

Appendix A – Reference Guide

1. Overview

This reference guide provides background material for the fictional world of Acia in the Epic Fantasy series, *The Light of Darkness*. It includes cultural, historical, and geographical references to the societies in **Acia**. It also includes information about the connected world of **Dagoth**. This guide is by no means a full account of the history of these lands, for that would require a book on its own. Instead, this guide gives you an introduction to the people, culture, customs, government, commerce, beliefs, and magic used in these worlds.

2. Acia

For all intents and purposes, Acia and our world are almost identical. There are four seasons, cold and hot climates, similar animal and plant life, and other aspects you'd find familiar. Acia, however, comprises a single populated continent of the same namesake. The civilization is on par with our notion of ancient Egypt and Rome, with influences from Medieval Europe. Except for some variations in wildlife, the flora and fauna match ours. The same goes for the lunar cycles and the number of days in the year. There are no

elves or dwarves or mythical races in Acia, only humans. However, there is magic. And we all love magic in a fantasy world.

3. Domains

You can think of a domain as a major geographical region. Six domains in Acia divide the continent. Some domains, like Terjurmeh and Meerjurmeh, are also countries. Others, like Darkforth, are a mix of territories and wilderness.

Domains of Acia:

- **Terjurmeh** is a desert nation, located in the western desert of the Northern Hemisphere. Its populace is a mix of nomadic tribesmen and city dwellers. A single political party controls most secular affairs but is held in check by competing parties. Terjurmeh is also considered a theocracy, where the Temple imposes influence upon the parties and oversees its own militia.
- **Meerjurmeh** is a desert nation as well, located east of Terjurmeh. Except for the city of Canuush-met, its population congregates along the fertile riverbanks of the country. Meerjurmeh is a republic, but like Terjurmeh, the Church greatly influences daily life and uses temporal power as a theocratic umbrella over the country.
- The **Northern Kingdom** is a sovereign nation located in the forests north of Terjurmeh. It's the youngest of the cultured civilizations in Acia, only six hundred years old, compared to Terjurmeh and Meerjurmeh, whose roots go back three thousand years. Its government is a monarchy.
- **Korin** is an empire geographically separated from Terjurmeh and Meerjurmeh by a mountain range. Its reach spans the greatest of any nation on the continent. The

empire has a dynastic system like ancient Egypt. The nation comprises twelve major principalities and the loosely annexed Provinces of the South.

- The **Provinces of the South** is a federated set of territories south of the Empire of Korin. The Provinces receive the empire's protection in exchange for goods and services. Each province has its own governorship and governmental system but is part of the federation's council, where participating members collaborate on interprovincial policy and interaction with the empire. Korin prevents one territory's subjugation of another through the presence of an occupational force.
- **Darkforth** encompasses the forested regions to the east of Meerjurmeh and Korin, including the Green Unknown. It's the least understood domain and seldom traveled by westerners. Three dominant cultures coexist and span its length and breadth in disparate clans and tribes. The An-jurah, who maintain close ties with the Ter-jurah at the leadership level, dominate Darkforth.

We'll take a deeper dive into these fascinating domains later in this guide.

4. Time and place

The **story** begins in the year **3387**. All calendars of the world use the **Year One** as the major boundary between modern and ancient epochs. The demarcation point is similar to how we divide CE (Common Era) from BCE (Before Common Era) in our calendar system. In Acian history, the Year One marks the first year following the Great War.

The Light of Darkness takes place across various domains, starting with Terjurmeh in Book 1, then venturing on to Meerjurmeh, Darkforth, Prall (the Northern Kingdom), and Korin in subsequent books.

5. Important historical events in Acia

5.1 Origin of humanity

Acia is a world filled with deeply religious peoples. The notion of creationism is the only accepted ideology of how humans came to be, and each culture has its own story to tell. According to the **Watcher**, **Azazel**, as he relates the story to our protagonist, Petrah, the first people of Acia were created by Jah the Creator from the bones of the Chosen at the behest of his angels. The purpose of this celestial act was to give humanity a second chance to prove their worth in the eyes of the Maker following the corruption in mankind's original world of Dagoth. But, as the Watcher points out, humans are easily corrupted, and their second legacy is no better than their first.

5.2 The Great War

The Great War is the equivalent of our World War I. It took place over three millennia before the start of the story. Its duration spanned forty years. Prior to the war, the **An-jurah** were the dominant people of the north. Sectarian differences led to civil war and division among the An-jurah. Those who believed in the god, **San**, remained An-jurah. Those who believed in the god, **Jah**, called themselves **Con-jurah**. Both sides recruited pagan armies from different parts of the world for their campaign. The **Battle of Jedahn**, which took place in modern-day Meerjurmeh, ended the conflict, driving half the An-jurah to the west where they would settle and later become known as the **Ter-jurah**, and the other half to the east where they would disappear into the wilds of Darkforth and never resurface again. The conclusion of the war signified the end of one era and the beginning of another. The **Year One** is the first year in the official Acian calendar and the first year following the Great War.

5.3 Settlement of Terjurmeh

After the An-jurah splintered into tribes at the end of the Great War, half journeyed to Darkforth while the other half traveled to the western desert of modern-day Terjurmeh. The westerners settled in the Kesel River region in the northeastern part of the country, establishing several communities along the Kesel. The largest of these settlements became the city of **Ekmed** in the latter part of the first century, Terjurmeh's first capital. Upon the establishment of an official government at the beginning of the second century, the nation was officially given the name of Terjurmeh, and its people became known as the Ter-jurah.

During a three-hundred-year transformation, settlers spread throughout the south and west, where they established communities along the fertile riverbanks, and later, the major modern-day cities of Kanmar, Fangmordah, and Elmar. Elmar became the capital of Terjurmeh after Ekmed was destroyed by Con-jurahn invaders in the fourth century. During this same period, the Temple was formed, and the **Codex**, the layman's law of the land, was written. To this day, the Ter-jurah remain nomadic and the system of government is still factional, made up of over three hundred parties.

5.4 Settlement of Meerjurmeh

Sectarian strife among the An-jurah during the years preceding the Great War of Acia gave rise to the Con-jurahn sect, a people dedicated to the worship of Jah, the Creator. After defeating and driving out the fragmented An-jurah, the Con-jurah settled in the **Hōvar Region** in modern-day **Meerjurmeh**. Unlike their nomadic ancestors, the Con-jurahn tribes gave up their migrant ways and settled heavily along the riverbanks throughout the country, establishing well-formed city-state governments. Intercity waterway commerce boosted local economies and led to rapid growth in the second

century. During this time, the Con-jurah established an oligarchy of governors that ruled for half a century. Meerjurmeh wasn't recognized as a nation until the third century, when the city-states formed a senate and unified under a single leader, backed by the newly formed Church. Modern-day Meerjurmeh is a republic.

6. Terjurmeh

6.1 Geography and climate

Mountains border the landlocked desert nation of Terjurmeh on three sides. The country receives almost no rain during the year. Cities and villages occupy the fertile river regions bisecting the land. The **Juum River** traverses the country west-to-east, fed by the **Fural Mountains**, splitting off into the **Kesel** and **South Kesel** Rivers. Hostile desert surrounds the populated areas. There is an invisible border between Terjurmeh and Meerjurmeh, marked by the end of the **Bunai Desert** to the west and the **Agobo Desert** to the east. Summers are brutally hot and dry in Terjurmeh, and winters are mild.

Three cities occupy the country: **Kanmar**, **Fangmordah**, and **Elmar**, the capital. Kanmar is the largest, but Elmar is the most populous. High walls border Kanmar and Elmar while Fangmordah is open. The **Shrine of San**, located west of the South Kesel, is the equivalent of Rome's Vatican and houses the leadership of the **Temple**. Oases dot the deserts of the country and are temporary homes to nomadic tribesmen. Of importance are **Bea-tet**, in the south Bunai Desert, for its strategic position as a trading post, and **Mingèl**, in the **Wastelands of Derel**, for its salt mining operations.

6.2 People

The people of the country are referred to as **Ter-jurah**. A person from this country may be called **Terjurmehan** (of the country) or **Ter-jurahn** (of the people). The Ter-

jurah divide themselves between city and village dwellers and nomadic tribesmen who travel the great wastes from oasis to oasis. Nomads journey the deserts during the cooler months, leaving the cities after the summer-end holiday of Hah'xallah and returning at the end of spring. The cooler weather in the deserts allows them to spread far and wide and engage in commerce in villages scattered throughout the country. Nomads often travel as tribes of extended family members. The more established tribes have **Teradi** as patriarchs, versed in the arcane arts, which help protect their tribes from bandits and cutthroats.

The Ter-jurah descend from the An-jurah, the first non-pagan civilization in the world. They are squat and amber-skinned, like their An-jurahn ancestors, and speak **Jurmehan**, the common tongue of the Northern Hemisphere. The people of Terjurmeh are bitter enemies with their neighbors to the east, the Con-jurah, and have a history of conflict dating back to the Year One. According to the *Book of Prophecy* in the *Holy Scriptures*, the Ter-jurah are prophesized to rise up one day and destroy the followers of the enemy god, Jah, including the Con-jurah. At the beginning of *The Light of Darkness*, an uneasy truce stands between Terjurmeh and Meerjurmeh.

The **Mumooni** tribespeople make up a tiny segment of the Terjurmehan population and are nomadic by nature. Originally from the **Fural Mountains**, they settled in West Terjurmeh after Kanmar became a major port city. Darker skinned than the Ter-jurah, with complexions that run copper and honey, the Mumooni have stuck to their roots over the centuries, rarely mixing with the Ter-jurah. Women often wear colored beads wrapped around their throats. The beads symbolize the experiences in the women's lives—their joys, struggles, and seminal moments. The youngest wear white beads to

show off their virtue. The men often scarify their faces with intricate patterns, similar to the **Machoo Indians**, adding patterns to their faces over their lives to tell their stories. While not directly related to the Machoo, some believe the tribespeople migrated west from Darkforth thousands of years earlier, crossing the Northern Range to the Fural Mountains and then on to the Permal Sea. Pockets of Mumooni remain among the Furals. They trade with the Ter-jurah during the summer months while visiting the cities, and have even accepted Sanism as their religion. Mumooni can be seen as far east as Fangmordah.

6.3 Government

Terjurmeh is a party-ruled government. The **Temple**, the religious authority in the land, defers control of layman affairs to a secular body of parties or factions. The term **faction** can be used interchangeably with **party** because the Temple acknowledges only one party system in Terjurmeh, the “secular” party system, while the laymen consider any organization with a unique charter as its own party. Over time, the distinction between faction and party has blurred to where both terms might be used by clergy and laymen alike, although “**party**” is the preferred term, used extensively throughout *The Light of Darkness*.

Over three hundred parties exist at the beginning of the story, with five major ones in control of the country. Each party runs as a mini-government, with officials, laws, and even troops. The major parties own large tracts of land, and the most powerful rule over entire cities or systems of trade (slave, commerce, and waterways). A secular set of laws, known as the **Codex**, dictates policy for the country. A single ruling party holds the executive power to effect policy and wage war. At the start of *The Light of Darkness*, the

Fist is the ruling party. The popular vote at the **Great Council**, an annual three-day gathering of faction leaders, affluent society members, and tribal heads (known as **Teradi**), determines whether the ruling party stays in power. Although the Temple keeps out of most layman's affairs, it has the authority to intervene in the affairs of citizens. A devout following ensures the Temple's power remains unchecked.

Despite Terjurmeh's multi-party system, the Fist governs from the country's capitol, **Den Gajjal**, located at the pinnacle of the hilly city of Elmar. The massive black granite complex serves as the center of lawmaking and governance, in accordance with the Codex. The capitol building sits across from the **Dome of San**, the main temple of Elmar, where the city Seer **Baaka** presides.

6.4 Major parties

There are five major parties in Terjurmeh at the start of the series:

- **Fist**. The ruling party in the country. Their dominance is often seen as tyrannical, although their focus on suppressing the people of Meerjurmeh has been received with wide-sweeping support in the past. Support, however, is dwindling as economic suffering and over-taxation take their toll on the population. The Fist has majority control of the cities of **Elmar** and **Fangmordah**.
 - Leader's title: **Iron Fist**
 - Party colors: **crimson and black**
 - Device: a **clenched fist**
- **Black Arrow**. Second-most dominant party, with a stranglehold on the slave trade and control of the **Slave Guild**. The Black Arrow has exclusive control of the city of **Kanmar**.

- Party leader: **Manis-cor**; goes by the title, **Dark Arrow**
 - Official party colors: **black and gray**
 - Device: **twin black arrows** crossed with their barbed arrowheads pointing up and away
- **Silver Blade.** Until a recently botched government campaign with devastating economic impact, the party held the number two spot in the country and control of Fangmordah. Their support has slipped and threatens to unravel them, but they still have ownership of the **Commerce Guild**, which provides financial strength and grounding for the troubled party.
 - Party leader: **Mras-Leebum**
 - Official party colors: **silver and black**
 - Device: **spear blade**
- **Green Flame.** The most controversial of the major parties. It is a brotherhood of magi, the secular equivalents of Temple priests. Until recent years, it was an obscure party with little support. That changed when **Uhtah-Pei**, Fifth Articulate of the Temple, took over. He is the first clergyman to assume a non-clergy leadership post in over a century. The Green Flame is the main constituent of the **Magi Guild**, the nonpartisan association dedicated to magi and Teradi, the mage tribal leaders.
 - Party leader: **Uhtah-Pei**
 - Official party colors: **green and black**
 - Device: **green flame**

- **White Hand.** An unconventional consortium of merchants and traders with a focus on commerce, particularly trade with Meerjurmeh. The party is under continuous pressure to sever ties with Meerjurmeh, particularly from the Fist, but an undercurrent of economic prosperity keeps the party among the top five.
 - Party leader: **Degas Sau**
 - Official party colors: **white and off-white**
 - Device: **hand with palm facing out** and fingers extended

Another party called the **Copper Shield** has made inroads with the country's leadership. They control shipping and the major ports along the Juum, Kesel, and South Kesel rivers and have a standing alliance with the **Silver Blade** on commerce.

6.5 Religion

The Ter-jurah are a deeply religious people. They pray to the god, **San**, and put him first above all else in their lives. Their primary religion is **Sanism**, and those who believe in San are called **Sanists**. The **Temple** is the governing body that sets forth religious doctrine based on the canonical writings of the *Holy Scriptures*, a thirty-six-volume series. According to the writings, only San and his host of angels may be prayed to. Iconography is strictly forbidden and punishable by death.

6.6 San

Also known as the **Father** or **Father of Truth**, **San** is considered the “one true god” by the Ter-jurah and is famously known as the **God of Darkness**. It is said he and his angels left Heaven and took Truth with them, leaving only lies. Although the Ter-jurah believe **Jah** (the Creator) exists, Jah has fallen from grace (the opposite viewpoint of the Con-jurah, who believe San has fallen from grace).

6.7 Serak

This is the holy device represented by an equilateral triangle with an all-seeing eye in the center. The delta shape coincides with the sacred number three. The eye is thought to be the eye of San or the eye of Truth. Seraks are found in shrines, homes, and places of business. Only priests may wear the device as jewelry, often as amulets hanging from necklaces. Priests of higher rank typically wear larger amulets to denote their greater relationship with San.

The Holy Scriptures have a passage that speaks of its genesis: “And San saw fit to consecrate his angelic hosts, three times three. And thus the holy delta came to be, for he saw it was right and pure and true. To his angels, he bestowed his blessing thrice. And he bound his all-seeing eye within the blessed device cast in his name. And they praised him, for he is the Father of Truth, and there shall be no other.”

6.8 The Temple

This is the religious organization of Terjurmeh. The **Temple** comprises clergy and has its own militia, about a third of the total number of soldiers in the country. A strict hierarchy governs the Temple, ranging from **acolytes** at the low end, to **clerics** and **priests** in the middle tier, and ending with the **Sacred Nine** at the top. **Red and black** are the official colors of the Temple.

6.9 End-times prophecy

The Ter-jurah believe in an end-times scenario where the devout followers of San, known as the **Truthful** in the scriptures, shall rise up and consume their enemies in an Armageddon-like fashion. The last book of their canon, the ***Book of Prophecy***, outlines this outcome in great detail, as well as the reclamation of Heaven by San. A mighty son

of San, named **San-Jahad**, or the **Great One**, will be the one to set the end of days into motion. He is the **Savior** in Sanism, born of a mortal woman, but deified as a demigod through the seed of his father, San. The Great One is to reach from his world to Acia and call forth the **Beast**, also known as the **Dragon**, a being of smoke and fire born from a volcano. The Beast's purpose is to snuff the hope of the **Faithful**, the followers of Jah. The scriptures do not specify when the end times will occur. Believers always think the time is nigh.

6.10 The Sacred Nine

No individuals are more revered in Terjurmeh than the **Sacred Nine**. They are the leadership of the Temple and are considered the divine vessels of San. No layman may oppose their will. Their titles are capitalized.

Constituents of the **Sacred Nine**:

- The **Mighty One**. Considered San's physical representation in Acia, he is the head of the Temple. As such, he is an extension of San's will, forsaking his birth name and shedding his human past. When the Mighty One passes on, the Seers select one of the five Articulates as the successor. Favor is traditionally given to the First Articulate, who often has the ear of the Mighty One. The Mighty One is addressed as **Your Most Holiness**.
- Five **Articulates**. As the theocratic policymakers of the Temple and executors of the Mighty One's will, they are the true power of the Temple. Each Articulate is numbered according to their seat, in order of ascension. The First Articulate is considered the most senior and handles much of the correspondence with the Mighty One. When an Articulate passes on, their replacement becomes the Fifth

Articulate, and the others move up. The Articulates of the Temple at the start of the series are:

- **Septamo**, First Articulate
 - **Efta-lah**, Second Articulate
 - **Nisheppah**, Third Articulate
 - **Refteron**, Fourth Articulate
 - **Uhtah-Pei**, Fifth Articulate
- Three **Seers**. As top-level Temple officials in charge of the religious affairs of their respective cities, they are chosen among the Temple's oracles for their gift of second sight and the ability to predict the future. Some of the greatest Seers in Terjurmehan history are revered as prophets. The Seers of the Temple at the start of the series are:

- **Baaka**, Seer of Elmar
- **Quoor**, Seer of Fangmordah
- **Kalresh**, Seer of Kanmar

During ceremonies or prayer gatherings, crowds prostrate, touching forehead to ground, as is customary in the presence of a high-ranking priest.

6.11 From creation to end times

The Ter-jurah believe Jah is the Creator, but do not worship him. According to the *Book of Creation* in the *Holy Scriptures*, **Jah** was made from the **Great Void** and gave substance to the Great Void. **Kattra** was the first word ever spoken, the Word of Creation. Its utterance divided the void from nothingness and the Heavens from the firmament. **Kattra** is also referred to as the **Divine Awakening**.

Following the Divine Awakening, Jah begot a brother, **San**, in which he instilled **Truth**. He then begot the first archangels, **Mika**, **Gabra**, and **Rapham**, to be his messengers and executors of his will. Then he begot the rest of the angels of Heaven and organized them into celestial orders.

Not content, he created man in his likeness, made a world for man to worship him, and gave man immortality through procreation. The angels saw that man was held above them, and this created the **Great Rift**. Jealousy and dissension abounded in Heaven, and San urged his brother to remove the light from Heaven, for he believed the light blinded the Creator's judgment.

According to the *Great Transfiguration of the Father* in the first book of the canon, war raged in Heaven between the hosts of Jah and San. Jah eventually cast his brother out of Heaven, and the truth with it. In the darkness, termed the "**color of no color**," San awaits the day when, according to the *Book of Prophecy*, he shall reclaim Glory in the **Final War**, where he will defeat Jah with his mighty hosts and secure Heaven as the victor.

6.12 The Great Act

The **Great Act** is a sanctioned assassination of a layperson by a clergyman. There is no higher honor among the clergy than to be given this task. It begins as an order from high up the Temple hierarchy. Senior clergy select a worthy acolyte to carry out the act. A cleric prepares the acolyte by painting the face, hands, and feet red and black, the holy colors of the Temple, and specifically: right foot red, left foot black, left hand red, right hand black, face black with the holy delta painted in red. The red symbolizes bloodshed and sacrifice, and the black faith and devotion. They form six holy colorations upon their

body in a crisscrossed pattern, acting as poles of heat and cold that draw in spiritual energy from the Netherworld. The acolyte carries out the mission in plain sight. It is forbidden for anyone to interfere with the act. To do so warrants death with the promise of eternally excruciating punishment in the Netherworld.

6.13 Divine power: the arcane arts

Divine power sits at the core of the magic system in *The Light of Darkness*. Only a person gifted with the ability to harness spiritual energy may use it. The power manifests itself through vocalization and will power, and can be witnessed through a person's ability to control the elements and manipulate the surrounding environment without the use of hands or mechanical devices. The individual uses the soul as the conduit and the mind as the controller of spiritual energy. Meditation and prayer are key components in the development of this power.

Mastery of divine power is seen both in secular and religious circles in Terjurmehan society. On the secular end, the **mage** stands atop the hierarchy as master of the arcane. The mage goes through apprentice, journeyman, and master stages—a seven-year process—to receive the title. Society views magi with the utmost respect. The respect extends to the tribe, in which the tribal leader, the **Terad**, must become a mage before assuming the top tribal position. On the opposite end, the Temple requires all its members to obtain mastery before becoming ordained priests. The priest, also called a **Terad-mara**, invokes spiritual power directly from the Netherworld and uses it mainly during religious ceremonies and sacred rites.

Channeling is the arcane art form employed to use divine power. The body serves as the vessel, the mind as the manipulator, and the soul as the conduit. The three work in

tandem to draw power from the ethereal realm of the Netherworld. This trinity concept is termed **unity**, and its purpose is to create a union between matter and energy.

Subvocalization aids in focusing the divine energy, although channeling is primarily performed using the mind in a prepared state. **Magi**, **Teradi**, and **Terad-mari** are all channelers.

Words of power are the vocalization of channeled energy. They can be used for a variety of tasks, often when a focused burst of energy is required to carry out the task, such as the levitation of a stone. The word of power might propel the stone into the air; channeling keeps it aloft.

Kantaka is a combat art form of channeling that uses the hands to shape energy and direct it at an opponent. Different poses create different energies, almost all offensive and designed for warfare. The **Guild of Magi** forbids Kantaka from being used outside the battlefield since it's such a deadly art. **Kantaka-irri** is full-contact combat, the unrestricted use of all three hundred poses. A learned channeler will choose from an array of offensive and defensive poses to overwhelm an enemy.

In Kantaka, tanga is everything. **Tanga** is the well of power the caster draws from, used to accumulate and shape energy. It's temporarily, often in the action of catch-and-release, to prevent the energy from harming the caster.

Defensive Kantaka poses used throughout the series:

- **ai-dem** – “iron cross;” heels of the palms come together, with one palm out, the other down
- **duhm-ga**, “smolder’s breath;” upraised fist to dissipate attack

- **ebbu-da** – “the bubble;” diagonal smack of the hands together creates a protective bubble around the defender, lasting just a few seconds, enough to deflect an attack
- **habeen** – “link breaker;” quick chop of the dominant hand; used to cut off smothering attacks
- **iqquoi** – “flying eagle;” hands curled away from each other like wings
- **nok-na** – “the wedge;” flat palm pointed toward the enemy, thumb angled up, wrist against the sternum
- **sekka-sinsu** – “saucer mirror;” cupping of the hands; reflects energy

Offensive Kantaka poses used throughout the series:

- **atsek** – “hammer’s spike;” quick drawing down of a fist
- **engama** – “dancing fire;” a small pyrotechnic offensive pose meant to heat the air in the opponent’s space
- **ermi-na** – “gooseneck pose;” arm hooks at the top into the shape of a gooseneck
- **gadzu** – “the mountain;” hands by the side, followed by circling the arms above the head, then crashing the hands down; used to collapse an object with downward force
- **ja-ben** – “tiger claw;” claw-like curling of the fingers to concentrate energy for a lethal blow against an opponent
- **ju-dem** – “crab strike;” fingers are formed into the shape of claws; useful for close quarters with multiple targets
- **lailee** – “silent noose;” forefinger and thumb touching to form a slipknot; by moving the thumb, the slipknot tightens, smothering the intended victim
- **mallek-na** – “wasp sting;” the channeler fires needles of energy at the opponent

- **tsi-tsa** – “spider’s grasp;” a smothering technique
- **turami** – “killing blow;” index finger is pointed at an opponent
- **ubbakesh** – “stone thrust;” hooked thumbs and palms face out; useful as a Murrati pose to multiply damage, with the force of throwing a stone pillar
- **voon-sai** – “flapping wings;” palms are spread like wings; creates a light gust of energy

Even more advanced than Kantaka is **Murrati**, or shared combat, where magi attack an enemy in concert to multiply their offensive. The skill is taught to journeymen in the final stages of their training to achieve mastership as magi. It’s a notoriously difficult skill, as all wielders must work together. A single variance can cause the entire offense to fall apart, leaving the channelers open to attack.

A lesser-known discipline is **Doktori**, the summoning arts, also referred to as the “forbidden arts.” It’s a dangerous form of magecraft because the channeler attempts to summon spirits for his or her bidding. To do so, they must reach into the Netherworld, always a perilous affair, because death is but a mistake away for the caster.

One of the side effects of channeling, particularly for the newly initiated, is **surati**, “dreams of a higher power.” The dreams are vivid and sometimes violent. It occurs when the soul outpaces the mind in its attempt to extend from the body into the spirit world. The physical self tries to compensate, and the victim ends up with anything from nightmares to convulsions to even death, sometimes setting their beds aflame in the night and burning themselves. To remedy the issue, a technique called **divine norming** is applied to bring the soul and body into balance with each other.

Elementalism is another forbidden art form, used only in secret and for achieving mastery over the primal elements in nature, such as fire, water, lightning, and earth. An **elementalist** uses a practice called the **absence of mind** to separate the waking and sleeping minds from each other and harness the power of the sleeping mind to control the elements. Some consider elementalism the most powerful of all arcane arts because it mirrors the spirit world by combining astral and ethereal elements to take on godlike qualities within the wielder. Examples of elementalism include the transmutation of stone, conducting lightning, and creating storm systems.

6.14 Prayer at meals

It is common for the senior-most person at a table to give thanks to San. The **holy delta** is a gesture done with the hand, similar to the holy cross practiced by Christians. You press your thumb, index finger, and middle finger together and dab the air counterclockwise from the top in the shape of a triangle. Depending on the situation, it might be accompanied by the phrase, “**blood to spirit**,” similar to how Christians say “amen” at the end of a prayer or the giving of thanks before the start of a meal.

6.15 San-mahadi

The San-mahadi were an order of priests sanctioned during the second millennium to suppress heresy. The priests, considered enforcers of faith, traveled mostly in threes and had the jurisdiction to enter any secular establishment and condemn heretics on the spot. While decommissioned, the Mighty One reserves the right under canon law to restore the order.

6.16 The number three

The number three is sacred among the Ter-jurah. It represents a holy trinity of god (San), human, and spirit. Any combination of three is considered a blessing in society: the father, the mother, and the child; the land, the rivers, and the sky; the three cities in Terjurmeh. Terjurmeh itself is called a “Desert Peninsula” because mountains border the nation on three sides. Multiples of three are also considered a blessing, such as in the **Sacred Nine** of the Temple or when soldiers form units of six. The number four is often frowned upon because it is one past the sacred number three. It’s the reason slaves are housed together four at a time.

6.17 Holidays

There are several national holidays in Terjurmeh. Three carry significance:

- **San-tel-moor.** The biggest holiday of the year and also the start of the New Year. It’s a three-day celebration often filled with jubilation and intense periods of prayer. Clergy mark the foreheads of citizens with **Sercula**, a sacrament of holy oil and blood. It is considered blasphemous to remove the dried, triangular marking from the forehead during the three days.
- **Hah’xallah** (a.k.a. Feast of the Hammer). A national holiday marking the end of summer and celebrating the victory at the **Battle of Andelah**, where the Ter-jurah defeated the Con-jurah in retribution for the destruction of the first capital city of Ekmed. The Ter-jurah commemorate the victory by sacrificing Con-jurahn captives in front of crowds and bludgeoning their skulls with war hammers. A feast always follows the sacrifice, which is why the holiday is sometimes referred to as the **Feast of the Hammer**.

- **Majana.** Takes place on the ninth day of the ninth month. It is one of the holiest days of the year. The country comes to a standstill on Majana, as businesses are required to close and people to attend Temple to receive the holy Sercula. Tribes often flock to the cities for the occasion before heading back out to the desert. A Ter-jurahn is expected to make the holy pilgrimage of **Kevath** at least once in their life during the holiday to the Shrine of San. The devout take the pilgrimage to the extreme, walking the entire distance on foot as a display of their devotion, fasting in the daytime, and eating a single meal at night.

6.18 Customs and traditions

Ter-jurah hold **San's Day** sacred. It marks the end of the seven-day week, similar to our notion of Sunday, and is a day often dedicated to rest and reflection. Citizens are encouraged to attend Temple and pray in the evening to renew their devotion to their god and faith. It is also a day of community, where neighbors come together to share meals in the daytime.

Men have traditionally held a dominant position in society, although times are changing. What was once the domain of man, religion, politics, business, and the military have begun to slowly transition to accept women. In tribal settings, the patriarch is the leader, although the matriarch is revered for her wisdom and respected as the hub of the family. Historically, a small percentage of women have been ordained by the Temple. Nishepph, Third Articulate of the Temple, is the highest-ranking member of the clergy at the start of the series, and is both respected and feared by those who serve beneath her.

6.19 Greetings and salutations

A priest is called **Holy One** when addressed or **His Holiness** or **Her Holiness** when referred to in the third person.

A party leader of high station is called **Your Greatness** when addressed or **His Greatness** or **Her Greatness** when referred to in the third person. The Great One also receives this honorific.

Soldiers often salute each other by pressing a fist to the chest. The gesture is also used in a ceremonial greeting or parting.

When two individuals meet, they typically bow their heads as a form of respect. The deeper the bow, the more respectful. Men who engage in conversation will typically lock their forearms first, the equivalent of shaking hands. Locking forearms is accomplished by grasping each other's forearm just shy of the elbow.

6.20 Military

Terjurmeh maintains an active military force to enforce civil order in the cities and to protect its lands from foreign invaders. The controlling party of each city is responsible for feeding, training, arming, and housing the troops garrisoned there. At the beginning of the story, the Black Arrow manages the garrisons in Kanmar while the Fist manages those in Fangmordah and the capital city of Elmar. In a time of war, all city troops fall under the authority of the ruling party, the party chosen to execute the will of the people.

6.21 Slavery

Slavery is a major part of life in Terjurmeh. The parties and Temple both support slavery. Slaves are private or public property, depending on the owner. In the public case, the city owns the slaves and houses them in common quarters. They are typically marked on their left ankles with tattoos designating ownership.

City slaves commonly wear linen outfits and color-coded rope belts. Red signifies a common slave and black a **Jabahn**, a slave with privileges.

To induce control, the city requires publicly owned slaves to drink a tea called **sprushah**, a stimulant that provides energy and staves hunger. Sprushah is addictive and has damaging long-term effects on the mind, resulting in memory loss and eventual catatonia, which is why the typical life expectancy of a slave is five to ten years.

City slaves often engage in public works projects and the basic manufacturing needs of the government, helping reduce labor costs. In Kanmar, the center of the slave trade for the nation, the slaves sleep in an extensive set of underground cells in what is termed the **pits**. They sleep four to a cell and work in pairs to remind themselves that they are not worthy of San's holy blessing, which is signified by the number three. It is forbidden for a publicly owned slave to shave or cut his or her hair.

Draadi, or slave masters, control the daily lives of publicly owned slaves. Through a chain of command, ending at the top with the **Draadlord**, they dictate regimens and mete out punishment. The Black Arrow party runs the slave trade and Slave Guild, which sets policy on ownership and manages the slave market.

It is a capital crime for a slave to look directly into the eyes of a clergyman.

6.22 Diet

The Ter-jurah are a nomadic people. They eat dense foodstuffs available to them for their long journeys, such as nuts, flatbreads, dried fruits, and cheeses. When able, they hunt desert game or fish the river causeways bisecting the country or herd when living close to the fertile banks or within the oases occupying the desert regions. Some of the population is static, living in the cities yearlong instead of venturing with their tribes.

Their diets have more variety, as they have access to local markets, ranches, and farms.

They consume grains and leafy greens and enjoy a rich diet of fish, poultry, and fowl.

Adults enjoy a variety of beverages, including ale, wine, and spirits.

6.23 Clothing

The hot clime of Terjurmeh limits clothing material to cotton or linen. **Tunics** are worn as everyday garments. Footwear is mostly in the form of sandals and the occasional boot for soldiers. Headdresses are common to protect people from the scathing sun.

Nomads wear variations of the tunic. The men prefer the loose-fitting **gebban**, an ankle-length garment made of cotton or sheep's wool that covers the arms and legs to protect the body from the desert sun. Gebba can be earth-toned and plain, striped, or stitched with intricate Jurmehan script that tells of their family heritage as stories that run around their hems and sleeves. The women prefer cotton headscarves and **gebbettes**, which contain embroidered front panels and billowing backs. To protect their faces from the merciless sun, men and women both wear headdresses called **bukara**, shaped like the coffin head of a cobra, with flaring cotton on either side of the face that trails behind their necks in a variety of colors and patterns, held in place by a circlet of reedwood or leather strap.

Draadi often wear tunics with heavy leather belts and red sashes laid diagonally across the chest or triangular epaulets upon the shoulders to denote rank. A double sash as an "x" is typically reserved for the highest-ranking Draad in a group, such as an element leader. The Draadlord also wears the double sash, but the second sash is gold to denote his rank.

Terjurmehan soldiers rarely wear armor. Those in Kanmar wear leather over tunics and linen headdresses wrapped over helms when out in the sun. Squad leaders and higher wear triangular epaulets on the shoulders. The typical soldier is armed with a short sword. Shields and bows are uncommon, except in warfare. Soldiers in other cities, like Fangmordah, dress similarly to those in Kanmar, but sometimes substitute burnouses for headdresses.

Magi wear black robes while priests wear red robes.

Robe colors worn by magi from apprentice to master:

- Junior apprentice: white
- Senior apprentice: green
- Journeyman: gray
- Mage (master): black

An **apprentice** is called a **White Robe** or **Green Robe**, depending on experience. A **journeyman** is called a **Gray Robe** and a **mage** a **Black Robe**.

Robe colors worn by clergy from junior (acolyte) to senior (priest):

- Acolyte: off-white
- Cleric: gray
- Priest: red

Besides their robe, priests may wear a serak as jewelry, often an amulet hanging from a necklace worn prominently over their robes. As tradition goes, the higher the priest's rank, the larger the device, although there is no law written in the canon to support the use or wear of seraks.

6.24 Allies and enemies

Modern-day Acia divides itself primarily along religious boundaries between Sanists, followers of San, and Jahnists, followers of Jah. Although a country such as Terjurmeh might trade with the Northern Kingdom, the two are trade partners, not allies. The Northerners believe in Jah while the Ter-jurah believe in San. Conversely, the Northern Kingdom and Meerjurmeh consider themselves allies because of their common belief in Jah. Korin allies itself with these countries as well, although there are pockets of Korin still entrenched in the old pagan beliefs.

The enmity between Terjurmeh and Meerjurmeh precedes either country's founding. The Temple perpetuates the Sanists' prejudice toward Jahnists. According to the Holy Scriptures of the Ter-jurah, the enemies of San are considered inferior and shall be put down when the appointed time comes. Because the peoples of the rest of the world have mostly converted to Jahism, an uneasy truce exists between domains favoring Sanism or Jahnism. The top seats of their respective religions reinforce the division, adding to the tension between countries through endless campaigns of religious hatemongering.

The Ter-jurah support their An-jurahn roots by maintaining ties with the An-jurah, who dwell among the tribal states east of Meerjurmeh, in Darkforth. At the start of the series, these ties have strengthened into a formal alliance between the two. Terjurmeh has pledged support to help the An-jurah annex their states under a cohesive leadership among warring territories in Darkforth. With increased control over the native populations of Machoo Indians and Idarian hillmen, the An-jurah are becoming a unified and formidable power onto their own . . . and a force to be reckoned with.

6.25 Commerce

Waterways speed up the transportation of goods and materials. They serve as the primary mechanism of intercity trade. Terjurmeh has an entire fleet of river-going vessels, from barges to slave galleys, to commute people and products.

The summer months represent the height of waterway travel because the nomadic tribesmen, who encompass about half the population, live in the cities during this time. Many tribes use barter or services in exchange for goods.

While Terjurmeh supports isolationism, it entertains limited trade between countries out of necessity and to boost the economy. Terjurmeh exports salt and textiles and imports exotic spices and liqueurs from Meerjurmeh and lumber from the Northern Kingdom.

At the beginning of the story, Terjurmeh's economy is in turmoil, with parties pointing fingers at one another for overspending, trade deficits, and failed government projects. Much of the blame is directed at the Silver Blade, which has lost popularity among the more prominent tribes for a failed infrastructure project that's resulted in increased taxes.

6.26 Currency

While Terjurmeh still engages in the barter of goods, most transactions are monetary. The Ter-jurah use coin for currency, ascribing greater value to precious metals like gold and electrum. Because other countries use similar metals, the exchange rate depends on the net weight of the coin and the perceived value of the currency internationally.

Denominations (lowest to highest) and shape of each coin:

- **Ruh** – copper – round
- **Currah** – silver – delta

- **Kant** – electrum – square
- **Till** – gold – round

Monetary conversion (lowest to highest):

- 20 copper ruh = 1 silver currah
- 12 silver currah = 1 electrum kant
- 3 electrum kanta = 1 gold till

1 till = 3 kanta = 36 currah = 720 ruh

6.27 Trillian of Darkness

The **Trillian of Darkness** is a set of tenets taught to clerics before they become priests. An elder priest sequesters a cleric underground for three days to remove the distraction of light and reveal the Trillian in total darkness.

Three pillars comprise the Trillian:

- The dark that binds
- The dark that usurps
- The dark that rules

Each one serves as a stage in the metamorphosis of cleric to priest. The goal is for the cleric to become vulnerable so they can liberate their mind and soul. Darkness is the key to all practitioners of the arcane arts, whether mage, Terad, or Terad-mara (priest), because it is the color of no color, and only when blind in the dark can one truly see.

Stage one of the metamorphosis is to bind with the dark by embracing it and using it as a cloak. This is achieved by uncovering secrets used by divine vessels like fallen angels, demons, and San.

Stage two is to usurp the dark by taking its secrets by force of will. This is the stage where a cleric is the most vulnerable to the dark forces of the Netherworld. It is the cocoon stage where one is defenseless in their attempt to absorb the dark's true potential. Only the most vulnerable self can lead to the most capable self. By doing so, one separates their spirit from their body, exiting their cocoon and physical being to enter the third and final stage, where they can rule the dark. If the cleric cannot break free of their cocoon, they will either resurface a failure and be forced out of the clergy or succumb to dark forces and perish.

Stage three is where the initiate becomes the master, able to harness the full potential of their craft. The well of power they tap into is limitless, and so they become like their angels and god as practitioners (and rulers) of the dark arts.

6.28 Prophetic Scriptures of the Ter-jurah

The ***Book of Prophecy*** is the last book in the **Holy Scriptures**, the cannon of the Terjurmehan Temple. Two key excerpts delve into end-days prophecy, also called the **Great Reckoning**. The Great Reckoning serves as a demarcation point in the history of mankind, followed by the prophesied **Age of Shadow**, a new era where the followers of San reign supreme over Acia.

The first excerpt that follows speaks of the transformation of the Father into the Son, where the Father is the god San, and the Son is his favored child, San-Jahad, also known as the Great One.

The second excerpt speaks of two wars. The first, waged by man, is **Samath**, which translates to the word Armageddon. The second, waged by San and his angels against Jah and his angels in Heaven, is the **Final War**.

Interestingly, Samath speaks of the second coming of the Great One. This coincides with the Korinian account of the Great War, where An-ta, the Sun God (Jah), bestowed upon the Emperor Exantecor, the first emperor of Korin, a weapon of Heaven called Korillion, also known as the Godkiller.

In the first coming of the Great One, Korinian lore tells of Emperor Exantecor going up against Da-amad, the Korinian Lesser God of Spite, which some theologians believe to be the incarnation of the Great One during his first attempt to destroy the believers of Jah. During the battle, Exantecor slayed Da-amad. He also slayed Kosmos, a fabled beast portended to bring ruin upon the world. Kosmos draws a comparison to the Dragon (Beast) of Terjurmehan lore. This means the Great One and his Beast attempted to overtake Acia once, only to be defeated, thus ushering in the Year One, and prophesied to return to fulfill Samath and bring darkness, the color of no color, to Acia.

Here are the two excerpts from the *Book of Prophecy*.

1. The Great Transfiguration of the Father

Jah, Creator, and First of Heaven, begot a brother to share his domain. His brother, the seed of Truth, of which there is no color, was named San. Then Jah begot Mika, Gabra, and Rapham to be his messengers and executors of his will. They were the first angels. Such was the Beginning.

Jah begot the multitudes in the realm of Heaven and they became his chosen, and there was peace, and all was well. But Jah was not content with his creation, and so he spawned man. When man came to be, there was given unto him an essence of the Creator, and Jah called it the soul of man. But man was imperfect, for he had not the essence of Truth within him.

And so Jah sent his messengers to speak his Word to man, and the angels, once favored above all, were cast aside, made to serve his will and nothing more. San, who was the First, brother to Jah and Seed of Truth, saw that all was not well and that disparity divided the cosmos. He heard the Word of the Maker, and in it, he heard the Great Lie.

And San, who was the Truth, spoke, and his brothers listened, but not all, and there was a great war in Heaven. The Heavens opened up and Jah cast out the Truth, and Heaven became devoid of it, for San and those who believed in the Truth left. Thus, Heaven came to be imperfect and stained. San begot his own kingdom, the color of no color, and named it the Netherworld. And he made his brethren, the excluded angels of Heaven, princes unto their own domains, and so the Great Rift came to be, and San became the Father of this domain and to all who followed his word, and a god unto his own.

So was the Great Transfiguration of the Father.

2. The Account of the Final War

San, the Father, who was the First and above all, came to beget a son. Of a mortal woman, this son was born. And it was said that he would have hair of black, face of a god, and eyes of sky, and in it, all would see the Truth of the Father.

And the Father announced to his angels, “This son I bear shall be great. And so shall he be named Great One and inherit the world.” Born was he, Great One, unto the world of men, blood of a virgin, blood of a god.

But the Father said, “And he shall toil among the world of men, rise in power, and fall. Such will be the fate of his first coming. Those who choose the Truth will be at his

side and will be marked so as to be invisible to the eye. And those who will rise against him will be the faithful of Jah, purveyor of the Lie. So, too, shall rise a great Beast of fire and smoke to shake the resolve of Jah's Faithful, and it, too, shall fail. Such will be the first coming, and the year of man shall be marked Year One."

And there came a time when the angels asked, "Father, when shall the Great Reckoning come to be?" Of which, the Father replied, "When my son, the Great One of man, is born of another land in the second coming, so shall the Great Reckoning begin. Upon his sixteenth birthday, the time of his choosing, shall he come to me, and I shall teach him anew. And the Great One shall rise above all others of his land and teach the Truth, of which I am its seed. Upon his thirty-sixth birthday, he shall ascend in greatness and reach across the cosmos to this world and stir the great Beast, a Dragon of fire and smoke from the Mother, the Womb of the Earth.

"The Mother shall give birth to the Dragon, and he will smother the light with smoke and fire and drive fear into the hearts of the Unbelievers. From the Dragon's birth will come Samath, the cycle that ends all things, and the Great One shall draw strength from the Dragon's shadow and unite the peoples of the world with the might of the Father, and those who oppose his might will despair and falter.

"My angel of this new world, my Gatekeeper and Watcher, shall open the way for him, and the Great One shall become my Sword. With the aid of the vast armies of the Marked, man shall succumb to the Truth in the time of Samath, and this world shall become the color of no color, and all who resist will fall before the Sword.

"And a great war shall ensue and the Marked shall prevail and the Great One shall return. So will be the fate of man."

And the Father spoke of the Great Reckoning. “And a time shall come when the Great One does battle among the world of men, and at that time, another child, begotten of my seed shall open Heaven for us, and we shall come to the Great Reckoning. Of him, I will name ‘Chosen One,’ for he will be chosen to open the way. And I will speak the Truth and all the hosts of Heaven shall listen, but not all will rally to us.

“There will be a Final War, a war to end all wars. Jah, purveyor of the Lie, shall know the Truth again and give way to its seed. He shall hear the terrible silence and all the color blinding those who cannot see the Truth shall be removed. You and your brethren shall become Kings of Heaven and rule for all eternity, and the marked of men shall become gods unto their own. This I promise, for it is the Truth.”

So was the Account of the Final War.

7. Meerjurmeh

7.1 Geography and climate

Like Terjurmeh, Meerjurmeh is a desert country. Except for the **Muuna Flats** to the north, which are great plains of sandstone and limestone, the rest of the desert is sandy, with the dunes of the **Agobo Desert** in the west reaching as high as a hundred feet. The desert is also known for its treacherous sandstorms, called **vaellra**.

The rivers sustain life and provide for its people. The **Tangeen River** flows from the southern end of the Eastern Gates, the mountains bordering Darkforth, to the east, and travels to the west, branching off to the **Estuary River** and the **River Nomad**. Cataracts along the eastern end of the Tangeen make upriver travel impossible. The same holds for the River Nomad, which swells where water fed from the Tangeen converges with water

fed from the Gōsh Mountains. The northern wastes of Meerjurmeh are inhospitable and rarely traveled.

The **Gōsh Mountains** border Meerjurmeh on the south side and the **Northern Range Mountains** on the north side. The forestland of **Darkforth** borders the east side.

Summers are extremely hot, with temperatures reaching as high as 140 degrees Fahrenheit in the Muuna Flats and Agobo Desert. Winters are cooler than those in Terjurmeh, with nighttime temperatures dropping as low as forty degrees.

Hōvar serves as the capital of Meerjurmeh and the nation's center for trade. It is also a holy city, as it is the center of the Jahn Church for all of Acia and a destination for missionaries across the world. The sprawling metropolis is set strategically at the intersection of three river systems—The River Nomad, Estuary River, and Tangeen River—nestled in a fertile river valley, surrounded by plantations, farms, and vineyards. The city is known for its beauty and bounty of floral displays that spill over the tall walls that serve as a defensive perimeter against invaders.

Key attractions within the city include **Potter's Square**, the statue-lined **Avenue of Saints**, **Barrow's End**, the **Cathedral of the Blessed**, the famed **University of Akan**, and the **Copper District**, where most government buildings are located, including the **Holy Court of the Ascended** (justice hall and highest court in the land), the **Ponia Tapa** (senate building) and **Vellum** (headquarters building).

The city is filled with colorful terraces, pastel-hued homes, monuments, paved streets, parks, and churches, built upon one another with crooked causeways among larger avenues. The wealthy own estates outside the city walls, along the fertile river delta as well as in the **Lion's Quarter**, an elite neighborhood. While there are few slums, there is

Louse's End, which attracts the poor. The **Bandolin Canal**, an offshoot of the Estuary River, divides the city center from the rest of Hōvar, crossable by three bridges, including the famous **Triplet Bridge**, also known as “**Lover's Lane**” for its scenic setting for couples.

Sushtâh lies northwest of **Hōvar** along the Estuary River. The city is known for its nut farms, clayware, silk growers, and silk weavers, who make some of the most desirable clothing of all the domains, with most of their fabric shipped to Korin, where gossamer skirts of sheer silk are all the rage among the nobles. Their parchments and inks are also renowned and sold abroad. Sushtâh is known for its mead, which is only available to visitors; no exports are allowed.

Geographically speaking, Sushtâh is a small, crowded city. Whitewashed plaster buildings cluster among a maze of walls. Several interesting architectural wonders include a church with a pyramidal crown; the seven-sided **Library of Ilion**; the hypostyle court of **Saint Karmus Square**, with its thirty-six columns positioned precisely to cast shadows in honor of the spring and fall equinoxes; the palm-shaped clerks and records offices that give the illusion of a long, sweeping front; many votive chapels; and the three-thousand-year-old ruins of **Parpet**, a crumbling complex of columned structures rife with mysterious hieroglyphs that give the appearance of Korinian origin.

Vergahl is the northernmost city of Meerjurmeh, a port city like Sushtâh, located on the Estuary River. Here, farmers tend to ju-man groves, the most famous crop of the region. When distilled, the fruit from the ju-man produces a ruby-colored liqueur called **ju-ju**, a major export and source of income. The pricey, sought-after liqueur gives off the aroma of cherries and cardamom and tastes of tart cherries and spice.

One of the whimsical tourist attractions of the city is the goat trees, which are nut trees with low-hanging branches goats can climb. A tree laden with nuts will also be laden with goats—quite the sight for visitors. Farmers capitalize on this strange arrangement between animal and tree, taking the seeds from goat dung to make luxury cosmetics exported abroad to wealthy consumers.

Tuur is the easternmost city of Meerjurmeh, a lot smaller, drabber, and less populated than the capital. The port city is located on the fertile bank of the Tangeen River. Locals dislike visitors from the west and are wary of foreigners. The city's claim to fame is its catacombs, an extensive network of ancient tunnels running beneath the city, where the dead were once interred. It attracts tourists who pay guides to lead them underground. Skulls and skeletons occupy the myriad cubbyholes dug into the bedrock, untouched for centuries. To disturb the dead is to be cursed, and the message is echoed by superstitious tour guides. Tuur locals prefer simple attire. Men favor the **saba**, a body-length shirt.

7.2 People

The people of the country are referred to as **Con-jurah**. A person from this country may be called **Meerjurmehan** (of the country) or **Con-jurahn** (of the people). The Con-jurah are city dwellers mostly (unlike the Ter-jurah, who are a mix of city dwellers and nomads). They live along the fertile riverbanks of the country and have one settlement (**Canuush-met**) in the south part of the Hōvar Region. The people descend from the An-jurah and have a long history dating back to the Year One. They are squat and amber-skinned, like the Ter-jurah, and speak **Jurmehan**, the common tongue of the Northern Hemisphere.

7.3 Government

Meerjurmeh is a republic. The senate effects all policymaking in the country. The public is supposed to elect its senators, but only the wealthy are eligible to become senators and only the influential are eligible to vote. The office of the **Lesser Light** is the highest secular post in the land and is held by one person. The Lesser Light serves as the country's head of state and has both executive and judicial power, arbitrates any disputes in the Senate, and has the final say in all affairs. The Lesser Light holds the post for life. When the position is vacated, a new leader is appointed by the Senate through majority rule. You can consider the position as the "Julius Caesar" of the Senate. **Kōs** is the present Lesser Light.

Because of the Church's dominant role in the lives of the Con-jurah, its leader, called the **Prime Manifest** or **Greater Light**, has authority over layman affairs and can override any political decision if it is in the best interest of the Church, including decisions made by the Lesser Light.

The **Judicial Council** ensures crimes are measured and justice is served. Elected **magisters** arbitrate and render judgments, officially titled **Adjudicators of the Holy Court**. They wear wigs and white robes, along with silver clasps with holy disks that signify their role as judiciaries. During legal proceedings, a magister is often accompanied by a **Registrar of the Holy Court**. The registrar administers the court record. Magisters are addressed as **Your Eminence**.

7.4 Religion

Jahism (also called **Jahnism**) is the approved religion of the Con-jurah. It places Jah, the Creator, at its center, and the **Jahn Church** as its authority. The **Greater Light** (the

Prime Manifest) serves as the head of the **Church** and relates the word of Jah to the masses. Jah's word is sacrosanct and may not be refuted. Think of the Greater Light as the equivalent of the pope during the height of the Catholic Church.

The **Jahn Church** is an extensive organization whose center is in the **Holy City of Hōvar**. Pilgrims from all over the world flock to the city each year to receive blessings from the Greater Light. The clergy comprises **archons** at the high end, then **priests**, **clerics**, and **acolytes**. There are **six archons** and they hold a position equivalent to the Articulates of Terjurmeh. They execute canon law and take on the additional duty as magistrates for the Senate, when needed.

The **Archon Guard** serves as a protective detail for the archons. They wear helms with white horsehair and cloaks with silver star-shaped fibulas. The **Prime Guard**, fewer in number, protects the Prime Manifest. They wear helms with red horsehair and white cloaks with gold fibulas.

Priests wear devices over their robes in the shape of the **holy disk**, a circlet often made of gold to distinguish them from the silver disks of government officials (although they wear other metals, such as iron, on the open road). Priests belong to **numbered orders** (e.g., the Ninth Order), headed up by senior priests.

In countries where the Jahn Church is the center of faith, a **Prefect** is ordained to lead the regional church for the respective nation. The **Northern Kingdom** has the **Prefect of Prall**, **Korin** has the **Prefect of Korin** and the **Provinces of the South** have the **Prefect of Andora**. The Greater Light serves as the **Prefect of Meerjurmeh**. A Prefect is addressed as **Your Most Holy Reverence**.

Unlike the Ter-jurahn Temple, which bans **idolization**, the Church sanctifies and encourages it. The Church canonizes **saints** and even has a street dedicated to them (**Avenue of Saints** in Hōvar), lined with statues depicting men and women with halos overhead. The most famous of all saints is **Saint Karmus**, who has a square in **Sushtâh** dedicated in his honor. Karmus was an archon who became the Greater Light in the year 1024 and handled the expansion of the Church's influence in Korin over its native polytheism. He increased the power of the Prefects in their respective domains. Karmus served as Greater Light for thirty-eight years and was loved for his tireless devotion to the Church, which canonized him as a saint shortly after his death. To achieve sainthood, an archon must first nominate a candidate. If all six archons agree on the selection, the four Prefects of Acia will vote, including the Prime Manifest. A unanimous vote of yeas results in the candidate's canonization.

7.5 Holidays

The Con-jurah celebrate **fetes**, religious festivals that honor the archangels of Jah.

There are three fetes during the year:

- Fete of Mika
- Fete of Gabra
- Fete of Rapham

There are four additional holidays:

- Rite of the Summer Solstice
- Rite of the Winter Solstice
- Festival of the Spring Equinox
- Festival of the Autumn Equinox

The Greater Light presides over these holidays, with religious services given on the adjoining Jah's Day. In other domains, such as the Northern Kingdom, the domain's Prefect is in charge.

7.6 Customs and traditions

The Con-jurah are a spiritual people who attend church in the morning on Jah's Day and then spend the remainder of the day with family. Marriage starts with the Church and the blessing of a priest, as the religious aspect of matrimony sets the tone of spirituality for the rest of the newlyweds' lives.

One tradition that honors the soon-to-be-married couple is the **Dinner of Unity**, a tribute to good fortune for a life of happiness and fulfillment celebrated the night before the wedding. The father of the groom arranges and pays for this event. Guests include close family and friends. Those of means throw lavish banquets, but even the poor rejoice with the best meal they can afford. More important is the significance of the occasion: a loving gathering on the eve of a blessed event.

On the day of the wedding, it's tradition for the guests from the Dinner of Unity to wear the same outfits to carry forward the celebration from feast to ceremony. Only the bride and groom dress differently. During the officiation, the bride and groom wear wooden reed diadems, tethered to each other by a cord to signify the bond of matrimony.

7.7 Greetings and salutations

Unlike Terjurmeh, where it's customary to lock forearms, Con-jurahn men place hands on each other's shoulders as a sign of friendly greeting and parting or touch fist to breast under more formal settings, such as with the Meerjurmehan senators. Women often hold each other's hands in greeting one another.

7.8 Food and drink

The diet of the Con-jurah is like those of the Ter-jurah. Many staples include flatbread, nuts, cheese, and a variety of fruits like prots. They slaughter chickens, hogs, and cattle for meals, but also enjoy fish from the various rivers bordering the major cities.

The Con-jurah are big tea drinkers. Their favorite is **cha**, a tea with an Earl Grey quality. Slurping is a form of respect to let a host know that the tea is above par. Even if it isn't, it's just a matter of common courtesy.

7.9 Clothing

Because of the hot desert climate, clothing is limited to lighter wear (tunics and sandals), similar to that of Terjurmeh. Priests and magi wear robes. In the eastern part of the country, a body-length garment called the **saba** is popular.

Senators dress in off-white wool tunics cinched about the waist with leather belts. Bright-red-and-gold striped sashes run crosswise over their torsos, secured by ornamental brass buttons at the hip and breast.

7.10 Allies and enemies

Meerjurmeh holds a unique position in the west as the center for Jahism. The Empire of Korin, once a pagan nation, has almost completely converted to Jahism, and recognizes the Church's authority in Hōvar, as do the Northern Kingdom and Provinces of the South. As such, Meerjurmeh is the center of an unofficial alliance between western Jahn nations. From a military standpoint, Meerjurmeh hasn't had to call on its allies in over five centuries. Terjurmeh, Meerjurmeh's archenemy, is aware of Meerjurmeh's loose alliance but doesn't officially recognize it.

Meerjurmeh has long been at war with Terjurmeh, but a threat along its eastern and northern borders continues to cause the country major problems. Marauding Idarians often attack travelers near the city of **Tuur**. In centuries past, the Idarians would attack the city outright. Because of this, Meerjurmeh's navy lends military support when needed.

7.11 Commerce

Intercity trade is managed via the waterways bisecting the country and via caravan for those settlements not accessible by water. Meerjurmeh flourishes through a combination of intercity commerce and international trade with the Empire of Korin and the Northern Kingdom. Trade with the Northerners is a tricky business because of Terjurmeh, which tries to control the trade of lumber. Exports include liqueur, spices, and silk clothing. Imports include iron ore, salt, and glassware.

One export considered controversial is the psychedelic, **dusk**. Enjoyed by the wealthy for its hallucinogenic and euphoria-inducing properties, the spice is heavily regulated and considered illegal, not just in Meerjurmeh but in other countries. That doesn't stop plantation owners from producing the product and paying off government officials to look the other way.

The production of dusk is a painstaking, time-intensive process. The spice comes from the oplia plant, which grows selectively in Hōvar (and nowhere else in the world), and only in the spring and summer. It's ready for harvest come early fall after the bulbs have fully grown. Farmers deprive the plants of water, drying them out. Oplia plants comprise a thistle-like stalk and bulb at the top the size of a fist. Harvesters separate out the bulbs from the stalks, then place the bulbs onto wooden drying racks in storehouses,

where the bulbs season. Once the bulbs crack open, sap leeches out onto the wood where it will dry completely. A worker will then carefully scrape off the dried sap, where it will be milled to produce a deep amber spice that gets weighed, apportioned, and stored in stoppered clay jugs or glass jars for mass storage or into smaller vessels for distribution. Government inspectors grade the spice, and then a wax seal is applied with the signet of the house, along with the grade. A higher grade demands a higher price. While the concept of government inspection seems contrary to the legality of the product, the law states that production in itself is not illegal, but the distribution and sale are.

7.12 Currency

Like Terjurmeh, Meerjurmeh relies heavily on its currency for commerce. All coins are circular with square notches in the center that makes them easy to string together. Parents often hang a coin by a cord to gift to their children as a seed for future prosperity. Each coin is stamped with a flower on one side and a wise Jurmehan saying on the other. The flowers reflect the natural beauty that abounds in Meerjurmeh's fertile river valley. The larger the denomination, the larger the physical size of the coin, which makes gold coins the rarest of all. It's interesting to note that the singular and plural form of each currency is the same (e.g., one urat or ten urat).

Denominations (lowest to highest) and the flowers stamped on the front:

- **Desh** – copper – naprot
- **Urat** – bronze – desert poppy
- **Loon** – silver – j'boun
- **Tak** – gold – water lily

Monetary conversion (lowest to highest):

- 10 copper desh = 1 bronze urat
- 5 bronze urat = 1 silver loon
- 10 silver loon = 1 gold tak

1 tak = 10 loon = 50 urat = 500 desh

7.13 Arcane arts

Meerjurmeh boasts many magi and priests proficient in the arcane arts. Like their Terjurmehan neighbors, they use **channeling** practices to channel divine energy. They also use **vocali**, words of binding that serve as a method of intonations and vibrational notes that harmonize with the frequency of the soul. It's like **divine norming**, but more effective, and used to help the magus control their power. Other channeling techniques include **Leventi**, the bending of light, where the practitioner draws upon a light source to wield its power. Fire is one source, but the most significant and effective is the sun.

All magi belong to the **Sacred Mage Order of Meerjurmeh**, the association that governs the regulations and policies of magi and the use of the arcane arts in Meerjurmeh. A mage titled **Magus Exetor** leads the order while also serving double duty as the head of the **University of Akan**.

Students of magecraft attend formal training, exclusively through a program at the University of Akan. Unlike Terjurmehan Magi, who wear black robes, Meerjurmehan magi wear white.

8. Northern Kingdom

8.1 Geography and climate

The Northern Kingdom sits in the northwestern end of the continent, separated from its closest neighbor to the south, Terjurmeh, by the **Pral Hills**, and Meerjurmeh, in the

Southeast, by the **Northern Range**. Grasslands and forests make up most of the country. Soil rich in minerals provides for excellent harvests, and much of the land is devoted to farmland. Summer days are hot and humid, but nights are moderate, while winters are cold and sometimes brutal, with snowfall in the higher elevations and along the **Northern Range** and **Errant's Pass** to the south.

Six **Valudoms** carve up the kingdom, each run by a nobleman of **Valudin** rank. You can think of a Valudom as a duchy or state.

- **Luxony** – the seat of power, home to the capital city of **Durenbeck** and port city of **Markania**; accessible to travelers by **Errant's Pass**, which sits between the **Pral Hills** and the **Northern Range**
- **Pral** – largest of the territories, mostly plains; located farthest north, stretching to the sea and east to **Darkforth**, where the forest forms a natural border
- **Julesland** – northwestern territory, mostly forest and plateau
- **Lenferd** – westernmost territory, set among the **Pral Hills** and forested lands along the sea
- **Billany** – landlocked territory bordered by **Luxony**, **Pral**, and **Kenton**
- **Kenton** – southeastern territory set on the **Pral Plateau**, butted up against the Northern Range Mountains

Errant's Pass serves as the primary passage between the Northern Kingdom and the lower domains of Acia. Other passages through the Northern Range exist but are nigh impossible to venture across in the winter. In warmer weather, caravans travel the well-worn natural roadway of Errant's Pass, but in the winter, access is often cut off by snow and ice. Guarding the road on the north side is **Errant's Keep**, a strategic fortification

overlooking the pass, built on a promontory of granite that gives it a tactical advantage against potential invaders. The Tissel family handles the safety of travelers across the pass, helmed by Quellen Tissel, Warden of the South.

Durenbeck is a bustling capital. Think Victorian-era London, and you'll get the picture. The downtown area is broken up into districts, each with its own theme, often in the name: the **Art District**, **Garment District**, and **Rose District**, to name a few.

Durenbeck straddles the northeast bank of **Lake Dess**, a large lake that offers picturesque views and respite from the busyness of the city. The capital hosts two major landmarks:

Dennington Palace and **Windmoor Castle**, both seats of power for the monarchy.

Durenbeck is famous for its clothiers, haberdashers, lively eateries, and taverns.

Markania, the Northern Kingdom's second-largest city, is known as the fashion capital of the kingdom, but also for its clockmaking—the best in the world. They sell their timepieces for outrageous prices to foreigners. To own a watch or clock from Markania is a statement of status . . . and the talk of the town.

8.2 People

The people of the kingdom are referred to formally as **Prallites** and informally as **Northerners**. There are two classes of citizens in the country: commoners and nobles. A middle class exists, but it accounts for such a narrow segment of the population that only those engaged in international trade fit into this class. Because agriculture is such an important part of the economy, most of the common class engages in farming and ranching.

Prallites are related to Idarians and have similar physical characteristics. Idarian hillmen settled in the Northwest over a thousand years ago. Clan chiefs became

landowners and then nobles over the four hundred years that followed. Husbandry advances led to a more settled lifestyle and, subsequently, the growth of community and economy; and finally, the creation of a cohesive government structure. An ambitious clan chief named **Markania the Great** subjugated his neighboring states and united the country under sovereign rule in 2738. King Markania's reign as monarch lasted twenty-six years and accounted for much of the nobility system that exists today.

The Prallites are the first people of Acia to adopt full names—that is, forenames with surnames. Most have two names (e.g., Chamfor Rengle), although it's not uncommon for aristocrats to give their children three or even four names as a sign of social status.

8.3 Government

The Northern Kingdom (often called **Prall**) is a monarchy. It's the youngest country in Acia, at just under 640 years. The monarch governs the land and gains title through hereditary right. Nobles, typically relatives of the king or queen, hold title to vast tracts of land which the common class cultivates in exchange for food and housing. The highest-ranking nobles, the **Valudin** (considered on par with Britain's Dukes in terms of nobility hierarchy) control the largest territories in the kingdom, called **Valudoms**.

The kingdom adopted a feudal system that comprises a hierarchy of nobles, vassals, and serfs. Because the kingdom is so young and continues to expand, mainly eastward, generational border and title changes have created a state of flux in the country. The primary culprit is the division of territory to support new minor lords, which creates additional vassalages and overtaxes the feudal system.

The **High Office of the Steward**, located in Durenbeck, serves the Crown on international affairs. The **Steward** acts in the capacity of both ambassador and liaison and

oversees representatives with expertise in foreign affairs, called **Vice Stewards**. Each Vice Steward represents the Northern Kingdom to a single foreign power under their purview.

The kingdom has a variety of laws, but a well-known one is the **Law of Prohibition**, which forbids the practice of magecraft. Interestingly, priests are allowed to train and use the arcane arts, as it is considered a “godly practice among the worthy.”

The **Royal Bureau of Alchemy** is an odd duck among the organs of government, consisting of alchemists charged with the chemical sciences for the kingdom. Many believe these alchemists as charlatans, performing cheap tricks and illusions, but they’ve been part of the government for well over a century, dedicated to the advancement of compounds and control of pharmaceuticals and therapeutics from the stance of legality and use. The Bureau falls under the governance of the High Office of the Steward.

8.4 Nobility class

Nobles rule throughout the Northern Kingdom and are servants of the Crown—the king and queen. The nobility class follows a rigid hierarchy. The monarch may bestow or revoke title, rank, and land, which makes the Crown all-powerful.

Here are the nobility ranks, from highest to lowest, and how they equate to the ones of our world:

- **King and queen** – monarchs; the king is also titled Knight’s General of the Army
- **Valudin** – equivalent of Duke
 - Six Valudin hold this title in the Northern Kingdom
 - Each governs a major territory
 - Most are related to the Crown by blood

- **Pernal** – equivalent of Marquess
 - Their respective sub-territory is called a Pernaldom
- **Quellen** – equivalent of Earl
- **Devant/Devantess** – equivalent of Viscount
- **Saquetier** – equivalent of Baron

Valudin of the Northern Kingdom:

- Luxony: Arnot Rengle, Regent to the Crown and brother to the king
- Prall: Arin Moreau, no ancestral ties to the Crown
- Kenton: Chaif Enure, second cousin to the king
- Billany: Anette Ador, first cousin to the king
- Lenferd: Gibbs Moraine, distant cousin to the king
- Julesland: Hender Bixury, first cousin to the king

The **king** and **queen** are addressed as **Your Majesty**, the **Valudin** as **Your Grace**, and all other nobles as **My Lord** or **My Lady**.

8.5 Houses (families)

The great houses of the Northern Kingdom make up the country's ruling class. Some houses go back to the country's founding.

Oldest among the houses is House Rengle, whose most prominent members include King Amure Rengle, Queen Elissa Rengle, and the king's brother, Valudin Arnot Rengle. The Moreaus represent the second-oldest house and one of great power in the realm. A centuries-old animosity exists between the Rengles and Moreaus, which causes unrelenting tension at the highest levels of the monarchy. The phrase, 'beware the Moreaus' speaks volumes as to the Rengles' take on their archnemesis. With a Moreau

holding the top post in the Jahn Church as the Prefect of Prall, the Rengles must be careful how they balance their secular power against the Church's widespread influence over the people of the Northern Kingdom.

Houses of note:

- **Rengle**
 - Crest: rearing black horse surrounded by a motif of woven leaves
 - King's colors: red and gold
 - Queen's colors: green and gold
- **Moreau**
 - Colors: black and gold
- **Tissel**
 - Colors: beige and copper
- **Moraine**
 - Colors: gray and white
- **Ador**
 - Colors: amethyst and white
- **Enure**
 - Colors: crème and forest green
- **Bixury**
 - Colors: brown and pearl

8.6 The Crown

Dennington Palace is the three-story estate of the king and queen of the Northern Kingdom. It is the Buckingham Palace of Acia, with its splendor and storied history. A

cellar equal in size to the structure above contains a secret tunnel that bridges the palace to **Windmoor Castle**, the Crown's fortification in Durenbeck.

Famous rooms:

- Gilded Room
- Green Room
- Blue Room
- Red Room
- Grand Ballroom

The following positions represent the household staff:

- **Grand Marshal of the Household** – heads all staff
- **Chamberlain** – attends to personal matters for the Crown
- **Master or Mistress of Larder** – manages the supply and storage of food and drink
- **Master or Mistress of Tablecloth** – manages dining affairs
- **Master or Mistress of Kitchen** – oversees cook staff
- **Master or Mistress of Cellar** – manages the supply and storage of wine and spirits
- **Master or Mistress of Horse and Mews** – manages the royal stables
- **Master or Mistress of Artisanal Desserts** (formerly of Pastry) – responsible for baked goods
- **Master or Mistress of Dress** – responsible for royal garb and fabrics
- **Master of Arms** – head of palace security and lead inquisitor into breaches of safety

Male staff are outfitted in liveries of starched black and white. Female staff wear conservative dresses, also black and white. Palace guards wear gleaming helms and breastplates over doublets.

8.7 Religion

Pagans for millennia, the Idarian-descended Prallites are mostly converted to Jahism. Missionaries from Vergahl in Meerjurmeh traveled to the kingdom near the end of Markania's rule and set up the first church in the capital city of **Durenbeck**. Today, the Church holds significant influence over the daily lives of Prallites. Like the Korinians, pilgrims often journey annually to Hōvar to receive blessings from the Greater Light.

The center of Jahnism in the Northern Kingdom can be found at the **Cathedral of Archangels**, in Durenbeck. The cathedral is the seat of power for the **Prefect of Prall**. It was built by King Joram in 2875, a century after the country's founding.

8.8 Holidays

Because the people of the Northern Kingdom are Jahnists, they've adopted the fetes from the Con-jurah that celebrate Jah's trio of famous archangels, Mika, Gabra, and Rapham. The festivals bring together commoners and nobles, who celebrate the occasions with food, music, and merriment. The Prefect of Prall presides over the religious ceremony that gives thanks to the angels for their protection over the people of the Northern Kingdom.

8.9 Customs and traditions

Fashion is big in the Northern Kingdom, boasting a thriving textile industry and many clothiers. Women and men equally drive trends in garb, with things like short capes, wide skirts, and fanciful doublets being all the rage. Markania is oft considered the home to

fashion in the kingdom, which also includes footwear, hats, jewelry, hairstyles, and the use of makeup. Clothing choices distinguish classes of citizens and serve as social statuses for the wealthy and privileged. With fierce competition among the nobility, staying up on the latest fashion is often a differentiator at court and means of gaining favor . . . or losing face.

Sports are geared toward having fun and pitting wits. The game of **thieves' ball** is a popular sport, where mallets and brightly colored balls are used. Two teams of two, each divided into different sides of a narrow fairway, compete against each other. One player hits a ball toward the flag on the opposite end, while his opponent attempts to knock the ball out of the way, stealing the position. **Jousting** is another popular sport, albeit a costly one, relegated to tournaments sponsored by the wealthy.

Marriage among Prallites is a time-honored tradition dating back to the country's Idarian roots, where the parents of the bride would offer beaded necklaces as an act of well-wishing and fertility so their daughters might mother lots of children. As Prall became a kingdom and prospered, these matrimonial gifts expanded to include heirloom pieces of pottery, jewelry, and essential oils, along with land for the newly married. To consecrate a wedding, a priest must offer a blessing before the public so the marriage might be witnessed in the sight of Jah. For prosperous families, a goose is cooked and served at dinner following the wedding, along with a bounty of fruits, cheeses, and baked goods to demonstrate generosity and good fortune for the newlyweds. Families who can't afford a goose settle for roast chicken or meat pies.

With honoring the deceased, the Prallites inter their dead in burial mounds, called **barrows**. Nobles and royals dedicate large tracts of land to these auspicious bounds of

raised earth, containing multiple chambers for family members. They connect the barrows through a network of tunnels belowground. The chambers contain niches for offerings, such as flowers, jars of wine, and vials of scented oils. Stones and earth are used as building materials. The entrances are often aligned to let light in during solstices as a way of allowing the light of Jah to bless those who have passed from the world. Workers called barrow keepers attend to the service and safekeeping of these tombs for the dead.

8.10 Greetings and salutations

The **bow** and **curtsy** are courteous forms of greetings. They're signifiers of respect in Prall culture and an art form all unto their own. For the ladies, there are three curtsies; for the gentlemen, seven bows. While the curtsies have names (e.g., half curtsy), the bows are numbered one through seven.

Curtsies:

1. Full curtsy

- Use: formal curtsy often aimed at one of a higher station or when full-blown respect is required
- Technique: a full bend in the front knee while the back leg pushes out and the entire body lowers while keeping the torso upright

2. Half curtsy

- Use: semiformal greeting or parting
- Technique: less exaggerated form of the full curtsy with barely a bend at the knees

3. The nudge

- Use: informal acknowledgment of the other party, sometimes used as a reflection of a bow made by the opposite sex
- Technique: a graceful but simple dip of the head with no bend at the knees

Bows:

1. Bow number one

- Nickname: the greeting
- Use: a semiformal method of greeting someone, such as an acquaintance, peer, or friend (when at a formal function)
- Technique: a medium-paced dip forward of the torso

2. Bow number two

- Nickname: the parting bow
- Use: similar to bow number one, but to say goodbye
- Technique: a quick dip forward of the torso

3. Bow number three

- Nickname: the flatterer's drape
- Use: to flatter or pay respect to a woman, often intending to show affection without coming across as flirtation
- Technique: a low bow

4. Bow number four

- Nickname: the gallant bow
- Use: a flamboyant bow used to express delight or affection without being flirtatious

- Technique: a low sweep with the hand, followed by the bend in the torso, where the back of the hand appears to brush the ground, then sweep away like a flourish of a quill on parchment

5. Bow number five

- Nickname: the humble sweep
- Use: when a gentleman wants to instill his full respect upon a lady in his company or upon his betters
- Technique: similar to the gallant bow, but with a more dignified and slower sweep of the hand

6. Bow number six

- Nickname: bow of reverence
- Use: to display the very highest form of respect, often to one above your station
- Technique: a slow, deep bow at the waist, with one hand over the belly, the other over the lower back

7. Bow number seven

- Nickname: the nod
- Use: the least formal of the bows; more of an acknowledgment than anything else; similar to the curtsy form of “the nudge”
- Technique: a dip of just the head with the barest forward movement of the torso

8.11 Food and drink

Prallites claim to have the finest **mead** in Acia, and many believe it to be true. The secret is in the form of natural additives, namely pepperleaf and avala bark, which enhance the intrinsic notes of clove and nutmeg. **Pepperleaf** imparts spicy notes while avala bark mellows the sugars in the beverages to create a smooth finish. **Gingerberry** adds a tangy, almost citrusy profile, which creates the most sought-after mead in the realm (and, some say, the world).

A variety of comfort foods sate the hearty appetites of the Northerners, whose harsh climates demand lighter meals in the summer and heavier ones in the winter. Everything from stews to roasts enrich suppers during the cold season. With Durenbeck's cosmopolitan culture, fine dining abounds among the upper class, pushing up the demand for pricey wines and liqueurs imported from the southern domains. For those with simpler tastes, hearty foods offer satisfaction. Such items include things like **crispies** (fried breakfast cakes) and **halos** (eggs scrambled inside nests of shredded potatoes).

8.12 Clothing

Prallites dress similarly to Europeans from the Middle Ages. Their garb is simple, especially the commoners, which include such apparel as pants, breeches, boots, and cloaks. The nobility uses more expensive materials and designs, with flaring dresses and doublets, often in the colors of their respective houses. Soldiers wear chain mail over their clothing. During ceremonies or official events, they also wear tabards. The country's crest depicts a rearing black horse surrounded by a motif of woven leaves, which is also the crest of House Rengle.

8.13 Allies and enemies

The Northern Kingdom, through the influence of the Church, has loose ties with Meerjurmeh. Trade with Terjurmeh has caused a conflict of interest among secular communities dependent on lumber exports, particularly in the country's southern region. To date, the kingdom has yet to decree an official stance with its neighboring countries, although Meerjurmeh came militarily to the country's aid early in its history when Idarian invaders attacked its eastern borders and threatened to sack the newly formed settlements and even the capital.

8.14 Commerce

Agriculture is the primary economic driver in the country as far as intracountry commerce goes. Terjurmeh's demand for wood has created a boom in the lumber trade over the last century, changing the dynamics of wealth distribution for the southern nobles, whose coffers quite possibly have grown to exceed the monarchy's. The kingdom's reliance on steel for manufacturing weapons and use in construction has boosted ore imports from Terjurmeh and spawned a considerable number of new mining operations along the recently founded settlements bordering the west end of the Serpent's Belt. Overall, the country prospers from economic expansion, even though the last few decades have proven nearly disastrous for the agriculture industry, which has seen hard winters nearly wipe out many of the late-harvest crops.

8.15 Currency

The currency of the Northern Kingdom comprises three denominations, divided neatly into units of copper, silver, and gold. All coins are round.

Denominations (lowest to highest) and stamps on the obverse:

- **Sovereign** – gold – pronged crown with six points, one for each Valudom, and a hexagonal gemstone in the center representing the monarchy governing the realm
- **Warren** – silver – rearing horse bearing a knight in plate armor holding a flaming sword aloft, surrounded by a wreath of woven leaves
- **Shim** – copper – falcon with wings back and talons extended as if about to snap up its prey, superimposed over a heraldic shield

Monetary conversion (lowest to highest):

- 50 copper shims = 1 silver warren
 - 10 silver warrens = 1 gold sovereign
- 1 sovereign = 10 warrens = 500 shims

9. Korin

9.1 Geography and climate

Korin takes up the largest geographical area of any individual country. Its capital sits just below Acia's equatorial axis. The lands to the north are arid, composed of desert plains and wastelands. The lands to the south and the east are mostly plains and grasslands. Low rainfall makes for poor cultivation in these regions, despite the suitability of the soil. Korin is bordered by a variety of natural barriers, including the **Gōsh Mountains** to the north, **South Furals** to the west, and the forests of the **Green Unknown** to the east. The largest river in the world, **The River Life**, stretches almost a thousand miles, traversing the nation longitudinally, fed by **Lake Gōsh** to the north. Summers along the equator are hot and dry, with temperatures reaching upward of 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Winters are fairly warm, with temperatures rarely falling below

seventy. The climate changes in the south and east where higher humidity provides a milder climate.

9.2 People

The people of the country are referred to as **Korinians**. Korinians are a diverse people whose aristocracy and regal bloodlines can be traced back thousands of years. The primary language of Korin is Korinian. Jurmehan is spoken as a secondary language, although those of means are encouraged to learn it both in verbal and written form. The history of Korin is rich and the country's culture is best described as a cross between ancient Egypt and the Roman Empire.

9.3 Government

Korin is a dynastic empire, comprised of **twelve principalities** and the loosely annexed **Provinces of the South**. The emperor is considered divine, a son of Jah, and is treated as a divine entity. The current ruler, **Xantecor**, is the third emperor of the twenty-fifth dynasty. The dynasty can be compared with the Roman Empire of the first and second centuries with its broad reach and military strength, although the strain of maintaining such breadth has caused fracturing and dissension, particularly in the outer territories, where the capital's influence wanes.

The emperor's seat of power is the **Pearl Palace** in the capital city of **Kasâh**. His court contains a mix of relatives and political appointees. A **steward** runs the court in the emperor's absence. The post is the highest layman position in the capital. The **chancellor** is the top diplomat on the international front and manages a cadre of ambassadors to different nations and territories. The chancellor's job is to direct interaction with heads of state of foreign countries on behalf of the empire.

Korin has an extensive, geographically disbursed military. The military falls under two departments, Army and Navy, led by **General Niak** and **Admiral Pulchak**, respectively. Both report directly to the emperor. Naval components are split between The River Life and the seaport of Kanteron on the East Coast of the continent, with the naval center at the nation's capital. Kanteron's naval presence is nascent and not a priority of the current dynasty. Spread throughout the empire are imperial garrisons. **Legions** form the basic strategic unit of the empire and comprise six thousand troops. They fall under a governor's rule during peacetime and imperial rule during wartime.

The official imperial colors are **gold and white**. White is typically used as the background for gold insignia. The nation's crest is a gold disc, which represents the sun and Jah, with a dozen spearheads, one for each major city, radiating out of the center, but not touching the disc itself. The detachment symbolizes the closeness of the people to Jah, with the lack of contact denoting a separation between mortals and the divine.

9.4 Principalities

There are twelve major cities in Korin. Each city is the capital of its eponymously named **principality**. The empire tasks governors with the management of commerce, security, and the interests of the empire in their respective principalities, and support for the empire abroad. All governors are required to have blood ties to the royal family.

9.5 Religion

Jahnism is the official religion of Korin, although there are sects that still pay tribute to the old gods. The post-Great War missionaries of Meerjurmeh converted the Korinians to Jahn in the third century. Jahnism became the official religion in the ninth century, but because of resistance among emperors who proclaimed themselves as living gods,

monotheism didn't supplant polytheism until the fifteenth century. Even then, the self-proclamation continues in modern-day Korin.

Necromancy is an important part of Korin's religious history, and it is still practiced today, and protected by the emperor. Many want the practice abolished, but the **Imperial Sect of the Necromantic Order**, which is headquartered in the **Great Necropolis** near the capital, maintains a stranglehold on the imperial elite and has done so for the better part of the past four thousand years.

The **necromancer** is the most powerful religious figure in the imperial religious hierarchy. A **shaman** is a practicing priest, a step down in the pecking order. Both practice Jahnism, but only necromancers are ordained to commune with the dead.

9.6 The old gods

Before Jahnism came along, Korinians were pagans who worshipped and paid homage to multiple gods. Their pantheon has **twenty-four gods**, twelve greater and twelve lesser.

Greater gods:

1. **An-ta** – god of the sun and father to all gods (considered by modern-day Korinians to be the original incarnation of Jah)
2. **Nuna** – goddess of the moon and mother to all gods
3. **Monos** – god of war
4. **Heroon** – goddess of the rivers and seas
5. **Topak** – god of the skies
6. **Hura** – goddess of fertility
7. **Atos** – god of night

8. **Chakna** – god of death
9. **Petuk** – god protector of souls
10. **Rakussan** – god of fire
11. **Thuth** – goddess of wisdom, laws, and judgment, and arbiter to the gods
12. **Kilios** – god of chaos and Unmaker of the cosmos

Lesser gods:

1. **Da-amad** – god of spite
2. **Endura** – goddess of wine and spirits
3. **Ibis** – god patron to the lara and ferryman of the deadlands
4. **Cannuset** – goddess protector of women and the unborn
5. **Bek** – goddess protector of children
6. **Ernasek** – god of mischief, pestilence, and disease
7. **Manutef** – goddess of tongues and knower of all languages
8. **Aktamonnen** – god of agriculture
9. **Kululeh** – goddess of luck, fortune, and prosperity
10. **Annor** – god of statecraft and commerce
11. **Lilinet** – goddess of love, marriage, and beauty
12. **Holos** – god of music, poetry, and song

The **lara** serve the gods as their undead servants.

9.7 Holidays

As with the Prallites, Korinians share in the fetes, rites, and festivals observed by the Jahn Church. Other holidays predate these and are still celebrated:

- **Eye of the Sun** – a New Year’s celebration that honors the sun god (An-ta originally; Jah in modern times)
- **Nunamon** – a festival begun by Isos, first emperor of the second dynasty, to honor Nuna, goddess of the moon, and the blessings of mothers to their children; celebrated during the first full moon of the year
- **Feast of Life** – a festival that pays homage to the bounty provided by The River Life, which takes place on the first Jah’s Day following the autumn harvest

9.8 Customs and traditions

Because death was such an important part of ancient Korinian tradition, when citizens prayed to the old gods and the emperors were considered divine representatives on the mortal plane, many traditions honor the old ways. Korinians believe the dead should be interred on the west side of The River Life because the sun sets in the west. Many still bury loved ones in the desert or in crypts carved into sandstone on the west side of the river. While mummification was an integral part of the preparation process for the newly deceased, its practice died off when Jahnism took over as the primary religion of Korin, although people in less populated areas still tend to the practice today.

As important as death is symbolically, so is life. It’s not uncommon for a father to make an offering of food and drink to an old god to request good health for the upcoming birth of a child. Hura, the goddess of fertility, still comes up in votives for this purpose, as does Bek, goddess protector of children.

Not all is serious among Korinians. They enjoy their fun too. One such outlet is the game of **khet**, the oldest board game in the world. It’s a two-person game, much the way chess and backgammon are. The goal is to move pieces strategically along the board to

topple the dynasty of the other player. The first to succeed wins. The game relies on subtlety as much as it requires strength and posturing. Players make use of feints, bluffs, and misdirection to outmaneuver and trick opponents into overprotecting their pieces or luring pieces out into the open. It's said the game mirrors political posturing.

Khet has gained such popularity among the Con-jurah that entire cafés have sprung up in Meerjurmeh for patrons to challenge one another to a game of khet while drinking tea and smoking djap. The popularity has also spilled over to the Provinces of the South. International tournaments allow friendly competition among neighboring countries, but the rivalry is fierce, with nationalism at the heart of these contests.

9.9 Greetings and salutations

Korinians are a proud people who respect their lineage. A person is referred to by their name and their relation to their parents when spoken of. For instance, someone named Mikah, whose father's name is Heliot, would be referred to as Mikah, son of Heliot, in speech or writing.

Soldiers and officers greet each other with a salutation of a fist over their chest.

Imperials are greeted reverently by commoners. An official greeting also requires the commoner to kneel before an imperial.

9.10 Food and drink

Korinians love their food. The elite are known for casting lavish banquets, none more extravagant than the emperor, who might throw a twenty-course dinner party on the whim for a hundred guests at a time. Exotic dishes like roast tongue of quail and braised mussels imported from the Permal Sea can fetch exorbitant prices. Aristocrats use exotic foods as a demonstration of social status and a means for gaining political favor.

While Korin boasts fine mead, ale, and wine, they also produce beer, which everyday citizens enjoy, some over water, especially in regions where clean water is scarce.

Korinian beer dates back to the early dynasties, but many believe its origin heralds from the province of Boronio to the south, where shamans praying to the spirits of the mountain-fed waters of West Lake would brew the beer as an offering to ward off evil sprites.

9.11 Clothing

The vast reach of the empire encompasses many cultures, and different clothing styles have been adopted by the people spread throughout the country. The hot desert climate in the central part of the country creates an environment for minimal loose-fitted clothing, such as the wear of **kilts** among men and simple cotton dresses among women. **Raks** are popular attire among the upper class, gossamer-and-cotton kimono-like outfits. Men and children often forgo tops during the hotter months. Jewelry is common among all classes of people. Men and women wear collarbone necklaces and earrings made of copper, silver, or gold. Korinians love color, which is why jewelry often includes the use of faience beads, glass, jewels, and gemstones.

Foot soldiers wear sandals and breastplates over tunics. Their outerwear is typically white with the country's official crest. Imperial palace guards wear white-lacquered breastplates and golden helms bearing the feathered plume of the icarus, a beautiful songbird of pure white, and long capes draped off their shoulders. Breastplates and capes bear the imperial insignia.

9.12 Allies and enemies

Korin has an old-standing alliance with Meerjurmeh, which is drawn along religious lines. There are talks in place to strengthen old ties, in particular, because of recent aggression from Terjurmeh, but neither Korin nor Meerjurmeh has called upon each other militarily for centuries. Korin regards Terjurmeh neutrally and has a truce in place to protect its mining interests in the Gōsh Mountains.

9.13 Commerce

Because of the extensive highway system built between the twenty-first and twenty-third centuries, trade between principalities across the empire is efficient and flourishing. Kasâh, the capital, and the cities of Finth and Scoriah are the major commerce hubs of the empire, with all roads leading to Kasâh. Korinian engineers are said to be the best at building roads that endure the test of time. One technique used is a method of crushing sedimentary rock into gravel, which is mixed with a bonding agent. Giant rollers drawn by pack animals press the surface flat.

The River Life provides an expedient means for travel and inter-hub commerce over a thousand-mile stretch of imperial territory. The empire is rich in spices and spins some of the most sought-after silks. Vast gold and silver reserves, along with ore mining operations in the South Furals and Gōsh Mountains, provide financial backing for trade. Marble, granite, porcelain, and rare gems are exported to the forest-rich Provinces of the South in exchange for lumbar and crystal. International trade is limited in the northern hemisphere because of desert and mountainous barriers and the isolationist policies of Terjurmeh and Meerjurmeh. Korin is currently exploring the use of sea travel to extend its reach to the southernmost provinces and transport highly sought-after pearls from Shell Bay on the West Coast to the cities of the East Coast. There are seaports in the

eastern cities of Kanteron, Atanah, and Dezīah, and a new one is being constructed in the western city of Pentegeiah.

9.14 Currency

Korin and the Provinces of the South use the same Korinian currency.

Denominations (lowest to highest) and symbols stamped onto each coin:

- **Tet** – copper – wheat stalk and spike
- **Koff** – bronze – coursing river
- **Emblem** – silver – cycles of the moon
- **Imperial** – gold coin – pyramid
- **Double imperial** (solar) – gold coin – sunburst

Monetary conversion (lowest to highest):

- 5 copper tet = 1 bronze koff
- 4 bronze koff = 1 silver emblem
- 10 silver emblems = 1 gold imperial
- 2 gold imperials = 1 double imperial

1 double imperial (solar) = 2 imperials = 20 emblems = 80 koff = 400 teff

9.15 The number twelve

Twelve is a sacred number in Korinian culture, dating back to the empire's founding.

There are twelve major cities, twelve principalities, and twelve **Grand Pyramids**.

Twelve spearheads form the insignia of the imperial standard. The number's significance heralds from the pantheon of ancient gods: twelve greater and twelve lesser gods. In modern-day Korin, it represents the divine number of Jah and is believed to bring good fortune.

10. Provinces of the South

10.1 Geography and climate

The topography of the **Provinces of the South** varies from grassland to hills to woods. Many rivers occupy the countryside, the larger ones fed by lakes and mountains to the north. The climate is temperate most of the year, allowing farmers and ranchers to work the land all year long. Three large bodies of water surround the Provinces: the Permal Sea in the west, the Eastern Ocean in the east, and the Asyran Ocean in the south.

10.2 People

The Provinces of the South—often referred to as just the **Provinces**—contain **twenty-three distinct provinces**. The people are as varied in skin tone as they are in heritage, many with roots that predate the formation of the Korinian Empire to the north. Many believe provincials are of Idarian descent, the result of migratory hillmen pioneering the southwest in the search for a new home.

Korinian is the official language, although many speak their own dialects. With the advent of Jahnism, Jurmehan has increased in popularity over the centuries. One can easily speak three or more languages, especially among those who trade with the empire, Meerjurmeh, and other provinces. Most provincials live a simple life, occupying farmsteads, ranches, hamlets, villages, towns, and seaside settlements or migrating with herds of cattle and horses across open plains.

10.3 Government

The Provinces of the South form a **federation** under Korinian rule. Each province has its own set of laws and government, superseded by imperial law when the empire's interest is at stake. A persistent occupational force from Korin maintains order in the

Provinces much the way the Romans did in North Africa during their height of power. The **Federation Council**, located in the port city of **Kurth**, which the empire recognizes as the official capital, dictates interprovince relations and acts as the liaison between the Provinces and the empire. Each of the **twenty-three provinces** is represented by a voting council member of equal stature, called a **consul**. A Korinian-approved **proconsul** governs the respective province. While the Provinces adhere to a federated system of governance, a few progressive provinces like Kurth and Visdon use a democratic approach of electing officials by way of the people's vote.

10.4 Religion

Jahism is the official religion of the Provinces of the South. Necromancy, once pervasive because of the empire's influence, has died out, and paganism, which was widespread up to the middle of the last millennium, is nonexistent, with many of the old temples destroyed and most traces of worshipping the old god eradicated by followers of the Jahn Church. Like Korinians and Prallites, the more devout followers make an annual pilgrimage to Hōvar in Meerjurmeh to receive a blessing from the Greater Light. Provincials who practice Jahism often partake in the holidays and celebrations sanctioned by the Church, which are shared among Con-jurah and Prallites.

10.5 Commerce

With seafaring vessels and a willingness to overcome age-long superstitions of venturing into open waters, shipping has become big business. The Provinces boast the best shipwrights in the world. Many rivers and seaports provide accelerated means of moving goods between provinces and Korin. Kurth, the largest port in the world, sits on the East Coast. Travel from the treacherous waters of the **Eastern Ocean** to **Shell Bay** on

the West Coast wasn't possible three centuries earlier. Advances in hull, mast, and sail design have made long journeys feasible. Since then, waterway commerce has exploded, providing prosperous opportunities for a select number of provinces and a new means of taxation for the empire.

Traders barter wares, furs, and livestock among neighboring provinces, with the more urbane trading goods with the empire. Currency is used sparingly but growing in popularity as provincials become more cosmopolitan, especially those engaged in shipping and seafaring. The Provinces don't mint their own coins, using imperial currency instead.

10.6 Arcane practices

The peoples of the Provinces dabble in channeling but lack the skills of magi and priests of Terjurmeh and Meerjurmeh. There are no formal schools that teach the arcane arts, but the Kurthans have developed an art form called **Kashpet**. It allows for the manipulation of the wind and the taming of the sea in open water, which helps sailors manage treacherous conditions out at sea. Kashpet is manifested through vocalization and communing with the elements, namely air and water.

11. Darkforth

11.1 Geography and climate

The domain of Darkforth divides east from west on the continent. From a Western perspective, little is known of the wilds of this domain. Dense forestland creates a natural border, ranging from the **Green Unknown** forest in the south, which borders Korin, to the main forest in the north, which borders Meerjurmeh. Jungles, rainforests, swamplands, mountains, and wastelands make travel inland a logistical nightmare for the

uninitiated. The forests and mountains have a cooler climate than the rest of the domain, with snowfall in the higher elevations during wintertime. Swampland and jungles are perpetually hot and occupy the central and eastern portions of Darkforth. A large stretch of volcanic wasteland takes up the northern area of the domain in the **Âhn** region. This inhospitable territory has one defining landmark visible from miles in all directions: a volcano named **Vanya**, translated as “mother” in Old Jurmehan. It is the only active volcano in Acia.

11.2 People

The peoples of Darkforth are diverse. There are three distinct races:

- **An-jurah.** The dominant segment of the Darkforth population. Originally from modern-day Meerjurmeh, the An-jurah entered the wilds of Darkforth just after the Year One and slowly spread over the domain, separating into disparate states ruled by warlords.
- **Idarians.** Native to the forests and lower elevations, these wild “hillmen” continue to live in clans as nomads, not only in Darkforth but across the Serpent’s Belt Mountains and parts of Mendegōsh. Westerners consider them barbarians.
- **Machoo.** Relatively unknown to the rest of the world, the Machoo are indigenous to the warmer regions of Darkforth and are the most primitive of civilized cultures. Machoo villages are spread throughout Darkforth. The people, mostly converted to Sanism, live peacefully within the An-jurahn-run states.

The following goes into more detail regarding these peoples.

11.3 An-jurah

The An-jurah have lived in Darkforth for over three millennia. After their defeat in the Great War, they splintered into two groups, half settling in modern-day Terjurmeh and the other half heading east across the Meerjurmehan countryside, until they entered the forests of Darkforth. Since then, they have spread across the domain and prospered. The An-jurah maintain ties with their geographically separated Ter-jurahn descendants through the leadership of the An-jurahn Temple. Other than this relationship, the rest of Western civilization knows little of the An-jurah, except what the history books say. The An-jurah speak Jurmehan as their primary language and **An-jek**, or low tongue, secondarily. Like their Ter-jurah cousins, they are short and squat.

11.4 Military

Warriors wear horned helmets and armor, including emblazoned breastplates, shin, and forearm guards. Black and red are favored colors, the black symbolizing the dark power of their god, San, and the red the spilled blood of their enemies. They fight with swords and spears at close range and use longbows to assail opponents from a distance.

Horn colors signify the warrior's hierarchy within the military ranks. A white-horn is the equivalent of a lieutenant, a red-horn a captain, a gray-horn a major, and a black-horn a general.

11.5 Government

The An-jurah are deeply territorial. Over the centuries, settlements and villages turned into states with distinct but shifting borders. Chieftains became warlords, and territorial disputes arose, ending in bloodshed and the transfer of power, and change in borders. Although the Temple remained a central part of An-jurahn daily life, it never took on a secular role, and therefore, the fighting continued . . . until three centuries ago.

Âhn, the center of the An-jurahn Temple, has slowly become the most powerful state in Darkforth. Its capital city, **Symorrah**, is now considered the capital of all An-jurah and, many say, Darkforth. A tribal council controls secular affairs with the role of warlord supplanted by a War Chief, the most powerful layman position among the people.

The tribal council's current initiative, backed by the Temple, is the unification of all states. Many of the northern states fall under the council's control, with warlords as participating members. Annexing the southern states is slow. The Southerners are less cultured than their Northern counterparts and are fiercely opposed to cooperative governing.

11.6 Religion

The **An-jurahn Temple**, or "Temple" in the vernacular, varies from the Terjurmehan Temple. Much of the Temple is local to the An-jurahn states and exists in a more primitive form than its Terjurmehan sister organization. Only within the last few centuries has the Temple taken on a more centralized role, accumulating power within Âhn, where the main temple is located.

Six **high priests** lead the Temple—the equivalents of Articulates of Terjurmeh—with one holding the role of **grand high priest**, currently the **High Priest of the Blood Sect**. The role carries tremendous power, but not on the same scale as the Mighty One, the Terjurahn incarnate of San in Acia, because of disparate leadership of the people, split among warring states.

Each high priest heads up a different order, called a sect. There are **six sects** in the An-jurahn Temple:

- Blood

- Moon
- Death
- Fire
- Shadow
- Warrior (Su-yi)

Like the Ter-jurah, priests make up the bulk of the clergy, followed by clerics and acolytes in the hierarchy.

Priests often shave their heads as a display of status, leaving just a ponytail. They stain their scalps in dark-red discs as a pledge of fealty to their god and tattoo the inner circumference of the circles with sharp-edged runes needled in black ink. Like their Terjurmehan brethren, they wear seraks hanging from necklaces. One addresses an An-jurahn priest as **High One** and refers to them in the third person as **His** or **Her Holiness**.

Most fanatical and feared among the Temple is an order of priests called the **Su-yi (Warrior Sect)**. Su-yi are warrior priests used by the Temple to enforce canon law and put down secular uprisings. They are vicious in their methods. The ruthless priests take down warlords when the need arises. To display their loyalty to their religion and god, they tattoo the crowns of their shaved heads with the holy delta in solid black, saving a small circle of hair they grow long into a ponytail. They never cut their hair, a sign of their never-ending devotion to their cause.

Su-yi blood-let in service of their god, letting droplets of blood dribble into an iron cup of offering, heated over hot coals. The iron in the cup is the key to **Azul-nahg**, the **Rite of Binding**. The unholy properties of the metal allow it to bind the blood onto itself, fusing the body to the vessel to prepare the host to receive a demon from the

Netherworld. The demon, tempted by the blood, invades the vessel, only to bind to it, trapping itself in the process and becoming a servant to its wielder. Once bound, the trinity of demon, vessel, and priest enter an unholy contract, allowing the host to wield the demon's nether power as his own. Only death can release the bond.

11.7 Holidays

The An-jurah observe most of the same holidays as the Ter-jurah. Some sects practice offerings in special ceremonies held during different phases of the moon or times of the year. Lunar and solar eclipses play a large part in the timing of sacrifices and offerings for certain sects.

11.8 Allies and enemies

The An-jurah maintain a symbiotic peacefulness with their indigenous neighbors. Conversion to Sanism has made Idarians and Machoo allies in the wild. Of strategic importance is the alliance with the Ter-jurah, who also believe in an end-days scenario where the followers of San will rise up against the followers of Jah and raze their enemies and unite the world under one faith. While the An-jurah have traditionally warred among themselves, they hold enmity with any who enter their domain and have encouraged their barbaric allies to wage war on those races near their borders. It is for this reason no outsiders enter Darkforth and live to tell the tale.

11.9 Commerce

Barter is still the key form of commerce among the An-jurah, although the more developed states have established a monetary system. Trade is isolated to intrastate trade and occasionally interstate commerce. International relations are nonexistent, nor is it a consideration.

11.10 Idarians

Tall and lithe, these Darkforth natives live in clans ruled by chieftains. They're avid hunters and warriors and territorial by nature. **Idarians** are often called "**hillmen**" by westerners for the belief they live only in the hills. They are in fact a nomadic people who travel far and wide across a myriad of terrains and territories. Idarians occupy the greatest geographic span on the planet, living in hills, plains, forests, and even jungles. Idarians who settled in the Northwest became modern-day Prallites, and those in the Southwest became citizens of the Provinces of the South over the centuries. Many westerners label Idarians as savages and consider their continuous encroachment on the more civilized nations to be barbaric and threatening. They do this mostly out of ignorance and fear, forgetting their genesis, which often resulted because of migration.

Idarians hunt, forage and trap game to survive. They speak various dialects of their own guttural tongue, but the more educated clansmen speak Jurmehan or An-jek. One of the oddest (and least understood) traits is how they greet foreigners. They whiff the air whenever they encounter a stranger. If the scent displeases them, they make a face, which can bring about aggression toward the stranger, even an arrow to the throat.

Idarians vary in skin tone from reddish-brown to deep copper like the Machoo. They distinguish themselves among clans using feathers, piercings, tattoos, animal hides, and brightly colored jewelry. They often keep their hair long, which they manage with leather headbands or circlets of metal, particularly when on horseback, on the hunt, or on patrol. Facial decorations include piercings of the nose, cheeks, and ears, and beaded necklaces or dangling trinkets of stone or bone, coarse outfits with colorful feathers or patches of

hide, tribal-patterned tattoos on their faces, necks, or arms. Warriors like to paint black lines in geometric, jagged patterns across the face to intimidate rivals.

Idarians are excellent warriors, using javelins or bows and arrows to fell prey and navigate the wilds upon their steeds. They typically fashion their arrowheads with bone, horn, or stone, although recent An-jurahn influence has better armed them with iron broadheads used for hunting and warfare, and equipped them with superior longbows for firing missiles at a distance. Men and women are equally formidable warriors, often forming hunting parties of mixed sexes. They're also capable horsemen, navigating difficult terrains upon the backs of their steeds.

The Idarians refer to San as the "night god." Like the An-jurah, they prey to San and give thanks for his blessing.

11.11 Machoo

Also called **Machoo Indians**, the **Machoo** are typically found in the warmer climes of Darkforth. They are short and skinny by nature and dress and live as primitives, confined to small villages spread throughout Darkforth. Machoo, like Idarians, believe in San and recognize the An-jurahn Temple as the official religious organization in the domain. They speak their own tongue, which sounds remarkably similar to the Idarian language, although the two are as different as Jurmehan and Korinian.

The height of their civilization lasted between 1100 and 1300, although it's a rough estimate, as their history was carved into stone relics and monuments, many eroded over time by the persistent rains. At their peak, the Machoo built pyramids and had kings who ruled over chiefdoms in West Darkforth. They used the pyramids for rituals and sacrifice, but also as cultural and spiritual centers. The pyramids honored the old gods who had

dominion over wind, water, thunder, war, birth, death, and fertility. Members of the royal family exhibited strength through barbaric acts, such as bloodletting of their own bodies after numbing themselves first by smoking leaves from the rare tika tree.

Machoo are a short people with copper skin that borders on nut-brown. Their noses are flat and wide like spades and their hair is dark brown. Some tribes trim their hair into bowl cuts. Because of the warmer climates of the jungle the Machoo often inhabit, their garb is limited to simple loincloths made of dried grass and reeds. For decoration and individuality, they add colored feathers they drape from their hips. They also string bits of bone, wood, and stone to form long earrings that cause their ears to droop. It's not uncommon for the tribespeople to pierce their noses with bones, wear lip plates to distend their lower lips, and scarify their faces and chests in unique, bumpy patterns to showcase their beauty and strength. Males over the age of thirteen will undergo scarification as a rite of passage from boy to man, choosing patterns they hope will attract females. Women rarely cover their breasts, showcasing their serried patterns of decorative scars. Children may wear decorations such as black squiggles, dots, and dashes painted onto their faces and bodies.

Machoo hunt with spears, bows and arrows, and use machetes and other rudimentary bladed weapons. They use the cover of their natural surroundings to aid in the element of surprise, ambushing enemies and game alike. They engage in limited husbandry to grow grains for milling into flour for unleavened bread, a staple in their diet, although they often harvest starchy tubers, which they dry and mill for a variety of foodstuffs.

The Machoo live in small villages that comprise a single tribe, mostly in clearings or along a river's edge. They live in huts with thatched roofs and use the wood of their

forests as building materials. They construct shrines of stone in the forests to pay homage to their god and ancestors.

High priests offer their people a channel to the divine. The priests wear headdresses of bright plumage and carry staves that symbolize their connection to San. One addresses a Machoon priest as **High One**.

12. Kushan

Although technically not a domain in Acia, **Kushan** is unique because it belongs to no country, nor is it claimed. Also referred to as the **City of Night**, Kushan has a long-standing history dating back almost 4,000 years. It's long been assumed to be a ruined ancient city—cursed and feared—but in fact, it is very much alive and well. The citizens call themselves Kushites.

Great walls rise from the desert sand to surround this fortress of a city. Fed by an underground river from the Northern Range to the north and nestled at the mouth of the most massive subterranean cavern in the world, the city is self-sustaining. The cavern connects a tunnel system that runs clear to the mountains. What makes the city unique is that it's hidden by a curtain of darkness that appears to be a vaellra suspended in place with sand drifting upward from the desert floor. This curtain is called the **Rift**, a magical barrier created after the city was originally destroyed by invaders. Like a vaellra, the motionless sandstorm is violent and capable of killing trespassers.

Kushites live as isolationists in the middle of the desert, thanks to the underground river that supplies fresh water from the mountains in the north. An aquifer supplies well water to the citizens. The **Cavern of Dei**, with its fertile stone terraces and entry to the life-giving water source, allows the Kushites to grow the foodstuffs they need, tend to

cattle, and nourish the population without importing anything. The self-sufficient nature of the population provides ample opportunity for creativity and ingenuity. Smithers make their own armaments, tools, and armor. Clothiers make textiles and clothing. Coopers, tanners, tinkers, and a host of other craftsmen use their skills to ensure the city remains autonomous.

Unfortunately, the Kushites live under a veil of fear. The **Malaji**, their rulers, govern ruthlessly. They comprise ten wizened men thousands of years old, once prominent An-jurahn magi. They forsook their souls for power and, in doing so, trapped themselves for eternity. Their master is **Gadreel**, one of the fallen angels known as the **Watchers**, who holds the city captive under his fell power, including the Malaji. At one time, Gadreel lived among the Watchers in Aerth (Dagoth), only to be punished by Jah in the end and put in chains.

The story goes that San freed the Watchers, but not Gadreel. Gadreel eventually tricked one of his brethren into breaking his bond and destroyed the angel. He fled through a portal to Acia, where he wandered the great deserts until coming upon Kushan. It was there that he gave the An-jurahn magi immortality for their souls, binding their spirits to him and making himself a god to them and all who lived in Kushan. To prevent their escape, and to ensure no one could enter the fabled city, Gadreel constructed the Rift. The Malaji, unable to die, have grown decrepit in their old age, but the angelic power drawn from their master sustains them. It's a miserable existence for all because the Malaji cannot die, the citizens cannot leave, and Gadreel, the renegade angel of Heaven, is afraid of both San and Jah and can find refuge only within his own prison.

Gadreel is named the **Prince of Vanity**, appearing as a comely young man in human form. His servants address him as **Exalted One** to appease him and prey to him as the **God of Kushan**. Gadreel is ever wanting, ever needing praise to maintain his tortured existence among mortal kind.

The **Malajus Exetor** is the title given to the lead Malajus. In 1207, a Malajus Exetor named Mallavant the Cold began a century-long war against Terjurmeh. According to Terjurmeh's history, the conflict ended in a duel between Mallavant and the reigning Mighty One of Terjurmeh. The Mighty One purportedly killed Mallavant and imprisoned his soul in black diamond in the Shrine of San. The remaining Malaji were branded heretics and executed by the Temple. The second day of San-tel-moor commemorates their victory. However, the deaths of the Malaji are not corroborated, nor are the Malaji proven to be gone for the world. Some believe they still rule in Kushan.

13. Dagoth

Dagoth is the origin world of mankind. It was originally called **Aerth**, the “land of plenty,” created by **Jovah (Jah, the Creator)**. According to the Watcher, Azazel, Jah spawned man from dust, where the rains mixed with the earth, and the mud took shape. It dried, cracked, and out came the first man. Jovah saw that man was good, and he begot woman, and mankind multiplied and prospered. But man became wicked, for in his heart he harbored lust, greed, hate, vanity, and jealousy. Jovah selected a handful of good people—the **Chosen**—to survive the **Great Flood** that destroyed the wicked. The offspring of the Chosen gave rise to a second generation of man, which became corrupt in the Creator's eyes. Because Jovah vowed never to flood the world again, he created

mankind anew, this time in Acia, using the ashes of the Chosen's bones in the hope his third attempt would rectify the failings of his first two creations.

It was during the time of the Great Flood that the **Watchers**—angels sent to watch over mankind—were punished in Dagoth for their corrupting influence over humans and for mating and begetting children, giants like themselves (estimated at around seven feet in height). They were set in chains as punishment to watch their children die along with the rest of the wicked people of the world. **Sag-ahn (San)** freed the Watchers, bringing the fallen angels under his fold to do his bidding.

At the height of their civilization, the peoples of Dagoth prospered and built great metropolises that flourished. During Petrah's visit to Dagoth, he comes upon his birthplace, the **Iron City**, a former architectural marvel, now in decay, scavenged by the locals for its rich supply of building materials. Great towers of steel and glass once crowded the busy avenues, now in ruin and disarray, a shadow of their former glory. They speak of the great engineering feats of the past, lost to the inheritors of this savaged world.

A great pestilence affects Dagoth. Along with the perpetual winter, disease has ravaged the world, which now dies a slow but inevitable death. Pasturelands and forests are in decline; food is scarce; life is brutal. City dwellers use creative farming practices to keep crops warm by sheltering them from the elements by growing produce and other foodstuffs within the skeletons of tall buildings. Ranchers also use the city, herding livestock into sheltered spaces away from the elements.

Dagothans abide by **the Law**. The Law creates order among the denizens. Those who break the Law, face punishment. A magistrate presides over a court in a justice hall called

a **Juditarium**, where they determine the guilt of the accused, along with sentencing.

Magistrates are addressed as **Your Honorable**.

Dagothans speak many languages, but the common tongue is **Glesh**. The clergy and military know the priest's tongue, which is Jurmehan.

Greetings, especially ones of respect, involve touching one's fingers to the forehead with the left hand.

The disparate peoples of Dagoth are divided along religious lines: those who follow Jovah (**Jovahns**) and those who follow Sag-ahn (**Sag-ahnists**).

13.1 Jovahns

Jovahns believe in **Jovah**, the **God of Light (Jah** to the peoples of Acia). The **Peshte**, also referred to as mountaineers, are the primary constituent of Jovahns in Dagoth. They maintain strongholds in the mountains, harrying their enemies on foot and horseback. Jovahns are a fierce, free people, but also a disadvantaged people, as their enemies have decimated their kind over the centuries. Weakened, they stand fast against a growing darkness and face potential genocide at the hand of their enemy.

13.2 Sag-ahnists

Sag-ahnists are the sworn enemies of the Jovahns. Aman's rise to power in Dagoth has allowed him to unite several peoples of Dagoth, all followers of **Sag-ahn**, the **God of Darkness**, also called the **God of Shadows**, **All Father**, **Truthforger**, and **Darkwreather**. These Sag-ahnists include the **Angorians** from the forests, the **Novatoa** from the hills, the **Meslins** from the desert, the **Jaketh** from the prairie lands, and the **Ska'rites** from the sea. The Angorians control the Iron City, the Meslins the outlying desert lands, including the castle and city Aman uses as his stronghold.

Sag-ahnists display their devotion to Sag-ahn through the branding of their left wrists. The left is preferred over the right, as it represents the glory attributed to the “left hand of darkness.” They refer to themselves as **the Marked**.

The **moodra** is the branded symbol of the Marked. It depicts a serpent wreathed in flame with a circle around it. The circle represents infinity and the undying devotion to Sag-ahn. The serpent’s head starts left of center, with gaping jaws that project a lick of fire for a tongue. Its body spirals clockwise, terminating at the center of the spiral. The serpent is called the **nautilus serpent**, shaped like an inverted nautilus. It’s said to be born of flame, reaching out from its genesis toward oblivion.

Another symbol is the **syriak**, the triangular device with the all-seeing eye in the center, similar to the serak of the Ter-jurah.

The **Shrine** is the religious body of Sag-ahnists as well as the name of the religious building where they gather. Devotees pledge their faith at shrines, the most devout wearing wooden masks over their faces to block out distractions as they pray. They often paint their masks gold to exhibit the value of their faith, the eyes holy black, with hollows over their mouths to let out the prayers and dribbles of red tears on the cheeks to symbolize the shedding of blood as a testament of faith. Bloodletting is also seen as a sign of faith, with droplets used on masks to show off the devotion to fellow Sag-ahnists. The **Great Shrine** is the largest shrine in Dagoth, a few days’ march from the Iron City.

Enforcers are anointed servants of the Shrine whose duty is to enforce the faith. They are like the San-mahadi of the Terjurmehan Temple in their mission to capture heretics and bring them to justice.

13.3 Amerans

The **Amerans** were once a powerful people, gifted builders, and master craftspeople credited with many of the metropolises in Dagoth. Their demise is unknown, but their contributions live on with their many monuments and cities, deemed engineering marvels for their mastery over steel and glass, and the scale of their buildings.