

Al'Jamlorn

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*"I dream of painting and then I paint my dream."
— Vincent van Gogh*

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As the Baklunish Hegira neared its third millennium, a state of peace and prosperity had settled upon the lands comprising the Caliphate of Ekbir. After the theft of the *Cup and Talisman of Al'Akbar* during the 16th Procession of Blessing in 2878BH (219CY), a disgraced Lortah al'Burvid was succeeded by Katil al'Wasadah as the nation's Caliph: The spiritual successor to the Righteous One and temporal leader of the folk of the land, both. Known more commonly to sages and scholars as "Katil the Builder", his tenure was marked by a series of extravagant construction projects across the entire breadth of the region. While these were ostensibly meant to improve the infrastructure and daily lot of the folk of the land, the shrewd Caliph had much more than this aim in mind when he ordered their commencement. He understood that the pride of his people had suffered greatly with the theft of their most holy religious relics. When incredible feats of engineering such as the immense Wall of Ten Thousand Martyrs that surrounds Kofeh, the Hanging Gardens of Hadash, and Ekbir City's series of great aqueducts – all of which continue to function even today – were completed under his direction, an Ekбири populace beholding them in hushed awe did not fail to have

their spirits lifted by the wonders they had proven capable of creating. So it was that the next two generations dwelling in the land saw something of a golden age smile upon them and, indeed, it is during this period that many of the greatest societal advances in the history of the Caliphate came to be.

The beginning of the end of this wondrous time can be easily traced to the events of 2975BH (316CY). In the early spring of that year, mixed Oeridian / Bakluni refugees from Ull flooded into southern Ekbir in droves along that land's traditional pilgrimage routes. These initial groups had been displaced by the Brazen Horde and the events of the Yorodhi insurgency in their homeland, fleeing the brutal and merciless fighting that had engulfed the region with little more in the way of personal belongings than what they could carry. Largely peaceful in nature and wanting nothing more than to escape the horrors of war, they were eager to assimilate themselves into Ekbiri society and prove a credit to their erstwhile home. In response to their presence, Caliph al'Wasadah established a series of camps along the Blashikmund River to house them and appointed official guardians – mostly chosen from his personal Farises – to each one, with a mandate to keep order amongst their number. Although the situation would deteriorate later in the year as larger groups of refugees joined their brethren – these ones proving unwilling to submit to the Caliph's authority and taking up arms against their Farisee guardians – several noteworthy individuals rose to prominence in Ekbiri history from the ignominy of these ramshackle refugee camps. The Uli that would become known to sages from all corners of the Flanaess as *Al'Temlorn* is one of these.

Despite his widespread renown, Al'Temlorn came from the humblest of beginnings. Around 2956BH (297CY), a boy named Sekbemdrigi was born in the Uli town of Yorod to parents whose names have been lost to the sands of antiquity. Known as a talented artist even as a young man, the brutal and unforgiving nature of his homeland afforded him few opportunities to draw and paint in the pursuit of personal joy and aesthetic pleasure. Instead, he toiled at the labor of decorating shields and armor with pigments of crushed

berries and animal fat for the army of the Orakhan. Surviving accounts from that time exist suggesting that the young artist's father had been taken from him when he was but a child during one of that era's infamous slaving raids in the Uli hills. Forced to provide for both himself and his infirm mother, Sekbemdrigi's was a life lived perilously close to destitution. Regrettably, that was not uncommon amongst the Yorodi hillmen who bore much of the brunt of the Orakhan's need for laborers to plumb his lucrative ore mines.

Placed in that context, it is small wonder that Sekbemdrigi was amongst the Uli that fled his homeland for the safety of the north, two decades after his birth. Because the Orakhan's soldiers and hired mercenaries were locked in a bloody confrontation with the barbarians comprising the Brazen Horde in Ulakand, many of those fighting men occupying the Yorodi hills had been redeployed to that conflict, leaving behind a substantially-depleted force. The hillmen took advantage of this to rise up as one against the brutal slavers that had long oppressed them, engulfing that region in the fires of strife as well. Unfortunately, thousands of innocents were caught in the crossfire of the struggle and tales of their wholesale slaughter by the pitiless soldiers of the Orakhan began to circulate on a daily basis. So it was that scores upon scores of refugees fled the hills northward for the safety of Ekbir where they might find safety from the atrocities of war and begin new lives for themselves. Although Sekbemdrigi was among these refugees, his mother was not. Unwilling to burden him with caring for her along his journey, she remained behind as Yorod burned. The day he left the town of his birth would be the last day he would see her face.

The passage overland to Ekbir's borders was not an easy one. The number of refugees involved in the northward trek far outstripped the amount of food, water, and good supplies they were able to bring with them. Many broke away to seek their fortune on their own or died along the way. Likewise, much of their journey saw them harried by bandits and marauders or took them across dangerous, war-torn landscapes and still more fell to their predations. When three score of the Uli finally crossed the Ekberi border come the early

spring, it was nothing less than a miracle. Indeed, many of the refugees began to pay homage to Our Lady of Fate in addition to whatever gods they worshipped in thanks for their providence. For his part, Sekbemdrigi had taken to sketching that which he had seen during the flight from Yorod: The serene peace of the foreign landscape and the unspeakable horrors of war; the silent anguish etched upon the face of his friends and neighbors and the way it was transformed to unfettered joy with the final crossing of the border. It is said that no few of the Uli refugees took note of the young artist's talents as they spied the progress of his quill and brush, the manner in which he captured these profound moments of their exodus giving them heart that beauty yet existed upon Oerth. For those fortunate enough to gaze upon its pages, this sketchbook – called “*A’sharalla Moquil isk’Jawil*” (translating to “A Tapestry of Brief Lives” in the Common tongue) – yet survives in the Mosque of Al’Akbar in Ekbir City: A testimony detailing the hardship and eventual triumph of these folk.

Sekbemdrigi would eventually settle in in Amah Dasrad, one of the small, temporary camps along the Blashikmund River established by Caliph al’Wasadah to house the Uli refugees. While the accommodations were hastily-constructed and hardly replete with comforts, in the eyes of the refugees it was like unto a small corner of paradise, considering the hardship from which they had fled. To celebrate their good fortune, the nominal leader of the Uli within the camp bade his fellows erect a small shrine to celebrate Istus' mercy. Upon its completion in the winter of that year, Sekbemdrigi was asked to create a great mural upon the immense flat of slate rock that served as the center of place of worship. The refugees spent much of the season gathering nature's bounties and trading what they could in order to provide the young artist with the pigments by which he could work. Finally, his quill and pots were blessed by the wise woman of the Uli in the name of Our Lady. It is said that Sekbemdrigi was moved greatly by the extent of the labors his fellows had been moved to in order to allow him to make that which lay in his imagination become realized upon stone. The history passed down amongst those ancestors of the refugee-folk say that the artist stood before the monolithic rock for ninety-nine days without rest, painting its blank grey face in a

cold, controlled fury – as if possessed by the restless spirits of those who had died upon the journey. When it was at last complete, Sekbendrighi fell to the ground, exhausted to the very soul. So it was that his first masterpiece, “*Ashrada isk’Istus Aqul*” (C: “The Weaver of All Destinies”), was composed.

The work, depicting Our Lady of Fate watching over the passage of the Uli refugees through the various phases of their journey, is considered by most scholars to be amongst the *Pentad Magnifica*: A list compiled by the learned of the land detailing the five greatest pieces of known artwork on all of Oerth. As the breathtaken refugees knelt humbled in the shadow of its opulence, its existence likewise awed the Farisee sent by the Caliph to watch over the Uli folk. Raszid isk’Qwallah reported the news of the masterpiece's existence to his superiors, prompting a visit to the shrine by no less than Amarah isha’Xafahn – the shiarya of the temple of Istus in Ekbir City – a week later. Smiling upon the labor, she declared the site as holy and ordered the creation of a grand sanctuary to be built around the stone. When the Cathedral of All Colors at Amah Dasrad was complete, it represented the seat of the faith and the largest formal site sacred to Istus in existence (a distinction it continues to have, even today). The construction of the mosque – and the trade it stoked from voyagers and pilgrims eager to bask in its glory – did much to further the fortunes of the Uli refugees that had settled in the region, making them easily the most prosperous of those that had fled that crucible of conflict.

The Uli refugees in other Ekбири camps, however, did not enjoy this same success. As work neared completion on *The Weaver of All Destinies*, still more refugees flooded northward across the border into the Caliphate. These groups were much larger than their predecessors and were significantly more aggressive than the Uli who were content to assimilate themselves into Ekбири culture. The leaders of these newly-arrived refugees refused to submit to the authority of the Caliph and, after whipping their fellows into a frenzy, took up arms against the Farisee guardians appointed to keep order amongst them. Eventually, the

situation along the Blashikmund worsened to the point where the Caliph was forced to call for his army to put an end to the violence in the heartland of his nation. Before the end of the year, these aggressive refugees and their leaders had been driven from the land up into the Udgru Forest.

The period of violence had been short, but in its course, much damage had been done. The bloodshed perpetrated by these new refugees destroyed much of the goodwill that the Ekbiris had extended to the Uli. Regardless of whether they had been a part of the mayhem or not, the refugees were now looked by the general populace of the Caliphate as unwelcome outsiders. Indeed, the series of events were significant enough that, in 2986BH (327CY), Katil al'Wasadah was succeeded by Qaanah al'Zar as Caliph of Ekbir. It was upon the lands of his clan that the Uli refugees had been allowed to settle and it was upon their land that the blood of the Farises drenched the Oerth. Accordingly, al'Zar ("the Stern") was possessed of an extremely draconian stance toward foreigners within Ekbir's borders – and it was for this very reason that he was chosen by the *lopol* of the five royal clans as their leader. Within the first year of his control of the Mosque of Al'Akbar, thousands originating from other Baklunish nations were expelled from the Caliphate, taking many skilled artisans and laborers from the country in the name of internal security. Surely, Sekbemdrigi would have been one of those but for the personal intervention of Shiarya isha'Xafahn, who publicly declared that an offense against the artist would constitute an offense against Our Lady of Fate. Despite the incredible temporal power invested in the Caliph, this was a line even he dared not cross. The Uli artist was allowed to remain in Ekbir, under one condition: The task of painting the great domed ceiling within the Mosque of Al'Akbar would fall to him to complete within three months' time. While this gesture was ostensibly given to prove his piety and obeisance, in truth, Caliph al'Zar hoped he would fail at the task. In giving him but a sliver of time in which to create a masterpiece, he was confident that Sekbemdrigi would disgrace himself in such a fashion that the Shiarya would be forced to withdraw her support for him – and that he could do with the artist as he pleased.

Yet the Shiarya was not without her own resources. At her command, powders of gold and silver, spices and gemstones, were brought in great urns by the Istian faithful to Sekbemdrigi to add to the pigments in his pots. With these, the artist hung suspended a hundred feet above the mosque's floor upon moonlight-thin rigging, realizing his singular genius with the strokes of a peacock's-quill brush. There, suspended as if amongst the stars, he created "*al'Jaliza sa al'Akbar*" (C: "The Triumph of the Righteous"): A great mural reflecting the reception of his namesake Cup and Talisman by Al'Akbar from the Baklunish gods. Spreading outward from that sublime point, it detailed the history of the Caliphate of Ekbir as a great procession through the night – even prophesying events as yet to come. At its extreme edges, the painting depicted the eventual return of the Baklunish folk to the tenets of their faith and their triumph over darkness. All this before becoming a mosaic representing the sunrise of a new day. The whole of the work took exactly 77 days to complete – well within the deadline set forth by the Caliph.

When Sekbemdrigi revealed the completed ceiling to the Caliph and his lopols, it is said gasps of awe went up amongst their number. Never before had any of them as much as imagined that such beauty existed as was laid above them. Some of them began to tremble. More than one of them threw themselves to the ground in reverent prayer. As the Caliph himself stood in the center of the mosque, with the eye of Al'Akbar himself set upon him, he began to openly weep. At last, he understood the error of his ways. With the gods as his witness, he proclaimed that the men and women of Ekbir would henceforth fight against darkness with light, as the Righteous One would have it. No more would those looking to the Caliphate for respite from war and violence be turned away as dogs. Instead, within its borders, they would know shelter – and let those that would menace them beware the blade of the Exalted Faith. His heart turned, the Caliph embraced Sekbemdrigi. From that point forward, he declared him – along with all of his future descendents – citizens of Ekbir. Finally, he swore, he would be called by his Uli name no more: Henceforth, he would be

known by his brothers and sisters as *al'Temlorn* (C: “The Artist”).

It is said that *al'Temlorn* smiled as he opened the doors of the Mosque of Al'Akbar and the first light of dawn kissed his skin. And while it may or may not be true that when he walked away from its grand edifice, he was never seen again – accounts differ as to what might have become of him after the completion of his final masterpiece, another of the legendary Pentad Magnifica – it is certain that his quill and pots remained behind in Al'Akbar's most holy site. These are now considered to be sacred relics of the Exalted Faith and tales circulate that an artist that shares the rarefied gifts of *al'Temlorn* can make miracles come into being, just as he could.

So it is written. A'taajamu s'akbar adium.

May His light shine upon you always.

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The Weaver of All Destinies (Major Artifact)

Composed by the renowned artist al'Temlorn, this painting lies upon a great piece of dark grey slate rock. The center point about which the Cathedral of All Colors – the seat of the faith of Istus – was built, it depicts Our Lady of Fate gazing impassively from her place amidst the hazy mists of All-That-Will-Become out upon the beleaguered refugees that fled war-torn southern Ull in 2975BH (316CY) for the

prospects of peace and prosperity represented by the Caliphate of Ekbir, far to the north. Undoubtedly one of the finest examples of artwork ever crafted by mortal hands, it is said that the painting represents the eternal vigilance of Istus over all that would walk the infinite strands of her woven web of destiny. When cloudy incense is lit at the foot of the masterpiece and the hollow chimes aside it are loosed to compose an otherworldly orchestra, it is said that the incalculable gravity of Her presence can be felt amongst her faithful. Her golden spindle can almost be felt to be setting into place the threads of reality itself, and in such moments – the impossible can be made real.

When the proper rituals are conducted by the current Shiarya of the Cathedral of All Colors (or, alternatively, a character who the Dungeon Master determines as having the personal favor of Istus), the painting has proven capable of invoking several powerful magical effects (each, as per spell at the 20th level of experience, when applicable):

- *Ceremony or Bless, At Will*;
- *Augury, 1/day*;
- *Commune, 1/week*;
- *Summon Time Elemental (16HD), 1/month*;
- *Wish, 1/year*.

The above powers represent that which is thus far known regarding the painting's properties. It may or may not be possessed of more, as-to-yet undiscovered qualities.

Any attack upon or attempt to move or desecrate *The Weaver of All Destinies* will be returned by 1-4 summoned Time Elementals (16HD). These elementals will fight to the death in defense of the painting, returning to the Plane of Time as soon as their enemies are rebuffed or destroyed. Likewise, any attack made upon an individual capable of utilizing the painting's powers in its presence will cause a single Time Elemental (16HD) to be summoned to their defense.

The Triumph of the Righteous (Major Artifact)

Another of the masterpieces created by the Uli artist al'Templorn, *The Triumph of the Righteous* is a vast, circular mural painted upon the domed ceiling of the Mosque of Al'Akbar in Ekbir City. At its center, the piece depicts Al'Akbar receiving his namesake Cup and Talisman from the collected pantheon of the Baklunish gods. Spreading outward from that point, it details in careful illustration the history of the Caliphate of Ekbir as a great procession through the night – even prophesying events as yet to come as the painting stretches ever outward. Finally, at its extreme edges, the painting depicts the eventual return of the Baklunish folk to the tenets of their faith and their triumph over darkness. From there, the painting gives way to a glittering mosaic representing the sunrise of a new day.

The precise powers possessed by *The Triumph of the Righteous* are as yet unknown. It has, however, proven capable of replicating several Clerical spells associated with healing and light. In the presence of the faithful of Al'Akbar, it has invoked the equivalent of a *bless* (over an entire congregation), a *heal*, a *hero's feast*, and a *sunburst* spell at various times. It is expected that these powers might be produced reliably – and still more might be discovered – were the painting to bask in the presence of the *Cup and Talisman of Al'Akbar*.

The Quill and Pots of al'Templorn (Minor Artifact)

Used to produce many of the masterpieces created by the legendary painter al'Templorn, these artistic implements received the blessing of several Baklunish priests during that worthy's lifetime. It is thought that, in some way, the various gods so invoked saw fit to lay their divine grace upon the quill and pigment pots he used, investing within them qualities befitting the singular genius of a man that was, perhaps, the greatest artist ever to stride the face of Oerth. The *Quill* is a single peacock's feather. Regardless of its antiquity or use, it remains as fresh and new to the eye as it appeared the day the plume was first plucked. For its opulence, it seems a simple thing, easily overlooked. Likewise, the *Pots* seem to be a set of seven ordinary ceramic jars. The small, fire-baked clay vessels are always perfectly clean, even though a veritable ocean of paint has graced their hollows.

In the hands of most, these artistic implements act as a normal quill and set of pots. In the possession of a bard of 10th level or greater, however, their true power becomes evident. The *Quill* allows a bard to act as if he possessed three additional levels of experience. The *Pots* act as if they were filled with *Nolzur's*

Marvelous Pigments, usable seven times each day. At the sunrise of each day, they fill themselves anew. One who possesses both the *Quill and Pots of al'Temlorn* may use them to create the following magical effects:

- a *chromatic orb* (use adjusted bard level to determine what colors can be conjured) or *color spray* 1/week.
- any of the *prismatic* spells (spray, sphere or orb) 1/month.

The power imbued within the *Quill and Pots of al'Temlorn* comes with a price, however. The possessor of even one of the artistic implements is compelled to roam the countryside forevermore. Unable to establish any sort of permanent home, they are driven to create lasting works of art as they voyage from place to place, just as did their original master. So it is that, despite their great power, the artifacts change hands often, creating masterpieces of legend all throughout the vast landscape of the Flanaess.