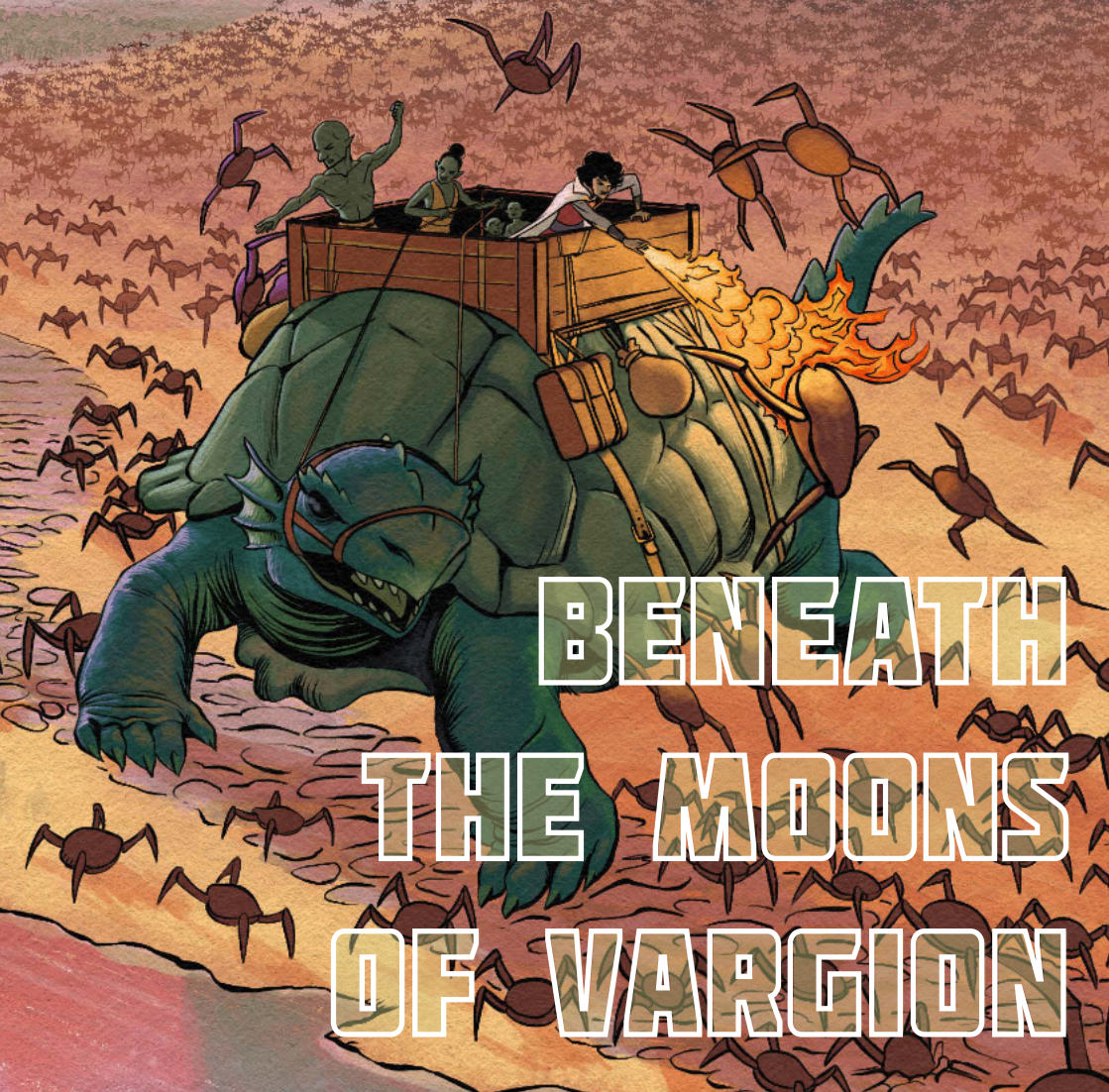


DAR SILVERCLOAK



BENEATH THE MOONS OF VARGION

THE AL-MUAB'IDEEN EMPIRE



Qura Farisli



Qura Ashim



Kom Gira



Qura Rashli

Qura Tishim



Qura Durisli



Armat



Naqum



Roud

Cloud-tops split before the Kelln's brazen prow, her sails trailing silvery aether. This high, there was little worry of being seen, which was good because the locals would be shocked to see a sloop cutting through the clouds. That sort of fear is expected, discovering worlds in the astral sea, but this one worried me enough that we were still not making a descent. Below, a civilization traced the path of a broad river through a vast expanse of sand dunes, life cutting through a desert, as was common on so many worlds.

At my side, Lavin peered through my spyglass, his large, scaly eye crinkling to fit an implement built for halflings. "It looks fine to me."

"The fields along the river?"

He frowned. "Something golden. Wheat?"

"Was anyone in the fields?"

"Ah."

"Exactly." I turned to the rail again. "I want you high, and get clear if something goes wrong. I can make my own way back."

"I thought you didn't trust us with your sails," he joked.

I rolled my eyes, as Lavin and his Scalies had proven themselves honest despite a history of piracy.

"Seriously, though. If it's dangerous, you shouldn't be alone."

"I've fled hundreds of worlds. I can fly back up here if I need to."

After a long pause, he said, "We'll stay high for now," which would have to be good enough.

I vaulted the gunwale. Four miles, I plunged unchecked, wind whistling past. As the ground rushed up, I flared my cloak. As with the Kelln's sails, it caught the aether. The cloak, a glassy-grey at rest, turned crystalline and gleaming as it belled out. One instant, it ended just short of my heels, the next it swept a dozen yards in every direction. The now-vast cloak filled with silvery eddies, bringing me gently down in a clutch of trees along the riverbank.

No birds sang, no animals scurried to hide, no boat plied the river. A few eyes just above the sluggish water, crocodiles or hippos or the local analogue, were waiting in stillness. Life should have been teeming, but instead the world waited.

Pulling my cloak close, I crossed the narrow river-road. Beyond

were fields, barley where we'd thought wheat, alongside them the thick-walled stables typical for tortoises, if a bit large.

Everything was clean, fresh, and abandoned. No signs of death, though. I tried to console myself with the hope that it was a feast-day, everyone in the city for the celebration. It didn't feel like a feast-day.

Nothing was in sight, but I had watched as I fell. East was the city where river met sea, west a town that held the heart of a hundred farms. I like cities. Also, Clō needs somewhere to study the local trade. Cities are usually safe, but when dangerous they are exceedingly dangerous.

I turned towards the town. We could go to the city later.

The road, packed earth with periodic logs to prevent total erosion, was pocked and uneven. The river stayed close, less straight than the road. The trees along the bank thinned, then vanished as the road cut past an oxbow marking a cut-off meander. Stilted huts dotted the shore, but no lines were cast, no fishers present.

A city within the morning's walk and not a soul to be seen. Resisting nerves, I kept my pace steady.

The trees thickened again, different though. Still a palm, but taller, with coconuts ripening where the others held dates.

"We don't have time!" The panicked call came from around the bend.

I hurried my steps, staying to the center of the road, ensuring I was seen.

A strangled yell greeted me. A blue-green woman with spiky ears and a clean white wrap ducked behind a massive gray tortoise. She was a bit taller than me, so probably a goblin. Two younger people, perhaps boys but I was no expert at what the local hip-wraps really represented, turned and peered from the howdah atop the tortoise's shell.

They ducked away when I met their eyes.

"Hello, fellow travelers. I am not from these parts, and—"

"And you're too damn foolish to know not to be out," someone snapped.

A man of similar color—he had the same hip-wrap, where the woman's wrap went higher, so the youths were probably boys—emerged from the palm grove. A quick knot attached a rope to the tortoise's howdah.

It was a massive beast, at least thirty hands and broad as it was tall. Circling about, I saw that there was a patch of deep mud, the road undermined where a log rotted through. The tortoise had sunk in and gotten wedged. The eternal problem with tortoises. They can go forever, but if they end up at an odd angle they need help getting out.

The man, clearly experienced, had looped the rope around a pair of trees. One end in the tortoise's powerful jaws, the other on its shell, it could tug itself free.

"Perhaps names," I said. "I am Sar, called the Silvercloak."

The youngest boy, excited to meet any stranger, said, "I'm Nadim."

"Zoya," said the other.

I had a sense of their dialect, and judging by the names revised my thought. One of the two was probably a girl, children that age just didn't wear full wraps.

Watching the two twist to see me, I realized something more important: their legs didn't work. Both were strapped in place, held in wooden chairs built into the front of their tortoise's howdah. Woven fronds dried about chopped whips of wood, threads knotting all the joins in ugly but functional binds, had the hallmarks of a farmer making do.

I glanced to the parents. Their eyes were tight with fear. It was several miles to the town, too far to carry their children at a run.

"Well, Zoya and Nadim, I think I can help."

Reaching into the well at my core, I poured some of the roiling aether through a runic facet, a slow gesture and soft word directing the spell. The mud bubbled and shifted, pushing as it hardened. The tortoise, which had been struggling that whole time in its stoic, steady manner, lurched a step forward, bumping the woman hard enough she almost fell.

The man stared, then slashed the rope and snatched a crop from the howdah. The weighted tip rung against the shell, setting the tortoise to steady, powerful strides.

The woman jumped onto the howdah and grabbed the reins from her daughter, while the man rushed alongside and fussed with the knotted rope.

Their massive tortoise, likely excellent for plowing fields, was stolid and steady, but no racer. Despite regular drumming to keep it moving, I was barely jogging to keep pace.

"I'm Asma. My husband is Naam. We're thankful."

Naam didn't respond, casting worried looks towards the dunes. There was a field between us and the desert here, but only one. I looked to those dunes as well, seeing nothing.

Past the field, silence held. A cluster of trees, and we could see the dunes again. Naam kept looking, but there was nothing.

"Not much further, now," Asma said.

"It's too late, though." Naam stopped. The tortoise moved two more paces and halted without instruction.

Ahead, the town was finally in sight from the top of a shallow rise. A mile, yet. The gates were closing. A call rang through the still desert air, thrice repeated in a growing chant. "Wrath crosses Fear while Hth dwells in the wolf's house!"

That obviously meant something, just not to me. Not that I needed details to know it was bad.

The woman was openly weeping, holding her children close. Zoya cried into her mother's shoulder. Nadim looked around in confusion.

"I'm not from here," I told Naam. "Perhaps you can explain."

A dreadful emptiness rested in his eyes. "It's too late."

"I don't believe in not trying."

He pointed skyward. "Look."

Two of the planet's many moons, these pale blue and dim yellow in the noonday sun, were brushing against each other. The blue began to occlude the yellow, the pair moving faster as they rushed to align. The sky shifted as they merged. A red haze filled the heavens,

stars strangely visible despite the sunlight. On the earth, a darkness rose. Billowing sands rising from the dunes, first in the distance but swift-approaching.

His voice was a hollow, weak thing. "It was supposed to be three more weeks until Wrath crossed Fear, and just a touch. That damn comet."

For a moment, I simply stared. There is a magnificence in disaster. I felt like I was seeing a volcano erupt, a tornado form, watching the side cleave off a mountain and slide towards me. Yet this was different, some impossibly vast disaster unique to this world.

Awe broke before fear. I needed to run. A quick glance back reminded me of the family huddling beside a tortoise. The urge to fill my cloak with power and fly skyward was almost overwhelming, but planetside I couldn't carry them with me. I would reach the skies and look down from safety as they were washed over by destruction.

A slow exhale softened my instinct to flee. I wasn't the weak person I had been. I could flee later, as the need arose.

The shadow above the dunes came closer, a sandstorm despite the gentle breeze. I reached deep, considering a rune of winds, wondering if I could find a way to shield us.

The dust-cloud reached the nearest dunes. Sand burst skyward, beneath it crimson beasts launching from the depths of the desert. I could see the first few leap skyward, but then more came from behind, blurring into an endless mass. In mighty leaps, they sped our way. They were a half mile distant, but that would last a minute at the most.

Naam had gone to his family, holding them close.

"Stay there," I told them.

Asma gained a twisted mixture of despair and hope on her tear-stained face, meeting my eyes, trying to share some of the hope I still held.

No time for consolation. I considered the beasts. They looked almost like locust, but perhaps that was more the swarm than the individual. Insectile at a glance with hard exteriors, but I couldn't

see detail.

Always those leaps, though. I estimated the distance to the river, to clear the few trees along it. Delving deep, I dragged aether up through the shallows of the world. About me, the sands lit silver in the stray light spilling from my cloak. The world gained a white tinge, mists swimming in my eyes.

Aligning runes, I channeled energy, chanting to shape it. It began as a twisting pattern in the barley, growing wider and wider, two-dozen spirals intersecting, clashing stalks shedding seed where the wind whipped them together. Pulling up fallen seeds and lifting blown sand, the winds became visible columns above the field, a chain of dust-devils wrestling skyward.

The sound of it came soon, the deafening rush of storm-winds grinding grit and grain together. The family stared past me in shock. The construct finished, I chained that flow in place.

The first leaping beast hit my wall. Updrafts caught it as momentum carried it through. Flung as from a trebuchet, it arced and splashed into the midst of the river.

I turned to Naam and Asma. "Can they swim? And will the ones that get past the ends rush us or go elsewhere?"

They just stared in shock as a dozen more beasts hurtled by. Asma shook herself. "I, I don't know. We're always inside the walls."

Naam seemed unsure. "They might turn towards the..."

His mouth fell open and the skies changed. The leading edge had been a trickle. Now the swarm arrived. In countless masses, they leapt into my barrier and were channeled overhead, limbs grinding and clicking together in percussive chaos. The sky above turned rust-brown, then black as their mass occluded the sun.

Town, I mentally finished for him. They hunted people, so they might turn towards the town. The other end, towards the city, was only near open fields. Those would turn towards us.

Above, there was a crash, a mass of bodies plummeting sideways out of the vaulting swarm. Crossed angles meant collisions, of course.

They were tangled together, struggling to get loose. I sent warped

blasts of aether into those that clambered free. Most of the cluster killed each other with thrashing limbs. As stillness came, I got a proper look.

They were cruel beasts, sculpted for bloodshed and naught else. All four limbs ended in blades that gleamed a razor edge, suitable for nothing but this mad rush of violence. No faces. No eyes or ears, no slits for nostrils or stalks of antennae. Yet they sensed prey.

I looked west, seeing most rushing on towards the town, less towards us. East, a swarm of perhaps a hundred came, the city too distant to draw them.

"This is going to feel weird," I told them.

"What are you doing?" Asma snapped as I set cupped hands on Nadim's little head.

I didn't have time to explain, chanting as swiftly as I could draw power in, the syllables clicking together as I forced my enunciation to stay correct. Anyone who studied battle-magic drilled for years to maintain that incomprehensible patter. Nadim flinched as I finished, darting his eyes around in worried flashes. He could feel something was wrong, but didn't know what.

I'd draped an illusion across his aura, trying to make him seem a rock. Zoya came next, who shuddered but bore it stoically. Naam tried to bat my hands away, but my cloak lashed out, slapping him back.

There is little crueler than keeping parent from child, no matter the cold logic that demands action. The clicking of that smaller swarm was audible past the roar from above. No time to reconsider. My cloak absorbed two flailing blows from Naam as I warped his aura from humanity.

Last came Asma, who had settled into cold resignation.

There are few cases where casting an illusion over someone's aura has value, but these creatures had no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no nose to smell, which suggested they found their prey by other means.

I finished just as the beasts filtering from the east arrived. Spinning, I let my cloak billow as a crystalline barrier. As they

tangled in that, I chanted, surfacing a pyrrhic rune and transmuting silvery mists to an orb of flame dense as the sun. It roared into the greater mass of beasts, exploding with deafening force. They were flung aside, blackened piles burning in the field.

Behind, my cloak was being battered towards me. I pulled it close, hood wrapped tight, and went limp. The blunted force of a claw that couldn't pierce my crystalline shell still jarred my skull. More blows, softer but still painful, against my ribs and thighs.

A rune filled my throat, and I poured power through it, turning my voice to the thunder of an angry storm, a wave of force that threw beasts from me. Limbs snapped as they tangled, but several still rose, shambling towards me with a mindless drive to kill, even though they had no mouths to eat.

No time to ponder that. I leapt, cloak flaring as aether filled it. I flew in an arc as great as their leaps, landing closer to the winds.

The bladed beasts stilled. Two paces from them to the family. They turned my way. My spell had worked.

They leapt. As they rose, I saw one turning towards the family, being clubbed back by Naam's weighted crop.

He would have to handle it.

I gathered the force for another burst of flame, feeling the runes on my soul strain from the power rushing through me. Sheer will held the spell together, blasting apart the second wave from city-ward.

A simpler spell, I lanced two of the beasts closing on me. I saw Asma with a kitchen knife, hacking at what Naam had pinned down. One rushed behind them and was snapped in half by their tortoise.

That view disappeared as the mass closed on me. Blade-limbs sliced, leaping assaults brought danger from above. The deep black chaos of battling strange beasts overwhelmed me.

I tried for another burst of flame, feeling the raw chaos of the aether I had drawn ricochet past the boundaries of its runes. Abandoning the spell, a cough of ash and flame almost choking me, it was all I could do to keep the wall of winds roaring.

I gathered the shards of runes together, assembling that simplest

of spells, the lance of raw chaos, sending bolts of aether that left brilliant afterimages in my vision where they crossed the shadows of the beasts. My cloak still guarded me, but it could not cover every corner, countless small gashes drizzling blood just past its edges.

A blow to my head sent me reeling and I felt my magics waver. My focus turned to the windstorm and a blade sank deep into my thigh.

I blasted that and one nearby to flinders. A gap opened, showing Asma and Naam hacking at another.

I hadn't shifted my aura, so I was the major draw, but that wasn't enough. My chest hurt. Not from a wound, but because I was about to run. Anyone who has survived the worst knows that you have to run, even if you're leaving people behind. I reached deep for the greater runes, the ones still painful to hold, flickering between a great blast of power to kill what I could and a swift tear to rip free from this world.

The sky changed. Blackness split, a gash of light. Looking up, I saw the flood of beasts launched off my windstorm part as a waterfall striking a rock. The Kelln's armored belly thrust down.

I laughed. The Scalies saving me was becoming a habit.

Aft of the Kelln, ropes dropped and a troop of eight descended with the disturbing fluidity of skilled pirates.

The ship rose and shadows covered the earth again. Battle continued, but desperation was gone. I pulled my cloak tight and survived the assault with only a few more cuts. Lavin and his seven sliced through the ones near the family, then began work on those attacking me. Work is the right word, a solid line of soldiers hacking apart mindless beasts. The swarm was vast, but the dozens left down here were nothing.

A few more came, killed by crossbow bolts at a distance. The beasts being hurled overhead thinned to a trickle. Stopped entirely.

I let the winds die, gasping with relief as the strain of power flowing through me faded. Looking out, I saw the river choked with the corpses of those things, the level already rising as it worked around this temporary dam. Judging by the thrashing in the water,

the local wildlife was more like a hippo than a crocodile, and it liked to eat these beasties.

I limped back to the family, meeting Lavin there.

"So this is a habit of yours," he said, matching my thoughts.

"I'll try to avoid it, next time." I stumbled, too much weight on my left leg.

Lavin had me laid out in an eyeblink, stitching wounds and bandaging gashes. "This idea of going down alone is not sound, I'll tell you that much. Shadows-cursed idiocy."

I looked past the grumbling soldier to the family of goblins. The four of them looked fine, but blood was everywhere. I gave a sad chuckle as I finally figured it out. "I forgot the tortoise."

Asma glanced at the dead beast, clearly considering its loss nothing with her family safe. "You saved us, you and..." she looked across the reptilian Scalies, up to the Kelln. She swallowed, fearful again.

"It was a pleasure to be of aid," I said. "Now, can you tell a weary traveler if this ordeal is over?"

The danger was over, but the moment was not. As with all farming communities, you worked while the sun shined, or in this case while the moons were in a conjunction. For half an hour more, the skies were ugly red, stars bright and sunlight dim. While this held, we cracked open shells and salted the beasts. With the Scalies helping, we got through ninety.

At last, the moons split. The beasts withered. Their skin pulled into crumpled knots, fracturing their plates as it did so. When they could pull no tighter, the whole broke into shards, then dissolved into sand.

Not the salted meat, though. That kept. When we actually reached the town, we found the walls piled with the dust of those beasts, crowds of people carting away a massive reserve of salted meat.

A strange land on a strange day.

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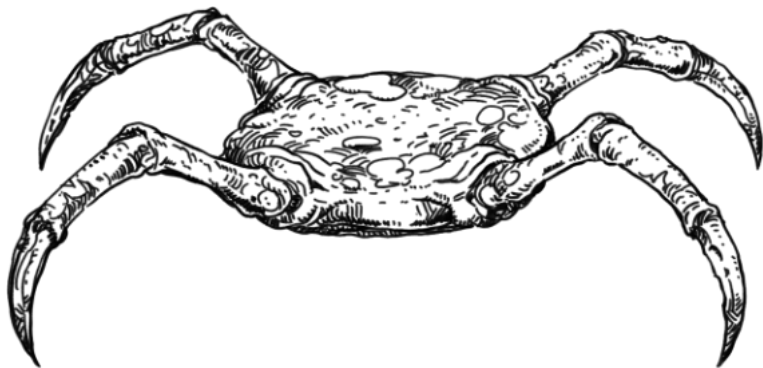
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Notes on Vargion

Vargion is a world filled with caution, but less-so danger. People constantly check when the next disaster is expected, and they are very rarely surprised. Hurricanes, dragon attacks, volcanic eruptions, all these can be predicted. When something happens unexpectedly, it's because someone missed it, not because of random chance or divine whim.

When I arrived, things were thrown off due to a comet passing through and the arbiter Fear reacting to its presence. However, even with a comet, there were four days warning of the impending disaster. In the town where I arrived, zero people died during that entire event.

However, predictable does not mean easily predicted. Astronomy is the highest of professions, and the most difficult. Complex mathematics, constant study of the stars, and a deep knowledge of local history and ancient tomes are needed to read the heavens.



The faceless "wrathling" beast lacks any way to eat, seeming built purely to inflict harm before it returns to dust

The Stellar Components

There are five components to Vargonian astronomy: arbiters, deities, houses, intruders, and the sun.

Arbiters / Moons

What look like moons are referred to as Arbiters. They are intermediaries for the deities, prayed to but not worshiped.

The twelve arbiters are somehow all in the same orbit, actually passing through each other during an eclipse. As the eclipse starts, the arbiters will speed up until they fully overlap, at which point they will stop for a time. Rather than either occluding the other, they gain a new color, casting it as an eerie light on the surface.

The arbiters orbiting Vargion are:

Courage (dull violet)	Cunning (mottled white)
Deceit (dark red)	Doubt (light red)
Fear (pale blue)	Jealousy (dark brown)
Joy (navy blue)	Mercy (faded aqua)
Patience (forest green)	Sadness (dull green)
Revulsion (pale pink)	Wrath (dim yellow)

Deities / Planets

Other than Vargion itself, each planet is the domain of a single deity. These appear to be intersections with other planes.

Locals claim it is impossible to communicate with a deity, and travel to and from their realms is either impossible or close to it. I did not try to fly there as I am not a fool.

When an arbiter occludes a deity, the deity will be visible as a burning spot through the arbiter, altering reality to those seeing that conjunction. The more deities and arbiters in one conjunction, the more massive the effects.

Even if there is no conjunction, the locations of deities in the sky affect all other astrological events.

The deities of Vargion are:

Aarik the Warrior

Aashri the Stormy

Arifleh the Diviner

Bahiit the Hopeful

Da'lit the Joyous

Fetiih the Victorious

Haiim the Nomad

Hth the Fortunate

Kutba the Author

Lahin the Shining

Mura the Clever

Qualin the Mighty

Sartus the Father

Ta'ith the Timekeeper

Uta'if the Guardian

Wari and Nev the Well-Watchers

Houses / Constellations

Referred to as houses, the key stars in the sky have been mapped into patterns like constellations. Every event is influenced, slightly, by the current house of every deity and arbiter, but the house that an actual conjunction happens in is most important.

Minor events also happen whenever a deity or arbiter leaves or enters a house. Complex calculations of their history of houses also matters, but is far beyond the scope of this text.

Intruders / Other Stellar Bodies

The moons and planets, being planar intrusions ruled by conscious beings, react to comets, asteroids, and other such things. These intruders have no direct effect, but cause other elements to shift, requiring astrological recalculation.

The Sun

The Sun is almost constant, but according to Vargonian scholars it needs to be measured regularly because days sometimes have different lengths. When the sun shifts, every other calculation needs to be entirely re-done.

They debate but have no agreement as to whether the sun is a deity, a planar intrusion, or some other sort of power.

Predicted Events

Events are described as regular (weekly or monthly), annual, decadal, centennial, or epochal. Regular events usually aren't even mentioned as everyone already knows about them.

Although I have focused on disasters, anything not done by people can be predicted. Blizzards, chimeras, and good harvests are predicted with equal accuracy.

Event Impact

Astronomers describe events as "constantly accumulating", and the conjunction as "releasing accumulation". The longer the wait, the more powerful the result.

The result of this is that unexpected disasters are also intense disasters. A region may know the cycle of the local blizzard, being always certain of its approach, but the epochal blizzard with a thousand years to accumulate is lost to time.

Thus, the most valuable treasures are ancient tomes that record forgotten cataclysms.

Aura Tinting and Personal Forecasts

A practice used locally, which I recommend researchers investigate, is aura-tinting lenses. By polluting a telescope's lens, an astronomer can view a sky skewed by a person's aura.

Before you travel anywhere, visit the local astronomer and buy such a forecast for your journey.

Disaster Defenses

Preparations. For most people, plans involve keeping packed bags near doors and knowing where to go for which disaster.

Conjunction Fortresses. All towns have a massive, windowless building with reinforced walls. Often, a well is inside. If a place doesn't have a conjunction fortress, it doesn't qualify as a town.

Calling Towers. Attached to most conjunction fortresses is a tall tower, from which an astronomer's assistant can call out announcements at dawn, noon, and dusk about upcoming predictions. If a call comes at an irregular time, everyone knows something is going wrong.

Message Chains. In cities and along major roads, calling towers are usually close enough to hear each other and echo the calls. Where towers cannot reach each other, there tend to be planned courier routes. This has limits, as the effect of the skies depends on the angle to the ground, any given prediction only mattering for a certain distance around the observatory that made the observations.

The Varikht

The majorities everywhere I went were what I would call humans and goblins, although I'm not certain these descriptions are accurate. Both groups had skins of shades from various tones of wheat out to greens and oranges, had ears and teeth that looked somewhere between the two, and were referred to as "varikht".

The tallest sort, looking most human, have pointed ears that stretch down to the bottom of the jaw. There's a group that's short like I'm used to seeing goblins, but they have mixed dentition as I expect from humans, and slightly blunter, shorter ears than I expect from a goblin. Then there are a cluster of middling height, with features that could match either.

I believe the majority of locals are some mixture of goblin and human, the nature of which stretches so far back that any distinctions are long gone.



From left to right, goblins, varikht, and humans of the slightly odd Vargonian variants, in typical Muabi garb

The Al-Muab'ideen Empire

The region we visited was dominated by the Al-Muab'ideen Empire. The empire traces the Tadifeq river, surrounded by a sandy desert on both banks. The river comes from highland mountains, where the Empire is fighting to wrest control from the natives.

There are major cities near the delta, at a key bend slightly inland, and on a cliff at the edge of the highlands. Smaller towns line the river, amid endless wheat fields.

Muabi Building Patterns

As the arbiters and deities control most natural phenomena, the focus of Muabi society is on predicting when the river will change. They trace out when floods will arrive, always prepared to evacuate in advance.

The towns seem near the river, but the actual important settlements are all on natural or constructed rises, able to withstand floods and hold out against the various beasts that occasionally attack. Most times, with everything predicted, work continues safely in the fields.

Muabi Societal Restrictions

Perhaps it is of a piece with their rigid world that their hierarchies are rigid as well. Forecasts are given regularly throughout life, and deviating from them is taboo.

Children usually inherit the job of their parents, never to leave it, nor to travel far from where they were born. While there are adventurers, they tend not to be respected, as the decision to leave their homes is a break from the pattern.

Muabi Governmental Organization

The empire is a tripartite hierarchy, twice over.

To start with, supporting the kingdom, are the three workers: farmers, laborers, and crafters.

At the top, leading the kingdom, are the triumvirate of kings Bushra, Jalim, and Aban. They may be kings, and their orders may be followed, but it is unclear if they would have real power if they tried to exercise it.

The truth is that the Al-Muab'ideen empire is run from the middle: the astronomers, the navy, and the magistrates. Foremost are the astronomers, without whom none are safe. The two wings of power alongside these are the navy, which plies the rivers and sails raids across the sea, and the magistrates, who keep the laws and travel about enforcing them.

Theoretically, the Bushra family leads the military, the Jalim leads the astronomers, and the Aban lead the magistrates, but it is clear they are mere figureheads.

Clō's Notes on Trade

In many ways, Vargion is a typical world, with all the typical resources. There are only two areas where it stands out.

Telescopes. Due to their need to carefully observe stellar movements, they are extremely skilled at grinding and enchanting lenses. They are at least competitive with the craftsmen of Volpith, possibly superior.

Rare Monster Organs. Because of how predictable their disasters are, they can often predict the arrival of a rare monster. If you are desperate for something hard to stalk, you can likely get a forecast of that beast's arrival within the next year, although the cost of access to stellar libraries is steep. For beasts of middling rarity, it's likely they already have it in stock, as they use the same components for spells and rituals as most worlds do, and many local adventurers stalk the forecasts for prizes.

I have only traded in the Muabi Empire, but regarding trading there, I make the following recommendations:

Always start with the astronomers. They can ruin anyone and do not like to be disrespected. They will most likely openly state what sort of bribe they want.

Bribe the magistrates. Al-Muab'ideen has enough laws that you're always violating something, and the laws against giving gifts to magistrates have such weak punishments they may as well be nonexistent. Bribery is always step one of a deal in Al-Muab.

Arrange the actual deal through the local mayor. Trade deals outside of a formal structure are not explicitly illegal, but the people who would risk making one are usually criminals. If you are not going through formal channels, you are risking a lot for very little gain.

In journeys to Vargion,
do not forget:

1. Nothing happens by chance.
2. Start every journey with a forecast.
3. Records of past events are the most valuable thing in the world.
4. Keep a watchful eye on the moons.

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Cover by Bruno Romao
Maps by Tommaso Di Giovanni
Internal art by CAUSTIC

