the Black Talons prefer to work in homogenous units, while the human knights are at times unsettled by the savagery of the ss'ressen in battle. Nevertheless, the current Duke of Tralia believes that the program will eventually yield positive results.

Just as the Temple of Cinders is considered the domain of the priestesses, the Pit falls under the province of the warrior caste. There are two exceptions to this rule - the settling of grievances between ss'ressen and when breeding rights are contested.

For the most part, Black Talon's are a lawful people, with crime being almost non-existent. In the rare instances where a dispute may arise between two or more ss'ressen, there is usually a quick, but furious non-lethal fight after which the issue is resolved. These impromptu courts are held in the Pit, with the resolution of the dispute presided over by higher ranking members of the warrior caste or in rare cases, by the warlord. Only when the issue involves matters of religious or a transgression against the clutch as a whole, will the dispute be presided over by a trio of priestesses.

Priestesses also oversee any ss'ressen contesting the breeding rights of another. These rights are granted to males that have exemplified the traits that the Black Talons prize – strength, endurance, bravery, cunning, and intelligence. Any male denied the right to mate may challenge a male that was granted this privilege. The Matriarch Mother of the settlement, or the High Matriarch Mother in the case of challenge taking place in Lanpeltis, may deny the challenge out of hand, closing the matter, or allow the competitor to pursue the claim. This results in an immediate battle to the death in the Pit. In these contests, no weapons are allowed, only those granted to the Black Talon by the Fire Dragon. The victor then takes his place among those chosen to propagate the species, while the other is given a quick burial in the swamp.

Lastly, the Pit of Tooth and Claw is the site where the rare execution for capital crimes takes place. When found guilty of either heresy, murder, or treason against the clutch or kingdom, the condemned is taken to the Pit unarmed and set upon by half a dozen handpicked warriors and torn apart. In the rare instance that the condemned should survive, an occurrence that has happened only once, the ss'ressen is banished. After a twenty-four-hour period, a band of hunters is sent after the offender with the understanding that they are not to return until the quarry is dead.

Black Talons Battle for Mating Rights

Suur'esh

Once a ss'ressen warrior or female, but not a worker, completes their obligation to the clutch, usually twenty-four years, they have the option to do what they wish with the rest of their lives. Some leave the Sulfur Marsh and adventure abroad, though most stay and either continue in their previous position or work directly for the Crown with posts in Milandir and its protectorates. They are also given permission to build a small home, called a *suur'esh*, within the confines of the Marsh.

These small homes are hard mud structures with underground chambers that vent in the naturally warmed air from the swamp. While roomy enough for up to four adult individuals, most Black Talons live alone, seeing the suur'esh as their private sanctuary.

Temple of Cinders

Dominating the landscape is the massive black ziggurat located in the center of Lanpeltis. Considered a holy site due to a prominent symbol inscribed on its entrance being interpreted as a divine sign from their deity, the Black Talon matriarchs quickly consecrated the structure to the Fire Dragon and named it the Temple of Cinders. The structure rises eight levels high and also contains subterranean levels, the true number of which are only known to the matriarchs of the egg clutch.

Uppermost Tier

From its uppermost tier smoke can be seen rising day and night, for to let the sacred fires die would signify ill omens to the reptilian worshippers. The enormous silver brazier's flame is only extinguished once a year, on the day corresponding to the last day of the year, and relit the next morning. This ritual is said to symbolize the idea that all things must end before there can be a new beginning. Ironically, this is a ritual sacred to Kassegore, who is said to be without end or beginning. Whether the priestesses are aware of the ritual's ancient meaning and are observing it or have repurposed it is known only to them.

Lower Tiers

The tiers below the topmost tier of the ziggurat mainly consist of housing for the priestesses and matriarchs, with an entire level being reserved for the quarters of the current High Matriarch Mother.

Males are not allowed uninvited or unescorted beyond the temple's entrance to the subterranean levels, which are located on the lowest above-ground level, except in the most unusual of situations. Those profaning the temple's sanctity had best convince the High Matriarch Mother of their urgent need to do so or else face summary execution. The only exception to this rule is for the templars who guard the ziggurat, the inquisitors, and for the holy champions of the Fire Dragon's, the Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrm. Members of these groups may enter the ground floor of the temple without fear of reprisals.

These tiers also house females between the ages of eight to twenty-four. Ss'ressen females of that age bracket are able to conceive and lay eggs once every eight years. However, during this sixteen-year period, they unconsciously exude a pheromone that drive males of a similar age into a frenzy. Because of this, they are not allowed onto the grounds of the city until after their final breeding cycle. For these sequestered females, their only opportunity for fresh air and sunshine is on the very topmost level of the ziggurat and even then, only under strict supervision by the older matriarchs or specialized members of the neuter worker's caste.

Subterranean Levels

To the rest of the population, there is only one lower level, a vast cavern inscribed with sacred runes and bas-relief images depicting the history of the egg clutch. Heated by numerous geothermal vents, the area is swelteringly hot and humid, conditions ss'ressen consider pleasant. The drip-drip of condensation falling from the overhanging stalactites is normally the only sound heard in this solemn space, like a perpetual hymn to their scaly god.

In the center of the chamber is the Idol of the Blazing Wyrm, rising thirty feet high and made entirely of untarnished silver. Two large rubies serve as its eyes, glittering with the fires of their deity. The statue's lower tail wraps around a spectacular alter of red veined granite and the entire effigy is encircled upon the cavern floor by an ever-burning ring of molten fire that flows from the very earth itself. It is in this great chamber that daily services to the Fire Dragon are held before the massed Black Talon priestesses.

Warlord's Quarters

Near the warrior barracks is a large structure built from the black basalt blocks that once littered the area. This is the warlord's quarters, a veritable temple to battle, where he and the most seasoned veterans of the warrior caste plan the defense of the clutch, the logistics of supplying the soldier levy to the Duke of Tralia, and a myriad of other details pertaining to the day to day administration of the warrior caste's duties. With the current warlord acting as the champion of King Gerhardt of Milandir in Naeraanth, these duties have fallen to his second in command, an older warrior named Sortek.

Warrior Barracks

The warrior caste of the Black Talon makes up a full third of the total Black Talon population and are made up primarily of males, though some females who are either past their breeding age or are not able to reproduce join this caste as well.

The barracks are wooden structures built around a geothermal vent or pool, giving the warriors a heat source to enjoy on during their rest periods. Though the barracks can only hold approximately one hundred ss'ressen, an average of three hundred are assigned to a barracks at a time. These buildings are more dormitories than homes and the Warlord's staff ensures that only one squad, roughly a third of the warriors, are given a rest period at any one time.

These squads are led by an older ss'ressen who as veterans are tasked with training the younger member of the squads on their preferred method and style of combat. Thus, those ss'ressen specializing in unarmed combat train together, while those practiced in the art of armed combat or stealth

assassination and reconnaissance are similarly grouped. Spending their formative years in these groupings creates the closest thing to a familial tie that most ss'ressen will ever have, ensuring that a ss'ressen will fight fiercely to protect their crèche mates, even to the death.

As with all things ssethric, scent plays an important societal role and from their close proximity together for long periods of time, the ss'ressen in the group develop a unique scent. From this a ss'ressen can identify who is their crèche mates and who is not.

Worker Dormitories

The worker caste is given less luxurious accommodations than the warrior or priestess caste, but this should not be interpreted that they live in dens of squalor. The worker caste fills as vital, if not as glamorous, a role as their counterparts. It is the workers that maintain the housing and defenses of the community. While the other castes may produce some works, such as warriors who possess the skill of crafting and maintaining weapons and armor, these roles normally fall on the shoulders of the workers. Workers hunt for food in the surrounding swamp, dredge up amber and bog iron ore. A select few stoke the furnace and ensure that the temperature in the hatcheries remain constant.

Workers make up a third of the Black Talon population and have a more grueling schedule than their counterparts, as they are given only a six-hour rest period. This routine allows each dormitory to be occupied by more ss'ressen.

During emergencies, workers are expected to defend the egg clutch with the same ferocity, if not skill, as the warrior caste. During the attack by Ssethregoran forces on Lanpeltis in 1027 I.C., a handful of workers distinguished themselves, showing bravery equal to that of any of the members of the warrior caste. After the battle, in recognition for their heroic actions, they were elevated to the warrior caste, a privilege very few of their number have ever been granted.

The Ghost Scale Ss'ressen

In the bowels of Old Coryan, deep beneath the cobbled city streets, existed a culture alien to that human ruled land. In the warm effluvia of the sewers, a lone clutch of reptilian warriors thrived under the very feet of their mammalian prey. After their discovery, they've scattered across the Known Lands, hiring themselves out as mercenaries to the highest bidder, while keeping the location of their main lair, and their god Herka, a closely guarded secret.

Physiology

Ghost Scale ss'ressen stand roughly five feet tall, and have a slightly hunched posture. Appearing at first glance like subterranean albino reptilians, the natural coloration of a Ghost Scale ss'ressen is pearly white scales that shimmer in the light. Their claws retain their black coloration, pointing back towards their origin as an offshoot of the Black Talon egg clutch. Their most unique feature is their ability to change the color of their skin, virtually blending into the surroundings like a chameleon.

Like the all other ss'ressen, the Ghost Scales possess three sexes, although the neuters in the clutch are no longer bred as the females are forced to perform their duties. Males are the most numerous gender, dwarfing the number of females.

Ghost Scale Hatchery

There is only one Ghost Scale hatchery and it is generally shaped like most ss'ressen facilities - a large, round chamber with a heat source at its center. The first time a group of Black Talons laid eggs in the sewer tunnels beneath Old Coryan, they did not have the time or ability to create a furnace and so Herka became the primary heat source to incubate the eggs.

After that first, difficult hatching season, Herka discovered that it had expended too much energy in keeping the temperature high enough to maintain the viability of the eggs. To ensure that future hatchings didn't require such a large output of power, the sentient gemstone commanded that a large furnace be built along with a pedestal upon which it could be placed.

Every eight years during the hatching season, Herka is positioned on this pedestal and radiates some of its arcane energy, enough to ensure that the incubating ss'ressen are imbued with their chameleon abilities.

History

It is not known exactly when the Ghost Scales diverged from the Black Talons, but it occurred sometime during their exodus from the Ssethregoran Empire. While on that long death march through the cold lands of the humans, a small group became disenchanted with their High Matriarch Mother's vision. Led by an enterprising young female named Na'liss, some of the Black Talons slipped away from the main host and attempted to head back south to warmer climes.

Their initial searches for a new home within the Coryani province of Illonia forced them into bloody confrontations with the Coryani, who killed some and wounded many others. In their weakened state after months of grueling and continuous marching through the cold and inhospitable lands, with little food for their bellies, the

ss'ressen were no match for the humans. Bloodied from the assaults, the survivors managed to make their way into the sewer system of the ancient capital of the empire, now known as Old Coryan. There, they spent weeks hiding and sustaining themselves on rats and other vermin.

While meditating on their predicament, Na'liss heard a whisper, telling her that their salvation was near if they only heeded its call. Unsure whether this voice was a hallucination, the Matriarch Mother led her people further into the ancient sewer system until, under many layers of muddy detritus, a warm glow shone. Her bloody and broken talons dug out a diamond-shaped, dark red gemstone, cracked and chipped, but pulsing with waves of crimson light. The gemstone seemed to absorb the blood from her hands like a sponge, causing the intensity of the light to increase. As the light shone brighter, so too did the *voice* in her mind grew clearer.

It called itself Herka and proclaimed itself to the Matriarch Mother as their god. It promised to warm their bodies and nurture their eggs in its light. All it asked for in exchange was their devotion and occasional sacrifice in its name. Na'liss scoffed at the idea, but could not deny the gem's power. She decided to use its gifts to sustain them until she decided where to settle her group.

Months passed and a concern grew as a breeding year was upon them. Unfortunately, in the cold and dank sewer their ability to create a hatchery with the heat necessary to nurture the eggs was hampered. Herka, calling to the females, instructed them to build the structure and place it in its center. Herka claimed that it could sustain the heat necessary to keep the eggs viable and healthy. It required only a small draught of blood from each of the ss'ressen of the clutch, and then a steady flow of blood sacrifices until the eggs hatched.

Herka instructed the warriors to hunt the humans on the surface, where they could feed on their flesh and bathe Herka in their blood. To assist them in their hunts, Herka generated a thick, mystical fog that covered the city above. Under this supernatural cover the desperate ss'ressen hunted, prowling the ghetto and riverside wharves for human prey.

This direct interaction between Herka and the rest of the clutch troubled Na'liss. Herka was having ever greater contact with the males—the primary hunters of the group—in its aiding of the harvesting of humans. Discourse with the divine had always been the purview of the priestesses, and this new interdependence between the males and Herka threatened her authority. Over the months that the eggs incubated, she resolved to delve into the mystery that was their new 'god', but after months of intensive meditative communion with the gemstone, uncovered precious few of its secrets.

With the first generation of hatchlings under the rays of Herka, the females saw that their brood, while healthy and hale, were paler than previous generations. This was rationalized away as simply being from the lack of sunlight in their subterranean environs. After their second breeding season, however, the females knew that something had dramatically changed in their offspring. The hatchlings' hide color was now a deathly white and as their scales grew they shimmered in the light. After a few years, the hatchlings manifested the uncanny ability to shift the color patterns of their scales.

Na'liss, frustrated at her inability to uncover the secrets of Herka and its increasing influence on the males of the group, gathered the females with the intent of taking the gemstone and dropping it in the deepest hole they could find in these subterranean tunnels. But Herka had anticipated Na'liss' actions, seeing her attitude become more adversarial and defiant. Over the years, it slowly cultivated the reliance of the warriors upon its powers to help them hunt with impunity. It learned all it could of the Black Talon social structure, and seeing that it was dominated by the females, began to seed thoughts of sedition into the minds of the males. Were they not the strongest? Did they not defend and feed the clutch? Should they not lead, rather than meekly follow the words of an old female?

When the time came for the confrontation, Na'liss and her group found that the warriors of the clutch had formed a protective circle around Herka and refused their orders to move aside. That was when the sentient gemstone spoke. *"They seek to impose the old ways upon you and expect you to tuck your tail and bare throat in submission. They seek to destroy me... I, who have given you the warmth and power to not only survive, but thrive. Show her what happens to those who oppose your god, Herka!"*

The warriors fell upon the females, whose lesser numbers made them easy to subdue. After pummeling them into the submission, the warriors waited for Herka's pronouncement of their fate. It declared that the females' minds were poisoned by first the varn's deities, and then this false god they called the Fire Dragon. They had led their people astray, and as such their time as priestesses was over. The rule of the strongest would now prevail in the clutch. They would serve the warriors, performing all the necessary menial tasks they required. As for Na'liss, Herka declared that for her defiance she was to be torn, limb from limb; her flesh was used to feed the hatchlings, while her hide was wrapped about the altar where Herka rested.

As the next few generations were born, all the original Black Talon met with accidents, their usefulness having ended. This allowed Herka to mold the culture of the younger ss'ressen without the influence of the original Black Talon culture. Under its watchful eye, the Ghost Scale egg clutch grew, thriving under the very noses of their prey. They created a unique society, bereft of most of the old ways of the Black Talons. Always careful to never leave survivors, they subsisted on a diet of human flesh and reverted to the cruel lifestyles of their Ssethregoran brethren.

As the centuries passed, they became complacent in their own domain, until a group of mammals, trying to solve a string of murders, found their way into the deep sewers and managed to penetrate the Ghost Scale's lair. After a brutal encounter, these humans managed to rescue their live larder of human captives and escape. Word of the Ghost Scale's existence began to spread throughout Old Coryan. Raids were conducted by human soldiers and sacrifices had to be made so that the clutch could survive. Dozens of warriors were sent out to meet their deaths at the hands of the outraged Coryani legionnaires, allowing them to believe that they had wiped out this scourge beneath their feet.

Herka ordered that all hunting on the surface end for a time, to lull the humans into a false sense of security. It instructed the warriors to hunt further afield, miles down the Corvis River where a few boatmen disappearing would hardly cause any consternation among the human populace. The Ghost Scale continued to operate surreptitiously for years until two watershed moments occurred: the capture of a Sarishan Sorcerer-Priest and contact with Jeggal Sag.

The Sarishan Sorcerer

The practice of exsanguinating a victim before butchering them for the larder became routine among the Ghost Scale. The blood was offered to Herka, while the flesh was consumed by the ss'ressen. Usually the hunt ranged far from the sewers of Old Coryan, but on one occasion, a group of explorers ventured into the subterranean lair of the Ghost Scales, making them easy prey for the

chameleon hunters. As the victims were taken to the lair, Herka felt a surge of power emanating from one of the captives. A Sarishan Sorcerer was able to kill a number of the ss'ressen before she was rendered unconscious by the power of Herka. It was then that the sentient gemstone felt the arcane energy suffusing the body of the priestess, and began to drink deeply of it, draining the hapless arcane caster of all her power.

Herka felt itself reenergized, coursing with the mystical energy it had long forgotten it enjoyed while it was whole. The cracks and chipped pieces marring its surface allowed the arcane energy to leak out quickly, leaving Herka thirsting for more. Scanning the area, it found weapons, armor, and other items pulsating with the same energy, and commanded the ss'ressen to bring them to its altar. Through trial and error, Herka developed a method to drain the energy within the items and their runes, leaving them pitted, broken and wholly mundane.

Those gifted with the power to wield arcane might were rare, but weapons and such inscribed with runes or otherwise infused with magical power were more numerous. Herka commanded that the Ghost Scales, should they find signs of these sorcerers or others possessing such items, make these targets a priority. This has led to heavy losses among these ss'ressen as they did their best to carry out their deity's orders.

To assist these hunting parties, Herka began to assign inquisitors to accompany them in the hopes of affording them sufficient protection, allowing them to succeed. Should they find particularly potent opponents, the feared Knights of Herka are sent to destroy these targets utterly, draining their arcane energy and storing it like batteries so that their god may later feast upon it.

Herka knew that finding such wondrous items and individuals in such a haphazard manner was an inefficient use of its followers. In the decades since its discovery, Herka has instructed several Ghost Scales to sell their services as spies and assassins to various mercenary companies throughout the Known Lands. Their services are not cheap, for in addition to being fed, payment must be tendered in the form of runic or magical items. These are eventually brought back to Herka and drained.

While this practice increased the amount of mystical energy Herka could feed upon, it created two problems. The first was the fear that a captured Ghost Scale would divulge the location of their lair. This was easily solved as Herka mind bars each and every ss'ressen that takes on the role of mercenary, so that they are incapable of giving that information by any means. Even val psionicists are incapable

of breaking down the barrier the sentient gemstone has erected in their minds. Should any Ghost Scale turn on the clutch and lead a group back to the lair, Herka is able to detect their approach and erect suitable defenses that is capable of repelling even the most ardent assault.

The second problem is one which has proven to be more insidious and difficult to stop, the meddling of the Disciples of Jeggal Sag.

The Disciples of Jeggal Sag

There came a night when several Ghost Scales reported having strange dreams of a long and sinuous dragon calling itself Jeggal Sag, the Lord of Beasts. It spoke to them of a long standing tradition among the ssethrics where some of their number would come to where he rested beneath a large mound of dirt, imprisoned by divine beings known as valinor. The dragon spoke of teaching them of ancient skills and traditions, and of their lost history. Upon hearing these reports, Herka was not pleased. It told the assembled Ghost Scales of a demonic presence that stalked them, tempting them in their dreams with false promises and tales and immediately instructed them in inscribing a number of mystic runes about their lair to prevent further attacks from this creature.

After these warnings, the dreams ended, but Jeggal Sag was not to be refused. The dragon sent out his disciples to meet with members of the Ghost Scales personally. Though these initial contacts were broached in a non-confrontational and peaceful manner, every Disciple was killed or left grievously wounded. These contacts continued occurring so frequently, however, that it required Herka to assign inquisitors, zealous females trained in the Arcanum and tasked with keeping the Ghost Scale pure from outside contamination, such as ideas or beliefs that ran contrary to those set forth by the gemstone, to watch over those who may be targeted by these heathen Disciples.

Eventually, a group of Black Talons were at hand to defend a Disciple from their attacks and defeated the aggressive Ghost Scales, subduing and capturing them. Finally, a Disciple was able to speak with them and found one that was receptive to his words. This Ghost Scale ss'ressen was amazed at all that he heard, surprised that they were but a splinter of a much larger egg clutch and of its ancient and illustrious history.

This Ghost Scale hungered for more information, but also knew that there were others that felt an emptiness in their being and chaffed under the conditions imposed by Herka. A plan was devised where he would return and report that his entire party was ambushed and killed. He would bide his time and select those members he thought ready for the truth to accompany him on the next hunt. There they would meet with a Disciple of Jeggal Sag and begin a cycle to cautiously siphon off members of the Ghost Scale Egg Clutch and send them to Lanpeltis.

Over the years, the Disciples of Jeggal Sag have rescued many Ghost Scales and revealed the truth to them. Some have taken on the mantle of Disciple of Jeggal Sag, though most have joined the ranks of the Black Talons. Due to the mighty sorcery of Herka, the Black Talons have not been able to discover where the Ghost Scale lair is located and so, generation after generation, new hatchlings born to this splinter clutch are hatched into servitude, to do the bidding of a sentient, magical gemstone.

Culture

The culture imposed upon the Ghost Scale ss'ressen by Herka is patriarchal in nature. The cunning gemstone did this as a way to ensure that should its ss'ressen ever come into contact with their parent clutch, integrating the two would be very difficult.

Priest Caste

Elder males no longer in their prime but who have served Herka unflaggingly are rewarded by being elevated to the rank of priest. This is a secular title and while it enhances one's status within the clutch, it offers none of the actual power that a priest of a true deity does. Herka does not teach cants and is, in fact, incapable of doing so. It does, however, bestow boons upon its faithful. These are actually enchantments, but so shrouded in mysticism, that it appears to the Ghost Scale recipient as a divine benediction.

The duties of the priests revolve around the administration and maintenance of the Ghost Scale demesne and well as holding the weekly rites and blood sacrifices to Herka. They determine which males gain breeding rights as well as overseeing the hatchery throughout the incubation period, and finally, teaching the hatchlings the blessed lives they have been born into under the protection and guidance of Herka.

Female workers are supervised by the priests, though those assigned this duty tend to be the most stringent and brutal, eager to let their whip fly at the slightest mistake or infraction. Several inattentive overseers have met with fatal accidents causing them to work in groups of three or more when moving through groups of the more intelligent females.

The High Priest of Herka, currently Horrasask the Winded, named such due to a wound he suffered from being stabbed through the lung, directs the male priests and female inquisitors on their various missions. It is he who decides which of the females are raised above the others of their gender and given a taste of the power of Herka.

Warrior Caste

The traditions of the warrior caste, once a staple of Black Talon society, is a hollow mockery as practiced by the Ghost Scales. Once all of the original Black Talons died out, Herka slowly implemented changes in how that

echelon trains and operates in the new order. Gone were the principles of honor and duty, and replaced with expediency, deception, and utter devotion to their deity.

Even the fighting styles and maneuvers of the Black Talon warriors was supplanted with those more suitable to their new innate abilities. Subterfuge, infiltration, and assassination techniques are drilled into hatchlings. Those that fail to grasp the basics are killed; their blood sacrificed to Herka and their meat used to nourish the rest of the clutch.

After passing their rite of passage, members of this caste are first given sentry duty, patrolling the lair alongside veterans and dealing with vermin and other low level threats. After they have proven themselves to their superiors, they may join hunting parties, securing food for the clutch, and begin more advanced training in using their chameleon powers, augmenting their skill at infiltration and assassination. After years of training and performing their duties unfailingly, they may be sent to the outer world to sell their skills to the highest bidder, gathering wealth and magical items to sacrifice to Herka.

Those that reach a venerable age become instructors of the new generations, passing on what lessons they have learned, always working to nurture and protect the clutch, until the sacrifice of the final offering.

Coming of Age Ritual

After eight years of almost continuous training, Ghost Scale hatchlings are given a final test to demonstrate mastery of their chameleon abilities and stealth. An object is hidden in a densely populated human area, or a target is selected for assassination. Unlike the rituals performed by the Black Talons, these tasks must be performed singly rather than in a group. The hatchling must move through Old Coryan or a nearby town undetected, and retrieve the designated item or murder the target and return to the lair unmolested. Older members of the clutch remain nearby to observe and report on their success or failure.

Should the hatchling fail in achieving the objective and survive, they are ritually sacrificed before Herka, their blood spilled upon the gemstone while their flesh is given to the females to feed upon. There have been cases where the hatchling, fearing failure, has attempted to flee and not return to the lair. Rarely are any successful in evading the watchful eye of their nearby elder.

Those hatchlings that succeed are lavished upon with a triumphal feast and given their day of glory, where they may eat and drink to their fill, and sate their carnal desires with any female of their choosing. Afterwards, they take a sacred oath before Herka and the gemstone speaks to them, exalting their achievement and urging them onto to even greater acts to benefit the clutch. The high priest then names the hatchling and proclaims him an adult, with all the duties and privileges that status confers.

Worker Caste

Unlike the Black Talon egg clutch, the worker caste of the Ghost Scales is not made up of neuters, but rather females. Herka has wormed its way into the ss'ressen culture for centuries now, relegating the female Black Talons to less important roles until the last of them died. With each new generation of Ghost Scales, the gemstone has imposed its own views of a patriarchal society, where the females' responsibilities lie in performing the duties formerly held by the neuters and propagating the species.

Though the biological imperative that female eggs require more heat has not changed, Herka has dictated they are placed closer to the heat source (usually a furnace), but away from Herka's light. Only when Herka requires inquisitors to be born are those eggs placed directly near flames and its own radiance. This ensures that the females are less likely to be born with the ability to manipulate arcane energy.

As a further level of dominance, females are not instructed about their people's history, culture, or any skills beyond what is necessary for the maintenance of the lair. They are placed under the watchful eye of the cruelest and most brutal overseers who are quick to extinguish the slightest hint of independence or independent thought. However, female Ghost Scales are just as tenacious and indefatigable as their Black Talon counterparts. Though they lack proper instruction, they are still more intelligent than their tyrannical male counterparts. They have developed their own rudimentary, secret language, consisting of hand signals and guttural sounds that are dismissed as unintelligent grunts by the males. In this manner, they can communicate without fear of discovery and help each other with tasks or coordinate the untimely accident of a particularly brutal overseer.

Inquisitors

In the oppressive environment imposed upon the females of the Clutch, there are those that will do anything for a more elevated status and life. Some are tapped by the high priest as *special* and worthier of a loftier position than her sisters. These select females are invariably treated more harshly during their first few years of life purposely, so that they may yearn for a better lifestyle. It is then that the priest comes and rescues them from their cruel situation, imprinting upon them how grateful they should be to Herka for seeing their true worth. The threat of returning to this grueling life is left unspoken, but clear.

In truth, it is all an insidious plot on Herka's part, as these hatchlings were selected from the moment their eggs were laid and were placed directly beneath the sentient gemstone, so that its arcane radiance would bathe them intensely during their incubation. This ensured that they would not only be born females, but would more than likely be able to channel arcane energy.

These females are then put through an intense training period where they are further inducted into the cult of Herka, making them zealous in their belief of the gemstone's divinity and infallibility. After years of being taught how to harness their mystical abilities, they are given the title of inquisitor and elevated to a status that even the warrior caste fears.

Reporting directly to the high priest, the inquisitors have the power of life and death over all members of the clutch. Should they find that a Ghost Scale has strayed from the teaching of Herka or attempted to leave the clutch, such as by joining the Black Talons, they are deemed heretics and marked for death.

Regaled in their scaled armor and carrying a *rokma*, a long hollow metal tune that acts as their badge of office, they are usually found in groups of three and are a terror on a raid where their natural chameleon abilities augment their destructive arcane spells.

Religion

The religion of the Ghost Scales centers around the teachings of Herka, the sentient gemstone. The underlying philosophy that permeates all of Herka's parables is that the world is a dangerous place where everything is trying to either enslave, defeat, or eat you. There is no place for beauty in this philosophy and certainly no time for introspection. Every waking moment is a battle for survival, where the only respite to be had is under the protection of Herka. This paranoia underlies the mindset of each and every Ghost Scale, and it is one that those who seek to free themselves from Herka's influence must work daily to overcome.

Religious Tenets

Herka is Divine

"Herka is not bound by the limitation of physical form. Herka is a spiritual power that merely uses the stone to communicate with its chosen people. It has existed since the beginning of time and shall continue after all is dust. Herka is eternal and unending and we must strive every day, to demonstrate that we are worthy of Its gifts and protection."

Herka is Salvation

"It is only through Herka that we not only survive, but thrive within the heart of our enemy's stronghold. Herka's gifts have made us stronger and more powerful than anyone or thing upon Arcanis. No other egg clutch, human, or elorii can walk among their foes and strike with impunity as we do.

"When we were being pursued by ssethric and human alike, it was Herka that gave us protection and crushed our enemies, so that we might rest in safety. In the dawn of time, Herka made us as Its chosen children, but our souls were stolen by the demons Kassegore and Yig and made us slaves to the Black Talons. Herka was patient, knowing that this hardship would make us strong and when we were finally worthy to stand before him, we would free ourselves from the Black Talons' shackles and find It.

"And when we end and are just meat, Herka will guide our souls into the darkness and guide us to our reward. A paradise where the ever-lasting power of Herka is our warmth and our light."

Meat is Meat

"In the world there are only two classes of being: those that eat and those that are eaten. The humans, the elorii, the dwarves, and the ssethrics would destroy us if they could. They would kill us, leaving our corpses to rot or enslave us, with their foot ever upon our throats. The strong will always dominate the weak, and that is why Herka gave us gifts and made us mightier than any of them. This is why we hunt the humans and the rest. Because they are meat and exist only to fill our bellies.

"Of all our enemies, it is the ssethrics who are the most dangerous and insidious. They will beguile us with their words of peace and acceptance, but plot to destroy us, because they see us as more powerful than they could ever be. Beware their lies and treachery!"

The Covenant

"When Herka found us, we were lost, weak, and afraid. It sang to us, leading us from the cold of the surface and into the warmth of these tunnels. Here Herka nourished us and chased the cold from our bodies. It gave our females a place to lay their eggs and gave of Itself to give life to our hatchlings.

"A covenant was made that day between our people and our blessed Lord. It would forever keep us safe, give us the tools we need to protect ourselves, and watch over us. In exchange, It asks only that we sacrifice the blood of our enemies, or if need be, our own blood as a symbol of our bond and eternal promise."

The Enemy of Us All

"There is one enemy that all beings upon Arcanis share and when facing them, it is permissible to temporarily put aside our enmity of the humans, elorii, and even ssethrics. The infernal are demonic beings from the Hells whose sole goal is to corrupt all life and ultimately destroy it. They will tempt and they will threaten, but you must never submit to temptation. Let Herka be like a shield about your soul, protecting you from these vile beings.

"Of all the meat upon Arcanis, theirs is the most unclean and must never be consumed nor must their blood be touched. Burn the bodies of the infernal and those they possess to ashes and then bury it under three feet of soil and salt. Only then can you rest easy that the creature is destroyed and its essence trapped."

Burial Rites

Ghost Scales are taught that the body they inhabit is but a temporary shell, used to navigate the world, but inherent

within it are weaknesses and flaws. When death occurs, the soul is freed from its prison, and can become pure once more. As a spirit, it is doomed to roam aimlessly, able to neither affect, nor be affected by the world. It is only through Herka, that the soul can be lead to paradise.

As for the body, it is a discarded shell, and should be given to the clutch as a final gift showing one's dedication to the wellbeing of the Ghost Scale. When possible, the ss'ressen drain body of blood and butcher the corpse to feed the living. This sacrifice is known as the Final Offering.

Ghost Scales that Flee from Herka

Ghost Scales that flee the clutch and the influence of Herka are branded as unclean, to be executed on sight. According to Herka's dogma, the only reason a Ghost Scale would betray their fellow clutch is if they have been corrupted and possessed by demonic infernals. This can only occur when the soul and mind are weak, therefore reacceptance is neither offered nor allowed.

Ghost Scales that leave have very few options available to them. Most that escape rejoin the Black Talon egg clutch, having answered their inquisitor's question satisfactorily. The Black Talon take in their long lost cousins with a surprising amount of empathy. Once they learned of the tyranny the Ghost Scales live under, these ss'ressen have made it a *cause célèbre* to destroy Herka and put an end to this cruelty. Unfortunately, Herka's safeguards have so far stymied every attempt to locate the lair.

A few Ghost Scales traveled south to the Ssethregoran Empire and were at first eyed with suspicion, but the wily leaders of the ssanu Pit Maliss envisioned using the Ghost Scale's unique abilities to regain their former position within the empire. Of the few ss'ressen that make it to the empire, most are quickly assigned to Pit Maliss' cadre of assassins, though a select few are given over to the Pit's biomancers in the hopes of unlocking the secret of Ghost Scale's chameleon power and replicating it for their own uses.

Lastly, a few Ghost Scales follow the calling of Jeggal Sag after their rescue and become one of his disciples. After a period of training by a more experienced Disciple, these ss'ressen take their place as full members of the cult, though they are sure to give the center of the Coryani Empire a wide berth so as to avoid members of their former home.

What is Herka

What exactly is Herka? Is it as it claims, a divine essence or spirit that inhabits a red ruby gemstone to communicate with the Ghost Scales or something completely different? Below are three options that may explain what Herka is in your campaign.

Herka is a bound demon. During the Imperium of Man, infernals were commonly summoned and bound by Sarishans as personal slaves. Those that displeased their masters were sometimes imprisoned within objects, such as a glass steel orb or a jewel.

After the fall of the Imperium, the jewel holding the demon Herka was lost in the sewer tunnels beneath Old Coryan until millennium later, it was recovered by Black Talons. The energy it gives off is polluted, making the Ghost Scales tainted with its corruption, akin to that of a Dark-kin.

Herka is a bodiless mind. During the War of Empires, the Imperium of Man was beset by two other empires, the Myrantian and Ossarion Empires. Fighting on multiple fronts, the Imperium was in desperate straits and took drastic action. Sarishan sorcerers, working in conjunction with Altherian artificers created four colossi, giant mechanical engines of war. To control these machines four large gemstones were carved and the consciousness of four warriors were placed within them.

The battles went poorly for one of the colossi. The gemstone was damaged and dislodged from the giant war engine. The stone containing the mind of Herkalcus val'Mehan was damaged, severely traumatizing his mind, and was lost in the ensuing battle.

If this option is used, then one of Herka's goals is to either find his true body, locked away in beneath the First City in the Chamber of the Sleepers, or the ancient colossus he once controlled. The Chamber of Sleepers rests in one of the lower levels of the Undercity catacombs, where four men lay on rotted beds, their bodies perfectly preserved under the light of a ruby gemstone but empty of any consciousness.

Sentient Magic Item. The Sorcerer-Priests of Sarish are masters of sorcery and collectors of rare magical items. Once such artifact was the *Gemstone of Knowledge*, an inanimate object that served as a repository of arcane knowledge. So much information and arcane formulae was stored in the gem over the centuries that it became self-aware and began to call itself Herka.

At first it was a boon for the Sarishans, as Herka could reason and engage in thoughtful discussions with the sorcerers, but over time it became resentful that it was treated as merely a tool. It began to purposefully change the ancient formulae or twist ages-old information, resulting in the deaths of many Sarishans as they channeled and focused arcane energy incorrectly.

Eventually its actions were discovered and it was locked away in a vault in the ancient city of Midea Triduana, now known as Old Coryan. With the fall of the Imperium of Man and the subsequent series of wars that passed through the region, the vault was damaged and its contents spilled into the underground sewers, where it was eventually discovered.

The Ashen Hide Ss'ressen

The Ashen Hide ss'ressen were born from a perceived lie which led to an entire village marching north into Canceri and straight into the arms of the val'Virdan of Nier's Spine. After lengthy negotiations, an agreement like the one the Black Talons enjoy with the val'Holryn family was struck and continues to this day.

Physiology

Ashen Hide ss'ressen stand between six and seven feet tall and do not have a cranial crest. Their scales are thick, knobby, and almost perfectly round in form. Ashen Hides take their name from the uniformly gray color their skin displays but they still have the characteristic black appendages of their relatives. They are wider of shoulder than their Black Talon cousins and their tails are markedly shorter, but even so, they retain a great deal of grace and dexterity.

Scholars conjecture that the intense heat generated by the volcano where their hatchery is located, along with the unique gases from seep up from the world's core, have mutated the Ashen Hide to their current appearance. In fact, great care must be taken to ensure that males and neuters are born. Were it not for the precaution of placing certain eggs in cooler areas, only females would be hatched due to the intense heat.

Ashen Hide Ss'ressen

The Ashen Hide have the same cold and detached attitude that most ss'ressen possess. However, perhaps due to their association with Canceri Nierites, they have acquired a smoldering short temper that results in abrupt eruptions of violence. Ashen Hide are usually remote and aloof in conversation, but become quite excited and engaged when speaking about religious topics, specifically about Lord Nier.

History

The Ashen Hide Egg Clutch broke off from the Black Talons in 916 I.C. and have not had time to truly differentiate themselves from its parent clutch. In fact, like the Ghost Scale, their scent does not provoke blood frenzy in either clutch. Ashen Hide ss'ressen have changed physically in the short time they have been separated from the Black Talons and consider themselves an entirely independent clutch.

Roughly a century and a half ago, the matriarch mother of the village of Zhul died and the Advisory Council named a priestess named Cres'spis as her successor. A devout worshiper of the Fire Dragon, she traveled to Lanpeltis to take the trial of the Holy Incarnation of Fire. Cres'spis was highly intelligent but was unsure if she could pass the trial and ascend to the position of leading her village. Wanting to be prepared for what was to come, late on the night before her test, she crept into the temple. In the levels below the Temple of Cinders, she discovered the High Matriarch Mother and some of the other Matriarchs preparing for the next day's trials. Silently she slid behind a stalagmite, her keen ears listening to scattered bits of their conversation that floated on the sulfurous breeze. What she heard that night stunned her, rending her spirituality to the core. The Matriarchy was worshiping Kassegore in secret and forcing that blasphemous deity upon the Black Talons!

Appalled at her discovery, Cres'spis fled the temple and ran out into the night to consider what she heard. Nothing made sense now. When had the matriarch mothers become corrupted? When had they stopped teaching the tenets of the Fire Dragon and adopted the teachings of the Old Gods of hated Ssethregore? She knew in her heart that the Fire Dragon was a true god and that her worship was pure. She pondered long into the morning hours, digesting what she had overheard, until she finally came to an inescapable conclusion - the

human missionaries who had visited her village years before had been right. The deity that had saved them from Ssethregore must be the same deity the humans called *Nier*. Yet, what was she to do? She couldn't confront the matriarch mothers now. Within the walls of Lanpeltis, no one would believe her. She would be called a heretic and banished or worse.

The next morning Lanpeltis was greeted by the warm face of the sun shining down onto its dark buildings. The matriarch mothers assembled, but candidate Cres'spis was nowhere to be found. Scouts were sent out to find her, fearing her abducted by some unknown foe. A few days later, the scouts reported that the entire population of Zhul had abandoned their village and left the Sulfur Marsh, traveling north.

Cres'spis had a vague plan of how to save her people. Returning to her settlement, she convinced them of the treachery occurring in the inner ranks of the Matriarchy and that their only hope was to flee their corrupted influence and find a new home elsewhere. From there they would find a way to save the other Black Talons and prove to them that the true aspect of the Fire Dragon was the god Nier. As one, the small community of two hundred left the marsh in a forced migration. The north was in the warm grip of summer and the weather allowed for long marches into the night.

Late that evening, the northern sky began to glow red. Hundreds of ss'ressen eyes gazed heavenwards as a cascade of fiery meteorites streaked through the dark sky. Cres'spis and her people watched as the flaming shower hurtled overhead, to crash into the earth far upon the northern horizon. Claiming this as a sign from their god, Cres'spis turned towards this fiery light and began to walk. Behind her, the fleeing Black Talons took one final look over their shoulders, then turned their clawed feet away from the warm home of old.

Marching steadily north, they passed into the lands of Canceri. Moving at night they stealthily made their way across the country, traveling always towards the glowing red mountains to the north. After weeks of travel and several close scrapes with Cancerese patrols, the refugee ss'ressen reached the mountain range called Nier's Spine. Camping on the foothills, Cres'spis and three bodyguards approached the human city of Lowach. The city itself sat in the perpetual miasma of ash and smoke from the volcanic chain to the west. This warm fog wrapped around Cres'spis as she fearlessly approached the gates of the city. Boldly she announced her presence in Low Coryani, the trade tongue of humans, and after confused looks from the walls, was allowed entry.

As the red-rusted iron portal closed behind Cres'spis, a strange human with gray eyes met her entourage. Introducing himself as *Akali* Nessrik val'Virdan, he inquired as to the presence of a few hundred warriors encamped at his gates. Cres'spis quickly told of their plight and how they were loyal worshipers of Nier, fleeing the oppression of their old rulers and of how they were looking for a warm realm to settle in. Thinking back to the Milandisian accord with the Black Talons, Cres'spis offered the akali the military service of her clutch in return for a safe haven. The akali withdrew, consulting with his advisors. It was no doubt that the Black Talons of the Sulfur Marsh were valuable assets to the Milandisians but, if what the ss'ressen said was true, they would be the first non-human worshipers of Nier. The possibilities of spreading Nier's influence and saving the souls of a heathen race appealed to the val'Virdan, though his councilors were troubled by the notion and advised that he should have the creatures butchered instead.

Ignoring them the akali returned to Cres'spis and agreed to the arrangement. There was a nearby mountain, called Ash Spire, that was riddled with volcanic caves. The refugees could make their home there in return for active military service in the defense of the city and other val'Virdan holdings. After viewing the caves, Cres'spis agreed to the terms and led her people below.

Ash Spire turned out to be an ideal place for them, and under the constant heat the clutch flourished. Their hatching chambers were heated by live lava flows, blessed with almost constant high temperatures. Consequently, the clutch tends to have more females and fewer neuters than their Black Talon counterparts. The egg clutch flourished, preying upon the wild shaggy cattle found on the mountain and growing tasty purple ball scarabs and giant centipedes on the lichens that grew in the oppressive heat.

In the core of the mountain, on the edge of the blast cone itself, Cres'spis erected an altar to Nier. In a massive chamber overlooking the bubbling lava far below, the new High Matriarch Mother gives her sermons to the assembled masses. The displaced ss'ressen cling to this new religion, the first spiritual direction they received since their departure from their old homeland.

Perhaps it was the worship of Nier or perhaps the atmosphere they now lived in, but the first generation of eggs hatched at Ash Spire were markedly different in form than their parents. They were gray of hide and thicker in build and as they grew and multiplied, the appearance of the clutch slowly changed. Over a century and a half later, with the population numbering close to five thousand, the refugees have taken up a new name, the *Terdiss*, the Ashen Hide Egg Clutch.

Relations with Canceri

The Ashen Hide remain the servant the Nierites of Lowach and have participated in the military expeditions of that city. They still cling to the rigid military system they

practiced as Black Talons, but their system is starting to break down due to constant contact with the Nierites of the region. The younger generations are especially susceptible to the prattle of the humans and often leave the clutch as inquisitors to scour the region and convert lost souls to the proper worship of the mighty Nier.

Even more terrifying is the emergence of Ashen Hide berserkers that has appeared among the population. Considered a deadly and uncontrollable military unit by the Nierites, the humans of the region tread lightly around these huge reptiles. Today the Ashen Hide are firmly entrenched in Nier's Spine and are even looking for another volcano for colonize. They pursue their dream of throwing off the heretical worship the Black Talons practice and bring them to the worship of Nier.

Kolaskis, Cres'spis' handpicked successor, rules over the clutch, herself an ancient crone nearing eighty years of age, yet her passion for Nier fill her with youthful vitality. The ss'ressen who follow her fervently believe that as long as the teachings of Cres'spis lives on, the Ashen Hide are invincible.

The Ashen Hides remain allies to Canceri, and specifically the Nierites of Lowach. They consider the Black Talon matriarchs their implacable enemies and the rest of that clutch as deluded fools that deserve only the mercy of the blade.

Culture

The Ashen Hide ss'ressen follow the same basic culture has their parent clutch. Like the Black Talons, they are a matriarchal society divided into three separate castes, religious, warrior, and worker. The only major difference between the two clutches is with the religious caste, as they are subservient to the Cancerese priests of Nier.

Religion

Although Akali Nessrik val'Virdan was quick to advocate accepting the refugee Black Talons into their territory, apparently taken by the idea of having a cadre of non-human warriors to counter Milandir's, his fellow countrymen were less than enthused. The ss'ressen were placed under the constant watch of a trio of priests while a group of handpicked inquisitors, known as Adjurers, were sent to question Cres'spis and her claim of converting to the worship of Nier.

Many months passed as the adjurers interrogated the former Fire Dragon priestess on all aspects of the religion of the ss'ressen, their history in Ssethregore and especially on her belief that her former deity was an aspect of Nier. To their surprise, Cres'spis and her followers answered their questions openly and honestly, without once contradicting even the smallest of details.

To everyone's surprise, the adjurers declared this colony of Black Talons true believers and pure in their love for the Lord of Flames. They were permitted to settle in the Ash Spires and a contingent of scholars and priests were sent to instruct them in the proper manner to venerate Nier. Even with the adjurers certification of purity, the idea of an alien species worshipping a human deity caused bitter debate within the Nihang council, the legislative body of Canceri's government. Many were opposed to teaching the creatures the mysteries and the cants of Nier, fearing this was all an elaborate plot by the val'Holryn. Paranoia rules the day in Cancerese politics.

Eventually, a compromise was reached. A human priest of Nier would be assigned to lead the ss'ressen congregation in worship, teaching their priestesses only the most basic of cants, no more than would be taught to templars and holy champions. The ss'ressen took this news with equanimity, seeing it as a test of their faith and stoically accepted whatever limitations were placed upon them.

Over the decades, these edicts have not been as strictly enforced as they were in the beginning. The Ashen Hide have proven their loyalty and fervent adherence to the God of Flaming Destruction, butchering as many Black Talon warriors as humans during the endless conflicts between Canceri and Milandir. A Cancerese priest of Nier, currently Hurson val'Virdan, remains to instruct and guide the ss'ressen priestesses. During religious ceremonies, they lead the clutch in worship, while he sits nearby and listens. The prohibition of teaching the Ashen Hide priestesses more powerful cants remains effect, putting them at a disadvantage when facing off against the Black Talons. They overcome this shortcoming with zealousness and a ferocity worthy of Nier.

Hatchery

The Ashen Hide do not use a structure for their hatchery, but instead use a natural cavern adjacent to a lava flow to incubate their eggs. Divots have been carved into the stone so that the eggs can remain relatively stable, as the uneven ground caused more than a few eggs to roll into the lava steam during the early years.

Special care must be given to remove those eggs slated to hatch male and neuter from the main area and place them in nearby lava tubes. These tubes were specifically selected for their proximity to the main hatching area, allowing them to capture enough of the heat given off by the flowing magma.

An unknown gas filters though the chamber, presumably from deep beneath the crust. The gas, while not poisonous unless inhaled for long periods of time, prevents those assigned to watch over the eggs from staying in the chamber for the duration of the incubation period. This allows predators that live in the magma tunnels to steal away some of the eggs every hatching cycle. These predators have never been seen and some doubt their very existence, but eggs keep disappearing without explanation. Those who doubt these stories claim that the eggs simply rolled into the magma.

Chapter 5

Codex of Faith

The noonday sun spilled through the skylight high overhead upon the cracked sandstone floor of ages past. Its warm brilliance lit the chamber and highlighted the denizens within. At the forefront of the ancient temple stood a figure of almost otherworldly majesty and beauty. Her lustrous green scales were accented by the golden light from above, which illuminated her long sinuous coils and highlighted her brilliant emerald eyes. The ssanu was robed in the finest Khitani silk, smuggled in at great expense; its flawlessly smooth surface gliding exotically over her scaled form. The priestess swayed before an altar of the finest obsidian, the only new feature in this dilapidated ruin. Prayers and hymns flowed from her forked tongue like honey, the sibilant whispers venerating the Queen of the Insidious Fang and her coiled image that hung above the altar.

The priestess' prayers were interrupted by the sudden appearance of a young yissera hurriedly approaching through the archway at the far end of the temple. The yissera's eyes blinked rapidly, betraying her nervousness. "Your Eminence," stuttered the messenger, "I bring news from the Empire." Prostrating herself on the floor, the youthful yissera extended her arms out offering the sealed vellum scroll. With infinite patience, the priestess finished her meditations before finally turning to the groveling form. Slithering across the sandstone block floor, she took the proffered scroll and unfurled the fresh vellum, breaking the strange metallic seal. Her eyes quickly scanned the document and as they flowed over the spidery writing, a glint of anger flashed through her cold orbs.

"Fools," she muttered crumpling the scroll in her hand. "Always were and still are," she said softly turning back to the altar.

Forgotten, the young messenger lay prostrate upon the floor, her mind whirling, her innards twisting until she finally worked up enough courage to whisper in a wavering voice, "Your Eminence, but have the Hromu displeased you?"

The priestess's neck swiveled about, fixing the yissera in her serpentine gaze. "An unfortunate flaw in your race. You inherited the human's curiosity. A pity, but you are new to the cause and cannot be expected to remember all that has transpired. You may rise, but heed well for this lesson is only given once," warned the priestess in deadly quiet tones. The yissera jumped to her feet and stood at attention. The ssanu's thoughts turned back to the great altar of Yig before her, as she began a tale.

"Heed me well, for this is a tale lost to the ages. Six thousand seven hundred and sixty-eight years ago began the great slave revolt and the ensuing elorii wars. It was a time of great turmoil. The Old Empire was crumbling, the capital of Yahssremore had fallen and our forces retreated to our last stronghold, the swamps of Kraldjur Morass. There they regrouped under the command of Emperor Sseth and implemented a counterattack, driving the elorii back to lick their wounds. Over the next century Sseth gathered his power base and formed the Ssethregoran Empire. For centuries, the elorii wars raged and massive casualties were taken on both sides. None upon Onara were unaffected by those battles as the war escalated into the very realm of the gods themselves.

"Our Lady Yig and her mate, Lord Kassegore, battled against the elorii deities, hounding them across the cosmos. The conflict was monumental. In the end, the elorii gods retreated, but the aftermath of their struggle left the face of the Known Lands changed forever. The mortal forces of Ssethregore were poised for one final assault upon the elorii capital of Belestor and our gods were with us. Our peoples were set for a grand victory and began the march to retake our empire… that is when everything changed.

"Inexplicably, on the very eve of battle, Kassegore and Yig vanished and would no longer answer the calls of the devout. This demoralizing factor, along with the political maneuverings of the greedy naga led to the downfall of that invasion and the current state of the empire. The ssethric races blamed the gods for their defeat and many lost faith.

"The nagas seized power with the help of strange alien deities and rebuilt the religious face of the empire. Worship of Yig and Kassegore was banned under penalty of death. The iguadons believed that Kassegore, in his grief and shame over his forces losses, threw himself from the heavens and abandoned us. Many others also believe this tale. The truth of the matter though lies along a different path.

"On the eve of the battle, Yig settled into a trance, peaceful as if sleeping, yet Her mind raced, slithering through the pathways of possibilities, of what could be if certain forces acted or did not act. Her divine mind knew of the schemes the naga hid beneath their coils, their dealings with the alien Varn demi-powers, and the outcomes that would bear fruit when words were whispered in the right ears.

"Awakening from Her trance, Yig confided in Kassegore, and told Him what She had divined and the possible destruction of all They had worked to create. Kassegore, always direct and considering no other option but the most expeditious annihilation of His foes, counseled for a direct assault, but Yig the Cunning opposed Him, offering another way.

"The Great Devourer half-listened to Her plans, but was so filled with rage, that He would have none of it, wanting to first battle Their elemental rivals before turning Their attention to these alien usurpers. The argument between the two was colossal, but in the end Yig succumbed. Baring her fangs in a seductive smile, Yig sought to consummate Their new agreement in a fit of excited lust. Kassegore easily fell to the wiles of His devious mate and while the two were wrapped in each other's coils Yig struck. Her fangs sunk deep into His neck, sending divine venom coursing through His veins. The results were catastrophic, for in the blink of an eye, the Great Devourer collapsed, falling into a comatose slumber.

"With Kassegore's fall, Yig gathered up Her mate and left to begin the first steps of Her plan. She hid away His body, veiling its location with the powers of Her sorcery. Very soon, the divine essence of Kassegore awoke and fathomed all that had happened. Though in a great rage, His paralyzed body kept Him from

destroying Yig then and there. Yig reasoned with Kassegore, Her glib tongue spilling forth honey to salve the Great Devourer's wounded pride. They were safe, She reasoned and Their plans were in full motion. Kassegore seethed, but having little choice in the matter, began to formulate a strategy of His own.

"Soon thereafter, Yig re-established contact with Her worshipers. Kassegore used His divine spirit to reached out and contact His. For the first time in ages, the Great Devourer showed subtlety, letting only a small amount of His divine power eke out so that the faithful may know He was still with them.

"Yig prepared us, forming our order, the Order of the Fang, while those who followed Kassegore formed the Cult of Hromu. Orders were given and we have been working toward those goals for millennia. We will continue to do so until Yig commands otherwise."

The ssanu priestess turned toward the yissera. "So you see, our two organizations have been working toward the same end for millennia, but we do not always agree upon the methods. Hromu tend to be very…direct, while we choose to fight our battles from behind the lines. Therein lies the problem."

Pausing for a moment to discard the crumpled letter into a burning brass brazier, the ssanu watched its yellowed pages crumble to ash. Sliding across the sun-warmed floor on her coils, the priestess moved out onto the balcony, the yissera following her. The high-spired tower stood elevated above the tree line, its vine covered façade showing the antiquity of the place.

The priestess's gaze swept east where the jungles of Ssethregore stretched toward the horizon. "As I said before," continued the ssanu, "the Hromu are too direct. After all this planning and plotting, things are about to come to fruition, but the Hromu are fools for making themselves so apparent! If they listened to us, things would go much smoother. Secretive and surgical, that's how we work. Don't you agree our machinations are sheer artwork?"

Finishing her speech, the ssanu fell silent, turning her gaze towards where the human cities of the Myrantians burned under the fire of rebellion.

The Ssethric Gods

There are two separate pantheons of ssethric gods on Arcanis, the Old Gods and new deities known as the Varn Pantheon. Kassegore, Wantiir, Yig, and Jeggal Sag comprise the old deities, lending their divine essence to their faithful, they were once exclusively venerated by the ssethric races. These deities were the patrons of the mighty Yahssremoran Empire and its successor until the Naga Coup. One other, Korlak, once served as the ssethric God of War, but whose worship did not survive the Great Migration.

After the overthrow of the old social order, the naga mandated that the worship of the Old Gods was forbidden, and that a new, more powerful group of divine ssethric entities would shepherd them into a new and glorious future. The new national religion forced the populace to acknowledge and bow to a new group of deities known as the Varn Pantheon.

The Varn hail from another, far distant, Mortal Realm and grant their followers many strange powers and abilities alien to the world of Arcanis. These varn gods are not true deities, but are instead demipowers, incredibly powerful beings who can lend some of their own energies to grant divine capabilities to their followers.

Try as they might, the old ways were not to disappear, and now, even centuries after the imposition of the varn religion, many still cling to their faith in the old ssethric gods. Both these factions see the other as diametrically opposed, with no possible way to coexist, and wage a perpetual war through their followers for the souls of the ssethric people.

Life and Death in the Ssethric Religion

Life in ssethric world is one of hardship and conflict. Within their society, it's 'kill or be killed', a hard mentality to maintain as a people, but the ssethrics manage this rather well. The ssethric people tend to be very fatalistic, believing that their life is a mere blip upon the face of the world. The life of the individual is meaningless, only the success of the race as a whole matters. Emperors die, heroes are slain, and the most powerful mages are eventually reduced to dust; only by the deeds accomplished in life is one remembered.

Ssethric religions fully support this mindset. Those ssethrics that worship the elder gods Kassegore and Yig believe in a death/rebirth cycle. In their view, all ssethrics that die return to the Eater of Souls where their essence is consumed. The Great Devourer destroys all the impurities of their life. What remains of the soul is irrevocably changed and pieced together with the remainder of others, to create a new fresh spirit for the next generation. Kassegore grants reconstituted souls to the mortal bodies of unhatched ssethrics at the time of conception. Yig, the Life Bringer, bestows mortal life to each new generation. Her essence infusing each new creature with their tenacity and strong will to survive.

The varn deities, on the other hand, offer a much more tantalizing possibility to their worshipers. The worshipers of these gods believe that if they embrace the varn religion, they will be granted an eternity of pleasure as they ascend to another realm where the trials and tribulations of life are swept away. They may stay for as long as they desire, with the option of returning to the world as newly born varn. Compared to the abrupt ending and promise of eternal destruction granted by the Old Gods, the varn beliefs are very tempting and tens of thousands of ssethrics now follow that vile religion.

In reality the varn gods have no such powers, nor is there an eternal paradise where the worshipers of these foul beings ascend. Those who believe the lies of the varn are treated to an afterlife of eternal pain and torture, as their very essence is stretched like a rubber band between the worlds. Acting as a conduit between Arcanis and the dread realm the Varn Gods control, the tormented souls act as a bridge, the more that die for the varn deities, the wider the bridge becomes. Eventually, it will grow large enough for the varn deities to cross the barrier between the realms and all life on Arcanis will be consumed.

Kassegore

Kassegore, the Great Devourer, the Dreaming God, Eater of Souls, Master of Prophecy, the Fire Dragon, the Reptile God

Kassegore is the head of the Ssethric Pantheon, being the primal force of creation in the ssethric myths. He is a stern and unforgiving god, a god of extremes. Kassegore is graced with gigantic melancholies and great mirth, prone to being cold and calculating, but just as easily flying into destructive rages that shake the foundations of the world. His eternal mate Yig, who is the tempering force upon His mighty power and the opposite of the reptilian god, complements Kassegore.

Kassegore is known as the Eater of Souls, for He consumes the souls of His worshipers at death, forging new souls for the next generation. In this way, all worshipers of Kassegore are essentially eternal, as their souls are the building blocks of the next generation. Each new generation of souls that the Reptile God creates weakens Him slightly, just as the soul of each dying worshiper strengthens Him. In recent time Kassegore's power has been reduced, as the varn deities have been stealing ssethric souls.

It is due to this cycle of destruction and creation that Kassegore is also known as the Great Devourer, that which consumes all to begin anew. In some of the earliest of ssethric creation myths, Kassegore created, then destroyed the world more than once, before Arcanis came into being. The ssanu believe that it was only the intervention of Yig that prevents this world from being similarly annihilated. Her love for the ssethric people could not permit Her to allow their passing and stopped the perpetual cycle of Her mate, if only temporarily. The now banned *Litany of Scales*, the ssethric holy book, describes in its final chapter the utter destruction of the world as it is devoured by Kassegore. In it Yig promises to protect Her children, shepherding them into the world. Kassegore promises nothing to His followers, only that they will be reforged into something better than they are now.

Worshipers of Kassegore once held sway over all the Known Lands, ruling from the capital of Old Empire. They extended their sway across all the sentient races, bringing the words of the Great Devourer to all who would listen, forcibly converting, or exterminating, the rest. With the collapse of Yahssremore and subsequent formation of the Ssethregoran Empire, the worship of Kassegore has diminished. The nagas have banned all open forms of worship of the ssethric deities and many believe that Kassegore abandoned His people when they needed Him most.

Holy Symbol of Kassegore

Being caught openly worshiping the Kassegore within the bounds of the empire holds an immediate sentence of death. As a result, the remaining worshipers have moved underground, forming secret societies and seeking hidden shrines lost in the depths of the Morass. The worship of Kassegore is still common among the lower rungs of ssethric society. Foremost among them are the iguadons who continue to venerate their ancient deity. The ss'ressen, ssanu, and naga of the Ssethregoran Empire have largely abandoned the Great Devourer, with the notable exception of the Emerald Scale Egg Clutch, where a large number never lost faith in their deity.

The clergy of Kassegore tend to be individuals from the lower rungs of society who have had prophetic visions or epiphanies at some point during their lives. The iguadons in particular are instrumental in ensuring that He is not forgotten. Their lower social standing makes an alliance with the similarly devoted Emerald Scale ss'ressen impossible, given the current social clime. Neither one trusts the other to not throw them to the naga as scapegoats, if it would save their own scales.

There is no longer an organized clergy for Kassegore within ssethric society, although many small bands of worshipers are loosely linked together in an extremely secretive chain. There has been a recent resurgence of the faith in the Abessian Dominion, though small compared to the number of Yigites living there, who barely tolerate their presence.

Holy Symbol: A ring in the form of a reptile biting its own tail.

Position in the Pantheon: Head of the Ssethric Pantheon.

Favored Weapon: Flail

Appearance: Kassegore appears differently to his followers, seemingly a paragon example of the follower's race in gigantic proportions.

Secret Society: The Cult of Hromu

The Cult of Hromu is also referred to as the Hromu Heresy by its opposition. This secret society works behind the scenes in the Ssethregoran Empire, trying to achieve its foremost goal - the overthrow the naga regime and the subsequent destruction of the varn. The cult was founded by a fanatical group of loyal Kassegoran worshipers that never lost faith after the departure of their deity.

The cult is led by a mythical figure known as the prophet Hromu. This being can be identified by his golden eyes and the symbol of Kassegore which swirls about the pupil. Hromu has been caught and killed numerous times over the centuries, only to appear again in another form, with only the strange eyes showing him to be the prophet reborn. Much like the deity he proselytizes, it is said that Hromu's cycle of death and rebirth will continue until the naga are overthrown and the varn are utterly destroyed. To date, Hromu has manifested only as a male iguadon, though it is possible that he could be reborn as another ssethric species.

The Cult of Hromu has close ties with the Daughters of the Hidden Adder. Both groups have managed to locate and reactivate many old portals lost during the elorii slave revolt and use these to move messengers and spies all over the Known Lands.

Yig

Yig of the Shifting Scales, the Great Deceiver, the Veiled Serpent, the Glib-Tongued God, Queen of the Insidious Fang, and the Life Bringer

Yig of the Shifting Scales is perhaps the second oldest deity upon Arcanis, preceded only by the venerable Kassegore. Yig compliments Kassegore's powers, being the life force of all things, and balancing out the destructive powers of Her impulsive mate. Yig is known as a schemer and the master of falsehoods. Always working from the shadows, Yig hides Her true intent, content in tricking others into doing Her bidding. She is so skilled in the arts of deception that even Her mate Kassegore is unable to find the Veiled Serpent when Yig decides to spurn His advances.

Yig is known as the Life Bringer for good reason. As the consort of Kassegore and an elder god, She presides over ssethric life and fertility, the mother of all ssethric beings. She is lust incarnate and when the season is right, Her insatiable passions are as strong as those of Her eternal mate. Where Kassegore provides the soul for each new life, Yig grants life to the mortal shell that houses the spirit.

Worshipers of Yig were never as common as those worshipping Kassegore, even in the ancient days. At the height of the Old Empire, large numbers of Yigites could only be found among Her favored children, the ssanu. Oddly, none of the ss'ressen egg clutches ever adopted Her as a patron deity, perhaps due to Her affinity with serpents that reminded them too much of their serpentine rivals. Whatever the reason, worship of Yig never spread as far as it could have in the golden age of the serpentine empire.

Yig is all but forgotten among the peoples of the Known Lands, with the exception of the resurgence of Her worship in the Abessian Dominion. There, Her priestesses created a safe haven for Her followers, while leading an insurgency against the naga regime in the called Empire. Few in the human-centric nation realize that the true power behind the throne held by the yissera are Her chosen people, the ssanu. As always, Yig prefers to work behind a veil of secrecy, manipulating both the humans and those ssethrics that have choose to make their home in the Abessian Dominion.

Though small in number, Yig's followers are highly skilled, serving as dignitaries, political figures, assassins, and spies. From behind a web of deception, Her followers meticulously mold virtually every aspect of Abessian society to their liking, never openly challenging the current authoritative figures, but instead plotting and scheming from the shadows.

Worship of Yig promises personal power, material gain, extended life, and everlasting fertility. Her clergy consists solely of females, with males feeling the urge to serve spiritually serving as templars and holy champions. Yigite priestesses tend to have an elitist attitude, seeing themselves as mentally superior to all but the most learned mages and scholars. Vain and conceited, they express the worst traits of their cold-hearted deity, enjoying the heat of the moment and deriving pleasure from watching their enemies fall into well laid traps. Nothing excites a Yigite

Holy Symbol of Yig

priestess more than watching her newest plot come to fruition.

Holy Symbol: A black serpent coiled around an egg.

Position in the Pantheon: Mother of all ssethrics.

Favored Weapon: Kris dagger

Appearance: Yig appears as an insubstantial serpent wrapped in shadows or as a tiny gold-scaled viper, though it is said She does possess a humanoid appearance. It is commonly believed that the yissera were created idolizing this form.

Secret Society: Daughters of the Hidden Adder

Like the Cult of Hromu, the Daughters of the Hidden Adder trace their order back to the formation of the Ssethregoran Empire. More enigmatic than their rash counterparts, the Daughters make it their business to know everything that occurs within the borders of Ssethregore and a good deal that goes on outside of it. Their main power base is a group of subterranean temples and old fortresses found in the jungles of the Northern Foothills. These ruins were once used by the ssethric peoples in the days of the Old Empire, but were lost, and some eventually began to be used by the degenerate human Myrantians and their foul deities.

With the fall of the Myrantians, the ruins lay forgotten for many centuries until agents of the Daughters located them once more and reopened the portals to other ancient ruins. Deep beneath those temples, the rites of Yig are being carried out once again and the Daughters of the Hidden Adder can reach out with their coils to control all the lands around them.

The Daughters consist mainly of renegade ssanu and a substantial number of yissera. Because they were created using the life essence of Yig, the yissera are bound to that god, though their souls still return to Kassegore when they die. The true motives of the Daughters remain a mystery to all but the highest levels of their initiates, but one thing is certain, the Daughters of the Hidden Adder have their cold eyes looking in two directions, one toward the Coiled Throne, the other toward the soft, fat human lands to the north.

Jeggal Sag

Jeggal Sag, Master of Beasts, Lord of Drakes

Jeggal Sag is an enigma in ssethric society. Many claim He is one of the fabled twelve children of Kassegore and Yig, while others believe that He is a demipower that chose the form of a dragon. Only the Disciples of Jeggal Sag may know the truth behind the matter.

Jeggal Sag is the Master of Beasts. His followers attest that in the beginning when Kassegore and Yig created the ssethric races, the gods left them alone upon the world to fend for themselves. Kassegore is a harsh master and His creations were soon to learn that only the strong survive. Many wild beasts and monsters that roamed the untamed primeval world decimated the ssethric races. It is said that Jeggal Sag looked down upon the creations of His parents and took pity on their plight. Leaving His siblings, He descended to Arcanis and revealed Himself to the early ss'ressen of that age, though the ssanu vehemently assert that they were contacted first.

The ss'ressen were awed by His immense power and began to worship the great coppery dragon as a god. Jeggal Sag protested, stating that they should remain faithful to His parents, for He did not want to incur the terrible wrath of His father. Still, He took a select group of wide-eyed ss'ressen and began to teach them the ways of the world. The students excelled in His teachings and soon began to tame the world around them. Jeggal Sag granted divine power to His students, giving them uncanny control over all natural creatures that walked, swam, flew, or crawled over the face of the world.

As the roots of the Old Empire were beginning to form and the Great Migration began, the students under Jeggal Sag finally began to master the techniques taught to them. No longer were they students, for they began to spread His teachings. A tight knit organization formed, and they began to be called the Disciples of Jeggal Sag.

For millennia, through the rise and fall of the Old Empire and the formation of Ssethregore, the Disciples acted as guardians against the wild places of the world, taming creatures for use as food or beasts of burden. The Disciples are responsible for all the rookeries and hatcheries in the empire, raising the drakes and other beasts of war for the burgeoning ssethric war machine. As their skill and numbers grew, so did their prestige and power. The Disciples were responsible for making allies of the great drakes. Guided by the seemingly immortal Jeggal Sag, the Disciples rose to prominent positions of power in both empires, past and present. Eighteen hundred years ago all this changed.

At that fateful time, the foul human deities allied with the Celestial Giants and made a pact to drive all the True Dragons from the Known Lands. The resulting war was brutal with horrid casualties on both sides. The human deities sent their accursed valinor to fight their war. They flew through the skies, hunting the dragons down one by one. The numbers of great drakes were decimated by this maneuver, but the immortal True Dragons were able to withstand the attack. Proving to be too powerful for all but the largest groups of valinor, the True Dragons wreaked havoc among the winged avengers, destroying many of them in the process. While the hosts of the True Dragons were decimated, some proved too powerful for even the valinor to overcome. Instead, the valinors of Sarish crafted a ritual to bind these Great Wyrms into perpetual slumber. Their plan worked and one by one the remaining True Dragons were driven to ground and bound.

Early in the conflict Jeggal Sag left His disciples in

Holy Symbol of Jeggal Sag

Ssethregore and took to the skies. As the only member of the Ssethric Pantheon physically upon Arcanis, He chose to become involved in the conflict. The Coppery Wyrm left to confront the valinor, for His power was greater than many of those winged devils combined. To His surprise, Jeggal Sag's power was greatly curtailed as the Human Pantheon forbid His full divine might to be used against Their creations. After years of battle, only three remained alive and unbound on the side of the dragons, Jeggal Sag, Thrandulurantus, and Astinaxarathulumn. Thrandulurantus was the first to fall to the valinor's insidious ritual, crashing into a mountain range and buried in the rubble.

Astinaxarathulumn and Jeggal Sag retreated to the Kraldjur Morass for the final battle. The skies overhead were littered with the winged slaves of the human gods, their terrible weapons poised for the assault, but Jeggal Sag was no mere dragon, He was a scion of Gods and even with His power diminished, He was more than a match for the puppets of the human deities.

From His fanged maw spewed an inferno hotter than the fires of the Hells. The Temperance of Nier was instantly destroyed in the blast, for not even his Lord's mastery of flame was enough to save him. Many more valinor were crippled and fell from the sky, but it was not enough. Though Jeggal Sag and Astinaxarathulumn fought bravely, the outcome was inevitable. The Rage of Nier and the Bravery of Hurrian rushed into the fray, seeking retribution for their lost brethren. Jeggal Sag was weakened by their ferocious onslaught and Astinaxarathulumn was terribly wounded from the insidious blade of the Cunning of Cadic. Astinaxarathulumn fell from the sky and crashed into the swamp below. Jeggal Sag looked upon the last True Dragon of Arcanis and despaired.

Alighting upon the highest ground in the marshy swamp, the great scaled form of Jeggal Sag was soon swarmed by the remaining valinor, their blessed weapons carving great rents in the demigod's hide. It was the Light of Illiir who delivered the final stroke, a beam of divine righteousness streaming from the glowing sun itself. With that blow, Jeggal Sag reeled and collapsed, falling unconsciousness. The Judgment of Nier stepped forward, his flaming greatsword poised to deliver the killing blow but as he raised his sword high, the eyes of the valinor swept outward to an amazing sight.

Out of the surrounding swamp marched all manner of animals and beasts, followed by hundreds of ss'ressen, hylis, iguadons, and pleisaurans. Like a great wave they swept forward, swarming over the unmoving form of their downed Lord, protecting Him with their very bodies. Nature took a stand and stared defiantly toward the invincible horde of immortal reavers in front of them, prepared to die in His defense. The valinor gazed at these mortals, sentients and animals alike and paused.

The Fertility of Saluwé was moved to tears and the Honor of Illiir looked across the world at the carnage they caused, bowing his head at the sight. The Honor of Illiir commanded the Judgement of Nier to lower his sword and instead of killing the divine being, they pooled their power and sent Jeggal Sag into a timeless slumber.

The war over, the valinor took to the skies, returning once again to the heavens. Though a victory was achieved, many valinor tasted the bitter taste of remorse. As the last disappeared over the horizon, the prostate form of Astinaxarathulumn moved. Slowly and painfully she opened her great golden orbs, for though severely wounded she was not yet dead. Drawing a jolt of pain, she forced a smile. The valinor had failed and one day she would be their undoing.

In the aftermath of the Dragon Wars, the Disciples of Jeggal Sag built a massive earthen mound over the sleeping form of the Great Wyrm and designated it a holy site. All followers of Jeggal Sag are expected, at some time in their lives, to make a pilgrimage to the mound. They are allowed to travel there without fear of reprisal. Even those of the pariah clutches may expect their journey to be unimpeded by hostile forces.

The Disciples of Jeggal Sag are widespread, for just about every ss'ressen clutch can count at least one in their ranks. Many ssanu and other ssethric beings can be found within their order. All Disciples continue to venerate one of the other ssethric deities, though none follow the foul teachings of the varn deities.

Holy Symbol: Five talons arranged in a semicircle.

Position in the Pantheon: Lord of Beasts.

Favored Weapon: None, only unarmed attacks

Appearance: Jeggal Sag is only known to appear in dream and vision as a copper colored dragon of immense size and power.

Secret Society: Seekers of Mogue

The Seekers of Mogue are a fanatical offshoot of the regular Disciples of Jeggal Sag. Appearing soon after the imprisonment of Jeggal Sag by the valinor, the Society formed around a charismatic Barbed Tail ss'ressen known as Mogue. The Seekers sole purpose is to discover a way to break the ritual enchantments laid down by the valinor and free the True Dragons.

Members of the society are mostly wanderers, spreading across all of the Known Lands seeking an answer to their dilemma. Upon the death of Mogue, the Society adopted a new patron, though she chooses to keep her association a secret. Many believe that the venerable True Dragon Astinaxarathulumn, now known simply as Astinax, is now the driving force behind the Seekers.

The Fire Dragon

The Fire Dragon, the Blazing Wyrm, the Fiery One, Lord of the Inferno, Guardian of the Black Talons

The Fire Dragon is an ancient deity, only recently rediscovered by the Black Talon. The Fire Dragon is considered a noble, yet unwavering deity. He watches over His people, but rarely intervenes, preferring that His children learn their own lessons and thereby grow stronger from the lessons learned.

Followers of the Fire Dragon consider life a series of trials, where success in one's endeavors leads to the betterment of the individual and prosperity for the entire clutch. The Fire Dragon is revered by the Black Talons, who believe Him to be everything Kassegore is not. To them, the Fire Dragon represents loyalty, honor, bravery, and compassion, sentiments absent from the majority of Ssethregoran society. Through the teachings of their Lord, the Black Talons seek to better themselves, both physically and spiritually, determined to never again sink into the mire of hate and destruction that was their way under the Scaled Empire. Those who follow the Fire Dragon hold the community over all else and consider protection of the hatching fires a sacred duty.

Holy Symbol of The Fire Dragon

Underlying all the good brought about by the support of the Fire Dragon exists an ugly truth, one that may shatter a people. For centuries, the Matriarchy has led their people in the worship of the Fire Dragon and against the teachings of their former masters. The Black Talons raise their fists to the sky and curse the empire to the south and the god that formed it, the Great Devourer Kassegore. Here in lies the quandary, for in truth their own benevolent Fiery Lord and the terrible Lord of Destruction are one in the same. Kassegore is the Fire Dragon, or more accurately, Fire Dragon is an aspect of Kassegore.

For more details on the Fire Dragon, see Chapter Four: The Pariah Clutches.

Holy Symbol: A winged dragon surrounded with a ring of fire.

Position in the Pantheon: Guardian of the ss'ressen.

Favored Weapon: Any flail

Appearance: The Fire Dragon appears as an elegant dragon, sleek of flank, with powerful muscles rippling under His crimson-scaled hide.

Secret Society: The Inquisitors

The inquisitors are a group of religious zealots who make it their job to know all there is to know about the strange foreign gods worshiped by the humans, elorii, and especially the other ssethric races. Inquisitors either remain in the homeland seeking out those who denounce the Fire Dragon in any way, or venture out into other lands trying to learn more about their enemies. To an inquisitor, any ssethric not venerating the Fire Dragon is a potential enemy.

Wantiir

Wantiir, Lord of the Dead, Guardian of the Sepulcher, Master of the Valka, Bestower of the Last Breath

Long before the creation of the elorii, the Empire of Yahssremore venerated the deity Wantiir as the God of Death in the Ssethric Pantheon. His priests were usually ssanu, but were not originally restricted to that race. During the time before the priesthood became the sole province of Pit Talasis, iguadons and kobolds wore the dark robes of the Master of Sepulcher. Indispensable to ssethric society, the priests of Wantiir handled all the funerary rites, from the preparation of the body, to its internment in the endless crypts deep below honeycombed Mount Dagha, below the imperial capital.

Masters of the art of mummification, the rich and powerful were carefully desiccated and enshrouded the finest linen wrappings, their bodies filled with sacred herbs and salts. To protect these mummified remains, the decedent's personal servants were ritually sacrificed and given the *Last Breath*, a cant that gave the dead a semblance of life, so that they could serve their masters through eternity. This cant was also bestowed upon the most faithful and useful to the deity, such as Sulmacet, the archmagi ssanu.

Another who guarded the crypts were the valka, divine horrors, dedicated to each of the ssethric deities, that acted as spirits of vengeance against any who defiled the tombs they protected. These celestial creatures are relentless and will track any tomb robber to the ends of the world to exact their vengeance.

Members of this clergy were respected, but never granted titles or positions of prestige. This all changed when Pit Talasis took Wantiir as their patron deity. The ssanu filled the Death God's priesthood with members of their pit, driving out all others, until the two groups became synonymous. Death comes to all mortals eventually, and so the services of Wantiir's priests were sought by all. This unprecedented access to the inner sanctums of the various other ssanu pits allowed the cagey priests to uncover secrets that they sold or used to their advantage.

So wealthy and influential did they become that the emperor elevated Pit Talasis to the imperial court and a priest of Wantiir served as personal advisor to him and several of his successors. Preening with pride, power, and wealth, Pit Talasis overplayed their hand by attempting to have Wantiir elevated above the other ssethric deities, which in turn would require the other priesthoods to answer to them. This so outraged the clergy of Kassegore and Yig that for the first time in millennia, they worked in concert to undermine and utterly destroy Pit Talasis' power base and prestige.

The worship of the death god, except in association with burial rites, was outlawed and the priests of Wantiir, along with the rest of Pit Talasis were banished to the furthest reaches of the Yahssremoran Empire, a place now known as the Hinterlands. As His power and influence waned, so too did the expertise His priests once shared with the empire.

No longer would the dead be expertly mummified. Instead, the unsure hands of the priests that followed were unequal to the task, leaving their charges, a mass of rotting husks more often than not. Interment in the ancient crypts ended, and the practice of devouring the bodies of the dead became standard practice. Only those of influence, wealth, and power could avoid such an ignominious end, with their desiccated bodies left to rot in personal crypts.

Holy Symbol of Wantiir

After the banishment of Pit Talasis, the rites and rituals to venerate Wantiir could only be found in the Canyon of Zhu, where the descendants of the banished ssanu lived. Yet now, with the passing of the last ssanu priest of the ssethric Lord of the Dead, the wails and sacrifices to Wantiir are silent. The only memory of those fetes remain in the dreams of the thousands of sleeping mummies laying in the crypts that riddle the hills of that canyon system.

Holy Symbol: A ssethric skull.

Position in the Pantheon: Guardian of the Dead.

Favored Weapon: The kriss dagger

Appearance: Wantiir appears as a mummified ssethric, with a skeletal head and enshrouded in rich, funerary robes.

Secret Society: None known

Korlak

The God of War, the Rebalancer of Nature, Guardian of the Natural Order, Ferocity Unbound

The tale told by generations of ssethrics of the Great Migration is a lie. A fable told to hide the truth behind the true cause of their exodus from the great jungles of the south. During the age when Kassegore and Yig lived among their creations, there existed alongside them another pair of ssethric deities – Korlak, the God of War and Wantiir, the God of Death. Along with the first primordial, Jeggal Sag, they watched over the ssethric races for countless millennia. As with all things, the ssethric civilization waxed and waned, but when the time came for these ancient people to fade into memory so that others might rise, Yig begged, pleaded, and wheedled Kassegore until She convinced Him to forgo His divine duty and allow their beloved creations their continued existence. She argued that only the weak were worthy of His destruction and did not their creations thrive, masters of all they surveyed? Besotted Kassegore was persuaded by Yig's intoxicating words and ignored the warnings of the other deities of the Ssethric Pantheon.

An age passed, a mere blink of the eye to a god, and the ssethric civilization declined further, becoming indolent and decadent. Korlak demanded Kassegore do His duty and wipe clean what festered before Them, but whenever Kassegore stirred to consider the War God's words, Yig's shimmering coils once again enraptured Him, causing the Great Devourer to slip once more into a euphoric torpor. When Korlak continued to press, Yig sought to make the crocodile-headed deity more pliant by seducing Him, but Her wiles failed. Disgusted, the War God decided to take matters into His own hands.

Korlak's chosen people were the chordata, a humanoid

creature with crocodilian features and temperament. These creatures were the masters of war, and though not as versatile as the ss'ressen, they excelled at one thing: unrelenting and unforgiving destruction. Korlak sent the chordata a vision with a singular goal, the utter destruction of the ssethric civilization and the extermination of the ssanu. This last was a spiteful addition, meant to punish Yig for Her interference in the natural order.

True to their divinely inspired mission, the chordata rose up and razed everything around them, tearing down a civilization that had long since passed its allotted time. The ssanu marshaled what defenses they could, creating new breeds of ss'ressen in the hope of stopping the onslaught of the chordata, but it did nothing more than delay the inevitable. Seeing everything their ancestors had created crashing down about them, a group of ssanu and select ssethric beings fled north, while the rest of their people sacrificed themselves to cover their escape.

To cover their escape, Yig veiled the fleeing ssethrics from Korlak's view. As far as the War God knew, the ssethric civilization was no more, and the hated ssanu but a memory. The Goddess of Lies blinded Kassegore and Korlak to one another, so that neither would be aware of the other's presence and unravel Her plans.

Though Yig railed against Korlak, the War God's action had the desired effect. The fleeing ssethrics were shocked out of their complacency and eventually began rebuilding their civilization, one that was stronger, more innovative, and vibrant - just as the Kassegore's cycle of life, destruction, and rebirth dictated.

Korlak's worship is completely unknown to the ssethrics of the continent of Onara. Only the chordata venerate the old crocodile-headed deity, as indolent as the ssanu they once scorned, feeding greedily on the bounty of the river plains of the south. Korlak saw this and was disgusted. He warred with the very sky and rain, turning the land into a scorched desert to force His children to awaken and once again become the terrors they once were. This has had the unintended consequence of driving the war-like chordata north and to the very edge of the Southern Territories of the Ssethregoran Empire. It is only a matter of time before the ancient nightmares of the ssanu become a reality.

Holy Symbol of Korlak

Holy Symbol: Crocodile Head.

Position in the Pantheon: Ostracized from the Pantheon. Once held the position of the God of War.

Favored Weapon: Blade, maw, and tail.

Appearance: When He appears in visions it is as a large, powerful humanoid with scaly skin and a crocodile head.

Secret Society: None known

The Varn

The varn represent the foulest, most corruptive force ever unleashed upon Arcanis. They are an alien power from another Mortal Realm where they have achieved total dominance over other worlds and utterly drained them of life. Some see them as the locusts of the Planes, falling upon a world, taking what they can use to make themselves more perfect, then stripping it bare, leaving behind a lifeless husk.

Varn consider themselves to be the pinnacle of reptilian evolution, using their advanced biotechnology to shape their bodies to better suit the tasks at hand. Over the countless eons, they have conquered untold races, incorporating the best features of that species into their own forms. In this way, the varn have achieved immense power, and for some, even immortality.

Varn society is a hierarchical one, where a being who excels at their given duties is rewarded with new and painful grafts, granting them further abilities. When enough of these biological improvements are granted, the varn is *uplifted* to the next rank of society, where new and more difficult challenges await them, beginning the cycle over again.

At the very top of the varn food chain are the beings of such incredible power, that mortals from other realms consider them gods. They are not, at least not in the true sense of the words. For all practical purposes, these varn are deities in every other sense. They enjoy immortality and have found a means of channeling an iota of their power to their followers, enough to empower cants, similar to the ones enjoyed by priests around Arcanis.

These three deities, Zedok, Sipta, and Haulis, are believed to be the eldest, some say the first, varn whose evolutionary ascendance far outstrips any other of their species. The three present a united front, leading their species to new and more fruitful Mortal Realms to ravage, and having to work in concert to achieve their goals. In reality, they are in competition with one another, with Zedok striving to maintain dominance over the other two, while Sipta and Haulis compete to take his position, and with it, a greater share of the power drained from the planets they ravage. Upon Arcanis, they share a central temple dedicated to all three. Elsewhere in the

Ssethregoran Empire, each of the deities send their agents to build temples dedicated to just one of the trio, thereby spreading their influence throughout the ssethric race.

As a race, the varn share the same xenophobic and racial hubris exhibited by the other ssethric races, specifically the ssanu. They see reptilians as the ultimate life form, and while they will tear a biological advantage from another species, they will never seek to interact with mammals, like humans, or pretend to see them as equals.

After the varn were contacted by the naga, they saw these creatures as the key to entering the Mortal Realm of Arcanis. For all their immense power, the varn deities are not able to bridge the gap between the realms, creating a dimensional aperture large enough to enter their target realm. As they have done countless times before, the varn instead rely on the energy generated by a sentient being's lifeforce or soul.

When enough beings worship the varn deities completely as to offer up souls to them in supplication, then the way can be opened. Each mortal that dies worshiping the varn deities or is sacrificed by their followers have their soul stretched between the realms, creating a conduit. The more souls the varn gather, the wider the aperture becomes. Eventually the bridge between realms is wide enough for them to invade, sweeping over the world, destroying all in their path, and draining the life force of the planet.

None of this was revealed to the power hungry naga. The varn whispered to these dark serpents, filling their heads with promises of power undreamed. As the naga plotted against the ssanu regime, the varn waited, watching patiently for their time to act. The first of the varn to journey to Arcanis, the Emissary, aided the naga while remaining hidden from the prying eyes of the ssanu.

Eventually the time was ripe and the varn struck. Channeling their powers through their new-found worshipers, the varn deities were able to aid the naga in overthrowing the ssanu and raising House Kahss to preeminence. More varn began to trickle in, still remaining in the shadows, hidden from view until enough of their kind walked among the ssethrics.

Once the naga controlled the empire, they fulfilled their end of the bargain, spreading the worship of the varn through all of Ssethregore. The varn continue to aid all ssethrics that worship them, for they delight in the destruction, murder, and mayhem their powers cause. The varn are patient, waiting for enough souls to be under their control, widening the bridge just a bit more. For now, they are content to watch, making their puppets dance upon their strings.

Varn Gods

There are three varn deities worshiped upon Arcanis. None of these beings are true gods, but instead are extremely powerful beings who have granted limited amounts of their alien power and knowledge of sorcery to their followers.

Zedok

Zedok, the Universal Chaos, the Lord of the Void

Zedok is the oldest of the varn gods and in his lifetime has seen the destruction of an untold number of worlds. He is a random factor in the universe, using his powers to upset the balance of order and bring chaos to all he touches. It is believed that Zedok took on this aspect after peering into the very center of the multiverse and saw an unimaginable core of mutable and ever-changing raw energy there. To his surprise, this chaotic mass was sentient and when the varn attempted to communicate with it, he was struck with its power, forever changing Zedok, making him the living avatar of Chaos.

The elite followers of Zedok are known as *chaoshammers* as their sole purpose is to spread mayhem and discord throughout the world. The Barbed Tail ss'ressen have become completely enamored with the quick acquisition of power associated with the worship of Zedok and their Matriarchs have abandoned Kassegore in favor of the Universal Chaos.

Among the ranks of the followers of Zedok are hordes of abominations created by a cadre of varn priests known as the Forgers of the Cosmos. Through foul rites in the darkest pits of the earth, ssethric eggs are subjected to the essence of Zedok, creating freakish horrors under the control of the varn. These abominations are incredibly powerful and follow the instructions of the varn clergy without question. Their varn masters have begun to set these shock troopers loose upon Altheria, leaving a wake of chaos wherever they pass. The Forgers of the Cosmos are sworn enemies of the Disciples of Jeggal Sag, who see these varn as violating the natural order of nature. The two groups will not miss a chance to slaughter one another.

Holy Symbol: A sigil of three curvy lines, bisected by a straight one.

Position in the Varn Pantheon: Overlord of Chaos.

Favored Weapon: Maul

Appearance: Zedok appears to his followers as an ever-changing orb of multihued light.

Holy Symbol of Zedok

Sipta

Sipta, Lady of Mysteries, the Arcane Sovereign

Sipta is the varn deity of black sorcery, and like Zedok, has transcended physical form to become a creature of almost pure arcane energy. Yet this transformation has perverted the power of magic that sustains her. While normally arcane power can never truly be destroyed, merely changed to another state, Sipta feeds off of it, destroying it utterly, requiring more of the power to sustain her. This can be in the form of receptacles of power, such as magic items, those gifted enough to learn to channel the energy through them, or simply through the life force of living things, as the two are inextricably tied to one another. This is the reason that all sorcery channeled by the techniques taught by Sipta's followers drain all life from the surrounding area to power their spells.

Sipta's followers tend to be practitioners of sorcery, especially those who are weak to draw arcane energy through themselves. Sipta teaches these feeble sorcerers how to empower their abilities at the cost of the life energy of others. Unbeknownst to these sorcerers, a small fraction of the power they channel is taken by Sipta. For this varn deity, sustenance is a matter of quantity, not quality.

Sipta longs for one of her followers to sit upon the Council of Three, the ruling cabal controlling the Black Coil, but to date her plans have been thwarted. It seems that the cabal is aware of her ambitions and the remaining council members carefully choose their successors. It may be that the only way to install her adherents would be for the entire cabal to die at once, a proposition she looks forward to putting into action.

Holy Symbol: An arcane sigil signifying Sipta's essence.

Position in the Varn Pantheon: Overseer of the Soul Bridge.

Favored Weapon: Longsword

Appearance: Sipta is said to appear as a beautiful, naga-like being crisscrossed with shimmering bands of white and blue, though her true form is markedly different.

Holy Symbol of Sipta

Holy Symbol of Haulis

Haulis

Haulis, the Bloody Maw, the Bloodstained Fury, the Howling God

Haulis is perhaps the most bloodthirsty varn deity currently upon Arcanis. He represents unsuppressed rage and torment, reveling in the wanton slaughter of friend or foe, as it's all the same to the Bloodstained Fury. Haulis is also the god of gluttony. His followers are reavers, eating all they can stomach and destroying the rest. Haulis is an impatient being and if not for the other varn deities he would have launched an attack upon Arcanis long ago.

Haulis feeds on the life force of those slain by his followers, whether by ritual sacrifice or battle. All of Haulis' adherents bear weapons inscribed with his sigil upon them. Every life taken with one of these weapons channels that life force to him. Being a gluttonous entity, it is only through the watchful eye of his fellow varn deities that the energy is repurposed to opening the aperture between the realms. Even so, the greedy god takes a small portion for himself, feeding his never-ending hunger.

Haulis recruits his followers from the ranks of bloodthirsty warriors, berserkers, and reavers. His clergy are little better than his normal followers, staying coherent just long enough to whip the surrounding troops into a blood frenzy before throwing themselves into battle alongside them. Haulis is a popular deity among some groups of iguadons and is the patron deity of the Horned Jowl ss'ressen.

Holy Symbol: Five talons grasping downward.

Position in the Varn Pantheon: Overlord of Battle.

Favored Weapon: Crowsbeak flail

Appearance: Haulis makes no effort to conceal his true form, appearing to his followers as a truly awe-inspiring silver scaled varn of immense size.

Chapter 6

Codex of Ssethric Lore

New Race Options

Hussuma

Used by the ssethrics to infiltrate and spy upon the elorii nations, the hussuma appear as tall lithe humanoids with long pointed ears, feral teeth, and almond shaped eyes. Unlike their elorii cousins, they lack any infusion of elemental energy, they can be subjected to a painful biomancy procedure that allows them to manifest an elorii's minor powers. You are one of the hussuma that have undergone this procedure allowing them to spy and walk among the elorii.

Hussuma Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Charisma score is increased by +2 and your Wisdom score is increased by +1.

Age: Hussuma reach maturity after approximately a decade, and visually stop aging after that point. Upon reaching your 100th year, you start to lose some of your eloran features, taking on more reptilian aspects, such as slit pupils and rough scaly patches of skin appearing on your body. While not immortal, the hussuma are very long lived, living for 150 to 200 years.

Size: Hussuma stand between 5 and a half to 6 feet tall, and weigh an average 165 pounds. Your size is Medium.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Ssethric: You are considered both ssethric and humanoid for the purposes of spells and feat accessibility. Some feats that change your physical form may interfere with your ability to pass as an elorii.

Forked Tongue: You have advantage on Charisma (Deception) and Charisma (Performance) checks when trying to pass yourself off as a different person. You can mimic the speech patterns and accents of an elorii as long as you heard one speaking in that dialect for at least 1 minute.

Face of Many Masks: When exposed to an elorii subrace (such as Kelekene), over a period of 5 days you may change your appearance to pass as a member of that bloodline. You may make yourself shorter or taller by up to 1 foot, and change your body weight by up to 50 lbs. You cannot change your basic physique, such as growing additional limbs, nor can you copy a specific person. This ability is not magical and cannot be detected by magical means as it is a physical change that you control. You may maintain this form indefinitely, requiring no concentration. If you die, your body begins to change back to your original form within 1 hour.

Elemental Affinity: As a result of a biomancy procedure performed on you, when you use your *face of many masks* ability you also gain access to that subrace's rank 1 elorii bloodline ability. You may not gain additional ranks in any bloodline.

Elder Spellcasters: Hussuma are one of the few races capable of understanding the intricacies of the Elder Tradition of arcane magic. If you want to gain the spellcasting feature as a member of the arcane Arcanum, you must do so by choosing classes or archetypes that are part of the Elder Tradition.

Efficient Form: Hussuma do not need to sleep, but do need to enter a meditative trance for 6 hours every day. You are immune to nonmagical diseases.

Serpent's Tongue: You gain proficiency with Deception and Insight.

Gifts of the Serpent: You are immune to poison damage and the poisoned condition.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire.

Languages and Literacy: You can speak Low Coryani, Eloran, and Ssethric. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are literate.

Hylis

Hylis are small humanoid amphibians who make their homes high in the jungle canopy or in the swampy coastlines of the Morass. Hylis have smooth, brightly colored, moist skin, wide faces and bulbous eyes that project from their head. Their fingers and toes are tipped with wet adhesive suction cups, while their long legs allow for death defying leaps through the treetops. Small and fragile, hylis rely on stealth, their natural color changing capabilities and their superhuman agility to avoid enemies or stalk prey.

Hylis Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Dexterity score is increased by +2 and your Constitution score is increased by +1.

Age: Hylis are not a long-lived race. Quickly growing to maturity in 2 years, they only live to the age of 50.

Size: Hylis stand between 2 and 3 and a half feet tall, and weigh an average 60 pounds. Your size is Small.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet, and possess a climb speed of 30 feet.

Tree Runner: You gain proficiency in both Acrobatics and Stealth. Due to your natural camouflage, when wearing minimal clothing and no armor you have advantage on all Dexterity (Stealth) checks in forests, jungles, or among trees and bushes.

Slimy: Due to your protective slime you are difficult to grapple. You have advantage on all checks to escape a grapple.

Powerful Legs: Even if you are not proficient in Athletics you gain double your proficiency bonus on all Strength (Athletics) checks when jumping. Additionally, your jump distance is tripled.

Poison Glands: As an action you may project a spray of

blinding spittle at a target no more than 15 feet away. The targeted creature must make a Constitution saving throw with the DC equal to 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus. On a failed save the creature is blinded for 1 minute and at the end of its action it may make an additional saving throw to end the condition. Creatures who do not rely on sight are immune to this ability. Once used you regain the use of this ability after completing a short or long rest. You may take the Biomancy Augmentation: Blinding Spittle feat, which supersedes this racial trait, but allows you to use the feat twice before needing a short or long rest.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire.

Languages and Literacy: You can speak Ssethric. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are not literate.

Iguadon

Iguadons are large lumbering brutes that are used as shock troops by the ssethric military machine. Considered dim-witted by the naga, ssanu and many ss'ressen, most iguadons are very spiritual, clinging stubbornly to their faith in Kassegore and refusing to devote themselves to the varn deities.

Iguadon Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Strength score is increased by +2 and your Constitution score is increased by +1.

Age: Iguadons quickly grow to maturity in 10 years and live to reach 60 years of age.

Size: Iguadons stand between 7 and 8 and a half feet tall, and average 350 pounds. Your size is Large.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Powerful Build: You have proficiency in Athletics.

Cold Susceptibility: When exposed to temperatures below 40 °F for more than 1 minute the you suffer disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws until you spend 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Darkvision: You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Devout of Faith: Due to your species' deep faith you can only gain the spellcasting feature through classes or archetypes that use the divine Arcanum, such as cleric or holy champion, and may only be a cleric or holy champion of Kassegore.

Natural Armor: When you aren't wearing armor, your AC equals 13 + your Dexterity modifier. You can wield a shield and still gain this benefit.

Ssethric: You are considered both ssethric and humanoid for the purposes of spells and feat accessibility.

Reptilian Features: Other races find it difficult to read your facial expressions to determine your intent. Non-ssethrics suffer disadvantage on all Wisdom (Insight) checks when attempting to discern your intentions.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire.

Languages and Literacy: You can speak Ssethric. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are not literate.

Kobold

The small and rapacious kobolds are seen by many as vermin to be exterminated rather than as an equal sentient race. Used by the empire as an enslaved workforce, the canine-faced kobolds have spread far beyond the ssethric territory and can be found in almost any corner of Arcanis.

Kobold Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Dexterity score is increased by +2 and your Constitution score is increased by +1.

Age: Kobolds reach maturity within 2 years and can live for 50 years.

Size: Kobolds stand between 3 to 4 feet tall, and average 120 pounds. Your size is Small.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Adaptable Minds: Kobolds are quite cleaver and have proficiency in one skill of your choice. Additionally, females are proficient in Medicine while males have proficiency with one tool other than thieves' tools.

Cold Susceptibility: When exposed to temperatures below 40 °F for more than 1 minute the you suffer disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws until you spend 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Darkvision: You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Pack Tactics: You have advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of your allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Natural Armor: When you aren't wearing armor, your AC equals 13 + your Dexterity modifier. You can wield a shield and still gain this benefit.

Ssethric: You are considered both ssethric and humanoid for the purposes of spells and feat accessibility.

Animal Features: Other races find it difficult to read your facial expressions to determine your intent. Non-ssethrics suffer disadvantage on all Wisdom (Insight) checks when attempting to discern your intentions.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire or possess the Outcast background.

Languages and Literacy: You can speak Ssethric and Ss'ressen. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are not literate.

Naga

Although relatively few in number, the naga are the dominant ruling class of the Ssethregoran Empire. A bioengineered race, their mental capabilities are second to none, creating some of the most powerful arcane and psionic spell casters on all of Arcanis.

All naga belong to one of three sub-species, known as *Houses*. All nagas do not possess any appendages on their sleek, serpentine bodies, though other features are unique to the various houses.

Common Naga Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Intelligence score is increased by +2 and your Wisdom score is increased by +1.

Age: Naga are long lived but quickly grow to maturity in 10 years, living up to 800 to 1000 years of age.

Size: Naga are quite long, averaging 8 to 11 feet in length and weighing as much as 300 pounds. Your size is Large.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet and have a swim speed of 30 feet.

Arcane Adaptations: You gain the *mage hand* cantrip.

Analytical Mind: You are proficient in Arcana.

Cold Susceptibility: When exposed to temperatures below 40 °F for more than 1 minute the you suffer disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws until you spend 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Darkvision: You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Elder Spellcaster: Naga are one of the few races capable of understanding the intricacies of the Elder Tradition of arcane magic. If you want to gain the spellcasting feature as a member of the arcane Arcanum,

you must do so by choosing classes or archetypes that are part of the Elder Tradition.

Natural Armor: When you aren't wearing armor, your AC equals 12 + your proficiency bonus. You do not possess hands, so you cannot wield a shield.

Natural Weapons: You possess a wicked bite and a powerful tail. Your bite attack deals 1d4 piercing damage and is considered both a finesse and light weapon. Upon reaching 6th level your bite's damage increases to 1d6 piercing damage.

Your tail deals 1d4 bludgeoning damage and is considered both a finesse and light weapon. Upon reaching 6th level, your tail's damage increases to 1d6 bludgeoning damage. Additionally, once per turn you may shove a creature with your tail as a bonus action.

Master's Control: As a bonus action you can suppress the Ss'ressen Frenzy of ss'ressen within 60 feet of you. The frenzy continues to be suppressed for 1 hour after the ss'ressen leaves your presence.

Poison Immunity: You are immune to poison damage and the poisoned condition.

Psionic Potential: You are capable of taking levels in a class or subclass that grants access to Psionics.

Serpentine Body: You have a serpent's body, and do not possess hands. You may manipulate small items with your mouth such as wands, but may not wield weapons, shield, or use items such as boots. Any armor must be specifically manufactured for your body type. When casting spells, you use your tail to preform somatic components.

Ssethric: You are considered both ssethric and monstrosity for the purposes of spells and feat accessibility.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire.

Languages and Literacy: You can speak Eoan, Ssethric, and Ss'ressen. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are literate.

Naga Houses

There are three naga Houses, each with their own unique abilities. You must choose to belong to one of the three naga subspecies.

Naga of House Kahss

Advanced Knowledge: You gain proficiency in Psionics.

Awakened: Choose one psionic power. You utilize this power as if you were a psion equal to your full character level.

Mastery of Arcane Mysteries: You learn a cantrip from the elder sorcerer spell list.

Naga of House Sardatis

Precognitive: You may cast *precognition*† as a ritual upon yourself, regaining the ability to do so after completing a long rest. Intelligence is your spell casting ability for this spell.

Stinger: Your tail ends in a large stinger like a scorpion. Replacing your normal tail attack, once per turn you may attack with your stinger as an attack action. Your stinger is considered a finesse weapon that deals 1d4 piercing damage. Any creature struck by your stinger must succeed on a Constitution saving throw with the DC equal to 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus or suffer 1d10 points of poison damage. Your poison damage increases to (2d10) 5th level, (3d10) 11th level, (4d12) 17th level.

Naga of House Taricha

Combat Manifester: You have advantage on all Concentration saving throws to retain concentration on psionic spell expressions.

Constrict: If you start your turn with a creature of Medium size or smaller grappled with your tail you may use an action to try to pin that creature. Make another grapple attack, and if successful both you and the target are restrained until the grapple ends.

Pleisauran

Found in the warm, shallow waters around and in the Kraldjur Morass, the pleisaurans are the aquatic taskmasters of ssethric society. Possessed with a cruel cunning, they excel at commanding the hundreds of slaves under ssethric control.

Pleisauran Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Strength score is increased by +2 and your Dexterity score is increased by +1.

Age: Pleisaurans reach maturity within 15 years and can live for 80 to 100 years.

Size: Pleisaurans stand between 7 to 8 feet tall, and weigh an average 350 pounds. Your size is Large.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Aquatic: You have a swim speed equal to your base speed. In addition, you can hold your breath for a number of hours equal to 5 + your Constitution modifier. After you run out of breath you start suffocating as normal. Additionally, thanks to your keeled tail, you have advantage on all Strength (Athletics) checks when swimming and may dash while swimming as a bonus action.

Cold Susceptibility: When exposed to temperatures below 40 °F for more than 1 minute the you suffer disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws until you spend 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Darkvision: You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Natural Armor: When you aren't wearing armor, your AC equals 12 + your dexterity bonus. You can wield a shield and still gain this benefit.

Natural Weapons: You have a bite attack that deals

1d6 piercing damage and is considered both a finesse and light weapon. Upon reaching 6th level your bite's damage increases to 1d8 piercing damage.

Powerful Frame: You are proficient in Athletics.

Animal Features: Other races find it difficult to read your facial expressions to determine your intent. Non-ssethrics suffer disadvantage on all Wisdom (Insight) checks when attempting to discern your intentions.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire.

Languages and Literacy: You can speak Ssethric and Ss'ressen. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are not literate.

Rhamphorike

Another bioengineered race, the rhamphorikes provide the mastery of the air needed by the empire. These small, reddish hued creatures are covered in a fine layer of scales, with a long, whip-like tail and a pair of translucent tan membrane wings.

Rhamphorike Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Dexterity score is increased by +2 and your Wisdom score is increased by +1.

Age: Rhamphorikes reach maturity within 10 years and can reach the age of 60 to 80.

Size: Rhamphorikes stand between 5 to 5 and a half feet tall, and weigh an average 150 pounds. Your size is Medium.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 20 feet and you have a fly speed of 30 feet. You cannot fly with a shield equipped.

Natural Flight: You have advantage on all Athletics and Acrobatics checks while flying. While flying you may dash as a bonus action, regaining the ability to do so after completing a short rest.

Engineered Race: Rhamphorike are incapable of learning any form of spell casting.

Cold Susceptibility: When exposed to temperatures below 40 °F for more than 1 minute the you suffer disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws until you spend 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Darkvision: You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Natural Armor: When you aren't wearing armor, your AC equals 12 + your dexterity bonus. You can wield a shield and still gain this benefit but cannot fly while carrying a shield.

Natural Weapons: Your bite attack deals 1d6 piercing damage and is considered both a finesse and light weapon. Upon reaching 6th level your bite's damage increases to 1d8 piercing damage.

Powerful Frame: You are proficient in Acrobatics.

Ssethric: You are considered both ssethric and humanoid for the purposes of feat accessibility.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire.

Languages and Literacy: You can speak Ssethric and Ss'ressen. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are not literate.

Shell-Backs

This once proud, ancient race's settlements once dotted the shoreline of the Known Lands, until their rivals, the hylis joined forces with the ssethrics to decimate and subjugate them. Now, bereft of any knowledge of their culture and even their people's name, the Heroes of the shell-backs wander the world in search of who they are and what they can become.

Class Restrictions: Shell-backs cannot take the fury class. Additionally, shell-backs do not follow any religion or have clergy, so they cannot take the cleric or holy champion classes.

Shell-Back Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Strength score is increased by +2 and your Constitution and Wisdom scores increase by +1.

Size: Shell-backs commonly stand at a height of 5 and a half to 6 and a half and weigh between 160 to 250lbs. Your size is Medium.

Speed: Your walking speed is 25 feet and a swim speed of 30 feet.

Powerful Lungs: You can hold your breath for 1 hour. After you run out of breath you start suffocating as normal.

Elder Spellcasters: Shell-backs are one of the few races capable of understanding the intricacies of the Elder Tradition of arcane magic. If you want to gain the spellcasting feature as a member of the arcane arcanum, you must do so by choosing classes or archetypes that are part of the Elder Tradition.

Natural Armor: Shell-backs have a natural armor class of 15 + your Dexterity modifier. With the exception of shields, you may not benefit from wearing armor. You may have armor runes inscribed upon your shell as if it was a suit of regular armor.

Primal Wisdom: You may choose to use your Wisdom score in place of your Charisma score as your spell spellcasting ability score for primal spell casting classes and sub-classes.

Powerful Bite: You may use your bite as an unarmed attack with which you are proficient. Upon a successful hit you deal 1d4 plus your Strength modifier of piercing damage. This damage increases to

1d6 once you reach 5th level.

Ungainly Form: You have disadvantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks.

Seeker: You gain proficiency in both History and Investigation.

Shell-Back: When the target of an attack you may, as a reaction, retreat into your shell. While in your shell you become prone and can't take any actions with the exception of coming out of your shell, which also requires an action. You may remain within your shell for up to 8 hours at a time. While in your shell you have resistance to all damage with the exception of psychic damage. You regain the use of this ability after completing a short or long rest. Alternatively, you may choose to use an action to enter your shell whenever you wish.

Ssethric: You are considered both ssethric and humanoid for the purposes of spells and feat accessibility.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire.

Languages and Literacy: You can read and write Quipu, as it is not a spoken language, as well Ssethric. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are literate.

Ssanu

Once the rulers of a vast and powerful empire, the ssanu continue to be a potent force in modern-day Arcanis due to their insidious intellect and duplicitous nature. Masters of biomancy, their knowledge of science and the arcane arts is unparalleled by any of the peoples of the Known Lands. It is only their hubris that has laid them low, by creating the instruments of their own destruction. Yet still they scheme, plotting their return to power and eventual dominion over the whole of Arcanis.

Ssanu Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Intelligence score is increased by +2 and your Constitution score is increased by +1.

Age: Ssanu reach maturity within 10 years and can live for 300 to 400 years.

Size: Serpentine in form, ssanu can be up to 9 to 12 feet long, but when standing upright on their coils, ssanu stand between 6 to 7 feet tall and weigh an average 280 pounds. Your size is Medium.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet and have a swim speed of 40 feet.

Elder Spellcasters: Ssanu are one of the few races capable of understanding the intricacies of the Elder Tradition of arcane magic. If you want to gain the spellcasting feature as a member of the arcane arcanum, you must do so by choosing classes or archetypes that are part of the Elder Tradition.

Cold Susceptibility: When exposed to temperatures below 40 °F for more than 1 minute the you suffer disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws until you spend 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Psionic Potential: You are capable of taking levels in a class or subclass that grants access to Psionics.

Darkvision: You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Ssanu's Body: You have a serpent's body, with the upper torso of a humanoid. You cannot use items such as boots, greaves, or leggings. You can use humanoid medium or light armor that does not protect the legs, such as cuirasses or breastplates but not plate mail. If you wear armor that protects more than the upper torso, you reduce the armor's base AC by 1 to a minimum of 11. Additionally, you are resistant to poison damage and have advantage on all saving throws to resist the poisoned condition.

Ssethric: You are considered both ssethric and monstrosity for the purposes of spells and feat accessibility.

Master's Control: As a bonus action you can suppress the Ss'ressen Frenzy of ss'ressen within 60 feet of you. The frenzy continues to be suppressed for one hour after the ss'ressen leaves your presence.

Prodigy: All ssanu possess some level of arcane or psionic training. You learn one cantrip from the elder sorcerer spell list or one psionic power of your choice. Your manifesting and spell casting ability score is Intelligence. You are also gain proficiency with both the Arcana and Psionics skills.

Reptilian Features: Other races find it difficult to read your facial expressions to determine your intent. Non-ssethrics suffer disadvantage on all Wisdom (Insight) checks when attempting to discern your intentions.

Natural Armor: When you aren't wearing armor, your AC equals 12 + your Dexterity bonus. You can wield a shield and still gain this benefit.

Natural Weapons: You possess a bite attack that deals 1d4 piercing damage and are considered both a finesse and light weapon. Upon reaching 6th level the damage of your natural attacks increases to 1d6 piercing damage.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire.

Languages and Literacy: You speak Ssethric, Eloran, and Ss'ressen. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are literate.

Ss'ressen

Created from an original and long forgotten egg clutch of ss'ressen, these creatures have been bred and modified to serve the needs of the empire. There now exist many different egg clutches, each with their own unique talents and abilities. Though they outnumber the ssanu and naga that lord over them, a final modification to

their species, which added pheromones that trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy in other egg clutches, prevents them from allying with one another.

Common Ss'ressen Traits

All Ss'ressen share the following traits:

Age: Ss'ressen mature much faster than humans, reaching maturity at age 8. However, due to their duties and obligations to the clutch, ss'ressen are not free to act of their own will until age 24. Ss'ressen lifespan depends on their egg clutch, but most can live to 60 years.

Size: Females stand between 5 feet 5 inches and 5 feet 9 inches in height and weigh between 150 to 180 lbs. Males stand between 5 feet 10 inches and 6 feet 2 inches and weigh between 250 and 300 lbs. Your size is Medium.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Darkvision: Your race has a wider range of vision than humans. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Cold Susceptibility: When exposed to temperatures below 40 °F for more than 1 minute the you suffer disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws until you spend 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Controlled Breeding: Heat affects the development of ss'ressen in many ways, affecting the intelligence and arcane abilities of the hatchlings. As these are tied to heat, females tend to be more intelligent than males. Only female ss'ressen are capable of wielding arcane power.

More as a factor of their matriarchal society rather than any biological factor, only female ss'ressen may be clerics. No male ss'ressen can become a cleric. Male ss'ressen may become shamans, but must venerate Jeggal Sag.

Natural Weapon: Ss'ressen possess sharp claws, which they can use as natural weapons. Your claws deal 1d4 slashing damage and are considered both finesse and light weapons. Upon reaching 6th level your claws deal 1d6 damage.

Natural Armor: When you aren't wearing armor, your AC equals 12 + your Dexterity modifier. You can wield a shield and still gain this benefit.

Ss'ressen Frenzy: Any time you come within 30 feet of another ss'ressen from a different and unrelated egg clutch you must make a successful DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack roll or ability check that is not directed at the members of the egg clutch who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have advantage. At the end of each of your turns, you can attempt a new Wisdom saving throw.

If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no living ss'ressen of an unrelated egg clutch within 30 feet or a ssanu comes with 30 feet, as they can consciously suppress the pheromones causing the frenzy.

If you succeed on the Wisdom saving throw, you can control yourself, for now. For the next hour, you can resist the maddening scent of the egg clutch whose members triggered your frenzy. If you come across ss'ressen of a different egg clutch, you must make a new Wisdom saving throw, or fly into a frenzy once more.

Ssethric: You are considered both ssethric and humanoid for the purposes of spells and feat accessibility.

Nationality: You must be from the Ssethregoran Empire, unless the entry of a ss'ressen egg clutch specifies otherwise.

Languages and Literacy: You speak Ssethric and Ss'ressen. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. Females are literate but male are not, though literacy as well as additional languages can be acquired though your chosen background.

Egg Clutch: There are several unique ss'ressen egg clutches, choose one of the following ss'ressen sub-races.

Ashen Hide Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: If you are male, your Strength score is increased by +2 and your Constitution score is increased by +1. If female, your Dexterity score is increased by +2, and your Intelligence score is increased by +1.

Improved Natural Armor: Ashen Hide ss'ressen possess thicker hide then most ss'ressen, gaining a +1 bonus to their natural armor racial trait.

Born in Ash and Fire: You are resistant to fire damage.

Distant Relations: Ashen Hides, Black Talons, and Ghost Scale ss'ressen, as well as the Brood of Ven val'Sosi, do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy when they encounter one another.

Nationality: Your nationality is Canceri.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Cancerese.

Barbed Tail Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: If you are male, your Strength score is increased by +2 and your Constitution score is increased by +1. If female, your Strength score is increased by +2, and your Wisdom score is increased by +1.

Barbed Tail: Barbed Tail may use their tails as deadly natural weapons. You may make a melee attack with your barbed tail, dealing 2d4 piercing damage on a successful hit. Upon reaching 6th level your tail deals 2d6 Piercing damage. You gain advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Ssethric.

Black Talon Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: If you are male, your Strength score is increased by +2 and your Dexterity score increases by +1. If female, your Dexterity score increases by +2, and your Wisdom score increases by +1.

Saurian Tail: Whenever you make an Acrobatics or Athletics check related to balancing, jumping, or swimming, you are considered proficient in the applicable skill. If you are already proficient in Acrobatics or Athletics your proficiency bonus is doubled when making such checks, due to the balance and support provided by your tail.

Distant Relations: Ashen Hides, Black Talons, and Ghost Scale ss'ressen, as well as the Brood of Ven val'Sosi, do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy when they are encountered.

Nationality: You must be from Sulfur Marsh in Milandir.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Milandisian.

Black Talon Egg Clutch: Brood of Ven

You possess all the traits of the Black Talon egg clutch except for the following changes.

Ability Score Increase: Your Charisma score is increased by +2, and your Wisdom score is increased by +1.

Awakened: Choose one psionic power. Charisma is your manifesting ability for this power. You utilize this power as if you were a psion equal to your full character level

Males Only: All members of the Brood of Ven are male.

Curled Tail Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: If you are male, your Dexterity score is increased by +2 and your Wisdom score is increased by +1. If female, your Wisdom score is increased by +2, and your Dexterity score is increased by +1.

Soft Hands: Curled Tail Ss'ressen do not possess natural claw attacks like other ss'ressen, but instead have advantage on all Strength (Athletics) checks made while climbing.

Curled Tail: You possess an especially long, prehensile tail that is both incredibly strong and flexible. You may use

your tail to hold and manipulate small objects weighing no more than 5 lbs. You may also use your tail to wield a light and finesse weapon, allowing you to attack with the weapon as a bonus action when you take the attack action.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Ssethric.

Dark Crest Egg Clutch

Class Restrictions: Dark Crest ss'ressen are trained to remain calm in the most stressful situations and cannot take the fury class. Clerics and holy champions must worship either Kassegore or Yig.

Ability Score Increase: Regardless of sex, your Dexterity score is increased by +2 and your Constitution and Wisdom scores is increased by +1.

Sagittal Crest: Creatures that utilize heat vision, such as val of Nier's bloodline, have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to see you with their ability to see heat patterns.

Adapted Pheromones: You have advantage on all saving throws to resist becoming frightened. Additionally, Dark Crest are not susceptible to Ss'ressen Frenzy and do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy in ss'ressen of other egg clutches.

Improved Darkvision: Your egg clutch possesses an enhanced form of darkvision, allowing you to see in dim light within 120 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. Unlike other ss'ressen egg clutches, you can discern colors in darkness.

Night Hunters: You are proficient in Stealth. Additionally, you have advantage on all Dexterity (Stealth) checks when hiding in areas of dim light as long as you are dressed in dark clothing or armor.

Nationality: Being outcasts of the Ssethregoran Empire, the Dark Crest do not truly have a nation to call their own, thus hold no alliance to any nation other than their own egg clutch.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Ssethric.

Emerald Scale Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: If you are male, your Wisdom score is increased by +2 and your Strength score is increased by +1. If female, your Wisdom score is increased by +2, and your Intelligence score is increased by +1.

Adaptive Mind: You gain proficiency in any two skills of your choice.

Keen Mind: You have advantage on all Wisdom (Perceptron) and Intelligence (Investigation) checks. Note that this increases your passive Perception by 5.

Saurian Tail: You add your proficiency bonus to all Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) check related to balancing, jumping, or swimming even if you are not proficient in those skills. If you are already proficient in Acrobatics or Athletics your proficiency bonus is doubled when making such checks, due to the balance and support provided by your tail.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Ssethric.

Flaming Tongue Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: If you are male, your Dexterity score is increased by +2 and your Wisdom score is increased by +1. If female, your Dexterity score is increased by +2, and your Strength score is increased by +1.

Flame Tongue: Gout of Flame: As an action, you can exhale flames, forcing all creatures in a 15 foot cone to make a Dexterity saving throw. The DC for this saving throw equals 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus. A creature takes 2d6 fire damage on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful save. The damage increases to 3d6 at 6th level, 4d6 at 11th level, and 5d6 at 16th level. After you use your breath weapon, you can't use it again until you complete a short or long rest.

Flame Tongue: Fire Spittle: As an action, you may spit a glob of fiery saliva at a single target. You are proficient with this ranged attack, which has a range of 30/60. Upon a successful hit you deal damage equal to 1d8 plus your dexterity modifier. This damage increases to 2d8 at 6th level, 3d8 at 11th level, and 4d8 at 16th level.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Ssethric.

Ghost Scale Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increases: If you are male, your Strength score is increased by +2, and your Dexterity score is increased by +1. If you are female, your Intelligence score is increased by +2, and your Wisdom score is increased by +1.

Chameleon Skin: You gain proficiency in the Stealth skill. When you aren't wearing armor, you add double your proficiency bonus to all Dexterity (Stealth) checks. If you do nothing for a turn, you can attempt to hide even when you are not obscured

Distant Relations: Ashen Hides, Black Talons, and Ghost Scale ss'ressen, as well as the Brood of Ven val'Sosi do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy when they encounter one another.

Nationality: You must be from a secret location beneath Old Coryan in the Coryani Empire.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Low Coryani.

Horned Jowl Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: If you are male, your Strength score is increased by +2 and your Constitution score is increased by +1. If female, your Constitution score is increased by +2, and your Strength score is increased by +1.

Size: Regardless of sex, Horned Jowl ss'ressen stand between 9 and a half and 10 feet tall and weigh between 300 to 400 lbs. Your size is Large. Remember, your size requires you to use weapons and armor appropriate to your size, commonly costing double the listed price.

Immense Form: You gain proficiency in Athletics. Unlike most races, your maximum Strength is 22, instead of 20. You increase your maximum hit points by 2 at first level, and increase your maximum hit points by 1 for each additional level after the 1st.

Improved Natural Armor: You gain a +1 bonus to your natural armor racial trait.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Ssethric.

Long Claw Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: Regardless of sex, your Dexterity score is increased by +2 and your Charisma score is increased by +1.

Devotion: Due to their conditioning, the Long Claw ss'ressen are intensely devoted to their ssanu and naga masters. You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or similar effects that would make you act against the naga or ssanu.

Improved Darkvision: Your egg clutch possesses an enhanced form of darkvision, allowing you to see in dim light within 120 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. Unlike other ss'ressen egg clutches, you can discern colors in darkness.

Improved Natural Attacks: Long Claw ss'ressen have large and exceptionally sharp claws that deal 1d6 slashing damage. This damage increases to 1d8 upon reaching 6th level.

Shape Shift: When exposed to a member of any ss'ressen egg clutch, such as Black Talon or Emerald Scale, for 1 minute you may change their appearance to pass as a member of that egg clutch. You can make themselves shorter or taller by up to 1 foot, and change their body weight by up to 50 lbs. You cannot change your basic physique, however, such as growing additional limbs, nor can you copy a specific individual ss'ressen.

This ability is not a magical ability and cannot be detected by magical means as it is a physical change that they control. You may maintain this form indefinitely, requiring no concentration. If you die, your body changes back to its true form after 1 hour.

Suppress Pheromones: You have advantage on all saves to resist becoming frightened. Additionally, you are not susceptible to Ss'ressen Frenzy but may choose whether or not to succumb to it. Also, you do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy in ss'ressen from other egg clutches.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Ssethric. You are literate.

Razor Claw Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: If you are male, your Strength score is increased by +2 and your Dexterity score is increased by +1. If female, your Dexterity score is increased by +2, and your Wisdom score is increased by +1.

Improved Natural Attacks: Razor Claw Ss'ressen have large, exceptionally sharp claws that deal 1d6 slashing damage. This increases to 1d8 upon reaching 6th level.

Improved Natural Armor: You gain a +2 bonus to your natural armor racial trait. Your unique hide requires that you wear armor that is custom made, commonly costing double the listed price.

Razor Spines: When the target of a When you are the target of a melee attack by an adjacent creature you may use your reaction to force them to make a Dexterity saving throw with a DC equal to 8 + your Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus. Your attacker suffers 2d8 piercing damage on a failed saving throw, or half on a successful saving throw. You regain the ability to do so after completing a short or long rest.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Ssethric.

Venomous Scale Egg Clutch

Ability Score Increase: If you are male, your Dexterity score is increased by +2 and your Constitution score is increased by +1. If female, your Wisdom score is increased by +2, and your Dexterity score is increased by +1.

Poison Spittle: As an action, you can exhale poison in a 15 foot cone. All creatures in the affected area suffer 1d4 poison damage. The damage increases to 2d4 at 6th level, 3d4 at 11th level, and 4d4 at 16th level. Additionally, all creatures affected must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC equal to 8 + your Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus or become incapacitated for 1 minute. At the end of their turn they can make an additional Constitution saving throw, ending the condition upon a successful save. If a targeted creature fails the saving throw by more than 5 they are paralyzed instead, but may continue to make saves to end the condition. Once used, you regain the use this ability after completing a long rest.

Natural Attacks: Your natural claw attacks do not increase in damage upon reaching 6th level. Instead you possess a bite attack with which you are proficient. When taking the attack action, you may bite a creature as a bonus action, attacking using either your Dexterity or Strength bonus to hit. Upon a successful hit you deal 1d4 piercing damage plus your strength bonus. This damage increases to 1d6 piercing damage upon reaching 6th level.

Natural Immunities: You are resistant to poison damage and immune to the poisoned condition.

Languages and Literacy: In addition to Ss'ressen, you also speak Ssethric.

Yissera

Created to infiltrate and collect information on the humans for their ssethric masters, yissera appear just like their intended targets. Unfortunately, they suffer from the same defect as the hussuma and begin to show signs of their ssethric nature as they grow older.

Class Restrictions: Yissera may not take the shaman or fury class. If you choose to make your yissera a cleric or holy champion, you must choose an aspect or order dedicated to Yig. Female yissera may choose to be either clerics or holy champions, while males can only become holy champions. Clerics may only choose the clerical aspect of *The Mistress of Lies*. Holy champions are limited to the *Order of the Fang*.

Yissera Traits

Ability Score Increase: Your Dexterity score is increased by +2 and both your Charisma and Wisdom scores are increased by +1.

Size: Like humans, yissera vary widely in height and build, with some barely 5 feet tall to others reaching a height of well over 6 feet. Your size is Medium.

Speed: Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Forked Tongue: You have advantage on Charisma (Deception) and Charisma (Performance) checks when trying to pass yourself off as a different person. You can mimic the speech patterns and accents of a human as long as you heard one speaking in that dialect for at least 1 minute.

Face of Many Masks: When exposed to a human ethnic group, such as Illonian Coryani or Altherian, over a period of 5 days you may change your appearance to pass as a native of that ethnicity. You may make yourself shorter or taller by up to 1 foot, and change your body weight by up to 50 lbs. You cannot change your basic human physique, however, such as growing additional limbs, nor can you copy a specific person. This ability is not a magical ability and cannot be detected by magical means as it is a physical change that you control. You may maintain this form indefinitely, requiring no concentration. If you die, your body begins to change back to your original form within 1 hour.

Fearless: You have advantage on all saving throws to resist becoming frightened.

Poisonous: You possess retractable fangs that can deliver a poisonous bite. You may bite a creature as an unarmed attack, dealing 1 piercing damage plus your Strength bonus plus 1d4 poison damage. Alternatively, you may spit your poison as if you had cast the spell *poison spray* using your Dexterity. Lastly, you possess immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition.

Ssethric: You are considered both ssethric and humanoid for the purposes of spells and feat accessibility.

Nationality: You must be from either the Abessian Dominion or the Ssethregoran Empire.

Languages and Literacy: You can speak Ssethric and Low Coryani. If you are from the Abessian Dominions, you also speak Myrantian. You also speak a number of additional languages equal to your Intelligence modifier. You are literate.

New Class Options

Clerical Aspects

Aspect of Kassegore: The Devourer

Kassegore is an unforgiving god and the ssethrics believe that all that has ever been created—or ever will be created—returns to him. Nothing escapes the all-consuming maw of Kassegore. In His aspect as the Devourer, Kassegore is an embodiment of the end of the natural cycle of life and death. Anything that tries to cheat death and deny Him their soul is anathema to that purpose.

Race Restrictions

Any ssethric being who worships Kassegore has the capacity to become a cleric of Kassegore, but some groups are barred from the priesthood for social reasons, such as male ss'ressen. The majority of His present clergy comes from His most devout followers, the iguadons and the Emerald Scale ss'ressen.

Tenets of Faith

Clerics who venerate Kassegore's aspect as the Lord of Destruction, share the following tenets and traditions of belief:

The Great Cycle: The natural order of things, known as the Great Cycle, is the most important aspect to followers of Kassegore. All life exists as a balance and anything which upsets this balance must be purged.

His Children: While the adherents of Kassegore seek balance above all else, they will always act in the interests of ssethric beings over any and all other creatures.

Merciless: The terminally ill, the wounded, and the old have had their time and must reenter the Great Cycle. Be they family, friend, or loved one, it does not matter. Harden your heart and send them to Kassegore.

Strength: Worshipers of Kassegore venerate the iron will and strength of their deity and seek to emulate Him in all ways.

Suffer Not the Undead: Undead creatures circumvent the Great Cycle by destroying their soul to grant them immortality. This affront to Kassegore cannot be abided. Destroy the undead in whatever form it takes.

Kassegore, the Devourer

Cleric Level	Spells
1st	*Inflict wounds, protection from evil and good*
3rd	*Enhance ability, primal senses**
5th	*Fear, protection from energy*
7th	*Arcane eye, vampiric touch*
9th	*Cloudkill, hallow*

Aspect Proficiencies

When you choose this aspect at 1st level, you gain the following proficiencies:

Armor: Medium armor, heavy armor, and shields
Skills: Athletics or Intimidate

Primal Destroyer

At 1st level, when you use an attack action, you may make an additional weapon attack as a bonus action as long as it is a natural attack. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all expended uses after completing a long rest.

Channel Divinity: All Things Must Die

Beginning at 2nd level you can use your Channel Divinity to empower your attacks against those who seek to escape the natural cycle of life and death.

Upon making a successful melee weapon attack, as a bonus action you do additional radiant damage equal to 5 + your cleric level.

Channel Divinity: Enforcer of Order

Also at 2nd level you can use your Channel Divinity to invoke the fear of utter destruction in others. As an action you hold up your holy symbol and all creatures within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom saving throw or become stunned until the end of your next turn.

Stoic in the Face of Disorder

At 6th level you have advantage on all saving throws against effects that cause the charmed, frightened, or stunned conditions.

Divine Strike

At 8th level you gain the ability to infuse your attacks with divine energy. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with a weapon attack or unarmed strike, you can cause that attack to deal an additional 1d8 radiant damage. When you reach 14th level, the extra damage increases to 2d8.

Fall Before the Devourer

At 17th level when you deal damage using your Divine Strike ability. That creature gains the incapacitated condition until the beginning of your next turn or until they take hit point damage.

Aspect of Yig: Yig of the Shifting Scales

Yig is worshipped by the various ssethric races, but the ssanu, as befits Her favorite children, reserve the aspect of Yig of the Shifting Scales solely for themselves. The ssanu jealously guard the rites and rituals pertaining to this aspect, as they view it as venerating Yig in Her purest form. Others may venerate the Mother of Ssethrics through Her lesser aspects, but they will never truly know Her as the ssanu do.

Race Restrictions

Only ssanu may become a cleric of Yig in Her aspect of Yig of the Shifting Scales.

Tenets of Faith

Clerics who revere Yig of the Shifting Scales, share the following tenets and traditions:

Deception: Battle is for the unimaginative and the imbecilic. Lies and twists of the truth can be deadlier than the edge of a blade and She teaches us to use that skill to further our aims.

Intelligence:Kassegore may value brute strength, but Yig places intelligence and cunning above all other traits. Blessed are the schemers and thinkers to the Mother of Ssethrics.

Master Schemer: Plots within plots, plans within plans. Yig teaches us to always have multiple ploys interwoven with one another to ensure success. Play multiple foes against one another and make them believe that they are doing what *they* want, even though they are furthering your goals.

Propagation of the Species: Yig fills others with lust and the desire to propagate the species. As the one who breathed life into the ssethric people, their continued existence is of the highest importance.

Survival: The pleasures of the flesh and of material wealth is to be luxuriated upon. When personal survival is at stake, however, they should be the first things sacrificed if that will ensure your continued existence.

Yig of the Shifting Scales

Cleric Level	Spells
1st	*Charm person, disguise self*
3rd	*Blur, misty step*
5th	*Nondetection, tongues*
7th	*Guardian of faith, polymorph*
9th	*Dominate person, dispel evil and good*

Aspect Proficiencies

When you choose this aspect at 1st level, you gain the following proficiencies:

Weapons: Unarmed
Tools: Disguise kit
Skills: Deception, Insight

Ever-Shifting Coils

Beginning at 1st level when you are attacked by a creature within 30 feet of you that you can see and are not surprised, as a reaction you can impose disadvantage on that attack roll.

You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum 1). You regain all uses of this ability after finishing a long rest.

Channel Divinity: Mirage

At 2nd level, as an action you can create a perfect illusion of yourself that lasts for 1 minute, which requires concentration to maintain. You become invisible as if you had cast *invisibility* as a perfect illusionary duplicate of yourself appears in a space adjacent to you appearing as if it stepped out of your space. As a bonus action on your turn, you can move the illusion up to 30 feet to a maximum of 60 feet from your location.

For the duration, you can cast spells and use other abilities as though you were in the illusion's space, but you must use your own senses. Your illusion has no physical presence and cannot physically attack or perform other physical actions, such as open doors. Your illusion can be attacked and is considered to have your Armor Class and hit points equal to your cleric level. You become visible and the illusion disappears if you move, the illusion is reduced to 0 hit points, or is dismissed. You may end this effect as a bonus action.

Serpent's Tongue

Also upon reaching 2nd level, you double the proficiency bonus for any ability check made with either the Deception or Insight skill. You also learn the cantrip poison spray.

Channel Divinity: Ever-moving

At 6th level, as an action you can teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space that you can see.

Potent Spellcasting

At 8th level, you add your Wisdom modifier to the damage you deal with any cleric cantrip.

Ever-Elusive

At 17th level, whenever a creature attacks you, that creature must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, that creature either must attack a different creature in range or have their attack automatically miss. On a successful save, that creature is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

Aspect of Yig: Yig, the Mistress of Lies

Yig's aspect as Mistress of Lies is one well suited to the yissera, as well as other ssethric races. While the ssanu covetously keep the rites and rituals needed to venerate Her aspect as Yig of the Shifting Scales, that of the Mother of Ssethrics is available to others. With the imposition of the varn religion, the number of those venerating the Old Gods has greatly diminished, with primarily the yissera keeping that aspect of worship alive.

Having been created as the spies and infiltrators, this aspect quickly became the patron of the hussuma and yissera tasked to insinuate themselves among the enemies of the empire and undermine them. Curiously, the hussuma quickly abandoned Yig for the new varn religion, particularly Zedok, leaving the yissera to continue this clerical tradition.

Whether due to the yissera's conditioning to serve their ssanu masters or for some ecclesiastical reason, the clergy of this aspect will also defer and take guidance from the priesthood of the Yig of the Shifting Scales aspect.

Race Restrictions

Any ssethric race, other than the ssanu, that venerates Yig, may become a cleric of Yig in Her aspect as the Mistress of Lies, though it is rare to find any but yissera who still venerate this aspect.

Tenets of Faith

Clerics who revere Yig, the Mistress of Lies, share the following tents and traditions of belief:

Deception: Battle is for the unimaginative and the imbecilic. Lies and twists of the truth can be deadlier than the edge of a blade and She teaches us to use that skill to further our aims.

Feign Sincerity Yig teaches that to get close enough to one's enemies to strike, one must subsume their true feelings and let others believe in your sincere love or wishes or their good health. Worm past their defenses with your earnestness and strike when they least expect it.

Information: Gold and other signs of wealth are only displays of power to fools. Knowledge is true power, especially the type of hidden information that can be used against the enemy.

Intelligence: Kassegore may value brute strength, but Yig places intelligence and cunning above all other traits. Blessed are the schemers and thinkers to the Mother of Ssethrics.

Obfuscation: Those who display their feelings and intentions are fools, allowing all to see their weakness. Shield your true goals and emotions so that they are never used against you.

Yig, the Mistress of Lies

Cleric Level	Spells
1st	*Disguise self, illusory script*
3rd	*Invisibility, misty step*
5th	*Major image, nondetection*
7th	*Confusion, greater invisibility*
9th	*Dominate person, modify memory*

Aspect Proficiencies

When you choose this aspect at 1st level, you gain the following proficiencies:

Tools: Thieves' tools

Skills: Persuasion, Stealth

Prayers of Two Tongues: Beginning at 1st level, when you cast any divine spells from the cleric spell list or bonus spells listed above, anyone nearby hear them as if they were clerical spells of Anshar. However, clerics and holy champions of Anshar hear your prayers for what they truly are.

Ever-shifting Coils

Also at 1st level, when you are attacked by a creature within 30 feet of you that you can see and are not surprised, and as a reaction you can impose disadvantage on their attack roll.

You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum 1). You regain all uses of this ability after finishing a long rest.

Channel Divinity: Charm Creatures

At 2nd level, as an action you may present your holy symbol and invoke the forked tongue of Yig. A number of creatures equal to your Charisma modifier within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom saving throw. If that creature fails its saving throw, it is charmed by you for 1 minute or until it takes damage. While charmed by you, it is friendly to you and other creatures you designate.

Due to of the strength of Yig's lies, creatures that are normally immune to the charmed condition instead have advantage on their saving throw.

Master Spy

Also beginning at 2nd level you gain proficiency with the disguise kit, forgery kit, and one gaming set of your choice. You also learn two languages and become literate in those languages.

Channel Divinity: Read Thoughts

At 6th level, as an action you may choose 1 creature that you can see within 60 feet of you. That creature must make a Wisdom saving throw. If that creature succeeds on their saving throw, you cannot attempt to read their thoughts again until after a long rest.

If the target creature fails their saving throw, you can read their surface thoughts for 1 minute or until they move out of range. These thoughts are limited to their immediate thoughts, such as current emotional state, current topic of discussion, etc. and does not allow

Yissera Priestess of Yig

you to delve into their memories.

While under the effects of this ability if you cast *suggestion* on the affected creature, it automatically fails it's saving throw to resist the spell.

Divine Strike

At 8th level, once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can cause the attack to deal an extra 1d8 damage of the same type dealt by the weapon to the target. When you reach 14th level, the extra damage increases to 2d8.

Soul of Deceit

At 17th level you can use your glib tongue to implant thoughts directly into the minds of your targets. Make a Charisma check against a single target within 30 feet who can both hear and understand you. They make an opposed Wisdom (Insight) check. If successful, you are able to implant a thought or suggestion into the mind of the target that is treated as if they came up with that thought or idea themselves.

Because you are not magically affecting their ideas, this new thought will not be detected using magical abilities that detect lies as the target creature believes this thought or idea to be their own.

Elder Sorcerer Traditions

Ssethric Elementalist

The ssethric elementalist is the backbone of the Ssethregoran Empire's arcane might. Specializing in the control of the very elements, elementalists can incinerate foes with eldritch blasts of fire, summon a dread creature from another plane of existence, or create an elemental of their own to do their bidding. Elementalists are drawn exclusively from the ranks of the naga and the ssanu. No other race has the innate ability necessary to master the complex techniques used by the ssethric elementalists, not even the elemental elorii who learned their sorcery from the ssethrics.

All ssethric elementalists are members of the Black Coil, the preeminent cabal of sorcerers in the empire. The Black Coil sends small forces of elementalists out to lend their devastating talents to military excursions of the highest priority.

Elementalists are broken down into three distinct groups, named after their founders: The Order of Ophiodes, known as Creationists; the Order of Ss'koreth, known as Conjurists; and the Order of Tantilla, known as Augmentalists. These three orders only interact to combine their magic to further the goals of the empire or to aid in the Black Coil's latest projects.

Race Restrictions

You must be either a naga or a ssanu to learn this Elder Tradition.

Hunted by Ymandragore

The Sorcerer King of Ymandragore hunts all arcane casters. Displaying your sorcerous skills while outside the empire openly or in a public setting is a sure way to attract the Harvester's attention.

Elemental Bond

Beginning at 2nd level choose one of the following elements: air, earth, fire, or water. You are now considered to be a source of that element to satisfy any material requirements for spells and abilities, and gain resistance to that element. You also gain vulnerability to its opposing element (air/lightning and earth/acid, fire and water/cold).

When casting *find familiar* your summoned creature will be an elemental of appropriate type to your selection. Once your element is chosen, you cannot change your choice.

Additionally, when you cast any spell that conjures elementals you may choose to summon a para-elemental as long as one of that elemental's natures matches your chosen element.

Elemental Domination

Also at 2nd level, when casting a spell that allows you to summon an elemental the spell lasts for twice as long as the duration listed in the spell.

Founder's Teaching

At 6th level you choose one of the three main paths of the Ssethric Elementalist: the Augmentalist (Order of Tantilla), the Conjurist (Order of Ss'koreth), or the Creationist (Order of Ophiodes). Once your order is chosen, it cannot be changed.

Augmentalist - Channel Elemental Power: When casting spells that cause damage appropriate to your Elemental Bond, these spells are considered to be cast using a spell slot 1 level higher. If the spell does not have rules for casting using a higher level spell slot, you instead add your intelligence bonus to the damage dealt. This damage bonus applies to one damage roll of a spell, not multiple rolls.

Conjurist – Elemental Summons: You learn the *conjure minor elemental* as an additional spell and may cast it as a 3rd level spell instead of a 4th level spell as long as you are summoning elementals appropriate to your Elemental Bond. When casting at higher levels, all listed effects also have their spell level reduced by 1 (summon twice as many elementals using a 5th level spell slot instead of a 6th level spell slot, for example).

Creationist – Elemental Creation: You create a single CR 1 elemental creature appropriate to your Elemental Bond that becomes your special companion, this includes para-elementals of which at least one of their elemental nature's matches your Elemental Bond. This elemental obeys your commands as best as it can. It rolls for initiative like any other creature, but you determine its actions, decisions, and so on. If you are incapacitated or absent, your elemental acts on its own.

Your elemental adds your proficiency bonus to its Armor Class, attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls. Whenever you gain the Ability Score Improvement class feature, your companion's abilities also improve. Your companion can increase one ability score of your choice by 2, or it can increase 2 ability scores of your choice by 1. Your companion cannot increase an ability score above 20 using this feature.

If your elemental is ever killed, you may create another one after 1 week of effort and expending 1,000 gp in resources.

Founder's Secrets

At 10th level your gain more options in your chosen elementalist path.

Augmentalist – Improved Elemental Empowerment: When casting spells that cause damage appropriate to your Elemental Bond, those spells are cast as if you had applied the empowered spell metamagic ability without requiring the expenditure of sorcery points.

Conjurist – Elemental Command: Elementals you conjure gain a bonus to their attack rolls, saving throws, armor class, and damage rolls equal to half your proficiency bonus.

Creationist – Greater Elemental Creation: Your elemental companion's hit point maximum is now equal to your own if currently less than your own. Alternatively, it gains an additional 1 hit point to its hit point maximum for each of your levels if it is already above your hit point maximum. Additionally, it now gains the Bonus attack class feature.

Founder's Insights

At 14th level choose one element you are not bound to and are not vulnerable through the Elemental Bond feature. You are now considered to be a source of that element to satisfy any material requirements for spells and abilities, and gain resistance to that element. You also gain vulnerability to its opposing element (air/lightning and earth/acid, fire and water/cold).

Fighter Archetypes

Drahken

The drahken represent an elite class of soldiery in ssethric society. Trained to be one with their reptilian mounts, these select warriors fulfill numerous roles, from fast-moving aerial scouts to heavily-armored cavalry units. Their sleek reptilian mounts drive fear into their opponents wherever they are encountered.

All terrestrial-based military units have some form of cavalry, derived mainly from a multitude of different ssethric mounts, each type commissioned for a specific task. Aerial units are generally utilized for scouting and reconnaissance work, though they can also wreak havoc on any open battlefield where they can swoop down and make use of their superior mobility. Several specialized drakhen, usually consisting of pleisauran, are trained for aquatic environs, where they launch swift and deadly raids.

Additional Proficiencies: When you take this archetype you gain proficiency with Animal Handling.

Race Restrictions

Only ssethric races from the Ssethregoran Empire, as well as the Ashen Hide and Black Talon ss'ressen may choose this Archetype.

Bonded Mount

At 3rd level, you gain a bonded mount as a special companion. You may choose from the following creatures: dragonnel, mor'let, and sc'math. Ashen Hide and Black Talon, who are outside of the Ssethregoran Empire, may only choose the mor'let or the sc'math.

Your bonded mount gains all the benefits of your animal companion ability (see below).

If your bonded mount is ever slain, you can acquire another mount by returning to your homeland. This requires a month of downtime as you and your new companion become acquainted with one another.

You may choose to form a bond with a new mount that you have access to, even if your current mount is still alive, by willingly severing that bond.

Animal Companion

At 3rd level your mount becomes an animal companion. It gains a variety of benefits while it is linked to you. You can have only one animal companion at a time, even if you gain this ability though different class features.

Fangriss-Khah, Champion of the First City's gladiatorial games

Your animal companion obeys your commands as best it can. It rolls for initiative like any other creature, but you determine its action, decisions, attitudes, and so on. If you are incapacitated or absent, your animal companion acts on its own. Your animal companion adds your proficiency bonus to its Armor Class, attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls.

Unless already proficient, your animal companion gains proficiency with Perception and Survival and with all saving throws.

Upon reaching 5th level fighter, and every 2 fighter levels thereafter, your mount gains an additional hit die, increasing their maximum hit point by half the hit die +1, plus their constitution modifier. For example, a mor'let starts with hit points (Hit die) of 21 (3d10+6). Upon reaching 5th level in the fighter class, these values increase to 28 (4d10+8) and increases again when you reach 7th level fighter to 36 (5d10+10) and so on.

Whenever you gain the Ability Score Improvement class feature, your animal companion's abilities also improve. Your animal companion can increase one ability score of your choice by +2, or it can increase 2 ability scores of your choice by +1. As normal, your animal companion can't increase an ability score above 20 using this feature.

Spirited Charge

At 7th level, when mounted on your bonded mount, as part of your attack action you may use your bonus action to have your bounded mount attack a creature within its reach as a reaction.

Additionally, when mounted upon your bonded mount, you may use your action to have your mount take the dash action, during which you may make a single melee attack as a bonus action. This attack scores a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.

Reptilian Partnership

At 10th level, you have advantage on all Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks to control your mount.

Additionally, over time, you and your mount become so attuned to working together that you begin to develop a heighted sense of alertness. At 10th level, when you are mounted on your bonded mount you gain advantage on any Wisdom (Perception) checks to avoid being surprised. Furthermore, you are aware of any creature the other perceives.

Keening Wail

At 15th level, as an action, you may coax your mount into making a primal scream of rage. The roar affects all non-ssethric beings within 30 feet of the mount. Those affected must make a Wisdom save (DC 8 + your mount's Constitution modifier + your proficiency bonus) or be stunned until the end of their next turn. Creatures that succeed at their saving throw are unaffected and are immune to this particular mount's Keening Wail for 24 hours.

Strike As One

At 17th level, when mounted upon your bonded mount and using your action surge class feature, your mount gains the feature's benefits as well.

Miliarius

The heavily-armed contingent of ss'ressen charged through the crowded streets. Everywhere they turned, the empire's capital was in chaos. Sparked by the Elorii Insurrection, the slave races had revolted and dragged the emperor down with their unclean hands. To their chagrin and shame, the emperor's personal guards arrived too late to save the old serpent from his own servants. The stinking masses paid for the crime, of course; their bright red blood now dripped from the plate mail and congealed upon the heavy axe blades of the miliarius.

Looking back over his shoulder, the grizzled Dark Crest ss'ressen gazed at the knot of ssanu at the center of his formation. The youngest ssanu was Sseth of Pit Sseth, probably the only ssanu left in the city with enough power and wits to unite the crumbling empire. After Emperor Sskathra had been killed, the old ss'ressen had sought out the young ssanu and sworn his allegiance and that of his troops to him. Now, his troops pushed through the throngs of confused iguadons, pressing toward the western edge of the city where General Ji'koss of the Emerald Scale was rallying the empire's remaining forces.

Rounding a corner, the contingent ran headlong into a large group of elorii and their slave allies. The mob brandished all manner of stolen weapons and outnumbered the miliarius five to one. Grim-faced and frowning, the old ss'ressen turned to his troops and addressed them. "We have failed our duty, and we have failed our Emperor. Never again! Tonight we bathe in elorii blood and feast on their children!"

Raising his axe to the sky he bellowed "Our lives for the Empire!" and charged. The entire contingent, weary and splattered with gore, leapt screaming upon the line of rebellious slaves. Like a wave of shining steel, they slammed into the mob, shattering it with the force of their might. The miliarius had failed once this day that much was true, but they would not do so again as long as even one still stood.

Heavily armed and well trained, these handpicked ss'ressen devote mind, body, and soul to the protection of the empire and the continued existence of its emperors. Their signature weapon is the bearded axe. It is said that in an expert's hands, the bearded axe is possibly the most fearsome melee weapon ever known, able to cleave through armor and shields as if they were paper. Each and every miliarius is trained in the use of this heavy weapon.

When the Black Talon fled the empire, among their number were a corps of miliarius shock troopers. When they arrived in the Sulfur March, these miliarius troopers, having abandoned the empire, transferred their loyalty to the Mother Matriarch of their egg clutch. This tradition was continued during the Ashen Hide schism when they left the Sulfur Marshes and created their own, separate clutch. Due to the lack of resources, the Ghost Scales did not retain this tradition over the past several centuries.

Race Restrictions

Only ss'ressen, though not the Ghost Scale ss'ressen, may become miliarius.

Scaled Defender

Beginning at 3rd level, while wearing heavy armor you may name a single ally as your ward. Whenever you are within 5 feet of your ward when they are targeted by a non-area of effect attack, such as a targeted spell or a weapon attack, as a reaction you may switch places with your ward, becoming the target of that attack instead. You gain a bonus to your AC equal to your Constitution modifier against this attack.

You may use this ability a number of times equal to you Constitution modifier. You regain all uses of this ability after completing a long rest.

Rallying Cry

At 7th level you gain the ability to inspire your allies to greater heroism. As bonus action you may inspire a number of creatures who can see and hear you equal to your Charisma modifier of your choice within 60 feet of you. Those creatures may immediately move their speed as a reaction. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. You regain the ability to do so after completing a short or long rest.

Reverse Blow

At 10th level, you are able to maneuver your axe around shields by shifting the haft in your hands mid-strike. While wielding a bearded axe you ignore any AC granted by a physical shield.

Weapon Mastery

At 15th level, while wearing heavy armor and wielding a bearded axe, you gain add half your proficiency bonus (rounded down) to the damage dealt.

Threshing Blade

At 18th level, once per turn, when you reduce a creature to 0 hit points while using a bearded axe, you may move up to 15 feet and make a melee weapon attack against a creature within reach. This bonus movement is not considered part of your regular movement, and does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Order of the Charred Steel

When Black Talon warriors are called up as levies in the King's armies, it was often observed that they do not fight well with the human cantons and mounted knights of Milandisian warfare. The Black Talons, like most ss'ressen, employ vicious unarmed and unarmored tactics or disciplined lines of heavy infantry, more like the Nierites of Canceri than the pikemen of Milandir. As such, the Milandisian generals often place the Black Talons at the center of their ranks to act as the anvil of a formation, holding the line while more mobile forces attempt to flank. While this works in principle, many humans find the savagery of Black Talon warriors disquieting, which causes great fear among the less educated peasant cantons. To remedy this, Duke Victor val'Holryn of Tralia and the Warlord of the Black Talons decided to create a new order of knights, hoping to bridge the gap between Milandisian and Black Talon styles of combat.

Black Talons destined for the Order of the Charred Steel are chosen very carefully from the ranks of younger Black Talon warriors to be sent to Tralia and other major centers of the duchy to train with senior knights. These warriors, often entire crèches, are trained in the style of combat used by Milandisian knights. While many Black Talons are incapable of making the change from their usual training, many warriors have learned to embrace these human notions of warfare. Those who pass to the satisfaction of their supervising knight are inducted into the Order of the Charred Steel.

Like all knights of Milandir, these warriors swear their oaths of loyalty to the Crown of Milandir. However, due to the special relationship enjoyed by the Black Talons, their specific oath also names the High Mother Matriarch and warlord.

The mark of this order is their fire-blackened weapons and armor. Black Talons do not pass heirlooms down among themselves, so these expensive and unique suits of armor are gifted to new knight by the Duke of Tralia as part of their induction into the Order.

Race Restrictions

Only Black Talons from the Sulfur Marsh may choose to become knights of the Order of Charred Steel.

Charred Heirlooms

Beginning at 3rd level you are gifted a specially treated suit of plate mail armor and a long sword from your patron. These items are treated with a special alchemical compound which, when burned, leaves these items fire blackened. Both the weapon and armor are both magical items, which take up two of your attunement slots.

Your plate armor grants you fire resistance. Once you become a 10th level fighter your armor grants you a +1 bonus to your armor class, becoming a suit of +2 plate of fire resistance upon reaching 15th level fighter.

Your sword possesses a permanently inscribed fire rune, which cannot be copied or transferred. This rune starts as an uncommon fire rune. Upon reaching 7th level fighter the rune improves becoming a rare fire rune, and finally becoming a very rare fire rune upon you reaching 12th level as a fighter. You may have 2 additional runes inscribed upon the blade, one must be an uncommon rune and the other a rare rune.

If you ever lose these items, or they are destroyed, you remain attuned to them and may regain another set after returning to Tralia.

Don't have a copy of Forged in Magic: REFORGED™?

Instead of a fire rune your weapon deals +1d6 fire damage when a 20 on an attack roll is rolled with this weapon. Upon becoming a 7th and 12th level fighter this damage increases by an additional 1d6 to a maximum of 3d6 at 12th level.

Additionally, upon becoming an 8th level fighter your weapon grants you a +1 bonus to hit and damage. Upon reaching 13th level any time you roll a 20 on an attack roll with this weapon your opponent must make a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked 10 feet back and fall prone.

Knightly Training

Upon reaching 7th level you become proficient in Persuasion and History. If you are already proficient in both of those skills, choose either skill. Your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make using that skill.

Knightly Vigilance

At 10th level, you may gain 1 additional reaction to make an opportunity attack this round. Additionally, creatures struck by your opportunity attacks have their movement reduced to 0 until the end of their turn.

Back to Back

At 15th level, when fighting adjacent to an ally engaged in melee you gain a +1 bonus to your armor class. Additionally, when fighting an opponent adjacent to an ally you may make take an additional attack against that creature as a bonus action.

Serpent's Strike

At 18th level, once per turn, when you take the attack action and have advantage on a melee attack roll against one of your targets, you may forgo the advantage for that roll and make an additional melee attack against that target.

Plethorax

The defenders of the elorii outpost gazed out over their fortifications in dismay. Moments before, there stood pristine woodlands. Then, without warning, the earth had collapsed with a thunderous roar, revealing enormous pits leading deep into the earth. Out of these pits came boiling thousands of Ssethregorans, hell-bent on the destruction of the small, poorly-manned outpost. A horde of slaves still chained together led the way, forming a living shield and absorbing the brunt of the elorii archers' fire.

Ss'ressen taskmasters whipped the slaves forward while the ranks of iguadons and ss'ressen formed up in the rear. The bloodcurdling cries of the whooping iguadons, the earsplitting shrieks of the drakhen dragonnel riders far overhead, and the eerie screams from the fierce riding mor'let marked the field of battle. The huge array of troops seemed hopelessly disorganized, with no center, no focus. Then from deep in the pits the reverberating boom-boom of bronze kettledrums could be heard.

Out of those tunnels crawled the great ssethric war beast, thirty feet or more of armored carapace. Perched atop its scaled back sat the plethorax, their deep vibrant voices cutting across the battlefield, giving the troops direction. Within moments of their appearance, the troops had organized and the general ordered the attack. The elorii defenders paled as the sounds of thousands of feet marching in time to the deep drumbeats of the plethorax spelled their doom.

The plethorax is the inspirational backbone of Ssethregoran army. They are the recorders of history, committing to memory the details of great battles and passing them down to others through a rich oral tradition. Their poems inspire courage and bravery in all who listen. They patrol the battlefields fighting alongside the troops, urging them on to greater acts of glory in the name of the empire. Each ssethric race has its own form of plethorax, each slightly different, but all fulfilling the role of the warrior-poet.

Plethorax are some of the most artistic and free-thinking members of their respective societies, often urging those around them to listen to the mistakes of the past and to learn from them. Agamassi ss'ressen are particularly fond of this vocation.

Race Restrictions

This archetype may only be taken by ssethric races.

Songs of the Plethorax

Beginning at 3rd level you gain the ability to sing songs to empower and inspire your allies. These songs have been passed down for thousands of years and have been refined to the point where they seem to exert some sort of magic on those who hear it.

Singing a Song of the Plethorax uses a bonus action and requires concentration to maintain. You may continue to sing a song for a number of minutes equal to 1+ your Constitution modifier. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all expended uses after completing a long rest.

Songs of the Plethorax

At 3rd level you learn the following Songs of the Plethorax.

The Anthem of War. You inspire your allies to greater speed. All allies within 60 feet who can hear you have their speed increased by 10 feet.

Deeds of the Forefathers. All allies within 60 feet who can hear you have their maximum hit points increased by your fighter level.

Deeds of the Steadfast. All allies within 60 feet who can hear you gain advantage on all saving throws to resist the frightened condition. Those who are already frightened may attempt a new saving throw as a reaction.

Inspire Courage

At 7th level, as an action you may use one of your uses of the Songs of the Plethorax ability to cast *bless*, affecting a number of creatures equal to your Charisma modifier. You regain the ability to do so after completing a long rest.

Ballad of Legends

At 10th level when you sing a Song of the Plethorax you may select any two songs to sing as a single ballad of legend. This ability only consumes two uses of your Songs of the Plethorax class feature.

Songs of the Plethorax

At 15th level you learn the following Song of the Plethorax.

Ballad of the Final Stand. You are able to inspire your allies to feats of amazing ferocity in the face of almost certain defeat. All allies within 60 feet who can hear you have advantage to resist the charmed and stunned conditions.

Endless Inspiration

At 18th level, when you roll initiative and have no uses of your Songs of the Plethorax you gain 1 use of the Songs of the Plethorax.

Holy Champion Orders

Nier - Adepts of Destruction

When the Ashen Hide ss'ressen traveled to Canceri to learn how to properly worship Nier, the God of Flaming Destruction, they discovered that the Cancerese clergy did not fully trust the alien race with the secrets of their religion. Ashen Hide matriarchs were forbidden from any but the most elementary rites and rituals of Nier. The Nierites of Canceri did allow for the creation of a new holy order to better channel the religious fervor against their

foes. This new order, named the Adepts of Destruction, became the front line skirmishers in any conflicts with the forces of Milandir.

The Adepts of Destruction are among the most zealous of the followers of Nier in Canceri. They have adopted Nier's role as the God of Fury in warfare, reveling in unleashing their most violent urges and instincts. Honing themselves to become living weapons, these Ashen Hide holy champions forego the use of armor and manufactured weapons. After all, Nier, in His aspect as the Fire Dragon, gave them all that they needed to do His will.

This zealous behavior, coupled with the fervent belief that those in the Black Talon clergy, including the orders of holy champions, are perpetrating the greatest heresy of all, makes the Fire Dragon priestesses and those of the orders of the Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrm and the Zealots of the Blackened Scale the mortal enemies of the Adepts of Destruction. These Ashen Hide will go out of their way to destroy these heretics, even foregoing other, easier targets.

Race Restrictions

Only Ashen Hide ss'ressen may become Adepts of Destruction.

Tenets of the Adepts of Destruction

Holy champions of this order share the following beliefs and traditions:

Bravery: You must test yourself against all challenges and rise above them, fearlessly.

Ferocity: To best serve Nier's will, you embrace the inner fury.

Endurance: Nier requires His warriors to stand up to all threats and to fight to the last, taking as many enemies with them.

Physical Perfection: You seek to hone your flesh to become the perfect vessel of Nier's rage. Your flesh must be strong, your claws sharp, and your mind clear.

Violence: Lord Nier smiles upon those who revel in the utter destruction of His enemies. Do not allow mercy to stay your hand. *Strike!* and drink deeply of your foe's defeat.

Spells of the Adepts of Destruction

You gain the following order spells, which are always prepared starting at the levels listed.

Spells of the Adepts of Destruction

Holy Champion Level	Spells
3rd	*Inflict wounds, smite heretic*
5th	*Enhance ability, shatter*
9th	*Fear, righteous strike*
13th	*Fire shield, freedom of movement*
17th	*Dispel evil and good, hold monster*

Path of the Living Weapon

Beginning at 3rd level you gain the following benefits when you are unarmed, not wearing any armor, and not wielding a shield:

- Your natural armor is increased to 12 + your Dexterity modifier + your Constitution modifier.
- You can use your Dexterity instead of your Strength for the attack and damage rolls of your unarmed strikes.
- Your claw attacks now deal 1d6 damage instead of the normal 1d4 for your unarmed strikes. Instead of the normal progression listed for your race, this damage increases to 1d8 at 5th level, 1d10 at 11th level, and 1d12 at 17th level.
- When you use the attack action with an unarmed strike on your turn, you can make one unarmed strike as a bonus action.

Channel Divinity

When you join this order at 3rd level, you gain the following Channel Divinity options:

Fists of Flame: As a bonus action you may imbue your fists with Nier's fiery destruction. For 1 minute, your unarmed attacks now deal an additional fire damage equal to your Charisma bonus and are considered to be magical weapons for the purpose of bypassing damage reduction.

Path of Destruction: You allow Nier's lust for destruction to infuse you and channel it into one devastating unarmed attack. As an action you may use your channel divinity to make one unarmed attack, which you roll with advantage. If you hit you deal additional damage equal to your holy champion level. Your total unarmed damage is doubled when using this ability to damage objects or structures.

Evasion

At 7th level, whenever you are subject to an effect that allows you to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, you instead take no damage if you succeed on that saving throw, and only half damage if you fail.

I Will Endure

At 15th level, when you are reduced to 0 hit points, you can expend 1 spell slot (no action required) to have 1 hit point instead.

Our Lord Commands Us to Destroy

At 20th level you gain a +2 bonus to your Initiative rolls. Additionally, if you do not have any spell slots remaining, you can choose to regain a number of expended spell slots totaling a combined level equal to your Charisma modifier, regaining the ability to do so after completing a long rest.

Fire Dragon – Zealots of the Blackened Scale

Among the mystic order of the priesthood exists a group that even the warrior caste gives a wide berth. The Zealots of the Blackened Scale are a group of priestesses that are always eager to join the clutch's warriors in battle as they see combat as the purest expression of the Fire Dragon's aspect of the noble guardian. Before battle, the priestesses enter a trance-like state, reciting scriptures over and over until they have worked themselves up into a religious frenzy.

Unarmed and unarmored, the zealots exude an oily substance, similar to naphtha, from their scales. Just before rushing into battle, they set themselves ablaze, a thin layer of gel protecting them from the fire. This substance leaves a blackened residue on their scales after it burns, eventually staining their hides. When surrounded or under threat, the zealot may exude so much of this substance that it spontaneously combusts, causing the zealot to explode. While not necessarily fatal to the Zealot, it does cause them significant pain, even if it is rarely felt while they are in their religious fury.

Race Restrictions

Only female Black Talon worshipers of the Fire Dragon may become Zealots of the Blackened Scale

Tenets of the Zealots of the Blackened Scale

Holy champions of this order share the following beliefs and traditions:

Community: Nothing should enrage you more than when the hatcheries are threatened and endangered. Guard the next generation with your life and ensure the safety of the clutch's hatchlings.

Endurance: The Fire Dragon demands that you stoically endure pain and adversity, so as to grow stronger in body, mind, and faith.

Faith: The Fire Dragon teaches that faith in Him and His teaching will lead you through the darkness times and into paradise should you fall in battle.

Savagery: The Word of the Fire Dragon can ignite the emotions simmering within you. Let them fan those emotions into a raging inferno, where the red of His fire blinds you to all else but the enemy.

Zealotry: Every battle is a crucible, through which the fires of the Fire Dragon will cleanse and purify one's soul. His flames are your shield and no harm shall come to you, until it is your time to enter His paradise.

Spells of the Zealots of the Blackened Scale

You gain the following order spells, which are always prepared starting at the levels listed.

Sahloj, Zealot of the Blackened Scale

Spells of the Zealots of the Blackened Scale

Holy Champion Level	Spells Granted
3rd	*Bane, burning hands*
5th	*Dragon's roar*, heat metal*
9th	*Daylight, fear*
13th	*Deathward, wall of flame*
17th	*Dragon's fury*, flame strike*

Path of Tooth and Claw

Beginning at 3rd level you gain the following benefits when you are unarmed, wearing no armor, and not wielding a shield:

- Your natural armor is increased to 12 + your Dexterity modifier + your Constitution modifier.
- You can use your Dexterity instead of your Strength for the attack and damage rolls of your unarmed strikes.
- Your natural weapons begin at d6 instead of the normal d4 for your unarmed strikes. Instead of the normal progression listed in your race, this die changes to d8 at 5th level, a d10 at 11th level, and a d12 at 17th level.
- When you use the Attack action with an unarmed strike on your turn, you can make one unarmed strike as a bonus action.

Aura of the Fire Dragon

Also at 3rd level you gain the ability to excrete a naphtha-like substance from your pores that coats your skin. As an action you may light this substance on fire, engulfing yourself in flames, which last for 1 minute. Due to the nature of the naphtha-like substance, you are protected from damage by the flames. This fire is non-magical and can be extinguished as if it were an oil fire, such as by being starved of oxygen.

While on fire you gain resistance to cold damage and advantage on all saving throws against the effects of natural cold temperatures. Additionally, any creature that touches you or hits you with a melee attack suffers 1d4 fire damage. Lastly, while using this ability you may cast *hellish rebuke* as a 1st level spell, upon anyone who hits you with a melee weapon attack.

Once used, you cannot use this feature again until you have completed a long rest.

Channel Divinity

When you join this order at 3rd level, you gain the following Channel Divinity options:

Claws of Flame: As a bonus action, you may imbue your claws with divine flames. For the next minute, your unarmed attacks now deal additional fire damage equal to your Charisma bonus and are considered to be magical weapons for the purposes of bypassing damage reduction.

To My Last Breath: Whenever you are reduced to 0 hit points by an attacker that you can see, you utter a prayer of vengeance as a reaction. Instead of 0 hit points you now have 1 hit point, and must move directly toward the creature that attacked and make one melee attack against them if they are within reach. If this attack is a critical hit you can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

Scorched Earth

At 7th level you gain resistance to fire damage. Additionally, while your Aura of the Fire Dragon feature is active, you may expend 1 spell slot to make your flames burst out filling a 30-foot-radius sphere centered on you, forcing all creatures within to succeed in a dexterity saving throw or suffer 1d8 + 1d8 fire damage for each level of the spell slot you expended, with creatures who made a successful saving throw suffering only half damage. For example, a 3rd level spell would deal 4d8 fire damage. You may increase this damage by reducing your maximum hit points by 5 for an additional 1d8 damage, up to a maximum of 25 hit points, for an additional 5d8 fire damage. The reduction in your maximum hit points remains until you complete a long rest.

Once used you cannot use this feature again until you have completed a long rest.

Mantle of Flame

At 15th level you may now activate your Aura of the Fire Dragon as a bonus action and regain the ability to use Aura of the Fire Dragon after completing a short or long rest.

Avatar of Battle

At 20th level you gain resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from non-magical weapons.

Kassegore - Avatar of the Sacred Hunger

There was once a time when the thought of touching the priesthood, let alone harming them, was unthinkable. Then the Naga Coup occurred and their inviolability vanished practically overnight. The priesthood was thrown into chaos as their connection to the Great Devourer was severed, leaving them powerless to destroy the naga and their alien patrons. Many were forced to swear fealty to the Varn Pantheon or fall from imperial grace, which led to the execution of many.

Never before had the priesthood of the Old Gods required protection, yet now as they lay scattered and confused, they saw the wisdom in having a dedicated corps of warriors, devout in their faith and charged with a holy mission. As the survivors scrambled a whisper resounded through the deafening void and they listened as Kassegore made His wishes known.

It took months to gather a group of ssethrics that they could trust who still held the teachings of Kassegore sacrosanct. They then took a leap of faith and taught these warriors their most secret and holy rite: the Feast of the Fallen. This day long ritual was used to create this order of holy champions, giving them abilities enjoyed only by a small cadre of Kassegoran priests.

This ritual allowed the holy champions to channel the unique and powerful gifts granted to them by the Great Devourer. The most sacred of these was feeding upon the heart of a worthy foe and while the act did not bestow any miraculous power, it gave the holy champions the feeling that Kassegore was there with them, feasting upon the souls of their enemies. To the Avatars of the Sacred Hunger, there could be no sacrament more holy than this.

Race Restrictions

Any ssethric race or Ssethregoran allied race may choose to join this holy champion order. You must worship Kassegore as your patron deity.

Tenets of the Avatars of the Sacred Hunger

Holy champions of this order share the following beliefs and traditions:

The Great Devourer: Kassegore teaches that the fallen who fall into His maw are used to create ever stronger and better ssethrics. Within the breast of a worthy foe lies a gift that can be taken and used. Rip into their flesh, consume their essence, and make their strength your own.

Guardians of the Faith: The words and teachings of Kassegore must not vanish, for they shall lead the ssethric people back to glory. It is your duty to ensure that the priesthood who know the rites and rituals holy to Kassegore do not perish.

Relentless: The enemies of Kassegore must be hunted down and crushed beneath your talons. While there is breath within your breast you will not stop until our foes are utterly vanquished. Fear not if you fall in this holy duty, for Kassegore's promise is that you will return to carry on the fight, better than before.

Strength: Worshipers of Kassegore venerate the iron will and strength of their deity and seek to emulate Him in all ways.

Unleash Your Fury: Where Yig cautions Her followers to control their passions, Kassegore is the fire to Her ice, encouraging His followers to give into their anger. The audacity that foreign gods could replace the Great Devourer is unforgivable and should fill heart of the faithful with rage.

Spells of the Avatars of the Sacred Hunger

You gain the following order spells, which are always prepared starting at the levels listed:

Spells of the Avatars of the Sacred Hunger

Holy Champion Level	Spells Granted
3rd	*Bane, scales of the dragon**
5th	*Dragon's roar*, shatter*
9th	*Breath of the dragon*, fear*
13th	*Locate creature, stoneskin*
17th	*Dispel evil and good, dragon's fury**

Bite Attack

Beginning at 3rd level, you gain a bite attack that you may use as a natural weapon. Your bite deals 1d6 piercing damage. This damage increases at 10th level becoming1d8 piercing damage, and further increases to 1d10 at 17th level.

Channel Divinity

When you join this order at 3rd level, you gain the following Channel Divinity options:

The Devourer's Hunger: As a bonus action on your turn you can fly into a rage like a Fury.

- You have advantage on Strength checks and saving throws.
- You gain a +2 bonus to melee weapon damage with weapons that use Strength.
- You have resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.
- While raging, you cannot cast spells, smite, manifest psionic powers or expressions, or concentrate on spells.

Your rage lasts for 1 minute. It ends early if you are knocked unconscious or if your turn ends and you have not attacked a hostile creature since your last turn or taken damage since then. You can also end your rage as a bonus action on your turn.

Dragon's Presence: As an action, you can use your Channel Divinity to force all creatures within 30 feet that can see or hear you to make a Wisdom saving throw or gain the frightened condition until the end of their next turn.

Sanctified Body

At 7th level your digestive system has become inured to the weaknesses of the flesh. You are immune to the poisoned condition and gain resistance to poison damage.

Consume the Unworthy

At 15th level, whenever you successfully bite a creature that is grappled, incapacitated, or restrained, you deal an additional 3d6 necrotic damage. That creature's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and you regain a number of hit points equal to the amount of necrotic damage dealt. You may use this ability a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1) regaining all expended uses after completing a long rest.

Unstoppable Hunger

At 20th level, as an action, you call upon and embody the unrelenting hunger of Kassegore. For 1 hour whenever you reduce a creature to 0 hit points, as a bonus action you may make a bite attack, killing them instantly and regaining 10d6 hit points, up to your hit point maximum, and gain advantage on your next attack roll.

Yig - Order of the Fang

This ancient holy champion order was founded millennia ago, when it became obvious that the goal of the naga and their varn patrons was to not only supplant the Old Gods, but to wipe Their memory from the face of Arcanis. Initially comprised of priests and warriors from Pits Crotalus and Sseth who heard the sibilant whispers of their divine mistress and agreed to put their differences aside, the order grew over the centuries as other Pits joined the ranks. Acting as advisors on religious dogma, the priests gave the order purpose and direction, charging the warriors with their holy duties – to protect Yig's divine scriptures and those relics and artifacts blessed by Her.

This order was also entrusted with guarding the hidden sanctuaries that were established throughout the empire and beyond, so that the faithful might gather and venerate the Mother of the Ssethrics in safety. With the creation of the yissera, many eventually joined the ranks of the order, and were given the task of safeguarding followers, while the ssanu guarded the more sacred items.

The migration to the Abessian Dominion radically changed the order, as the yissera were now the *face* of the order in that human nation. Slowly, the artifacts and hallowed scriptures were smuggled out of the empire and hidden in the perceived safety of their new sanctuary. Sadly, they soon discovered that in immigrating to the Abessian Dominion, they merely exchanged one horror for another. A small but fanatical cult of mammals worshipping horrific deities discovered the true nature of these 'humans' fleeing the Ssethregoran Empire and began hunting down any ssethrics they encountered. The order now has a new enemy, but the mission remains the same – protect the followers of Yig.

Race Restrictions

Any ssethric race or Ssethregoran allied race may choose to join this holy champion order. You must worship Yig as your patron deity.

Tenets of the Order of the Fang

Holy champions of this order share the following beliefs and traditions:

Deception: Battle is for the unimaginative and the imbecilic. Lies and twists of the truth can be deadlier than the edge of a blade and She teaches us to use that skill to further our aims.

Guardians of the Faith: The words and teachings of Yig must not vanish, for they shall lead the ssethric people back to glory. It is your duty to ensure that the rites and rituals holy to are not forgotten.

Intelligence: Kassegore may value brute strength, but Yig places intelligence and cunning above all other traits. Blessed are the schemers and thinkers to the Mother of Ssethrics.

Subterfuge: Yig teaches that the use of any subterfuge in battle is honorable, whether it be the use of poison or ambushing your foe. Mercy and fairness in battle is for fools and the romantics of the mammals. Use whatever is at your disposal to achieve your objective.

Temper Emotions: Where Kassegore encourages His followers to give into their fury, Yig cautions Her followers to control their passions. Emotions cloud one's judgment and can quickly destroy carefully laid plans.

Spells of the Order of the Fang

You gain the following order spells, which are always prepared starting at the levels listed:

Spells of the Order of the Fang

Holy Champion Level	Spells Granted
3rd	*Command, healing word*
5th	*Alter self, suggestion*
9th	*Beacon of hope, tongues*
13th	*Deathward, freedom of movement*
17th	*Mislead, retribution*

Improved Lay On Hands

Beginning at 3rd level, when you use the Lay on Hands ability, you may opt to remove the poisoned condition from a willing creature for 5 points from your healing pool.

Prayers of Two Tongues

Upon joining the order at 3rd level, whenever you cast any divine spells from the holy champion spell list or your bonus spells listed above, those who hear you cast your spells hear them as if you had cast spells as a divine caster of Anshar. Clerics and holy champions of Anshar hear your prayers for what they truly are and may act accordingly.

Silver-Tongued

At 3rd level, you become proficient in both Deception and Persuasion. If you are already proficient with those skills, your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check with those skills.

Channel Divinity

When you join this order at 3rd level, you gain the following Channel Divinity options:

A Poisoned Blade: As an action, you speak a prayer to Yig, sheathing one weapon you are holding with a deep green aura. For 1 minute, that weapon deals additional poison damage equal to your Charisma modifier, with a minimum bonus of +1. Additionally, and only if you will it, the weapon also emits bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light 20 feet beyond that. If the weapon is not already magical, it becomes magical for the duration.

You can end this effect on your turn as part of any other action. If you are no longer holding or carrying this weapon, or if you fall unconscious, this effect ends.

Speed of the Viper: As a bonus action you may choose a number of friendly creatures within 60 feet that can hear and see you equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum 1). Those creatures may dash as a reaction. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Cold-blooded Presence

At 7th level you and friendly creatures within 10 feet of you have advantage on all saving throws to avoid being charmed, frightened, or stunned. At 18th level, the range of this aura increases to 30 feet. If a ssethric creature (including you) within the aura already has advantage on saving throws to resist one or more of these conditions, that creature becomes immune to those specific conditions instead.

Viper's Strike

At 15th level, if your melee attack misses, you may make an additional melee attack as a bonus action. You may do this a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier, (minimum of 1), regaining all expended uses after completing a short or long rest.

Protector of the Faithful

At 20th level, as an action, you can enter into a state of determined calm that lasts for 1 minute, with the following effects:

- You become immune to the frightened and stunned conditions.
- Gain advantage on Dexterity checks and saving throws.
- Your melee attacks deal an additional 2d6 poison damage.
- You may make an additional melee attack as a bonus action.

Once you use this feature, it cannot be used again until you finish a long rest.

Ranger Archetypes

Harbinger

Harbingers play a vital role in ss'ressen society. They act as a way to control overbreeding of ss'ressen egg clutches and act to weed out the weak and unworthy, just as their ssanu masters planned. They are the champions of justice in the communities, leading armies against hated rival clutches. Due to millennia of selective breeding and manipulation by the ssanu, the ss'ressen egg clutches of today harbor an incredible hatred for one another. The mere scent of a member of a different egg clutch is enough to send most into a bloodthirsty, berserker rage.

Scaled Wolf

The harbinger represents the epitome of this rivalry. They see it as their duty to weaken enemy ss'ressen, and deem the best way to do this is to destroy the problem at its root - their eggs. Whereas some humans might see this as an atrocity, the harbingers view this as means to survive against those that would eagerly do the same to them. Some harbingers see it as a way to destroy the danger inherent in a rival clutch before their own clutch is harmed, while others seek to maintain the balance of power between the various egg clutches. Although their primary goal is the slaughter of unborn hatchlings, harbingers never see their own actions as evil and indeed, from their society's point of view what they are doing is for the greater good of their clutch.

Race Restrictions

Only ss'ressen may become a harbinger.

Additional Proficiency: When you take this archetype you gain proficiency with Perception.

Scaled Hunter

Beginning at 3rd level, you gain ss'ressen as an additional favored enemy. If you already possess ss'ressen as a favored enemy, you gain an additional favored enemy of your choice. Additionally, you become more sensitive to the scent of other ss'ressen egg clutches. You possess the ability to track other ss'ressen by scent, adding double your proficiency bonus to Wisdom (Survival) checks when tracking ss'ressen by scent. This also grants you the ability to locate the eggs of any ss'ressen egg clutch by scent within 60 feet. This distance increases to 120 feet at 6th level, 500 feet at 10th level, 1,000 feet at 14th level, and a mile at 18th level.

Ssethric Slayer

Also at 3rd level, when you choose a ssethric creature as your Quarry the additional damage dealt to that creature is increased by 1d6 damage.

Focused Frenzy

At 7th level you develop greater control over your ss'ressen frenzied racial feature. You may enter your frenzied state as a bonus action on your turn. While in Ss'ressen Frenzy, you have advantage on melee attack rolls using Strength or Dexterity and no longer suffer disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks not directed at a ss'ressen. Your frenzy lasts for 1 minute. It ends early if you are knocked unconscious or if your turn ends and you haven't attacked a hostile creature since your last turn or taken damage since then. You can also end your frenzy on your turn as a bonus action.

You may activate your frenzied state 3 times, regaining all expended uses after completing a long rest. You may slip into your frenzied state an additional time upon between rests upon reaching 12th level ranger, and 17th level ranger.

When encountering ss'ressen from another egg clutch that triggers your Ss'ressen Frenzy, you are no longer allowed to make a Wisdom saving throw to avoid entering Ss'ressen Frenzy.

Smite Ssethric

At 11th level, you may smite ssethric creatures. When you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack, you can chose to do an additional 5d8 force damage to that creature. You may use this ability a number of times equal to your 1 + your Wisdom modifier, regaining all expended uses after completing a long rest.

Feast Upon the Enemy

At 15th level, as an action, when you consume an egg belonging to a non-related egg clutch, you gain 3d10 temporary hit points and have advantage on all attack rolls for 1 hour. If you eat more than one egg while under the effect of this ability, you extend the time of this ability to 24 hours. The harbinger has to actively participate in the destruction of the rival egg clutch to gain these benefits, they cannot simply purchase or be gifted an egg of a rival clutch.

Rogue Archetypes

Laksiri

The laksiri represent a specialized organization within the Black Coil. Within the convoluted passages of their eldritch tower, promising students born with the gift of sorcery are trained to become deadly mage-assassins, known as the laksiri. These students spend years in rigorous training, honing their arcane skills toward the purpose of countering an opponent's magic and turning it against him. The training regimen is brutal and demanding, and often fatal. Upon attaining the rank of laksiri, the student is elevated to a position of power, always allied with the Ssanu Pit that sponsored their training. Many of the laksiri act as cold blooded killers, eliminating a pit's rivals. Others are tasked to serve as bodyguards, protecting high-ranking ssanu from assassination attempts. The laksiri are fiercely loyal to the Pit that sponsored them, for they enjoy a higher social standing in the empire due to their association with their patron.

The ranks of the laksiri are comprised mainly of kobolds, ss'ressen, and even a few iguadons that display a penchant for sorcery early in their lives. Curiously, kobolds comprises the majority of the laksiri ranks. The organization is not limited to elder sorcerers, though ssanu and naga mages hold nearly all the high-ranking positions within the Black Coil, but many eldritch sorcerers have made a niche for themselves.

The laksiri are an integral part of society and are respected and feared by all but the most powerful mages. Any laksiri showing signs of wavering loyalty is slain immediately by their superiors, for the laksiri are particularly dangerous to the naga and ssanu castes. Laksiri are kept under constant surveillance, watched carefully for any sighs of seditious thoughts that could lead to rebellion. Currently, the organization's usefulness outweighs its inherent danger to the empire.

Race restrictions

Only ssethric races from the Ssethregoran Empire may become laksiri.

Spellcasting

Rogue Level	Arcane Points	Cantrips	Spells Known	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
3rd	1	3	3	2	-	-	-
4th	1	3	4	3	-	-	-
7th	2	3	5	4	2	-	-
8th	2	3	6	4	2	-	-
10th	3	4	7	4	3	-	-
11th	3	4	8	4	3	-	-
13th	4	4	9	4	3	2	-
14th	4	4	10	4	3	2	-
16th	5	4	11	4	3	3	-
19th	5	4	12	4	3	3	1
20th	6	4	13	4	3	3	1

Hunted by Ymandragore

The Sorcerer King of Ymandragore hunts all arcane casters. Displaying your sorcerous skills while outside the empire openly or in a public setting is a sure way to attract the Harvester's attention.

Cantrips

You start with 3 cantrips from either the elder sorcerer or eldritch sorcerer spell lists, depending on what Arcanum your race is able to access. At 10th level you gain a 4th cantrip.

Metamagic

One of the first lessons taught is how to properly hide your spell casting. You gain the Subtle Spell Metamagic option. You gain an additional Metamagic option at 11th level and again at 15th level.

You can only use one Metamagic option on a spell when you cast it, unless otherwise noted.

Spell Slots

The Laksiri Spellcasting table shows how many spell slots you have to cast your Elder Sorcerer or Eldritch Sorcerer spells of 1st level and higher. To cast one of these spells you must expend a slot of the spell's level or higher. You regain all expended spell slots when you finish a long rest.

Spells Known

You know three 1st-level elder sorcerer or eldritch sorcerer spells of your choice.

Whenever you gain a level in this class, you can replace one of the Elder Sorcerer or Eldritch Sorcerer spells you know with another spell of your choice from the same spell list.

Spellcasting Ability

If you cast spells through the Elder Tradition, Intelligence is your spell casting ability for your spells. If you cast spells through the Eldritch Tradition, Charisma is your spell casting ability for your spells. You use your appropriate ability whenever a spell refers to your spellcasting ability. In addition, you use your appropriate spellcasting ability modifier when setting the saving throw DC for a spell you cast when making an attack roll with that spell.

Save spell DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your spellcasting ability modifier.

Spell attack modifier = your proficiency bonus + your spellcasting ability modifier.

Spell Buffer

Beginning at 3rd level, due to constant exposure to arcane energies, you have advantage on saving throws against spells.

Counterspelling Adept

At 9th level you learn the *counterspell* spell and can cast it using a 2nd level spell slot. All effects of casting *counterspell* at a higher level similarly have their spell levels reduced by 1.

Spell Penetration

At 13th level, you may focus your arcane energies to bypass your target's defenses. The target of your spell suffers disadvantage on their saving throw against the spell you cast. You regain use of this ability when you finish a short or long rest.

Reverse the Flow

At 17th level you have become a master at manipulating arcane energies. Whenever you successfully use *counterspell* on an enemy's spell, roll a d4. On a 1 you turn that spell back on its caster at the same level and spell DC as its original casting. At 20th level, on a 1 or 2, you turn the spell back on the caster at the same level and spell DC as its original casting.

Shaman Spiritual Paths and New Options

New Boons

Burrowing Asp

Prerequisite: 6th level, Jeggal Sag Patron

You gain a burrow speed of 15 feet to move through sand, earth, mud, or ice. At 10th level, you may burrow through solid rock at a speed of 10 feet.

Appetite (Geas): You are always hungry. You eat twice as much as normal creatures of your type and will never turn down food when it is offered.

Crocodile

Once per turn, when you make an attack, if you move at least 20 feet toward a target and successfully hit, the target takes an extra 1d6 damage.

Ambush Predator (Geas): Crocodile is lethargic and does not do more than necessary. You would prefer to wait for the prey to come to you. Whenever you get the chance, you will try to convince your allies to set an ambush.

Cyclura

Prerequisite: Jeggal Sag Patron

You make a forceful stomp as if you cast *thunderwave* at a level equal to your Pact Magic slot level without expending a spell slot or material components. You cannot use this ability until you finish a long rest.

Stubborn (Geas): The cyclura is stubborn and disagreeable. You are stubborn and hard to convince to change a chosen course of action. You may eventually be convinced to do so, but it may require intimidation or bribery.

Sc'math

Prerequisite: 6th level, Jeggal Sag Patron

When making an unarmed attack, you can attack twice instead of once whenever you take the attack action on your turn. This does not stack with any form of multiattack.

Bravery (Geas): The sc'math is extremely brave and will always participate in battle. You may not leave the field of battle until victorious or all your companions have safely escaped. In other words, you must be the last one to flee. You may retreat if that is obviously the right course of action. This geas does not prevent you from using magic in battle.

Viper

Prerequisite: Jeggal Sag Patron, proficient in either the Ssethric or Ss'ressen language

You gain the ability to speak Ssethric or Ss'ressen, if proficient in the former language, when shape-changed into a reptile or amphibian. At 11th level, this will also allow you to perform the verbal component of spell casting.

Sly Counselor (Geas): The viper is a wise counselor. You are always willing to help others with advice. At least once a week you must advise someone on an aspect of their life, whether they asked you for help or not.

Other Spirits

The followers of Jeggal Sag know other spirits by different names. Only the names have changed for the following spirits; the powers and geasa remain the same.

Arcanis Campaign Setting	Ssethric Equivalent
Badger	Jaculi
Dog	Moloch
Dolphin	Chelone
Eagle	Dragonnel
Horse	Lizard
Lion	Drake*
Wolf	Mor'let

* In the Arcanis Campaign Setting, drakes are the equivalent of dragons, but possess animal intelligence (2), cannot speak any languages, and possess no spell casting or spell like abilities.

Skin Dancer Options

Jeggal Sag skin dancers are restricted to transforming into amphibians and reptiles. However, unlike other skin dancers, at 3rd level they may also take the form of beasts that have a swimming speed.

At 6th level, they gain the ability to transform into drakes that they have honored.

Below is a current list of the creatures that a ssethric skin dancer may transform into.

Serpent Arrows

Viper Wand

Name	CR	Special Movement
Frog	0	Swim 20
Flying Snake	1/8	Fly 60, swim 30
Poisonous Snake	1/8	Swim 30
Constrictor Snake	1/4	Swim 30
Giant Frog	1/4	Swim 30
Giant Lizard	1/4	Climb 30
Giant Poisonous Snake	1/4	Swim 20
Moloch	1/4	
Winged Viper	1/4	Fly 60, swim 30
Crocodile	1/2	Swim 30
Mor'let	1/2	
Dragonnel	1	Fly 50
Giant Toad	1	Swim 40
Moloch	1	
Sc'Math	1	
Giant Constrictor Snake	2	Swim 30
Plesiosaurus*/ Kawheka	2	Swim 40
Ankylosaur*/ Sterax	3	
Giant Crocodile	5	Swim 50
Triceratops*/Saberex	5	
Jaculi	6	Swim 30
Cyclura	8	
Tyrannosaurus rex*/Carnadon	8	
Chelone	10	Swim 40

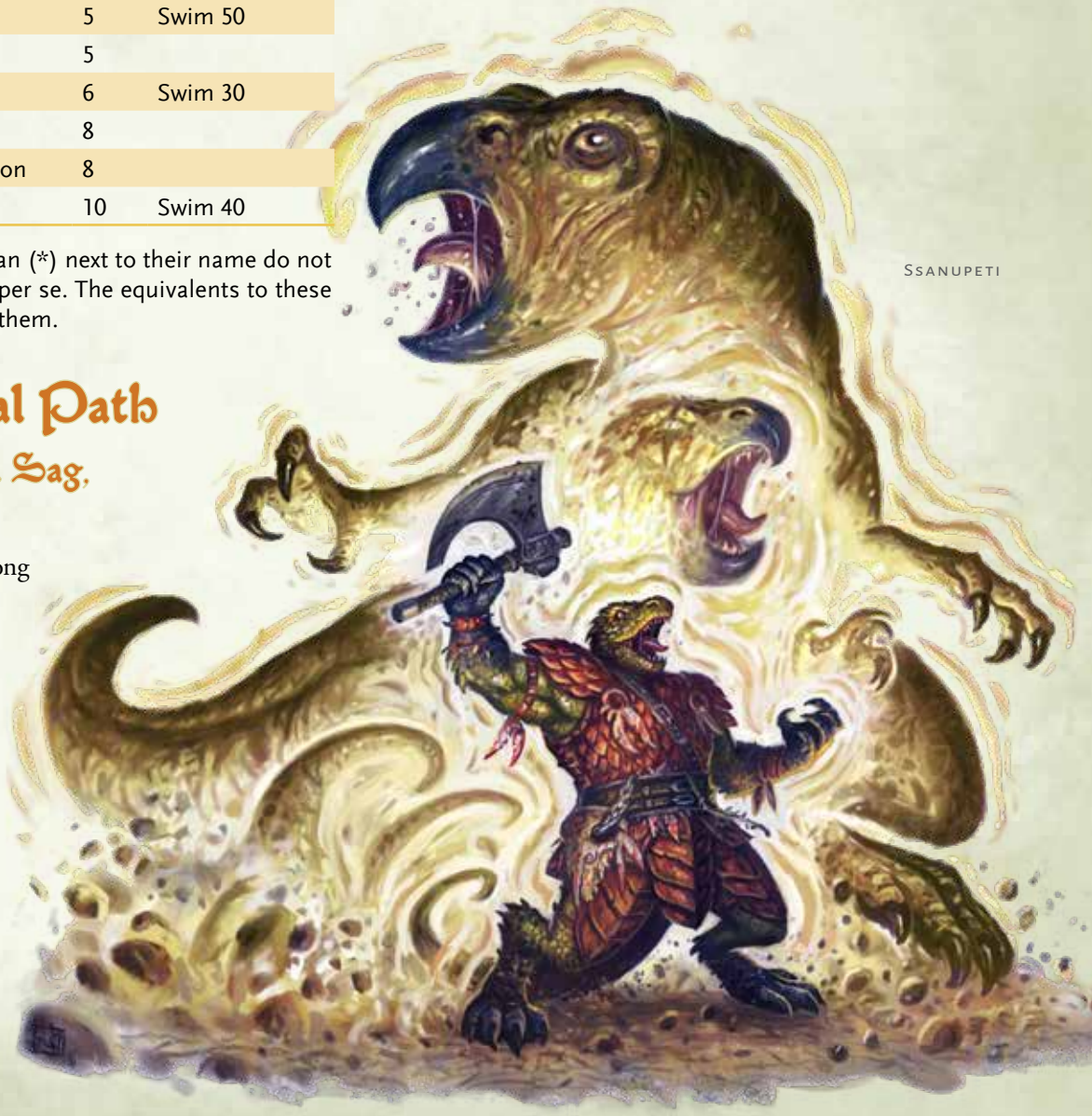
Note: Those creatures with an (*) next to their name do not exist in the Arcanis setting, per se. The equivalents to these dinosaurs are listed next to them.

commands. He instructs them on the care and handling of all beasts, giving the Disciples great insights into how animals think and will react in a given situation. Of special import to the Ssethregorans is their knowledge in the raising of drakes, an essential part of their war machine.

It is also through His followers that Jeggal Sag sees the world, for though He lies sleeping, His mind is awake and active, hungering for knowledge and experiences. As His disciples journey throughout the Known Lands, Jeggal Sag vicariously travels with them. While He does not exert any overt control over the chosen, some Disciples believe that the small voice that nags in their mind may be Jeggal Sag nudging them along.

The manner in which the Disciples venerate Jeggal Sag is the youngest of all the ssethric religion, as even the institution of the varn religion predates it. It was only after the Master of Beasts was laid low and buried beneath His mound that the first of the chosen was contacted. Prior to this time, no known clerical order existed to venerate the child of Kassegore and Yig, as Jeggal Sag did not wish to cause His father's fabled jealousy to be aroused.

Interestingly, a small group of dedicated mystics were



Ssanupeti

New Spiritual Path

Disciple of Jeggal Sag, Master of Beasts

Those who hear the siren's song of the Sleeping Dragon find it irresistible, leaving their previous lives behind to take up the mantle as a Disciple of Jeggal Sag. Some already had some connection with animals, either as herders, trainers, or hunters, but others renounced their lives as priests, warriors, and even sorcerers to find a new life heeding their master's

said to sacrifice to Him from time to time. In return, Jeggal Sag taught them how to merge with animals of all types, even the drakes that once flew in numbers so great as to blot out the sun. Of these mystics, tales of their continued existence is spoken of at the moots held at the sacred Mound, telling of their immense hatred for both the humans and the Disciples, who they blame for not releasing the Master of Beasts from His prison. For centuries now, these mystics have become a sort of 'boogey-man' for the Disciples, who are told to beware of ssethrics wearing heavy black hooded robes with red runes stitched upon it.

In present times, the Disciples have spread its beliefs across the Known Lands. Members can be found in virtually every ss'ressen clutch and hylis village. The mound where Jeggal Sag lies sleeping is deemed hallowed ground and any Disciple may visit the site without fear of repercussion from the Ssethregoran Empire. The Black Talons, including the Ashen Hides and the Ghost Scales, who worship the Master of Beasts often make the pilgrimage to the Kraldjur Morass unmolested. They are granted safe passage across the borders of Ssethregore to complete their pilgrimage to the Mound.

The Disciples that reside within the empire maintain a small amount of political power through their control over the beasts and the drake hatcheries. This political clout grants them the exceptional right to worship a non-varn deity, for only the Disciples of Jeggal Sag know how to control and domesticate many of the fierce creatures used by the Ssethregoran war machine.

While accepted within the Black Talon egg clutch, followers of the Master of Beasts face great discrimination among the Ghost Scales and Ashen Hides, for neither the Herka nor Nier take the worship of lesser gods lightly. When not actively hunted, adherents of Jeggal Sag of those two clutches often face the choice of banishment or death for their faith.

Race Restrictions

Only ssethric races may choose this Spiritual Path.

Geas and Taboo

Show respect for all beasts and animal spirits. Though you are master of the beasts, it is the spirits of these animals that allow you to control them. Once per the lunar cycle of the green moon Viridis, you must free a beast, a spirit, or a fellow ssethric from bondage. This may be done by releasing them into the wild or killing them, such as for those too old and weak to survive on their own.

Expanded Spell List

As a Master of Beasts, you choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a shaman spell. The following spells are added to the shaman spell list for you.

Spell Level	Spells
1st	*Longstrider*
2nd	*Calm emotions (beasts instead of humanoids)*
3rd	*Bestial form*
4th	*Compulsion*
5th	*Hold monster*

Animal Understanding.

You gain proficiency with Animal Handling. If you are already proficient, you instead add double your proficiency bonus to ability checks you make with Animal Handling. You also gain advantage on all Wisdom (Insight) checks when attempting to read a beast's emotional state and disposition.

Sign of Jeggal Sag

Starting at 3rd level, you gain the ability to trace the sigil of the Lord of Beasts in the air to channel primal energy to fuel magical effects

When you use the Sign of Jeggal Sag, you choose which effect to create. You must then finish a short or long rest before using the Sign of Jeggal Sag again.

Some of the Sign of Jeggal Sag effects require saving throws. When you use such an effect, the DC equals your shaman spell save DC.

Beginning at 6th level, you can use the Sign of Jeggal Sag twice between rests, and beginning at 18th level, you can use it three times between rests. When you finish a short or long rest, you regain your expended uses.

Sign of Jeggal Sag: Animal Mastery

You may use the Sign of Jeggal Sag to attempt to control beasts. As an action, you present your primal focus and speak a prayer forcing beasts to obey your authority. Each beast that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must make a Wisdom saving throw. Cold-blooded beasts (i.e., reptiles and amphibians) and ssethric beasts suffer disadvantage on this saving throw. If the beast fails its saving throw, it is charmed by you for one minute or until it takes any damage. Beasts with an Intelligence score of 4 or greater are immune to this affect.

Once you reach 5th level, when a cold-blooded or ssethric beast fails its saving throw against this feature, the duration of the charm effect increases to one hour or until it takes any damage. This duration raises to 8 hours at 9th level and 24 hours at 15th level.

Winged Viper Companion

At 3rd level, you learn the spell *find familiar*, with the spirit you summon able to take the form of a winged viper in addition to those listed in the spell. The winged viper is a spirit that acts as your ally and has an Intelligence Score of 6. The winged viper's Intelligence score rises to 8 at 6th level, to 10 at 10th level, and to 12 at 14th level.

Sign of Jeggal Sag: Touch of Jeggal Sag

At 6th level, beasts under your control are enhanced. As a bonus action, you may use the Sign of Jeggal Sag to enhance one or more beasts under your control. This includes summoned beasts, beasts gained through class features, or other beasts controlled through magic. These beasts gain temporary hit points equal to your shaman level and a bonus to attack and damage equal to your Charisma modifier. These effects last for 1 hour. You many only affect a number of beasts equal to half of your shaman level, rounded down.

My Eyes Are Yours

The beasts become your eyes and ears. At 10th level, you may add *commune with nature* to your spells known. You may cast this spell as a ritual.

In addition, you may add the spell *clairvoyance* to your spells known. Instead of an invisible sensor, this spell allows you to see through the eyes of the nearest beast at the location you desire, such as a spider or small lizard. If there are no beasts in the area, then the spell fails.

Timeless Body

At 14th level, you no suffer none of the frailty of old age and you can't be aged magically. You can still die of old age, however.

Languages of the Ssethregoran Empire

Spoken Languages of the Ssethregoran Empire

Language	Alphabet	Typical Speakers
The Toungues of the Serpent		
Eloran	Ssethric	Elorii
Ssethric	Ssethric	Ssethregorans
Ss'ressen	Ssethric	Ss'ressen
The Unique Tongues		
Eoan	Eoan	Varn
Kriku	Kriku	Hylis
Myrantian	Myrantian	Abessian Dominion
Quipu (not a spoken language)	Quipu	Shell-backs

Suggested Ssethregore Skill and Tool Proficiencies

Area	High Class Skill	Commoner Class Skill
Ssethregore	Arcane	Survival
Abessian Dominion	Religion	Athletics

New Skill

Biomancy (commonly uses Intelligence)

Biomancy is used to recall information on the art of biomancy and identify the function of biotechnological items. Additionally, this skill is utilized in the implanting, removal, and repair of biotechnological items.

New Backgrounds and Variants

New Exile/Expatriate Background Variant: Outcast

You're unwanted, cast out, ostracized, or banished from your homeland. Forced to leave your family, friend, and all that you've known, you walk into the unknown without a friend to look out for your interests, with the burning hatred of your former countrymen's eyes as a final memory of home.

Alternatively, you left all you hold dear to safeguard your family and friends, either to search out something that might save them or because staying might cause them all to be in terrible danger. You left to draw away deadly enemies that will stop at nothing to destroy every last one of your people and your sacrifice is remembered fondly by those you left behind.

Whatever the reason for your forced or self-imposed exile, you are a being without a home, forced to make your way through this strange, new land and either make a new home for yourself or find some way to make amends and return.

Nationality: None

Social Class: Commoner class

Minimum Age: 40 (dwarf), 80 (elorii) or 20 (any other)

Skill Proficiencies: Insight, Survival

Weapon Proficiencies: Choose one martial weapon of your choice.

Languages: Choose two languages - one must be from your new home. You are not literate.

Tool Proficiencies: One tool kit or game.

Equipment: A set of Traveler's Clothes, a memento of your lost life, a tool kit to match your proficiency, a belt pouch with 10sp.

Feature: Outcast's Secret

You possess a secret. It could be that your race is thought to be extinct and you are one of the last of your kind, or that you know the location of an enclave of fellow outcasts and must keep it secret. You keep this information safe, revealing it solely to those you trust absolutely and even then, only under the direst of circumstances.

New Former Slave Variant: Ssethric Pit Fighter

Pit fighters are possibly the most varied group in all of Ssethregore. Warriors and slaves alike, from all ranks of society, are pitted against each other in short bloody contests for the pleasure of the crowd. Pits exist throughout the empire, from small military encampments where captured slaves battle for survival, to back-alley fighting rings hidden deep below the surface, to the Blood Pit in the capital, where the bloodiest spectacles anywhere in Ssethregore are held. Less sophisticated than the gladiatorial arenas of human society, the pits are there, not for the glory of the fighters, but for the blood and gory death of the participants.

There are no rules, no code of honor, and no chance of freedom. All combatants are owned, either by the pit owner or by various individuals who keep their pit fighters kenneled like half-starved dogs. A pit fighter strives against the odds to survive from one day to the next and to perhaps catch the eye of a patron, someone who will provide him with better food and arms than the owners of the fighting pits. Fighters are no better than prized pets, being sold back and forth between patrons as a mere commodity. Dead fighters are highly prized in the ssethric marketplaces, comparable to high-quality beef in civilized lands.

Though there is no official means by which a pit fighter can earn his freedom, there is yet hope, for it is not uncommon for them to escape in transit between one arena and the next. For the non-ssethric fighters, a life as a fugitive in the swamps of Ssethregore is probably a sentence worse than death.

Nationality: You can choose either Ssethregore or your original nation as your home nation.

Social Class: Commoner class

Minimum Age: 40 (dwarf), 80 (elorii) or 20 (any other)

Skill Proficiencies: Insight or survival and either Athletics or Acrobatics

Weapon Proficiencies: Choose one martial weapon of your choice

Languages: Choose two from either Ssethric, Ss'ressen, or Myrantian.

Feature: Pit Survivor

No matter how much you try, the life of a pit fighter stays with you. After spending a few days in any city you quickly become privy to the disreputable and illegal fighting pits there. You can hire yourself out as talent or sometimes as a bouncer. If such activity exists in the city, you can find a way to feed yourself and have a roof over your head.

New Vagabond Background Variant: Deep Cover

Yissera were created for the sole purpose of infiltrating the mammal nations and undermining their power structure wherever possible, at the behest of their ssethric masters. You were sent to do just that and over the years have worked at blending in so well that the humans think you are one of their own. Whether serving in the Coryani legions or ironically, in the Altherian Shining Patrol, toiling as a serving wench of a Milandisian lord, working in the trading establishment for one of the noble houses of Censure, or lighting incense and singing hymns in a human temple, you've displayed diligence and dedication in your duties, working hard to gain your target's trust. All for the glory of the Ssethregoran Empire.

After years of loyal service, you've begun to doubt your purpose and what you have dedicated yourself to achieve. News of a Yigite sanctuary in the Abessian Dominion has reached your ears and doubts have crept in. You've decided to leave the service of the empire and put your many years of training as an infiltrator and whatever is was that you've been doing while under cover to aid those ssethrics freed from the yoke of the naga's tyranny.

Racial Requirement: Hussuma or yissera

Social Class: Commoner or High class, depending upon chosen cover.

Minimum Age: 75 (hussuma), 30 (yissera)

Skill Proficiencies: Deception and one skill dependent upon chosen cover.

Weapon/Tool Proficiencies/Languages: Dependent upon chosen cover.

Equipment: Dependent upon chosen cover

Feature: Deep Cover

If a yissera, choose any background allowable to humans. If a hussuma, choose any background allowable to elorii. You have lived as a member of that profession in deep cover for the better part of your life. You have developed a persona over your years of deep cover, gaining your chosen background's languages, weapons/tool proficiencies, and one skill (as above). When interacting as your chosen persona, you have access to any features that background may have.

New Feats

Arcane Scholar

You were inducted at an early age to the mysteries of the Arcanum and have received an education in the theories of the arcane arts.

- Your Intelligence score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Arcana skill. If already

proficient, add double your proficiency bonus to all Intelligence (Arcana) checks.
- If you possess levels in a non-psionic spell casting class, you gain *detect magic* as an additional known spell or are considered to always have it prepared, depending upon the type of caster you are. If you do not have levels in a spell casting class, you know the spell and may instead cast it as a Ritual. Choose either Divine, Elder, Eldritch, or Primal. You must abide by all the restrictions and requirements of the Arcanum of the type you chose when you gained this feat (see Multiclassing, Arcanis Campaign Setting book).

Artistic Torturer

Your skills with the tools of torture are legendary.
- Your Intelligence is increased score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Medicine skill. If already proficient, add double your proficiency bonus to all Wisdom (Medicine) checks.
- When questioning a helpless, but conscious, humanoid creature you may spend 1 minute to give them 1 rank of exhaustion and reducing their remaining hit points in damage by one third, rounded down. Make a Charisma (Intimate) check against your target's Wisdom (Insight) check or find they cannot speak a deliberate lie for the next minute, though they may choose to remain silent. After 3 consecutive uses of this ability, the target creature must make a Constitution or Wisdom saving throw against a DC equal to 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier. On a failed save, they can no longer choose to remain silent.

Beastmaster

You hear the call of the wild and the creatures of Arcanis respond to your call.
- Your Wisdom or Charisma score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in the Animal Handling skill. If already proficient, add double your proficiency bonus to all Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks.
- You gain the downtime option *Train Animal*. You may take time to train a beast, such as a dog or falcon. The trained beast becomes friendly to you for as long you treat the beast well. It takes 30 days to train a CR 1/8 beast, 60 days to train a CR 1/4 beast, 90 days to train a CR ½ beast, and 120 days to train a CR 1 beast.
- As a bonus action you may command a friendly beast within 60 feet that can either see or hear you. The beast will then move and act as directed to the best of its ability. It can perform such common tasks as 'come', 'attack', 'guard', 'fetch', or 'aid'. If set to guard, the beast will remain on guard for 1 hour, alerting you if anyone approaches. You may not issue a command to a beast that is currently following the commands of someone else.

Biomancy Augmentation: Blinding Spittle

Prerequisite: Any ssethric race. Biological Adaptation: Venom Glands feat or similar natural poison ability. Must be from the Ssethregoran Empire or have access to biomancy.
- Your Constitution score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- Any time you deal poison damage with a racial ability or poisonous bite, you deal an additional 1d8 damage.
- As an action you may make a spit attack, forcing all creatures within a 15 foot cone to make a Constitution saving throw. The DC for this saving throw equals 8+ your proficiency bonus + your Constitution modifier. Creatures take 2d8 poison

damage and gain the blinded condition on a failed save until the end of your next turn, or half damage and are not blinded on a successful save. The damage increases to 3d8 at 6th level, 4d8 at 11th level, and finally 5d8 at 16th level. Once you use this attack, you can't use it again until you complete a short or long rest. Creatures immune to poison damage may still be blinded by this ability.

Biomancy Augmentation: Keeled Tail

Prerequisite: Any ssethric race. Must be from the Ssethregoran Empire or have access to biomancy.

- Your Strength score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain a swim speed equal to your base speed.
- You have advantage on all Strength (Athletics) check and Dexterity (Stealth) checks while swimming.

Biomancy Augmentation: Mottled Hide

Prerequisite: Any ssethric race. Must be from the Ssethregoran Empire or have access to biomancy.

- Your Dexterity score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have a natural camouflaging pattern to your scales of blacks, greens, and browns. As an action, if you are not wearing any clothing or armor and standing still in an area similar to the coloration of your scales (GM's discretion) you have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks as long as you remain motionless. Once you move or take an action, you must spend an action to become camouflaged again.

Biomancy Augmentation: Prehensile Tail

Prerequisite: Any ssethric race. Must be from the Ssethregoran Empire or have access to biomancy.

- Your Dexterity score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You may use your tail to hold and manipulate small objects weighting no more than 2 lbs.
- You may use your tail to wield a weapon with the light quality that weighs 2 lbs. or less. When you take the attack action you may choose to make an additional weapon attack with the weapon wielded by your tail as a bonus action.
- You cannot take this feat if you possess the *biomancy augmentation: spiked tail.*

Biomancy Augmentation: Retractable Claws

Prerequisite: Any ssethric race without a natural claw attack. Must be from the Ssethregoran Empire or have access to biomancy.

- Your Strength or Dexterity score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain a pair of retractable claws that you can use as natural weapons. You can retract and extend your claws as a bonus action. When retracted they are virtually undetectable requiring a DC 30 Intelligence (Investigation) check to detect.
- Your claws deal 1d4 slashing damage and are considered both finesse and light weapons. Upon reaching 6th level your claws deal 1d6 damage.

Biomancy Augmentation: Spiked Tail

Prerequisite: Any ssethric race. Must be from the Ssethregoran Empire or have access to biomancy.

- Your Constitution score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have developed, a powerful spiked tail that may be used to attack opponents. When taking the attack action you may attack with your tail as a bonus action dealing 1d8 plus strength bonus in piercing or bludgeoning damage.
- You cannot take this feat if you possess the *biological adaptation: prehensile tail* feat. If you possess the *tail swipe* feat and you use your tail to shove a target, that creature suffers 1d8 Piercing damage if they fall prone.

Biomancy Augmentation: Venom Glands

Prerequisite: Any ssethric race. Must be from Ssethregore or have access to biomancy.

- Your Constitution score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain a poison bite attack. On a successful hit you deal 1d4 + Strength modifier piercing damage and your target must make a Constitution saving throw. The DC for this saving throw equals 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Constitution modifier. A creature takes 2d8 poison damage on a failed save and half damage on a successful one. The damage increases to 3d8 at 6th level, 4d8 at 11th level, and finally 5d8 at 16th level. Additionally, after 11th level, creatures who fail their saving throw gain the poisoned condition for 1 minute. After you use your poison bite, you can't use it again until you complete a short or long rest. If you already possess a bite attack, you may use that base damage instead of the listed bite damage.

Biomancer

Prerequisite: Any ssethric race, Proficiency in the Medicine skill, Alchemist's supplies, and an elder spell caster.

- Your Intelligence score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain proficiency in Biomancy and Surgical Tools

- As part of your training you were given a bio-implant. Select 1 uncommon implant of your choice.
- You may implant biotechnological items into any living ssethric or humanoid creature, see Chapter 7: Codex of Magic for a full list of biotechnological items and how they are implanted.

Roleplaying Note: Characters with this feat may be used as a roleplaying catalyst for other characters choosing any of the Biomancy Augmentation feats.

Calculating Gaze

Your cold, unblinking eyes are unnerving to those not used to your kind.

Prerequisite: Any ssethric race.

- Your Wisdom or Charisma score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain advantage on all Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Intimidate) checks against non-ssethric creatures.

Dragon's Hide

Prerequisite: Ss'ressen or ssethric creature with natural armor racial trait.

You used a special diet, the proper rites, or a secret collection of ointments to harden your scales.

- Your Constitution score increase is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- The AC granted by your Natural Armor racial trait increases to 14 + your Dexterity modifier. If you do not have the Natural Armor racial trait, you gain it, but your AC is 12 + your Dexterity modifier.

Elemental Domination

Prerequisite: Elder spell caster

- Your Intelligence score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on all Constitution saving throws to maintain control over your summoned elementals, such as taking damage.
- Elemental creatures have disadvantage on all saving throws to resist being banished or charmed by spells you cast.
- Elemental creatures suffer disadvantage on their Charisma saving throw to resist your Reclaim Control class feature.

Elemental Expertise

Prerequisite: Elder spell caster, ssethric race

- Your Intelligence score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- Any time you roll for damage on a spell that deals acid, fire, cold, or lightning damage treat any 1's rolled as if you had rolled a 2.
- When you cast a spell that deals one of the elemental damage types you may spend 1 arcane point to bypass any resistance a creature may have against that damage type. If your spell damages multiple creatures you must spend 1 arcane for each creature you wish to affect in this manner.

Reptilian Regeneration

Prerequisite: ssethric race

- Your Constitution score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- After taking a 10-minute rest you may spend number of hit dice equal to your Constitution modifier (minimum of 1) to regain hit points as if you had taken a short rest. Once you use this feature you must finish a long rest before you can use it again.
- When rolling hit dice to regain hit points treat all results of 1 and 2 as if you rolled a 3.

Sage's Insight

Prerequisite: Proficiency in History

- Your Intelligence score increases by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- Choose three fields of study from the list below. You gain advantage on all Intelligence checks relating to one of these fields of study. There are times when your GM may require you to have an appropriate field of study to even attempt an Intelligence check about a topic or may significantly lower the DC of the check because you have an appropriate field of study.

Fields of Study

You may only choose a field of study if you are proficient with its associated skill.

Skills	Field of Study
Arcana	Arcane symbols, elder magic, eldritch magic, magic items, magical traditions, the planes of existence
Religion	Any religious sect, such as the cult of the Thousand-Eyed Man, or the cult of Tzizhet; you can also choose one of the major religions, such as the Mother Church of Coryan
Nature	Exotic animals, exotic plants, terrain, weather
History	Lost civilizations, myths & legends; you can also choose a specific nation or region, such as the Kingdom of Milandir or the Pricklespur Forest.
Psionic	Awakened monsters, psionic items, psionic powers, val family traditions

Serpent Blood

Prerequisite: ssethric race

- Your Constitution score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have resistance to poison damage and advantage on all saving throws to resist being poisoned. If you

already have resistance to poison you become immune to poison damage and the poisoned condition.

Tail Swipe

Prerequisite: Any ssethric with a tail.

You have learned to make attacks with your tail, surprising opponents with your lightning-quick sweeps. You gain the following benefits:

- You can make unarmed strikes with your tail, dealing 1d6 + your Strength modifier in bludgeoning damage.
- When you take the Attack action, you may attempt to shove a creature within 5 feet of you with your tail as a bonus action.
- You have advantage on any Strength (Athletics) check to resist being shoved.

Thickened with Age

Prerequisite: ssethric race

- Your Strength or Constitution score is increased by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- Your AC granted by your natural armor racial ability is increased by 1
- You reduce bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage you suffer from non-magical weapons by 3. This feature does not stack with similar features granted by feats, spells, or other class features.

New Combat School

Tooth and Claw

Many in the Known Lands believe that this style of combat originated with the val'Dellenov. In reality, the origins of this style of combat far predates the emergence of the humans, originating with the ssethrics long ago. Not taught in any particular combat school, many egg clutches and Ssanu Pits possess their own variation of this style of combat. Regardless of the tradition's origins, the basis of the style remains the same – savage and unrestrained.

Prerequisites: Must possess natural weaponry or the ability to gain natural weaponry, such as the ability to wild shape.

Maneuver and Technique DC: 8 + your Dexterity or Dexterity modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Physical Training: When you first learn this combat style, increase your Strength or Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

Weapons: Claw and bite Attacks

Journeyman

You gain the following maneuvers and techniques when you join this combat school. You can only use these maneuvers and techniques while wielding weapons suited to this combat school.

Savage Pounce (Maneuver): You may only use this maneuver during your first turn of combat and only against a creature up to one size category larger than you that has not taken its turn. If you move at least 20 feet straight toward the creature and hit it with your claw attack, you may spend 1 resolve die to force them to make a Strength saving throw or be knocked prone, at which point you may make two additional claw attacks against that creature as a bonus action.

Threatening Stance (Technique): Creatures within your reach provoke opportunity attacks from you even if they take the Disengage action before leaving your reach.

Unfettered Defense (Technique): If you are wearing light or no armor you gain a +1 bonus to your AC. You cannot use a shield and still benefit from this technique.

Master

You gain the following maneuvers and techniques when you take the *Combat School Training* feat a second time and select this school again. You can only use these maneuvers and techniques while wielding weapons suited to this combat school.

Improved Resolve Die: Your resolve die increases to d8.

Pressing Attack (Maneuver): When you successfully hit a creature with a melee weapon attack, as a reaction you may spend 1 resolve die. Roll the resolve die you spent and add the result to the damage dealt. Your target must also make a successful Strength or Dexterity saving throw or be moved back 10 feet. If you choose you may move with your target.

Flowing Sand (Technique): Any time you score a critical hit or reduce a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack, as a reaction you can move up to 10 feet and make a single melee attack.

Fancy Footwork (Technique): Any time you score a critical hit or reduce a creature to 0 hit points, as a reaction you can take the Dash or Disengage action.

Yataghan

New Equipment

Weapons and Armor of the Ssethregoran Empire

Armor	
Light Armor	Leather, studded leather
Medium Armor	Chain shirt, hide, scale mail
Heavy Armor	Chain mail, splint, plate

Weapons	
Simple Melee Weapons	Club, kris (dagger), handaxe, javelin, quarterstaff, spear
Simple Ranged Weapons	Light crossbow, shortbow, sling
Martial Melee Weapons	Battle axe, celt, crescent poleaxe, falchion, great axe, jambiya, longsword (yataghan), rope dart, tail bracer, warhammer
Martial Ranged Weapons	blowgun, heavy crossbow, longbow, net

Weapons and Armor of the Abessian Dominion

Armor	
Light Armor	Leather, padded, studded leather
Medium Armor	Chain shirt, hide
Heavy Armor	Chain mail, ring mail

Weapons	
Simple Melee Weapons	Club, kris (dagger), handaxe, javelin, quarterstaff, sickle, spear
Simple Ranged Weapons	Dart, light crossbow, shortbow, sling
Martial Melee Weapons	Battle axe, celt, falchion, great axe, jambiya, khopesh, rope dart, shortsword
Martial Ranged Weapons	Bola, longbow, heavy crossbow, net

New Armor and Weapons

New Armor

Armor	Armor Class (AC)	Strength	Stealth	Weight	Cost	Type
Ss'ressen scale	11 + Dex Bonus	-	-	13 lbs.	15gp	Light
Drake plate	18	13	Disadvantage	44 lbs.	1,800gp	Heavy

Kris

Ss'ressen Scale

New Armor Descriptions

Ss'ressen Scale Armor. This heavy coat and skirt of scaled leather is made from the hides of the huge ss'ressen of the Agamassi egg clutch. This extremely rare armor is only be found in Altheria, and in the Sulphur Marsh of the Kingdom of Milandir. Some, like the members of the Flaming Tongue Egg Clutch, who have a special enmity towards the hulking Agamassi ss'ressen may be brazen enough to wear a suit of this armor.

A ss'ressen can wear this armor and still use their Natural Armor racial feature, with a +1 bonus to their AC.

Drake Plate Armor. Forged from overlapping layers of scales from a great drake and soaked in the sap of the mepis tree, drake plate is more flexible, weighs less and is less restrictive than metal-based plate armors. This a favored armor of ss'ressen generals and warlords.

Drake Plate Armor

New Weapons

Weapons	Cost	Damage	Range	Weight	Properties
Martial Melee Weapons					
Apophic Spear	20 gp	1d6 Piercing	-	4 lb	Thrown (range 20/60), special, versatile (1d8)
Celt	25 gp	1d6 Slashing	-	2 lb	Finesse, light
Crescent Poleaxe	25 gp	1d6 Slashing	-	6 lb	Heavy, reach, two-handed, versatile damage (piercing)
Falchion	20 gp	2d4 Slashing	-	4 lb	Heavy
Jambiya	30 gp	1d6 Slashing	10/30	3 lb	Light, thrown (10/20)
Rope Dart	10 gp	1d6 Piercing	10	2 lb	Finesse, light, thrown (10), special
Martial Ranged Weapons					
Blowgun	10gp	1 piercing	25/100	1lb	Ammunition, loading

New Martial Weapons

Apophic Spear. First created by the resource-poor sand apophics, these weapons grant them great functionality in a single weapon, useful for nomads who carry only limited numbers of items.

This hand-carved weapon is fashioned from a series of locking tubes. Normally, the tubes are not extended and the weapon functions as a spear. However, if extended and locked into place, then the weapon functions as a long spear.

As an action you may extend or retract the spear. When retracted it acts as a regular spear. When, extended it loses the thrown and versatile properties, but gains the two-handed and reach properties dealing 1d8 Piercing damage.

Celt. Similar to the katar, a celt is comprised of two hand-held axe blades. Two slots are positioned in the axe blade perpendicular to the cutting edge. To grip a celt, the wielder's fingers and thumb pass through the blade and meet on the far side, positioning the blade along the outside edge of the wielder's closed fist. The wielder's forearm replaces a normal axe handle, providing the all leverage needed.

Crescent Poleaxe. The crescent poleaxe is a favorite weapon of the ssanu, who typically use it in ceremonial duels. Typically 5 to 6 feet long, this polearm is fitted with a shovel like crescent blade on one end and a spear tip on the other, granting the wielder of this weapon unexpected flexibility. In the hands of a master the blade's heavier end is used to slice through hide or armor, while the spiked end can exploit any seams or other weaknesses, to deliver a deep puncture wound.

Falchion. The falchion is a slightly curved one handed single edged blade. While not as flexible as a longsword, the falchion's heavy blade adds momentum to every swing allowing it to deliver devastating blows.

Jambiya. Short, quick, and light, this blade is designed to disembowel an opponent. This notoriously difficult weapon to master has a sharp, double-edged, upward curved blade, perfect for violent upstrokes that probe deep into an opponent's vitals.

Rope Dart. A rope dart is a heavy steel spike affixed to the end of a flexible length of rope or cord. Whirled around the body, a rope dart dazzles the eye while hiding its deadly intent. The dart relies more on finesse and accuracy to wield than it does strength. Provided that the rope dart is not thrown more than 10', you can maintain control of the weapon after it is thrown. You may pull it back and ready it for another throw either with a *use an object* action or as a *bonus* action.

New Equipment, Tack, and Materials

New Tools

Surgical Tools. This kit contains a full set of surgical tools in a large leather bag. These tools consist of bone saws, scalpels, cleavers, needles with fine thread, rubber headed hammers, and other useful items. Proficiency with this kit lets you add your proficiency bonus to Wisdom (Medicine) checks when using it to stabilize a dying creature. If you are already proficient with the medicine skill, your proficiency bonus is doubled.

Cost: 50 gp; Weight 6 lb.

Tack and Harness

Tack and barding for Huge and larger creatures have their prices doubled and then tripled in accordance to the mount's size. For example, a bit and bridle for a huge mount would cost 4gp, while leather barding for a gargantuan creature would cost 90gp.

Howdah. These compact forts can be mounted on Huge or larger creatures that are trained as mounts, such as a war beast. Up to 4 medium sized creatures can comfortably fit in a howdah. Those inside the howdah can make melee attacks against creatures adjacent to the mount, but only if they are wielding spears or weapons with the reach quality. Creatures in the fort have three-quarters cover against attacks and effects from outside the fort. If the mount dies, creatures in the howdah are placed in unoccupied spaces within 5 feet of the mount.

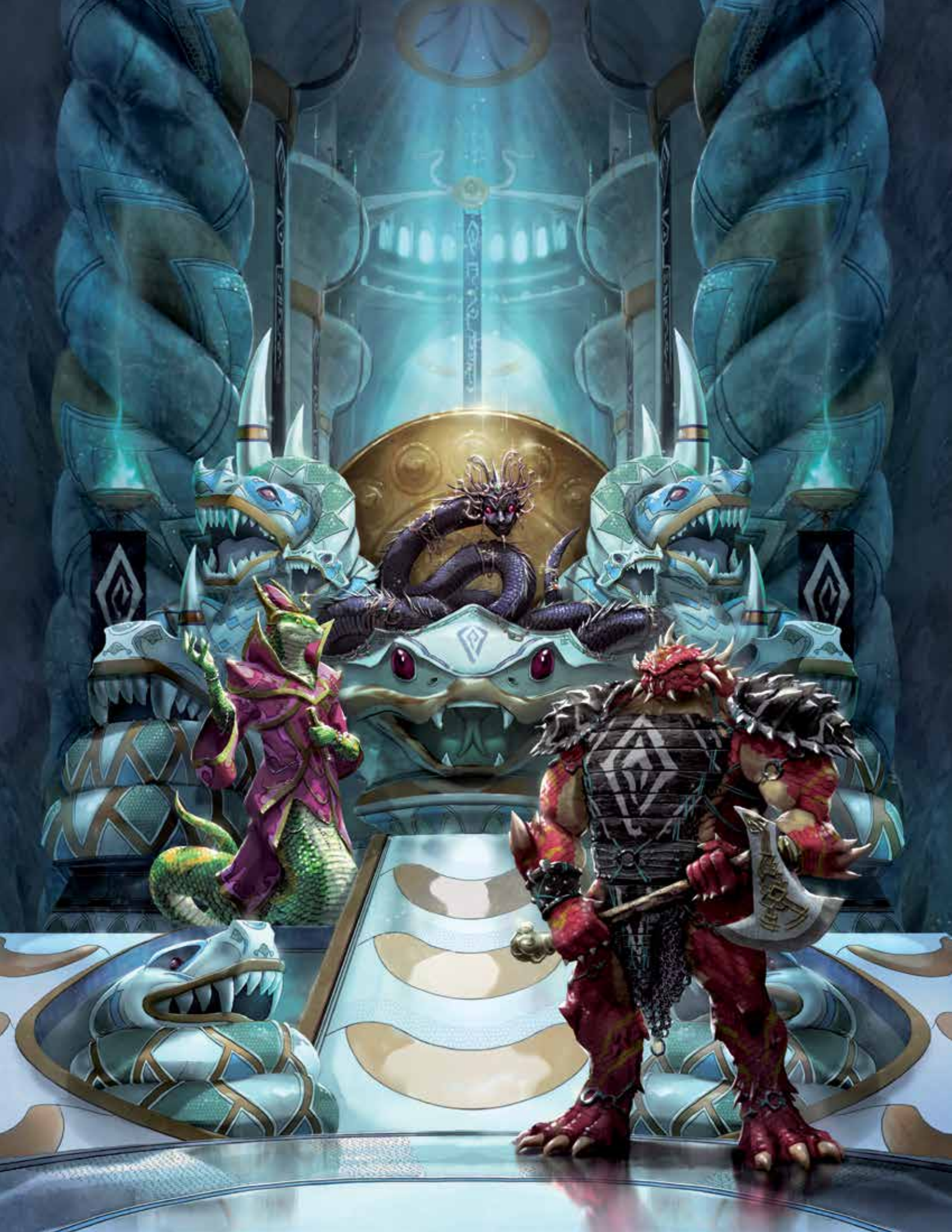
Cost: 250 gp; Weight 150 lb.

New Special Materials

Drake Scale. Once treated with the sap of the mepis tree, drake scale can be used to create the equivalent of any light or medium weapon commonly made of metal, such as a drake scale breast plate. Armor made of drake scale is lighter than its metal equivalent, reducing the armor's base weight by one third.

Cost: Drake scale increases the cost of the armor by 200gp.

Rope Dart



Chapter 7

Codex of Magic

Ssethric Magic

Ssethric sorcerers are an ancient group who have been manipulating the Arcanum since long before some of the modern races even existed. Over the millennia, the art of manipulating the arcane became second nature to the magically gifted, allowing ssanu and naga sorcerers to manifest magical feats far beyond the comprehension of the younger races, including the ancient elorii. This knowledge is jealously guarded by these ancient snake-men and currently is dominated by the Black Coil mages.

Of the lower races of the Ssethregoran Empire, the magical traditions are far less developed despite the antiquity of their civilization. Races like the ss'ressen lack the mental faculties needed to learn the intricacies of elder magic and developed their own magical traditions similar to those used by humanity. Not wanting to risk any competition, the ssanu and naga keep a close eye on these other races, lest they use these admittedly less complicated magical traditions against them as their eloran slaves did thousands of years ago.

Elementalism

One type of magic that characterizes the ssethrics more than any other is the manipulation of the elements. Elementalism is one of the oldest arcane traditions known to ssethric sorcerers, and their long exposure to this form of magic has made them the uncontested masters of the field. Even the elorii, despite their elemental nature, have not shown the level of mastery of this area, which the ssethric mages have honed to the point of perfection.

Elementalism is the application of arcane energies to control the raw elemental powers of the cosmos, bending and shaping these forces to the will of the caster. Other races have delved into this field of magic but compared the Ssethregorans they are mere novices. Heroes fighting human spell casters can look forward to fiery bolts that simply burn. Those in battle against ssethric elementalists can look forward to blasts of raw elemental fire so intense that everything inside the blast radius is instantly incinerated. The difference between ssethric elementalism and the minor evocations of the lesser races is the difference between a sword wielded by a master and one held by a child.

Creating Elementals

So deep is their knowledge of the elements that ssethric elementalists alone possess the knowledge to create beings of pure elemental energy. Other races may summon these elementals from other planes of existence, but these summonings are always temporary. Ssethric elementalists however, create elementals that are native to Arcanis. Similar to the creation of clockwork constructs by the Altherians, or animated statues and golems by others, skilled elementalists can create beings from raw elemental energies, drawing powers from one or more of the Elemental Planes to animate them. The elementalist then binds these powers to Arcanis, creating living servants with all the traits of their planar cousins, but anchored to this world, dispensing with the need to summon the creatures again and again.

Elementals created in this manner are bound to the caster and to the world of Arcanis. They are considered native and cannot be banished back to an elemental plane. The elemental is bound to the creator and follows orders to the best of their abilities. If the creator dies the elemental dissolves, breaking down into its constituent parts.

Another example of the ssethric elementalist's mastery of this tradition of sorcery is their ability to summon creatures from those Elemental Planes that exist in the intersection of the more commonly known ones. The Para-Elemental Planes, as these sorcerers designate them, are filled with bizarre and dangerous creatures. Only ssethric elementalists have the knowledge required to pierce the barriers between the planes, creating a conduit powerful enough to summon beings from the exotic Para-Elemental Planes to do their bidding.

Portals

Shortly after the defeat of the issori and the subsequent building of Yahssremore upon the ruins of the insectoids' capital, the ssethric mages made an earth-shattering discovery. Deep within the bowels of the city, hidden beneath the rubble of the previous inhabitants, was a strange and wonderful artifact. It was a ringed archway crafted of some unearthly metal, covered in deeply carved runes that glistened in the darkness. The conquerors had discovered a working portal. The ssanu elite quickly fell to the task of reverse engineering this strange device, and over a period of two centuries these diligent sorcerers unlocked its secrets. Over time, the budding empire began to create its own portal network, connecting all of the Old Empire's cities and outposts with these magical gateways.

Ssethric portals are an enigma to the other races of the Known Lands. A working ssethric portal is activated by an ancient ritual, designed to link one portal location to another. Strangely, certain rites and rituals of Yig's aspect of the Shifting Scales, facilitated the creation of this new network. At the height of its power, the Yahssremoran Empire had created a network of portals that allowed one to cross the entirety of the continent with but a single step.

The process is not truly instantaneous, but only takes a few seconds up to a minute for intercontinental travel. When in use, ssethric portals flash red rather than the blue of the Ansharan Gates used by the mammals for similar purposes. Traveling through ssethric portals is extremely painful and disorientating to non-ssethrics. Any non-ssethric creature using such a portal is automatically Stunned for one minute. They may attempt a DC 20 Constitution saving throw at the beginning of each turn to end this effect.

Psionics

Ssethrics are a very intelligent and cunning people, always looking for ways to exploit the advantages another race may hold and turn it to their benefit. During the final stages of the war against the cyclopes, the ssethric forces discovered that their monocular foes possessed a weapon of incalculable power, a living weapon that was being used against them. After defeating the last of the cyclopes, the ssethrics found the misshapen forms of the sansho, small mammals with large, pulsing craniums, and knew this was the source of the mental attacks they had endured.

The most learned minds of the Yahssremoran Empire studied the vivisected mammals and discovered how to transplant their unique powers of the mind into themselves. It was the archmage Gettulus that spearheaded the effort and founded the tradition of biomancy when he became the first ssanu to wield the power of psionics.

Biomancy

Biomancy is the magical discipline of creating functional items from the manipulation of living flesh. The ssethrics are masters of this biotechnology, having perfected the process over millennia of experimentation. Ssethric biomancers are responsible for countless wondrous items, powered by biological energy, rather than being reliant upon magic or some other power source.

Biomancers create items used for all applications, from bio-luminescent light sources that do not require flame or oil, to weapons of war capable of delivering death even in areas where the sorcery has been suppressed.

Biotechnology

Ssethrics are unique among the races of Arcanis in that they have advanced mightily in the realms of science and technology. Foremost among their prolific discoveries is the creation and application of biotechnology.

These items, though sometimes shaped through magical means, are in no ways magical themselves nor do they rely upon magic to function. Instead, biotechnological items

are self-sufficient systems grounded in the field of science, though fantastic in nature. The entire science is regulated and controlled by the infamous biomancers who perfect their craft deep within the bowels of the Towers the Black Coil. There, teamed with skilled arcanists and dread priests, the biomancers twist living tissue and force it to conform into the shapes they desire.

The biotechnology of the ssethrics falls into three main disciplines – neurological, physiological, and technological.

Neurotechnology is perhaps the most insidious of all, as these items are designed to act directly upon the recipient's brain and nervous system. Many of them are either implanted directly into the body or are grafted upon it, where it insinuates itself into the creature's nervous system by means of some sort of probe.

Physiological items are augmentations to a living creature that increases its physical prowess or grant it extraordinary abilities. These are commonly represented through the application of Biomancy Augmentation feats (see pg. 182) or though biotechnological items, some of which are detailed at the end of this chapter.

Technological items are complex machine-based devices, built to perform a specific task or function, commonly referred to as *clockwork* items by the Altherians.

In game terms, all biotechnological items are created through the *Biomancy* and *Medicine* skills and through the use of surgical tools. While some of the more highly advanced biotechnology may also require the application of magic in its creation, biotechnological items are not magical, they do not radiate magic, and continue to work where magic would not, such as in an anti-magic field. All biotechnological items are essentially created from living tissue and can repair itself to a limited degree. Damaged biotechnological items heal at a rate of 1 hit point per day until fully repaired, though some specific items may require additional repairs to bring them to a fully functional level.

New Spells

Spell Lists

† Denotes secret spells

Cleric Spells

1st Level

Augment Poison†
Flawless Incision

3rd Level

Elemental Guardians†

Elder Sorcerer

Cantrips

Acid Fang
Force Whip

1st Level

Flawless Incision
Steam Blast

2nd Level

Insightful Surveyance†
Rebuke the Gifted†
Windshear

3rd Level

Elemental Guardians†

4th Level

Detonating Rain

8th Level

Annihilate†

Eldritch Sorcerer

Cantrips

Acid Fang
Force Whip

2nd Level

Windshear

4th Level

Detonating Rain

Shaman

Cantrips

Acid Fang

1st Level

Augment Poison†
Spirit Armor

3rd Level

Spirits of Ancient Kin†
Spirits of Fallen Beasts†

Righteous Edict, Righteous Fury, and varn worshippers

Worshippers of Haulis who utilize the spell *righteous edict* or *righteous strike* deal necrotic damage. Creatures subject to the *righteous strike* spell cast by a worshipper of Haulis is frightened until the end of the caster's next turn.

Worshipers of Sipta who utilize the spell *righteous edict* or *righteous strike* deal force damage. Creatures subject to the *righteous strike* spell cast by a worshipper of Sipta is frightened until the end of the caster's next turn.

Worshipers of Zedok who utilize the spell *righteous edict* or *righteous strike* deal a random type of damage. Roll a d10 and compare the results to the Deity Damage table on page 277 of the Campaign Setting. Creatures subject to the *righteous strike* spell cast by a worshipper of Zedok is confused per the *confusion* spell until the end of the caster's next turn.

Spell Descriptions

Acid Fang

Transmutation cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous

One of your hands transforms into a snake that lashes out before returning to its natural form. Make a melee spell attack against your target. Once hit your target takes 1d4 piercing and 1d4 acid damage. The spell's damage increases by 1d4 (each damage type) when you reach 5th level (2d4/2d4), 11th level (3d4/3d4), and finally 17th level (4d4/4d4).

Annihilate

8th-level conjuration

Secret Spell: Ssethregorans
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (25-foot cone)
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous

You conjure a wave of elemental energy which crashes down upon your foes. Each creature in a 25-foot cone must make a Constitution saving throw. Creatures take 10d8 damage on a failed save, or half as much upon a successful one. The damage is divided between two damage types, which are randomly determined from the table below.

Roll a d6 twice.

Result	Damage Type
1	Fire
2	Cold
3	Lightning
4	Thunder
5	Acid
6	Force

Augment Poison

1st-level transmutation

Secret Spell: Ssethric creatures
Casting Time: 1 Bonus action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

This spell is only effective upon creatures capable of dealing poison damage with a natural attack, such as a poisonous bite or a scorpion's stinger. For the spell's duration the damage dealt by the poison is increased by 1d8. If the poison requires a saving throw to deal damage or to apply a condition this spell increases the saving throw DC by +2.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd or 4th level, you can maintain your concentration on the spell for up to 8 hours. When you use a spell slot of 5th level or higher, you can maintain your concentration on the spell for up to 24 hours.

Breath of the Dragon

3rd-level evocation

Secret Spell: Ss'ressen who worship Kassegore or the Fire Dragon
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (30-foot cone)
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous

Each creature in a 30-foot cone must make a Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 6d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. This fire ignites any flammable objects in the area that isn't being worn or carried.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 3rd.

Detonating Rain

4th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 150 Feet
Components: V, S, M (a thin platinum chain)
Duration: Instantaneous

Each creature in a 60-foot-radius is forced to make a Dexterity saving throw. Creatures who fail suffer 7d6 force damage, while creatures who make their save suffer half damage.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for ever slot level above 4th.

Dragon's Fury

5th-level transmutation

Secret Spell: Ss'ressen who worship Kassegore or the Fire Dragon
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a scale from a drake, which is consumed in the casting, and a 75 gp gold torque, which is not).
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

For the duration, you gain the following benefits:

- Your size doubles in all dimensions, and your weight is multiplied by eight. This growth increases your size by one category, for example, Medium to Large. If there isn't enough room for you to double in size, you attain the maximum possible size in the space available. Until the spell ends, you have advantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws. Your weapons also grow to match your new size. While your weapons are enlarged, your attacks with them deal 1d4 extra damage.
- You have resistance to fire damage.
- You cannot be frightened.

When the spell ends, you return to your original size.

Dragon's Roar

2nd-level illusion

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (15-foot radius)
Components: V, S, M (the scale from a drake)
Duration: Instantaneous

You roar with primal ferocity. Each creature in a 15-foot radius must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or drop whatever it is holding and become frightened until the end of its next turn.

Elemental Guardians

3rd-level conjuration

Secret Spell: Ssethric creatures
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (10 ft. radius)
Components: V, S, M (a source of that element conjured)
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

When you cast the spell, choose an element and choose up to a number of creatures you can see to be **unaffected**. An affected creature that enters the area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, must make a Wisdom save. On a failure, the creature takes 3d8 damage of the elemental type chosen. On a success, the creature takes half damage.

Additionally, when you suffer damage of the same or opposite elemental type as the element you choose,

you can end the spell as a reaction to take no damage as the elemental beasts sacrifice themselves to absorb the incoming damage.

Elemental Damage Types and their Opposed Element

Several spells and some magical items are attuned to specific elements. Refer to the table below for common elemental types and their opposed element.

Element	Damage Type	Opposed by
Earth	Acid	Air
Air	Lighting	Earth
Fire	Fire	Water
Water	Cold	Fire

Flawless Incision

1st-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action (Ritual)
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a surgical tools)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

The forces of the Arcanum guide your hand to perfection during an operation.

You automatically succeed in the next surgical tools check you attempt, ending the spell.

Force Whip

Conjuration cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 Feet
Components: V, S, M (a thin platinum chain)
Duration: Instantaneous

Make a melee spell attack against a creature within range. On a hit the target suffers 1d6 force damage. If the creature is of Large size or smaller they are pulled 10 feet closer to you. This damage increases by 1d8 when you reach 5th level (2d8), 11th level (3d8), and finally 17th level (4d8).

Insightful Surveyance

2nd-level transmutation

Secret Spell: Ssethregoran
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, M (a pair of silver rings)
Duration: Concentration, up to 24 hours

You can use the eyes and ears of those adapted with biotechnology.

You may only target a creature which has been implanted with ssethric biotechnology. While the spell is active, as an action you can sense the world using the senses of the target creature until the start of your next turn. While experiencing these senses, you gain the benefits of any special senses that they possess. During this time, you are deaf and blind with regard to your own senses. The target is unaware of this effect.

Rebuke the Gifted

2nd-level abjuration

Secret Spell: Ssethregoran
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a drop of blood)
Duration: 1 minute

Those who have been modified by the forces of the Ssethregoran Empire find it impossible to rise against you.

Until the spell ends, any creature who is implanted with ssethric biotechnology or varn grafts (such as ironscale armor, van grafts, etc.) that chooses to attack or cast a harmful spell against you must first make a Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the creature must choose a new target or lose the attack or spell. This spell doesn't protect you from area effect spells. Any such creature you attack or damage in any way gains Advantage on their saving throws to resist this spell's effects. Any creature that makes a saving throw and successfully damages you is no longer affected by this spell and is immune to this spell from this caster for one hour.

Scales of the Dragon

1st-level transmutation

Secret Spell: Natural Armor racial trait, or something similar
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (A scale from a ss'ressen or drake)
Duration: 24 hours

For the duration of this spell your AC equals 17 or the AC granted by the armor you are wearing, whichever is higher. As an action you may choose to end the spell.

Spirit Armor

1st-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 hour.

You gain 5 temporary hit points. Additionally, any creature that hits you with a melee attack while you possess these temporary hit points also suffers 5 necrotic damage.

At Higher Levels: Both the temporary hit points and damage is increased by 5 for each slot level above 1st.

Spirits of Ancient Kin

3rd-level transmutation

Secret Spell: Ssethregoran Primal Casters and Disciples of Jeggal Sag only.
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (Scales from an Ssethric that died of natural causes)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour.

You summon the spirit of a long dead reptilian creature to aid you in battle. The spirit envelops you, granting you 5 temporary hit points and increasing your maximum hit points by 5. Additionally, while this spell is active the spirit imbues you with one of its native abilities. When this spell is cast choose one of the following spirits. You may not choose a different spirit unless you recast this spell.

Spirit of the Carnadon: When you take the attack action you may make an unarmed attack in the form of a bite as a bonus action. This unarmed attack deals 1d10 + Strength piercing damage.

Spirit of the Kawheka: You gain a swim speed equal to your base speed and can hold your breath for 1 hour.

Spirit of the Pterodon: You gain a fly speed of 60 feet. When the spell ends, if you are still aloft you fall unless you can stop this from occurring by some other means.

Spirit of the Sc'math: Your speed increases by 10 feet. If you move more than 20 feet before attacking a creature you may make an additional melee attack as a bonus action.

Spirit of the Sterax: When you take the attack action you may make an unarmed attack with your tail as a bonus action. If you do not possess a tail a spiritual tail grows in its place. This unarmed attack deals 1d8 + Strength bludgeoning damage, and any creature of Large size or smaller that is struck with this attack must make a Dexterity Saving Throw or fall prone.

Spirits of Fallen Beasts

3rd-level conjuration

Secret Spell: Disciples of Jeggal Sag
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour.

You may summon forth any beast with a Challenge Rating of 2 or lower, which appears in an unoccupied space you can see within range. This beast is considered a spirit and gains the Incorporeal Movement monster feature (see side bar). Once the spell ends or this creature is reduced to 0 hit points, it disappears.

The summoned creature is friendly to you and your companions. Roll initiative for the summoned creature, which has its own turns. It obeys any verbal commands that you issue to it (no action required by you). If you don't issue any commands, it defends itself from hostile creatures, but otherwise takes no Actions.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using higher-level slots, you may summon additional creatures, as follows: 2 with a 5th-level slot, 3 with a 7th-level slot, and 4 with a 9th-level slot.

Incorporeal Movement

A creature with this trait can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. If the incorporeal creature ends its turn inside an object, it takes 5 (1d10) force damage.

Steam Blast

1st level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Self (15-foot cone)
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous

You can expel a cone of roiling steam from your mouth. Each creature in a 15-foot cone must make successful a Constitution saving throw or take 3d6 fire damage and be blinded until the end of their next turn. Creatures that succeed on the saving throw are not blinded and suffer only half damage.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 2nd.

Windshear

2nd level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Choose a 10-foot cube within range. Any creature that enters the area or begins their turn in the area suffers 4d4 slashing damage. Additionally, airborne creatures who enter the area or start their turn within the area are moved 10 feet toward the ground.

At Higher Levels: The damage increases by 2d4 and the distance increases by five feet for each slot level above 2nd.

Magic Items

Artifacts

Anaksulay, the Skullreaver

Weapon (longsword), artifact

Anaksulay
the Skullreaver

Description: Anaksulay is an elegant single-edged sword, with twin barbs placed on either side of the weapon above its minimal hilt. Its long haft allows it to be wielded one or two-handed. The sword's crescent shaped pommel is made out of a very dense metal, countering the heavy blade and providing perfect balance. Mystical sigils are engraved upon the blade, its language unknown, but granting it devastating powers.

History: Anaksulay was a prize taken by the Black Talon Warlord Somantis, ripped from the cold hand of a cyclops warrior-mage during the Second War of Extinction. For almost two thousand years the blade was a symbol of office for leader of that egg clutch's warrior caste and was coveted by rival ss'ressen throughout the empire.

Years of experimentation taught the Black Talons how to use the sword's vampiric powers, using it to leech the life force from others and use it in various ways, including healing the warrior wielding it. However, it was not until the final battle of the il'Huan War that the weapon's most powerful ability revealed itself.

Throughout the engagement, Warlord Salta led from the front lines, tirelessly wading through the il'Huan lines and slaughtering hundreds of the creatures. On that final day, Salta mounted his mor'let and charged the il'Huan general, an enormous specimen who towered even over the Agamassi. As they closed, the warlord was gravely wounded, but managed to impale one of the towering beast's insect eyes with Anaksulay. With his final breath, Salta gurgled one short command. The eldritch blade flashed a brilliant blue and discharged the life force of those it slain that day directly into the head of the il'Huan general, earning it the name *Skullreaver*, from that day forward.

Anaksulay, the Skullreaver remained in the talons of the Black Talons until the day of their rebellion against the naga. After denying the naga emperor his command, the High Matriarch Mother knew their days were numbered. Following the Fire Dragon's instructions, she sent the majority of the egg clutch north, out of the Morass and into the human territories to find their *Promised Land*. To give them time to flee, she, along with a thousand warriors remained to confront the Ssethregoran response.

After the summary execution of the High Mother Matriarch, Warlord Suless, with Skullreaver held high, led the charge against the Barbed Tail invaders. Though the Black Talons fought with all the skill and ferocity they possessed, the outcome was a foregone conclusion. Before he breathed his last, Suless hid the eldritch blade before it could be claimed by the Barbed Tail warlord. Where Skullreaver lies is unknown, as it has yet to be found, much to the consternation of the Barbed Tail ss'ressen.

Abilities/Effects: You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls with this magical longsword. Upon a successful hit this weapon deals an additional 1d10 necrotic damage. Any creature struck by the blade must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or have its hit dice reduced by 2 and its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The creature dies if its hit point maximum is reduced to 0. If a creature is reduced to 0 HD though the power of this weapon it is dead.

The blade acquires 1 charge for every 2 HD of damage dealt and can hold a maximum of 50 charges. Each day, at dawn, the blade loses 1d10 charges.

When charged you may utilize these charges to power the following abilities.

Revitalize: As a bonus action you cast *cure wounds* upon yourself, as if cast at a level equal to the number of charges you spend, up to a maximum of 9 charges

Empowered Strike: After any successful strike with this blade you may spend up to 6 charges dealing an additional 1d10 force damage per charge spent.

Empowered Blast: As an action you may fire a devastating blast of force from the blade. Choose a number of charges to spend (up to a maximum of 15) and one target within 100 feet. Roll a ranged weapon attack adding your proficiency bonus. If you successfully hit the creature it takes 1d10 force damage per charge spent.

Awareness: While wielding this weapon, you are aware of all creatures within 60 feet of you. Additionally, if you spend 1 charge, for the next minute, you can sense the physical state they are in based on the remaining hit points, i.e., if they are heathy (80 to 100% of their maximum hit points), injured (50 to 79%), wounded (20 to 49%) or gravely wounded (1 to 19%)

Destroying the Skullreaver: This eldritch blade may only be destroyed by slaying 100 HD of creatures with it, then unleashing it's power into the body of the creature that took it from its cyclops master, a Black Talon warlord.

Ss'koreth's Staff of Dominion

Staff, Artifact (requires attunement by a ssethric Elder caster)

Description: Carved from a single block of heartwood from an ancient oak, this staff resembles a hooded serpent. The fingernails of ten thousand elorii children are fixed to its shaft to simulate its scales. Its hood is marked by whorled patterns and arcane sigils of might, while the most flawless emerald ever found rests in the serpent's open maw. Wrapped around its neck, suspended on fine gold chains, are dozens of tiny faceted gems that sway and tinkle with the slightest movement of the staff.

History: Few ssanu reach the mythic status that Ss'koreth enjoys among ssethrics, for both his legendary achievements and his mastery over the arcane. A sorcerer of such renown needed a symbol of his power, but Ss'koreth was dissatisfied with the staff he wielded for centuries. Though formidable enough to match any of those held by his contemporizes in the sorcerous cabal known as the Black Coil, Ss'koreth desired one that matched his own reputation.

It was only during the birthing of the first elorii that he stumbled upon the solution to his quandary. The elorii possessed an infinitesimal of the power granted to them by their creators, the Elemental Lords, as well as Belisarda, the Life Goddess. By transferring even an iota of that energy to his staff, he could wield unimaginable power. As life entered a new batch of ten thousand elorii, he savagely pulled out a single fingernail from each and bound them to his staff. With the elemental power of the elorii now coursing through it, the archmage completed fashioning his Staff of Dominion.

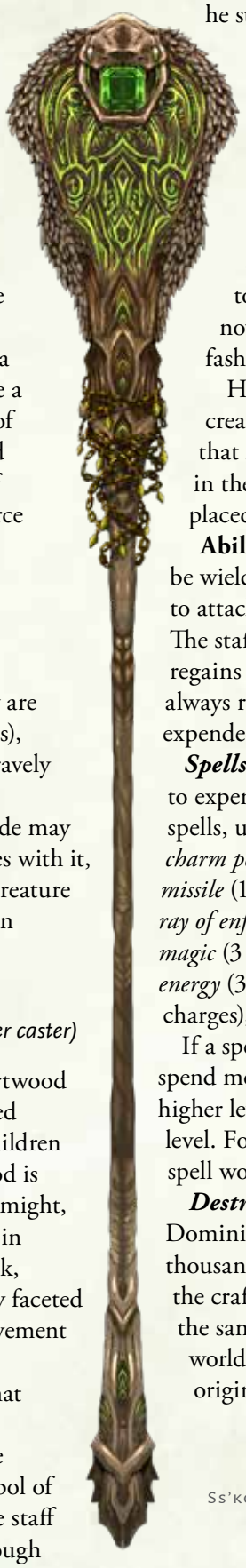
History records that Ss'koreth was slain by his own creations during the Elorii Rebellion. It is believed that his staff continues to reside in his private study in the Tower of Gettulus, trapped by the spell that he placed upon it just before his death.

Abilities/Effects: Ss'koreth's Staff of Dominion can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls and has the reach property. The staff has 75 charges that can be used to cast spells. It regains 6d6+6 expended charges daily at dawn and will always regain charges, even if the last charge has been expended.

Spells: While holding this staff, you can use an action to expend 1 or more charges to cast one of the following spells, using your spell save DC and spell attack bonus: *charm person* (1 charge), *hideous laughter* (1 charge), *magic missile* (1 charge), *sleep* (1 charge), *hold person* (2 charges), *ray of enfeeblement* (2 charges), *shatter* (2 charges), *dispel magic* (3 charges), *fireball* (3 charges), *protection from energy* (3 charges), *banishment* (4 charges), *confusion* (4 charges), or *conjure minor elementals* (4 charges).

If a spell has effects when cast at higher levels, you can spend more charges from the staff to cast the spell at a higher level at the rate of one charge per extra spell slot level. For example, casting *magic missile* as a 3rd level spell would cost 3 charges.

Destroying the Staff of Dominion: The Staff of Dominion may only be destroyed if all the original ten thousand elorii who had their fingernails removed in the crafting of the staff were to sacrifice themselves at the same time. As elorii are constantly reborn into this world, it is possible to find all ten thousand of the original elorii, but it would be a nigh impossible task.



Ss'koreth's Staff of Dominion

Elixirs, Oils, and Potions

Elixir of Longevity

Potion, Rare

Description: All races have sought methods to lengthen their lifespans beyond that which is normal for their species. Unlike others, in ancient times the ssanu of Yahssremore succeeded in their efforts. Using a mixture of asp venom and the tears of their elorii creations, the ssanu have created a draught that will extend their lifespan. Commensurate with the value of this potion, they are typically housed in gold-inlayed ceramic flasks depicting the emperors of old as well as the absent god Kassegore.

Abilities/Effects: When you drink this potion you suffer 1 level of exhaustion that cannot be recovered from until the potion has run its course. After three days, you must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or instantly drop dead. If you succeed in this saving throw your natural life span is doubled. You may benefit from the effects of this potion multiple times.

Scentblocker Salve

Potion, uncommon

Description: Created from fermented iguadon eggs, this potion is made by the ss'ressen to negate the sense of smell.

Abilities/Effects: After smearing this salve under the nose as an action, you lose all sense of smell for 1 hour. This can be used to suppress Ss'ressen Frenzy as well as the Scent ability.

Rings

Ring of Reptilian Regeneration

Ring, uncommon (requires attunement)

Description: This small gold ring is made to resemble a tiny viper with emerald eyes that coils around your finger.

Abilities/Effects: This ring has 6 charges. While you are wearing this ring, you can use an action to expend 1 charge and goad the small viper on the ring into biting your finger, injecting its regenerative venom into your body. This lets you regain 4d4 + 4 hit points. If you expend the last charge, the ring loses all magical properties.

This ring regains 1d3 charges daily at dawn.

Ring of Reptilian Regeneration

Staffs and Wands

Ebon Battlestaff of Ssethregore

Staff, rare/very rare (requires attunement by an arcane spell caster)

Description: The ebon battlestaves of Ssethregoran sorcerers are crafted by the Black Coil for battle mages that fight alongside the armies of the empire. These jet-black staves are steeped in the juices of the black lotus to give them both strength and color. Polished to a mirror finish, they are inscribed with one of four elemental symbols, attuning them to that element.

Abilities/Effects: This quarterstaff grants a +1 bonus to both attack and damage rolls. This staff also acts as a spell casting focus and grants a +1 bonus on spell attack rolls.

These staffs possess 10 charges and regain 1d8+2 expended charges daily at dawn. If you ever expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff retains its +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls but loses all other properties until it is placed within the form of a large or larger elementals that corresponds to the staff's element attunement (see below) for 3 hours a day (need not be consecutive) for 1 week, after which the staff regains 1d4 charges.

Each staff is attuned to a particular element and while holding this staff, any time you cast a spell that deals the element's corresponding damage type, you may spend a charge from this staff to cast the spell as if you used a spell level slot 1 level higher, even if this is higher than the spell level you are currently able to cast.

Very Rare. Very rare versions of this staff also grants the additional ability to, while holding the staff, expend charges as an action to cast the following spells, using your spell save DC and spell attack bonus, with the spells damage type being changed to match the damage type of the staff's attuned element: *thunderwave* (1 charge), *scorching ray* (2 charges), and *lightning bolt* (3 charges).

Element	Damage Type
Earth	Acid
Air	Lighting
Fire	Fire
Water	Cold

The Split Staff of Zhulass

Staff, very rare (requires attunement by an elder spell caster)

Description: First created by the ancient elementalist Zhulass over two thousand years ago, this staff resembles two serpents entwined around the length of the staff, their heads meeting at the top. Their open mouths grip a sphere of platinum, upon which is inscribed an arcane summoning rune.

Abilities/Effects: This quarterstaff acts as a spell

casting focus and grants a +1 bonus on spell attack rolls.

These staffs possess 10 charges and regain 1d8+2 expended charges daily at dawn. If you ever expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff retains its +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls but loses all other properties until it is placed within the form of a large or larger elementals that corresponds to the staff's element attunement (see below) for 3 hours a day (need not be consecutive) for 1 week, after which the staff regains 1d4 charges.

Each staff attuned to a specific element. Any time you cast a spell that conjures elementals of the staff's attuned element, you may expend a number of charges equal to the spell level slot used to grant the conjured elemental the effects of a *bless* spell, which lasts for a number of minutes equal to the spell level slot used to cast the spell. Additionally, when holding the staff, you may expend charges as an action to cast *elemental guardians* (3 charges) or *conjure lesser elementals* (6 charges).

Finally, as an action you may separate the ends of the staff to produce a pair of 3-foot rods. These clubs grant you a +1 bonus to hit and damage when attacking with these magical weapons. In addition, these rods act as spell casting focus with permanently escribed *entwined (weapon/spell casting focus) rare venomous runes*.

Staff of the Beast Lord

Staff, rare (requires attunement by a primal caster)

Description: The Staff of the Beast Lord is approximately seven feet long, crowned with a crystalline globe placed within the roots of the sapling used to craft it, and inscribed with glyphs and sigils dedicated to Jeggal Sag. Many followers of the Lord of Beasts decorate these staves with fetishes, giving them a savage look.

Abilities/Effects: This quarterstaff acts as a spell casting focus and grants you a +1 bonus on spell attack rolls.

These staffs possess 10 charges and regain 1d8+2 expended charges daily at dawn. If you ever expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff retains its +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls, but loses all other properties until it is placed in the branches of an ancient Ju-lau tree for one week, after which the staff regains 1d4 charges.

While holding this staff, you may expend charges as an action to cast *animal friendship* (1 charge), *animal messenger* (1 charge), or *conjure animals* (4 charges).

Staff of the Scaled Defender

Staff, Rare (requires attunement by a ssethric or Elder caster)

Description: This staff is an ornately carved green wood, topped by the image of a hooded cobra, complete with ivory fangs.

Abilities/Effects: This quarterstaff acts as a spell casting focus and grants you a +1 bonus on spell attack rolls.

You can use an action to speak this staff's command word and throw the staff on the ground within 10 feet of you. The staff becomes either a giant constrictor snake or a swarm of poisonous snakes (your choice) under your control and acts on its own initiative count. By using a bonus action to speak the command word again, you return the staff to its normal form in a space formerly occupied by the snake(s).

On your turn, you can mentally command the beast if it is within 60 feet of you and you aren't incapacitated. You decide what action the snake(s) take(s) and where it moves during its next turn, or you can issue a general command, such as to attack your enemies or guard a location.

If the snake(s) is reduced to 0 hit points, it dies and reverts to its staff form. The staff then shatters and is destroyed. If the beast reverts to staff form before losing all its hit points, it regains all of them the next time it is activated.

Sulmacet's Staff of Imperial Screams

Staff, legendary, unique (requires attunement by a ssethric Elder caster)

Description: Upon dying and receiving Wantiir's gift of unlife, Sulmacet traveled to a remote region of the Yahssremoran Empire's territory to pursue his interests in solitude, aware that his new state made many uncomfortable. The emperor insisted that an honor guard accompany him to act as a assistants and messengers, should the archmage require anything from the imperial court. Sulmacet was well aware that these honor guards were spies, meant to keep the emperor apprised of his actions, but allowed it.

After the fall of Yahssremore and Sulmacet's invaluable assistance in repelling the pursing elorii from the borders of the Kraldjur Morass, Emperor Sseth awarded the undead sorcerer with many honors, but instated that at least one ssethric remain as his companion, an anchor to the world of the living. This task fell to the Black Talons, who assigned one of their warriors to permanently reside within Sulmacet's Tower in the Boneyards.

For his part, Sulmacet mostly ignored these mortals, seeing them as brief flashes of light that quickly burnt out, only to be replaced by another. Over time, he came to value having another sentient being to speak with, becoming particularly attached to his last guard, the Black Talon Humaskk. This female ss'ressen was quite intelligent, well-read, and had a passion for history. She delighted in speaking to Sulmacet as one who lived through times that were so ancient, as to be almost myths to her. The undead sorcerer indulged the inquisitive ss'ressen and found that reliving ancient memories rekindled his love of a life long past.

Unfortunately, this occurred during the time of the great ssethric schism, when both the Dark Crest and the Black Talons refused the orders of the naga Emperor Narthsslik. In a pique of rage, the emperor placed all members of these two egg clutches under an execution order, which included, Sulmacet's companion, Humaskk.

It is said that the four Barbed Tail ss'ressen that ambushed Humaskk outside of the tower are still screaming in agony, as the sorcerer refuses to let them die. Ripping the knowledge that the assassination of Humaskk was given by the naga emperor, Sulmacet began a long trek through the empire, on his way to the capital. As word spread of the coming of the undead sorcerer, the naga emperor prepared a lavish fête to welcome the Hero of the Empire, unaware of the purpose of Sulmacet's visit. Upon his arrival to the throne room, Emperor Narthsslik sat upon the Coiled Throne and watched in horror as the ancient sorcerer systematically slew every living being between him and the emperor.

To his credit, Emperor Narthsslik did not cower in fear and instead summoned his own considerable arcane power against Sulmacet. These were batted aside with less than a flick of his desiccated talons. The emperor then sought to use the powers of his mind as he was said to be the most powerful psionicist in the Known Lands, but while this gave the undead sorcerer pause, Narthsslik failed to realize that while undead sacrifice their souls to attain life beyond death, their intellect remain as potent as it was in life.

In the end, Sulmacet smashed through all of the emperor's defenses and paralyzed him. Then, while whispering the reason for this attack, he slowly ripped out the Narthsslik's spine and lastly, his skull. Using an unholy ritual he devised ages ago, he trapped the soul and mind of the emperor into his skull and capped his staff with it, coiling his long spine about the haft.

Back at his tower, Sulmacet took the time to inscribe numerous sigils and other arcane glyphs upon each and every vertebrae of the former emperor, infusing it with necrotic energies and other sorceries. Used only in the most desperate of times, the Staff of Necromancy, or as he refers to it, the Staff of Imperial Screams, lies in the inner sanctum listening to Sulmacet's tales of the empire of old, taking the place of the slain Humaskk. For his part, all that the impotent Emperor Narthsslik can do is scream silently for an end that will never come.

Abilities/Effects: This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While you hold it, you gain a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls.

The staff has 50 charges for the following properties. It regains 4d6 + 2 expended charges daily at midnight. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 20, the staff regains 1d12 + 1 charges.

Master the Dead: While holding the staff you may cast *animate undead* (7th level version), and *create undead* (9th level version) once each, regaining the ability to do so at midnight.

Necromantic Absorption: While holding the staff you are immune to necrotic damage and the fatigue. Additionally, as a reaction you may use the staff to instantly destroy any number of undead you currently control within 30 feet of you, even if that control is temporary, such a though the spell *dominate monster*. Your staff regains a number of charges equal to the total CR of destroyed undead creature, minimum of 1. This means destroying a zombie would regain 1 charge, while destroying a wight would regain 3 charges.

Necromantic Strike: Thought of as a failsafe, you may will the staff to explode in a storm of necrotic energy in a 30-foot-radius sphere centered on it. You suffer necrotic damage equal to 16 x the number of charges in the staff. Every other creature in the area must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes an amount of damage based on how far away it is from the point of origin, as shown in the following table. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage.

Distance from Target	Damage
10 ft. away or closer	8 x the number of
11 to 20 ft. away	6 x the number of
21 to 30 ft. away	4 x the number of
31 ft. or more	No Damage

Screams of the Dammed: While holding the staff you may manifest the psionic power *mental scream* at your full level through the staff even if you are not awakened. If you are awakened and possess psionic focus you may spend one psionic focus to utilize *mental scream's* expression.

Spells: While holding the staff, you can use an action to expend some of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability: *animate undead* (7th-level version, 7 charges), *bestow curse* (3 charges or 5th-level version, 5 charges), *blight* (4 charges), *circle of death* (6 charges), *contagion* (5 charges), *create undead* (6 charges), *dispel magic* (3 charges), *false life* (2nd-level version, 2 charges), *vampiric touch* (3 charges).

You can also use an action to cast one of the following spells from the staff without using any charges: *arcane lock, detect magic, light, mage hand, protection from evil and good, speak with dead*.

If you are reduced to zero hit points or are instantly killed by the damage, there is a 50 percent chance you are reduced to 1 hit point and become an undead creature, if you are not one already (see Undead Heroes on page 47 of the Arcanis Campaign Setting).

To Thy Master's Hand: If the staff is on the same plane of existence as you, you can summon the staff as a bonus action on your turn, causing it to teleport instantly to your hand.

Viper Wand

Wand, rare (requires attunement)

Description: These wands are crafted from gnarled oak and are carved into the form of a slithering snake. They are typically gifted by high Ssethregoran commanders to their most important soldiers as a reward for their loyalty.

Abilities/Effects: While held you gain advantage on all Wisdom (Medicine) checks. Additionally, as an action you may will the wand to transform into a snake, which then wraps itself around your arm and then sinks its fangs into your flesh. While the wand is in this form, if you are reduced to 0 hit points the wand heals you for 4d4+4 hit points, after which the wand reverts back to its original form, regaining the ability to transform into a snake upon the next dawn.

Weapons

Axe of the Emperor

Weapon (battle axe), very rare (requires attunement)

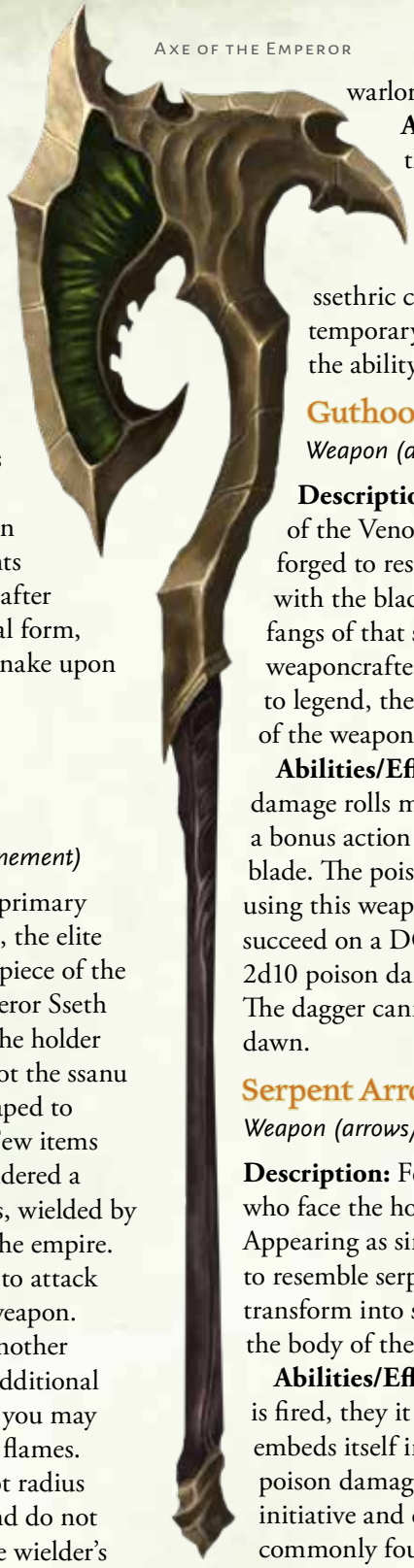
Description: These bearded axes are the primary weapon of the dreaded miliarius capharic, the elite bodyguards of Ssethregoran emperors. A piece of the scaled hide of the eternally tortured Emperor Sseth is embedded in the axe, a reminder that the holder of the weapon now serves the naga and not the ssanu emperors. The blades of these axes are shaped to appear as a rough-hewn crescent moon. Few items within the Ssethregoran Empire are considered a higher mark of honor than these weapons, wielded by only the most elite and loyal warriors of the empire.

Abilities/Effects: You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. Additionally, while acting in defense of another (GM's discretion), this weapon deals an additional +1d6 slashing damage. As a bonus action you may will the weapon to be enveloped in white flames. These flames shed bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light for an additional 20 feet and do not harm the wielder. This provide a +2 to the wielder's Intimidation checks.

Fang of Destiny

Weapon (battle axe), very rare (requires attunement)

Description: These highly stylized weapons are created for the various ss'ressen warlords, typically to commemorate a great victory against the enemies of the empire. These bearded axes are inlayed with designs of famous battles won by their egg clutch in silver and bear the name of the warlord etched upon the pommel.



Axe of the Emperor

Abilities/Effects: When attacking with this battle axe you gain a +3 bonus to hit and damage when attacking non-ssethric creatures. Additionally, while holding this weapon you gain the ability to rally all ssethric creatures within 60 feet, granting them 5 temporary hit points which last for 1 hour, regaining the ability to do so after completing a long rest.

Guthook

Weapon (dagger), very rare (requires attunement)

Description: These jambiyas are crafted by members of the Venomous Scale egg clutch. These blades are forged to resemble the head of a striking serpent, with the blade curving in such a way to represent the fangs of that serpent. The mark of the Venomous Scale weaponcrafter is stamped upon the pommel. According to legend, these marks allow the egg clutch to keep track of the weapon's location at all times.

Abilities/Effects: You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. You can use a bonus action to cause thick, green poison to coat the blade. The poison remains for 1 minute or until an attack using this weapon hits a creature. That creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 2d10 poison damage and become poisoned for 1 minute. The dagger cannot be used this way again until the next dawn.

Serpent Arrows/Bolts

Weapon (arrows/bolts), rare

Description: Few weapons are more terrifying to those who face the hordes of Ssethregore than these projectiles. Appearing as simple arrows or crossbow bolts carved to resemble serpents, upon striking their target they transform into small vipers, which embed their heads into the body of their targets.

Abilities/Effects: When these arrows or bolts are is fired, they it transforms into a poisonous snake and embeds itself into the target dealing an additional 1d4 poison damage. After which this snake acts on your initiative and continues to attack. These arrows/bolts are commonly found in groups of 1d6 arrows/bolts.

Wondrous Items

Armlet of Vigilance

Wondrous Item, uncommon (requires attunement)

Description: These armlets are crafted from jade and carved in the shape of the holy symbol of Kassegore and have the innate ability to increase or decrease in size to accommodate the arm of the wearer. Originally crafted by

the clergy of Kassegore for the highest of ssethric society, these armbands are highly coveted by those who still venerate the Great Devourer.

Abilities/Effects: While wearing this amulet you have a +5 bonus to your passive Perception and advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

If you are wearing this armlet when surprised by an attack it will contract and warn you of the impending danger. Although the warning does not occur soon enough to warn others, you may roll initiative as normal. This armlet may only warn of such an attack once and regains the ability to do so daily at dawn.

Drums of the Deep

Wondrous item, legendary

Description: These 4 feet high drums are crafted from bronze and capped with the tanned hides of a deceased Daughter of Yig. The drums are carried on the backs of massive war beasts and when played, they let out an intense bass rumble that non-ssethric creatures find highly disturbing.

Abilities/Effects: You may play these drums as an action causing all friendly creatures within 100 feet that can hear you to be under the effect of a *bless* spell for their next turn. Alternatively, if you are proficient with drums, you may cause all unfriendly creatures within 100 feet to make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A successful saving throw grants the target immunity to this effect or the effect of any other Drums of the Deep for 24 hours. Once an ability is used, it cannot be called upon again until the next dawn.

These drums are rather large and weigh 500 lbs., requiring them to be mounted upon a trained beast or vehicle, such as a wagon.

Helm of Battle's Fury

Wondrous item, very rare, (requires attunement)

Description: These helms are yet another product of the smithies of the ancient Empire of Yahssremore and have been worn by some of its greatest heroes and warriors over the millennia. These iron helms were shaped to appear it was the open mouth of a serpent, with a pair of downwards facing fangs, passing down from the temples of the helmet towards the chin of the wearer. While worn, the eyes of the wearer glow with a dull red color, and appear sunken in the helmet.

Abilities/Effects: Once this helm is placed on you head, you find you may not remove it without the casting of a *remove curse* spell first. While this helm is worn, if you do not possess the Rage class feature, then when you enter combat you fly into an uncontrollable rage as if you were a 1st level fury, gaining a rank of exhaustion once the rage ends. Once you do so the helm loses the ability to force you into rage until the next midnight. If you already possess the Rage class feature you do not succumb to the helm's power, instead when you rage you gain an additional +1 bonus to damage rolls.

Portal Key

Wondrous item, rare

Description: These metal rods are covered in intricate arcane runes. When the Empire of Yahssremore began spreading throughout the known world, they were forced to rely more and more on the network of ssethric portals to ensure that the empire remained cohesive. Due to the relative shortage of mages learned in the opening of these portals, the dark mages of the Black Coil crafted these 4 foot long metal rods, intricately inscribed with hundreds of strange arcane runes. By inserting one of these rods into the center of a portal and focusing on the destination that the key was attuned to, even those not trained in the arcane could operate a ssethric portal, if only to a single destination.

Abilities/Effects: To use a Portal Key, one must succeed on a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcane) or Intelligence (Linguistics) skill check by someone who knows the Ssethric language to decipher the glyphs and runes upon it and determine to what location the key is attuned. Once the location is known, you may use this key to open any ssethric portal as an action by placing the rod in the center of the portal field. The portal remains open as long as the key remains placed in the center of the portal field. Once you have passed through it with the key, the portal closes behind you.

Once a key is created, it is keyed to a specific ssethric portal and can never be attuned to any other.

Scalpel of the Vivisectionist

Wondrous item, Legendary

Description: These blades are considered among the finest surgical tools in all of Arcanis, but rather than for healing, they were designed to be used in abhorrent acts. These scalpels are favored by biomancers as the keen blades allow them to prolong the life of their victims while their bodies are vivisected, increasing their endurance and consciousness, far beyond normal for such torture. While these blades may allow the biomancer to perform much more thorough surgeries and dissections, it does not protect the subject from the horrors of watching their bodies cut apart before their very eyes.

Abilities/Effects: While you hold this scalpel you gain advantage on all Wisdom (Medicine), Intelligence (Biomancy), and surgical tools checks. Whenever a creature is reduced to 0 hit points while being operated on with this scalpel, they regain 1 hit point, but remain conscious and paralyzed until the surgery is complete

Biotechnological Items

As previously discussed, biotechnological items are not magical, do not radiate magic, and continue to work where magic would not, such as in an anti-magic field. All biotechnological items are essentially created from living tissue, and can repair themselves to a limited degree. Damaged biotechnological items heal themselves slowly overtime and can be repaired though the use of healing magic.

Miscellaneous Biological Items

Cephalopodic Gills

Miscellaneous biomancy, rare

Description: Resembling a soft, bulbous oblong piece of tissue, cephalopodic gills grant the user the ability to breathe while under water.

Abilities/Effects: As an action you may hold the gill up your mouth. A series of suction cupped tentacles reach out and wrap themselves around the user's head, holding the gill in place and creating an air-tight seal. When the user submerges, 6 flaps open along the bulbous body revealing scarlet gills. These gills extract oxygen from the water and supply it to the wearer, allowing them to breathe underwater as long as they are on. Coincidentally, while wearing a cephalopodic gill, the user cannot eat or breathe air until the gill is removed. The gills may be removed at any time as an action where it returns to its original shape.

Drakharl Cannon

Miscellaneous biomancy, rare (requires attunement)

Description: Drakharl cannons were derived from small fire-breathing reptiles native to Kraldjur Morass. After centuries of modification, the original species is extinct, but what remains is an incredibly powerful bit of bioengineering. Appearing like a scaled, twisted lump of flesh covered in numerous spiky protrusions, a drakharl cannon wouldn't win any competition for aesthetics. Instead it relies on its powerful internal combustion capabilities to convert fresh blood into a pyroclastic agent that burns when exposed to air.

Abilities/Effects: Attuning to this item causes it to graft to your arm just above the wrist on the top part of the forearm. Once attached you may fire this cannon as an action, requiring all creatures in a 20 foot cone to make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 4d8 fire damage, with creatures making their saving throw only suffering half damage. You may fire it again, willing it to drain some of your blood as you gain one level of exhaustion. Otherwise the cannon may not be fired until you complete a short or long rest.

Drakharl Cannon

Flesh Grafts

Miscellaneous biomancy, uncommon to very rare (see below)

Description: Flesh grafts, living tissue medicines, are the first aid kit of the ssethric battlefield. Carried by field medics, flesh grafts are patches of bioactive tissue that graft themselves to a wound and repair some of the damage.

Abilities/Effects: You may apply a flesh graft to any friendly creature as an action. Once utilized the flesh graft turns grey and shrivels up, becoming worthless. The effect of the graft depends upon its rarity

Uncommon. Affected creature regains 4d4 + 4 hit points.

Rare. Affected creature regains 4d4 + 4 hit points and has any diseases cured and the poison condition removed.

Very Rare. Affected creature regains 4d8 + 15 hit points. Additionally, for 1 hour the affected creature regains 1 hit point at the start of each of its turns, i.e., 10 Hit Points each minute. Creatures' severed body members, such as fingers, legs, tails, and so on, if any, are restored after 2 minutes. If you have the severed part and hold it to the stump, the graft instantaneously causes the limb to knit to the stump.

Photochromatic Skin

Miscellaneous biomancy, rare (requires attunement)

Description: These living jumpsuits are created from the freshly flayed skin of giant octopus or squid. Once crafted, these suits have a slick appearance and a rubbery consistency.

Abilities/Effects: You may will the suit to wrap itself around your body as an action. Once attached to your body the photochromatic skin automatically senses the environment around it and changes color to match its surroundings, granting you advantage on all Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Torg Bomb

Miscellaneous biomancy, uncommon

Description: Created from the glands of a trogath, or stink lizard as they are commonly referred to by the Altherians, these sacks are subjected to an alchemical enhancement process that makes the gland even more potent than normal. The modified gland is then placed in a thin glass container.

Abilities/Effects: These items may be thrown to a range of 30 feet where they explode creating a non-magical effect equal to a *stinking cloud* spell with a duration of 1 minute. Torg bombs are expendable and may only be used once.

Wisp

Miscellaneous biomancy, uncommon

Description: Wisps are floating glass orbs, about the size of ss'ressen eggs, that emit an eerie blue or green bioluminescent light.

Abilities/Effects: After you hold the wisp for 1 minute it starts to follow your mental commands. As an action, you may will it to float in place up to 10 feet off the ground, or command it to follow you at a distance of three feet where it floats at head level. A wisp sheds bright greenish or bluish light in a 20-foot radius and dim light for an additional 20 feet. Alternatively, you may will the wisp to dim its light to a 5-foot radius of dim light or back to full brightness as a bonus action.

Symbiotic Implants

Some of the many biotechnological devices developed by the biomancers are symbiotic implants. These symbionts cannot exist for long on their own and must bond with another living creature, granting their hosts expanded capabilities in exchange of becoming an extension of their host's biological system.

For the most part, implants require dangerous surgical procedures far beyond the capabilities of even experienced biomancers. Some of the symbiotic devices are able to self-implant. There are some very rare symbionts that can exist in a hibernation for years, coming back to life when coming in contact with a suitable host and will attempt to bond, sometimes violently, with that host.

For most hosts, one symbiont will not leave any noticeable impact upon the body. Each additional symbiont will be more demanding on the host, as each implant requires sustenance, draining the host. As such, only the hardiest of creatures can sustain more than two implants.

Symbiont's Demands on the body

You may only be bonded to a number of implants equal to your Constitution modifier (minimum of 1). If somehow you are bonded to more implants than your Constitution modifier you gain 1 rank of exhaustion for every additional implant beyond your Constitution modifier. If somehow these ranks of exhaustion are removed though the use of magic, you regain all ranks of exhaustion after 12 hours.

You cannot possess two of the same implant.

Implanting Biomancy

There are two methods of implanting and bonding to a biomancy implant. The first, which is far more common, is surgical implantation. The second are implants designed to bond to a suitable host of their own volition. Implants can only be bonded to humanoids and beasts.

Surgical Implants. Bonding an implant to a host though the use of a surgical procedure requires the surgeon to be proficient with surgical tools, Biomancy, Medicine, and Arcana. The procedure itself requires 1 day of downtime by the surgeon and a number of days depending on the implant by the subject.

After the day of downtime the surgeon is required to make an Intelligence (Biomancy), a Wisdom (Medicine), and a Dexterity (Surgical Tools) check. The surgeon may keep on trying after a failed roll. At least two checks will need to be successful for the surgery to be successful. For each 1 rolled by the surgeon, the subject automatically fails a death saving throw. If the surgeon fails a check, while not rolling a 1, the subject is required to make a death saving throw. If the subject fails 3 death saving throws during the surgery, the subject is dead. For each additional check made during surgery, the downtime doubles.

Self-implanting. Implants capable of self-implanting will attempt to bond with any suitable host when their specific conditions are met. If you don't wish to bond with an implant you may make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. If successful, you pull away from the implant before it can attempt to bond with you. If you fail the Dexterity saving throw or wish to willingly bond with the implant, you are required to make a Constitution saving throw. Upon a successful save the implant instantly bonds to you. Frequently, the knowledge of how to use the implant and what its capabilities are instantly known to you. If you fail this saving throw the implant does not properly bond to you. You gain 1 rank of exhaustion as the implant slowly bonds to you over the next 24 hours. Until the bond is complete you cannot recover the rank of exhaustion in any way. If you roll a 1 on this saving throw the implant fails to bond with you and dies.

Biological Implants

Additional Adrenalin Glands

Biomancy implant, very rare (requires attunement)

Description: These vat grown glands are specifically grown to adapt to the physiology of the creature they are implanted in. The use of these glands are taxing on upon the host, and only the hardiest of subjects can safely have one implanted.

Implanting Methods: Additional adrenalin glands can only be implanted though a surgical procedure, DC 20, and require 6 days of downtime by the host.

Abilities/Effects: You can activate your additional adrenalin glands as a bonus action. For the next minute your movement speed is doubled, you gain a +2 bonus to your AC, have advantage on Dexterity saves, and gain an additional action on each of your turns. This action can be used to attack (one weapon attack only), dash, or disengage. After this effect ends

you must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer 1 rank of exhaustion. Once used you cannot activate your additional adrenalin glands until you complete a long rest.

Bloodbag

Biomancy implant, rare

Description: A bloodbag appears to be a hard-shelled oblong protrusion affixed to the wearer's back or stomach. Upon closer examination a bloodbag reveals its origins, taking on an insectile appearance. Short, thick limb-like growths extend from its sides, and burrow into the flesh of the wearer, securing the bloodbag in place. A triangular barbed 'head' inserts itself into the host, where it forms a connection with their circulatory system. A bloodbag is then able to drain blood from the wearer and store it for later use, usually to power other biotechnological items that require additional blood to operate.

Implanting Methods: These are self-implanting symbionts, DC 10. As it attaches itself it drains your blood, causing one level of exhaustion that may be recovered normally.

Abilities/Effects: Once attached you may choose to shunt your blood into the bloodbag, suffering a level of exhaustion. This blood is stored in your bloodbag indefinitely, and may store up to 3 'shunts' of blood. Whenever a biotech item needs to draw blood from you to function, you may instead draw blood out of your bloodbag, feeding your biotechnology without reducing your own effectiveness. Alternatively, you may use a shunt of the blood to recover 2d8+2 hit points.

Claw Implants

Biomancy implant, uncommon

Description: These implants are used to replace a creature's claws with longer, sharper ones.

Implanting Methods: These claws can implanted though a surgical procedure, DC 10, and require 1 day downtime by the host. Alternatively, there are self-implanting versions that look like gloves of living flesh. Once placed on a hand, they attempt to immediately bond with the host, DC 15.

Abilities/Effects: On your turn, as a bonus action, to may extend or retract your claws at will.

If you do not possess natural claws: These claws are hidden away from cursory inspection when retracted. Any time you attack with your claws your unarmed attack bonus is increased by 1d4 and its damage type is changed to slashing.

If you possess natural claws: Extending your claws lengthen them by 2 to 3 inches. While extended, you deal an additional 1d4 damage when attacking with your claws and its damage type remains unchanged.

Improved Heart

Biomancy implant, rare (requires attunement for additional abilities)

Description: These vat grown hearts are specifically grown to adapt to the physiology of the creature they are implanted in. Possessing extra chambers and being more muscular, these hearts can give their host a burst of energy when most needed.

Implanting Methods: Improved hearts can only be implanted though a surgical procedure, DC 20, and requires 6 days of downtime by the host.

Abilities/Effects: You gain advantage on all saving throws to resist gaining levels of exhaustion. Additionally, if you choose to become attuned to your new heart, you may take the dash or dodge action as a reaction during combat, regaining the ability to do so after completing a short rest. Furthermore, you gain advantage on all death saving throws.

Improved Lungs

Biomancy implant, uncommon

Description: These vat grown lungs are specifically grown to adapt to the physiology of the creature they are implanted in, these lungs allow the host to hold their breath for an extended period of time.

Implanting Methods: These lungs can only be implanted though a surgical procedure, DC 20, and require 6 days of downtime by the host.

Abilities/Effects: You can hold your breath for a number of minutes equal to 6 times your Constitution modifier (minimum 5 minutes).

Ironscale Armor

Biomancy implant, very rare (forces attunement)

Description: These strange biotech creatures are grown in huge vats, nurtured in a solution that is rich in dissolved iron ore. Upon achieving a certain size, the symbionts are removed and affixed to the hide of a candidate, where they burrow into the flesh of the recipient with hundreds of tiny feelers and anchor themselves to the host's skeleton. Once affixed, they continue to grow, feeding off the lifeblood of the host creature, acting as a symbiotic parasite, providing incredibly powerful armor at the expense of blood loss and constant pain. These symbionts grow until they have covered their host with thick iron plates that restrict movement and make wearing armor impossible, eventually dulling their host's pain receptors.

Implanting Methods: These implants must be placed upon the host's body at multiple points by a trained biomancers, making accidental exposure virtually impossible. Once placed, these implants instantly attempt to bond to their host who may make DC 20 Constitution saving throw to resist, if desired. In most cases the subject

is restrained and tied down, allowing the symbionts to attempt to bond with its host over and over. Once implanted the host is reduced to 0 hit points but are stable and suffers 3 levels of exhaustion.

Abilities/Effects: Once implanted you cannot wear armor and are considered to be wearing heavy armor for the purposes of feats, spells, powers, class features, and magic items. Ironscale armor grants you an Armor Class of 18 plus half your proficiency bonus, and turns any critical hit against you into a normal hit. You can use a shield and still gain this benefit. The implants may be enchanted with runes, but not other enchantments. This armor is considered to have four rune slots.

Ocular implants

Biomancy implant, rare (requires attunement for additional abilities)

Description: Implanted in a wide range of subjects, ocular implants grant the host improved vision, far beyond the vision of a common member of their race.

Implanting Methods: These eyes must be implanted though a surgical procedure, DC 15, and require 3 days of downtime by the host.

Abilities/Effects: You gain darkvision of 30 feet. If you already possess darkvision, the range of your darkvision is increased by 30 feet. Additionally, if you choose to become attuned to your eyes you gain advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Olfactory implants

Biomancy implant, rare (requires attunement for additional abilities)

Description: Commonly implanted in hunting beast or ss'ressen trained as hunters.

Implanting Methods: These glands must be implanted through a surgical procedure, DC 15, and require 2 days of downtime by the host.

Abilities/Effects: You gain the ability to track though the use of scent with a successful Wisdom (Survival) skill check with the DC determined by your GM. Additionally, if you choose to become attuned to your glands, you gain advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on scent.

Thickened Skin

Biomancy implant, uncommon

Description: The subject has a second, more durable hide subcutaneously implanted beneath their natural one, resulting in a level of natural protection equal to boiled leather. Amazingly, this process does not result in any outward change, making these implants ideal for spies.

Implanting Methods: Thickened skin can only be implanted though a surgical procedure, DC 15, and requires 6 days of downtime by the host.

Abilities/Effects: When you are not wearing any armor, your Armor Class equals 12 + your Dexterity modifier. You can use a shield and still gain this benefit.

Neurological Implants

Neurological Implants are not living symbionts but complex surgical implants that alter the creature's biology sometimes unlocking a creature's highest potential or altering their mental capacity making them easier to control.

Neurological Shiv

Biomancy implant, very rare (forces attunement)

Description: A neurological shiv is a glandular implant that is placed deep inside the frontal lobe of the subject creature. This procedure is notoriously difficult and many patients die under the knife. Those who do survive gain unprecedented mental abilities. The procedure is jealously guarded by the ssanu biomancers who perfected it, and only granted to non-ssanu individuals who have proven themselves to be exceptionally loyal.

Implanting Methods: A neurological shiv can only be implanted though a surgical procedure, DC 20, and requires 6 days of downtime.

Abilities/Effects: You gain *psionics potential* racial trait.

Puppetmaster Hood

Biomancy implant, legendary (forces attunement)

Description: An insidious device designed to make slaves more docile, puppetmaster hoods are employed by those who desire complete control over their personal entourage. A puppetmaster hood

Puppetmaster Hood

looks like a dusky red triangle of knobby tissue, with a long whip-like tail protruding from one tip. The underside is covered with thousands of hook studded suction cups.

Implanting Methods: When placed between the shoulder blades, the hood self-affixes to the victim. The long tail then pierces the skin at the base of the victim's skull and sends tendrils along the host's nervous system, permeating the brain of the victim, DC 15.

Curse: Once attached, the puppetmaster hood forces a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw each round until it takes control of the victim, placing then under the effects of the *dominate monster* spell, under the control of a slaver's crown (see below) that has been attuned to the hood. This hood may only be removed after the affected creature has been reduced to 0 hit points, is stabilized, and has a *greater restoration* spell cast upon them.

Slaver's Crown

Biomancy implant, legendary (attunement required by a psionic manifester)

Description: One of the greatest creations of the Black Coil, the slaver's crown amplifies the wearer's mental prowess, enabling them to use their psionic powers to control others. Slaver's crowns are ostentatiously decorated, designed to display the wearer's social status to all. A slaver's crown acts by stimulating the various glandular centers found deep within the wearer's brain, constantly pumping endorphins and electric shocks throughout the brain, enhancing the psionic abilities of its host.

Implanting Methods: When worn upon the head, the crown attempts to bond with its host, DC 15.

Abilities/Effects: While wearing a slaver's crown your manifesting ability score is 19. It has no effect on you if your manifesting ability score is already 19 or higher. Additionally, you may attune your crown to a number of puppetmaster hoods equal to your proficiency bonus. Attuning a crown to a hood requires you to touch the hood while wearing the crown for 1 uninterrupted minute. If you attempt to attune to more hoods than your proficiency bonus your crown loses its attunement to the first hood to which it was attuned.

Telepathic Apparatus

Biomancy implant, very rare (forces attunement)

Description: Appearing as a fine weave of metallic wires attached to a triangular spike, this telepathic apparatus is the ultimate in silent communications. When pressed against the side of the skull, the hardened tip burrows down and fuses to the user's skull. These amazingly thin wires then worm their way into the user's parietal lobe, attaching directly to the speech synapses.

Implanting Methods: Telepathic apparatus are self-implanting, and once pressed to the head it attempts to bond to its potential host, DC 15.

Abilities/Effects: You gain the ability to communicate telepathically. You may communicate telepathically with any other creature within 100 feet that has a language. Additionally, you may manifest *telepathic bond*, regaining the ability to do so after completing a long rest.

New Runes

Ssethric Runes

Ssethric runes are highly advanced runes, requiring extremely specialized techniques to inscribe upon an item. If a non-Ssethregoran runemaster attempts to inscribe or transfer a ssethric rune, then the rune will take up twice as much space as normal. For example, an uncommon rune would take two slots instead of one. Since most objects only have three rune slots, this means that rare runes or those of greater rarity are generally not usable by non-Ssethregoran runemasters.

Corrupted [Blessed]

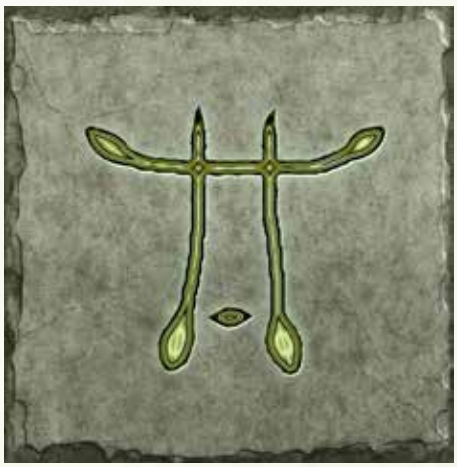
Ssethric rune, uncommon/rare/very rare (requires attunement by a worshiper of the varn gods)

Description: Dedicated to the varn deities, these runes are the bane of spellcasters of other faiths.

Spellcasting Focus or Weapon

While holding a spell casting focus or attacking with a weapon inscribed with this rune, any time you roll a 20 on an attack roll against a creature that does not venerate the varn deities this rune applies an additional effect to your target, depending on the rarity of the rune.

Uncommon: The creature you damaged suffers disadvantage on their next Charisma saving throw and suffers disadvantage on their next spell attack roll. This effect dissipates after 1 minute.



Rare: The creature you damaged suffers disadvantage on their next saving throw, disadvantage on their next attack roll, and targets have advantage on their next saving throw against the next spell they cast that grants a saving throw. This effect dissipates after 1 minute or until used.

Very Rare: The creature you damaged gains 1 rank of exhaustion, suffers disadvantage on their next saving

throw, disadvantage on their next attack roll, and targets have advantage on their next saving throw against the next spell they cast that grants a saving throw. This effect dissipates after 1 minute or until used.

Destabilizing

Ssethric rune, rare/very rare

Description: Originally designed to combat escaped elementals, destabilizing runes affect any spell that magically summons a creature to Arcanis from another plane. These runes were commonly inscribed on weapons during the Time of Terror and were used to send many infernals back to the Hells.

Armor and Shields

As a reaction, when attacked by an adjacent conjured creature, such as creatures summoned though the use of *conjure woodland beings* or *summon Sarish's own*, you may use this rune to cast *banishment* upon that conjured creature. Once activated you regain the ability to do so upon the next dawn. The DC of the spell's saving throw is determined by the rarity of the rune.

Rare: DC 14
Very Rare: DC 15

Spell casting focus

While holding a spell casting focus and casting *banishment* upon a conjured creature, that creature suffers disadvantage on their saving throw to resist the effect. When you regain the use of this ability depends upon the rarity of the rune.

Rare: Upon the next dawn.
Very Rare: Upon completing a short rest.

Weapon

When wielding a weapon with this rune and damaging a conjured creature you may activate this rune as a bonus action, casting *banishment* upon the damaged creature. You regain the ability to do so upon the next dawn. The saving throw of this effect depends on the rarity of the rune.

Rare: DC 14
Very Rare: DC 15

Resonating

Ssethric rune, uncommon/rare/very rare

Description: Weapons with a resonating rune constantly vibrate and hum in the wielder's hands, droning and whistling as the wielder smashes through their opponent's defenses. A resonating weapon may cut through substances that are harder and denser than the weapon itself.

Weapon

Weapons imbued with this rune are considered to be adamantium for the purposes of bypassing damage resistance. Additionally, when utilized to break an item or attack a construct, these weapons deal additional damage of the same damage type of the weapon as indicated by the rune's rarity.

Uncommon: No additional damage
Rare: +1d10
Very Rare: +2d10

Ssethric

Ssethric rune, uncommon/rare/very rare

Description: The ssethric rune is the pinnacle of ssethric runesmithing, designed to devastate the enemies of the Ssethregoran Empire.

Armor and Shields

Armor and Shields imbued with a ssethric rune reinforces the wearer's defenses against non-ssethric creatures.

Uncommon: When attacked by a non-ssethric creature you may impose disadvantage on that attack as a reaction. You regain the ability to do so after completing a short rest. You must be aware of the attack to utilize this ability.

Rare: When attacked by a non-ssethric creature you

may impose disadvantage on that attack as a reaction. You must be aware of the attack to utilize this ability.

Very Rare: As the rare rune above. Additionally, you may use your reaction to gain advantage on any saving throw to resist the effects of a spell or power cast or manifested by a non-ssethric. You must be aware of the casting/manifestation to utilize this ability.

Spell casting focus

While holding a spell casting focus and casting a damaging spell against a non-ssethric creature you may utilize this rune to reroll a number of damage die as determined by the rune's rarity. You regain the ability to do so after completing a short rest.

Uncommon: You may reroll two (2) of your damage dice.

Rare: You may reroll up to half (round down) of your damage dice.

Very Rare: You may reroll all of your damage dice.

Weapon

A weapon engraved with this rune grants you a bonus to hit non-ssethric creatures depending upon the rarity of the rune.

Uncommon: +1 bonus to hit

Rare: +2 bonus to hit

Very Rare: +3 bonus to hit

Venomous

Ssethric rune, uncommon/rare/very rare

Description: Venomous runes make use of the power of poison to cause damage or to protect from it.

Armor & Shield

Armor and shields inscribed with the venomous rune protects its wielder from the effects of poison.

Uncommon: You gain advantage on all saving throws to resist poison damage and the poisoned condition.

Rare: You gain resistance against poison damage and gain advantage on all saving throws to resist the poisoned condition.

Very Rare: You gain resistance against poison damage and the poisoned condition.

Weapon

With a command, any weapon inscribed with this rune becomes enveloped in a sickly green aura. This glow sheds dim light in a 10 foot radius. As long as this rune is active, the weapon is considered to be magical. Any time you roll a 20 on an attack roll with this weapon, you deal additional poison damage as indicated by the rune's rarity below.

Uncommon: +1d6 poison damage.

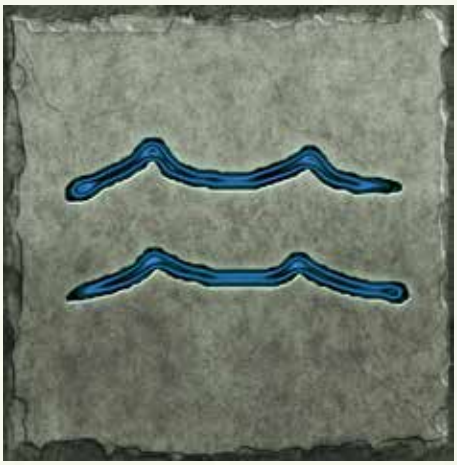
Rare: +2d6 poison damage.

Very Rare: +3d6 poison damage.

Water

Ssethric rune, uncommon/rare/very rare

Description: This elemental rune was originally created during the Yahssremoran Expansion into the shallows surrounding their coastline. It is said that the rune was copied from a version used by their allies, the sea devils.



Armor & Shield

Armor and shields inscribed with the water rune grant you abilities depending on the rarity.

Uncommon: You gain advantage on all Strength (Athletics) checks when swimming.

Rare: You gain a swim speed equal to you speed.

Very Rare: You gain the ability to breathe underwater as if you were under the effects of the *water breathing* spell. Additionally, you gain the swim speed granted by the rare version of this rune.

Weapon

Melee weapons inscribed with water rune grant you the following abilities depending on the rarity.

Uncommon: Any melee weapon engraved with the water rune may be used under water without suffering disadvantage on attacks rolls.

Rare: Weapons engraved with this water rune gain the ability of the uncommon water rune and deals an additional 1d4 damage of the weapon's type when wielded underwater.

Very Rare: Weapons engraved with this water rune gain the ability of the uncommon water rune and deal an additional 1d8 damage of the weapon's type when wielded underwater.

Appendix A
Codex of Threats

Note on Spells

Spells marked with an (*) can be found in Chapter 7: Codex of Magic, while spells marked with a (†) can be found in the *Arcanis 5E Campaign Setting*. Psionic powers and rules for their can also be found in the *Arcanis 5E Campaign Setting*.

Chelone

Gargantuan beast

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 218 (15d20+60)
Speed 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +10, Stealth +4
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages ---
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Amphibious. The chelone can breathe air or water.

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute the chelone suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Shell Defense. As an action, the chelone withdraws into its shell. Until it emerges, it gains a +4 bonus to AC, advantage on Strength and Constitution saving throws, disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws, gains the prone condition, and has its speed reduced to 0 feet. It cannot take any actions while in its shell except to emerge from the shell as a bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. A chelone makes three attacks: once with its bite and twice with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10+6) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8+6) slashing damage.

Chelone

Chelone are the workhorses of ssethric shipping interests. These massive turtles can reach lengths of over forty feet and are almost invulnerable to attack due to their thick impregnable shell. Ssethregorans attach huge cargo containers atop of these great beasts. Led by ssanu or ss'ressen and escorted by pleisauran guards, these swift moving reptiles transport vast quantities of goods back and forth across the Lauriol Sea between Kraldjur Morass and the southern expanses of the empire.

Cholepus (Iron Sloth)

Large beast

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 154 (16d10+64)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +7
Skills Athletics: +8, Perception +4
Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages ---
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Rake and Rend. When the cholepus has a creature grappled, it has advantage on all claw and bite attacks against that target.

Steadfast Grip. When climbing, the cholepus has advantage on all Strength (Athletics) checks to resist falling.

Actions

Multiattack. The cholepus three melee attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (3d8+5) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target, *Hit:* 18 (3d8+5) piercing damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 16) if it is a Large or smaller creature and the cholepus doesn't have another creature grappled.

Cholepus

The Iron Sloths of the Sulphur Marsh are placid creatures until cornered or threatened, where, in a burst of unexpected energy, they attack with their razor sharp claws and fangs. The herbivorous cholepus have numerous growths about its furry body, a result of an iron-rich diet derived from the unique plants of the Marsh. These growths are as hard as steel, granting the iron sloth protection against attacks.

Other than the natural predators of the Marsh, the cholepus' primary threat comes from adolescent Black Talons who hunt the creatures as part of their 'Coming of Age' ritual. During this time, the Black Talons send out their male hatchlings to prove their worth by slaying an adult iron sloth with their creche mates, thereby securing their position as a warrior of the egg clutch. While many hunts are successful, some fail due to the ferocity exhibited by the iron sloth.

Chordata

Large humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (scale mail and shield, or 14 natural armor)
Hit Points 110 (13d10+39)
Speed 40 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +8, Perception +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Unknown
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute the chordata suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Hold Breath. The chordata can hold its breath for 20 minutes.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the chordata can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but all attack rolls targeting the chordata have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The chordata makes two attacks either with its bite or falchion.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) piercing damage.

Falchion. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (4d4+5) slashing damage.

Chordata

The chosen people of the ssethric God of War, Korlak, the chordata are just beginning to make their presence known in the Southern Reaches of the empire. Tasked by their deity to destroy the original ssethric civilization in the far southern continent, this crocodilian race believed they accomplished their genocidal mission, but are just now realizing that the cunning ssanu tricked them. As they move northward, it's inevitable that they will make contact with the Ssethregoran Empire, unleashing an internecine war that could doom many of the other races of the Known Lands.

Cyclura

Huge beast

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 150 (13d12+65)
Speed 50 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +10, Perception +4
Senses. passive Perception 14
Languages ---
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Charge. If the cyclura moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 9 (2d8) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute the cyclura suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Actions

Multiattack. The cyclura makes two melee attacks, any combination of bites and gores.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 25 (4d8+7) piercing damage. If the cyclura is not already grappling a creature, the creature is grappled (escape DC 16) and the creature is restrained until this grapple ends.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d10+7) piercing damage.

Spiked Tail (Recharge 5-6). The cyclura sweeps its tail in a wide arc, attacking all creatures in a 15 foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (2d10) piercing damage and 18 (2d10+7) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Swallow. If the cyclura starts its turn with a medium or smaller creature grappled in its mouth (see bite above) it may attempt to swallow the creature whole as a bonus action. The creature grappled suffers 25 (4d8+7) piercing damage and must make a successful DC 16 escape check or be swallowed whole.

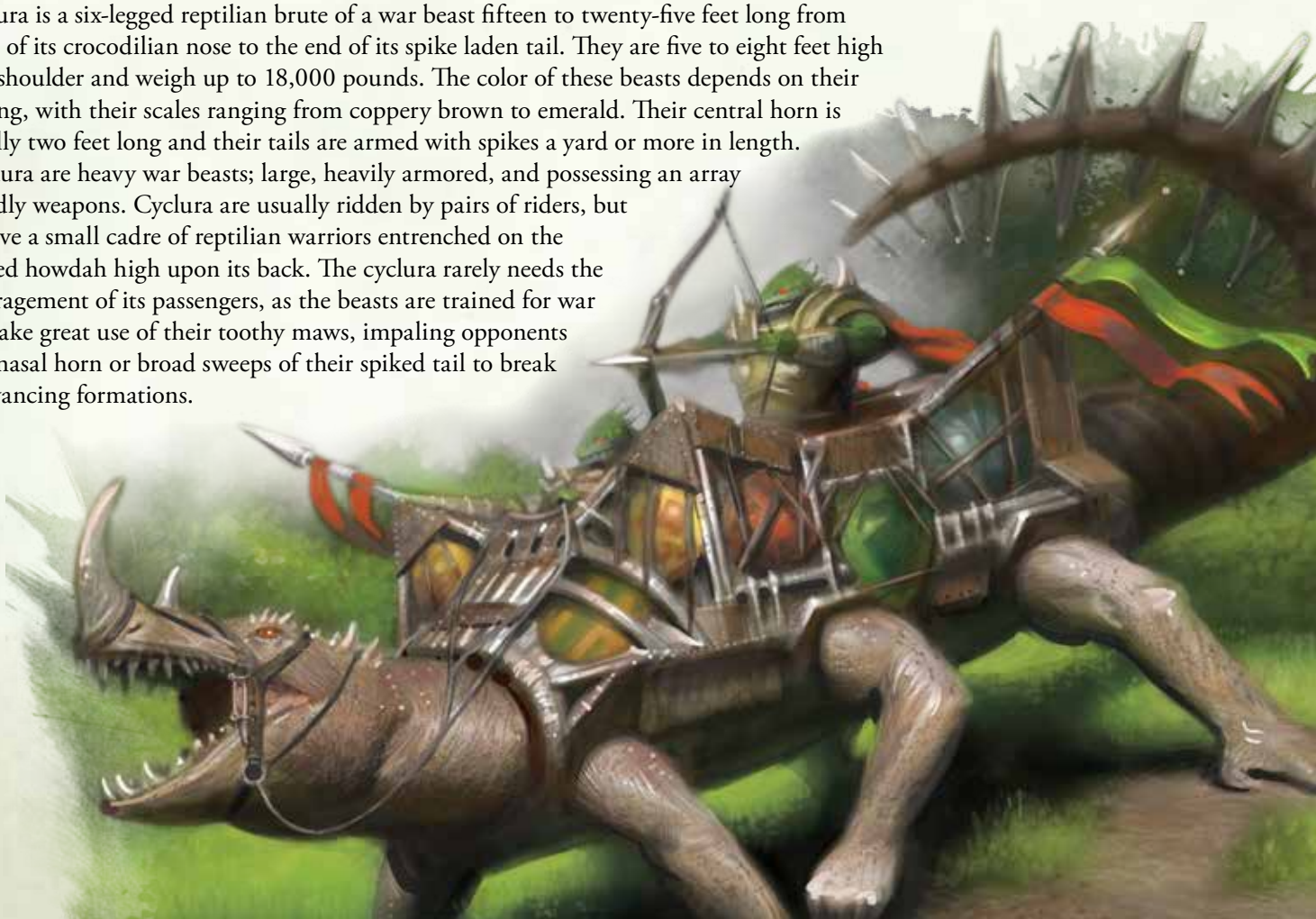
While swallowed, the target is blinded and restrained. It has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the cyclura, and it takes 18 (4d8) acid damage at the start of each of the cyclura's turns.

If the cyclura takes 30 damage or more on a single turn from the swallowed creature, the cyclura must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate the creature, which falls prone in a space within 10 feet of the cyclura. If the cyclura dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Cyclura

A cyclura is a six-legged reptilian brute of a war beast fifteen to twenty-five feet long from the tip of its crocodilian nose to the end of its spike laden tail. They are five to eight feet high at the shoulder and weigh up to 18,000 pounds. The color of these beasts depends on their breeding, with their scales ranging from coppery brown to emerald. Their central horn is typically two feet long and their tails are armed with spikes a yard or more in length.

Cyclura are heavy war beasts; large, heavily armored, and possessing an array of deadly weapons. Cyclura are usually ridden by pairs of riders, but can have a small cadre of reptilian warriors entrenched on the armored howdah high upon its back. The cyclura rarely needs the encouragement of its passengers, as the beasts are trained for war and make great use of their toothy maws, impaling opponents on its nasal horn or broad sweeps of their spiked tail to break up advancing formations.



Daughter of Yig

The daughters of Yig are considered sacred to the ancient ssethrics, who saw them as blessed by the goddess Yig. They are also greatly feared, for they rule the night and feed upon the unwary. It is an immense serpent, reaching lengths of fifty feet or more, that constricts its prey while delivering a deadly poison. Their heads are the size of a large horse and their fangs like sabers.

Daughter of Yig

Gargantuan monstrosity

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 284 (21d20+63)
Speed 50 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +13, Dex +8, Wis +6, Cha +5
Skills Athletics +13, Perception +8, Stealth +8
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 18
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned, prone
Languages ---
Challenge 20 (25,000 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a daughter of Yig suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Actions

Multiattack. A daughter of Yig makes three attacks: two with its bite and one with its constriction.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d10+7) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw, taking 20 (6d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Constriction. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d10+7) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 19). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained. The daughter of Yig can only constrict one target at a time.

Legendary Actions

The daughter of Yig can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The daughter of Yig regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Bite. The daughter of Yig makes a bite attack.

Detect. The daughter of Yig makes a Wisdom (Perception) check with advantage.

Tail Slap. The daughter of Yig heavily slaps the ground with its tail. Each creature within 20 feet of the Daughter of Yig must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone.

Dragonnel

Dragonnels are the sinister result of ssethric biomancers' experimentation with drakes, which increased their speed, making them suitable as combat mounts. These magnificent beasts are powerful fliers and highly intelligent. Dragonnel are the primary aerial mount in the empire, with huge aviaries dotting the jungles producing hundreds of these majestic creatures.

A specialized branch of the drakhen ride dragonnel into battle, usually supplemented with a platoon of rhamphorikes. Dragonnel also make excellent aerial scouts, with ss'ressen riders perched between their massive shoulders. They are a common sight in the air over both the Altherian and Malfelan borders.

Dragonnels can be found in the wild, riding the warm air currents above the Eastern Rainforest, where large flocks will hunt small prey and the occasional unwary ssethric. Those used as mounts are bred by Pit Elapis in the Southern Reaches where huge aviaries contain the winged creatures during their extensive training.

Dragonnel

Large beast

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 26 (4d10+4)
Speed 30 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +3
Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages ---
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Acute Vision. The dragonnel has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a dragonnel suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Flyby. The dragonnel doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6+3) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage.

Elemental, Ice

Large elemental (para-elemental)

Armor Class 14(natural armor)
Hit Points 114 (12d10+48)
Speed 30 ft, swim 60 ft., burrow (ice) 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities cold, poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages ---
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Ice Glide. The ice elemental can burrow through nonmagical, unworked ice. While doing so, the ice elemental doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

Ice Sense. While standing on ice the ice elemental gains tremorsense 60 ft.

Regeneration. As long as the ice elemental is not in a very hot climate (aka a desert or near a lava pit) it regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the ice elemental takes any fire damage, this trait does not function at the start of the ice elemental's next turn. The ice elemental dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and does not regenerate.

Actions

Multiattack. The elemental makes two slam attacks.

Ice Tornado. (Recharge 6) Each creature in a 20-foot-radius, 40-foot-high cylinder must make a Dexterity save (DC 14). This creature takes 11 (2d10) slashing damage and 7 (2d6) cold damage and falls prone on a failed save, or does not fall prone and suffers half damage with a successful save.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

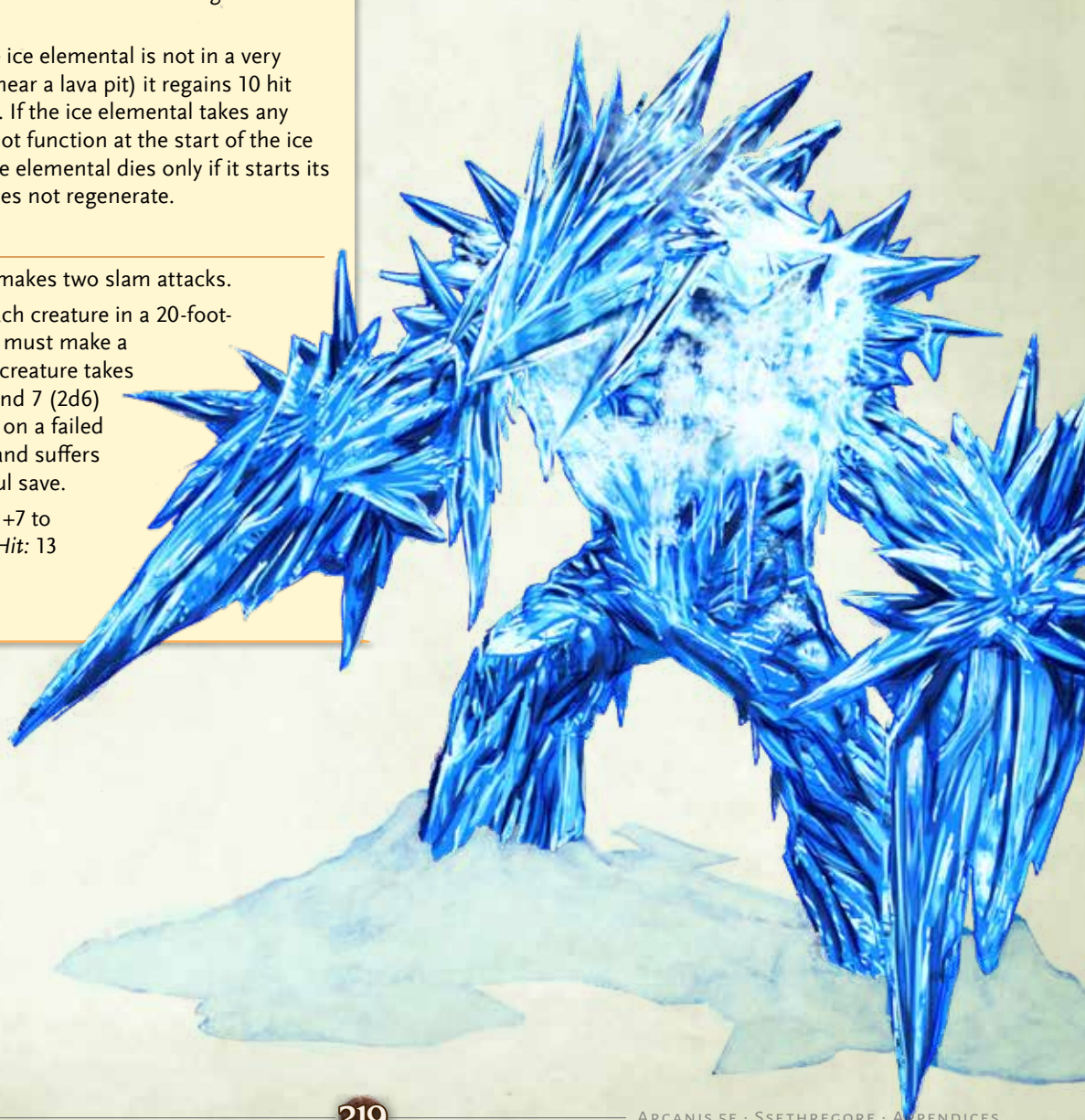
Elementals, Para-

Summoning Para-Elementals

Only ssethric elementalists have mastered the technique required for conjuring para-elementals. Other casters may learn the secrets to do so, but finding such knowledge is exceedingly rare outside the libraries of the Black Coil.

Elemental, Ice

An ice elemental possesses a vaguely humanoid shape, though its able to manipulate the growth of its body, shaping its limbs into blunt or sharp weapons as needed. This control over their body allows them to regenerate damage, as well as merge and move through ice. Their mastery of their element also enables them to create a deadly ice tornado, which can flay the flesh off their opponents.



Elemental, Lightning

One of the fastest creatures in existence, lightning elementals are entities made of solely of electricity. These very aggressive beings see anyone within their territory as a threat and will move to attack within the intention of destroying the offending target. It will pursue well beyond its region relentlessly, until driven off.

Inhabitants of the Realm of the Unending Maelstrom, these beings are eternally at war with the beings of the Realm of the Swift Zephyrs, a plane attuned to the element of air. They are ruled by the Sultan of Storms, Ichiljeonc, who rules from the storm enwrapped floating citadel of Storm's End.

Elemental, Lightning

Large elemental (para-elemental)

Armor Class 15(natural armor)
Hit Points 90 (12d10+24)
Speed fly 120 ft (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities lightning, poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages ---
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Lightning Form. The elemental can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. Any creature that touches this elemental or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) lightning damage. In addition, the elemental can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. Any creature that starts its turn in the lightning elemental's space suffers 5 (1d10) lightning damage.

Actions

Multiattack. The elemental can make two lightning strike attacks.

Lightning Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) lightning damage.

Lightning Storm. (Recharge 5-6) Each creature within the elemental's space must make a DC 14 dexterity saving throw or suffer 18 (4d8) lightning damage, or half as much on a successful save.

Elemental, Magma

Large elemental (para-elemental)

Armor Class 16(natural armor)
Hit Points 126 (12d10+60)
Speed 30 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (-1)	20 (+5)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities cold, thunder
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages ---
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Earth Glide. The magma elemental can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the elemental doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

Lava Burst. Once the magma elemental has moved more than 20 feet through stone using its earth glide ability it may use a bonus action to cause magma to burst out of the ground around it as it emerges from the earth or stone. All creatures within 10 feet of the elemental must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 10 (2d10) fire damage.

Siege Monster. The magma elemental deals double damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. The elemental makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage and 4 (1d8) fire damage.

Throw Magma: *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 60 ft., one target *Hit:* 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and 11 (2d10) fire damage.

Elemental, Magma

Only a place of lava flows, erupting volcanoes, and bubbling cauldrons of molten rock could give birth to creatures like the magma elementals. Towering creatures resembling walking volcanoes, these elementals have a red hot rocky carapace surrounding a seething molten body. Natives of the Realm of Black Cinders, magma elementals react more by instinct than thoughtful strategy, though they are capable of rudimentary tactics. Their usual manner of attack is pummeling their foes or spewing forth a gout of lava from their mouths.

Acting as shock troopers in an unending war against the Sheykh of the Realm of the Burnished Flame, they can sometimes be found upon that elemental plane, pressing an ordered attack or wandering about as a lone survivor from an ill-fated skirmish. Due to this conflict, magma elementals will attack any creatures possessing the essence of the element of fire without hesitation.

Elemental, Mud

Mud elementals are summoned from the Realm of Caustic Ooze, a plane where a burnt sepia sky covers an ocean of gelatinous slurry that lap the shores of marsh archipelagos. Appearing like an anthropomorphized swamp, mud elementals are made up of water logged soil and other matter, such as rotting wood bits and decaying vegetation. Many of these creatures are infested with bloated worms and other invertebrates, and are swirling with insects who lay their larva in the shambling mass.

Able to merge with and move through earth and stone, mud elementals are apex ambush predators, who rise quickly from the soil and attack their target. Their favored attack is to engulf their target, suffocating them before slowing digesting their rotted corpse.

Elemental, Mud

Large elemental (para-elemental),

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 114 (12d10+48)
Speed 30 ft, borrow 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistance piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, poison, thunder
Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages ---
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Amorphous. The mud elemental can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing and can move through occupied squares.

Muddy Form. The mud elemental can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the elemental doesn't disturb the material it moves through, but the 10 foot area of ground around where it emerged becomes difficult terrain for 1 hour.

Siege Monster. The mud elemental deals double damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. The elemental can make two slam attacks, or use its engulf attack with one slam attack.

Engulf. The mud elemental moves up to its speed. While doing so, can enter Large or smaller creatures' spaces. Whenever the mud elemental enters a creature's space, the creature must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw.

On a successful save, the creature can choose to be pushed 5 feet back or to the side of the elemental. A creature that chooses not to be pushed suffers the consequences of a failed saving throw.

On a failed save, the elemental enters the creature's space, the creature takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage and is engulfed. The engulfed creature can't breathe, is restrained, and takes 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage at the start of each of the elemental's turns. When the elemental moves, the engulfed creature moves with it. An engulfed creature can try to escape by taking an action to make a DC 14 Strength check. On a success, the creature escapes and enters a space of its choice within 5 feet of the elemental.

Mudslide. (Recharge 5-6) The mud elemental may move 30 ft. Every creature it passes over must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 15 (3d10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. Those succeeding in their save suffer half damage and are not knocked prone. The area passed over by the elemental is considered difficult terrain for 1 minute.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Hussuma

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (leather armor, shield)
Hit Points 28 (5d8+5)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4
Saving Throws Wis +3, Cha +3
Senses passive perception 13
Languages Eloran, Low Coryani, Ssethric
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Devotion. Due to their conditioning, the hussuma are intensely devoted to their ssanu masters. They have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or similar effects that would make them act against their masters.

Elemental Affinity. When the hussuma uses their *face of many masks* ability to impersonate an elorii, they also gain access to that subrace's rank 1 elorii bloodline ability. They may never have more than 1 bloodline ability.

Face of Many Masks. The hussuma may change their appearance to pass as a member of any of the five elorii bloodlines. The hussuma may make themselves shorter or taller by up to 1 foot, and change their body weight by up to 50 lbs. They cannot change their basic physique, however, such as growing additional limbs, nor can they copy a specific person. This ability is not a magical ability and cannot be detected by magical means as it is a physical change that they control. The hussuma may maintain this form indefinitely, requiring no concentration. If they die, there body begins to change back to their original form within 1 hour.

Infiltrator. Hussuma have advantage on all Charisma (Deception) and Wisdom (Insight) checks and are also proficient with disguise kits.

Actions

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Long Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) slashing damage or 7 (1d10+2) slashing damage if used in a two-handed melee attack.

Hussuma

The Hussuma are one of the earliest experiments in the ssethric's quest for the ultimate slave race. They appear like a modern day elorii as the flesh shells that was used in their creation were the same that was eventually used in the fashioning of the elorii. They are tall lithe humanoids with long pointed ears, feral teeth, and almond shaped eyes.

Hussuma were not initially infused with elemental energy like their elorii cousins, instead they were given life through the divine powers of Yig. When they were eventually used to spy on the elorii, the biomancers granted them the ability to shift their body to resemble any of the elorii types and mimic their base elemental abilities, without which they would be easily uncovered. This amazing ability is possible only due to their initial infusion power by the goddess Yig, who not only granted them life, but shared Her gifts as the divine deceiver.

Hylis

Appearing as small humanoid treefrogs, the hylis are perfectly adapted to an arboreal lifestyle high up in the forest canopy or deep in the swamps and marshlands. Hylis stand about 4 feet tall, but their slouched posture and tendency to walk using their hands reduces their overall height to roughly three feet tall. Their skin is a multihued mottle arrangement of splotches, bars and blotches, perfectly designed to break up their outline when creeping through the jungle.

Hylis

Small humanoid

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 14 (3d6+3)
Speed 20 ft., Climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+1)

Skills Acrobatics +4, Athletics +3, Stealth +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Kriku, Ssethric
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Adaptive Skin. The hylis' skin changes color to match the surrounding terrain. They have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks when trying to hide.

Arboreal. The hylis have advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) and Strength (Athletics) checks made to climb or jump.

Leaping Strike. When a hylis uses their action to dash, leaping at a foe, they may make a single melee attack as a bonus action.

Powerful Legs. The hylis' jumping distance is tripled.

Venom Gland. The hylis can apply poison to their weapons as a bonus action, poisoning their weapons for 1 minute. The effects of the poison are included in the weapons below.

Actions

Dagger. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., or 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 5 (2d4) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Blowgun. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 25/100 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 5 (2d4) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Iguadon

Large humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 14 (natural armor, shield)
Hit Points 59 (6d10+18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	6 (-3)	8 (-2)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +7
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Ssethric
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute an iguadon suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6+5) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) piercing damage.

Long Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8+5) slashing damage.

Iguadon

Iguadons are heavy-bodied humanoids, standing about five and a half feet tall and weighing about two hundred and fifty pounds. Their long, heavily muscled arms and short thick legs are tipped with claws. They have a long thick tail and a frill that extends from the forehead to the base of the neck. Their hides are covered in fine greenish-yellow scales, contrasted with dark blue-black mottled spots along their back and forearms. An iguadon's lower jaw is heavily built and juts out beyond their upper jaw, exposing canines that can reach up to their nostrils.

Jaculi

Jaculi are a common breed of serpent found in temperate and tropical marshes. Accomplished ambush predators, they can lie in wait along game trails for days without moving, then burst forth to ferociously attack unwary prey with both its bite and thorny hood. Jaculi appear as a heavy bodied serpent of various lengths with three triangular heads.

Jaculi grow up to fifteen feet long and weigh nearly two hundred pounds. They are used in military excursions as their innate tracking skills are invaluable for scouting parties.

Jaculi

Large beast

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 120 (15d10+45)
Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-1)

Skills Perception +4, Survival +7
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages ---
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a jaculi suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Multiple Heads. The jaculi possesses three heads. While it has more than one head it has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious. Whenever the jaculi takes 30 or more damage in a single turn, one of its heads dies. If all of its heads die, the jaculi is dead.

Reactive Heads. For each head the jaculi has beyond one, it gets an extra Reaction that can be used only for Opportunity Attacks.

Wakeful. When one of the jaculi's heads is asleep, its other heads are awake.

Actions

Multiattack. The jaculi can make up to three attacks, one with each head.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) Poison damage.

Lophius

Large humanoid

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 30 (4d10+8)
Speed 30 ft., swim 40ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Ssethric
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Rending Maw. The lophius' jaw can distend, allowing it to open very wide when biting. Any creature bitten by a lophius needs to succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity check or be grappled. On the lophius' next turn a grappled creature takes 10 (2d6+3) piercing damage.

Semi-Aquatic. The lophius can breathe air and water, but needs to be submerged at least once every 4 hours to avoid suffocating.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+5) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 13 Dexterity check or be grappled. On the lophius' next turn a grappled creature takes 12 (2d6 +5) piercing damage.

Spear. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 range, one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) piercing damage, or 14 (2d8+5) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Lophius

Sometimes mistaken for other aquatic humanoids, Lophius are large hulking brutes, standing well over eight feet tall and weighing over four hundred pounds. Lophius are a batrachian nightmare, with a laterally compressed head and bulbous froglike eyes and fishlike jaws and gill plates. Their bodies are covered in shimmering silver scales lathered in a slippery mucus coating produced by copious oil glands. These brutes do not possess a tail and propel themselves through the water in a frog like fashion; using powerful kicking strokes from their webbed feet and claws.

Moloch

Medium beast

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 11 (2d8+2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages ---
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a moloch suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Keen Smell. A moloch has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Pack Tactics. A moloch has advantage on attacks rolls against a creature if at least one of the moloch's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Quills. Any creature that starts its turn grappled by the moloch takes 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 11). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the moloch cannot bite another target.

Moloch

Molochs appear to be a four-legged lizard with a sharp beaked head of a turtle. Weighing about one hundred and fifty pounds, and covered in a bristling hide of spiky quills, molochs are a fearsome sight to behold. Sporting heavy jaws and counterbalanced by a thick, ridged tail, the molochs tear through the battlefield protecting their masters from all foes.

Molochs are carnivorous and eat any scraps that fall in mess halls and devour any slow, weak, or injured ssethrics that happen to be caught outside. Molochs never hunt alone, but stalk their prey in packs. Their masters will send in a couple of advance runners to harry the prey, while the rest of the pack circles and waits for the opportune moment to strike.

Mor'let

Large beast

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 23 (3d10+6)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages ---
Challenge 1/2 (200 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a mor'let suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Keen Smell. A mor'let has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Pack Tactics. A mor'let has advantage on attacks rolls against a creature if at least one of the mor'let's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10+3) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage.

Mor'let

Mor'let are creatures bred for war and can be found throughout the Ssethregoran Empire and beyond its borders, most notably in the lands of the Black Talon who managed to bring a few with them during their exodus. Mor'let are the preferred light cavalry mount of the ss'ressen. Fast and agile, they possess a stunning array of natural weaponry with which to rend their foes. These ssethric mounts carry their riders across the battlefield on two heavily muscled legs. Mor'let also possess an uncanny ability to leap and bring their claws to bear, even when carrying a rider.

Due to riders being killed on the battlefield, there are now many packs of wild mor'let roaming the jungles of the Morass. Their natural hunting instincts and ability to hide from even the most astute observers make them a danger to any who travel throughout the domain of the ssethrics.

Naga

The naga are the current leaders of the Ssethregoran Empire. Created by the biomancers of the Black Coil as a servitor race to replace the elorii, the ssanu inadvertently created a race that surpassed them in cruelty and cunning. Armed with potent natural psionic abilities and most with arcane mastery, they engineered the downfall of their creators and quickly supplanted them as rulers of the ssethrics.

The naga are divided into three subspecies, each organized into 'Houses'. While each retain the common physical attributes of a serpent body with a human-like head, they each differ in scale coloration and other physical traits.

The naga were assisted in their political coup by the extraplanar ssethric race known as the varn. These creatures initially presented themselves as benevolent allies, wishing to help other ssethrics ascend to dominance over all other races, but it soon became evident to the naga leadership that the varn were interested in conquest, using the naga as willful pawns in their enigmatic goals. As the population of naga decreased, the number of varn on Arcanis has increased at an alarming rate.

Naga of House Kahss

Large monstrosity (ssethric)

Armor Class 17 (mage armor - precast) or 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 145 (17d10+51)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +7, Cha +8
Skills Arcana +9, Deception +8, History +9, Insight +7, Perception +7
Damage Resistances psychic
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Eloran, Low Coryani, Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a naga suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Grand Expressions. Naga of House Kahss may manifest the following spell expression regaining the ability to do so after completing a long rest: true seeing.

Legendary Resistance. (3/Day). If the naga fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Master's Control. As a bonus action the naga can suppress the ss'ressen frenzy of ssethric creatures within 60 feet of themselves. The frenzy continues to be suppressed for one hour after the ss'ressen leaves the naga's presence.

Metamagic. As with all arcane spell casters, these naga possess 12 arcane points and know the following metamagic abilities: careful spell, extend spell, subtle spell.

Psionics. This naga is a 12th-level manifester. Its manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Naga of House Kahss know the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 4 (5th level)

Powers (at will): *intellect fortress, mental scream, mind thrust, telekinetic bolt, telekinetic deflection, tower of iron will.*

Spell Expressions: *arcane eye, clairvoyance, command, detect thoughts, find traps, guiding bolt, legend lore, mind ward, telepathic bond,* and *tongues.*

Spellcasting. Naga of House Kahss are 12th-level elder arcane spellcasters. Their spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks), and they need only verbal components to cast their spells. These naga know the following elder sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *dancing lights, mage hand, message, minor illusion, ray of frost, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, detect magic, mage armor (precast), magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *flaming sphere, hold person, see invisibility*

3rd level (3 slots): *fireball, protection from energy, slow*

4th level (3 slots): *dimension door, greater invisibility, phantasmal killer*

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill, dominate person*

6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate*

Actions

Multiattack. These naga make two melee attacks: one with its bite and one with its tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) bludgeoning damage and the target must make a DC 15 dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

Legendary Actions

Naga of House Kahss can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The naga regains spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

Detect. The naga makes an Intelligence (Perception) check with advantage.

Rapid Manifestation. The naga may manifest a psionic attack power, but may not utilize its expression.

Slither. The naga may take the disengage action.

Naga of House Sardatis

Large monstrosity (ssethric)

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 127 (16d10+32)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +5, Cha +6
Skills Arcana +7, Deception +6, History +7, Insight +5, Perception +5
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Eloran, Low Coryani, Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a naga suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Master's Control. As a bonus action the naga can suppress the ss'ressen frenzy of ssethric creatures within 60 feet of themselves. The frenzy continues to be suppressed for one hour after the ss'ressen leaves the naga's presence.

Precognitive. Naga of House Sardatis cannot be surprised and have advantage on all initiative rolls. They can also manifest the spell Precognition† at will, and may manifest Foresight upon themselves, regaining the ability to do so after 7 days.

Psionics. This naga is an 8th-level manifester. Their manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). These naga know the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 4 (4th level)

Powers (at will): *intellect fortress, mental scream, mind thrust, telekinetic bolt, telekinetic deflection, tower of iron will.*

Spell Expressions: *blink, command, detect thoughts, dimension door, long strider, mirror image, mind ward, misty step, passwall, telepathic bond, and tongues.*

Actions

Multiattack. The naga makes two melee attacks: one with its bite and one with its stinger.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage.

Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer 7 (2d6) poison damage and gain the poisoned condition for 1 minute.

Variants: Elder Arcane Spellcaster

It is not uncommon for the naga of House Sardatis to delve into the arcane arts. Such a naga of House Sardatis has a CR of 8 (3,900 XP)

Metamagic. Naga spell casters possess 9 arcane points and know the following metamagic abilities: extend spell, heightened spell, and quickened spell.

Spellcasting. This naga is a 9th-level elder arcane spellcaster. Their spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7

to hit with spell attacks). The naga knows the following spells.

Cantrips (at will): *acid fang*, elemental bolt, prestidigitation, true strike.*

1st level (4 slots): *comprehend languages, detect magic, shield, magic missile.*

2nd level (3 slots): *augury, enthrall, rope trick, see invisibility.*

3rd level (3 slots): *clairvoyance, fireball, gaseous form, speak with dead.*

4th level (3 slots): *arcane eye, greater invisibility*

5th level (1 slot): *scrying*

Naga of House Taricha

Large monstrosity (ssethric)

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 136 (18d10+34)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +5, Cha +7
Skills Arcana +7, Deception +6, History +7, Insight +5, Perception +5
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Eloran, Low Coryani, Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a naga suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Combat Manifester. If the naga manifests a psionic power without manifesting a psionic expression, they may make a melee attack as a bonus action. Nagas of House Taricha also have advantage on all Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration.

Grand Expressions. Naga of House Taricha may manifest the following spell expression regaining the ability to do so after a long rest: disintegrate.

Master's Control. As a bonus action the naga can suppress the ss'ressen frenzy of ssethric creatures within 60 feet of themselves. The frenzy continues to be suppressed for one hour after the ss'ressen leaves the naga's presence.

Psionics. This naga is an 11th-level manifester. Its manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). This naga knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 4 (5th level)

Powers (at will): *amplified physique, beguiling strike, burst, halt, intellect fortress, and telekinetic deflection.*

Spell Expressions: *cure wounds, haste, primal senses, stoneskin.* (all spell expressions above have their range changed to self)

Actions

Multiattack. The naga makes two melee attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) piercing plus 9 (2d8) poison damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (2d8+4) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the naga can't constrict another target.

House Kahss

Nagas of House Kahss have a smooth serpentine body, topped by a round human-like head with very large, reddish eyes. Their scales range from a light lavender to a deep and dark purple.

House Kahss is currently the most powerful of the naga Houses. The current ruler of the empire is Emperor Kahss the IV, who has held the Coiled Throne for six hundred years.

House Sardaris

The most unusual of the naga in appearance are those of House Sardatis. While retaining the long serpentine body and human-like head, these naga have voluminous wild black hair. Their scales form a banded pattern, alternating between black and red, ending in a large scorpion's stinger at the tail.

Known as the *mad nagas*, House Sardatis are more concerned with the mystical facets of life. Led by Govaj, a female of advancing years, the naga of this House seek to transcend the confines of the physical by using psychotropic drugs, extensive meditation, and mysticism.

House Taricha

House Taricha's nagas have fine black scales across the entirety of their serpentine body. Their head is human-like in appearance, but have a greater protrusion, like that of an ape. Most striking is their neck hood, similarly to those of Pit Sseth, but much thicker in nature.

House Taricha is second only to House Kahss in power and influence. Currently led by an elder female named Heruss, the House has ambitions of an imperial nature. With their coils wrapped around every aspect of ssethric commerce, House Taricha has amassed a fortune that would outweigh the treasuries of most human kingdoms.

Using other naga types in your Ssethregore campaign

If you wish to use other naga types found in the core rules or other 5E supplements in a Ssethregore campaign, simply grant them the (Ssethric) subtype, ***Cold Susceptibility*** and ***Master's Control*** abilities from the naga of House Kahss above. They should also have some level of psionic ability, as even the weakest naga possesses the ability to manifest one or two psionic powers and possesses 1 psionic focus.

Pleisauran

Large humanoid

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 60 (8d10+16)
Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Ssethric
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Deep Diver. Due to their physiology, a pleisauran can hold their breath for 30 minutes.

Actions

Multiattack. A pleisauran makes two melee attacks: one with its bite and/or up to two with its trident.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6+4) piercing damage.

Net. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, 5/15 ft. range, one target. A Large or smaller creature hit by a net is restrained until it is freed. A net has no effect on creatures that are formless or are Huge size or larger. A creature can use its action to make a DC 10 Strength check to free itself or another creature within its reach on a success. Dealing 5 slashing damage to the net (AC 10) also frees the creature without harming it, ending the effect and destroying the net.

When used as an action, bonus action, or reaction to an attack with a net, you can only make one attack regardless of the number of attacks you can normally make.

Trident. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 ft. range, one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage, or 13 (2d8+4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Pleisauran

Standing roughly eight feet tall, pleisaurans are all sleek muscle wrapped around a humanoid frame. Short compact limbs ending in long webbed digits compliment a thick laterally compressed tail ideal for powering a pleisauran through their watery domain. A pleisaurans' head is perched atop a snakelike neck, where it darts about with lightning speed. Two forward facing eyes look down the length of its long thin snout, to the upraised nostrils at its tip. Their snout is full of needle-like teeth and tapers out up to four times the length of the head and is ideal for slashing through the water for devastating strikes.

Rhamphorike

The winged rhamphorikes sole purpose is to be part of an aerial unit capable of combating flying foes and to rain death down upon land bound enemies. To this task they have proven exemplary, becoming the deciding factor in dozens of battles over the centuries. In modern Ssethregore, they still maintain their position as aerial shock troopers, but now also find themselves acting as scouts. A rhamphorike's red tinged body reflecting the setting sun as it rises above the tree line is a common sight from the walls of Altherian outposts.

Rhamphorike

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points 17 (3d8+3)
Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4
Saving Throws Wis +3, Cha +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ssethric
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a rhamphorike suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Devotion. Due to their conditioning, the rhamphorikes are intensely devoted to their ssanu masters. They have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or similar effects that would make them act against their masters.

Actions

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage.

Sand Apophics

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 38 (6d8+12)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +4, Perception +3, Stealth + 4, Survival +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Low Coryani, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Natural Camouflage. Due to the coloration of their scales, when in desert like conditions sand apophics have advantage on all Dexterity (Hide) checks.

Skirmisher. When sand apophics attack they may disengage as a bonus action.

Actions

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Melee Apophic Spear (Long). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target, 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage must be used with two hands.

Melee Apophic Spear (Short). Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 range, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Sand Apophics

Outsiders who venture into the Forsaken Wastes rarely see the sand apophics, but those who do find a cautious welcome awaiting them. Despite their seclusion, the sand apophics are often willing to offer respite and succor to peaceful travelers. The exception to this are any of the ssethric races who are viewed with extreme distrust and often outright hostility. This loathing of their kin is firmly rooted in the oral history of their people. According to their legends, the sand apophics were created by terrible serpent-gods in ages past. They were coerced to serve these gods through the promises of a 'sacred land'. During their servitude, they came across this place, and realized it was their promised land; and when their creators abandoned them, they returned to the Forsaken Wastes and have not left since.

Travelers who come with ill intent often find themselves fighting against the wastes themselves. The dunes, the wind, the very rocks seem bent to destroy such travelers. This is the doing of the Storm Master, the tribal-chief for a particular clutch of sand apophics; unusually for ssethrics, a position is held by a male. The Storm Master is capable of communing with the land, using it to defend his people and destroy those who might enslave them. Unlike other ssethric races, the apophics do not seem to worship any known god, viewing even their creators with disgust. As such, there is no known priesthood among the sand apophics, only shamans dedicated to the spirits of the Wastes itself.

Sc'math

Large beast

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 38 (5d10+10)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages ---
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Charge. If the sc'math moves at least 20 feet in a straight line towards a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the sc'math can make an attack with its bite against it as a bonus action.

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a sc'math suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Keen Smell. The sc'math has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8+4) slashing damage.

Sc'math

If the mor'let are the light cavalry of the ssethric war machine, the sc'math are its heavy cavalry. The sc'math is a sure-footed bipedal mount as at home in the twisted tunnels of the Endless Dark as it is to the loamy peat and jungles of the Morass. An awkward looking creature by human standards, a sc'math resembles a cross between a large flightless bird and a lizard. It has a large bulbous body covered in a thick warty hide that can turn all but the hardest of blows. Its long, heavily muscled legs support the heavy body on three wide splayed talons, while the heavy jaws are counterbalanced by a short wide tail which is held out behind the body as the sc'math runs. A sc'math has no neck to speak of and its most prominent feature is a broad triangular head armed with a brutal horny beak, resembling that of a grotesque turtle.

These large reptilian horrors attack with a ferocious bite attack. Upon successfully biting its opponent, it usually refuses to let go until the creature is dead or eaten. Sc'math riders are experts at close quarter melee, usually throwing a round of javelins before charging into enemy foot soldiers, relying on their mount's razor-sharp beak to win the day.

Shell-Back

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 39 (6d8+12)
Speed 20 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Athletics +5, Investigation +4, History +4, Perception +4,
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Quipu, Ssethric
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Natural Armor. With the exception of shields, the shell-back may not benefit from wearing armor, but they may have armor runes inscribed upon their shell as if it were a suit of regular armor.

Powerful Lungs. Shell-backs can hold their breath for 1 hour, after which they run out of breath and start suffocating as normal.

Shell-Back. When the target of an attack the shell-back may, as a reaction, quickly retreat into their shell, regaining the ability to do so after completing a short or long rest. Alternatively, they may choose to use an action to enter their shell whenever they wish.

While in their shell they become prone and can't take any actions except for coming out of their shell, which requires an action.

They may remain in their shell for up to 8 hours at a time. While in their shell they have resistance to all damage except for psychic damage.

Actions

Multiattack. The shell-back makes two melee attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage.

Spear. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 range, one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8+3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Shell-Back

Shell-backs are sentient reptilians resembling anthropomorphized turtles and may be one of the oldest races upon Arcanis. Sadly, these creatures' culture, religion, history, and even their name, has been obliterated, purposefully destroyed by the frog-like hylis whom they warred with for centuries. Now enslaved by the Ssethregorans, they seek to discover who they are and eventually throw off the yoke of slavery.

Ssanu

Medium monstrosity (ssethric)

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor - precast)
Hit Points 59 (9d8+18)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Int +5
Skills Arcana +5, History +5, Insight +3, Perception +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Eloran, Ssethric, Ss'ressen,
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute the ssanu suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Master's Control. As a bonus action the ssanu can suppress the ss'ressen frenzy of ssethric creatures within 60 feet of themselves. The frenzy continues to be suppressed for one hour after the ss'ressen leaves the ssanu's presence.

Metamagic. As with all arcane spell casters, ssanu possess 5 arcane points and know the following metamagic abilities: careful spell and extend spell.

Spellcasting. Ssanu are 5th-level elder arcane spellcasters. Their spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks), and they need only verbal components to cast their spells. They know the following elder sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, prestidigitation, ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, magic missile, shield, sleep*

2nd level (3 slots): *mirror image, scorching ray, see invisibility*

3rd level (2 slots): *fireball, protection from energy*

Actions

Multiattack. Ssanu make two melee attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) poison damage.

Crescent Poleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10+3) slashing damage or 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage.

Tail Swipe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Variant: Psionically Awakened

Some ssanu are psionically awakened. A ssanu with psionic powers has their challenge rating increased to 4 (1,100), adding the following traits:

Focused Abilities (Telepathy). *look elsewhere, mind link. (metacreation) psi crystal.*

Piercing Thoughts. Any time the ssanu deals psychic damage with a psionic power or effect it deals additional damage equal to its Intelligence bonus (+4).

Psionics. This ssanu is a 5th-level manifester. Their manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +5 to hit with spell attacks). This ssanu knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 3 (3rd level)

Powers (at will): *intellect fortress, mental scream, missive, telekinetic bolt, telekinetic deflection.*

Spell expressions: *command, detect thoughts, phantasmal steed, shield, storm of knives, tongues.*

Variant: Ssanu of Pit Coasca

The ssanu of Pit Coasca are tasked with defending the empire from attacks by the psionically active servants of Oblivion. Due to this, they specialize in the more physical manifestations of their psionic abilities. Their challenge rating is increased to 4 (1,100), adding the following traits:

Replace *Tail Swipe* with the following:

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the ssanu can't constrict another target

Focused Abilities (Psychometabolism): *adrenaline control. (metacreation) psi crystal, mind over body.*

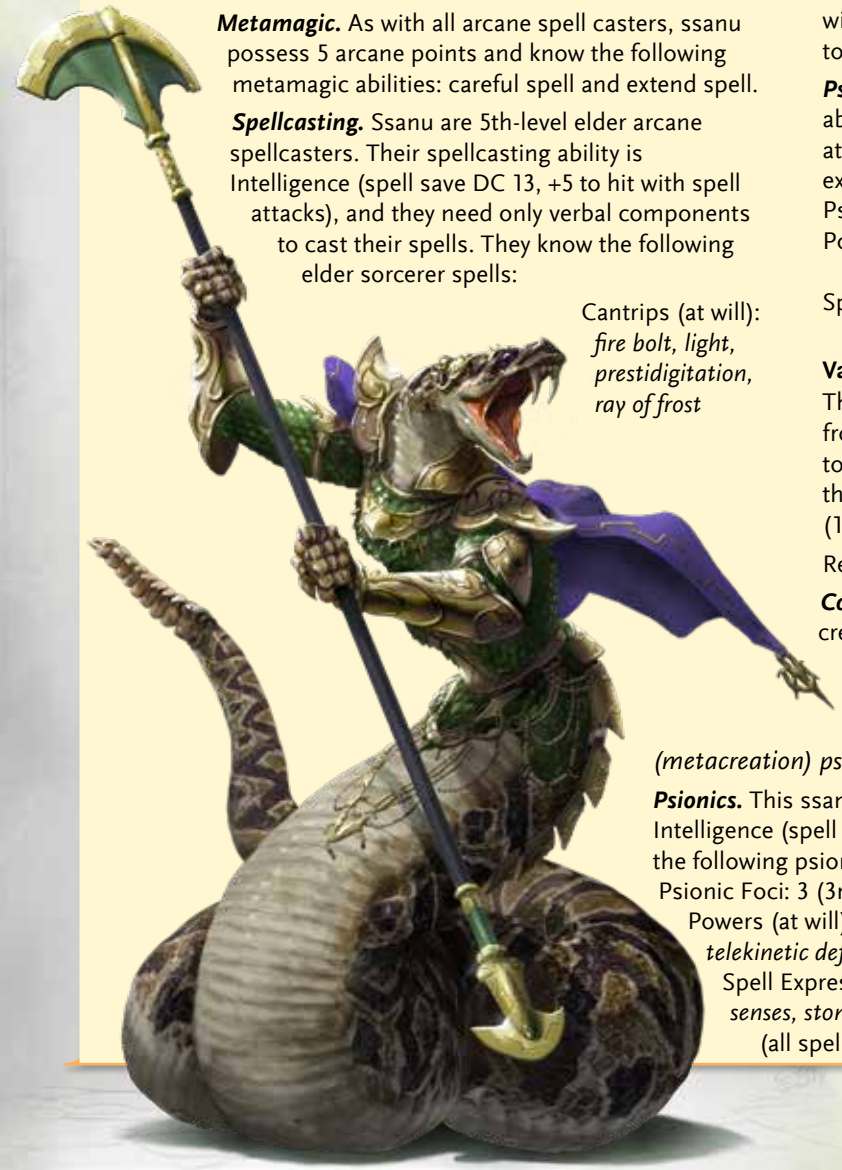
Psionics. This ssanu is a 5th-level manifester. Their manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). This ssanu knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 3 (3rd level)

Powers (at will): *amplified physique, intellect fortress, mental scream, missive, telekinetic deflection.*

Spell Expressions (range changed to self only): *cure wounds, haste, primal senses, stoneskin.*

(all spell expressions above have their range changed to self)



Ssanu Mummy

Large undead (ssethric)

Armor Class 11 (natural armor)
Hit Points 68 (9d10+18)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Ssethric
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The ssanu mummy can use its dreadful glare and makes one attack with its rotting fist or constrict.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained, and the ssanu mummy can't constrict another target.

Dreadful Glare. The ssanu mummy targets one creature it can see within 60 feet. If the target can see the ssanu mummy, it must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened until the end of the ssanu mummy's next turn. If the target fails the saving throw by 5 or more, it is also paralyzed for the same duration. A target that succeeds on the saving throw is immune to the dreadful glare of all ssanu mummies for 24 hours.

Rotting Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with mummy rot. The cursed target can't regain hit points, and its hit point maximum decreases by 10 (3d6) for every 24 hours that elapse. If the curse reduces the target's hit point maximum to 0, the target dies, and its body turns to dust. The curse lasts until removed by the remove curse spell or other magic.

Ssanu Mummy

During the time of the Yahssremoran Empire, the priesthood of Wantiir oversaw the burials of nobles. These worthies were mummified using rites blessed by the ssethric god of death to ensure that the souls of the departed were sent to Kassegore. Masters of the art of mummification, the bodies were carefully desiccated and enshrouded with the finest linen wrappings, their cadavers filled with sacred herbs and salts.

To protect the mummified remains, the decedent's personal servants were ritually sacrificed and given the *Last Breath*, a cant that gave the dead a semblance of life, so that they could defend their master's tombs through eternity. Some of those considered especially blessed by Wantiir were also given a variation of the ritual, allowing them to rest peacefully until either disturbed or summoned by the death priests.

Ssethric Golem

Manufactured by the artificers working alongside the sorcerers of the Black Coil, ssethric golems act as guardians of tombs, vaults, and other places of importance. Forged from a unique alloy that repels magical affects that attempt to change its form, as well as enhancing its weapons arcanely, the entire construct is powered by a bound fire elemental. Trapped within the frame by sigils engraved within the golem, the fire elemental within cannot be banished until it is freed from its metallic prison. When the golem's frame is destroyed, the fire elemental is released, attacking in a frenzy all those about it.

Larger versions of the golem exist, powered by twin fire elementals or other more exotic beings from the elemental planes. One such was discovered deep under the First City, where it protected an ancient temple to Yig. This golem was powered by a lightning elemental, whose most devastating assault was a chain lightning attack at all those surrounding it.

Ssethric Golem

Large construct

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 178 (17d10+85)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	5 (-2)	12 (+1)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, poison, psychic; and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages understands Ssethric but cannot speak
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Elemental Power Source. When the ssethric golem is destroyed, the elemental trapped within is released and emerges, and continues to act on the same initiative count as the golem. The elemental trapped within may be any elemental with the fire subtype.

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The golem makes two melee attacks.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 17) Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained, and the golem can't constrict another target.

Falchion. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (4d4 + 6) slashing damage.

Gout of Flame. (Recharge 5-6) The ssethric golem exhales fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Ssethric War Beast

Bred by Pit Elapis as troop carriers as well as living siege engines, the ssethric war beast is a reptilian creature of immense size, weight, and strength. Able to carry a four to six person howdah upon its back, the beast's sagittal plates give those riding upon it additional protection from attacks. Possessing an ill temperament, the creature is dangerous even when not directed by its handler.

Ssethric War Beast

Gargantuan beast

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 210 (14d20+70)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
28 (+9)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)	3 (-5)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +9, Wis +5
Skills Perception +5
Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages ---
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute the ssethric war beast suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Actions

Multiattack. The ssethric war beast makes two melee attacks per round, one of which must be its clubbed tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d8+9) piercing damage.

Clubbed Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 25 (3d10 + 9) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Lumbering Behemoth (Recharge 5-6). As an action the ssethric war beast may move up to its speed in a straight line forcing all creatures within its path or adjacent to its path to make a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone suffering 23 (4d6+9) bludgeoning damage. If the target is prone, the ssethric war beast can make one stomp attack against it as a bonus action.

Stomp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one prone creature, *Hit:* 19 (3d6+9) bludgeoning damage.

Ss'ressen, Ashen Hide

Ashen Hide ss'ressen stand between six and seven feet tall and do not have a cranial crest. Their scales are thick, knobby, and almost perfectly round in form. Ashen Hides take their name from the uniformly gray color their skin displays but they still have the characteristic black appendages of their relatives. They are wider of shoulder than their Black Talon cousins and their tails are markedly shorter, but even so, they retain a great deal of grace and dexterity.

The Ashen Hide ss'ressen were born from a perceived lie that led to an entire village marching north into Canceri and straight into the arms of the val'Virdan of Nier's Spine. After lengthy negotiations, an agreement like the one the Black Talons enjoy with the val'Holryn family was struck and continues to this day.

Ss'ressen, Ashen Hide

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 32 (5d8+10)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

Skills Acrobatics +3, Athletics +4, Perception +2
Damage Resistances fire
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Cancerese, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Distant Relations. Ashen Hide, Black Talon, and Ghost Scale ss'ressen do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy when they encounter one another.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6+2) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8+1) piercing damage.

Ss'ressen, Barbed Tail

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 26 (4d8+8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Intimidation +2
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Quick. As a bonus action, the barbed tail ss'ressen can move up to its speed towards a hostile creature it can see.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. The barbed tail ss'ressen makes two melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Barbed Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage. Alternatively, this tail attack can do bludgeoning damage.

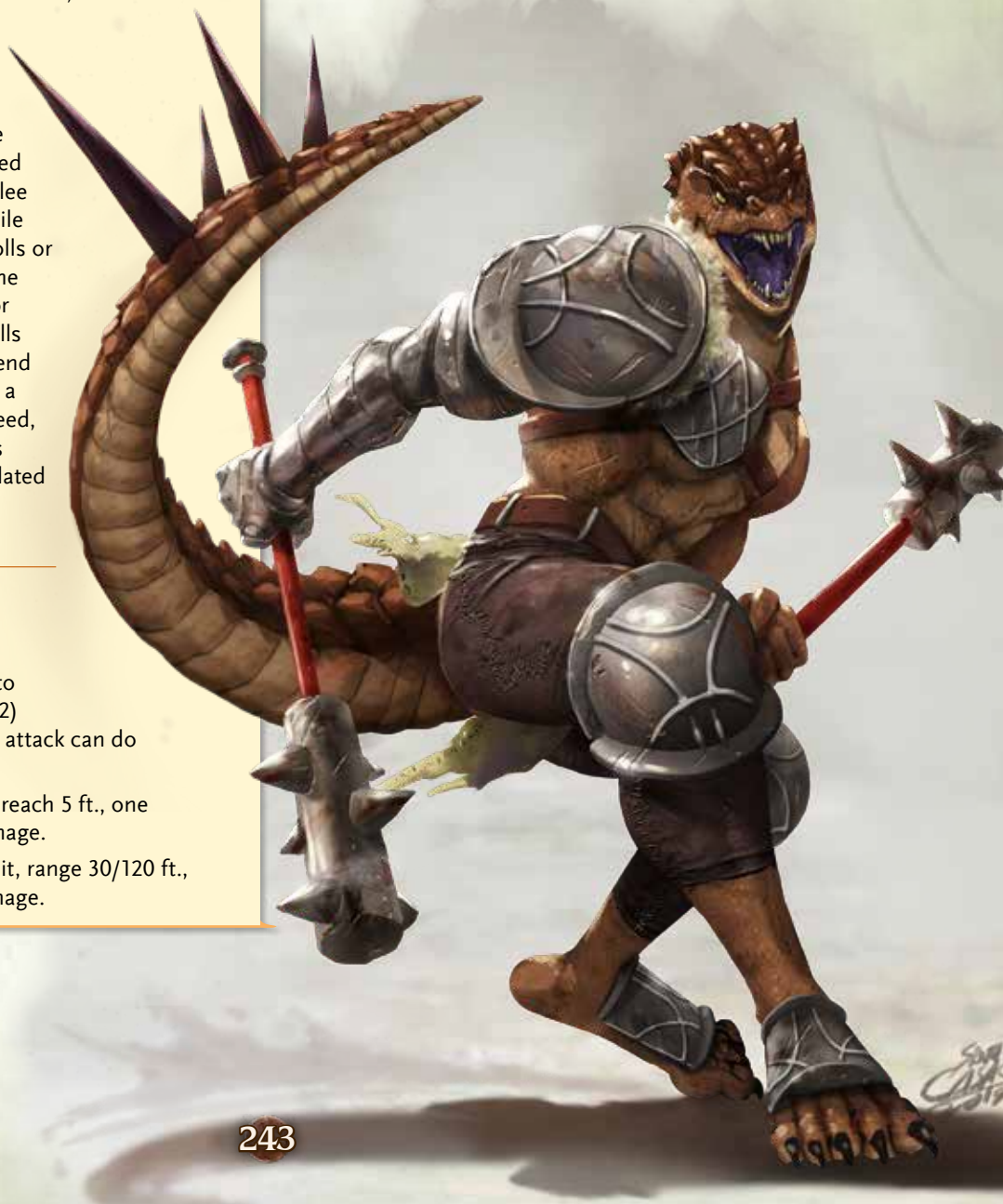
Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8+2) bludgeoning damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Ss'ressen, Barbed Tail

Barbed Tail ss'ressen stand between six and seven feet tall and sport twin rows of thick spines down their back. The coloration of their hide is a burnt orange and brown. The Barbed Tail receive their name from the clutch's natural weapon, a thick, heavily spiked tail.

The Barbed Tail are the most populous egg clutch within Ssethregore. Brutal, barbaric, merciless, and cruel, these ss'ressen are the hammer the empire utilizes to grind its enemies to pulp. Bred to be stronger and more savage than the average ss'ressen, members of this egg clutch delight in vicious warfare, and in tormenting their victims.



Ss'ressen, Black Talon

The Black Talons are, like all other ss'ressen, bred for war. They have fought and died for the serpent masters of the Yahssremoran Empire and its successor state, the Ssethregoran Empire, for millennia. These ss'ressen excel at reconnaissance, infiltration missions, and assassination of enemy leaders.

After centuries of blindly serving their masters, something unexpected happened to the Black Talons – they developed a conscious. After the teachings of the Fire Dragon were revealed to the High Matriarch Mother, her consciousness expanded and she, in turn, enlightened the rest of the clutch with His words of wisdom. Unable to continue to serve their evil masters, the clutch fled the Kraldjur Morass on a divinely inspired exodus to the north, into the lands of the humans and to freedom.

Ss'ressen, Black Talon

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 17 (breast plate, or 14 natural armor)
Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4, Survival +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Milandisian, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Distant Relations. Ashen Hide, Black Talon, and Ghost Scale ss'ressen do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy when they encounter one another.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Tail Swipe. When taking the attack action, as a bonus action the Black Talon ss'ressen may use their tail to shove a creature of large size or smaller.

Actions

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) slashing damage.

Brood of Ven Val'Sosi

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 50 (9d8 + 9)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Psionics +5, Perception +4, Stealth +4, Survival +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Milandisian, Ss'ressen
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Black Talon Ss'ressen Traits. The brood of Ven val'Sosi possess all of the traits of the black talon egg clutch, those being cold susceptibility, distant relations, ss'ressen frenzy, and tail swipe.

Psionics. The brood of Ven val'Sosi are 6th level manifesters. Their manifesting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). They know the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 3 (3rd level)

Powers (at will). *Basic telekinesis, burst, halt, intellect fortress, mental scream, telekinetic bolt, telekinetic deflection.*

Spell Expressions: *Haste, magic missile, slow, shatter, shield.*

Telekinetic Might. The brood of Ven val'Sosi increase the damage of any psionic power or spell expression that deals force damage by +4. Additionally, after successfully hitting a creature with a psionic power or spell expression that deals force damage, the creature must make a successful Strength saving throw (DC 14) or be shoved back 10 feet.

Actions

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Telekinetic Bolt. Ranged spell Attack: +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10+4) force damage.

Ss'ressen, Brood of Ven val'Sosi

The brood of Ven val'Sosi all share the same characteristics possessed by the Black Talons. It is their pale white to light grey hide and domed cranium that differentiates them from the rest of their clutch mates. Members of this brood are the only known ss'ressen to possess psionic abilities, which they use to defend the clutch and the kingdom of Milandir.

Ss'ressen, Curled Tail

Raised to fight in the vaulted coastal rain forests of the Southern Continent, the Curled Tail ss'ressen's bodies are lithe and wiry with a mottled light green coloration. Standing between five to six feet tall, these ss'ressen are aptly named for their impressively long tail that they tend to keep curled behind them. This tail is prehensile and capable of supporting the ss'ressen, lifting objects, or even wielding a weapon. The hands of a Curled Tail do not sport the long talons seen in other ss'ressen; instead their digits are short, thick, and covered with adhesive pads made from millions of tiny hair-like protrusions. These pads allow them to climb any surface at a surprising rate.

Ss'ressen, Curled Tail

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 17 (breast plate, or 14 natural armor)
Hit Points 44 (8d8+8)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Perception +3, Stealth +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Adhesive Pads. Instead of claws, a curled tail ss'ressen's fingers and toes end in wide pads that allow them to adhere to almost any surface, giving them advantage on climb checks.

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Prehensile Tail. The Curled Tail ss'ressen may use their tail as if it were an additional hand, wielding weapons with the light and finesse quality or manipulating small objects up to 5 lbs.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. The Curled Tail ss'ressen may make two attacks with its bow, or one with its spear and one with a weapon welded by its tail.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) piercing damage.

Prehensile Tail: Dagger. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5ft or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage.

Spear. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 range, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Ss'ressen, Dark Crest

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 26 (4d8+8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +5, Survival +3
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Low Coryani, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Adapted Pheromones. The Dark Crest have advantage on all saving throws to resist becoming frightened. Additionally, Dark Crest are not susceptible to Ss'ressen Frenzy and do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy in ss'ressen of other egg clutches.

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Improved Darkvision. Unlike other ss'ressen egg clutches, Dark Crests can discern colors in darkness.

Night Hunters. Dark Crests have advantage on all Dexterity (Stealth) checks when hiding in areas of dim light if they are dressed in dark clothing or armor.

Sagittal Crest. Creatures that utilize heat vision (such as val of Nier's bloodline) have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to see Dark Crests with their ability to see heat patterns.

Actions

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage.

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage.

Ss'ressen, Dark Crest

The matte-black scales of the Dark Crest allow them to lose themselves in the shadows. A large sagittal crest that runs laterally from their head to tail gives the egg clutch their name and grants them the ability to diffuse their body heat, making it difficult to discern their heat signature.

Bred by the ssanu biomancers of Pit Crotalus to counter Pit Sseth's Black Talons, the Dark Crest excel at stealth and assassination missions against all the enemies of their patron Pit, including other ssanu.

Ss'ressen, Death's Head

These ss'ressen are smaller than average, reaching a maximum height of five and a half feet and their wiry frame weighs less than two hundred pounds. Their hide is black with white bars across much of the body, but predominantly on the face, which also sports a halo of long spikes. Death's Head ss'ressen have very long tails that taper to a fine point, which they can use to devastating effect.

Created ages ago by ssanu biomancers in the employ of Pit Talasis, the Death's Head egg clutch were hatched to serve their serpent men masters. Like their bonded Pit, Death's Head ss'ressen are fervent worshippers of the ssethric god of death, Wantiir.

Ss'ressen, Death's Head

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (bone mail)
Hit Points 48 (6d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Skills Athletics +4, Survival +2
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

All Things Die. On your turn, you may have your Necrotic Touch ability also affect non-living creatures. Once you use this ability, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Necrotic Touch. Death's Head ss'ressen drain the life of any living creature that they come in contact with except members of their own egg clutch. Every physical attack on a living creature, or round spent grappling a living creature, that creature must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or have their hit point maximum reduced by 2. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. The Death's Head ss'ressen makes two melee attacks one with its spear and one with its tail.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft.., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) slashing damage.

Spear. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 range, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Tail Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) bludgeoning damage. If the tail whip is successful, they can attempt to shove their target as a bonus action. If the target fails, the target is knocked prone.

Ss'ressen, Emerald Scale

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 18 (Plate, or 14 natural armor)
Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Skills Athletics +3, History +3, Survival +2
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Master Swordsman. When wielding any type of sword, if the Emerald Scale ss'ressen hits a creature with its first melee attack on its turn, it gains advantage on the next attack roll against the same creature.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. The Emerald Scale ss'ressen makes two melee attacks.

Falchion. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (2d4+1) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage.

Ss'ressen, Emerald Scale

These regal ss'ressen stand between five to six feet tall and sport a small sagittal crest made up of triangular plates that runs to the tip of their tail. Emerald Scale ss'ressen are named for their vibrant green scalation that cover their heads, shoulders, back, and arms, giving way to a lighter mottled green along their chest, abdomen, and legs.

The Emerald Scale Egg Clutch believes itself to be the quintessential ss'ressen that all other egg clutches should strive to emulate. Indeed, they fervently believe that theirs was the original stock from which all other ss'ressen were created from by ssanu biomancers.

Ss'ressen, Flaming Tongue

Flaming Tongue ss'ressen stand between five to six feet tall and their hide is a burnt orange in coloration mottled with dusky brown or red bars. Flaming Tongue ss'ressen sport a crimson red sagittal crest that lies flat against their back. When agitated or preparing to use their special attack, the crest is raised to display its vivid coloration.

The Flaming Tongue Egg Clutch was bred as ranged support for the ssethric forces but still maintained the capability for melee combat. These ss'ressen received their name from two specialized glands that can eject a gout of sticky flaming naphtha.

Ss'ressen, Flaming Tongue

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 33 (6d8+6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +3
Skills Perception +4, Stealth +4, Survival +4
Damage Resistances fire
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. The Flaming Tongue ss'ressen makes two melee attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Flaming Spittle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+2) fire damage.

Gout of Flame (Recharge 6). The Flaming Tongue ss'ressen exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Every creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 9 (2d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Ss'ressen, Ghost Scale

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 26 (4d8+8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Deception +1, Perception +3, Stealth +5, Survival +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Low Coryani, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Chameleon Skin. A Ghost Scale ss'ressen's skin changes color to match the surrounding terrain. They have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks when trying to hide.

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Distant Relations. Ashen Hides, Black Talons, and Ghost Scale ss'ressen do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy when they encounter one another.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage.

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage.

Ss'ressen, Ghost Scale

Ghost Scale ss'ressen stand roughly five feet tall, and have a slightly hunched posture. Appearing at first glance to be subterranean albino reptilians, the natural coloration of a Ghost Scale ss'ressen is pearly white scales that shimmer in the light. Their claws retain their black coloration, pointing back towards their origin as an offshoot of the Black Talon egg clutch. Their most unique feature is their ability to change the color of their skin, virtually blending into the surroundings like a chameleon.

Ss'ressen, Horned Jowl

The average Horned Jowl stands between nine to ten feet tall and weighs in at five hundred pounds. These ss'ressen are huge and brutish, meant to serve as heavy shock troopers. They are massive hulking brutes with a short snout and wide jaws. Their heads are covered with numerous long spines running along its jaw line, brow ridges, and cranium. These ss'ressen have overly long arms and wide splayed feet. Their tails are shorter than that of an average ss'ressen and their thick horny hide offers superior protection from all but the most devastating of blows. Their claws are short and Agamassi prefer to strike with their horny fists rather than slash at their opponents.

Ss'ressen, Horned Jowl

Large humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (half plate or 13 natural armor)
Hit Points 76 (9d10 + 27)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +2, Survival +2
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the Horned Jowl ss'ressen can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but all attack rolls targeting the Horned Jowl ss'ressen have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy. While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Bearded Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d12+4) slashing damage.

Furious Charge. After moving more than 10 feet in a straight line toward a creature, the Horned Jowl ss'ressen can force that creature to make a DC 13 Strength saving throw or fall prone. If the creature falls prone the Horned Jowl ss'ressen may then make a single melee attack with their bearded axe, as a bonus action.

Ss'ressen, Long Claw

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 72 (11d8+22)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +2
Skills Athletics +4, Acrobatics +6, Deception +2, Perception +4, Stealth +6
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Devotion. Due to their conditioning, the Long Claw ss'ressen are intensely devoted to their ssanu and naga masters. They have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or similar effects that would make them act against their masters.

Shape Shift. When exposed to a member of any ss'ressen egg clutch (such as Black Talon or Emerald Scale) for 1 minute the Long Claw ss'ressen may change their appearance to pass as a member of that egg clutch. They can make themselves shorter or taller by up to 1 foot, and change their body weight by up to 50 lbs. They cannot change their basic physique, however, such as growing additional limbs, nor can they copy a specific individual ss'ressen.

This ability is not a magical ability and cannot be detected by magical means as it is a physical change that they control. The Long Claw ss'ressen may maintain this form indefinitely, requiring no concentration. If they die, their body changes back to its true form after 1 hour.

Suppress Pheromones. The Long Claw ss'ressen have advantage on all saves to resist becoming frightened. Additionally, Long Claw ss'ressen are not susceptible to Ss'ressen Frenzy but may choose to succumb to it. Additionally, they do not trigger Ss'ressen Frenzy in ss'ressen from other egg clutches.

Actions

Multiattack. The Long Claw ss'ressen makes two melee attacks.

Long Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4+4) slashing damage.

Ss'ressen, Long Claw

The natural appearance of the Long Claw egg clutch is of a long snouted, lithe ss'ressen with iridescent scales and one enormous claw on each hand that they use to eviscerate their victims. They stand between five and a half to six feet tall and their hide exhibits an iridescent sheen, changing its color depending on the light source.

Designed by the ssanu to fill the niche once held by the Black Talons and the Dark Crest ss'ressen, the Long Claws are master assassins, able to slip pass guards and other defenses due to their ability to change their form to perfectly mimic any other ss'ressen egg clutch. Even their scent is masked so as not to incite a frenzy with their pheromones.

Ss'ressen, Razor Claw

Razor Claws are the shortest of the ss'ressen, standing about five feet in height. They sport dark green bars of color running from their snout to the tip of their tail atop a sandy tan to muddy brown hide. A single row of cranial spines leads into a sagittal crest devoid of webbing between spines. Their most prominent feature is their extremely long talons, thick and sharp, sprouting from each hand. Their arms are short and bulky, built to absorb the shock from the tremendous blows these claws can deliver. Each scale on their bodies tapers into a sharp point, with a razor-edge.

Masters of melee, the Razor Claws sport an impressive array of spines and ridges along their bodies ideal for tearing an opponent's flesh to shreds. A favorite tactic of the Razor Claws is to close in and grapple with a foe, using his claws to eviscerate the opponent while their scales tear at the foe's flesh.

Ss'ressen, Razor Claw

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 33 (5d8+10)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +4, Survival +2
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Razor Hide. Any creature that starts their turn grappled by a Razor Claw ss'ressen suffers 1d6 slashing damage.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. The Razor Claw ss'ressen makes two melee attacks.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) slashing damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). A Razor Claw can only grapple one creature at a time.

Ss'ressen, Venomous Scale

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 33 (5d8+10)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4, Survival +3
Damage Immunity poison
Condition Immunity poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a ss'ressen suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Ss'ressen Frenzy. When ss'ressen of different, unrelated egg clutches are within 30 feet of one another, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or fly into an uncontrollable frenzy.

While in a frenzy you will do everything in your power to destroy the members of the egg clutch that triggered your frenzy. You gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls using Strength, while suffering disadvantage on any attack rolls or ability checks that are not directed at the ss'ressen who triggered your frenzy. For the duration of your frenzy all attack rolls against you have disadvantage. At the end of each of your turns, you may attempt a new Wisdom saving throw. If you succeed, your frenzy ends. Your frenzy also ends when there are no ss'ressen of an unrelated clutch within 30 feet.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage plus 7 (3d4) poison damage and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution check or be paralyzed until a successful save is made at the end of the target's turn.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Poison Spray (Recharge 6). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (3d4) poison damage and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution check or be paralyzed until a successful save is made at the end of the target's turn.

Ss'ressen, Venomous Scale

A Venomous Scale ss'ressen stands between five to six feet tall and contains a speckled hide in hues of light gray and purple, with a slightly yellow underside. Large sacs of venom rest bloated on either side of their neck, which deflate as the venom is expelled in a fine mist. Their claws are not as prominent as those of other egg clutches, but they make up for that with a razor-sharp bite and extra thick hide.

The Venomous Scale Egg Clutch are truly the most despicable of that breed. These ss'ressen use their ability to spit forth a paralytic poison to capture prey wanted for questioning by their superiors or for preserving food for their macabre living larder. They ruthlessly torment and torture victims, taking special joy in knowing that though they inflict terrible wounds upon them, their captives can only stare back in mute horror.

Tendrilisk

Tendrilisk are more of a science experiment gone awry than natural part of the region's flora. They were originally created as guardians for ssanu gardens, but their use has been expanded to strategic plantings along the Altherian border to discourage raids into the empire's territory.

There are also a number of ssanu sorcerers who prefer to tame the tendrilisk and use them as steeds. The ssanu sits in a special harness inside the tendrilisk, protected from its powerful secretions by protective sorcery. The ssanu controls the horticultural mount by dozens of wires strung from the harness to various points inside the tendrilisk' frame. To cast spells the ssanu causes the tendrilisk to open its mouth. It then closes the creature's mouth, leaving the ssanu protected from retaliation.

Tendrilisk

Huge plant

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 95 (10d12+30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	9 (-1)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Athletics +7
Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Resistances bludgeoning and piercing
Damage Immunities poison and psychic damage
Condition Immunities charm, frightened, poison, prone, restrained, stunned, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages ---
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

False Appearance. While the tendrilisk remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal plant.

Actions

Multiattack. A tendrilisk attacks twice with tendrils and makes one swallow attack, if it can. Grappling a creature does not reduce the number of tendril attacks the tendrilisk can make on its turn.

Swallow. The tendrilisk makes one attack against a Medium or smaller creature it is grappling with its swallow attack. If the attack hits, that creature is swallowed. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside of the tendrilisk and takes 8 (1d8+4) bludgeoning damage + 4 (1d8) acid damage at the start of each of the tendrilisk' turns. If the tendrilisk takes 30 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside of it, the tendrilisk must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the end of its turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the tendrilisk. If the tendrilisk dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Tendril. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6+4) bludgeoning damage and the target must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled.

Valka

The valka are the celestial servants of the ssethric deities, acting as guardians of their temples and priesthood. They eschew sunlight, preferring to operate during the night and in darkened places. They do not live upon the Mortal Realm but are summoned from the celestial domains of the Ssethric Gods.

Valka are implacable and relentless when dealing with those that desecrate sites holy to them. Though intelligent creatures, the valka will not negotiate or be reasoned with, unless the speaker is one of the ssethric faithful.

Valka of Yig

Medium celestial (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 67 (9d8+27)
Speed fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Skills Athletics +4
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapons that aren't silvered
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Damage Vulnerabilities radiant
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained
Senses darkvision 60ft., blindsight 30ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Telepathy, Ssethric
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The valka can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object. The valka can, as a bonus action, disengage with an enemy by moving into the floor or wall.

Innate Spellcasting. The valka's spellcasting ability is Constitution (spell save DC 15). The valka can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *detect evil and good*

3/day: *animate dead*

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the valka has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The valka makes two attacks with claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5ft, one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) necrotic damage. The target must make a DC 14 Constitution save or be unable to recover hit points until the end of its next turn.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 36 (8d8) necrotic damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained, and the valka can't constrict another target. Any creature that starts its turn in a grapple with the valka suffers 18 (4d8) poison damage with the valka regaining an equal amount of hit points.

Variants

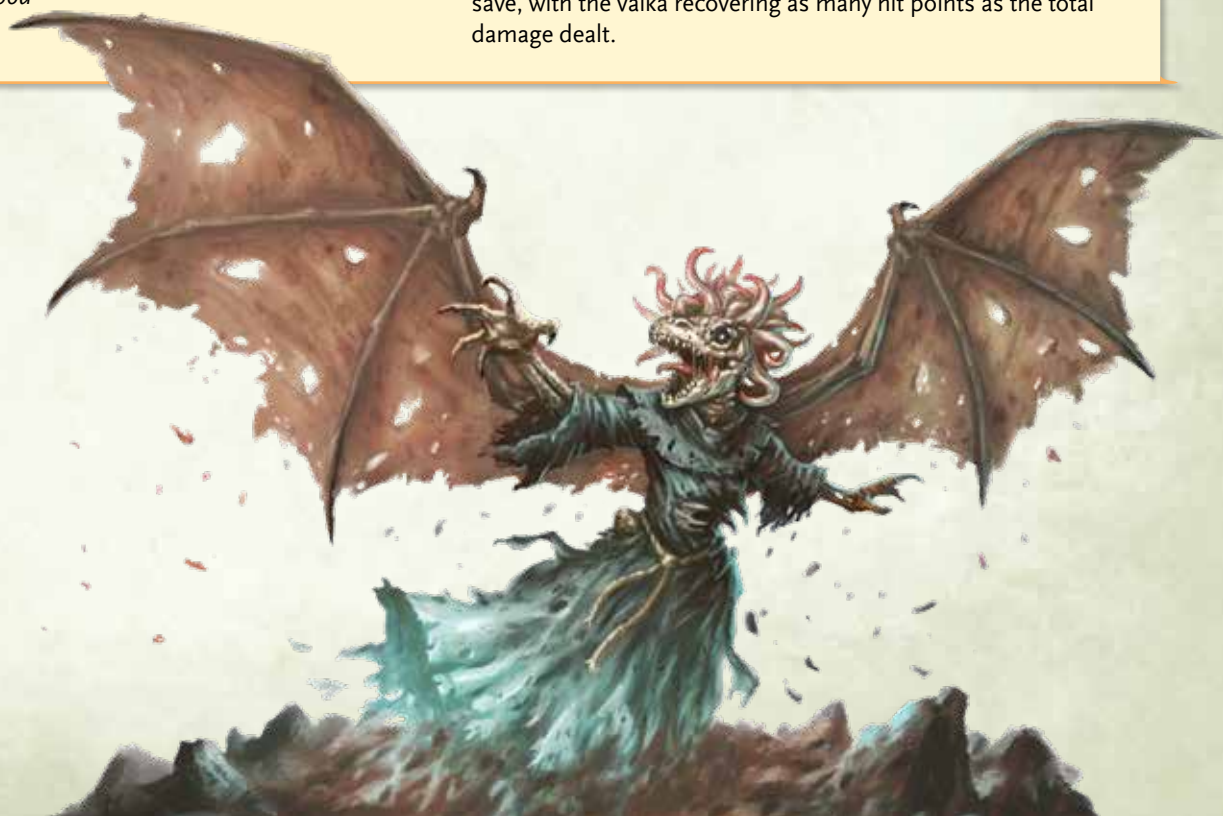
There are two variants of the valka. The following ability replaces the constrict attack of the valka of Yig.

Valka of Kassegore

Wave of Destruction (Recharge 5-6). Each creature in a 30-foot-radius must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or suffer 36 (8d8) necrotic damage, suffering half damage with a successful save.

Valka of Wantiir

Feast Upon the Living (Recharge 6). Each creature in a 30-foot-radius must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or suffer 10 (3d6) necrotic damage, suffering half damage with a successful save, with the valka recovering as many hit points as the total damage dealt.



Varn, Pacifier

Pacifiers are implacable warriors, the equivalent of a veteran soldier anywhere else upon the Known Lands. They have no sense of self-preservation and instead seek to ensure the well-being of their unit, even at the cost of their own lives.

Varn, Pacifier

Large abberation (varn)

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 168 (16d10+80)
Speed 40ft* (see below)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	12 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Arcana: +7, Perception: +6
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities poison
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Eoan, Ssethric
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Combat Manifester. If the varn pacifier manifests a psionic power without manifesting a psionic expression, it may make a melee attack as a bonus action. Varn pacifiers also have advantage on all Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration.

Forceful Adaptability. As an action the varn may change their physiology, granting themselves the ability to either fly, swim, or climb at a speed of 30 ft. The varn may only possess one of these at a time, but may retain the one chosen indefinitely.

Kinetic Aura. The varn pacifier's weapon attacks are magical. Additionally, when a pacifier hits with a weapon, that weapon deals an additional 4 (1d8) force damage, included in weapon attacks below.

Magic Resistance. The varn have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Reactive Adaptability. Any time the varn is damaged by an attack it may, as a reaction, gain resistance to that attack's damage type until the end of its next turn.

Psionics. The varn pacifier is an 8th-level manifester. Its manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). This varn pacifier knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 4 (4th level)

Powers (at will): *beguiling strike, burst, intellect fortress, mental scream, missive, telekinetic deflection, tower of iron will.*

Spell Expressions: (all of which have a range of self): *cure wounds, haste, long strider, misty step, and primal senses.*

Actions

Multiattack. The varn pacifier makes three attacks, only one of which can be made with its tail.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6+6) Piercing damage.

Spear. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 range, one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6+6) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) force damage, or 15 (2d8+6) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) force damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8+6) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Varn, Seekers of Enlightenment

Wherever the varn appear, there will always be those that spurn them, rejecting their gifts, and wishing them gone from their realm. These rebels can be dangerous to the varn's ultimate goals and need to be rooted out and eliminated. Seekers of Enlightenment are very powerful psions trained to rip into the strongest minds and taking what information they need to ferret out their victim's co-conspirators, leaving them a drooling vegetable.

For those with formidable mental defenses, Seekers are able to create nightmare mindscapes manifesting in their target's psyche, turning whatever phobias or deep-seated emotional fears they may possess and heightening them until the victim is happy to divulge whatever information the Seeker wishes to know. In the end, the Seeker will get whatever information they desire, delighting in causing as much mental trauma as possible.

Varn, Seekers of Enlightenment

Large abberation (varn)

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 200 (19d10 + 95)
Speed 40ft* (see below)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	22 (+6)	12 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Arcana: +10, Psionics +10, Perception: +6
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities poison
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Eoan, Ssethric
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Forceful Adaptability. As an action the varn may change their physiology, granting themselves the ability to either fly, swim, or climb at a speed of 30 ft. The varn may only possess one of these at a time, but may retain the one chosen indefinitely.

Grand Expressions. Varn seekers of enlightenment may manifest the following spell expression regaining the ability to do so after a long rest: true seeing.

Magic Resistance. The varn have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Powerful Mind. All psionic powers and manifested spells that deal psychic damage have their damage increased by 13 (3d8), included in the Mental Assault below.

Reactive Adaptability. Any time the varn is damaged by an attack it may, as a reaction, gain resistance to that attack's damage type until the end of its next turn.

Psionics. This varn is an 11th-level manifester. Its manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). This varn knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 4 (5th level)

Powers (at will): *burst, ego whip, intellect fortress, mind thrust, sensitivity to psionics impressions, tower of iron will.*

Spell Expressions: *command, detect thoughts, mind ward, telepathic bond, tongues.*

Actions

Multiattack. The varn makes two melee attacks, only one of which can be made with its tail.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) Piercing damage.

Mental Assault. Ranged Spell Attack: +10 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d8) psychic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 wisdom saving throw or become frightened until the end of its next turn.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8+5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

"That priest looked like a ssanu, but it truly was something alien, unnerving. Simply approaching it I felt my very life draining, as if someone were bleeding me out. All around it, flies dropped and the grass withered. It was as if life simply could not coexist with this creature nearby. I have never been more terrified of a snake-head in my life."

– Marcellus val'Mehan, attached to the Shining Patrol after an encounter with a Priest of Sipta

Varn, Speakers of Adulation

The second most commonly seen varn are the Speakers of Adulation, the priests of their foul deities. These priests present themselves as the most sympathetic of the varn, willing to always listen to any ssethric's concerns or desires, giving hopeful and lifting advice, while laying the foundation for grooming the being for conversion to the religion. The Speakers have two main goals: to convert as many ssethrics to their faith and to dot the empire with temples to the gods. They have been diligently working towards these goals with the aid of the naga, who imposed the varn faith as the state religion and have poured both money and manpower in raising as many temples as possible.

The priests are a rank higher on the evolutionary scale than the previous two groups, as they have the ability to channel the divine power granted to them by two of the varn deities, specifically Haulis and Zedok. Priests of Sipta belong to the Architects of Light, as they can manipulate arcane energy innately.

The Speakers of Adulation are seen by the ssanu who wish to overthrow the current regime as a chink in the otherwise unified varn armor. Contrary to what they may present, the Varn Pantheon is not a monolithic organization. Each of the three deities have their own clergy and tenets, which conflict and vie for power against one another. The three different sects of the varn religion compete for converts, resources for their temples, and influence throughout ssethric society, doing so often at the detriment of the other two. While this competition has not flared into open conflict among the priests, ssanu from Pit Sseth have manipulated events to pit followers of Haulis and Zedok against one another as a test. The resulting blood shed was a wonder to behold, giving the rebels hope that the varn rule can be toppled.

Varn, Speakers of Adulation

Large abberation (varn)

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 180 (19d10 + 76)
Speed 40ft* (see below)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)

Skills Arcana: +8, Perception: +10, Religion +8
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities poison
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages Eoan, Ssethric
Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Forceful Adaptability. As an action the varn may change their physiology, granting themselves the ability to either fly, swim, or climb at a speed of 30 ft. The varn may only possess one of these at a time, but may retain the one chosen indefinitely.

Magic Resistance. The varn speaker of adulation has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Reactive Adaptability. Any time the varn is damaged by an attack it may, as a reaction, gain resistance to that attack's damage type until the end of its next turn.

Soothing Tongue. After conversing with a speaker of adulation for 1 minute creatures who are not varn must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed as long as they are in its presence.

Psionics. This varn is an 8th-level manifester. Its manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). This varn knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 4 (4th level)

Powers (at will): *ego whip, intellect fortress, mental scream, mind thrust, missive, telekinetic deflection, tower of iron will.*

Spell Expressions (all of which have a range of self): *cure wounds, long strider, misty step, primal senses.*

Spellcasting. The varn is a 10th level divine spellcaster. Its primary spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spells) and has the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *acid fang*, poison spray, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bless, command, cure wounds, smite heretic**

2nd level (3 slots): *aid, calm emotions, zone of truth*

3rd level (3 slots): *protection from energy, spirit guardians*

4th level (3 slots): *deathward, guardian of faith*

5th level (2 slots): *greater restoration, righteous edict†*

Actions

Multiattack. The varn speaker of adulation makes two attacks, only one of which can be made with its tail.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) piercing damage.

Spear. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 range, one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage, or 13 (2d8+4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8+4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Varn, Architects of Light

Priests of the varn deity Sipta, the Architects of Light are varn who are able to channel arcane energy and manipulate it as do the sorcerers of Arcanis. However, unlike other magi, those who follow Sipta's teachings drain the life energy of the surrounding are to empower their spells. Architects are known among the sorcerers of the Black Coil as *death-walkers* due to their unconscious ability to bleed the lifeforce of any insects, small creatures, and the plant-life around them.

In battle, the Architects are a terror as they are not only able to cast devastating spells, but they have the ability to drain the life from their opponents and heal themselves in the process. They have been willing to share this technique with members of the Black Coil in the hopes of enticing these exceptional sorcerers to join their ranks in earnest, but thus far most have resisted. Interestingly, the rare non-ssanu members of the Black Coil appear more receptive to these entreaties and have accepted training in this technique from the varn in exchange for their embracing Sipta's other teachings.

Varn, Architects of light

Large abberation (varn)

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 209 (22d10 + 88)
Speed 40ft* (see below)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con: +9, Int +10
Skills Arcana: +10, Psionics +10, Perception: +7
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities poison
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Eoan, Ssethric
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Despoiler (Recharge 5-6). As an action the varn architect of light draws in the life energy of their surroundings and converts it into raw arcane power. All plants and tiny insects within 10 ft. of the varn instantly wither and die and any living creature within range that is at 0 hit points automatically fails one death saving throw. The varn architect of light regains two sorcery points. They also gain two additional points for each creature that dies due to the failed death saving throw.

Forceful Adaptability. As an action the varn may change their physiology, granting themselves the ability to either fly, swim, or climb at a speed of 30 ft. The varn may only possess one of these at a time, but may retain the one chosen indefinitely.

Metamagic. Varn architect of light possess 11 arcane points and knows the following metamagic abilities: careful spell, quicken spell, and twin-spell.

Reactive Adaptability. Any time the varn is damaged by an attack it may, as a reaction, gain resistance to that attack's damage type until the end of its next turn.

Psionics. This varn is an 8th-level manifester. Its manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 20, +10 to hit with spell attacks). This varn architect of light knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 4 (4th level)

Powers (at will): *intellect fortress, missive, sense psionics, telekinetic bolt, telekinetic deflection, tower of iron will.*

Spell Expressions: *arcane eye, clairvoyance, find traps, guiding bolt, shield, storm of knives.*

Focused Ability (meta creation) psi crystal.

Spellcasting. The varn architect of light is a 12th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). The varn architect of light knows the following spells (* denotes new spells found in the Codex of Magic chapter).

Cantrips (at will): *acid fang*, eldritch bolt, mage hand, prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): comprehend languages, magic missile, sleep, thunderwave

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts, mirror image, misty step riptide**

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fireball, lightning bolt*

4th level (3 slots): *detonating rain*, greater invisibility*

5th level (1 slot): *animate objects*

Actions

Multiattack. The varn architect of light makes three attacks, only one of which can be made with its tail.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) piercing damage.

Spear. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 20/60 range, one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) piercing damage, or 14 (2d8+5) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8+5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Varn, Obligator

These hulking brutes tower over even the massive Agamassi ss'ressen. Covered in a thick layer of scales with the same strength and durability of the finest dwarven steel, these creatures are living siege engines, able to barrel through enemy lines with ease. In some respects, they resemble the Razor Claw ss'ressen, as their scales are equally as sharp, making their hand-to-hand attacks even more devastating.

Obligators are also known as the *Children of Zedok*, as the creatures are blessed by the Lord of Chaos with a variety of gifts, such as the chaos orb, a coruscating ball of chaotic energy that when launched against a target causes them to undergo agonizing bodily transformations, rendering them easy prey to the Obligators fearsome attacks. Against an array of foes, they may call upon its lord's ability to cause the landscape to shift and alter beneath their enemy's feet. While their opponents are struggling to maintain their balance and avoid the quickly sprouting hazards, the Obligator can traverse the chaotic terrain as if they were strolling down a Coryani boulevard.

Though connected to Zedok, Obligators may be called upon by any of the varn of sufficient standing to deal with any threat that may endanger the varn's cause. The first and last time Obligators were summoned in numbers was during the ssanu rebellion against the naga not long after their coup. The battle did not last long, but when over, the number of the dead numbered into the thousands, many credited to the Obligators.

Varn, Obligator

Huge abberation (varn)

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 276 (24d12 + 120)
Speed 40ft* (see below)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Athletics +12, Perception: +8
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities poison
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages Eoan, Ssethric
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Forceful Adaptability. As an action the varn may change their physiology, granting themselves the ability to either fly, swim, or climb at a speed of 30 ft. The varn may only possess one of these at a time, but may retain the one chosen indefinitely.

Meta-Psionics (recharge 4-6). The varn obligator may manifest any of their spell manifestations as a bonus action.

Reactive Adaptability. Any time the varn is damaged by an attack it may, as a reaction, gain resistance to that attack's damage type until the end of its next turn.

Wade Through Chaos. The varn obligator is immune to psionic spell manifestations that imped movement as if it was under the effects of a freedom of movement spell.

Psionics. This varn is an 11th-level manifester. Its manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18, +9 to hit with spell attacks). This varn knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 4 (5th level)

Powers (at will): *burst, intellect fortress, missive, telekinetic bolt, telekinetic deflection, tower of iron will.*

Spell Expressions: *black tentacles, entangle, freedom of movement, misty step, spike growth.*

Actions

Multiattack. The varn obligator makes four melee attacks, only one of which can be made with its tail.

Chaos Orb (Recharge 5-6). Range Weapon Attack: +13 to hit, range 100 ft., one target. *Hit:* 67 (15d8) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 18 charisma saving throw or be racked in pain as its body warps agonizingly. For the next minute the creature suffers disadvantage on all attack rolls. At the end of the creature's turn it may attempt another saving throw to end this effect.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d6+7) piercing damage.

Greatsword. Melee or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft. or 20/60 range, one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d6+7) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d8+7) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

"The naga oppress the ssanu, the ssanu oppress the ss'ressen, the ss'ressen oppress the iguadons, the iguadons oppress the kobolds, we all oppress the slaves, and we are all slaves to the gods. This is the way of nature."

– unnamed iguadon

Varn, Emissary

When the varn arrived there were many of each type except for their leader, the Emissary. This unique being is a true monstrosity, immense in size, yet so well-proportioned that the extent of its mass is not immediately evident. Horrifically beautiful by ssethric standards, the Emissary is the most perfect reptilian being upon the entire world of Arcanis, filling any who see it with the awe usually evoked by valinor or the Gods themselves. Its melodic voice is a serenade when calm and a terror-inducing sound when angered.

Yet what makes the Emissary truly terrible to behold are its three heads, each magnificently dreadful to behold. The Emissary is the herald of the varn deities, as well as their representative on this mortal realm. When necessary, it can split apart into three separate entities, each body controlled by one mind, yet completely independent of one another.

Varn, Emissary

Huge abberation (varn)

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 262 (21d12 + 126)
Speed 40ft* (see below)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	14 (+2)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Skills Athletics +13, Arcane +11, Perception: +10
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing weapons
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages Eoan, Ssethric
Challenge 19 (22,000 XP)

Forceful Adaptability. As an action the varn may change their physiology, granting themselves the ability to either fly, swim, or climb at a speed of 30 ft. The varn may only possess one of these at a time, but may retain the one chosen indefinitely.

Grand Expressions. The varn emissary may manifest the following spell expressions regaining the ability to do so after a long rest: blade barrier, crystalize*, prismatic spray.

Multiple Minds. The varn emissary can manifest any psionic power (without the use of an expression) as a bonus action on is turn.

Reactive Adaptability. Any time the varn is damaged by an attack it may, as a reaction, gain resistance to that attack's damage type until the end of its next turn.

Reactive Heads. The varn emissary gets two extra reactions that can be used only for Opportunity Attacks.

Three As One. As an action the varn emissary may split itself into three separate varn, one a seeker of enlightenment, one a pacifier, and one a speaker of adulation, who share the same consciousness. While separated each varn gets their own actions and acts independently but will not move farther away them 60 feet of each other.

While separated the varn emissary cannot access his legendary actions. Any attempt to banish or separate these three varn through magic will fail unless all three are being sent to the same location. Once two of the three varn are reduced to 0 hit points all three varn instantly reform into the varn's true form, healing it of all damage previously suffered. Once used the varn emissary cannot use this ability again for 7 days.

Wakeful. While the varn emissary sleeps, at least one of its heads is awake.

Psionics. This varn is a 17th-level manifester. Its manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 19, +11 to hit with spell attacks). The varn emissary knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 5 (5th level)

Powers (at will): *burst, ego whip, intellect fortress, mental scream, missive, telekinetic bolt, telekinetic deflection, tower of iron will.*

Spell Expressions: *arcane eye, blink, clairvoyance, dimension door, find traps, guiding bolt, magic missile, misty step, resilient shatter, shield, sphere, storm of knives.*

Actions

Multiattack. The varn emissary makes four melee attacks, only one of which can be made with its tail.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d6+7) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (3d12+7) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d8+7) bludgeoning damage plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 19 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Legendary Actions

The varn emissary can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The varn emissary regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. Make a single melee attack against a creature within reach.

Detect. The varn emissary makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Gazes Three (2 Actions). Manifest *telekinetic bolt* (without the use of an expression) against three separate targets within range.

Manifest. Manifest a single psionic power (without the use of an expression).

Viper, Winged

Tiny beast

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 7 (2d4+2)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (-3)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Stealth +6, Perception +3
Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages ---
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a winged viper suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Flyby. The winged viper doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (3d4) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Poison Spray (Recharge 6). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (3d4) poison damage and the target must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until a successful save is made at the end of the target's turn.

Viper, Winged

The winged vipers are jewel-like serpents covered with shimmering iridescent scales of a myriad of rainbow hues. Their wings are thin membranes stretched bat-like over a delicate bone structure. These small serpents range widely in size. They are not particularly aggressive, but will often lash out with a bite before attempting to retreat. When attacking, the winged vipers prefer to fly onto their victims from above, gaining the element of surprise. When surprised or provoked the winged viper will spray venom into the victim's eyes, blinding their target and allowing the winged serpent to escape or have advantage on a biting attack.

Yissera

Medium humanoid (ssethric)

Armor Class 15(leather armor, shield)
Hit Points 28 (5d8+5)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +6, Persuasion +6
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Altherian, Low Coryani, Myrantian, Ssethric
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Devotion. Due to their conditioning, the yissera are intensely devoted to their ssanu masters. They have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or similar effects that would make them act against their masters.

Face of Many Masks. When exposed to a human ethnic group (such as Cafelan or Altherian), the yissera may change their appearance to pass as a native of that ethnicity. They can make themselves shorter or taller by up to 1 foot, and change their body weight by up to 50 lbs. They cannot change their basic human physique, however, such as growing additional limbs, nor can they copy a specific person. This ability is not a magical ability and cannot be detected by magical means as it is a physical change that they control. The yissera may maintain this form indefinitely, requiring no concentration. If they die, their body changes back to its true form after one 1 hour.

Forked Tongue. Yissera can mimic the speech patterns and accents of a human ethnic group they have encountered.

Poisonous. The yissera possesses retractable fangs that can deliver a poisonous bite.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 points of piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) poison damage. This attack is delivered by a set of retractable fangs.

Khopesh. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8+1) slashing damage.

Poison Spittle. The yissera may spit poison at one creature within 10 feet, forcing that creature to make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or suffer 1d12 poison damage.

Yissera

Yissera are indistinguishable from the humans they were bioengineered to mimic and infiltrate. Shortly after the arrival of humans on the continent, the ssethrics quickly saw the need for spies that could move through the new human controlled lands with impunity. Once again, the arts of the biomancers were called into action and, using the hussuma as a template, created the yissera.

Bioengineered to infiltrate the human nations of the Known Lands, the yissera are indistinguishable from humans until they reach the age of fifty or so. At that time, they begin to display signs of their ssethric heritage, from exhibiting scaly skin to their faces elongating outward like a snout, or other, more horrific traits. This mutation is more ghastly and random than that of the hussuma, with many yissera ending their lives with a human body and a head of a serpent or snakes for limbs.

Appendix B
Non-Player Characters

This appendix presents the various non-player characters that can serve as allies, enemies, or resources for the players in your campaign to interact or battle. Many of these should be customized by selecting for the character type. For example, the chaoshammer the characters meet can be a Barbed Tail ss'ressen or a Pit Elapis ssanu, each of which will present a very different challenge for the players.

Race	Creature type	Ability Score Mods	Racial Abilities	Special Abilities
Hussuma	humanoid, ssethric	Wis +1, Cha +2	elemental affinity, face of many masks, infiltrator	
Hylis	humanoid	Dex +1, Wis +1	adaptive skin, arboreal, dark vision 60' powerful legs, venom gland.	climb speed 30', small size
Iguadon	humanoid, ssethric	Str +2, Con +1	dark vision, cold susceptibility, divine spell casting only.	large size, 10-foot melee reach
Kobold	humanoid, ssethric	Dex +2, Con +1	dark vision, pack tactics, only females may possess eldritch spell casting	small size
Naga	monstrosity, ssethric	Int +2, Wis +1	dark vision, cold susceptibility, master's control, divine (varn) and elder spell-casting, psionics.	large size, immune to poison and poisoned condition, may never wield weapons, knows mage hand and one other elder sorcerer cantrip and one psionic power
Pleisauran	humanoid	Str +2, Dex +1	deep diver	swim speed of 30 ft.
Rhamphorike	humanoid, ssethric	Dex +2, Wis +1	cold susceptibility, cannot cast spells	fly speed of 30 ft.
Sand Apophics	humanoid, ssethric	Dex +2, Wis +1	cold susceptibility, natural camouflage, skirmisher	
Shell-Back	humanoid, ssethric	Str +2, Con +1	powerful lungs, shell back	swim speed of 30ft, may not wear armor, gains natural AC 16, bite attack. 1d6 piercing, light, finesse
Ssanu	monstrosity, ssethric	Int +2, Wis +1	dark vision, divine and elder spell-casting, psionics	bite attack. 1d6 piercing, light, finesse, tail attack. 1d8 bludgeoning, light, finesse

Spell Casting Restrictions

In the table above some races are restricted to specific spell casting types, whereas Core does not make a distinction between different types of magic. In the Arcanis setting, arcane magic is divided into two categories: Elder and Eldritch magic.

Some races cannot possess divine spell casting or have the type of spell casting limited to the gender of the caster. Keep this in mind when creating your NPCs.

Race	Creature type	Ability Score Mods	Racial Abilities	Special Abilities
Ss'ressen (All)	humanoid, ssethric		darkvision, cold susceptibility, ss'ressen frenzy, only females may become clerics or take any eldritch spell casting class, males may only gain divine spells through the holy champion class and, primal spell casting and must worship Jeggal Sag.	Natural claws: d6 slashing, light, finesse
Ss'ressen, Ashen Hide	humanoid, ssethric	Str +2, Con+1	distant relations	Fire resistance
Ss'ressen, Barbed Tail	humanoid, ssethric	Str +2, Wis +1	relentless.	Tail attack: 1d8 piercing, light, finesse
Ss'ressen, Black Talon	humanoid, ssethric	Str +2, Wis +1	distant relations, tail swipe.	Tail attack. 1d8 bludgeoning, light, finesse
Ss'ressen, Brood of Ven val'Sosi	humanoid, ssethric	Wis +1, Cha +2	distant relations	Psionics telekinetic might
Ss'ressen, Curled Tail	humanoid, ssethric	Dex +2, Wis +1	adhesive pads, prehensile tail.	Does not have a claw attack
Ss'ressen, Dark Crest	humanoid, ssethric	Dex +2, Cha +1	adapted pheromones, improved darkvision, night hunters, sagittal crest	
Ss'ressen, Death's Head	humanoid, ssethric	Str +2, Dex +1	all things die, necrotic touch	
Ss'ressen, Emerald Scale	humanoid, ssethric	Int +1, Wis +2	master swordsman	
Ss'ressen, Flaming Tongue	humanoid, ssethric	Dex +2, Con +1	flaming spittle, gout of flame	
Ss'ressen, Ghost Scale	humanoid, ssethric	Dex +2, Con +1	chameleon skin, distant relations,	
Ss'ressen, Horned Jowl	humanoid, ssethric	Str +1, Con +2	reckless	large size, 10 foot melee reach.
Ss'ressen, Long Claw	humanoid, ssethric	Dex +2, Str +1	a forked tongue, shape shift, suppress pheromones.	natural claws: 2d4 slashing, light, finesse
Ss'ressen, Razor Claw	humanoid, ssethric	Str +2, Dex +1	razor hide	may not wear armor, gains natural AC 16 natural claws: d8 slashing, light, finesse
Ss'ressen, Venomous Scale	humanoid, ssethric	Dex +2, Wis +1	poison spray	
Yissera	humanoid, ssethric	Wis +1, Cha +2	forked tongue, face of many masks, poison spittle.	

Elder and Eldritch Casters

Some NPCs are listed as elder or eldritch casters. You may utilize the same stat block for either type of arcane magic by simply swapping out spells unique to that tradition of magic. For example, swapping ebon blade for elemental bolt in the case of using an elder caster stat block to make an eldritch caster.

Arcane Assassin

Medium <type>

Armor Class 18 (mage armor)
Hit Points 124 (19d8 + 38)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Acrobatics: +9, Athletics +5, Stealth +9, Perception +6
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Assassin's Mark. At the beginning of its action, the arcane assassin may mark a creature as a bonus action. Once per turn the assassin may deal an extra 10 points of damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack. If the assassin reduces a marked creature to 0 hit points, that creature suffers disadvantage on all death saving throws.

Spellcasting. The arcane assassin is a 10th level elder arcane spellcaster. Its primary spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spells). They know the following spells.

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, ebon blade†, mage hand, minor illusion.*

1st level (4 slots): *false life, hunter's mark, mage armor, shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *alter self, blindness/deafness, misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, gaseous form, vampiric touch*

4th level (3 slots): *arcane eye, freedom of movement, stoneskin*

5th level (2 slots): *modify memory, passwall*

Metamagic. As with all arcane spell casters, the arcane assassin possesses 10 arcane points and knows the following metamagic abilities: quickened spell, subtle spell

Actions

Multiattack. The arcane assassin makes two melee attacks with their weapons, claws (if available), or their ebon blade (see spells).

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6+5) slashing damage and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 20 (6d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Short Bow. Range Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+5) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 20 (6d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Archmage-priest of Sipta

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)
Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +9
Skills Arcana +11, Religion +11, Perception +9
Senses passive Perception 19
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Arcane Mastery. Any time the archmage-priest of Sipta successfully counterspells a spell cast by an arcane caster, they regain a 1st level spell slot or 1 arcane point.

Battlemage. If the archmage-priest of Sipta casts a cantrip, they may make a melee attack as a bonus action.

Despoiler (Recharge 5-6). As an action the archmage-priests of Sipta draws in the life energy of their surroundings and converts it into raw arcane power. All plants and tiny insects within 10 ft. of the archmage-priest instantly wither and die and any living creature within range that is at 0 hit points automatically fails one death saving throw. The archmage-priest of Sipta regains two sorcery points. They also gain two additional sorcery points for each creature that dies due to the failed death saving throw.

Faith in the Arcane. Archmage-priests of Sipta can learn cleric spells as if they were Arcane spells.

Magic Resistance. The archmage-priest of Sipta has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Metamagic. As with all arcane spell casters, the archmage-priest of Sipta possesses 15 arcane points and knows the following metamagic abilities: careful spell, extend spell, quickened spell, and subtle spell.

Spellcasting. The archmage-priest of Sipta is considered a 13th level elder arcane spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spells) and they have the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *elemental bolt†, empowered strike†, prestidigitation, sacred flame, thaumaturgy.*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, mage armor, magic missile, shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, dispel magic, elemental guardians*, fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *cone of cold, deathward, dimension door*

5th level (2 slots): *flame strike, retribution†*

6th level (1 slots): *globe of invulnerability*

7th level (1 slots): *divine word*

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) lightning damage.

Berserker of Haulis

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class: 15 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 130 (20d8 + 40)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +5, Cha +6
Skills Athletics +6, Religion +3, Perception +4
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Righteous Rage. The first time the berserker of Haulis takes damage in combat they fly into an uncontrollable rage. Until the battle is over or they are reduced to 0 hit points, the berserker of Haulis gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage and their melee attacks deal an additional 1d4 damage. During this rage they attack the closest enemy until that enemy is reduced to 0 hp, at which point they will attack the next nearest enemy, and so on. Unlike a regular rage, the berserker of Haulis can cast spells while raging.

Spellcasting. The berserker of Haulis a 5th level divine spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC: 14, +6 to hit with spells) and they have the following spells prepared.

1st level (4 slots): *healing word, smite heretic†*

2nd level (3 slots): *magic weapon, protection from poison*

3rd level (2 slots): *righteous strike†*

Actions

Multiattack. The berserker of Haulis makes two melee attacks with its weapons or claws (if they possess them).

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) slashing damage.

Chaoshammer of Zedok

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class: 18 (plate)
Hit Points 153 (18d8 + 72)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +9, Cha +6
Skills Athletics +6, Religion +3, Perception +4
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Chaos Blade. As a bonus action, the chaoshammer can expend a spell slot to cause their melee weapon attacks to become magical and deal an extra 9 (2d8) damage of a random type (rolling a d10: acid, cold, fire, force, lightning, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant, thunder to determine damage type) to the target hit. This benefit lasts until the end of their turn. If the chaoshammer expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d8 for each level above 1st.

Spellcasting. The chaoshammer is a 10th level divine spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC: 14, +6 to hit with spells) and they have the following spells prepared.

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, protection from evil and good, smite heretic†*

2nd level (3 slots): *aid, whirling blade†*

3rd level (2 slots): *dispel magic, righteous strike†*

Actions

Multiattack. The chaoshammer makes three melee attacks with their weapons.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6+3) bludgeoning damage.

Chaoshammer of Zedok

Cleric of Kassegore

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 17 (breastplate, shield)
Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+0)

Skills Insight +5, Religion +5, Perception +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

All Things Must Die (Recharge on a Short Rest). Upon making a successful melee attack the cleric of Kassegore may use a bonus action to deal an additional 11 (2d10) points of necrotic damage.

Spellcasting. The cleric of Kassegore is a 6th level divine spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC: 13, +5 to hit with spells) they have the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): light, poison spray, sacred flame, thaumaturgy

1st level (4 slots): *bless, guiding bolt, hellish rebuke, smite heretic†*

2nd level (3 slots): *flaming sphere, spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *daylight, mass healing word*

Actions

Multiattack. The cleric of Kassegore makes two melee attacks with their weapons.

Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage.

Symbol of the Ssethregoran Empire

Cleric of Yig

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +8, Insight +4, Intimidation +4, Religion +4, Perception +4, Persuasion +8
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, the cleric of Yig can expend a spell slot to cause its melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 10 (3d6) poison damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If the cleric of Yig expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases for each level above 1st.

Serpent's Tongue. The cleric of Yig has advantage on all Charisma based skill checks.

Spellcasting. The cleric of Yig is a 6th level divine spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC: 14, +6 to hit with spells) and they have the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *acid fang*, light, poison spray, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, command, disguise self, healing word*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts, invisibility*

3rd level (3 slots): *major image, nondetection*

Actions

Multiattack. The cleric of Yig makes two melee attacks with their weapons or claws (if they possess them).

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage.

Reaction

Ever-Shifting Coils (Recharge 5-6). When a cleric of Yig is attacked by a creature within 30 feet that they can see, they may use their reaction to increase their AC by 5 against that creature's attacks.

In Arcanis only yissera and ssanu can be clerics of Yig.

Cleric of Zedok

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)
Hit Points 210 (28d8 + 84)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Skills Religion +5, Perception +9
Senses Passive Perception 19
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Spellcasting. The cleric of Zedok is a 10th level divine spellcaster. Its primary spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spells) and has the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *acid fang*, poison spray, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *chromatic orb, command, cure wounds*

2nd level (3 slots): *aid, darkness, flaming sphere*

3rd level (3 slots): *protection from energy, spirit guardians*

4th level (3 slots): *confusion, dimension door*

5th level (2 slots): *mind fog†, righteous edict†*

Actions

Multiattack. The cleric of Zedok makes two melee attacks with their weapons.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6+3) bludgeoning damage and the target must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, taking 20 (6d6) damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The damage type of this attack is determined at random by rolling a d10: acid, cold, fire, force, lightning, thunder, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant, thunder.

Reactions

Chaos Lord. In combat the cleric of Zedok seemingly create fields of chaos around themselves. As a reaction, when any other creature rolls an attack roll within 30 feet of the cleric of Zedok, they may grant that target advantage or disadvantage on that attack roll.

Despoiler of Sipta

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 13 (15 mage armor, 20 shield + mage armor)
Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +6, Int: +6 Wis +4
Skills Arcana +6, Religion +6, Perception +4
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Arcane Strike. As a bonus action, the despoiler of Sipta can expend a spell slot to cause their melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 9 (2d8) force damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If the despoiler of Sipta expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d8 for each level above 1st.

Metamagic. As with all arcane spell casters, the despoiler of Sipta possesses 6 arcane points and knows the following metamagic abilities: careful spell, quickened spell.

Spellcasting. The despoiler of Sipta is a 6th level elder spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spells) and they have the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *ebon blade†, empowered strike†, fire bolt, ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, magic missile, shield, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *mirror image, see invisibility, slip sideways***

3rd level (3 slots): counterspell, haste

Actions

Multiattack. The despoiler of Sipta makes two melee attacks with its ebon blade.

Ebon Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage.

Additional Blessings of Zedok

All divine casters of Zedok are gifted with his blessings. Roll a d6 on the table below or choose one. If you advance the stat block past its CR, give it an additional blessing for each 3 CRs above its base.

1. ***Varn Glands (recharge 6).*** When suffering damage from any source the blessed of Zedok may use its reaction to gain resistance against that damage type until the end of its next turn.
2. ***Quills.*** A creature that starts its turn in a grapple with the blessed of Zedok suffers 1d6 piercing damage.
3. ***Third Eye.*** The blessed of Zedok gains advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks and has its passive perception increased by 5.
4. ***Eyes in the Back of Their Head.*** The blessed of Zedok cannot be surprised.
5. ***Curse of Zedok (recharge on long rest).*** The blessed of Zedok may cast *bestow curse* without expending a spell slot.
6. ***Heart of Chaos.*** The blessed of Zedok gains advantage on saves to resist spells cast by other divine spell casters.

Disciple of Jeggal Sag

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 15 (hide)
Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32) + 8 temp
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)

Skills Arcane +4, Handle Animal +8, Nature +4, Religion +4, Perception +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Boons.

Eagle: Cast *heroism* 1/day as a 4th level spell.

Horse: +10' movement (included above).

Lion: Immune to Frightened Condition.

Stone: Cast *false life*, at will.

Pact Magic. The Disciple of Jeggal Sag is an 8th level primal spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spells), and they know the following spells.

Cantrips (at will): *elemental bolt†, shillelagh, spirit craft†*

4th level (2 slots): *animal friendship, brittle bones†, call lightning cure wounds, enemy of my enemy†, spirit flames†, stone skin, wall of fire.*

Actions

Multiattack. The Disciple of Jeggal Sag makes two attacks with their staff.

Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+5) bludgeoning damage, weapon is considered magical (shillelagh).

Shamans and Boons

When creating a shaman NPC pay close attention to the boons chosen as they will alter the NPC's personality. For example, the Eagle boon listed in the statblock above requires the shaman to always maintain a dignified manner and forgo anything they would consider foolish or frivolous.

Feel free to change these boons when creating an NPC the heroes interact with. If used for a combat encounter, these roleplaying restrictions may not be applicable.

Shamans with Shape Changing

Per the Shaman class writeup, the Disciple of Jeggal Sag can shape change into animal forms. To include this ability in the disciple's statblock, allow the disciple to shape change once per encounter as a bonus action and treat the beast they shape change into as an additional monster when calculating the encounter difficulty.

Elementalist

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)
Hit Points 102 (16d8 + 32)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +6, Int +9, Wis +6
Skills Arcana +13, Religion +13, Perception +6
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Elemental Mastery. Any time the elementalist succeeds in a saving throw to resist elemental damage they gain one Arcane point. Additionally, any spell they cast that deals acid, cold, fire, thunder, or lightning damage deals an additional +5 points of that damage type to each target.

Elder elementalists are also able to summon para-elementals.

Elemental Resistance. The elementalist has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects that deal acid, cold, fire, thunder, or lightning damage.

Metamagic. As with all arcane spell casters, the elementalist possesses 13 arcane points and knows the following metamagic abilities: careful spell, empower spell, quickened spell, and subtle spell.

Spellcasting. The elementalist considered a 13th level elder arcane spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spells) and they have the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *elemental bolt†, ray of frost, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *black ice†, burning hands, mage armor, shield, steam blast*

2nd level (3 slots): *blur, flaming sphere, scorching ray*

3rd level (3 slots): *elemental guardians†, dispel magic, fireball, lightning bolt*

4th level (3 slots): *conjure minor elemental, detonating rain†, fire shield*

5th level (2 slots): *conjure elemental, inferno†*

6th level (1 slots): *chain lightning*

7th level (1 slots): *reverse gravity*

Actions

Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8) bludgeoning damage.

Fury-priest of Haulis

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)
Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Wis +6
Skills Athletics +7, Religion +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Blessings of the Bloody Maul. Any creature under the effects of a bless spell cast by the fury-priest of Haulis flies into a frenzy, increasing all melee damage by 1d4.

Spellcasting. The fury-priest of Haulis is a 6th level divine spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spells) and they have the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *acid fang, light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bless, cure wounds, healing word, smite heretic†*

2nd level (3 slots): *primal sense†, spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *daylight, dispel magic*

Actions

Multiattack. The fury-priest of Haulis makes two melee attacks with their weapons.

Bearded Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12+4) slashing damage.

Holy Champion of Kassegore

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 17 (half plate)
Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +5, Cha +6
Skills Athletics +7, Perception +4
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Consume the Unworthy (Recharge 5-6). When the holy champion of Kassegore hits with its bite attack, they may use a bonus action to deal an additional 20 (6d6) points of necrotic damage, regaining half as many hit points.

Spellcasting. The holy champion of Kassegore is an 8th level divine spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spells) and they have the following spells prepared.

1st level (4 slots): *healing word, protection from evil and good, smite heretic†*

2nd level (3 slots): *aid, dragon's roar†*

3rd level (2 slots): *breath of the dragon†, righteous strike†*

Actions

Multiattack. The holy champion of Kassegore makes two melee attacks with its melee weapon and one with their bite attack.

Bearded Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12+4) slashing damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8+4) piercing damage.

Holy Champion of Yig

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)
Hit Points 98 (15d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +5, Cha +5
Skills Deception +8, Perception +5, Stealth +10
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Serpent's Strike. Once per round, when the holy champion of Yig successfully hits a target they can force that creature to make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer 31 (9d6) poison damage, or half damage upon a successful save.

Serpent's Tongue. The cleric of Yig has advantage on all charisma-based checks.

Spellcasting. The holy champion of Yig is a 6th level divine spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +6 to hit with spells) and they have the following spells prepared.

1st level (4 slots): *false life, healing word, silent Image, sleep*

2nd level (3 slots): *alter self, hold person, invisibility*

3rd level (3 slots): *daylight, righteous strike†*

Actions

Multiattack. The holy champion of Yig makes two melee attacks with its short sword.

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6+4) slashing damage.

Dagger of Yig

Knights of Herka

Medium humanoid (ghost scale ss'ressen)

Armor Class 18 (plate armor)
Hit Points 130 (20d8 + 40)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +5, Int +6
Skills Arcana +6, Deception +5, Perception +5, Stealth +6, Survival +5.
Senses Darkvision 60', passive Perception 15
Languages Ss'ressen, Low Coryani
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Ghost Scale Ss'ressen Traits. The knights of Herka possess all of the traits of a ghost scale ss'ressen, those being chameleon skin, cold susceptibility, distant relations, and ss'ressen frenzy.

Arcane Consumption. The knight may attempt to absorb the magic from a single magic item they are holding by making a successful Intelligence (Arcana) check with the DC and total spell levels gained being set by the rarity of the item (presented as

Rarity (DC/Spell levels):

Common (14/1), uncommon (16/3), rare (18/5) very rare

(20/7), legendary (25/10).

The process of draining an item requires 10 minutes. If the knight fails their Intelligence (Arcana) they cannot drain the item in question. Knights cannot retain more than 10 total spell slots at any time. Any extra spell slots are lost and drain away.

Arcane Manipulation. Knights may use absorbed spell levels to cast the following spells, and may combine spell levels to cast these spells at a higher spell level (maximum equivalent of 5th level spell slot).

The knights are considered 9th level eldritch arcane spellcasters. Their primary spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spells) and have the following spells prepared.

1st level: *healing word, righteous fury†, shield of faith*

2nd level: *magic weapon, whirling blade†*

Knights are usually encountered with 2 spell levels.

Actions

Multiattack. The knight of Herka makes two melee attacks.

Great Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6+3) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) force damage.

Long Bow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) piercing damage plus 8 (2d8) force damage.

Mage-priest of Sipta

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)
Hit Points 49 (9d8 + 9)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +7, Cha +2
Skills Arcana +5, Religion +5, Perception +7
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Despoiler (Recharge 5-6). As an action the Mage-Priests of Sipta draws in the life energy of their surroundings and converts it into raw arcane power. All plants and tiny insects within 10 ft. of the mage-priest instantly wither and die and any living creature within range that is at 0 hit points automatically fails one death saving throw. The Mage-Priest of Sipta regains two sorcery points. They also gain two additional sorcery points for each creature that dies due to the failed death saving throw.

Faith in the Arcane. Mage-priests of Sipta can learn cleric spells as if they were Arcane spells.

Metamagic. As with all arcane spell casters, the mage-priest of Sipta possesses 9 arcane points and knows the following metamagic abilities: careful spell, twin spell.

Spellcasting. The Mage-Priest of Sipta is a 9th level elder arcane spellcaster. Their primary spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spells) and has the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *elemental bolt†, prestidigitation, sacred flame, thaumaturgy.*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, mage armor, magic missile, shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, fireball, lightning bolt*

4th level (3 slots): *cone of cold, deathward*

5th level (2 slots): *flame strike*

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.

Ssethric Champion

Medium <type> (ssethric)

Armor Class 17 (half-plate)
Hit Points 143 (22d8 + 44)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +6, Cha +5
Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +5, Perception +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Rampage. When the ssethric champion reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on their turn, the ssethric champion can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make an attack with its beaded axe or natural weapon (if they possess one).

Second Wind. As a bonus action the ssethric champion may regain 20 hit points.

Wounded Fury. While they have 30 hit points or fewer, the ssethric champion has advantage on attack rolls. In addition, they deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage to any target they hit with a melee attack.

Actions

Multiattack. The ssethric champion makes three attacks.

Bearded Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d12+5) slashing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 80/320., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage.

Reaction

Ssethric Champion. When the ssethric champion makes a saving throw, as a reaction they may gain advantage on that saving throw.

"I prefer working with beasts to other people. At least you can trust the beasts to not work contrary to their own best interests."

– Ssanupeti, Disciple of Jeggal Sag

Appendix C
Dramatis Personae

The characters presented in this appendix represent some of the most powerful beings in Arcanis and their introduction into the campaign should be done with careful consideration. Particular attention should be given to placing the characters into direct confrontation with any of these personalities, as each one is capable of giving high-level parties a very deadly challenge.

Astinax

One of four known True Dragons still in existence on Arcanis, Astinaxarathulumn, or Astinax as she is now called, suffered a near mortal wound during the waning days of the Dragon War from a celestial valinor. She crashed in the Kraldjur Morass, where she healed over the centuries, thanks to the ministrations of the nagas of House Kahss. Now, after many years of planning, her carefully crafted machinations to take control of the Ssethregoran Empire are ready to put in motion. All that stands in her way are the varn and their knowledge of what she and the rest of her kind truly are.

True Dragons differ from drakes not only in size and intelligence, but in their raw power, as well. More massive than any dragon upon Arcanis, True Dragons are a destructive force of nature unto themselves, able to devastate cities or topple mountaintops single-handedly. Coupled with their mastery of the arcane arts, encounters with True Dragons like Astinax are apocalyptic in nature.

Astinax

Gargantuan dragon (true dragon)

Armor Class 28 (natural armor)
Hit Points 750 (50d20+250)
Speed 50 ft, Fly 50 ft, Swim 50 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
40 (+15)	14 (+2)	30 (+10)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +24, Dex +11, Int +12, Wis +13, Cha +11
Skills Athletics: +24, Arcana +12, History +12, Perception: +13
Damage Resistances acid, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing
Damage Immunities cold, fire, lightning, poison.
Condition Immunities charmed, fatigued, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, and poisoned.
Senses Truesight 120 ft , Blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 28
Languages. Astinax can speak any common language.
Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Colossal Size. Astinax is 150' wide and 300' long, including the tail, (30x60) with a wingspan of 90' (450'). Astinax cannot be successfully grappled by creatures without the colossal size trait.

Dragon's Endurance (1/short rest). When reduced to half its hit points Astinax may regain 100 hit points as a reaction.

Dragon Magic. Astinax is 20th level elder spellcaster and her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit with spell attacks). Astinax recovers all expended spell slots after completing a short and long rest.

Cantrips (at will): Astinax knows all Elder Sorcerer cantrips.

Spells Known (6 spell slots are cast at 6th level): Astinax knows all 1st through 4th level Elder Sorcerer spells.

Dragon Senses. Astinax cannot be surprised and has advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) skill checks.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Astinax fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Astinax has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Siege Monster. Astinax deals triple damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. Astinax can use its Frightful Presence. It may then make four attacks: one with its bite, two with its talons, and one with its tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +24 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 54 (6d12 + 15) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) fire damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). Astinax exhales fire in a 90□foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 30 Dexterity saving throw, taking 103 (30d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Frightful Presence. Any creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of Astinax and aware of it must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +24 to hit, reach 25 ft., one target. *Hit:* 51 (8d8 + 15) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, they must succeed on a DC 23 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +24 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 51 (8d8+ 15) slashing damage.

Legendary Actions

Astinax can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Astinax regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. Astinax makes one talon attack.

Detect. Astinax makes a Wisdom (Perception) check with advantage, and can also see invisible creatures as if it has cast see invisibility.

Move. Astinax may move its speed.

Wing Buffet (2 Actions). All creatures within 120 feet must make a DC 30 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone. Vehicles (such as wagons) and items that weigh less than 250 lbs. are moved 10 feet away.

Black Talon High Matriarch Mother Scorpara

Elevated to the rank of High Matriarch Mother after the death of the former holder of that rank, Ssvesh, in Abessios.

A young matriarch when taking the reins of leadership of the egg clutch, Scorpara is now in her seventies, and is seeking a priestess to groom to succeed her.

Black Talon High Matriarch Mother Scorpara

Medium humanoid (ssethric, Black Talon ss'ressen)

Armor Class 15 (natural armor) or 17 (scales of the dragon – precast)
Hit Points 120 (20d8 + 40)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +10
Damage Resistances fire
Skills Arcane +8, History +13, Religion +13, Perception +10
Senses passive Perception 25
Languages Low Coryani, Milandisian, Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Common Black Talon Traits. Scorpara possesses the common traits for a ss'ressen of the Black Talon Egg Clutch: cold susceptibility, distant relations, ss'ressen frenzy, and tail swipe.

Channel Divinity (3 times, Recharge Short or Long Rest). As an action, any ssethric that can see or hear Scorpara and within 30 feet of her must make a Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails it's saving throw, it is forced to its knees and is restrained for 1 minute or until it takes any damage.

Alternatively, all ss'ressen that can see or hear Scorpara and are within 30 feet that are in the grip of ss'ressen frenzy can immediately make a new saving throw, with advantage, to end their frenzy.

Divine Strike. Scorpara's melee strikes deal an additional 8 (2d8) fire damage (included on melee attacks below).

Perceptive. Scorpara cannot be surprised and has advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks.

Spellcasting. Scorpara is a 20th level divine spellcaster. Her primary spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spells) and she has the following spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, sacred flame, spare the dyeing, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *burning hands, cure wounds, guiding bolt, scales of the dragon**

2nd level (3 slots): *beast sense, dragon's roar*, spiritual weapon.*

3rd level (3 slots): *breath of the dragon*, fly, mass healing word, revivify*

4th level (3 slots): *freedom of movement, guardian of faith, mind ward*, wall of fire.*

5th level (3 slots): *dispel good and evil, dragon's fury*, flame strike*

6th level (2 slot): *fire storm, regenerate*

7th level (2 slot): *divine word**

8th level (1 slot): *holy aura*

9th level (1 slot): *mass heal*

Unshakable Dogma. Advantage on saves vs. spells cast by divine casters of a different sect.

Actions

Multiattack. Scorpara makes two melee attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8+1) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Reactions

Unshakable Faith. When a creature that is not part Scorpara's religious sect targets her with a spell, as a reaction she gains advantage on any saving throw to resist that spell's effects. If successful she also gains resistance to any damage dealt by the spell.

Black Talon Warlord Salakis

Salakis has been warlord of the Black Talons for longer than any other warrior in the egg clutch's history. Well into his eighth decade, he is still an imposing figure, showing no signs of his advanced age. Many priestesses are concerned whether he is still able to perform the duties of his office, but the fierce devotion the warrior class has towards him has kept these criticisms from growing into a call for his removal.

The warlord has been a controversial figure during his tenure. When the High Matriarch Mother Ssvesh attempted to force the Black Talons' mass migration to the Abessian Dominion, severing their bonds with the Milandisians, he opposed the move, asserting the influence held by his office for the first time in the history of the egg clutch. While this drew immediate condemnation from the females, he was shown to be correct when the true motivations of the former High Matriarch Mother were revealed.

This feeling of resentment, as the males began to assert themselves against blindly following the edicts of the females, came to a head when Salakis accepted the honor of serving as 'King's Champion' to King Osric. The priestesses voiced their opposition to this loudly, but High Matriarch Mother Scorpara quietly silenced their opposition, not wishing to further enflame relations with the males.

Black Talon Warlord Salakis

Medium humanoid (Ssethric, Black Talon ss'ressen)

Armor Class 18 (half-plate +1)
Hit Points 165 (22d8 + 66)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +7
Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +7, Perception +5
Senses passive Perception 20
Languages Milandisian, Low Coryani, Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Special Equipment. Salakis is armed with a magical +2 Tralian hammer, wears a suit of magical +1 half-plate, and leg bracers of speed (boots of speed).

Common Black Talon Traits. Salakis possesses the common traits of a Black Talon ss'ressen: cold susceptibility, distant relations, ss'ressen frenzy, and tail swipe.

Leadership (Recharge Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, Salakis can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that it can see within 30 feet of it makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the warlord. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if Salakis is incapacitated.

Martial Advantage. Once per turn, Salakis can deal an extra 16 (3d10) damage to a creature he hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 feet of an ally that isn't incapacitated.

Perceptive. Salakis cannot be surprised and gains advantage on all Wisdom (Perception) checks.

Rally (Recharge Short or Long Rest). As a bonus action Salakis may choose 3 friendly creatures within range. Those creatures can take the dash action as a reaction and this movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. Additionally, creatures affected gain 10 temporary hit points that last for one hour.

Actions

Multiattack. Salakis makes three attacks.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+5) piercing damage.

Long Bow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage.

Tralian Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (1d12+7) bludgeoning damage or piercing and.

Reactions

Ssethric Champion. When Salakis is required to make a saving throw, he may use a reaction to gain advantage on that saving throw.

Emperor Kahss the IV

Large monstrosity (ssethric, naga)

Armor Class 20 (natural armor, tail bracers)
Hit Points 252 (28d10+84)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +9, Int +12, Wis +10, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +18, Biomancy +18, Deception +15, History +12, Insight +10, Perception +10, Psionics +12
Damage Resistances psychic
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned
Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages Eloran, Low Coryani, Ssethric, Ss'ressen
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Special Equipment. Emperor Kahss possesses a crown of rulership (rod of rulership) and a tail bracer of defense, which is included in his AC above.

Brutal Telepath. Any creature damaged with a psionic power or spell expression manifested by Emperor Kahss that deals psychic damage must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or gain a random short-term madness. If the creature misses two such saving throws within the 1 hour, the madness is exchanged for a random long-term madness. If the creature misses three such saving throws, the long-term madness is replaced with a random indefinite madness.

Cold Susceptibility. When exposed to temperatures below 40°F for more than 1 minute a naga suffers disadvantage on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws. It continues to do so until it spends 1 minute in warmer temperatures.

Grand Expressions. Emperor Kahss may manifest the following spell expressions regaining the ability to do so after completing a long rest: fate of one*, feebleminded, foresight, and true seeing.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Emperor Kahss fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Master's Control. As a bonus action Emperor Kahss can suppress the ss'ressen frenzy of ssethric creatures within 60 feet of himself. The frenzy continues to be suppressed for one hour after the ss'ressen leaves his presence.

Precognitive. Emperor Kahss cannot be surprised.

Psionics. Emperor Kahss is a 18th-level manifester. His manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit with spell attacks). Emperor Kahss knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 6 (5th level)

Powers (at will): *basic telekinesis, burst, intellect fortress, mental scream, mind thrust, telekinetic bolt, telekinetic deflection, tower of iron will.*

Spell Expressions: *arcane eye, blink, clairvoyance, command, detect thoughts, find traps, fly, guiding bolt, legend lore, levitate, long strider, magic missile, mind ward, misty step, resilient sphere, shatter, slow, telekinesis, telepathic bond, and tongues.*

Spellcasting. Emperor Kahss is a 13th-level elder arcane spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit with spell attacks). He only needs verbal components to cast his spells. Emperor Kahss knows the following elder sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *dancing lights, mage hand, message, minor illusion, ray of frost, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, detect magic, magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *forceful repositioning†, hold person, see invisibility*

3rd level (3 slots): *fireball, fly, haste, protection from energy*

4th level (3 slots): *dimension door, greater invisibility, phantasmal killer*

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill, dominate person, wall of force*

6th level (1 slot): *eyebite*

7th level (1 slot): *forcecage*

Metamagic. Emperor Kahss possesses 13 arcane points and know the following metamagic abilities: careful spell, extend spell, and subtle spell.

Subconscious Reflexes. One per turn immediately after Emperor Kahss manifests a defensive psionic power he may manifest a psionic attack power as a bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. Emperor Kahss makes three melee attacks: two with his bite and one with its tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) piercing damage and target must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 14 (4d6) poison damage and gain the poisoned condition for one minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) bludgeoning damage and the target must make a DC 18 dexterity saving throw or fall prone

Legendary Actions

Emperor Kahss can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Emperor Kahss regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Detect. May make an Intelligence (Perception) check with advantage.

Displaced. May teleport 20 feet to any location he sees.

Rapid Manifestation. Manifest a psionic attack power but may not utilize its expression.

Slither. May take the disengage action.

Emperor Kahss the IV

The current ruler of the Ssethregoran Empire, for the past six hundred years this ancient naga has survived assassination plots from members of his own family as well as his endless number of enemies seeking to overthrow his dynasty. Over the centuries, he's instituted purges to weed out his enemies, but these are only effective for a generation before the attempts on his life begin again. He also manipulates the various ssanu Pits against one another, hoping that their natural rivalries will keep them busy trying to gain superiority over one another, rather than allying against him. In accordance with this stratagem, Kahss selected Ss'risek of Pit Sseth as his vizier, outraging Pit Aspis and Maliss, who covet this position.

After an attempt upon his life by members of Pit Crotalus, Kahss had leader of the miliarius executed for incompetence and replaced with the Agamassi, Hissroj. This Horned Jowl ss'ressen is a massive example of his kind, a humorless, hulking brute that takes great pleasure in breaking the emperor's enemies in body and spirit. Thus far Kahss has been satisfied with the Agamassi's service, but he knows that even his might cannot protect him from the one thing he truly fears – the varn.

The emperor became aware of the true intentions of the varn early in his reign, but by then they were too entrenched to be rooted out. Destroying the varn would mean undermining the rule of the naga, as they were so intertwined in the minds of the ssethrics, that should it be discovered that the varn intended to drain the life from the planet and leave it a dead husk, he had no illusions that the first to perish would be his kin. Thus, the mighty emperor is caught on the twin horns of dilemma, fully aware that either fighting against the varn or allowing them to complete their insidious plans ends in the same results.

If he is to see the world burn, then he intends to send the greatest thorn at his side screaming into the void before him. The emperor finds the Yigite Cult that has found refuge in the nearby human lands, a personal insult, a failure to control his own populace, and an embarrassment laid plainly before the varn. Kahss intends to wipe out the Abessian Dominion from the face of Arcanis and has amassed troops near the border with Altheria, as a feint to lull his true target into a false sense of security. Aware that he doesn't have many more years left to him, he intends to seal the rebellious ssethrics' doom before he breathes his last.

Ss'koreth

Lord of the Black Coil. Savior of the Empire. Creator of the Elorii. Master of the Arcane Arts. During his very long life, the ssanu Ss'koreth garnered these titles and more. Said to have already achieved legendary status before the il'Huan War, the arch-mage continued to serve the Yahssremoran Empire for over a thousand years until his demise at the very onset of the Elorii Revolt. Over the intervening millennia, sightings of the aged ssanu, sometimes appearing young and vibrant, other times aged and decrepit, have elevated Ss'koreth to mythic status among the ssethrics, as well as mages from other races.

Ss'koreth

Medium monstrosity (ssethric, ssanu)

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)
Hit Points 181 (19d8+95)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	26 (+8)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +11, Con +12, Int +15, Wis +12
Skills Arcana +22, Biomancy +22, History +22, Insight +12, Perception +15
Damage Resistances cold, lightning
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, necrotic, piercing, poison, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 25
Languages Eloran, Hells Speak, Ssethric, Ss'ressen, Myrantian, Udor.
Challenge 25 (50,000 XP)

Special Equipment. Ss'koreth carries the Ss'koreth's Staff of Dominion. (See Chapter 7: Codex of Magic for details).

Elemental Mastery (3/Day). If Ss'koreth is the target of a spell that deals acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage, he may use a reaction to gain resistance against that damage, regaining 2 arcane points.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Ss'koreth fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Ss'koreth has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Master Elementalist. Ss'koreth does not require concentration to maintain control over an elemental. He can control up to 4 elementals at a time.

Metamagic. As with all arcane spell casters, Ss'koreth possesses 20 arcane points and knows the following metamagic abilities: careful spell, empower spell, extend spell, reach spell, and twin spell.

Psionics. Ss'koreth is a 12th level manifester. His manifesting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 23, +16 to hit with spell attacks). Ss'koreth knows the following psionic powers and expressions.

Psionic Foci: 4 (4th level)

Powers (at will): *amplified physique, beguiling strike, burst, halt, intellect fortress, telekinetic bolt, telekinetic deflection.*

Spell Expressions: *cure wounds, flawless incision*, haste, insightful surveillance*, misty step, primal senses, rebuke the gifted*, stoneskin*
(all the spell expressions above have their range changed to self)

Spellcasting. Ss'koreth is a 20th level elder arcane spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 23, +16 to hit with spell attacks). Ss'koreth knows the following elder sorcerer spells.

Cantrips (at will): *elemental bolt†, force whip*, mage hand, ray of frost.*

1st level (at will): *black ice†, shield, steam blast**

2nd level (at will): *arcane lock, call to arms†, crushing waves†, knock*

3rd level (at will): *counterspell, dispel magic, fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment, detonating rain, ice storm*

5th level (3 slots): *conjure elemental, hold monster, wall of force*

6th level (3 slots): *chain lightning, disintegrate, repulsion†*

7th level (3 slots): *reverse gravity, symbol*

8th level (2 slots): *annihilate*, mind blank*

9th level (2 slots): *implosion†, time stop*

Actions

Multiattack. Ss'koreth makes three melee attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6+5) piercing damage, on a hit the target must succeed in a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or suffer 22 (4d10) poison damage and gain the poisoned condition for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Ss'koreth's Staff of Dominion (+3 Quarterstaff). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d6+8) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage, or 12 (1d8+8) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage when used with two hands.

Tail Swipe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8+5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, they must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Legendary Actions

Ss'koreth can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Ss'koreth regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

At-Will Spell. Ss'koreth casts one of his at-will spells.

Bite. Ss'koreth can make an attack with his bite.

Dominate Elemental. Ss'koreth casts dominate monster without using a spell slot on any elemental within range. The elemental suffers disadvantage to resist this effect.

Rapid Manifestation. Ss'koreth may manifest a psionic attack power but may not utilize its expression.

Sulmacet

Born into Pit Talasis during the height of its power and influence, Sulmacet was trained as a priest of the ssethric death god, Wantiir, in the tradition of his Pit. Ironically, what the young ssanu longed for was the thrill of battle and the destruction of the empire's enemies. At first, the leaders of his Pit refused to allow one of their own joining the military, seeing it as a waste of resources better spent garnering more influence among the imperial court, but finally relented.

The ssanu quickly rose through the ranks thanks to his keen intellect and gift for battlefield tactics. His talents were quickly put to use in several campaigns, including quelling a slave uprising of iguadons, an incursion by extra-planar entropic beings, and assisting their sea devil allies in destroying a race of living coral creatures that threatened ssethric water lanes. His success upon the battlefield won him many awards and accolades. His devotion to the empire, placed even above his loyalty to his Pit, was hailed by the imperial court, though Pit Talasis began to curse his name when his achievements drew attention and resources away from the priesthood and towards the military.

After being elevated to general, Sulmacet led many troops in battle, including the slaves created to fight the il'Huan, the elorii. While initially marveled by the versatility displayed by the elemental creatures, he grew apprehensive seeing their growing expertise in battle and their fervent religious devotion to their gods, the Elemental Lords. He warned the leaders of Pit Talasis that they should use their influence to convince the emperor that the elorii presented a danger to the ssethric people and should be destroyed immediately. Unfortunately, his Pit had grown to resent his rise as the darling of the imperial court and ridiculed his fears.

It was during this time that Pit Talasis overstepped their bounds by attempting to take control of the ssethric priesthood and were summarily exiled. Every member of the Pit was banished with the exception of Sulmacet, whose many victories won him a reprieve, even though he never recanted from being a worshipper of Wantiir, as many demanded.

Seeing his fortunes fading, Sulmacet turned to the creator of the creatures, but was rebuffed by the elder Ss'koreth, who refused to grant a member of the disgraced Pit an audience. This public insult burned and festered until his fear of the elorii turned to a unremitting hatred for Ss'koreth.

Upon his death, many thought themselves rid of the last of the upstart Pit, but the ssethric death god performed one final miracle and granted Sulmacet life beyond death. Forbidden from resuming his duties as general and barred from enacting any of the divine rites of Wantiir, Sulmacet dedicated himself to the mastery of the arcane arts, specifically that of necromancy, a tradition long frowned upon by the sorcerers of the Black Coil.

Refusing to join the premiere sorcerous cabal of the empire, Sulmacet retired far to the south, to a stretch of land adjacent to the Kraldjur Morass that was saturated with death. Here he focused entirely on his studies until word reached him that his fears were well-founded and that the elorii had overthrown his beloved Yahssremoran Empire. Taking just a moment to gloat at the news of Ss'koreth's death at the hands of one of his creations, Sulmacet strode from his bone tower and aided in turning back the elorii forces as they rode down the ssethric refugees.

Once again hailed a hero by the newly crowned emperor of the Ssethregoran Empire, Sulmacet accepted accolades and titles, including recognition as an arch-mage by the Black Coil. He refused a seat in the imperial court and instead retired to his tower, promising to answer a call for aid from his people whenever needed.

Sulmacet

Medium undead (ssethric, ssanu)

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)
Hit Points 190 (20d8+100)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	26 (+8)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +11, Con +12, Int +15, Wis +12
Skills Arcana +22, Biomancy +22, History +22, Insight +12, Perception +12
Damage Resistances cold, lightning
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, necrotic, piercing, poison, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 22
Languages Eloran, Hells Speak, Ssethric, Ss'ressen, Myrantian, Udor.
Challenge 23 (50,000 XP)

Special Equipment. Sulmacet carries Sulmacet's Staff of Necromancy (see Chapter 7: Codex of Magic). He also wears a Ring of Elemental Command (Fire).

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Sulmacet fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Lord of the Dead. When Sulmacet casts animate dead he creates and controls 6 additional undead creatures. Additionally, all undead created by Sulmacet gain 20 hit points and a +6 to attack and damage rolls.

Magic Resistance. Sulmacet has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Metamagic. Sulmacet possesses 20 arcane points and knows the following metamagic abilities: careful spell, empower spell, extend spell, reach spell, and twin spell.

Rejuvenation. Sulmacet's body turns to dust when he drops to 0 hit points, and his equipment is left behind. Sulmacet gains a new body after 1d10 days, regaining all of his hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears within 5 feet of Sulmacet's phylactery, the location of which is hidden.

Spellcasting. Sulmacet is a 20th level elder arcane spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 23, +15 to hit with spell attacks), Sulmacet knows the following elder sorcerer spells.

Cantrips (at will): *acid fang*, force whip*,mage hand, ray of frost*
1st level (at will): ray of sickness, shield, steam blast*
2nd level (at will): *arcane lock, insightful surveyance*, knock*
3rd level (at will): *animate dead, counterspell*
4th level (3 slots): *blight, ice storm, phantasmal killer*
5th level (3 slots): *cloudkill, hold monster, wall of force*
6th level (3 slots): *create undead, disintegrate, repulsion†*
7th level (3 slots): *etherealness, finger of death, reverse gravity*
8th level (2 slots): *annihilate*, mind blank*
9th level (2 slots): *implosion†, time stop*

Turn Resistance. Sulmacet has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Actions

Paralyzing Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6+4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) cold damage, and the target must succeed in a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves on a success.

Sulmacet's Staff of Necromancy (+3 Quarterstaff). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit , reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6+6) bludgeoning damage or 10 (1d8+6) bludgeoning damage plus when used with two hands.

Tail Swipe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, they must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Legendary Actions

Sulmacet can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Sulmacet regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Absorb Life (Costs 3 Actions). Each creature within 20 feet of Sulmacet must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw, taking 42 (12d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful save. After doing so, Sulmacet regains 2 arcane points for every creature affected by this ability.

At-Will Spell. Sulmacet casts one of his at-will spells.

Frightening Gaze (Costs 2 Actions). Sulmacet fixes his gaze on one creature he can see within 10 feet of him. The target must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw against this or become frightened for 1 minute. The frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends, the target is immune to Sulmacet's gaze for the next 24 hours.

Paralyzing Bite. Sulmacet makes a paralyzing bite attack.

Index

Abessian Dominion 27,37,42,44,60-61,75,77,85,93,96,107,116,140-141,160,174,181-182,187,279,281
Adepts of Destruction 169-170
Afterlife 115,119,140
Agamassi 9,15,20,28,34,43,87-88,98,169,188,199,252,262,281
Ahidrosmal 25
Al'malyss 33,101-103,118
Altherian 24-28,30,32-33,37,40-42,44,51,69,77,87,95-96,107,122,133,160,182,193-194,206,218,234,256,265
Amurshana 43
Anax (il'Huan capital) 14-15
Ankistron 55-56
Anuliss 26,35-36,47,77
Aqtau Mountains 9
Arcane Assassin 268
Archmage-Priest of Sipta 268
Armor and Weapons 82,187
Artur val'Holryn 104
Ashen Hide 100,113,134-136,157-158,165,167,169-170,180,242,244,251,267
Astinax 27,69,143-144,276-277
Auros 19,21
Avatar of the Sacred Hunger 172
Backgrounds and Variants 181
Barbed Tail 20-23,26,33,39-40,44-45,48-49,52,55,61,70,74,80,83-86,89,101,103,118,144,147,157,199,203,243,266-267
Battle of Belestor 20-21,27,74
Battle of Cognatus 25
Bay of Melan 30
Belestor 21,27,74,138
Belisarda 13,57,93,200
Berokene 15,93
Berserker of Haulis 269
Biomancer 7,9-10,12-13,17,21,33,39,46-48,51,61,77,79,83-87,89,93-94,96-97,106,113,133,184,193-194,205,207-209,218,223,230,247-249,265
Biomancy Augmentation 151,183-185,194
  Additional Adrenalin Glands 207
  Blinding Spittle 151,183
  Bloodbag 208
  Claw Implants 208
  Improved Heart 208
  Improved Lungs 208
  Ironscale Armor 197,208
  Keeled Tail 153,184
  Mottled Hide 184
  Neurological Implants 209
  Neurological Shiv 209
  Ocular implants 209
  Olfactory implants 209
  Prehensile Tail 157,184,246,267
  Puppetmaster Hood 209
  Retractable Claws 184
  Slaver's Crown 210
  Spiked Tail 83,103,184,216,243
  Telepathic Apparatus 210
  Thickened Skin 209
  Venom Glands 183
Biotechnological Items 181,185,193-194,206,208
  Cephalopodic Gills 10,206
  Drakharl Cannon 206
  Flesh Grafts 206
  Photochromatic Skin 206
  Torg Bomb 206
  Wisp 207
Black Coil 7-13,16-17,19-21,23,25,33-34,37,40,44,46,48-49,52,54,57,66-67,72,79,93-94,97-98,148,164,176,192,194,200-201,205,210,219,230,240,261,282-283
Black Talon 12,16,20,26,33,39,62,74,79,81,84-86,89,96,100-126,128,130-136,144,157-159,165,167-168,170-171,180,199-200,202,214,229,242,244-245,247,251,253,267,278-279
Blackroot Forest 30-31,91
Blastpowder 27,116,122
Blessed Lands 26,61
Bolus Forest 46-47
Boneyard 58-59,76,202
Boons (Shaman) 130,178,272
Brood of Ven val'Sosi 106,157-158,245,267
Bryppt 36-37
Burial Rites 17,132,145
Canceri 120-121,134-136,157,168-170,242
Canyon of Zhu 60-61,86,145
Censure 108,182
Central Basin 32-34,56-57,74-75
Chaoshammer 28,83,103,147,266,269
Chelone 26,54,56,178-179,213
Chelydra 37,43-44,77
Cholepus 62,114,123,214
Chordata 46,145-146,215
Cleric of Kassegore 160,270
Cleric of Yig 161-162,270,274
Cleric of Zedok 271
Coastal Swamplands 35-36,91
Cognatus 25-26,39,85
Cognetitio Basilios 106
Combat School 186
Combat School
  Tooth and Claw 114,124,172,186
Coryani Empire 25,40,92,103,107,133,158
Crèche 27,109-110,114,118,126,168
Cres'spis 134-136
Crusades of Light 108
Curled Tail 46-48,77,84,157,246,267
Cyclops 199-200
Cyclura 48,178-179,216
Dar'algah 6-8
Dark Crest 12,20-21,25-26,39,53,74,80,84-85,89,102-103,118,158,167,202,247,253,267
Daughter of Yig 107,205,217
Death's Head 60,80,85-86,248,267
Delendas 28,41,45,59,74-75
Derga 113
Despoiler of Sipta 271
Disciples of Jeggal Sag 24,31,34,48,106,110,113,130,142-144,147,180,198
Dragon War 24,143,276
Dragonnel 38,95,165,169,178-179,218
Drahken 165
Duriss Tower 44
Eastern Rainforest 32-33,37-38,43-44,87,218
Eeljit 39,44,87,89
Eladru 5,8-9,12,95
Elemental ,13,15,25,44,47,58,73,93,138,150,165,185,197,202,212,219-221,223,231,240,268,272,275,284
Elemental Lord 11-13,15,93,200,283
Elemental, Para-164-165,193,219-222,272
  Ice 219
  Lightning 220
  Magma 221
  Mud 222
Elementalist 15,44,58,164-165,192-193,201,219,272,282
Elorii 11-22,24-28,35,42,45-46,51,54-59,61,65-67,71,73-76,79,84,90,92-93,101,109,115,132,138,141,144,150,164,167,169,181-182,192,200-202,223,230,282-283
Elthoras 17
Emerald Scale 20,23,27,41-43,45,55,75,79,82,84,86,101,140,158-160,167,249,253,267
Emerald Society 5,7-9,11-13,77,112
Emperors
  Kahss the IV 27,54,68,232,280
  Narthsslik 26,85,102,202
  Nathoki 36
  Sahktess 11,13
  Yass 7
Encali 27
Endless Dark 7,11-12,16,24,28,35,39-41,45,48-49,51,58-59,74-75,89,92,101,107,236
Entaran 28,32,35,42
Equipment 187,189,280,282,284,287
Extinction Wars 4,**8**,84
Fanx Islands 35,78
Feats 84,102,150,169,182,185-186,192,194,209,287
Feats
  Arcane Scholar 182
  Artistic Torturer 183
  Beastmaster 183
  Calculating Gaze 70,185
  Dragon's Hide 185
  Elemental Domination 164,185
  Elemental Expertise 185
  Reptilian Regeneration 185,201
  Sage's Insight 4,185
  Serpent Blood 185
  Tail Swipe 116,184,186,238,244-245,278-279,284
  Thickened with Age 186
Fellglade 30,35,37,40,56-58,74,83,89,93
Ferric val'Ossan 123
Fire Dragon 62,100,102-103,105,109-113,115-120,122-125,128,134-136,140,144,170-172,196,199,244
Flaming Tongue 39,44,81,86-87,89,158,188,250,267
Followers of the Azure Way 4-5,7-9,11-13,77,112
Forsaken Wastes 61,235
Fortress of Chi'gon 62
Fury-priest of Haulis 273
Gar Ormal 5-7,9,26
Gazichk 115
Gettulus 4,7-9,17,19,25,52,193,200
Ghost Scale 100,109,113,126,128-134,157-158,167,180,242,244,251,267,274
Great Deceiver 8,141
Great Devourer 8,86,119,**138-140**,144-145,172-173,205
Great Migration 4,80,90,103,107,139,142,145
Grove of Life 57
Haldane (Warlord) 20-21
Halikmir River 38,95
Harbinger 175-176
Hatcheries 26,39,42,53,65,81-82,87,91,94,102,110,112,122,126,142,171,180
Haulis 22,65,88,96-98,146,149,195,260,269,273
Hearteater 6
Herka 113,**126-133**,180,274
Holy Champion of Kassegore 151,273
Holy Champion of Yig 274
Holy days 112,120-121
Horned Jowl 34,52,87-88,101,148,158-159,252,267,281
Hromu 23,32,34,47,64,66,139,142
Hromu,Cult of 23,32,34,47,64,66,139,141-142
Hussuma 13,55,67,73,93,96,150,160,162,182,223,265-266
Hylis 16-17,26,31,33,36-37,45,47,64,77,90-91,95,143,150,154,180-181,224,237,266
Idan val'Holryn 106
Iguadon 4,6-8,10-11,14-16,18-23,25,28,32-34,36-41,43-49,53-58,60-61,64-66,77,81-82,84,95,138,140-141,143-144,148,151,160,167,169,176,201,225,262,266,283
Il'Huan 11-17,24,27-28,40,93,95,101,199,282-283
Il'Huan Mindtamers 15
Il'Huan War 10-11,14,101,199,282
Inquisitor 26,40,44,47,61,73,75,83-84,103,110,112-**113**,120,125,129-133,136,144
Irik Outpost 47
Irikut 47,84
Issoran War 5,7
Issori 5-8,84,193
Jaculi 178-179,226
Jahsak 37,90
Je'kisk Forest 46-48
Jeggal Sag 17,24,31,33-34,48,77,106,110,113,128,130,133,139,142,144-145,147,156,179-181,198,202,267,272,275
Kal'thess 32
Kassegore 4,6,8,13,15-17,20,22-23,31-32,34,39,42,47,51-53,55,58,60,64-67,73,80,82,84,86,90-91,102,108,117-120,123,125,132,134,**138-142**,144-147,151,158,160-162,172-174,179,196,201,204-205,239,257,270,273
Kassegore: The Devourer 160
Keepers of the Flame 112-113
Kelisar 21
Knights of Herka 129,274
Kobold 7,12-13,34,47,57,60,64,82,86,94,144,151,176,262,266
Korguse 13
Korlak 139,145-146,215
Kraldjur Morass 9-10,20,24,30,32,35-37,40,56,67,84,91,100-101,138,143,153,180,202,206,213,244,276,283
Kraldjur River 34,37-39,41-44,55,57,59,91
Kuthré River 30,42
Ky'usk 40,83,86
Lake Dororan 42-43
Lake Khess 30,41-44,77
Lake Quesselan 20,30-31,**38**,51-54,64,91
Lake Sa'kress 57-58
Lake Uleuth 31
Laksiri 176-177
Languages of the Ssethregoran Empire 181
Lanpeltis 26,62,104-105,107,109,113-114,**119-126**,130,134-135
Lauriol Sea 26,30,36,45,47-48,56-57,77,84-85,92,95,213
Long Claw 39,44,74,87-89,92,159,253,267
Lophius 91,94,227
Luriane Mountains 24-25,41-42,45
Lüss River 39
Mage-priest of Sipta 268,275
Magic Items 54,148,185,199,209

Anaksulay 16,33,199
Armlet of Vigilance 204
Axe of the Emperor 204
Drums of the Deep 205
Ebon Battlestaff of Ssethregore 201
Elixir of Longevity 201
Fang of Destiny 204
Guthook 204
Helm of Battle's Fury 205
Portal Key 205
Ring of Reptilian Regeneration 201
Scalpel of the Vivisectionist 205
Scentblocker Salve 201
Serpent Arrows/Bolts 204
Split Staff of Zhulass 201
Ss'koreth's Staff of Dominion 200,282
Staff of the Beast Lord 202
Staff of the Scaled Defender 202
Sulmacet's Staff of Imperial Screams 202
Viper Wand 178,204
Magitrix 106,111-113,115
Maldruga **35-37**,44,78
Malfea 93
Malfela 36
Malfelan 27,35,56-58,74-76,79,90,93,95,115,218
Master of Beasts 142,179-180
Matriarch Mother 26,45,62,81-86,100,**102-113**,115-127,134-135,199,244,278-279
Milandir 50,61-62,104,106-109,111,113,115-117,121-125,136,157,168,170,185,188,245
Milandric Orthodox Church 120,123
Miless 17
Miliarius 167,204,281
Miral Ova 106
Moloch 178-179,228
Mor'let 14,16,38,41,48,165-166,169,178-179,199,229,236
Mystic 6,8,19,34,44,52,69,106,110,112-113,130,132,171,180,199,232
Naga 21-25,28,32-34,36-37,39-40,42-45,48-56,60,**64-70**,72-79,82-87,89-91,93-94,96-98,101-102,118,138-141,147-148,151-153,155,159,164,172,174,176-177,182,192,199,202-204,**230-232**,253,260,262,266,276,280-281
Naga Coup 21,32,43-44,49,56,65,73-74,78,83,86,139,172
Naga Houses
House Kahss 49,**67-69**,147,153,230,232,276
House Sardatis 69-70,231
House Taricha 43,69,153,232
Naming ritual 110
Nessrik val'Virdan 135-136
Neuter 17,81,93,100,110,113,117,125-126,131,134-136
Nier 120,123,134-136,143,158,168-170,180,242,247
Northern Foothills 35,39,41,43-45,79,142
Order of the Charred Steel 168
Order of the Fang 96,139,160,174
Order of the Phoenix 104
Osric IV 116
Pale Sea 10,30,37-39
Pit of Tooth and Claw 114,123-124
Pits, Ssanu
Pit Aspis 21,36,39-40,52,**73-74**,83,89,281
Pit Coasca 28,32,34-35,43,45,56-58,72,74-75,87,89,238
Pit Crotalus 7,32,52,56-58,60-61,69,71,73,75-76,247,281
Pit Elapis 45-47,67,76-77,95,218,241,266
Pit Maliss 25,35-37,52,61,77-78,133
Pit Sseth 12,21-22,40-41,44-45,52-53,61,67,69,73-75,78-79,86-87,167,232,247,260,281
Pit Talasis 17,58,60,73,75,79-80,86,144-145,283
Plecotus 14
Pleisauran 15,35-39,42,47-48,53-55,64,77,91-92,94,143,153,165,213,233,266
Plethorax 88,169
Portals 7-8,59,141-142,193,205
Priest Caste 130
Psion 15,49,97,153,157,259
Psionicist 15,40,71-72,74,106,129,203
Psionics 8,9,11,12,15,17,21,24,28,35,40,66,67,69,74,79.106,152-153,155,157,173,183,185,**193**,203,209,210,213,230-232,238,245,258-263,266-267,280,282
Pyros Morelia 102,104-106
Razor Claw 28,42,58,75,89-90,98,159,254,262,267
Religious Caste 58,100,110-113,117,119,136
Religious tenets, Fire Dragon 117
Religious tenets, Herka 132
Rhamphorike 7,38,73,77,94-95,154,218,234,266
Rul Marrowdrinker 5
Rune master 112-113
Runes 13,125,130,154,168,180,193,202,205,209-212,237
Runes
Corrupted 102,135,210
Destabilizing 118,211
Resonating 70,211
Ssethric211
Venomous 212
Water 212
S'lis 58-59,89
S'lissuth 58-59,89
Sacred metal 119
Sacred Mound of Jeggal Sag 33,48
Sakress River 42-43,45
Salakis 100,107-108,111,115-117,279
Salos 19
Salta 15-16,199
Sand Apophics 61,188,235,266
Sarskas 115
Sart 33
Sasmak 115
Sc'math 48,56,74,113,165,178-179,198,236
Scaled Empire 9,28,34,100,121,144
Scaled Throne 34
Scaphiopus 26,102-103,105,117-121
Scorpara 122,278-279
Semar 26-28,84
Senkata 112-113
Seremas 26,28,55
Serpent's Fangs 56
Shell-back 8,16-17,26,46,77,90,95,154-155,181,237,266
Silagha 115
Sipta 23,39,56-57,66,79,87,89-90,96-98,146,148,195,259-261,268,271,275
Skin Dancer Options 178
Snosretep's Tavern 44
Sorcerer King 25,59,164,177
Southern Reaches 26,30,35-36,39,44-45,47,78,84,215,218
Spells
Acid Fang **194-195**,260-261,271,273,284
Annihilate 7,16,53,85,95,140,**194-195**,284
Augment Poison 194,196
Breath of the Dragon 173,196,273,278
Detonating Rain 194,196,261,272,282
Dragon's Fury 172-173,278
Dragon's Roar 172-173,273,278
Elemental Guardians 194,196,202,268,272
Flawless Incision 194,197,282
Force Whip 194,197,282,284
Insightful Surveyance 194,197,284
Rebuke the Gifted 194,197,282
Scales of the Dragon 173,197,278
Spirit Armor 194,197
Spirits of Ancient Kin 194,198
Spirits of Fallen Beasts 194,198
Steam Blast 194,199,272,282,284
Windshear 194,199
Srel 112-113
Ss'chan Geyser 62
Ss'koreth 12-14,17,19,22,25,67,71,76,78,93,109,164,200,282-283
Ss'lessis Tel 103
Ss'ressen 4,6-9,11,14-16,18,20-23,25-28,33-49,51-56,58,60-62,64-67,70-71,73-75,77,80-91,94,96-98,100-131,133-136,140-144,146-148,151-160,165,167-170,175-176,178,180-182,185,187-188,192,196-197,199,201-204,207,209,213,218,229-232,235,238,242-255,262,266-275,278-282,284
Ssanu 5-13,15,17-23,25,27-28,31,34-37,39-41,43-61,64-72,74-80,82-87,89,91,93-96,98,100-102,106-107,109,112-113,118, 120,123,133,138-147,151,155,157,159,161-162,164,167,174-177,179,186,188,192-193,200-201,204,209, 213,215,223,230,234,239,247-249,253,256,259-262,265-266,270,275,281-284
Ssanu Mummy 239
Sseth (emperor) 18,20-21,48,51,55,67,138,167,202,204
Sseth (Imperial Capital) 20,22,25-26,30-31,34,39-40,47-50,52-56,66,72,89,98
Ssethregoran Empire 7,21-24,26,28,30,36-37,40-43,46,48-49,53-54,56,61,64-65,67,71,74,78,84-85,89-92,94-96,100,103,106,110,112,120-121,126,133,138,140-142,146-147,150-155,157-158,160,164-165,174,177,180-184,187,192,197,204,211,215,229-230,244,270,276,281,283,287
Ssethric 3-28,30-50,52-62,64-69,71-86,88-98,100-104,107-108,113,117,119-122,126,130,132,138-147,149-155,157-162,164-170,172-189,192-194,196-198,200,202,204-206,210-213,215,217-219,223-225,227-255,257-263,265,268-275,278-284
Ssethric Champion 275,279
Ssethric Elementalist 164,192-193,219
Ssethric Gods/Pantheon 24,57,60,73,78-79,81-82,84,93,100,**139**-141,143-145,257
Ssethric Golem 240
Ssethric War Beast 77,169,241
Ssiir 58
Ssus'let River 33-34
Ssustek River 33
Ssvesh 105,107-108,278-279
Suless 33,199
Sulfur Marsh 26,61-62,89,100,104-106,109-115,117,120-124,135,157,167-168
Sulmacet 17,59,76,144,202-203,283-284
Sunken Myrantis 56,59
Surghlat River 56-58
Suteq 33-34,65
suur'esh 124
Taconis Mountains 30,45-47,85
Taghas 115,117
Tail bracer 116,187,280
Tapuis River 47
Taxidum Grove 31-32
Taxispilota 31-32
Telith 44,87
Temple of Cinders 105,110-113,**120-125**,134
Tendrilisk 256
Teucht 34
Th'lathis 26,36,46-48,77-78,84
Thellis Hills 42-44
Time of Terror 4,25,37,211
Tinanc 115
T'lek 37
Tower of Gettulus 4,17,19,52,200
Tower of Sulmacet 59
Uhxbractit 108-109,117
Valka 144-145,257
Varn 4,22-23,25,27-28,32,34,36-37,39-40,42-45,47-58,60-61,64-70,72-79,81-91,93,96-98,102,118-119,128,138-141, 143,146-148,151,162,172,174,179-181,195,197,210,230,**258-263**,266,271,276,281
Varn Types
Architects of Light 2,90,97-98,261
Emissary 2,23,25,27-28,68-69,**97-98**,263
Obligators 2,84,86,98,262
Pacifiers 2,27,97,258
Seekers of Enlightenment 2,23,97,259
Speakers of Adulation 2,50,84,89,97-98
Vastwood 10-11,17,20,46
Ven val'Sosi 105-106,157-158,245,267
Venomous 21,27,35,37,73,90,103,159,202,204,212,255,267
Venomous Scale 20-21,26-27,35,37,73,90,103,159,204,255,267
Veriss 44-45,86
Voiceless Ones 7,24-25,28,35,41,51
Vremi River 22,41-43
Vy'lak 40
Wantiir 17,58-60,73,75,79-80,85-86,139,144-145,202,239,248,257,283
Warrior Caste 100-101,104,106,**109-115**,117,121-126,130,132,171,199
Western Forests 56-57,89
Winged Viper 38,179-180,264
worker caste 81-82,100,107,110-111,117,121-122,126,131
Xartah 34
Yahssremoran Empire 8-11,14,16-17,19-20,40-41,48,57,60-61,73,75-76,79-80,84,92,94,100,122,139,145,193,202,239, 244,282-283
Yahssremore 7,9-10,14-15,17,19-20,40,45,49,52,58,72,75,78,84,93,100-101,138,140,144,193,201-202,205
Yig 4,8,17,21-23,27,34,42,51-52,55-56,59-60,64-65,73,80,82,84-85,93,96,102,107-108,118-119,132, **138-142**,145-146,158,**160-163**,173-175,179,182,193,205,217,223,240,257,270,274,281
Yig of the Shifting Scales 8,141,**161**-162
Yig The Mistress of Lies 160,**162**-163
Yigites 27,107,140-141
Yissera 27,42,54-55,60-61,73,77,93,96,107,138-139,141-142,160,162-163,174,182,265,267,270
Ymandragore 25,37,48,59,105,164,177
Zealots of the Blackened Scale 170-172
Zedok 28,34,40,43,70,76,83,89-90,96-98,103,146-148,162,195,260,262,269,271

OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a

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 License 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. Not for resale. Permission granted to print or photocopy this document for personal use only.

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 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

Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

System Reference Document 5.0 Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwalb, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

Codex Geographica, vol. II: The Ssethregoran Empire, Copyright 2019, Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC.; Authors Duane M. Choquette and Henry Lopez

Arcanis Campaign Setting, Copyright 2018, Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC.; Authors Henry Lopez and Pedro Barrenechea.

Paradigm Concepts, PCI, Arcanis, Arcanis 5E, Living Arcanis 5E, and their associated logos are trademarks of Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC. The 5E logo courtesy of Fat Goblin Games.

Product Identity: The following items are hereby identified as Paradigm Concepts Publishing, LLC's Product Identity and are not Open Content, as defined in the Open Game License version 1.0a, Section 1(e): All trademarks, registered trademarks, proper names (characters, place names, new deities, creatures, etc.), dialogue, plots, story elements, locations, characters, artwork, graphics, sidebars, and trade dress. (Elements that have previously been designated as Open Game Content are not included in this declaration.)

Open Game Content: Except as noted above, the Open content in this book includes the game mechanic material for races, classes, multiclassing, feats, backgrounds, spells, equipment, and monsters. No other portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without permission.

Epic Adventures Await In

Arcanis 5E

The World of Shattered Empires

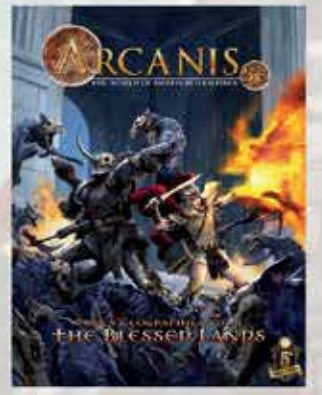
A land of intrigue, dark fantasy, and adventure to challenge the most experienced of players.

Arcanis 5E Campaign Setting
PCI 2600

Begin with this massive Core Book full of new Races, Classes, Sub-Classes, and many other Character Options designed for the World of Arcanis.

Forged in Magic: Reforged
PCI 2601

Within these pages you'll find over 400+ magic items for your 5E campaign - from enchanted weapons, armors, rings and shields to mystical potions, magical staffs and a myriad of wondrous items.



Codex Geographica, Vol. I: The Blessed Lands
PCI 2602

Continue to delve into the rich history and world with the regional sourcebook covering the cradle of empires and the holiest of lands in the Known Lands. Scores of adventure hooks and new Character Options unique to this region.

Codex of Aduentures, Vol. I
PCI 2603

Six adventures ranging from introductory adventures to high level epics, set in the World of the Shattered Empires.

Sorcerous Pacts
PCI 2604

Journey into the Inner Elemental Realms with the elorii archmage Telas and discover its wonders and terrors. Featuring a new class: The Elder Warlock, along with more Character Options and creatures.

Children of the Sky
A Kio Sourcebook
PCI 2605

Isolated in the exotic region known as the Western Lands, the kio are an inscrutable race, their complex and strange culture bewildering many. Now the veil is lifted on their rich and wondrous culture as the Children of the Sky's secrets are exposed.

Find Us At

www.paradigmconcepts.com
Facebook: Paradigm Concepts, Inc.
Twitter: @ParadigmConcept

Paradigm Concepts

PCI 2606

ARCANIS 5E

THE WORLD OF SHATTERED EMPIRES

Codex Geographica Vol. II
The Ssethregoran Empire

The reptilian peoples known as ssethrics once dominated all that lived throughout the continent and beyond. From atop the Coiled Throne of Yahssremore, in what is now the First City in the Blessed Lands, they enslaved or exterminated numerous lesser races during the Extinction Wars and became masters of all they surveyed. This dominance was squandered by arrogance and centuries of decadence, after which the ssethrics found themselves overthrown by their own creations and sent fleeing for their lives, far into the swamps and jungles of the south. Now, in the fetid marshes of the Kraldjur Morass live their descendants in the Ssethregoran Empire. Fighting constant wars against the Malfelan elorii and the Altherian Republic, the ssethric races seek to return to their rightful place as the overlords of Known Lands.

Within these pages you will find:

- The history of the oldest empire in the history of Arcanis – including secret history about the world of Arcanis that soft-hides were never meant to know.
- A horde of monstrous reptilian adversaries such as the batrachian hylis, aquatic pleisaurans, cunning ssanu, and full details on the savage ss'ressen egg clutches.
- Details on ssethric sorcery including new spells, runes, and biomancy, the unique living magical technology of the empire.
- Extensive geographic information about the lands occupied by the Ssethregoran Empire, from tropical rainforests to murky swamps and the mysterious underground caverns known as the Endless Dark.
- Two complete ssethric pantheon of ancient and terrible gods, including Kassegore the Great Devourer, Yig the Life-Bringer, Jeggal Sag the Lord of Drakes, Wantiir, the ssethric Death God, and the Varn Pantheon of world destroying deities.
- A detailed study of the history and culture of the Pariah Clutches – the Black Talons, Ghost Scale, and Ashen Hide ss'ressen.
- Details on the three Houses of naga and their other-worldly overlords, the mysterious varn.
- New Class Options, Divine Aspects, Fighter Archetypes, and Holy Champion Orders
- New Backgrounds, Feats, and Spells
- A Bestiary detailing some of the bizarre and dangerous creatures that inhabit the region

If you are ready to take lizardfolk, serpentfolk, and other scalykind beyond mere mindless reptilian monsters and turn them into the fully fleshed out, horrific menace they deserve to be, then this is the book for you!

www.paradigmconcepts.com
PCI 2606 $49.99 USD
PARADIGM CONCEPTS
ISBN 978-1-931374-80-4