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 With the assistance of Brian A. Dorion, Peter Fraser, James Alan Gardner, and James Nicoll.

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Welcome to Aegis!

The city-state of Aegis is built over the Gate, the heart of the world's magic. The Gate is a blessing, a curse, and a responsibility.

Beyond the Gate lie horrors beyond imagining, loathsome frights so great that even the spawn of Hell will co-operate with humankind to keep them away. The gate first opened 21 centuries ago, and after the first War of the Gate, Aegis was founded. Since that time, the Gate has been breached three more times. Some say the fifth War of the Gate is due soon.

And the heartbeat of the city is magic. Vampires and other undead are citizens here; Eldritch faeries may meet for wine with wizards and scoundrels. Magic is technology in Aegis, with all that implies.

Aegis and Role-Playing

Aegis is also a role-playing environment both familiar and unique. It's an excellent place to begin fantasy role-playing and a diverting location for the experienced player.

For the beginning fantasy role-player, Aegis is comfortable because many of the assumptions underlying life in Aegis are similar to those in the modern world: people are literate, the sexes are equal, and the religious environment is a mosaic. Magic is, in some senses, regarded as technology. Yet there are still monsters to be killed (or befriended), spells to be cast, wrongs to be righted, and a strong sword-arm is of great benefit.

For the experienced role-player, Aegis is different: Vampires and werewolves are citizens, the combinations of magics are heady, and the rules are not the same as in other fantasy cities. Watch your step in Aegis, because your old habits could make you dead...or worse.

Using Aegis as a Campaign Setting

The intent is to have Aegis as a campaign setting. The "Campaigning" and "Adventures" chapters keep that in mind.

However, if you don't *want* to use Aegis as a setting for an entire campaign, you can use it as a setting for several adventures.

Using Aegis in Your Adventures

You can choose to use Aegis as an exotic location for the PCs to visit; you might want to build it up for a while first...let them hear stories of the city where monsters live, that sort of thing. You can have the PCs attempt to invade Aegis, to get something out of the city...possibly a monster of some kind has escaped to Aegis to avoid crimes.

If you use Aegis as a location for visiting, think about your magic system carefully. Aegis is a very magic-rich environment, and you'll need a similar justification in your adventure.

PCs may need to bring a dead friend or relative to Aegis in an attempt to have him or her resurrected.

You might also choose to simply steal parts of Aegis for transplantation into your own campaign world. Perhaps the vampires have a similar structure in your world, or there is an organization of monsters. Perhaps the Faerie have a similar breeding problem (or the elves, for that matter). Or maybe you simply want an evil wizard-lord to run something like the Midnight Circus. A huge empire requires a huge bureaucracy, and Aegis can provide a model for that.

You can also reverse the intent of Aegis. As written, it's a cosmopolitan city where different creeds and races are tolerated. You're free to run an adventure (or even a campaign!) involving the heroic paladins who eventually subjugate the City of Vampires and free the humans from their servitude.

Customizing Aegis

Like all role-playing supplements, Aegis is yours to modify as you see fit. You may want to extract useful ideas, spells, magical systems or any part. Even if you use nothing more than the name, I'll be satisfied. (Well, not as satisfied as if you used it all, but satisfied.)

The City

Aegis is the largest city in the world, with a population of about 400,000. It is one of the few to make tourism its second largest industry. (Opinions differ as to the largest industry.) Aegis has branches of all of the main magic colleges. Aegis has the pits of Hell. Aegis has the Colossus. Aegis has the Maze, the Zoo, Blood-Toll Bridge, the Midnight Circus, and other attractions. The city couldn't sustain itself without magic.

The city can be supported because it's intensively farmed. Zombies do a lot of the physical labour, although the land is usually owned by others.

Corn, wheat, and rice are staples. Much of the food is imported from Goblet-Hollow, also called the Valley, which is at the source of the Mearallaem River. Aegis also imports food (meat animals, some grains, some fruits) from the neighboring nations of Gurriel, Omaki and Palliss. Aegis can survive without this importation, but diet would be reduced. The climate in Aegis is suitable for citrus fruits, although fruits like apples and peaches must be brought in from Ruesada or from Goblet-Hollow. (It may help to think of Aegis as Vancouver and Goblet-Hollow as the Okanagan Valley.)

A Quick Tour

The city sits on the mouth of the Mearallaem River, which opens into the Bay of the Colossus, a nearly circular bay. The opening of the bay to the ocean is to the south, and Aegis is on the northeast compass point of the bay.

The territory that belongs to Aegis is roughly the area within four days' ride from the city. Aegis also controls the land along the Mearallaem River into the mountains, up to Goblet-Hollow. Beyond that? To the west is the Great Marsh, and north of that the Blackmark Forest. To the north and east are the Raemear Mountains. To the south is Elfhome. Aegis has never been invaded over land.

The Old City contains the Zoo, the Palace of the Warden, the slums, and the oldest homes of nobles. (Most noble families also keep homes in the Hammer section of town, across the river.) With the exception of the estates, most of these buildings are five and six stories tall, of stone construction for the first story or two, and then of wood. The original construction of the Old City predates the Third War of the Gate. The

walls that surround the Old City are intended to keep things in.

The outer city walls line the river on both sides, and surround most of the city. Within those walls are Hell, the Marketplace, the Wizardrow, and most of the rest of the city. At each of the Bay Door and the River Door, there is a huge portcullis, erected by magic with the aid of silkies and merpeople, that prevents river craft from entering the city via the river. The river walls are lower than the rest of the walls because of the confidence the city places in these two blockades.

Outside the city walls live many of the agriculturists and labourers. The docks for the bay and the warehouses for the maritime district also hug the shore of the bay, outside the walls. There are river docks above Blood Toll Island.

There is also a small island in the bay, Nagamis Island. Lovers go there for trysts.

Technically, Blood Toll Island is outside the city walls as well, because it is in the middle of the river. However, the two blockades on the river should protect it, and the Undead who reside there.

The population density in the city varies from dense (150/hectare) in the Old City to sparse (50/hectare) beyond the outer walls. The city is roughly 20 km across and covers 4000 hectares.

There are fourteen districts in Aegis (one for each seat on the Warden's Council, plus the Old City, which is controlled by the Warden). Although each of them is described in a certain way - i.e., the Thumb is the Merchant's District, remember that for the inhabitants, Aegis often functions like two separate cities. Each side of the city has all the necessities needed for living (for the poor, to minimize the number of times they must cross the Blood Toll Bridge). However, if you are interested in something unusual, your best bet is the area which specializes in that item. Appendix B describes all fourteen of the districts, but for a quick tour, we'll just name them: On the eastern side of the Mearallem river are the Old City, where the Palace and the Zoo are, the Chine (or river docks), the Rookery, Bishopsrood (the religious center of Aegis), Hell, the Funnel (the wizard's district), the Stewpot, the Magazine, and the Spur (the region outside the walls, extending down to the bay).

On the western side of the river are the Grudge district (a slum), the Swords district, the Thumb (the mercantile district), the Hammer, Wands, and the Magazine (again).

There are an uncertain number of entrances into

Aegis, but everyone talks as if there were four: the Marsh Door, the Plain Door, the River Door, and the Bay Door. Both the River and the Bay Doors are two sets of entrances each, one on each side of the river, but they are talked about as if they were single entrances; thus, people talk about the Bay Door, and not the Western Bay Door.

When talking about places that occur on both sides of the river, such as the Bay Door, the Spur, or the Magazine, it's always assumed that you are talking about the one on the same side of the river as you are currently on. If you're talking about the other one, you refer to the Moon Spur, or the Moon Magazine, or the Moon Bay Door.

An area that isn't a district and yet may be of some importance is Scribe Alley and the Alley of Rumours. Both of these occur in the space between All-Fools Street and Porter Road, Scribe Alley on the Western side and the Alley of Rumours on the Eastern side. The Alley of Rumours has a number of interesting and not particularly legal establishments. Scribe Alley deals with information in its own way; translators, linguists, writers, poets, bards, librarians, and others who make their living off language are here. The Bell Call ought to be here, but isn't.

The Government

The ruler of the city is the Warden. There are 13 seats on the Warden's Council. There are likewise thirteen sections or wards in Aegis. The nobles of a ward compete to become representative (note that a noble for a ward need not live in that ward). (It follows, of course, that there are fourteen districts, including the Warden's.)

The Council run the city; the Warden is responsible for its upkeep, image, and protection. The Warden owns the treasury, the city guard, and the customs office. The current Warden, Lairda Gemlen, is a reasonable woman.

The vampires have an official representative. They are suspected to be supporting another seven as well.

Over the years, Aegis has tried all the governments: democracy, theocracy (but nobody worships Thurmillim any more), monarchy, autocracy, oligarchy, you name it. The current method is not too bad.

Political Parties

Although Council members are inevitably noble, there are some political factions which have an

identity. Some parties are associated with Houses; for example, the House Koreamon can be relied upon to stress the need for strong defenses. While Koreamon may have other Houses following it, it's known that Koreamon leads this particular stance. Other parties are made of affiliations of weaker Houses. For example, the Velox party promotes a middle-of-the-road stance when dealing with Palliss and Shier Kra. No one House can be said to hold this opinion. (In fact, there are several meliorist parties.)

Despite the fact that there is no obvious political power for the common people, they have a say. Most lords pay attention to what the people in their districts say, because it's better for business. Tyranny, as they know in Aegis, is strictly for the short term.

The Nobility

Currently you purchase a noble title and get to keep it as long as you can make your payments. There are 225 noble families in Aegis. Each noble family has a coat of arms; a hundred and five of these coats are over a thousand years old. The other hundred and twenty noble titles have been created in the last thousand years, as the Warden needed more money for the city, or as the population grew.

Heraldry

Here are the basics of Aegis heraldry (a familiarity): There are two metals and five colours (gold and silver; red, blue, green, black, violet). You cannot place a metal on a metal, nor a colour on a colour. Some of the patterns are different than on Earth; for instance, the Aminon coat of arms is Gold, trefoil swords counter-clockwise, on a field, Sable. This is a triangle of three gold swords, the base sword pointing right, on a black background.

Non-combatants wear their arms in an upright pentagon; combatants wear them in a circle, representing a shield. Should combat be necessary against a foreign invader, the combatants will wear tabards. Heraldry skill will allow you to know more of them.

There are 225 noble houses, each with its own coat of arms. There are also arms for other organizations, such as the Warden, the city government, several of the religions, and the Free Company of Mercenaries.

The Undead have their own nobility and coats of arms, with different metals and colours (mercury and iron (silver and rust); blue, indigo, brown, black,

yellow). The Undead can tell the difference. It is a difficult thing for a living person to know the undead arms, since the undead are secretive about these things.

Buying a House

It may happen that players want to buy a house. There may be one or two houses available or about to become available; should the current Lord Noraemon meet an untimely end, the House will become available to any who can pay off his debts (which are extensive)..

Some Houses

House Aminon: One of the oldest Houses in Aegis, over a thousand years old. Historically in charge of protecting the city in all wars, it has lost prestige and function over the past three centuries as a result of a curse placed on the family line. Ancestral home in the Old City is Illaminonear, recently rebuilt and refurbished by Tererinh Daimrea, who purchased the title after the death of the last of the previous line, Anikin Rockall.

House Anamilon: House Anamilon was founded during the last War of the Gate, and is the leading house in supporting magic and magic research. Several Lords of Anamilon have become mighty mages; one founded his own school.

House Koreamon: A young house, four hundred years. The House Koreamon once employed Lomino the sculptor. Koreamon is responsible for protection of the city in case of war; not known whether or not this includes a War of the Gate.

House Noraemon: A disreputable house with few redeeming factors. The current lord is expected to bankrupt the House before he dies. If he does not destroy the house, there are a number of bastards waiting to be recognized; if he fails to recognize any of them, there will be trouble. His father died in a brothel in Hell, disagreeing with the bouncer.

House Roakim: A struggling house which has some problems. The current lord, Rokum, tries to protect the reputation of his sister, Lady Esta (known to the servants as Lady Esta of the Deep Pockets). Esta is a kleptomaniac; she once stole Sujhin Mazerunner's mirror.

House Stazia: An undistinguished house. The current lord is active politically (he's a meliorist of the Velox party); the lady, Lady Stazia, has ambitions to

become a vampire.

The Law

The justice system is not completely honest; some members can be bought, some can't. The philosophy is "stern but fair"; Vlad the Impaler would have liked it. (He would have objected to the invisible end most of the criminals came to, though. Couldn't be seen by anyone, in the Maze.)

Instead of lawyers per se, Aegis has Pleadors (also known on the street as Mouths). They are a combination of lawyer and lobbyist, since they will press your case with an appropriate noble or the Warden if paid enough. Most Pleadors have Bureaucrats and Bribery as well as Conversation and Oratory.

There are also regular jails, for regular crimes.

Any high-profile thief is going to get caught, and publicly punished. Punishment depends on the crime. You might just get sentenced to working in the Zoo. (Not hard work; it just has a high mortality rate.)

The Guard work on clearing out the Undead before dawn. It makes bad feelings with the Hellspawn if you let suspects disintegrate in the sunlight.

The City Guard

There are about 14,400 guardsmen (actually guardsmen and guardswomen) in the city.

Guardsmen receive training in fighting, so they are at least as good as ruffians or bandits.

Please understand that the city guards aren't police officers in the modern sense of the word. They are guards, a militia. Their principal job is to defend the city. In the absence of an immediate threat, they make the streets safe for the interests of the Warden, and currently the interests of the Warden are served by making the streets safe for tourists.

There are also elite guards, composed primarily of vampires, which guard the Maze. Every once in a while they run into something. Sometimes they don't come back. Each troop is required to have a token human or vampire (depending).

Due to the tourist trade, members of the city guard have the authority to carry out detective investigations. Most will pick any known member of the criminal class and arrest him. The suspect is jailed for about a month, by which time any tourists who are concerned about the crime are gone. Some will actually try to find the criminal.

Each city guard has a steel broadsword and a cuirass. He or she has a skirtplate, a small shield, greaves and vambraces. Helms optional.

In Hero terms, his armour is DEF 3. In CORPS terms, it is 2/2.

Contraband

Iron is illegal. The undead have very powerful Detect Iron spells at the city gates. The only people allowed to have iron are the city guards, and certain very high officials (the Warden, for one).

There is a drug called Red Habit or Crimson Hand (because the leaves have a crimson patch which looks like a hand), which is grossly addictive to elves. Humans are unaffected. Red Habit is illegal. The leading supplier of Red Habit in Aegis is the Kraken, who founded his (its?) mob rule on this vice.

The Citizens

Aegis is distinguished from many cultures by two things: compulsory education for children of citizens and sexual equality for men and women. See the “Life in Aegis” chapter for more information.

As might be expected, the people are racially mixed. All hair colours are present, all eye colours. Most people have skins a light caramel colour, befitting their Ruesadan background, but there are others.

(Off the continent of the Sceptre, Aegis natives are regarded as “swarthy.”)

Given that people have vampires to be prejudiced about, there is little bigotry regarding skin colour. (There is plenty regarding nation of origin, however.)

Its People

When you discuss the people of Aegis, you are talking about three factions: the human (mortal) population, the Fae folk, and the Hellspawn. The humans make up by far the largest part of the population.

Some Demographics

These figures can only be considered to apply to the human population (60% of Aegis) unless otherwise stated.

Definitions

Rich: spend 10-35% of income on food
Middle Class: spend 25-50% of income on food
Poor: spend 60-80% of income on food
Destitute: what income?

(Obviously, this can be extended to the Undead by saying “existence-sustaining necessities” instead of food. However, the vampires have made wealth a pre-requisite for joining them, which skews the figures, so they have been left out of this.)

Distribution of Wealth: Human/Vampire

Rich	3%
Middle Class	27%
Poor	59%
Destitute	11%

Breakdown by Employment

(assuming 45% of population is dependents...old, sick, children)

Occupation	%	#
Lords ¹	0.7	1,680
Clerics	10	24,000
Professional ²	5	12,000
Mages ³	2	4,800
Merchants	7	16,800
Craftsmen	10	24,000
City Guard	6	14,400
Servants	18	43,200
Agriculturists ⁴	15	36,000
Labourers	15.3	36,720
Destitute ⁵	11	26,400

1. 225 noble families.
2. Doctors, pleaders, etc.
3. Includes students
4. Doesn't include zombies
5. Including approx. 7,000 thieves

Humans

Human beings make up 60% of the population of Aegis.

Some of the districts of Aegis (the Swords district, for example) are highly prejudiced against the non-humans. There is a known distrust among the common folk of the undead, which the Vampires try to play against.

Faery

The Faery folk have recently become something of a problem. It's the elf gangs, mostly.

Some of the eldritch (brownies, for example) are much more comfortable with humans than the majority of their kin. You can often find Brownies outside the Eldritch areas of the city. Redcaps (a kind of brownie) find sugar (sucrose) intoxicating. You can bribe a redcap with a piece of sugar cane, or a bit of rock sugar. (There is a second, man-eating kind of redcap not found in the city.)

There are few dwarves in the city, although there is one dwarf-only tavern (The Iron Anvil). There is no rivalry or enmity between dwarves and elves, other than the enmity dwarves feel to *everybody*.

The only eldritch race who are forbidden to the city are Kobolds, who once attempted to mine the Gate. (The expression “dumb as a Kobold” is still grounds for a brawl in the areas of Aegis where memories are long.)

Eldritch vs. Faerie

Although most humans don't realize it, there is a distinction between the “Eldritch” and “Faerie.” Eldritch is a broad term, covering everything/everyone of magical origin that is *not* Hell-spawned. “Faerie” refers to Eldritch (usually humanoid) who are part of a particular political division: the Seelie and Unseelie Courts. The Faerie truly live in a separate realm; the Elfhope supports

many passages between these two realms, although other passages exist or can be created. The Faerie have a complex ritual of accession and succession; members take new names to contend for the throne or for mating.

Dwarves, for example, are Eldritch but are *not* Faerie. The dwarves do not submit to the leadership of the Courts. Redcaps do; therefore Redcaps are Faerie. (The Redcaps in the city are small brownie-like folk, with green skin and red hands and faces. The evil iron-shoed redcaps live in the Truran Mountains, where they feed on or ally with the Kakkam.)

Elves

The most prominent of the Eldritch are the Elves. They are tall, graceful, and often beautiful. They show no signs of aging. In their home, the Elfhome, they are people of music and mystery; some say the elves taught the angels how to sing.

But the elves who live in the city are different. They're still tall, graceful, and beautiful, but they're also, to some extent, *familiar*. The sophisticated, experienced city-dweller is often blasé about them. ("Oh, it's an elf. Don't stare, you'll mark yourself as a hick.")

Most elves live on the eastern side of the river, and most elves in the city are *young*. Why?

Well, the elves are tremendously long-lived—they thought they were immortal. However, two hundred years ago, they began to die off. Suddenly they realized that they could die, and they went into a fit of breeding. Now there are all these adolescent elves (one to two hundred years old) crowding their elders in the Elfhome; their elders sent them to the city, where they began taking over neighborhoods and, in general, acting like punks. Elf JDs.

To compound this problem, the Eldritch also have a problem with drugs: there is a drug called Red Habit which is *very* addictive to elves, and it is being brought in by the Kraken.

Not all elves are like this, of course; there are some elder wise mages in the city. (For example, the elven mage Boxcars lives in the Funnel.) There are other young elves who have good reputations (such as Boxcars' niece, Sujhin Mazerunner), and there are the members of the elven embassy.

The Elfhome

Most elves live in the Elfhome, the large forest to

the south of Aegis. The elves have established clear trading routes that non-elves can use to travel around the Elfhome, although there are tolls to be paid for use of the roads. (A boat is cheaper, except during the stormy season.)

Hellspawn

Six hundred years ago, the vampires led an attempt by the hellspawn to become the ruling class. This resulted in the Undead Accord (the Kordalu Accord, after the vampire who negotiated it), giving the undead equal rights in the city.

Some of the Hellspawn are still mistrusted — no one really trusts the vampires as a group.

Other hellspawn could be good friends. For example, there is a sport (blacktongue kickers) which is moderately popular (and once was extremely popular); there is an interclan competition every year during the Festival which is always held on Blacktongue Field, and which is always refereed by the ghost of Emer Spraytoe, who invented the game!

Vampires

Vampires are the most notable of the Hellspawn. They tend to be aesthetes, interested in complex webs of power and intellectual pursuits.

Vampires have a lifespan of 200 to 300 years. Eventually the magic holding them together fades, senility sets in, and they leave the crypt door open. It is known that sunlight destroys them.

PCs have heard all the usual stories about vampires, but don't know which are true (the vampires aren't telling): They can't cross running water (this seems to be true); they can't enter a home unless invited; they fear certain holy symbols; they drink blood; they can be held in their coffins by a wild rose; they dislike garlic. They can hypnotize their victims. They gain strength and speed when they become vampires. They sleep in their native soil during the day. Normal weapons are held to be ineffective against them; iron hurts them somewhat more. To kill them, you must drive a stake through the heart and cut off the head, or expose them to sunlight. They have human familiars.

The vampires have turned becoming one of them into an expensive, high-status proposition. It costs a great deal of money to become a vampire; illegal vampires are condemned to die. There are only a certain number of tombs on Blood Toll Island, which is where the creme de la creme of the Undead sleep.

The vampires keep their exact numbers secret, although popular rumour has it that each vampire is assigned one of the noble houses for another takeover. Be that as it may, there are more than five hundred vampires and fewer than a thousand.

Some vampires are good people, although there is a weeding-out process that tends to select for a specific Machiavellian type. If the vampires are up to something, they won't do it in the open, because there is still a mistrust of the Undead among the human population.

Some vampires affect extremely long fingernails that can be used as claws; some people who want some day to become vampires also adopt this affectation. (It is one of the ways to spot a vampire wannabe.)

It is illegal for a vampire to directly bite a human being; however, there are vampires who feel that biting is the only way to feed, and who are willing to pay money for the privilege. The Inn of the Midnight Son is a little-known tavern which features a basement room where vampires may feed in the traditional manner.

In the standard campaign, player characters cannot be vampires.

Weres

Weres are unusual in that they look entirely human most of the time. (In the world of Aegis, there is only one moon, a large one, with a full moon every 31.683 days.) Usually the full moon is three days, but sometimes it is four. Weres in Aegis change into the animal form; they do not become a human-animal hybrid.

There are a variety of weres: werewolves, wererats, weretigers, werebears; werebears are immune to fire.

Most of the weres live in a ghetto just outside of Hell, by the Zoo. When the full moon comes, they all go to some of the large empty areas of the Zoo. Contraception spells don't work on weres, so fertile weres are often locked up in their homes.

Anyone native to Aegis can recognize a were.

In the standard Aegis campaign, player characters cannot be were.

Zombies

When the Vampire Accord was signed, the zombies were a problem. They weren't self-aware, but they had rights under the Accord. Spells were later developed which created self-aware zombies—these spells are now the only legal spells for zombies. Hence there are two types of zombies: automatons and self-aware zombies (living dead).

Zombies make Aegis possible; they do the heavy agricultural work needed to support the population.

Most zombies in Aegis are debtors, who are working past death to pay off their debts. A man who is in debt may arrange to be turned into a zombie after death so that he can continue to work and pay off his debts, or the Debtor's Court could arrange this, if it's more money than the debtor's blood will cover.

Other Species

There are other mortal races in Aegis. Only one or two are mentioned here.

Barsoomians

The "Barsoomians" are a green-skinned four-armed race sometimes imported to fight in the Midnight Circus. They are used to the deserts of Astinoivayl, and often have problems with the humidity in Aegis.

Kakkam

The Kakkam are a race of large humanoids who come originally from the Truran Mountains, in the northeast of the continent. They are known to be fierce primitive warriors, but have been largely driven back into the mountains.

Relations Between Them

For the most part, the races live in relative harmony. This may be because the non-human races are thoroughly outnumbered, or it may be because humans save their bigotry for the Hellspawn.

Aegis' Neighbours

Aegis shares the continent of the Sceptre with a number of other nations: Goblet-hollow is Aegis' vassal state; Gurril and Omaki are north and east; the Elfhorne is immediately south of the city, and Palliss and Shier Kra occupy the bottom of the continent. There are also island nations throughout the Dragon's Tail islands.

Aegis trades with Gurril, Omaki, the nations on Astinoivayl's east coast, and the northwestern nations of Haquida. It also trades with the island-nations along the Dragon's Tail, and indifferently with Shier Kra.

Goblet-Hollow

Goblet-Hollow is the valley which provides most of the fruits and winter food for the city of Aegis. It is its own fiefdom, protected by Aegis by long-standing agreement. Lord Garay is the current Lord of Goblet-hollow. Goblet-Hollow is its own fiefdom, protected by Aegis.

The Mearallaem River flows out of Goblet-Hollow down to Aegis. Barges carrying foodstuffs travel down the river and are hauled upstream by horses.

Goblet-Hollow is also significant because it is the route from Omaki to Aegis. The family which guards the pass proper is named the Rocklines.

Gurril

A large feudal nation, ruled by a central king to whom the others pay homage. Gurril's current king hasn't been seen in public for a few years; it's possible that the queen is hiding his death or senility to maintain rule. Women are second-class citizens in Gurril. While not actively hostile to the Eldritch, they don't deal with them much, except for the mountain dwellers (dwarves and such). Gurril occupies itself with internecine warfare.

Its major products are fish, metals, and coal. They produce excellent ships. Gurril is bounded on the east by the Morrillab River.

Omaki

Omaki has only recently become a democratic republic. The previous autocracy was thrown out eight years ago. Omaki is populated by two distinct

social groups: the Riders, and the Farmers.

The Riders raise meat animals (cattle, buffalo), and the Farmers raise crops. There are (and always have been) bitter disputes between the two groups. Previously, these disputes were brought to the ruler of the territory. The new tribunal has established a central court and circuit judges, but the system still has some bugs in it. Another problem is raiders coming down from the mountains.

The new tribunal may be too ambitious; they have declared a new capital city, a new legal system, and an end to the previous social castes. It seems likely that their next step will be a war to unite the people; the question is whether they will attack Gurril, Robalda, or Aegis.

There is a pass through the mountains to the Valley, and then to Aegis. Animals for meat are brought through here during summer and fall, and caravans come through from the northern part of Shier Kra as well as Omaki. This pass has never successfully been used for an attack before, but it isn't impossible.

Palliss

Palliss is a green, farmed Christian country whose monarch rules by Divine Right. The principle pass across the mountains into Shier Kra is Back Break Pass. Palliss is primarily notable for its religious intolerance and the sheer fanaticism of the Order of the Knights of the Riven Palm. The two principal political forces influencing the King are the Knights and the Church.

The main political force in the country is the Order of the Knights of the Riven Palm; they also form the commissioned ranks of the army. The Knights take the names of weapons (e.g., Sir Guy de Pick). Each Knight is expected to be supreme with his name weapon, as well as competent with sword and shield, lance, and mace. Upon attaining his title, each Knight has an iron rivet driven into the palm of each hand, hence the name of their order. The iron rivets are intended to protect them from magic at all times. Technically, the Knights are subservient to the wishes of the Mother Church, though this is not currently the case.

The Church of Palliss is descended from the Roman Catholic Church; they do not recognize the

Pope in Aegis, and have their own Pope.

All magic which is not under control of the Church is banned in Palliss.

Palliss has frequently decided that the Gate would be better administered under its rule, but Palliss has no truly competent mages, and has never taken the city. The path directly into Aegis' territory is blocked by the Elfhome, so a land attack would have to travel through Shier Kra and then Omaki in order to get to Aegis. Palliss is also not particularly good at espionage. Their last serious attempt at conquest was inspired by the vampire pope (about two hundred years ago).

Women are second-class citizens in Palliss. There are no slaves in Palliss, although there are indentured freedmen, who are the next best thing.

Palliss has very extensive and exotic court functions, honouring saints that have very little to do with the Roman Catholic Church as you and I understand it. Every three years, there is a tournament at Lidon (near Back Break Pass), the Tourney of Allucquere, which is famous throughout Palliss. The Shrine of Our Lady Allucquere is also in Lidon, near the Tourney site; people are frequently cured of their curses by going to the Shrine. Lidon has a population of about 3,000, and caravans leave for the Palliss cities of Tallommande and Coridomme. Tallommande has a population of about 8,000 and is about two and a half day's journey from Lidon. Coridomme's population is about 5,000 people, and it is about three days' journey from Lidon.

The capital is Allimonde, population about 50,000. The summer capital is Perssallon, which the King much prefers.

Robalda

Robalda was once a Ruesadan colony. Unfortunately, the Truran Mountains are the home of the Kakkam (large, Orc-like creatures). Parts of the countryside were reclaimed from the Kakkam, but when Ruesada had other problems, they ceased all military aid. Robalda has spent the last four hundred years fighting a losing battle. They are very aware of being under siege.

Robalda has precious little trade, and little to trade with. Some lumber is exported, and they have excellent forests for ship masts, but that's about it.

They are governed by an appointed king, who is chosen from the barons. The king taxes them, but in return plans the major sorties against the Kakkam

and train the young fighters whose families cannot afford this themselves. The Robaldans are proud people.

They have relatively few court functions, but there are a number of festivals.

There are no slaves in Robalda.

Shier Kra

Shier Kra is a theocracy. They have fifteen gods, and the priests of each god rule for fifteen years. However, they don't do it in sequence; the high priests get together and have a series of magical contests. It is presumed that the winner has a more powerful (or more benevolent) god. The incumbent is handicapped, but that handicap can be lessened or increased, depending upon the government's performance over the last term. This system leads to incredible politics and back-biting as up-and-coming gods try to lower the current ruler's effectiveness (and increase the handicap). The current god, the Rat God, is half-way through his term.

Shier Kra has widespread slavery. It is the market for slaves on the continent. The principle industries are textiles and farming, although they make an exquisite liqueur, which is highly prized (Shustrov Trem).

The most important geographical feature of Shier Kra is the Shustrim Klo, which is the river leaving the Jewel Lake. It provides transport throughout the nation. It — and magic — holds the nation together. The Shustrim Klo empties into a gulf, the Shustrim Flay, where the capital is.

The capital is Ashiev Du (Kra means nation, Du means city). Ashiev Du is surrounded by bayou and marsh.

Shier Kra has a reasonable merchant navy, but is very limited in its regular navy. It has privateers out harrassing other nations, however, primarily the nations of Haquida and Ruesada. The nations of the Dragon's Tail do not allow ships with the Shier Kra flag to pass.

The World

The Sceptre is the smallest of the continents of the world. There are nine continents and 13 seas.

The Continents

The continents are:

1. **The Sceptre** (The Dragon's Tail is the name of the archipelago trailing off the handle). The Sceptre is a moderate-climate continent, possibly better termed a very large island.
2. **Astinoivayl**. It lies west of the Sceptre. Astinoivayl is divided in half by the Twin Deserts. Through the centre of the Deserts runs the Stayviloin River. The River is ruled by the River Empire, an empire in decay. They could never expand beyond the river.
3. **Jek Tun Quyinn**. This continent is to the west of Astinoivayl. Magic is weakest here, of all places in the world. There are rumours of a race of wizards. The Barsoomians and reptile men come from here. Barbarians from Quyinn are rare; all use names with Quyinn in them. There isn't much trade with these nations.
4. **Lalliprilloman**. A continent slightly smaller than Australia, to the south east of the Sceptre, between the Ruesada-Haquida complex and Kharkid.
5. **Haquida**. Haquida is roughly Europe to Ruesada's Asia. Both lie east of the Sceptre.
6. **Dhruntrug** (pronounce "dh" as a voiced "th", like "the"). The land of the northern warlike species and races. Many empires are born there; few last long. This continent has produced many Alexanders, and most of their conquests remained united that long.
7. **Kharkid**. A cold and frigid land, except for one peninsula. Roughly Antarctica with a peninsula that stretches up; the tip of the peninsula is directly south of the Dragon's Tail. Kharkid contains an insular set of tribes.
8. **Ruesada**. The fragments of an empire. Several of the fragments claim to be the rightful empire, and have launched abortive attempts to gather all the pieces. The Ruesadan Empire at its height controlled much of the Soorethil and Praesillad Seas.
9. **Bef Mozhem-sur** ("zh" like the French "j" in "je"). A strange set of lands, all bonded by a common religion, about which they have many wars. Exquisite spices and jewelry are produced here. The continent is west of Jek Tun Quyinn and east of Ruesada. One of the countries is called Ylar; it had a coup eight years ago, so there are a surprisingly large number of Ylar exiles in Aegis.

The Oceans

The seas and oceans are:

1. The **Western Diamond Sea** (so-called because it is bounded by Sceptre at the northernmost point, Haquida to the east, Astinoivayl to the west, and the northern tip of Kharkid to the south).
2. **Soorethil Sea**, which lies between Haquida and Ruesada.
3. **Praesillad Sea**, which separates Haquida from Kharkid, and is bounded on its eastern side by Lalliprilloman. The area around Kharkid is known for its fierce storms.
4. **The Eastern Expanse**. Beyond Lalliprilloman and Ruesada there is a vast expanse of water, broken only by a few scattered islands. The Turtle Kingdoms are in the Expanse; so are the Rafters.
5. As it goes north, the Eastern Expanse becomes the **Uederasa Sea**, bounded by Dhruntrug and Bef Mozhem-sur. This sea is temperate to arctic; it is passable for only five months of the year; for the other ten, no ships sail.
6. The expanse between Jek Tun Quyinn and Dhruntrug is the **Arndhrag Ocean**. Due to the Moryum Dhrell (think Gulf Stream), this section of ocean is open much of the year. There is constant interaction between the coastal nations on these two continents.
7. Between Jek Tun Quyinn and Kharkid is the **Talkhid Ocean**.
8. Jek Tun Quyinn has one of the three land-locked seas on the planet: **Ahk Bok Rowamm**.
9. Between Jek Tun Quyinn and Astinoivayl is the **Toem Eskalaedam**. A tropical ocean. Although it is relatively narrow, if you aren't becalmed or eaten by sea monsters, you'll be killed by the storms.

10. In Ruesada is an inland-but-not-land-locked sea, **Nyeridal Cres**. The Nyeridal Cresal allows transport to the Eastern Expanse.
11. On the line connecting Haquida and Ruesada is the **Aloquirrel Sea**. Formed as the continents push together, it is surrounded by mountains.
12. Directly to the east of Sceptre, between it and Haquida, is the **Eastern Wall**.
13. Aegis faces to the west of Sceptre, looking out on the **Western Wall**.

Other Lands, Other Nations

There are things worth knowing about other lands and nations in the world.

Old Ruesada

Old Ruesada was once a mighty empire, but the Third War of the Gate (a thousand years ago) weakened it, and it fell apart four hundred years ago. The core of what used to be the empire has splintered into the lands of the Dragon Princes. The Dragon Lands are ruled by the Princes of Snow, Copper, Gold, Diamond, Silver, Iron, and Blood. The Dragon Princes used to be sorcerors as well, but it's not clear if all or any of them still are.

The Emperor still sits in the capital, but has no control over the Dragon Lands. What is now called Ruesada is the land to the south and west of the Dragon Lands.

A number of schools of magic hold that the Old High Ruesadan language is closest to the original Naming Tongue, and therefore holds more magic. Certainly many magical tomes and scrolls are written in variants of Old High Ruesadan.

A History

Some of the high points of Aegis history (Dates approximate):

?: Before Aegis.

Undead and Eldritch appear.

0: The First War of the Gate.

The Gate is finally sealed by powerful, primitive magics. Some say the First War lasted decades; others say it was over in months. The forces unleashed by the First War created the Bay of the Colossus.

1: Founding

Aegis founded upon the ruins of Aegis. Because things still escape the Gate, the Maze begun as a simple walled labyrinth. A roof is added when flying things emerged.

572: The Razing

Top layer of Aegis razed by the Kradath. They destroy sections of the Maze. They are subsequently destroyed by the Maze's inhabitants.

572-573: Second War of the Gate.

Several major magic colleges founded as a result of knowledge gained in this war. Forbinites claim that this war was ended by Forbin's arrival.

982: The Ruesadan Invasion

Invaders from Ruesada besiege the city; they bring the worship of Thurmillim with them. The siege lasts almost a year; it is this siege that leads the magic colleges to create the "Preserve Food" spell. Aegis' language roots are very similar to the High Ruesadan because of this invasion. Magic is not a useful defense in this war; too much iron in the city.

983-999: Third War of the Gate.

Ruesada ceases to be a major military power after pouring its materiel into this war. Because the war ends with the millennium, this is taken as an omen of good fortune to come.

1020-1500: The Golden Age of Aegis.

Prosperity, trade, an exceptional series of Wardens. The Undead knew their place then. The Eldritch and Undead regard this as a time of oppression and slaughter. The Zoo is built during this time, and populated with natural beasts.

1516: Sorcerer King as Warden

The position of Warden taken by Asth, the Sorcerer King. Asth institutes sweeping social

reforms which are not taken to heart by the populace. (Including final elimination of Thurmillim-worship.) Riots are common. Asth populates the Zoo with things from the Maze.

1521-1542: Fourth War of the Gate

Asth, seeking something (power? true resurrection for his dead wife? Opinion still divided), opens the Gate. Thus begins the Fourth War of the Gate, perhaps the most bitter. All fight in this one, Hellspawn, Eldritch, and human.

1542: The Vampire Revolt.

The Undead seize the opportunity and take control of the city. A long series of negotiations follow which end the persecution of Undead and Eldritch. Most of the Eldritch retire to the mountains and forests at this point. The Vampire Accord is signed. Iron is banned in the city (except for the iron used in the Gate: even after a War of the Gate, few have seen the Gate itself).

1545: The Current Age

The beginning of the current age in Aegis. Traders spread the idea of one standard Festival week. The magic colleges expand, Hell becomes famous. The Midnight Circus is founded.

1628: Death of the Ruesadan Empire

The Old Ruesadan Empire splinters into the Dragon Lands. While there is still an Emperor in the capital, Ruesadan rule is essentially done. Support for Robalda is discontinued; Robalda establishes its first independent treaty with Aegis.

1812: Kobolds Banned

A tribe of Kobolds makes its way past the traps, and the Maze, and the Guard, and attempts to mine the iron in the Gate. After arrest, their stated defense: "Well, it was just sitting there! How were we supposed to know it was something special?"

1895: The Forbin War

Palliss mounts an attack on Aegis by sea. Forbin destroys many of the ships; Forbin seen smiling for many years afterwards. The rest of the ships are destroyed by magic.

Magic

Aegis is most famous for its magic. All of the major schools of magic have colleges here, where magic is easy. Many have subsidiary colleges elsewhere.

Magic in Aegis is so easy that even people without a hint of magery in their blood (for example, the “Natural debility: POW” disadvantage) can perform the three Everyman spells.

(This abundance of magic is one reason why certain Languages of Power are discouraged in Aegis. A carelessly-spoken syllable could destroy the city.)

The Gate

Because Aegis is built upon the Gate, the source of all magic on the planet, it is the centre for all magical research. All magic colleges make their homes here. As a mage approaches the Gate in the Labyrinth, the amount of “wild” magic increases tremendously, and the effects of spells become out of proportion to their casting. Many mages have been known to burn out from channelling the tremendous energies near the Gate.

Rules of Magic

All spells on the planet have the limitation: will not work if more than a dagger’s worth of iron is in the same hex as the caster. This limitation is only worth +1/4, because iron is banned in Aegis. It’s important to realize that this also stops Constant spells; mages who are going into iron-legal areas therefore use Ward instead of Shield, so that the iron in arrowheads accumulates on the ground more than a hex from the caster. Dwarves and Kobolds, workers in metals, almost never perform magic of any kind.

Learning magic (in a particular college) involves an *attunement ritual*. Once you are attuned to a particular college, you must use the components of that college to cast your magic spells, and you are restricted to that college’s “theory” of magic or worldview. (As a side effect, this means that every college of magic has a secret book of “evil spells” or the spells that were created by members who went mad or turned to evil. Since they were restricted to their own colleges, they had to create spells in that school.)

The Everyman Spells are the exception to this rule, and they will only work on the continent of the

Sceptre, where Aegis is. (They are not widely known in Palliss and in Shier Kra, which both have reasons for not allowing the spells to be known.)

The Everyman Spells

Because Aegis is at the source of all magic, everyone knows these three magic spells. These have been time-tested over the years. If you say them wrong, they do not backfire. They cannot be boosted to give a greater result (can’t be pushed). They require material components. All of them take at least a minute to cast, and have incantations or gestures. In Aegis, anyone can cast them, whether or not one has magical aptitude or the disadvantage “Natural debility POW”. The spells are:

1. **Start fire.** (Components: ashes and fuel) (Does 1/2 d 6 K in Hero or 1 DV in CORPS)
2. **Contraception.** Must be cast daily by men, monthly by women. (Component: leafless branch from a tree that has never flowered—this component is not used up by casting the spell)
3. **Preserve food.** Lasts 24 hours (Component: salt, food must be in a special container)

These spells have been *thoroughly* tested. One spell is released for public use about every five hundred years. (The Shield spell is being rushed; it should be ready in about two hundred years.)

You can buy books of household spells, but these take someone with Magic Skill to use, even though all of them have the advantage No magic roll. Examples of the spells found in them: Raise bread, maintain even temperature (useful for ovens and common rooms), polish silver, dust with whirlwind.

If you want to blow big bucks, you can buy a Secretary Quill spell, which will take dictation.

Magic Colleges

All of the leading magic colleges have schools in Aegis. For our purposes a magic college is a group of mages or priests who are united by a common theory of magic. (All account for high- and low-magic areas, and the detrimental effects of iron.) All the spells of a college are thus united by some special effects and by some aspect of the casting. For example, all spells of the Order of Flame must bend flame some way and

they all require Gestures and Incantations. Givamoe magics are almost all ritual, requiring some hours of preparation and the ingestion of interesting potions. Details are more important if you run into them. Knowledge Skill Magic Colleges will help you identify the school of a spell if you see it performed.

Some of the more notable magic colleges:

Elemental Colleges

There are five colleges, based on the five elements (wood, water, air, earth, and fire). Each of their spells must be accomplished using the element of their college. (See appendix.)

Givamoe Magic

Givamoe mages believe that all things have spirits and that the interactions of these spirits cause things to happen. They heal you by sucking out the bad spirits that have gotten into you. Most of their magic tends to be healing or cursing magic, although they have some interesting attack spells based on the spirits of natural features. Their spells require a natural object whose spirit can intercede or be requested to act for them.

Saegin

Only the Saegins know what the tenets of their magic are; only Saegin mages learn it, and Saegins start to become mages after a two-year novitiation (is this a word?), and four more years as a monk. (For more information on the Saegins, see Appendix 2.)

Dheenunan (Blood magic)

The magic college of the vampires. It is only taught from one vampire to another. The Chapter of Secrets has more information on Blood Magic.

Moonblade

The weapons shop where the best magical weapons are made. They qualify as a school. Their records are absolutely confidential. All of their Create spells are complex and ritual. The Moonblade shop occasionally buys exotica from adventurers. Industrial spies try and find out what the Moonblade is buying.

Guild of Necromancers

In Aegis, most Necromancers are on the level of hedge wizards. It just doesn't take much to raise the dead here.

Alchemy

Mages look down on alchemy, partly because it requires no inborn Magic skill to learn. Alchemy is

the art of using the magic inherent in objects to achieve magical ends. To become an alchemist requires the skill Alchemist, which covers basic lab procedures, and Alchemical Theory. To create new elixirs, you must have the skill Alchemical Research. To mix an elixir, you must make a skill roll and someone must tend the elixir 24 hours a day. A failed skill roll usually just means an ineffective batch; an 18 on the skill roll means it blew up.

Almost any magical effect can be created with alchemy, but all elixirs take a long time to create, have only a limited number of charges, use exotic materials and destroy them in the process, and have other limitations, including (usually) requiring time to take effect.

Although alchemy is magical, you cannot use Analyze Magic to analyze an elixir. You must use the *new* spell Analyze Alchemy, which is otherwise treated just like Analyze Magic. Also, any decent Alchemist can analyze an elixir given a lab, 4-7 hours and a successful skill roll.

Alchemical elixirs come in four forms: **Potions** (take one turn to affect subject); **powders**—must be taken in food or drink (take 10 minutes to affect subject); **pastilles**—thumbnail-sized tablets which must be burned and the fumes inhaled for effect (take one phase to affect subject); **unguent**—cream or jelly, must touch bare skin (effect is instant).

Each form has its own shelf life and storage limitations as well. Potions only last a day after being uncorked (so they're often sold in one-dose bottles). Powders will last nearly forever while dry, one month in food or drink. An unburnt pastille will last a month, but is destroyed by water. Unguents are neutralized by water, strong sunlight, and last a week after being exposed to air.

An elixir costs about 1 silver piece for each day it takes to make.

Religion and Mythos

One of the famous streets in Aegis is AllFool's Street. Every major church has a branch here; even Catholicism. (It's changed somewhat; two hundred years ago, they had a vampire Pope, Pope Gregory Innocent III. Alas, he got left in the sun one day.)

The Citizen and the Gods

As befits citizens of a polytheistic culture, citizens of Aegis are fairly casual about gods. New or foreign gods are generally considered to be local gods under a new name, or as part of a hybrid adopted for reasons best known to the gods.

(In this context, the Mosaic dictum "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" makes much more sense.)

One is cautious of gods, careful of gods...but one doesn't start wars for gods. Strangers are generally treated with respect, since a stranger could be a god in disguise (or at least a source of revenue).

There is no strict dividing line between religion and secular activities. Religious holidays are also holidays; religious pilgrimages are expected to be fun and interesting.

The Tarot

This isn't really a religion. Most of the people in Aegis have their cards read at least once a week. The reading has an eighty percent chance of coming true if there are no major arcana cards in it. If there are cards of the major arcana, then you can attempt to get the Burning Woman to intercede for you.

There are two sets of cards, the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana. The Major Arcana consists of 21 cards, while the Minor Arcana is 65 cards, 5 suits of 13 cards each.

These details on the cards and their meanings have deliberately been left vague so GMs can give clues through Tarot readings without being straight-jacketed by them.

The Minor Arcana

The five suits: Clouds, Wands, Torches, Anvils and Streams. They are traditionally arranged in a circle, in that order, with Streams leading back to Clouds. The general meanings are as follows:

Clouds: Dreams, hopes, the emotions.

Wands: Life, bounty, the Eldritch.

Torches: War, the Hellspawn, conflict.

Anvils: Manufacturing, money, tasks.

Streams: Travel, the intellect, freedom.

The cards come in the denominations of 0 to 8, with 0 representing the total absence of that characteristic (even reversed), and with four face cards: Heir (youth, potential unrealized), Jack (path unchosen), Lord, and Lady.

The Major Arcana

Some of these cards will be familiar to you as being in our current Tarot deck; others are very Aegis.

- 0 The Fool (also The Tourist)
- 1 The Mage
- 2 The Duke and Duchess
- 3 The Vampire Lord (or The Leech)
- 4 The Burning Woman
- 5 The City (or The Shield)
- 6 The Seer
- 7 The Sun
- 8 The Moon
- 9 The Tomb
- 10 The Changeling
- 11 The Blind One (or Fate) (husband of The Burning Woman)
- 12 The Colossus
- 13 The Trickster (or the Raven)
- 14 The World
- 15 The Sword
- 16 The Lovers
- 17 The Merchant
- 18 The Wanton
- 19 Death
- 20 The Cascade

It is possible for one of the characters to make a living as a card reader. See the *Mechanics* section for a description of how it's done in game terms.

Luck

Everyone believes in luck. Different religions have different gods in charge of luck, and different gods have different items and numbers they have blessed as lucky.

The magic numbers that everyone believes in are 3, 5, and 7. That's why the year is 15 (3X5) months of 28 (7x4) days, instead of 15 29-day months, or any other combination.

Forbin

Aegis sits on a circular bay (a meteor crater). Standing astride the two spits of land that guard the entrance to the bay is the Colossus, Forbin. He is eternal; he doesn't eat, he doesn't excrete. He does move, though. The Forbinites believe that if Forbin ever leaves, the Gate will collapse and the end of the world will come. They spend their time trying to entertain him. Small Forbins to stand astride doorways are very popular in Aegis. (The thieves' guild likes them, too; they give more hand-holds. Not to mention Rullin the Clever who almost escaped capture by impersonating one.)

The Saegin Monks

(Sy'jin) A monastic order with about 1,200 members in Aegis and six monasteries. They believe in perfect balance of all things. Saegin monks can be recognized by their white robes and their milky white eyes. All Saegin study martial arts, and have a slightly mystic reputation because they can fight while blinded.

The Saegin have a good reputation in Aegis; they may not in other areas. The Saegin helped greatly in the last War of the gate.

They are blinded after their second year of study; this blinding is supposed to be horribly painful, with the student required to fast for a week before. There are several conflicting stories about how the blinding is done:

In one story, the priest supervising takes a red-hot spoon and gouges out the student's eyes. If the student flinches or moves, he fails, and is further mutilated and left for the Beggar Queen to take. If he does not flinch, he is taken away and his eyes are replaced with ivory balls, which are used by the Saegin as an artifact of magic when he becomes a mage.

In another story, the student is asked to blind himself, by dropping acid into his own eyes. If he blinks, the inside surface of the eyelid is burned and scarred, reminding him every time he blinks afterward that he did not maintain perfect control during his investiture.

Some people believe that the Saegin are not blind

at all, but they have a glamour cast over their eyes which allows them to see in the dark.

The religion appeals primarily to men, but there are female members. The six monasteries are divided among five Houses.

Information for players who choose Saegin characters is given in Appendix 2.

Some Other Religions

The Burning Woman The Aegis version of the Prometheus myth. Disobeying her husband, the Blind One (or Fate), she gave magic and fire to humanity. As punishment, he set her on fire for ten thousand years. She can intercede for you, taking on another two years of punishment. Sometimes her husband gets angry at humans for doing this, and the attempt to intercede fails; you get blown up (die horribly, suffer something far worse than you would have without intercession) and the Burning Woman has two hundred years taken off her sentence.

Oerimaekin (pronounced Or-i-my-kin) Oerimaekin is not a religion for the weak of spirit. They don't believe in life after death, they don't believe in the Tarot. Instead of helping their fellow men, they prefer to use them. The religion stresses self-reliance (I'm tempted to say that they have a statue so they can spit on it during ceremonies, but no—) and worldly success. To prove their devotion, they walk over hot coals, and they attempt to make bags of money. If you want a license to walk all over people, join this religion. The only real relationships they have are with other Oerimaekins, because they know where they stand.

More importantly, people don't want to like the Oerimaekin, and the Oerimaekin don't help it by sneering at everyone else. There is a fringe group that few people know about (the Maekinant) who are somewhat softer, and more tolerable.

Rainbows The Rainbow religion will allow anybody and allows almost anything, so long as members give 50% of their income to the church. (They don't state it this baldly.) The Rainbow church is recent and popular. It promises eternal life, absolution for sins, pleasure for the faithful with the certainty of punishment for those who don't believe. The Rainbow religion is causing a certain amount of concern among leading religious leaders. It is new and popular. Rainbows who've

just seen the light wear a scarf of their color (red). As you advance, you change colours. Green rainbows wear a different shade of green than Green Priests. The high priest is Indigo. The god Imanam is, literally, Violet. As a scapegoat, the Rainbows have chosen the Oerimaekin.

Sickles A pagan group, they worship the earth mother-fertility goddess, who is symbolized by the season's crop. They vie with the druids for rights to tend the city parks. The Warden gives them some parks of their own in which they worship.

Death

In Aegis, Death's appearance changes as a gauge of how desirable one finds the idea of dying. Death shifts from a skeleton to a beautiful person of the appropriate sex. Death likes to drink at a tavern called the Aling Raven.

Death is pleasant to speak with and will not play games for anyone's life. "I am only the servant," Death says. "Argue with my masters, not with me."

Living in Aegis

There are good times and there are bad times. The popular perception is that these are good-times-sliding-into-bad-times. ("Things aren't as good as they were when your father was young, I'll tell you that, though at least there's some work still.")

Fashion

The residents of Aegis dress for a wet warm-temperate climate. Men and women wear essentially the same garments, but the styles are different; one can easily tell a man from a woman by dress alone. The summer wear is a light shift (for women) or a light blouse and a kilt (for men), usually with a belt or sash, and a light cloak, and sandals. Spring and fall wear adds hose and a heavier cloak; in the winter, men switch to pants. Most men wear a breechclout under their kilts. Women may wear a breechclout and many women wear an undergarment which functions somewhat like a brassiere (rather like the ancient Cretan model). Winter footgear is leather boots which look rather like moccasins (since no nails are used in making Aegis footgear).

For formal occasions, high-born and middle-class women will wear gowns and men will wear hose or pants.

Colours tend to be bright; leathers are frequently dyed.

Elves tend to dress like Robin Hood year-round.

Vampires wear pants year-round, men and women.

The Economics of Blood

Aegis has a rather complex economy based on blood. There's a fair amount of inflation-devaluation.

You may choose to use one of two currencies as a GM running a campaign in Aegis. If you prefer a simpler currency, there is a simple gold-silver-copper scale: If you enjoy a realistic (but difficult) economy, keeping track of occasional inflation, devaluation, and multiple currencies, you may use the blood economy. In either case, no iron coins are allowed.

In the simple currency, 1 gold piece = 10 silver pieces; 1 silver piece = 100 copper pieces. For convenience, use current prices for items, but think of a copper piece as about 50 cents. They cut coppers into eighths if needed. A beer is 2 coppers.

In the complex currency, there are three different currencies: the Warden's currency, the bridge-token, and bonds issued by one of several private organizations.

The most stable currency is the bridge-token. You can make a profit through careful exchange of bridge-tokens, though not on a regular basis, and the Guild of Money-lenders frowns on it. (Bridge-tokens go for less in the purely human areas far from the bridge, because these people don't go across the bridge. So you can buy tokens from them for resale near the bridge. But these people rarely have tokens.)

Every month, you go down and donate a certain quantity of blood. You receive tokens. The ratio of blood:gold is fairly well fixed, so you can always pay some poor person to donate for you. You might even get the blood cheaper than just buying a token on the black market. Since the coins can only legally be spent on Blood-Toll Bridge and in Hell, they find their way back to the blood banks.

Food and Drink

The staples are corn (maize), wheat, and rice. Much of the food is imported from Goblet-Hollow, also called "the Valley", which is at the source of the Mearallaem River. Aegis also imports food (meat animals, some grains, some fruits) from the neighbouring nations of Gurril, Omaki, and Palliss. The city can survive without this importation, but diet would be reduced. The climate in Aegis is suitable for citrus fruits, although fruits like apples and peaches must be brought in from Ruesada or from Goblet-Hollow. (It may help to think of Aegis as Vancouver and Goblet-Hollow as the Okanagan Valley.)

Meat is eaten two or three times a week; most people keep chickens or other fowl if they can (just as many people keep a vegetable garden), and one can always buy fish or goat or pork at one of the markets. Cattle are rarely eaten, although they are sometimes brought down from Omaki and then slaughtered. Oxen and horses may be eaten, but they aren't bred for it.

Both soft and hard cheeses are made from goat's milk. Most cheese comes from outside the city.

Beer and wine technologies are reasonably developed, because of the Preserve Food spell. A jar

of ale costs a penny (about a dollar in terms of earnings). The alcohol levels in Aegis brews are world-famous; in most lands, the beer is about one per cent alcohol but in Aegis it can be six per cent. (A redistilled sweet beer with fifteen per cent alcohol is also popular, but expensive.) Wines in Aegis are reasonably good (though not the best) because the grapes can be good, and the brandies are excellent.

Family and Clans

People in Aegis have families, and they have clans. Clans are assigned like astrological signs, according to the day of the week on which you were born. People born on the cusp are very special, since they belong to two clans. Hellspawn tend not to have clans. Some vampires and weres might.

Anyone born during Festival is a Raven. Ravens consider themselves special because some of the legendary heroes were Ravens. Many Ravens are executed.

Some clans have rivalries: Wind vs. Fog, and Bear vs. Salmon. (These are more like army-navy rivalries than Hatfield-McCoy rivalries.) River, Tree, Wolf, and Raven clans are neutral. (Wolf and Raven clans used to be rivals, but that stopped as a result of the Vampire Revolt. Maybe someday I'll figure out the story.)

A member of your clan is obliged to help you in a time of crisis. Help does not mean betraying their employer. If you go around abusing this, they can boot you out of the clan. Nobody is neutral to someone who has been ostracized from a clan. In practical terms, you have to leave the city, even if that is not explicitly the purpose of ostracism.

Of course, if someone comes up to you and says, "I am also of the Wolf clan. Help me!" then you have to.

Each clan has a mark. The marks aren't secret, but they aren't advertised, either. If you aren't particularly observant, you could grow up without knowing what some of the marks are. It takes 1 pt. of knowledge to know other clans' marks. You always know the mark of your own clan. Each clan assigns the clan mark at a different age, but none before the age of eight.

The clan system extends through the nations of Sceptre, Haquida and Western Ruesada.

One's style of marriage depends upon ones religion and ones social standing. Nobles often have formal marriages which include dowries and exchanges of rights and titles, and extensive

agreements about childcare and inheritance. Most people simply ask and then move in together; they may ask for the relationship to be sanctified at temple. Divorce is automatic if the couple have decided to have children and there were none after three years. If the couple don't want to divorce, they can extend their marriage to include another party to substitute for the sterile or substitute partner. (Some marriages include three or four parties anyway.)

Most families in the city are small (birth control is available!) and more closely resemble modern nuclear families. (The clan system largely replaces the extended family.)

Inheritance is by sex: boys inherit from their father, girls inherit from their mother. If only one sex of child is born, they inherit from both parents.

Birth and Death and Resurrection

Most people (humans) are born in the homes of their parents. The births are usually attended by midwives, who may or may not know magical spells. Some people will use magic to hold off the birth or speed it up to come at a more propitious time, but the majority of people do not. What will be, they figure, will be.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most humans choose to be cremated after a funeral service. (The service is usually a religious blessing followed by a wake.)

There are graveyards in Aegis (there are several in the Swords district, for example), and a "headcount" is done on a regular basis to ensure that no one is reviving corpses without permission.

Most graveyards are paupers' graves. It costs more to be cremated than to be buried, and the Warden is reluctant to burn someone who may only appear to be dead. (There was a mistake several hundred years ago involving a powerful vampire and an overzealous bureaucrat.)

Some few people save a token of a deceased relative (usually a thumb) to use in case they ever need to resurrect that relative. (Other people regard this as barbaric, since only the complete destruction of the body will sever the silver cord that binds a soul to its body.) People who do keep tokens treat them as irreplaceably valuable (and there are criminals who steal ancestor-tokens and ransom them).

Because of the problems with population pressure, resurrections are subject to bureaucratic approval. Although there are mages who will do "back-alley"

resurrections, most reputable mages will only store the corpse or token until such time as a certificate is obtained from the Warden. (This is handled on a daily basis; applicants plead their case to an upper-level bureaucrat who has a given number of certificates to hand out. Applications are open to the public; you can argue against someone's resurrection if you want.)

Once the certificate and the money have been passed to the mage, the resurrection is usually straightforward. The mage has worked out the details in advance.

Note that resurrections can also be performed by gods. These are not subject to bureaucratic whim, but are extremely rare. (In fact, there are none currently alive in the world.)

Entertainment and Special Events

The citizens of Aegis are fond of entertainment, and there are special events all through the year.

Festival

The last seven days of the year (8 days every 130 years) are the Festival. Festival is a big money-making time in Aegis, but it's also a legitimate celebration of the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. At Festival time, one can (should) make one's peace with old spirits, beseech the blessings of gods, and try to create a favourable environment for omens in the coming year. The Festival in two years is an 8-day festival, which is extra-special. Some preparations are already underway.

Blacktongue Kickers

A popular sport in Aegis. The Festival includes a round-robin playoff between teams, ending with the championship game, refereed by the ghost of Emer Spraytoe, the inventor of the game.

The Midnight Circus

The Midnight Circus is an old established gladiatorial arena located in Hell. It runs at night only, and often features humans against hellspawn opponents. Champions become local celebrities, and there is a great deal of betting on the outcomes of fights.

The current champion is Greemayrisk, a

Barsoomian.

Technology

Aegis has roughly the technology that Earth had in 1300. There are differences, however.

Technologies

Aegis has the following technologies:

- The printing press. Moveable type. Paper.
- The wooden truss. Cement and concrete for finishing roads and buildings. Houses have tile roofs instead of thatch.
- The block and tackle.
- The "S" trap in plumbing, allowing flush toilets and sinks that are not noxious.
- Soap. A general connection between hygiene and disease, although the actual cause of disease is believed to be spirits.
- Glass. Glass mirrors are available, but are very expensive (glass is not made in Aegis). Spectacles are known, too.
- The water-driven mechanical clock. (Aegis has a large clock tower in the center of the mercantile district on the West Bank, which is visible—if not legible—throughout the city.)
- The water wheel. Used in relatively few locations, because it's easier to have someone enchant the mill, or use zombies and a whim-drive.
- Paddle wheel boats with animal whim-drive (not usable on the Mearallam). Ship convoys.
- Sailors can take advantage of magnetic compasses, mariner's compasses, astrolabes, and charts of the fixed and moving stars.
- Alchemists are capable of producing a number of reagents, including sulfuric acid, nitric acid, aqua regia, and silver nitrate.
- Mathematicians have the concept of zero, of decimal points, of decimal arithmetic, and a reasonable knowledge of algebra and trigonometry.
- The concept of hops in brewing beer is also known. (Aegis is known to have the best breweries, distillers, and vintners in the world, producing potent brews that often knock foreigners unconscious, since alcohol levels in Aegis brews can approach six per cent, while they are usually one per cent in other lands). The concept of the assembly-line is largely

unknown, except for certain religious and magical technologies. (Components are given initial preparation by novices, improved by journeymen, and finished by masters.)

Ships around the southern part of the continent, where the winds are tricky, use the lateen sail. Lug sails are common around the north, where the trade winds are more predictable.

Weapons and Armour

All citizens who have been through the public school system have familiarity with bow or crossbow or staff or sword (equal chance, or the player can choose). This is part of the Aegis Citizen's Package (see later).

Most people are satisfied with knives or clubs; thieves and bandits may use shortwords. The quarterstaff is moderately popular; it's the weapon of choice for the Saegin priests.

Because of the melting-pot nature of the city, there are a wide variety of weapons here, almost any weapon that doesn't contain iron or gunpowder. Maces, flails (including nunchaku), and lances aren't particularly popular. (In Aegis' narrow streets, it's difficult to charge a horse.) People who live in the Great Marsh use a type of bolo to bring down birds.

The occasional barbarian or professional fighter might wander about with a bronze bastard sword. Carrying a weapon like that attracts the wrong kind of attention, though.

No one has ever heard of gunpowder. Even if they had, they would assume it was magic. (It may exist as a viable technology on the far side of the planet, where magic is weak.)

Nobles and vampires tend to use sabre, epee, and rapier. Vampires particularly employ what is essentially Florentine style (use of the dagger adds +1 to DCV, like a sword, if you have bought familiarity with Florentine style).

Each city guard has an iron broadsword and a mail shirt, shorter than a cuirass. The mail shirt is bronze, magically strengthened. A Guardsman has a skirtplate, a small shield, greaves and vambraces. Helms are optional, and are usually discarded in the summer, when the humidity is high.

Only Guardsmen (and ex-Guardsmen) have armour that good. Not all ex-Guardsmen have saved enough money to buy their armour from the Warden. Everyone else must make do with hardened leather or cloth.

In Aegis, people name their favourite weapons,

especially if the weapon is expensive or magical. Each sword in succession needn't have its own name; perhaps a vampire always names his rapier Dheenamra, or Blood Drinker, though this is his fourth rapier by that name.

About Bronze

Bronze is about half as strong as steel, and weighs about 10% more. (Halve the defense values for steel weapons given in the rules.) Bronze blades nick and dull quickly (treat it as a weapon of poor quality). This is no problem in the city; it'll cost you a silver piece to get the weapon sharpened again, or you can do it yourself with familiarity with Weaponsmith or Weapon Care, and the tools.

Bronze is much more expensive than iron. However; although there are decent copper mines in the mountains, Aegis depends upon the mines in Toorn in Ruesada for its supply of tin.

There are two types of magical bronze: Mage's Bronze and Smith's Bronze. Both are made by mages. Mage's Bronze is as strong and light as steel, but reverts to regular bronze if the spell is broken. Smith's Bronze is made by magic but is not inherently magical: it is as hard and strong as steel, and never reverts to regular bronze, even in no-magic areas. It must be worked by a smith. Only the Moonblade shop knows the spells for Smith's Bronze; the payment includes a dozen beryls of a certain size and quality.

You can buy a magically hardened blade that's as strong as a steel one for only 30 gold pieces. You can get one that's much harder for a lot more.

Education

Aegis has public schools. Children attend from ages 4-7 (a bit longer than Earth ages 5-8, given the difference in the year). Children are taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and basic weapons proficiencies. They are taught some measure of social studies: some history, some geography, and some of the great stories of their people. ("A citizen's first duty is to the Warden," and so on.) Other topics include what to do if there's a fire, how to mobilize in case of attack, and so on.

Literacy is reasonably wide-spread because of this (hence all of the news-sheets), but there are plenty of adults who can only barely remember how to make their mark. Because the city deals with so many tourists, being illiterate is not (in general) a great

disadvantage.

When a child leaves school, he or she is old enough to apprentice to a guild or take other employment.

Aegis has public schools; citizens are required to go to school from age 4 until age 8. The schools teach basic reading, writing, arithmetic and the use of bow or crossbow. Private tutors are available to teach after the age of 8. Many adults have forgotten how to read, though most can still write their names.

Sexual Equality

The humans have had full sexual equality for a thousand years, ever since the contraception spell was perfected. Discriminate against people because of their religion or ancestry or ethnic background, sure, but not because their sex.

Side effects include the dissolution of “traditional” (Ruesadan) marriage ceremonies and a change in inheritance practices.

Jobs and Employment

To a large extent, the employment system is feudal. Most jobs are hereditary. If your mother was a servant of the Inikear family, you will be too. Should a family or a church purchase your services, you will follow them. They, in turn, pay for all the necessities of life, and throw the wedding party for you, and all of that. In essence, you have sworn fealty to your employer. Some employers and some jobs may require you to swear homage.

Probably the best job to get from that point of view is city guard. The pay is good, and there are no restrictions on who you marry, because the Warden has no rivals. (No admitted rivals.) People do leave the city guard; it is a dangerous job, and a cautious and economical guardsman can leave after ten years and buy a small business.

Aegis has all sorts of jobs. If you can’t do anything else, you can be a guide (if you’re a native). Fishermen. Craftsmen. Aegis has some of the master craftsmen of the world. Aegis is also very fond of entertainers.

Because of the high degree of literacy in Aegis, they have weekly news-sheets, published on rag paper with moveable type presses. The type is carved wood. The news-sheets have ads, so you can make a living as a newsman in Aegis. Not a good one; there are four or five long-term news-sheets with new ones appearing and disappearing all the time. The oldest is

the Bell-Call, published and mostly written by Oarimel Lemig.

There are professional people in Aegis—chirurgeons, pleaders, scribes, etc. They have guilds.

Guilds

Here are some guilds of Aegis. The guilds have a degree of power: they control entry into fields of employment, and are reasonably free of influence by the vampires. (Some humans regard this as being between a rock and a hard place: vampires or guilds.)

Animal Handlers Guild
Apothecaries Guild
Artificer’s Brotherhood
Blacksmiths’ Alliance
Brotherhood of Stonemasons
Carpenters’ Cadre
Embalmers’ Guild
Federation of Fences
Fellowship of Pain (official torturers, executioners)
Fellowship of Physicians and Chirurgeons
Heralds’ and Messengers’ Guild (includes news-sheet producers)
House of Pleadors
Jewelers’ Guild
Merchants’ Consortium
Moneychangers’ Guild
Moneylenders’ Guild
Order of Architects
Order of the Planets and Harmonics (Astrologers’ Association)
Pilots’ Guild
Pleasure Consortium (prostitution, drugs, etc.)
Scribes’ Guild
Shipwrights’ Guild
Tailors’ Guild
Thieves’ Guild
Slavers’ Guild

Hygiene: Sewers and Aqueducts

The city of Aegis has relatively advanced sewers; unlike other cities in the world, fecal matter does not coat the streets. Most houses have running water and flush toilets, of a sort. Water is provided

The sewers do not empty into the bay or the river. (They did once, but the merpeople object, and the merpeople are essential to the Aegis fishing industry.) Instead, there is an “aqueduct” (actually a cloacaduct) that carries waste to the Great Marsh. This sewer is covered, and accessible underground through the

maze of tunnels that make up the Aegis sewer system.

Rain sewers *do* empty into the river.

Both sewer systems are largely populated. The rain sewers tend to be the hideouts of beggars, and the cloaca tend to be populated by wererats.

The Second Oldest Profession: Tourism

The city of Aegis encourages tourists. (By “tourist” we mean “foreign visitors who will spend money”.)

The concept of tourists in a “medieval” society is not unheard of. Many of the “pilgrims” in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* act as though the pilgrimage is a holiday.

The Normans had a practice of sending sons to finish their education in France; the Elizabethans sent theirs to Italy.

Some medieval towns did support themselves by catering to pilgrims who passed through on the way to holy sites. Military and religious orders were founded, ostensibly to cater to the needs of pilgrims

With pilgrims come diseases, brawls, con men, prostitution (not just the needs of male pilgrims, but many pilgrim nuns who never made it to their destinations ended up as whores at some wateringhole along the way).

Aegis makes a big deal out of two things: *Anyone* can do magic in Aegis, and *monsters* roam the streets *safely*. One of the reasons for the Midnight Circus is to expose visitors to actual Hellspawn in a safe environment.

Most inns and taverns that deal with the tourist trade have an employee, the “spur,” whose job it is to get everyone involved in conversation (and drink more, but that’s incidental). In a night in a tourist inn, you are expected to participate in the stories and the songs. If you want a secret meeting, go somewhere else.

They make their own fun in the inns and taverns (although an entertainer will not be out of work for long, in Aegis).

Pilgrims undoubtedly have different reasons for a trip to Aegis:

- Some bring their dead companions to Aegis in the hope of having them resurrected.
- Some hope to have some other miracle occur, or get a boon of a god.
- Some are adherents of the Christian faith, and would like to meet with the Pope.
- Some want to see the Undead or to learn from them.

Wheels within Wheels: A Chapter of Secrets

This chapter contains some secrets. If you are not playing a thief, a beggar, a Saegin, or an elf, you should content yourself with reading the first section, “Assorted Rumours”.

Assorted Rumours

This section contains rumours. Truth not guaranteed.

Saegin priests are blinded by dripping acid into their eyes; if the candidate blinks, he fails and is still blinded.

The vampires control almost all of the Warden’s council.

A vampire cannot enter a building unless invited.

Kakkam are really violent Faerie, ejected from the courts of the Fae.

The Pallissene Knights of the Riven Palm are immune to magic.

Beggars and thieves are part of the same guild.

Death’s appearance is different for each person.

Elves can control a human’s mind.

The child of a vampire and a human can see invisible things.

Shapeshifters can’t be trusted.

It takes five bites from a vampire to become a vampire.

Most gods adopt human form to wander the streets of the city.

Thieves

As befits a high-density area, Aegis has a high thief population, including Brams, who are beggars who fake deformities. This includes beggars, many of whom are not maimed at all (although one subfaction

of the Cleaved tribe of beggars (see below) will maim the fakes, who are understandably not thrilled). There have been times when the Thieves’ Guild has owned part of the Council; this is not one of those times.

The Guild doesn’t like foreigners working in town, but it hasn’t the structure to deal with all of them. The Guild exerts strongest control on pickpockets and those who would steal from inns, since those are the crimes that directly affect the tourist trade. Non-member con men are only hunted on an 11-roll and a really inventive thief might be able to win their respect and membership with a spectacular theft. Of course, then he would owe dues, wouldn’t he?

If a thief begins to attract attention, there’s a good chance that the Guild will contract to have the thief taught a lesson. Perhaps he or she will be caught...

Legal punishment for first theft is forced labour; second theft is loss of a hand. They never cut off both hands; that would increase the beggar population. Instead, they set you to work in Hell, or they auction off your blood to the vampires to pay back your theft.

Almost all fences in Aegis belong to the Fraternity of Fences. They won’t buy from a non-Guild thief. This means that most of the free-lancers work for specific targets or for cash.

About a hundred years ago, the beggars split off from the Thieves’ Guild and formed their own group. Most people believe that the thieves and the beggars are still the same group.

Beggars

When the beggars started to worship Thurm, about a hundred years ago, they split off from the Thieves’ Guild, and developed their own identity. (Their worship of Thurm is a secret, known only to beggars.) The Beggars’ Guild is currently ruled by Maron, the Beggar King, and his consort, the Veiled Lady (or the Lace Lady), Erdeeth. In the past few months, however, there has been a Feud between the Beggars, which has divided the Guild in two.

The Beggars’ Guild is made up of six tribes, given here in increasing order of status:

Brams

Non-deformed children of beggars who must then fake their deformities. Beggars hold them in the lowest regard. Most of the

“old” Brams — those who faked injuries before the separation with the Thieves’ Guild — considered themselves con-men and are now part of the thieves.

Cleaved

Warriors or adventurers who have been maimed. Some of the Cleaved are a bit fanatical and will “make” converts out of brams in the Thieves’ Guild.

Gutterkin

The desperate, the destitute, and the mad.

Demonsbreath

Those maimed and crippled by disease & illness.

Stained

Those maimed by accident or intent (Erdath is a member of this tribe).

Thurget

The congenitally deformed (Maron is a member of this tribe).

Saegins

The following information should be restricted to players whose characters are Saegin monks.

Combat

It is accepted that the Saegin are masters of combat. There are Saegin archers; they are more advanced in their studies, and have already mastered the quarterstaff.

The Saegin reputation for combat began with the last War of the Gate. The Saegin monastery of the time was its own division. Being blind, they were unaffected by visual illusions and did not require light in the labyrinth. There are those who say that the Saegin mages did not successfully banish the monsters. But there are those who say that the Saegin mages bound one of them, and that monster waits beneath one of the monasteries, to be used by the Saegin against the Others when the next Gate War happens.

As you can expect, the Saegin are pretty much left alone. Sometimes a gang will learn how to recognize the novices and beat them up; the gang is usually dealt with, but not by the Saegins. (At least, not that anyone can trace...)

The Saegin Religion

Although the Saegin study combat as part of self-discipline and self-knowledge, it is only the branch of the church found in Aegis. Any one who has taken the time to study the Saegin will have discovered that the Saegin have tried all avenues of self-discipline. This means that there are, for instance, a few who are from a different branch who study instead a yoga-like discipline, or writing, or singing. There is in Bef Mozhem-sur a Saegin circus. But then, Bef Mozhem-sur is a strange land.

The basic tenets, then, are asceticism and self-control, achieved through mastery of a discipline. (This is most clearly shown in their magic.) There are few holy writings of the Saegin, for obvious reasons. The only holy books and writs they have are intended for the novices. These are primarily writings on diet, topics for meditation, and the initial exercises on training the mind and the senses.

The Saegin religion is not monolithic; they are divided along several lines. First are the divisions of discipline; there is generally respect between the branches. More serious are divisions based on differences in philosophy. The public does not hear about these differences. Given the relative secrecy of the Saegins, we can assume that the revealing of Saegin secrets is one of these issues.

Hierarchy

The Aegis priests are organized into six Houses, the Houses of Thought, Hearing, Touch, Taste, Smell, and Movement. All of the Houses are equal, but the House of Thought is more equal than others. At least, it is at this House that the Saeginimet (most accurately, the One Who Judges, in Old High Ruesadan) stays.

Each House has an Elder, who is supposedly only a resource for others, but who practically wields the power.

The Elders of a city meet regularly. The Saeginimet is frequently seen toiling in the garden, or instructing novices.

Magic

Like many other magic colleges in Aegis, the prospective mage must undergo a ceremony which (effectively) sensitizes him or her to the qualities of the college’s magic.

Because the Saegin emphasize self-discipline and memorization abilities, they learn magic relatively quickly once they start, but they start later in life. There are a number of restrictions on the lifestyles of Saegin mages; if these are not followed, the magic will not work.

The mage must abstain from sex, and from contraception spells. (Granted, the second isn't a great disadvantage once you've accepted the first.) For a month after indulging in any form of sexual activity, the mage will be unable to perform any sort of magic.

The diet is highly specialized. No red meat, no poultry. Certain kinds of fish are kosher, some aren't. It costs money to maintain this diet, if you don't have your own garden; about 20 silver pieces extra each month.

There are a series of physical exercises which must be performed at least every other day, preferably every day. These take about an hour, and replace the katas of the regular Saegins. They focus the magical energies in the correct parts of the body.

Touching a piece of iron has the same effect as sexual activity; it "grounds" the magical energies. Saegin magic is built around the concept of balance and entropy. (Even balance needs an opposite concept as counterweight.) Saegin mages tend not to use magical items. They also do not allow the investiture of objects with one's magic -- you can't

put magical energy into your quarterstaff so you can sleep around and still fight in the morning.

Elves

Elves are extremely long-lived. One of the problems with being an elf is that life can get boring.

As a result, the elves have adopted a behaviour identified as "elf-mind." After one or two hundred years of life, an elf begins to feel a certain restlessness. (There are physical symptoms: the brain is regenerating.) When this happens, he makes preparations to go "beyond the sea." An elf can hold this off by making will or ego rolls, but eventually must give in. It's a biological imperative for them.

And then, the next morning, the elf wakes up and he is someone else, *with a new history*. The "elf-mind" comes into play because all of the other elves *agree* with him or her. (This can drive humans crazy, because they see their old friend, but everyone insists that that's someone else who happens to look just like him.)

This won't normally affect PCs, but it explains why elves don't have 400 years worth of experience.

Although elves don't have the Immortality advantage, they do age slowly and they heal nerve damage better than humans and most others do. They will not regrow lost limbs, however.

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