

# Kostaddi

*We are the true and chosen people of Emperor Sun!*

Kostaddi is one of the more heterogeneous satrapies of the Empire. It is home not only to a large Dara Happan population, but also a wide range of other cultures, from the Sable Riders of the Hungry Plateau to the grim inhabitants of the hell-city of Alkoth.

The people of Kostaddi surrendered to Sheng Seleris. As punishment for this treachery, they have been subject to the Khan of Khans of the Sable Nation since 4/27 (1436 S.T.). He collects tribute from the lowlanders in the manner of a nomadic lord, following the rituals of Jenarong and Jaquat. He assigns the tribute gathering to clan khans, in a form of tax farming, and collects his tribute from them. The Khan of Khans holds court in Two Towers, which commands the only route up from the lowlands, when he is not conducting his seasonal journey across the Plateau.

The native Kostaddi are largely farmers and petty town-folk, and although heavily influenced by the dominant Dara Happan culture, they still cling to their native worship of Gerendetho the Great Billy Goat and his wife Senkana, the Barley Mother. They account for less than a third of the total population, but in many cases even the Dara Happans in Kostaddi have begun adopting some of their ways, from their useful magic to their characteristic broad-brimmed straw hats.

## Potent Lands of the Rich Earth

Kostaddi comprises the eastern portions of the Dara Happan provinces of Vonlath and Henjarl as well as the hill lands of the Kostaddi and the Sankenites. It is a land of contrasts: two thirds of the territory is rich farmland, but the rest is the bleak steppe atop the Hungry Plateau. Kostaddi is the most temperate of the satrapies, shielded from the worst winter storms by Karasal and Silver Shadow, with warm summers and mild winters, and only the high Hungry Plateau ever experiences serious

cold. It has long been associated with its herds of goats, although Dara Happan lands favor cows and pigs.

## Alkoth

One of the three great Dara Happan cities, Alkoth is the home of Shargash, the Dara Happan god of destruction and war. The Girdle of Shargash (a titanic wall of impenetrable green stone) surrounds the ancient city. Its four gates are tunnels under the wall to the outer city, largely made up of docks and the Jaran riverfolk dwellings along the curve of the Oslir River around the city. The wall marks more than just the city limits, for within its confines the Inner World gives way to the Dara Happan Underworld. Inside the city, beneath a starless sky, the grim Alkothi live, love, fight, and raise families like other people. They simply do so alongside the legions of demons and ghosts that are the children, servants, or slaves of Shargash. The people of the lands around the city call it Hellgate, and rightly fear the berserker armies that spill forth from its gates to bring the word and power of the Red King to those who displease Shargash. Alkoth has never fallen to assault, only treachery and the vagaries of politics. As such, it has never been sacked or pillaged, the only city in Dara Happa to claim such an honor. The records and libraries of Alkoth are intact, but private. Yelmgatha, an exceptional hero, came out with a copy of *The Glorious ReAscent of Yelm*, and thus reestablished the ancient Dara Happan religion.

At the Dawn, the city was independent, but joined the Empire under Emperor Khordavu. Alkoth will only follow the true Emperor, just as Shargash would only obey Yelm. Every emperor since Anaxial has visited Alkoth as part of the Eleven Tests and received the Girdle of Strength upon his acceptance.

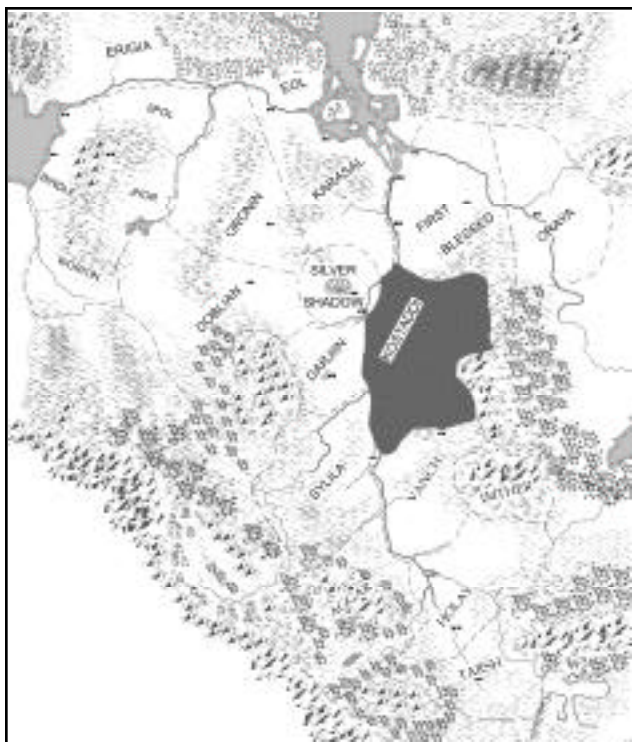
Many warriors of the city serve in the Imperial Army, private vexillae, or the bodyguard details of powerful and envied Yelmic nobles. In return, the city and its people are shunned by most Imperials as a damnable pit. Many bloody cults exist there that daily sacrifice slaves and citizens to Shargash. The streets are covered in the ashes of the dead. The people revel in mob violence and surrender themselves to the ecstatic dance and drums that echo around the city at every holy event and sacrifice.

Three cult officials share rule of the city. The Red King has authority over external city relations (including all aspects of war). He must be a peerless warrior and high priest of Shargash the Destroyer. The Green King rules within the walls and provides fertility to the croplands outside the city. He is the high priest of Alkor the city god, commander of the Elevens, and champion of Shargash the Purifier. Behind the two kings of the Inner World is the Black King, who epitomizes the mystical aspect of Shargash and his power of *rakapas*: disintegration or dissolution. The Black King often walks the streets covered in filth and ash, speaking in the hidden tongue of his god while enraptured citizens listen and hope for a blessing. Death at the hands of the Black King is a great honor to the family of the slain, whose soul serves Shargash as a demon in its next life.

## The Imperial Census

Population: 585,000

Alkothi	16%
Dara Happan	35%
Kostaddi	30%
Lunar	10%
Sable	9%



## The Hungry Plateau

Ten hundred years ago, Sable Riders were recruited from the distant lands of Prax to fight the savage Pentans. The Hungry Plateau Sable Riders are their descendants. Emperor Khordavu granted them the harsh and seemingly uninhabitable Hungry Plateau in 230, but its tough plants and hostile spirits were suited the sable folk. Khan Jaquat united their tribes and was the first to raid the lowlands. Unconquerable at their height, they kept a rough independence until the Khan of Khans led his horde against the new Lunar Emperor. He sought great wealth in partnership with the Imtherian rebel Jannisor. The army entered Glamour, ascended the tower, and stormed across the Silver Road towards Moongate. There, suspended, the Twin Stars showed them their true destiny with the Goddess and the Red Emperor. They stopped their attack and fell upon Jannisor instead.

Now the Sables are a terrifying cavalry force at Moonson's disposal. For their valor in fighting Sheng (in contrast to the cowardly surrender of the Kostaddi lowlands), they were granted overlordship of the satrapy. The current Khan of Khans, Rhaffa, is no simple barbarian, but a figure as at home on the saddle of a sable as playing the political games of the Imperial court in his role as Satrap of Kostaddi. Although he has given many clans a 'grazing' (a fief generally containing a few towns from which they can collect tribute) in Kostaddi, they still maintain their nomadic lifestyle, herding their animals from pasture to pasture on the Plateau.

The Sables are a loud, boastful people long inured to the hardships of living on the Hungry Plateau. They are also a proud people, who are used to receiving the tribute from the surrounding terrified lowlands and have no compunction about doing whatever it takes to achieve their goals. They hunt the laughing dog, burrowing land-eel, running owl, and gray deer with their javelins and hunting dogs, and herd sables, cattle,

and goats. They worship their founder, Jaquat the Warlord, and his wife, Ergessa the Obedient Wife. Shamans worship the Silver Sable and its spirits.

## Sanken

In Sanken, the bulk of the population follows traditional gods, such as Gerendetho, but are ruled by a substantial class (almost a third) of Yelm worshippers who follow the ways of Sankendavu, their ancient hero. Sankendavu taught that 'We are all Yelm' to those of the pure bloodlines, and his people have followed that creed, even though it often brings them into conflict with the mainstream Yelmic cult in the Oslir valley. Due to their philosophy, Yelmites from Sanken are unconventional, self-responsible, and eager to quest for their powers, as Yelm did in his youth. They believe utterly in *noblesse oblige*, protecting and helping their peasants with a fierce sense of responsibility. Sankenites excel as warriors; they emulate Yelm and his heroes, and those seeking an elite force with unbending honor hire them as bodyguards and hoplites. They are traditionally supportive of new ideas and exploring the many ways of Yelm. As a result, they were foremost in aiding Khordavu in his reform of the Empire in 220 S.T., entering into the resulting Dawn Age mysteries, and accepting the Dragon Sun when he ruled. They aided the last solar Emperor, Yelmgatha, in paving the way for the Red Emperor.

Their capital is **Orientos**. Built originally by Sankendavu upon the precipitous slopes of the Vragum Plateau, Orientos means "place of turbulent strength" in Dara Happan. The Bokosin River shields two sides of the plateau in a triangle, with the third side guarded by a titanic ditch that can be flooded from the river. Atop the plateau, the ancient and ever-increasing walls, towers, and bastions of Orientos soar. Here stands the temple citadel that holds Sankendavu's preserved body, which is visited by Sankenites seeking inspiration.

## Shargash the Destroyer

*The Fear Striker*

Shargash is the God of War, the source of all fighting arts. Yelm's most violent son, Shargash participated in the making of the world, and in the making of Alkoth and its traditions. He was trouble, always ready to turn his violence against any foe. The Golden Age was the Age of Peace, and so always and ever the Golden Emperor held Shargash from action.

When the Emperor was murdered in a cowardly manner and went to the realm of Kazkurtum, the Dead God, Shargash was finally released. At last, he met Death at a place in the Underworld called the Boneyard, beneath clouds of flies and vultures. He forced Kazkurtum to beg for mercy and not only freed Yelm, but awoke within himself the burning Janata, the Killer Bolt. Shargash is still the foremost god of the hell-city and troops of Alkoth. Sensible Dara Happans fears him and his bloodthirsty followers, but even they recognize that violent and dangerous times sometimes call for a violent and dangerous god.

*Entry Requirements:* Must be male.

*Mundane Abilities:* Dance, Devotee of Shargash *or* Initiate of Shargash, Mace and Shield Combat, Mythology of Shargash, Play Drums.

*Virtues:* Brutal, Violent.

*Affinities and Feats:*

☩ **Berserker** (Fight while Injured, Howl of Fury, Smash Many at Once, Strength of Shargash)

† **Combat** (Burning Weapon, Crushing Mace Blow, Shield Help, Smash Shield Wall)

☩ **Destruction** (Crack Earth, Fiery Aura, Strike Foe with Sky Bolt, Violent Wind)

*Secret:* **Janata the Killer Bolt** (The devotee invokes this magic in a contest by bidding all his AP at once. If he drives his opponent below 0 AP and is victorious in the contest, the opponent dies.)

*Other Side:* Shargash' Palace is on the Bloody Planet in the Solar Realm. After death, his followers go to his Palace, where they practice fighting until he sends them back to the Middle Realm as daimones of death and destruction. Shargash' planet wanders slightly in the sky, always moving closer to any large war so that he can get a better view of the bloodshed. From Shargash' Palace one may charge into the Golden Age, the Storm Age, the Great Darkness, or the Underworld.

*Disadvantages:* The cult is not popular outside of Alkoth except as mercenaries; even then their bloodthirsty excesses are frowned upon. Imperial Citizens find Shargash reactionary, violent, and compulsive, so his worshippers rarely achieve positions of power (at least, not outside of Alkoth).

