

Tel Zohar: Players Guide

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Welcome to Tel Zohar

Nero Central AZ chapter (pending)

Within this document you will find the basic information about the region in which your PCs will be interacting, the people, environment, important places and common monsters and beasts. It will also provide you with important OOC information about particular rules or scenarios that are unique to our chapter.

We welcome your input for our world and encourage every player to create detailed characters with rich background and history and submit them to the Plot team.

We welcome any suggestions or creative contributions you have to help flesh out Tel Zohar, you are encouraged to write up histories, cultures, events, as well as offer plot suggestions or ideas for NPCs, events or monsters from our players. These ideas can be submitted in writing to the Chapter GM's and owners; Marian Brock-Andersen, Billy Clark & Jess Oortman, can be contacted at phxtrinityentertainment@gmail.com.

We will have a website with forums, rules, information and much more in the near future at this time you can join our growing community on either Facebook: Tel Zohar (Nero Central AZ) or Google + Community's: Tel Zohar.

Please keep in mind this is a living document, it will evolve as we grow as a group.

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Chapter Rules & Guidelines

- ❖ We are family friendly groups, children are allowed on site but must wear an orange sash or head band to designate them Non-Combat if under the age of 14 and be supervised by a parent or guardian who is responsible for them on site.
- ❖ All players in Tel Zohar are expected to read the official NERO rule book that is available as PDF from nerolarp.com.
- ❖ No NPC actions on forum between events any PC interactions with NPCs must go through plot.
- ❖ Level Cap in Town – Level 6 (subject to change)
- ❖ Necromancy is legal and undead are commonly seen working as labor or running establishments. Not all undead are inherently evil with in Tel Zohar.
- ❖ Loner garb is available but limited please request its use when you preregister for an event.
- ❖ Brand new NERO players are strongly encouraged to monster at least a few hours at their first few events to help familiarize themselves with game play and rules.
- ❖ Rape or Sexual Assault is not an acceptable in game / in character plot or interaction. If anyone ever cry's Rape call an immediate hold and get the person to first aid directly.

*** *Approved Play Tests***

- ❖ Racial Traits Supplement Version 1.31

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Costume Guidelines:

- ❖ Costumes must be appropriate for the races listed in the Core NERO rule book.
- ❖ Your costume must not require spotters, stage ninjas, levitation devices, or any other external assistance to be safe for you to move around in.
- ❖ You must be able to maneuver safely across uneven terrain, through brush and scrub trees and between tents and fire rings.
- ❖ Any part of the costume that will come in contact with other players must meet the weapons safety guidelines from the Core NERO rule book. Wings, tails, limbs etc.
- ❖ Costumes must be able to be worn for 4 hours in direct sun and temperatures over 90 degrees without causing heat exhaustion.
- ❖ Plot, Marshals and Chapter GM's have the right to deem a costume unsafe at any time during the event and require the player change into something that is not a potential hazard to them or other players.

Character Creation Notes:

Characters can be built using the following alternate structure example.

Race: Any

Culture Pack: Barbarian / Uncivilized, Gypsy / Nomadic or Civilized

This means you can play an Elf who is also a barbarian and lives in the Shajara Mountains or an Elf who lives in a nomadic tribe in the Surmad Desert or an Elf who lives in the City of Astoria.

Tel Zohar is located on several trade routes, because of this, your character can be from anywhere we are not requiring even first level characters to be natives.

When creating the southern native cultures any nomadic tribal or early settled people would be appropriate, Middle Eastern, African, Native American, or South American, and Mediterranean influence along the coast would also be appropriate. In the northern area, we have introduced a heavy influence of northern European tribal and semi-settled people such as Vikings, Saxons, and Celts. This influence is from loggers, hunters, and furriers who would travel south to the mountains to ply their trade and eventually settled and influenced the culture.

We hope this gives everyone a rich and varied environment to play in. Your character, race, clothing, mannerisms, and social beliefs can be unique as you want them to be. It also makes it very easy for out of chapter visitors or Nero members that move from other places to bring their characters with them.

*FAQ

Safe to assume starting level for the game is 1.0?

You are correct, new characters start with 50 build, but we can allow the purchase of blankets ahead of time. Once we have the contract signed, and Logistics access, you could create your character with your membership, donate goods to the game, and get blankets with your goblin points. This would allow you to have additional build for your character before the start of our first official event.

Level Cap?

The level cap will *probably* (Totally subject to change) be limited to a specific area, and will be based on the highest home-chapter character, plus a certain number of build. Even level capped, many outside-of-town modules will not be capped. There are several reasons for this, and there will be an in-play way of completely removing the cap. There will probably be mystery, political intrigue, and maybe a little death involved.

Is it safe to assume that all ranged profs are +1 here as well, or do they have additional damage included?

All profs are plus 1, be they one-handed or two-handed. Standard profs are not only hand specific, but weapon specific. Master profs are only hand specific, but work with all weapons you have a skill for. Base damage on a bow is 3, if memory serves

How does the skill buy back works?

Buyback only counts for Profs and Backstabs, for instance. You buy the requisite critical attacks, then it is converted to a prof when you hit the requirements. The critical attacks are removed from your character, and a permanent +1 standard/master prof replaces it.

Can I have a Noble Rank/Titles

Yes and No. Plot will not be assigning Nobel ranks or titles to players. If you wish to be a leader then you will have to earn your title and power through in character interaction with the players and NPCs. In fact we strongly encourage the players to build their own

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faction, tribe, gang or similar and use their collective assets to influence the political, economic and cultural structure of the land. We will reevaluate this as time goes on and may bring in official noble ranks at a later date.

****Seraldry***

- Astoria: Green and Purple
- Furu Ridge: Blue and White
- Four Winds Mercantile: Black and Gold
- Al Zohar: Maroon, Purple and Gold
- OOG - Solid White
- Non-Combatant - Solid Yellow, or Yellow and White

Any player created factions should choose one to three color combination for their belt favors

Land of Tel Zohar



Proposed area of Nero world – Pending Final Approval

Tel Zohar is a land of two regions, the south an aired desert with little water and less shade. Its sandy landscape is dotted with scraggly low trees and raged brush mixed with proud cactus. Rises of craggy hills break up the otherwise flat monotony of the land and offer the best options for travelers looking for relief from the unforgiving sun. Somehow among this harsh and unforgiving land the people have found ways to thrive, their art and clothing bright with color and adorned with elegant stones and precious metals.

The desert's summer storms are sudden and violent winds whip up the sand into great billowing waves of darkness, these storms are sometimes accompanied by lightning and thunder and preceded or followed by short torrential downpours of muddy rain. Those who do not seek refuge in the mountains or foot hills hunker down for the summer staying close to protective structures, shuttering windows and doors when the sky takes on the color of sand and riding out the violent outbursts that make travel even more dangerous than the blistering sun and scarce water.

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To the north the desert slowly gives up its hold to the mountains, cactus replaced by sparse evergreens that fill in as the elevation rises until forming a respectable forest. Rivers and lakes add lushness and draw various game animals to their banks. Many of the people are a mix of desert dwelling folk and immigrants from the north seeking the bounty of fur and logging trade in the area. The summertime migration of animals and people feeling the summer storm bring a yearly influx of trade and help bolster the northern peoples for their snow bound winters.

Another interesting feature of Tel Zohar is a mystical drain that comes up on those who enter into towns or large settlements. The feeling creeps up slowly and soon one finds their magic and might of arms lessened, as if their physical or mystical strength is being leeched away. For some it's truly unsettling others a minor inconvenience, either way no one has yet been able to neither explain the effect nor find a way to banish it.

Trade Roads

There are two major trade roads that cut through Tel Zohar and meet at Arim's Well, each arm of the road is simply called by its primary direction.

Winter Run Road: The northern trade road which passes through the mountains near the Logging camp Furu is located just off the western side of Katen Lake.

Kantar Pass: The South Trade Road extend into the desert a dangerous stretch of road that is used almost exclusively by mining caravans as there are few settlements to the south of Arim's Well.

Shemdar Road: The East Trade Road cuts away from Arim's Well in a somewhat northern fashion and eventually passes through Astoria's territory before taking a southern turn.

Nephgrim's Way: The West Trade Road extends to the west all the way out to the coast. About halfway to the coast if one turns south they will find Nimbus Oasis or death in the desert.

Surmad Desert

Resources

The land is rich with soft metals, copper, and gold, in particular, semi-precious stones and exotic animal bones are also prevalent, so much so even the common folk often wear adornment on their body or clothing made from these materials. The quality of the crafting and the quantity of adornment are the true defining mark of economic wealth when it comes to these materials. Well water and farmable land also are marks of wealth and power in the southern region.

Nomadic Tribes

The people of the Surmad Desert are largely tribal, the majority of which live a nomadic lifestyle, and their homes are tents or semi-permanent structures that can be moved easily. They follow the herds along their migration routes. Many of them use domesticated wild horses and dogs to assist in their hunting and traveling. Their clothing is usually made of animal skin cured and painted with bright colors and patterns. They hold firmly to a very earth-centric shamanistic worldview, revealing the wisdom of the elders, the power of ancestral spirits and the forces of the world around them. These tribes follow the animal migrations and like them move north to avoid the summer storms that make the region particularly dangerous.

Settled Tribes

Permanent structures are usually made of earth and stone and reinforced with lumber from the north and can be found along the few small creeks and rivers or at natural springs. Some tribes live in caves or dwellings carved into the low rocky mountains. The settled people raise animals for food and wool which they weave into fantastic fabrics. They raise native plants in small gardens next to wells to supplement their food needs as well. Most settlements are built inward, so that doors open towards other structures often creating a ring of homes or buildings in small clusters when not built directly into the earth or stone. This provides some protection for the people when the summer storms hit. The largest settlement is the City of Astoria, high walls

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courtyards and small windows are typical of the city's architecture designed to help provide protection to the inhabitants from the elements.

Clothing & Armor

Most of those who live in the Surmad area opt for lightweight fabrics to keep cool in the sun. There is a love of bright colors and shiny accents to be added to their clothing, often creating an elaborate and rich costume. While not particularly conservative it is not uncommon for people to cover much of their skin to protect it from the sun. Armor tends to be made from leather with metal accents.

In the south full suits of metal armor are not recommended, the wearer often becoming ill in a short time. Most armor is made of hardened leather or hides with metal adornment to reinforce vital areas. Even in the north, the summers can reach into the high 90s and the tradeoff for not killing yourself from heat exhaustion is favorable to the better protection.



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Places & Persons of Interest

Arim's Well

Arim's Well is a small freshwater spring located in the middle of the wastes, while too small to support a large settlement it has become the main stop for caravans moving east - west and north -south called the Crosswinds Bazaar. The Well is considered a neutral area while no one cares if travelers kill each other those who disrupt trade or who assault and steal from the merchants will soon find themselves unable to do business.

Crosswinds Bazaar

Crosswinds Bazaar is managed by the Four Winds Mercantile which has a permanent setup at Arim's Well while many of the merchants come and go the Four Winds themselves are always present ready to do business with any caravan, adventurer or

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wanderer. The Mercantile has a strictly neutral policy; they will do business with whoever has the goods or coin and don't ever take sides. Publicly.

The Four Winds have several smaller traveling merchants, who set up shop in wagons or tents in various other areas of Tel Zohar and designate themselves based on the region they are working in. North wind Traders, South wind Traders, East wind Traders or West wind Traders.

Karich Asud

The head of the Crosswinds Mercantile family, Karich is somewhat fluid in gender and never directly interacts with anyone outside of the family and referred to as he or she interchangeably. When asked to clarify the response is usually. "Karich is.... well Karich."

The Crosswinds Mercantile is all about making money, they are against anyone or anything that will demand taxes or tariffs or put regulations on their trade like Queen Eriba intends to.

City of Astoria

Home of Queen Eriba, Astoria is often called the Jewel of Surmad, its tall walls and courtyards decorated with carvings and painted in brilliant tones. The small river that runs through the center of the city is planted with trees and small irrigation channels carry water to the many gardens and fountains in the city public and private. She has taken up her father's banner and seeks to unite the tribal people and bring peace to the savage lands of her home. Should she attain this goal she will declared herself Empress and name the most loyal of her followers Lords and bestow the most verdant lands to them to govern.

Queen Eriba Abyad

The daughter of the most powerful Warlord in the Surmad region, with his sudden and suspicious death only a few years after successfully establishing the only real city in the region she has taken up his mantle and goal to unite all of Tel Zohar under her rule. Many

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have sworn their allegiance to the Queen of Astoria or who are paid well for their loyalty. The Queen unites the Surmad Region and creates the Astorian Empire that was her father's and now her Dream.

Nimbus Oasis

The largest body of water in the southern region of Surmad, the legends says that the water of the Oasis glow with a mystical light, however, no one has ever seen evidence to support this. The most popular theory is that the first people to find the oasis and live to tell about it was so near death from thirst and exposure they hallucinated the glow. This theory is also used to dismiss other strange tales of the oasis and its surrounding territory. The Oasis is often disputed territory many insist that it should be considered neutral and open to any but only a fool would not seek to try and control the largest source of water in the area as well as the only land that has the potential for farming.

Shajara Mountains

Resources

In the north fur and lumber are the most common sources of industry though mining is also lucrative.

Cities / Settlements / Dwellings

With land that is able to sustain settlements the homes are made of wood and stone, though still tribal in nature the mountain folk are quickly moving to establishing what others might consider ‘civilized’ cultures. Many of the settlers here are traders, hunters and furriers, trading posts that grew into small settlements and some to villages and towns. There are few settlements that could be called cities in this area, the closest is the Logging town run by Arth.

Clothing & Armor

The further north one goes the heavier and warmer the clothing becomes as the high reaches of the Shajara Mountains get snow in the winter and stay cool in the summer. Shajara clothing tends to lean towards layered tunics of heavier weave, leather and fur accents, bone and horn details as well as metal and semi-precious stone accents acquired through trade or mining. The strong influence of immigrants and settlers from northern peoples has also influenced the clothing and language.



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Places & Persons of Interest

Katen Lake

The lake is situated in a large cradle of the mountains just below Furu Ridge. Its particular shape, the lay of the trees and the lands creates a whispering sound when the wind: which seems to always be present, blows through the area and over the water. An excellent source of fish and watering hole of choice for the other mountain wildlife it was an ideal place to set up the logging camp. There are a number of legends about the lake, most of which revolve around a woman searching for someone or something, the whispering sound that the wind makes is said to be her voice. Weak willed individuals are believed to be lured by the voice to the water and either drowned or die of exposure especially in the winter.

Furu Ridge

Originally a logging camp Furu has grown until it might qualify as a town if a large number of the inhabitants were not seasonal workers. The influence of the northern tribe from which Arth was born is evident in the building construction and decor. The town holds a few dozen A-frame simple cabins and a large central lodge which has become a bustling tavern and inn over the years. Many of the seasonal loggers and hunters still live in campsites outside the town others have built cabins which they reside in when at Furu to work or hunt.

Jabal "Arth"

Arth is a man of means in the north, big and strong, skilled warrior, hunter, trapper and now runs the largest Logging camp turned town of Furu Ridge. He is well aware of the desires of Queen Eriba and knows that when she finishes uniting the Surmad people she

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will turn her greedy eyes north to his mountain home. Arth wants most of all to be left in peace to run his business with his children and watch his grandchildren grow.

Like most of the mountain folk he is fiercely independent but he also knows that their only hope may lie in banding under one leader and the perks of being King are pretty nice too. Arth's followers are usual those who he has earned the respect of through business or his skills as a hunter and possibly because he has killed a bear by himself, he has the skin to prove it. .

North wind Trade Post

The northern representatives of Crosswinds Mercantile, goods ordered from any of the other Crosswinds operations can be picked up here or vice versa. Though not as well provisioned as the Crosswinds site, a North winds representative can get you anything you need, with enough time and coin.

Bestiary

Almost any monster in the Nero world can be found in the land of Tel Zohar, Goblins, Hobgoblins, Orcs, Trolls, Giants, Gnolls, Kobolds, Angry Bears, lizards, scorpions, snakes, spiders, rust monsters, giant fire ants, various elementals, undead, living plants, Sandmen and a variety of fairy folk.

Kraktus

The Kraktus is a living cactus like plant, it tends to have eight arms or protrusions that can extend and grapple unsuspecting passerby's. The victims are dragged to the base of the Kraktus and pinned down by thick ropes of roots where they are used as fertilizer for the plant.

Yatan

Small humanlike creatures that cause mischief, they break things and steal things and often play mean spirited pranks to cause other creatures to fight. Souring milk, undoing work that someone completed, taking items from one person's home and putting it in the home of another person who they had just quarreled with. Because of their size and upright posture Yatan often disguise themselves as children but they prefer to play their tricks at night or in the early or late hours.

Loshe

The Yatan's smaller and uglier, evil cousins, these imps can turn invisible for short periods of time, they like to play pranks too, but they prefer to poison the well, or stab people with hat pins over simply causing discord.

Musat

Small pony sized creature that appears to be a cross between a coyote and a lizard. The Musat has a long tail, patches of fur or scales and razor sharp teeth and claws. They mostly prey on livestock but will also attack small children or adults that are alone when they can.

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Cervideva

Half human half deer or other forest animal this creature is believed to be a corrupted nature spirit or mutated blending of a person and animal caused by evil magic's gone terribly wrong. These creatures are somewhat mindless and crave flesh of living creatures with an insatiable hunger. If not killed quickly they can become quite terrible growing in strength and hunger with each kill. These creatures usually are found in the mountains almost never in the desert.

Tehihan

Short creatures that might be an offshoot of Hobblings or Dwarfs based on their height, build and overall hairiness. Tehihan live in the region of lowland where the desert starts to turn into the mountainous region. They are extremely fast and very deadly fighters despite their size. They can be incapacitated by normal means but no one has been able to kill one. The Tehihan travel and attack in groups of 3 or 4. Usually when encountered they will call for others to join them. Most people use the Run Like Crazy tactic when they encounter a Tehihan band.

Qanoen:

The Qanoen is a parasite; it passes from one Qanoen to host and then forms another Qanoen. The Qanoen is a rotting human head from which leathery wings have grown out of the ear holes, its tail is made up of the human spine, from the mouth and nose three muscular tongues with sharp spines which can shoot out three feet from the gaping maw. These tongues are prehensile and can catch and reel in prey or hold it while the mouth descends on to it to eat. Being stuck by a spine has a chance of being infected, the parasite larva will travel through the bloodstream to the brain where it sets up shop in a matter of days the host becomes violently crazy and prone to self-harm and wandering off away from other people. When a victim fall incapacitated the parasite tears the head free and flies off to start its own life cycle.

Legends and History

The Lost City of Gideon

There is a ruin of an ancient city that was once called Gideon, which lies 10 miles North of Nephgrim way and 6 miles West of Winter Run. This is a place of scorched and the blasted earth, where only cacti and thistle trees are now standing as silent sentinels, where a thriving metropolis once stood. Gideon was once the center of great trade, a mining city where golden spires rose high into the sky, schools of knowledge flourished here and wealth overflowed onto the streets. Legend has it that this is where the six Gems of the Desert came to rest in the great halls of King Nephgrim. It is said that the six gems ranged from the size of a man's finger to the size of a grapefruit, which is a rare and sometimes sweet fruit.

As legend would have it, the Wildman of the North accompanied by Dwarves, numbering in the tens of thousands came to claim the Gems of the Desert. For the great wealth that they would bring, was easily amounted to five King's ransoms. However the city of Gideon was very well-equipped her armies outmatched the Wildman of the North three to one. Amongst Gideon's armies were trolls, Lizard kin and Humans. It is said that King Nephgrim, boasted to the citizens of Gideon, that his armies would be victorious against these dimwitted Wildman and Dwarfs of the North. Little did he know that the Northerners had ice dragons to accompany them in the slaughter and when the tide of northern army smashed into the walls of Gideon, it sounded as if a massive thunderclap ripped across the sky.

The trolls of Gideon were merciless upon the wild Northmen and the Dwarves for they were quicker at tossing large boulders than that of catapults and far superior even to that of the ballista on Gideon's battlements. It is said that the Lizard kin had a natural ability to create fire, burning those who managed to reach the top of the wall and climb over the parapets. But to no avail, once the ice dragons came the defenders of Gideon began to crumble. For six months this battle raged. Magic against dragons, trolls against the Dwarf's, catapults against humans and steel rang and armor ripped. Death danced joyously that day, until almost nothing was left standing, of the once, great city of Gideon. No one knows what happened to the six Gems of the Desert, some say they were sold, some say they were scattered to the four winds, but most say they were lost to the legend after 6000 years. Who can say?

Twig Wellwind, Scribe to the Executor of the Conclave of Den.

** Local Tribes, Settlements, Organization and Factions.*

Scorpion Tribe

Submitted by Travis Jones

Introduction:

The Scorpion tribe is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a weak minded or stupid tribe. Through countless generations they have survived the harshness and dangers of the untamed desert. It is through those generations of survival that the tribe has taken on a utilitarian mindset and culture in what is needed to survive in the shifting sands of the world.

Items of little or no use are tossed aside in lieu of an item that has several functions and uses. Only the smallest of items with massive sentimental value that has no real use would be kept. This is also seen in their language. They are VERY blunt and call things as they see them. There is no room for sparing another person's feelings. If they see someone acting like an idiot, they will tell that person so. There is no polite small talk, as small talk is a waste of time. There is no dickering. When a price is set, it is set. That is the price, nothing more. The BEST one could get for dickering from a member of the tribe is they will tell a non-tribe member what they are willing to pay for an item. If the offer is not accepted the tribe member will not waste time and walk off. Lies are not alien to the tribe and do have the ability to do so should the need arise. Although to them, lying is yet another waste of time.

Living in the desert, time is important, and to needless waste it is almost a sin. The tribe has patience and understands its need for survival, but to just waste time for the sake of wasting time, they cannot stand. Yes planning is important, but then one MUST act upon the plan if it is going to work.

To them, the tribe is family and survival of the family is important. Although the tribe firmly believes in self-reliance, it makes it all the more important when a fellow tribe member asks for help. To ask for help, in itself, from a fellow tribe member is something not taken lightly. To ask for help from a person outside their tribe is almost unheard of. Should a tribe member owe a debt to a person outside the tribe, that member will do whatever is needed to pay off said debt as quick as possible, as being indebted to a person outside the tribe is looked upon as a sign of weakness.

In the tribe the concept of 'personal items' is strange, as to them all members are part of the tribe, and thus all items owned by tribe members are owned by the tribe. To them a tool is a tool, is a tool, and it doesn't matter why is using it, as long as it is being used in a productive form. The only exception to this concept is weapons. A personal weapon has been fashioned and altered to tailor one user. In the hands of another, it will not be as useful as it would be in the hands of its owner. This does not mean that the weapon would be off limits to anyone else, just that said weapon belongs to one specific member of the tribe and they get priority with it.

History (as known by the tribe):

The sands of time are harsh. As such most of their 'real history' has been lost and buried. Thanks to oral tradition the history does live on. Although it should be known that with each passing generation the story changes a little bit here and there. Sometimes the brave deeds take on epic undertones and other, deemed less important facts, are left out for one reason or another.

According to the tribe, the first member of the tribe, Scor, was born out of the blowing sands of the desert. He was

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adopted by the giant King Scorpions that roamed the land back then. He grew up as one of them, learning their ways and fighting style. As he had been raised among them, when he reached adulthood, he stopped aging. For hundreds of seasons, he lived among the scorpions and eventually worked his way to being their king.

Although exactly HOW it came about is unclear, but he took a wife and they had many humanoid children. For many generations the children of Scor and the scorpions lived as equals. They lived in peace and prosperity in the shifting sands of the desert. They even managed to make a simple settlement. Sadly after many seasons, Scor died. He was entombed in a sacred shrine in the middle of the settlement. It was at that time, without leadership, that the children of Scor started to fight among themselves to decide who would be king. The infighting was bloody and dirty. Brother killed brother without fear or regret.

Seigo (the first) and a few of his brothers took the opportunity to leave the settlement. They vowed to remain nomadic as it was the settling down and too much free time that led to the evil thoughts and actions that transpired. He, along with 4 brothers and a small host of Giant Scorpions left the settlement and headed toward the setting sun. After many days travel, they knew that they needed to replenish their numbers. Then men took wives. (How this was done is glossed over)

A hierarchy of leadership was formed.

It was soon discovered that hauling a bunch of items with no practical use through the desert was a waste of energy and time. They were wasting resources just keeping useless items in good shape. It didn't take long for those of the new tribe to see the folly in owning such items, and said items were degraded. The concept of "avoid needless words" was next. With the howling winds, many words would get lost or misheard. It didn't take long for the tribe to say what they mean and what is needed.

Although there were other tribes in the desert, contact with them was kept short. One never knew when the other tribe might get brave, or stupid and try to attack. All deals and trades with other tribes were kept short a price was offered. A counter was given. If they did not agree in that counter offer, then there was no trade.

It is not known exactly how it happened, but the giant scorpions they had used as mounts vanished. Some believe that they died out or just left for one reason or another. Although some members of the tribe do own family heirlooms of scorpion hide armor (leather armor pieces) Some even a giant tail stinger that are used as a dagger.

For generations the tribe lives as this. Not anti-social, but still untrusting of those not part of the tribe. Although they dealt with all the other races from time to time, the tribe always saw them as weak and dependent on things that were of no use.

One morning after several poor trade encounters with the Spider Tribe, they were attacked. The Spider Tribe was offended with the Scorpion tribes refusal over the price of goods. The battle was long and bloody. After several days and nights of combat, the Spider Tribe finally stopped their assault. Since then there has been a death feud between the two tribes. To this day it takes all the restraint of any Scorpion tribe member to not attack, and kill, a member of a Spider Tribe on sight. They will NEVER work with or deal with member of the Spider Tribe. Those few members who did have dealings, and got caught, were exiled from the tribe and seen as dead. (NOTE: Exile means that the tribe member is stripped of everything they own. Items, clothing, weapons etc., and left in the middle of the desert.

It was after that battle that the Scorpion Tribe opened its ranks to other races. Needless to say very few of the other races accepted the invitation. Amazingly enough, they welcomed with no prejudices or limitations. They were part of the tribe and treated as such. It wasn't long until they were seen as just another tribe member. This did not open their minds or views of member of that race outside of the tribe. And thus it stayed that way for many generations.

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Aside for heroic tales and undertakings of tribe heroes, new mythos, or normal new things popping up, things were roughly the same. That is until about 25 seasons ago. The tribe had increased in number to well over 400. They had just found a nice valley to settle in for a while. It had a firm, rocky ground and there was even a small watering hole. The winds would blow well over the encampment, due to the large sand dunes surrounding the site. They had been there for just over a fortnight. The tribe chief and the circle of elders were in conference to talk about the future of the tribe.

It was then that the earth began to shake. From all around the high dunes were being pushed aside as tall spires of a building began to rise from under the sands. The whole tribe was in discord and members ran in every direction. Although it was not known exactly how or why, the Scorpion Tribe was scattered. The massive numbers of 500 to 600 in the tribe as a whole. Was not more like 50 to 100 at most. Over the seasons, they have ran into other factions of the main tribe who remember the event or were told about it in their history.

(PLOT NOTE: The even not only scattered the tribe to the four winds but also through time. The events in actual history was 25 years ago, but to some of the tribe, that event happened as short as a few nights ago up to 200 plus years ago. This also allows for other players to come in, claiming it happened only a few nights ago.)

Looks, Dress, Markings:

Those of the Scorpion tribe are very utilitarian in their dress and items carried. Shiny items are useless to them, and they not only see no need for them but are confused as to why anyone logical creature would ever actively seek or long for one. To them fur is murder, as in to wear fur, for any reason, would kill you from the heat. They dress in light weight desert fashions. Contrary to popular belief, they so not like to show a lot of skin. In fact, they do try to cover as much as they can. This includes masks to cover their faces. (said masks are to keep the bright sun out of their eyes, as well as a crude filter for breathing then sand is in the air) Their leathers are all from desert dwelling animals. They also avoid loud or unnatural colors, as it generally draws unneeded and unwanted attention. To show too much skin is almost taboo to the tribe.

Almost every item they own has, somewhere on it, a marking of their clan. That mark is that of a scorpion (duh). It is almost their brand it everything the tribe owns, makes or acquires gets this brand.

Belief System:

To the Scorpion Tribe their totem is the giant king scorpion. All other scorpions follow and move on the orders of the scorpion spirit. To kill on is seen as BAD MOJO. Should a non-tribe member kill a scorpion, the tribe shall refrain from any business and dealings with the person for at least a fortnight as to give wide breadth for the totem spirit to enact whatever revenge it so chooses. The distance as to not get in the way or proximity of the hell that shall reign down upon the poor sod. Should nothing happen, the tribe shall assume that either the spirit feels that taking action on the creature is beneath its interest, or the creature had made admins for its actions. Should a member of the tribe kill a scorpion, the tribe shall seek retribution from the offender. This comes at the decisions of the other tribe members who know of the foul deed.

To the tribe, usefulness is everything. If you are unable to show a practical use or skill, you are seen as less than an equal. It is not uncommon for tribe members to treat other, seen without a use, as a child. If a creature can prove to be useful to member of the tribe, they well almost always be treated with respect.

Although it is not exactly known why, the members of the Scorpion tribe do not like those of the elven blood. In short if a creature pointy ears, there is a good chance that the tribe well treat it with prejudice. They are seen as weak, tricky, full of lies and misdirection. Although the tribe does not hide these views, they well not actively go against, betray or kill them.

Concerning Elves AKA "Those Pointy Eared Bastards"

The Scorpion Tribe, as a whole has 'issues' with elves. These include all kinds of elven blood, Drae, Elf (Amani, Quentari, Stone, Wild etc.), & Mystical Wood Elf. It is not that they 'hate' elves per se, but more they have had deep distrust. If asked why this is, most just say that it is what their clan has believed for generations. And no one really knows the real reason as to why. It's just been that way for a long time and they see no need to change their views at this time.

Yes the Tribe well word and deal with elves, but it causes a tension with tribe members. Every now and then anti elf sayings well slip out. Anti elf jokes are not uncommon to be heard from a member of the tribe.

In reality, the true history of the Tribes hate of elves came from a relationship between an tribe member and an elf that had gone bad. It seems that many generations ago, one of the elders thought it would be a good idea to marry his son to an elf, to help strengthen bonds between the two people. Thankfully the son and the elven maiden hit it off fairly quickly. Unfortunately, said elven maiden was of noble blood and had, through her years, amassed a lot of material wealth, including several houses throughout the area, several stables, shops and other items.

This led to the couple arguing as to which road to follow. The son of the tribe wanted to follow the traditions of the tribe, and travel as light as possible. The elven maiden, did not. And when living with the tribe more than tripled their numbers just with her personal staff, and weighed the whole tribe down as she demanded that she take several pack animals worth of crap into the desert.

The arguments soon turned into fights, with her using Celestial magic. Soon their domestic dispute involved other tribe members. The Elven maidens staff, believing that the "savage barbarians" were betraying the pack jumped in to defend their employer. This led to member of the Tribe jumping in to defend fellow tribe members. After a very bloody battle, and several members of the tribe dead or severely wounded the elves left.

The tribe made it a point to never trust an elf. And told tales of their betrayal and evil ways. As their society history was almost wholly oral at the time, the story changed with each telling, and each new generation changed it a bit to suit the current situation of the tribe. Over generations, the story had gone from the truth as seen by someone who was there, to them being demons of pure evil who wanted to destroy the tribe, to the current stage of where, elves should not be trusted. They most likely won't sneak in and kill you while you sleep, but you may find that you were visited in the night and robbed. Or backstabbed when you were foolish enough to actually trust them with something important. Some of the older member of the tribe do almost look at them as second class citizens. (much like the older racist bigots of the south were to look upon African-Americans)

Rituals & Rites:

Rite of Adulthood:

As children it is understood that their ability to be useful to the tribe as a whole is rather limited, and are therefore

given simple and not real important tasks. When the child reaches the age of 12, they are no longer seen as a child and need to prove their worth to the tribe. The rite starts on the next full moon with a feast and the tribe tells stories about the child and his/her childish acts. The feasting, stories and songs, go on all night, of which the child must be a part of. Before dawn breaks, the child is taken to the edge of the tribes current encampment, given a single weapon (of their choosing), a skin of water and sent out into the sands. During this time they must survive a full moon cycle by themselves. Should the child return on the next full moon, they are now seen as an adult and be treated as such. At this point, they are an adult within the tribe, but not a member or part of the tribe.

Trial of Adulthood:

When the new adult has recovered from the Rite of Adulthood, they must partake in the Trial of Adulthood. They have proven that can take care of themselves and survive. But to be able to take of just yourself is useless to the tribe as a whole. It is during this time that the new adult must prove to have a useful skill or talent that can help the tribe. This is done by trying different jobs in the tribe. The new adult gets to choose in which order they wish to try the jobs. Normally a master of a job will judge if the new adult has a talent or natural skill for the job. Should the new adult prove to be good, the master will accept the task of mentoring the new adult in the finer points of the job. Almost any master of a job may mentor up to 6 different new adults (depending upon demand)

Of course one of the more popular professions that almost every new adult wants to try is that of a Warrior of the Tribe. Sadly a master warrior may only mentor 1 new adult at a time. This is due to the training that is needed demands one on one attention. It is said that the master warriors are the most picky of who they choose to mentor.

If a new adult cannot find a master willing to mentor them either due to lack of skill or personality conflicts, they are given the title of "Extra", as in an extra mouth to feed or an extra body to take care of.

About Extras:

Being an Extra is not fun. In fact, they are seen as a burden on the tribe as a whole. They have shown no skill or ability of measurable worth and thus treated as a lower. They are given the crappy jobs that the rest of the tribe deems too bad, dangerous, and disgusting. They are the ones who dig the waste holes. They are the ones who are used as bait to lure creatures out into the open. They are the ones who pull the wagons or carts then a pack animal can't or won't. They are the ones who fetch firewood or water (although always overseen by a respectable member of the tribe.)

They are treated poorly and are almost always the last to eat, if there is enough food. They have the smallest tents, if there are enough tents. This is to encourage the children to be of use and weed out the weak/useless of the tribe. It is fairly common for those who are cast into the Extra status to leave the tribe and sneak off in the middle of the night. The tribe does not stop this from happening, but will not offer any help or support for those leaving the tribe.

Rite of Redeeming:

Being an Extra is not always for life. Should an extra prove themselves to be useful to the tribe, they may be given a chance to redeem themselves. First the Extra must be going above and beyond their normal duties and still manage to show that they have learned a useful skill to the extent that it is noticed by more than a few members of the tribe. At which point the Extra may ask for the Rite of Redeeming. This rite is up to the Circle of elders as to what the Extra must do.

Trial of the Warrior:

Those new adults who are accepted to train to be a warrior have a hard task of training for no less than 5 years and

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no more than 7. At which point the Master Warrior training the new adult will declare to the tribe that the training complete and set forth the terms of the trial. This is wholly up to the digression of the Master Warrior. It is generally a task and a timeframe of which to complete it. Should the new adult be a pain or difficult during training, the Master Warrior might give an impossible task or timeframe or even both! The new adult **MUST** complete the task within the timeframe or seen as failing. When the task is complete, the new adult makes a public announcement that he/she has finished the task and provide proof. Should the new adult pass, the master warrior will announce to all who can hear that in his eyes, this person is not a just another member of the tribe but a warrior and brother in arms. Failure means that the new adult is seen as an Extra

Rite of the Poison Vision:

From time to time guidance is needed from a more supernatural element as common logic and thought is not providing an answer that works. During this time the Rite of the Poison Vision can be done. This is simple getting a small black scorpion and provoking it enough to sting the forearm. As the poison venom courses through the body the person will have very vivid visions. When the person wakes from the vision, they will have a better understanding of the problem and hopefully an answer.

Sadly there is a chance that the poisons will outright kill the person. If they do survive the sting, they are sick for no less than 3 hours and are able to do nothing as they are on a vision quest and communicating with the Scorpion totem.

Rite of Adoption:

For all of the history of the tribe, this has only been done for 1 cycle many seasons ago. It has never been done again thus far. Only the Chief has the power to declare that a Rite of Adoption can be done, and that is only if the requirements are met.

Should a non-tribe member wish to join the tribe, they must forgo their past lives, history, race, culture, everything. They must start anew, with nothing, as all members of the tribe have started that way. They must understand that from hence forth, should they pass the rite, they are members of the tribe, and are to follow the beliefs, traditions and laws of the tribe. They are **ONLY** a member of the Scorpion Tribe. Not a race, not a culture, not anything.

They must find someone to vouch for them and make the claim that would be a use to the tribe. Said member is staking their life on this statement. As should the rite fail or the new member betrays the tribe, then the member vouching for them shall die for attempting to weakening the tribe.

On a full moon a member of the tribe brings forth a non-tribe member who wishes to join. The member makes a public announcement to this fact and vouched for the character of the non-tribe member. It is then that the Circle of Elders questions the new comer. (questions are random and differ from person to person) Each elder then will set forth a task. This is to test their creativity, skill, talents, etc. Should all the tasks be completed, then the new comer is asked **THE QUESTION**.

The new must partake in the Rite of the Poison Vision to get the answer. When the new comer awakens from the vision, he/she will be asked **THE QUESTION** again, of which the newcomer must answer. Should the answer be correct, the Circle of Elders will announce that the new comer is now a new adult among the tribe.

Rank & File or Hierarchy of the Tribe:

Chief:

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This is the person who makes decisions for the tribes wellbeing. Should the move to a different site to encamp in or stay where they are. Should the tribe accept new members into the tribe or not. Even if the tribe should trade with a group of traders and merchants or not. The Chief is watched by the Circle of Elders. Should the Chief be making mistakes or endanger the tribe the Circle of Elders may remove him. Thus the Circle of Elders will debate and choose a new Chief.

Circle of Elders:

The Circle of elders is a group of the oldest surviving member of the tribe. Normally between 5 to 9 members, always an odd number. It is their task to use their experience to help the Chief in decisions for the tribe.

Master of Tasks:

Simple fact is things need to get done on a daily basis to make sure the tribe is to survive. Be it handling the animals, burying the scat or harvesting the Kels, someone needs to make sure the work gets done. The Master of Tasks keeps track of who knows what skill and sees to it that there are enough people for each task that needs to be done. Those he mentors are the ones who run the orders to the correct parties.

Master of Beasts:

Animals are high maintenance. Then need feeding, watering, cleaned, healed when needed and generally looking after. In the desert even more so. The Master of Beasts makes sure all the creatures are taken care of. He/she is also in charge of the feed animals. And the population control of them. If there is a feast, he/she is the one that gets the order to slaughter on of the herd. Then make sure that those used are replaced. Generally he/she oversees the lesser beast masters and those who are being mentored.

Master of Trades:

Someone has to deal with those not of the tribe. Thankfully he/she gives this task to those who wish to be traders. It is the Master of Trades job to make sure that there is coin or materials to trade. He/she keeps track of exactly what amounts of what there is to trade with. Those who are being mentored are used to carry the lighter items and remain quiet then trades are being made.

Master of Kels:

The tribe cannot live on meat alone. They need other kinds of food in their diet to survive. This is where Kels comes in. The Master of Kels makes sure that it is growing and new crops are dealt with accordingly. Those who are farmers do the hands on work and those being mentored get the pleasure of feeding the Kels.

Note on Kels. Kels is a brownish-black moss that normally grows in the underbelly of larger tunneling creatures of the desert. It does not do well in the sun, so crops are normally kept in rolled up pieces of fabric. It feeds on the blood of animals. Water does nothing but drown it. While alive it gives off a sweet smell that normally draws small creatures (in the wild this would allow the larger creatures to eat and live longer, which is good for the moss) The tribe feeds the moss by spraying blood from slaughtered animals onto the unrolled fabric at night. When exposed to sunlight it dies almost instantly. It has a very bland and somewhat bitter taste, but it does provide as a food source. It almost always is spiced up with.. well anything for flavor.

Master of the Extras:

Those who are seen as Extras do need to be overseen. Not to make sure that they don't escape, but more to make sure that what tasks are given are done correctly. As well to make sure that those who do decide to remain with the tribe are cared for and their basic needs are provided for, if there is enough to go around. The Master makes sure that everything runs smoothly as well as takes count of new Extras and those who have left either by running

away or dying. Those who work for the Master are called Ranchers. They personally oversee the Extras while they work. Those who are being mentored are tasked with gathering rations for the Extras. And caring for those who are sick or injured. Needless to say this does breed some animosity toward the Extras from time to time.

War Chief:

The War Chief has the job of the defense and protection of everyone in the tribe. He/she mainly takes on the role of general and sheriff of the tribe. The laws need to be upheld and it is the War Chiefs to see that they are. The warriors take their orders from the War Chief. They protect the tribe and make sure the laws are upheld. Those who are training to be warriors are the grunts.

Master of the Galley:

Making sure there is enough food to feed the whole tribe is not an easy task. To make it taste good when there are limited resources is even worse. The Master of the galley plans the meals and sees that things are running smooth. Those cooks under the master, are in charge of not only cooking the food, but making sure there is enough, making deals with the masters of other jobs for the things needed. Those who are being mentored get the joys of serving the food and cleaning up afterward.

Master of Scouts:

If there is a person who knows the land it is the Master of Scouts. He/She has a rather large collection of maps and takes notes of that the scouts reports. The Scouts are the ones who are fully trained warriors but have also shown a talent in surviving and going unnoticed in the wilds. They well go out to gather information. They then report back to the Master with the information. As the tribe is nomadic, it is a good chance that there are at least 6 to 20 scouts out at any given time. A standard recon for a scout is 2 weeks unless important information needs to be given quickly.

Language:

Dealing with outsiders is a must. The Tribe makes a point to learn the local language as soon as possible. Although generally not needed, it is common practice for a few members of exceptional mind set to learn to read and write it as well.

As living in the desert can breed its own culture, it also breeds its own language. Jokingly titled "The Scorpion tribes Tongue" is more a mish-mash of different languages for things that can be easily understood in the high winds of the desert. Although not a 'real language' in itself, it can convey only the simplest of meanings in regards to sharing information in the day to day needs of the Tribe. The tribe does not keep this as a secret, and anyone with an ear for languages and a little time can figure out what was said.

Laws of the Tribe:

- First and Foremost the Scorpion is scared. It shall not be hunted, attacked or have harm done to it by any member of the tribe. To be stung by one is a blessing. Accept it with pride and learn from what visions you may be blessed with.
- The Tribe is Family. It is understood that other raced may need help and it is up to you to choose to help them or not. Your actions are that of the tribe. Should they harm the tribe, so shall they hurt you. Should they help the tribe, so shall they help you. The tribe and its wellbeing comes first, above everything else.
- Thou shall not stand to suffer the Spider Tribe to live. Should a chance to kill one of its members arise, it is your duty to do so. Pending that it shall not bring harm to the tribe.

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- Be mindful of the laws and traditions of other people. Although we are not of their people, we are in their land or do pass through. Follow their laws, less they would bring harm to the tribe. If one of their laws need to be broken, do not get caught.
- Do not be indebted to those outside the tribe. To owe to others makes you a slave to them and their wishes. It is a shackle that can cage you to a single place. It is better to the lowest member of your own tribe then one not of our clan.
- Avoid needless trappings, be they words, actions or items. Use what you need to survive. Everything else is a waste and a trapping. All the extra things take away from your freedom.
- Disputes within the clan should always be handled within the clan. It is no business of outsider.
- Travel as light as possible. Heavy things are mostly dead weight. Lighten the load or lose the load.

Language:

For a tribe of “Uncultured and Uncivilized” brutes of the desert wastes, the Scorpion tribe are very well read and well spoken.

Male-Female Interaction:

To the tribe there are two kinds of people in the world, useful people and people who are a burden. Gender does not matter to them. Both male and female are equal in the eyes of the tribe.

Inter-Racial Interactions:

Those within the tribe are family and trusted without question. Those outside the tribe need to earn trust. It is that simple. Although for some reason any race with pointy ears makes those of the tribe uneasy.

Crafts:

There are craftsmen and women among the tribe. But almost everything they make is made to functionality and use rather than looking good. The tribe does have a portable forge and smithing tools, but it is very simple and designed for light weight and small size. It really can not make anything larger than a standard sized weapon.

Magic:

The Tribe does have (or had) several very skilled Earth based magic users within their ranks. They are use to it and have no problem with it. Celestial magic is known to them and do not like ot trust is as it does not ‘feel right’. And well politely refuse any part of it. Should the matter be pressed, violence has been known to happen. As for Necromancy, The tribe has mixed feelings about it. Some members see it as something that could be useful and can delegate jobs to undead. Others look at it as unnatural. As of yet the Circle of elders has not given an answer as to if it shall be accepted by the tribe. But for now it is not allowed to be used within the limits of the encampment.

Politics:

To the tribe, politics is the result of people with too much time on their hands. There is a system of power for the tribe. It has worked for countless years, why change it now. As for politics outside of the tribe, it is avoided to the best of their ability. One tribal member who name has been lost history had been quoted in saying. “I would rather have a spell of Celestial power cast over me than try to deal with the politics of that damn town!”

The Mirage

Submitted by Donald Bratton

Introduction

Wander into a tavern in Tel Zohar late in the evening and just listen. Over the snoring of the most inebriated patrons, you may be treated to a tale spun by an old caravaneer, or a scarred young soldier, or a merchant's wife that seems fantastic. There are rumors of a group of beings in the deepest desert, the harshest wastes, that rise from the rock itself to rescue stranded travelers and deal death to those who would harm the desert or others. These rumors are given form in wagon axles miraculously repaired during the night with mesquite wood and a paste made from sand and cactus flesh, in bandit camps with everything untouched but everyone dead, in the delirious visions of parched travelers near death, claiming to see the rocks rise up to offer them water and food, but vanishing before they could see or say more.

Cultural Structure

The Mirage live in groups called families throughout the desert, which range from a minimum of around 20 individuals up to more than 30,000 in the Grand Cathedral. Outside estimates place the number of Mirage at less than 10,000, but in reality their number surpasses 150,000. Mirage homes are communal and always underground or built into the sides of cliffs, never easily visible to a passing traveler even should they walk right over or next to the entrance. Each family is led by its Mother, the eldest female, and taught by its Father, the eldest male. Other key individuals include Rock Shapers, who carve out new living quarters within the home, Water Keepers who keep record of and guard the family's communal water, Farstriders who explore the desert to hunt for food and scout for danger, and Menders who provide healing to the family. Individuals of all races are a part of the Mirage, and the origin of the society is lost to the ages. New members are typically born in, but recognizing the need for new thought and blood, the Mirage have been known to accept outsiders who have shown great promise and respect for the desert.

Key Cities and Locations

- Grand Cathedral (Capital)
- Great Warren (City of Trade)
- Monsoon Grounds (Temporary camp for farming and hunting)

Mirage live in harmony with the desert and know it well as their constant companion. Many know the basics of Earth magic and herbal lore, and all are schooled in basic survival and first aid. Great wisdom is drawn from the desert around them, and the Mirage revere it as a part of them, simultaneously parent and child to all. Evidence of the Mirage, when visible, is often mistaken for desert terrain - a set of stacked stones as a waypoint, a wounded (by natural causes) saguaro that hides a cache of supplies, a bleached skeleton oriented in a certain direction to show danger or the way home.

There is great trade between the Mirage families, relying primarily on a barter system and, when

necessary, using water as a currency. Water is scarce in the desert, and the Mirage have adapted to this scarcity. Every single drop of water than can be captured and re-used, is. Human waste is heated and distilled to recover all water, and the solids are used to fertilize underground crops. The bodies of the dead are stored in salt for a year to remove all water, then buried as the salt is heated to release their water back to the family. Waste is desiccated and the water harvested before being burned to keep the family's abode warm on cool desert nights. The highest crime in Mirage society is theft or destruction of the family's water - the punishment for Mirage and outsider alike is the Desert Trial.

Mirage justice is harsh but fair. In any case, no matter how minor, the family's Mother is the chief arbiter of justice. Three men and three women - an elder, an adult, and a child of each gender - serve as the council of justice, hearing evidence, questioning witnesses, and advising Mother. Mother's decision is final. The harshest punishment in Mirage justice is the Desert Trial. The convict is lashed to a saguaro cactus and inflicted with 10 shallow knife wounds - one for each tenet of Mirage society (see Personality Traits) then left for three days. Should they survive, they are welcomed back and given great gifts by way of apology for the family's error as revealed by the desert. However, none have survived yet. With the Desert Trial, it is as if the desert itself assists the Mirage, with animals coming from far and wide to torment the convict - scorpion stings, mouse bites, tarantula hawk stings, rattlesnake bites, javelina gorings - keeping him or her alive until the very last hour of the ordeal.

Personality Traits

The Mirage teach their youth virtue and vice through the flora, fauna, and desert they have come to know. These are reflected in the sayings below, which are studied by all Mirage from the age of three until their death.

The Ten Lessons of the Desert: Virtues

1. Be honorable like the rattlesnake, who always warns before he strikes.
2. Be frugal yet generous like the cactus, who stores all the water she can yet gives freely of it in her fruit.
3. Be aware like the rabbit who senses danger miles away.
4. Be vigilant like the scorpion who is ever ready to defend herself.
5. Be smart like the mouse, who adapts and overcomes all challenges.
6. Be strong like the mesquite that cannot be felled by the mightiest storm.
7. Be stealthy like the fox who is seldom heard and never seen.
8. Be deep as the geode which hides profound beauty.
9. Be trustworthy as the wolf who would lay down life and limb for his brothers.
10. Be stout as the javelina, who is unfazed by any of the trials of the desert.

The Ten Lessons of the Desert: Vices

1. Be not wasteful like the rattlesnake, who kills that which he cannot eat.
2. Be not inhospitable like the cactus, who repels all visitors, benevolent and evil alike.
3. Be not cowardly like the rabbit, who runs even from friends.
4. Be not vicious like the scorpion, who stings even young children that mean no harm.
5. Be not unclean like the mouse, who spreads disease.
6. Be not desolate like the mesquite, who looks dead even in life.
7. Be not thieving like the fox, who steals from the Family's food though he can hunt his own.

8. Be not rigid as the geode, which splits in two rather than yield.
9. Be not proud as the lone wolf who thinks himself better than his brothers.
10. Be not uncivilized as the javelina, whose nature and stench betray a life of filth.

Key Character Building Points

Race

Mirage can be any race.

Class

Mirage tend to favor Earth over Celestial magic among their scholars and Templars, and tend to favor Rogues over Fighters, but examples of all classes can be found among them. Given the lethality of the desert, Mirage Rogues often gravitate toward poisons, which can be readily concentrated and distilled from many creatures in their homeland.

Naming

Birth name: Known only to their Family, and given by Mother and Father at birth, guarded closely and believed to have great meaning and power over the Mirage's fate and relationship to the desert. Never share or use this name IP with anyone that isn't part of your Family, and never where it can be heard by someone who isn't part of your Family. Put this in your character history for Plot to know.

Mirage name: Used only among the Mirage, chosen by the Family at ascension to adulthood, usually to typify the individual's greatest strength and contribution to the Family. Never share or use this name IP with or around someone who isn't Mirage. Put this in your character history for Plot to know.

Wanderer name: Public name, chosen by the individual should they decide to Wander. This is the name that goes on your character sheet.

Skills

All Mirage are taught First Aid from a very young age, and it is highly recommended for all Mirage to take this skill. Craft (Desert Survival) and Herbal Lore are also common skills among the Mirage.

Garb

It's really hot in the Tel Zohar desert, and Mirage garb reflects this. Colors tend to be light to reflect the harsh sun but shades of tan, sage, and ochre are also common to allow the Mirage to blend with their surroundings. Traveling garb is usually many layers of light, airy fabrics which protect from the sun but allow cooling breezes to flow through. At home, the Mirage are known to wear more colorful garb in earth tones accented with copper, gold, and silver threads and jewelry, using gemstones like turquoise and various quarts as accents. For formal events, Mirage will pull out all the stops and dress in their finest, typically including dark maroon, purple, sage green, and a metallic highlight. Look to the Fremen of Dune, the Jedi, Tatooinians, and Jakku scavengers of Star Wars, and the Bedouin of the Middle East for ideas.

Al Zohar

Submitted by Donald Bratton & Jeffery Freeman

Introduction

Where there is trade, there also are the Gypsies. In darkest night, in coldest winter, in harshest sun, the brightly colored caravans of the Travelers can be found, bedecked in colors, ringing with the sweet music of cymbal and string, humming with song and joy. The most prominent of these families, the al Zohar tribe, has plied their wares along the desert roads of Tel Zohar for centuries, harvesting rare materials from the wastes and selling them in town, or far afield.

Personality Traits

The al Zohar, like all Gypsies, are outgoing, gregarious, friendly, and warm. They welcome all travelers and traders alike to view their wares. It is not uncommon to hear their parties before seeing their camps. Those who find them in the night are often swept up in their whirlwind of revelry, blurring the night with drinking and gambling. Such travelers find themselves stumbling home the next morning with their spirits, and wallets, lightened.

Though seen as benign by the common folk, those who fancy themselves royal or noble often cast suspicions upon the al Zohar, as they seem to delight in stealing the hearts of noble brides and grooms to be. Some believe it part of a game played by the various bands, each seeking to steal the most powerful heart in the land. The al Zohar profess innocence in the matter, claiming that a heart cannot be owned. Despite this, noble bloodlines weave through the history of al Zohar, including some ex-nobles who gave up their lives to travel with the family.

They dress light and bright, befitting a band of nomads. An insular community, they behave by their own rules and customs. They don't seem bothered by their outsider status, perhaps even preferring it. They form social bonds with outsiders seemingly at random, but even these bonds seem at arm's length. While easily dismissed as whimsy or happenstance, a careful observer would notice they have a particular, if inscrutable, criterion at work. Occasionally, an outsider is admitted into the family, traditionally through marriage or adoption.

Social Organization

What is known is each family or group of families (known as a Tribe) is lead by a bandoleer. Smaller groups are known as bands. Each band is part of a tribe. Rumors of a Gypsy royalty persist, but no concrete evidence suggests such a person or persons exist. Gypsies laugh off such assertions, and the al Zohar are no exception. They dismiss the notion as a "misunderstanding" or "translation error" before offering another drink.

Language

Professor Atwell, a prominent sorcerer and student of language, has described the language of Tel Zohar gypsies as "a hot mess". Those that have managed to learn the language do so only after being adopted

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into the tribe and are subsequently unwilling to divulge its secrets. Fortunately, all the gypsies of Tel Zohar speak the common tongue, albeit with a heavy accent. Two words appear commonly: *ljito* and *etsaia*. *ljito* appears to be the word for gypsy, while *etsaia* is the name they give to outsiders.

Their language, a subset of Gypsy, is more accurately a hodgepodge of other languages. al Zohar pepper their vocabulary with words they like from other languages. Their actions indicate that their conversation are highly contextualized, allowing them to speak freely around others and communicate complex messages in seemingly frivolous statements.

Economics

Gypsies travel from place to place, trading crafts and services wherever they stop. Their brightly colored caravans are a common sight at Arim's Well. They are also fond of gambling, especially for profit.

Gypsies are shrewd merchants, negotiating ruthlessly with outsiders. Internal economics, however, are far more gregarious. All members of a band appear share and share alike, though it is not uncommon to ask for something in exchange. Such trades have a much better rate than they'd ever offer an outsider

Trade between tribes is also a generous affair. Each tribe will actively try to give the other a better deal to demonstrate their wealth. Often these trades end in equal exchange, with one tribe worsening their deal to balance the scales. It is an embarrassment to profit from such a trade and an affront to actively seek such profit.

Sayings and Gypsy Curse Introductions

Being from the desert, the al Zohar Family has some rather unique introductions for their curses and sayings.

"May the monsoon never come if..."

"May the water rise up and flood the desert if..."

"May the mountains never again see snow if..."

"May scorpions sting me a thousand times if..."

"May I be hugged by a hundred saguaro if..."

"May I forever smell like a javelina if..."

Garb Guidelines

Look to brightly colored traditional Middle Eastern dress from Turkish, Lebanese, Egyptian, and Moroccan cultures for inspiration.

Mechanical Recommendations

Al Zohar Gypsy's still follow standard Nero rules for the Gypsy race / culture. Players are advised to learn Read and Write, Healing Arts, and either Herbal Lore or the Racial Detect Poison/Antidote early. Since you will be receiving Small Weapon and Thrown Dagger proficiency as a racial ability, do not waste your build on them. Similarly proficiencies and backstabs should be used on a another weapon class, even if you plan to use daggers. The Tradesman racial trait makes the Gypsy race some of the most potent alchemists in NERO. Those who are looking at casting may wish to consider these skills as well for potion/scroll production.

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Heraldry

Family Member:

Maroon and purple, split vertically, with golden sun

Family friends:

Maroon and purple, split vertically (no device)