

Al Andalus

Population 465,000

A cultural melting pot where prejudice is rare and learning diverse. An ancient city in the midst of a large oasis near the centre of the Gobi Desert. The oasis has been nicknamed Gobi Heart, many travelers idealizing Al Andalus as a kind of paradise, and a haven for seekers of wisdom.

Al Andalus exists independent of other nations, claims as territory an oasis rich with natural resources, and as a city would be an invaluable prize if conquered, historically much pursued by military leaders. Since the Paradise Wars, a brief period of peace has elapsed.

A strict military education of at least three years, or a lifelong magical education, is required of anyone seeking citizenship. This education cannot even begin until an individual is at least fourteen years old. For an outsider to attain citizenship requires at least ten years of residency, including submission to at least one year of living under the surveillance of a Djin to determine loyalty. Outsiders are never allowed formal training by the Djin.

Few occupations are available to non citizens, mostly indentured periods of servitude. This is especially true of long-term visitors. Trade and sales is an option for all. There is a high tax on such ventures for all non citizens unless undertaken illegally "under the table," the penalty for which is usually a period of indentured servitude to the government.

Gobi Heart

The oasis is lush and vast. It has been enhanced by the magic of the Djin of Al Andalus so that some vegetation is hostile specifically toward enemy armies and raiding parties, either denying the enemy fruit or attacking with poison spores and projectile thorns and ensnaring vines. Greenery is thick, fed mostly by underground water sources. There are very few large trees. There is only one exposed stream without the city, where it is considered appropriate for visitors to drink and resupply, so long as they pay some small tribute to the resident water sprites.

The oasis has been carefully enhanced over the centuries, as has its plant and animal life. Care has been taken to conceal the bulk of the water supplies. Vegetation, underground tunnels have been engineered to optimize the disposition of animal life. It is commonly a new recruit's first duty as an official soldier to scout the oasis.

Exotic Animals

Sand Sharks: Violent, edible, rare within the oasis itself. They are a kind of reptile well adapted to rapid travel through desert sands. They grow up to four feet long, their jaw is a round assortment of sharp teeth receding into the pit of their stomach. Their flesh is sand yellow. They have round bodies, an upward-pointed fin on their tails, and three pointed fingers on each of their slender arms, arms capable of rapid movements. They rarely attack in packs since they are solitary creatures, and rarely attack humans unless summoned to

the task. They are fast. Their mouths and claws are dangerous. The animals are easily killed if their rubbery flesh is pierced.

In the past, they have been used to signal ambush against an army approaching the oasis. The Djin summon a large contingent of the creatures to distract the enemy, and Al Andalus attacks. Such battles are waged to prevent danger to the vegetation of the oasis.

Sand Wyrms: Said to be the last of the desert dragons. They are the pride of the noble Lyrian House, the only family to have successfully captured any.

They are kept on Lyrian property because of an especially prepared sandpit lined with delirum, a potent metal alloy. The pit descends far below the ground. It took many decades of spellcrafting to complete.

Since the Paradise Wars, an apologetic communication is rumored to have begun between the dragons and the Lyrians. It is considered an atrocity that wyrms were once captured and treated like specimen to be studied under a microscope, bred, and harvested of blood. Still, they are the symbol of the House, and only thanks to those experiments is communication now possible between humans and the sand wyrms. It is now illegal to experiment on the dragons, but much of their blood is kept in storage by the Lyrian Djin.

A treaty was struck between the dragons and the Lyrians. One of the conditions was the provision of free food to inhabitants of the sand pit. Another condition was that the pit be connected to an open tunnel allowing free access to the desert. The rest of the conditions of the treaty remain a mystery. Mogdh Ron Lyrian is recorded as the man responsible for learning to talk with the dragons. He taught other members of his own family how to do it.

Sand wyrms grow up to 65' in length, with a midsection of up to 7'. Their flesh is a glossy yellow. Their long wings and three sets of wing-like fins appear to be for navigating through the underground. It is rumored they are capable of short periods of gliding above the surface. Large round holes enclosed by a thin greenish-yellow material serve as ears. They have three rows of short spiky teeth on their upper and lower, long angular jaws. Their muscles are difficult to penetrate. Their flesh is of the durability of hardened leather. They have long arms consisting of between 5 and 7 segments, with taloned 4-fingered hands capable of holding and handling the basic tools. Their tails are long and slender, the midsection of which supports their smallest set of fins, and the tip of which is barbed by a length of white bone. The softest part of their body is the throat. Forked tongue. Capable of telepathic speech, too reclusive (and once-insulted) to communicate with most outside lifeforms. Also, their telepathic language is strange from that of the humans.

Cobra Mounts: Bred sparingly due to difficulty, danger, and resources required to tame and keep fed. A cobra mount can only bond with one rider, and can only be properly trained by hir own rider, and are jealous of other mounts should their rider own a stable.

Intelligent, fast, powerful. Communicate by intent and empathy. They have long fangs attached to paralytic venom sacks, potent and long-lasting. Short pointed tail. Hind legs shorter than front legs. Reptilian, with scales ranging in color from green to yellow to red. Called cobra mounts because the shape of their large ears and the roundness of their head

and slanted eyes make them look similar to cobras. Tongue forked, elongates like a frog's to trap insects. About the size of an average horse, nearly three times as fast.

Guneza: Bred as sparingly. They are easier to breed and keep in captivity, slightly harder to tame since they don't emphatically bond with their riders and are extremely destructive by nature. Once fully-tamed, anyone trained to ride a guneza can do so. If not fully-trained, the guneza might attack and kill its own mount.

They have a crescent protruding from the tail tip, with a long end and a short end, razor edged and tipped. A magical enhancement made of steel. Their fur is very short and soft. Coarse muscular structure. The head has a fur-covered horn up to 9" in length. Level back. About the size of a large mule. Long teeth, reptilian nose. Eyes to the front of their rectangular heads. Fat wet black tongue. Bad breath. Can run as fast as the Cobra Mounts for longer durations. Their muscular tails are a brutal weapon nearly three times the length of their bodies.

Horses and Camels: A popular export, since so many magically-enhanced breeds exist within the city walls.

Elephants: are being bred into some kind of new war engine, taking into consideration the need for durability in hot, humid, sandy desert conditions, and some form of reptilians cross is in the works.

Scorpions: Popular pets amongst teenagers, since they are cheap to feed and keep in cages. Commonly milked for venom by soldiers.

Snakes: Also milked for poison. Less often trained as pets. No constrictors native to Gobi Heart. Many varieties difficult to handle.

Lizards: Many kinds exist, so many dishes in Al Andalus are reptilian.

Sheka: A popular breed of dog. Large and muscular. Short thin tail ending in three skinny, furry tips. Hair thins out toward the base of the tail. Body covered in short brown and yellow hair, with white on the belly. Ears shaped like an "s". Circular heads w/ grinning, protruding jaws. Very loyal. Slightly like a giant version of the bull dog with tight skin. Grow up to four feet tall, prefer not to have the riders. Enjoy hunting.

Government

Nobility

The same noble families have been ruling for centuries with rare exception. There are 18 Jabbar Houses, 8 Lower Aldic Houses, and 2 Upper Aldic Houses. Each Jabbar House, supposedly representing the "common people," gets to send 5 members as representatives to Gatherings. The Lower Aldic Houses get to send 10 members each, and the Upper Aldic Houses 25 each. If the issues to be discussed concern the guilds, the Jabbar are in charge of electing representatives from the guilds, who do not get to vote and may exercise verbal influence over the results.

It is polite to give each House at least 10 days to prepare for a Gathering. Only individuals from the Aldic Houses can call a Gathering. The individual who does so is not allowed to vote at that particular event. Two elected military officials from respected families guard the entrance to the Gathering. Their job is to see that all who enter sign the book, and no imposters slip through the gate. The only way for non nobility to veto a decision made at Gathering is for 95% of all Guild Leaders to sign a single document of protest.

The nobles all own large estates with an assortment of extra buildings to support their staff of servants. The smallest of the Jabbar Houses are nearly as large as the estate of the Merchant Guildmaster and come equipped with more indentured servants. Many of these estates are fortified with large walls and small guard towers.

Guilds

Mostly meet to discuss their particular field of interest. Sometimes different guilds gather to discuss exercising an influence over city politics and Gatherings, and on those rare occasions it is desired to veto the decision of the nobles. Nobles can join a guild, cannot become Guild Masters. Each guild is required to have at least 5 Guild Masters. The Merchant Guild has 5, the Magic Guild 10, Military 6, Knowledge and Studies has 25.

Merchant Guild: Regulates trade and economic disputes, controls taxes on goods. Policy is to maintain a neutral trading atmosphere even with hostile nations except during times of war. Due to the diversity of good available within the city limits, high taxes are not considered unfair. The city thrives on imports and exports, goods ranging from armor, weapons, sugar, water, silk and cloths, healing salves, magic potions, exotic plants and animals, etc.

“Bring nothing when meeting with a Master of the Merchant Guild, for under any circumstances, that is what you will walk away with.”

There used to be a Guild master for all the different areas of trade before a frugal 5 managed to capitalize on the opportunity to excel, and bought out the competition.

Merchants are required to register to own a business, or to sell more than a limited quantity of goods over time. Citizenship is required to register so foreigners are exempt.

Guild of Magic: Often looked upon with distrust due to their tendency toward utmost secrecy. A Lore Master is meant to be a master of magical history and diverse magical knowledge, while a High Djin is meant to have mastered and excelled at the art of the Djin Order to a greater degree than any lower-ranking living members of the city.

Amongst the Guild Masters, 5 are Lore Masters and 5 are High Djin. 3 of the Lore Masters are Djin as well, while 1 is Blooded and the other a buli Magus. The Lore Masters and the High Djin are meant to be equal. The Lore masters have access to more secret libraries and tomes and the High Djin are slightly more influential, recognized as the most powerful practicing magi in the city.

Under mysterious circumstances, the magic academy Plebius is headed by a High Djin rather than a Lore Master. Noble intervention was involved in the decision. It disrupted the balance of power since that High Djin has as much access to magical tomes as any of the Lore Masters and all the usual privileges of his title. The School Master's name is Derg the Pale, an Al Andalus born practitioner with ties to distant Phranide. Most of the teachers in Plebius are under one of the 3 Djin Lore Masters, with a few under the remaining 2. 4 Guild Masters of Knowledge and Studies interact with the Lore Masters concerning school policy. Their guild has less influence over Plebius than any other school.

Anyone desiring to practice magic within city walls is required to register with the Guild of Magic, especially if displayed in public. Only citizens can register permanently. This does not prevent the sale of magical artifacts. It means that magical artifacts, if they are to be tested, should be tested by a member of the guild. Temporary registration guarantees a supervised visitation to the city. Wild talent locals gain the right to study magic at an early age, and forego military education by gaining citizenship as a lifelong devotee of the magic arts. At least 10 years must then be spent studying at Plebius.

The Blooded practice a magical discipline that involves casting spells through blood sacrifice and learning to manipulate and change the consistency of blood. Since their manna supply is often drawn directly from their own bodies, they risk significant shock to health when casting potent spells, especially when approaching old age. When in need they can always cut open a small mammal as a substitute, or even to replace their own blood loss. This form of magical practice is banned in many regions of the world.

The buli Order is male-only due to the feminine nature of the current they channel. They are immune to other forms of magic. They must be careful to prevent their manna supply from stealing the magic of any artifact or person they come into direct contact with and converting it to buli, since that is the tendency whenever buli touches other mystic energies. The buli Order, consisting of scattered individuals, is one of the most widely dispersed forms of magic in the world.

The Djin are adept at manipulating sand and desert terrain, finding and manipulating water supplies, and communing with desert spirits and deities. Skilled at using sunlight to create illusions. The Djin are the most common and well respected magical order throughout the desert.

Most of the other magical disciplines taught in Plebius are not officially practiced or applicable to martial arts training, and taught in cooperation with the Military Guild.

Military Guild: Since all but wild talents must register with the military guild and complete 3 years of training just to gain citizenship, a strict line is drawn between active and standard registration. Active members compose the official military power. Standard registrants can be drafted at any time. The military is so large there has rarely if ever been a need.

10 years of training is demanded of active members before they are released as combat-ready unless there is immediate demand for their services. At least 15 years of training is demanded before you can become a commanding officer. 20 years of training and intensive study was required for the Twelve Masters of Military Education before they even

began teaching. By the time they earned their Guild Mastership, they were all well into their middle ages. The oldest, soon to be forced to retire, is 84 going on 85. He still has his health. Training time varies concerning magically competent recruits.

During the Paradise Wars, the six Guild Master positions fell into the hands of separate Jabbar Houses. Officially, the law prohibiting the same was temporarily amended for three reasons: 1) Jabbar aren't considered nobles by the Aldic Houses. 2) The military's power needs to be kept in check. 3) Guild Masters aren't allowed to vote at Gatherings, limiting the political influence of those 6 Jabbar individuals.

Guild of Knowledge and Studies: The 25 Guild Masters in charge are 25 of the planet's most brilliant scholars. A veil of secrecy conceals certain aspects of magical knowledge, and tomes ad cetra ect. Other than that, no subject is taboo. There are 12 Masters of Military Education, 4 Masters of Magical Studies, 3 Masters of Religious and Philosophical Studies, 4 Masters of Economic Studies, 2 Masters of Historical Studies. Except for the Guild of Magic and the Guild Masters of the Military, it is required by law that you be registered with this guild in order to teach. Collectively, this guild regulates the upkeep of schools and public libraries, and the general infrastructure of education.

One requirement made of registered members is that 1 decaying ancient manuscript is to be copied and possibly translated, and approved by a Teacher. One advantage of joining the guild is that once the status Teacher is acquired, you absolutely cannot be drafted against your will unless the entire city is mobilized.

Military

Al Andalus depends on the military moreso than any other nation. Constantly under attack from the Hoggar Empire and occasionally threatened by raiders from Bliss, Land of the United Tribes, Al Andalus would long ago have been assimilated if not for her superior wisdom and evolving military ingenuity. In theory, in times of peace, all six Military Guild Masters share equal power, while during times of war a Gathering is immediately called to elect a Supreme General.

Green Warriors: 300 masters of unarmed and melee goblin fighting arts are chosen as the military's most elite fighting unit. There are only 300 because it is almost impossible to master any of the goblin arts unless you are a real goblin (an intellectually driven race of beings, similar in appearance to the goblins commonly depicted in fantasy, who channel elemental forces into their martial arts styles), and because only the absolute greatest masters are chosen. The Green Warriors are each given a Goblin Battle Axe, swordbreaker dagger, a small round shield attached to the upper arm, a row of five poison darts to line the insides of the shield, and a second weapon of choice.

The most commonly chosen secondary weapon is a large light-weight variation of the throwing axe, suitable when drawn from their belt for close-range combat as well as one good long range hit.

Green Warriors wear light armor so as not to hinder the grace necessary to excel at the goblin arts.

All 300 incorporate a form of elemental magic into their martial arts.

Brute Force: Roughly 5,000 of the best foot soldiers in Al Andalus. Wear a specially designed metallic robe that is somewhat heavy, inflexible and oft underestimated. Carry heavy weaponry that easily defeats light armor. Commonly trained in the martial arts of the old dwarven barbarians, the neighboring Bliss tribes, and the goblins. Not as skilled as the Green Warriors, also known to incorporate certain styles of combat magic into their martial arts.

Regular Infantry: 23,300, commonly used to defend against cavalry charges and to guard the front line from attacks and enemy missiles. Trained to use a diversity of weapons, to use spears w/ spiked butts to defeat horses and other forms of cavalry, and when needed, to carry large lightweight shields to defend against archery fire.

Marksmen: 2,000 in number, possess keen sight, steady hands, unshakable concentration, and skill w/ a variety of missile weaponry, such as the large repeating crossbow, the standard crossbow, the throwing spear, the throwing dart, the longbow, ad cetrum et al. Usually use a long range type of crossbow that fires one large missile with a metal head dipped in poison or some expensive chemical. The most skilled missile units of Al Andalus. 50% are magically competent, and another 30% practice incompetently.

Infantry Archers: 7,000 standing men trained in missile warfare. Often armed with the heavy repeating crossbow.

Cavalry Archers: Carry a light crossbow with a gravity reloading chamber. Still needs to be restrung. Also carry a secondary weapon of some kind for close range combat. 6,000 in #

Special Cavalry: 600 men on Guneza and Cobra Mounts. Wear heavy armor, carry heavy weapons, are often spread out amongst other units. The riders of the Cobra Mounts are usually magically competent, since telepathy is required to bond with their mounts.

Since Guneza are a difficult mount to dominate, some form of magical training is required before one is allowed to ride.

Cavalry: 6,500 standard cavalry units.

Magic Units: 200 units specialize in magic, 20% Blooded and almost 80% Djin, with another 100 kept in reserve. They have all graduated from dependence on a Mentor.

Only a handful of the buli Magi are members at any given time, since this is the rarest magical art popularly practiced in Al Andalus, and since great skill is required for the buli to cooperate in close proximity to other types of magic users without accidentally leaching them of their manna.

Shekas: Since easily trained, 1,000 are kept specifically for the army to defend troops, detect spies, route and track the enemy.

Such is the standing military power in times of peace, with nearly an equal number of troops composing a reserve force of slightly lesser skill. Food and middle class housing is provided for the active military, daily training exercises required even for reserve forces.

Fortifications

City Gates: There are four heavily guarded gates leading into and out of Al Andalus. Consist of heavy sliding iron doors and a falling steel grate. They are 25' wide and 15' tall. A small circular building has been constructed on each side without the gate, and two guard towers connect the walls to the edges of the gate. 4 guards patrol each circular building, and 5 guards each guard tower. They are protected by powerful enchantments, as is the structural integrity of all Al Andalus fortifications. The guards carry heavy repeating crossbows. The guard towers will support 50 men each, and the circular buildings 20 men each, 10 within and 10 on the roof, which is protected by a short wall requiring kneeling. The inside of the building requires aiming through small circular openings.

Djin can create and collapse temporary tunnels out of the city. Their collective enchantments prevent others from doing the same.

Walls: The city walls are 45' tall, 3' thick, composed of delirum metal spellcrafted into place. The upper inside of the wall is lined with various lengths of platform.

Missile Towers line the walls, in such a manner that there are eight on each wall. The missile tower consists of five levels with small openings facing the outside walls, and an additional level above the walls that allows an elevated vantage point. Each holds 100 men. A metal slide rolls shut behind the opening.