

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®



OFFICIAL GAME ADVENTURE

Empires of the Sands by Scott Haring

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INTRODUCTION

Introductions (particularly introductions to games and game supplements) invariably fall into three categories. They can be truly useful overviews of the product, with good advice on where to start and what to do. They can be self-congratulatory, indulgent tripe in which the author tries to convince the reader what a tremendous amount of work went into the project, and how lucky he is to even have it in his hands. The last type is an obsequious, fawning thank-you note in which the author tries to mention every friend he ever had by name, detailing the invaluable contributions of third-grade teachers, girlfriends, pets, and other people you couldn't care less about. This introduction has to fill an entire page; so I'll give you a little bit of all three.

Useful Overview

With a title like that, this had better be good, huh? Anyway, *Empires of the Sands* is a sourcebook for the FORGOTTEN REALMS™ world setting for the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game. It covers three major areas in the southwest corner of the main continent of the planet: Amn, Tethyr, and Calimshan. They are called the Empires of the Sands because of their generally warm climate and large areas of dry, inhospitable land. The book is divided into three main sections, each dealing with one of these countries.

Opening each section is a General Description, which includes a discussion of the races (both human and non-human) present, the languages spoken, and the social customs of the land. The social customs section will be particularly valuable to those wanting to understand the personality of a resident of one of these lands for better roleplaying. For example, trying to bribe a judge will have a totally different result in Amn than it will in Calimshan, and understanding the social customs and personality of the two countries will help the DM know what to do.

Other sections cover the history, government and politics, religion, geography and climate, and money and commerce of the different countries. Together, they give a detailed background to each country, filled with the little details (names of coins, typical expressions, etc.) that make roleplaying more fun.

Of course, the action-lovers out there will have plenty to do, too. The remaining sections list dozens of opportunities for bands of hardy adventurers to right wrongs, bring criminals to justice, alter the course of history, or just make a little profit and pick up a little treasure.

The Cities section provides descriptions of every city listed on the two-part map provided in this sourcebook. (The maps, by the way, are the same scale as the detailed maps in the FORGOTTEN REALMS™ campaign set, and fit together with them. If you also add the map in FR2—*Moonshae*—you are well on your way to having a map of the Forgotten Realms that will completely cover your wall!

After the cities are described, all the other places of interest are discussed (in a section titled, appropriately enough, "Places of Interest"). The mountains, swamps, ruins, castles, islands, and rivers—plus the dangers and rewards which lurk there—are described.

Last, but not least, is a section called "Characters" which lists some of the important people and groups of people in the Empires of the Sands, along with the necessary statistics for play. The list includes heroes and villains, potential enemies and possible allies, people who will have an impact on campaigns set in this area.

My goal was for a typical DM to take any single city, place, or character description, and be able to come up with an adventure stemming from the circumstances described that would entertain his or her players. Taken as a whole, there should be enough ideas here for a campaign to run for a very long time, with a mix of high drama, low humor, great enrichment, and self-

less sacrifice.

As part of the center pull-out section we have included campaign-tailored character sheets, specific to the Forgotten Realms. Seven of these are filled in, and one is left blank for your personal photocopying use.

Please address any questions regarding this product to: FR3 Questions, c/o Scott Haring, TSR, Inc., POB 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

Indulgent Tripe

When I think of this project, I don't think of it as a labor of love, or a labor of duty, but just a labor. Deadlines fell victim to procrastination and self-doubt, and soon even my friends began to shun me like a leper. Friendly (and not-so-friendly) hints were dropped with the subtlety of a falling brick. Office supplies were destroyed. There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth.

But finally, I finished. And I can't help but think that despite the delays, it's a pretty good product. Normally, an introduction like this is written well before the art and maps are finished. But this thing is so late that I've already seen the art and maps—I'm very pleased, and I hope you like them, too. And I promise to start earlier next time.

Fawning Thank-Yous

I want to thank my editor, Karen Martin, for being so patient; my boss, Jim Ward, for destroying only selected portions of my office and not the entire thing; Warren Spector, for understanding; and the other TSR staffers, especially Mike Breault, Douglas Niles, and Jeff Grubb, for letting me bounce ideas off them; and my mother, for letting me use her computer to write part of this book.

And a big thank-you to Ed Greenwood, whose 10-year-old AD&D® campaign is the basis of the Forgotten Realms, and whose extensive notes provided the skeleton for this work.

Amn

General Description

Of the three “nations” said to comprise the Empires of the Sands, Amn is the only one that is, truly, a nation. Ruled for over 20 years by a “Council of Six” made up of the richest and most cunning merchants in the land, Amn has enjoyed unprecedented years of peace and prosperity.

Amn’s borders are the Cloud Peaks and the Troll Mountains to the north; the Snowflake Mountains to the east; the Sea of Swords to the west; and the northern edge of the Forest of Tethir to the south. This includes the Tethir Road and all the towns along it, from Riatavin to Murann.

Races Appearing

Amn is, first and foremost, a human society. There are no known groups of elves or dwarves living anywhere in the country. There are the ever-present rumors of a lost dwarven kingdom in the Snowflake Mountains, filled with fantastic treasures from a forgotten time, but this story is more of a favorite childhood fairy tale than a legitimate legend.

This is not to say that there are no elves or dwarves to be found; Amn is a country where money talks, and as long as there are non-humans willing to sell their special talents to men and put up with being away from their own kind, a resident of Amn can find an elf or dwarf. Nearly every marketplace worthy of the name has shops either run directly by elves or dwarves or by someone who claims to have been trained by one. These claims are sometimes not very authentic, and travelers will have to ask around: Not every “Dwarven Armory” is run by a dwarf—some shop owners, in fact, wouldn’t recognize a dwarf if one walked through the door.

There are, on the other hand, a considerable number of halflings residing in Amn. In fact, nearly 15% of the population is made up of halflings. While there is no discrimination against the

halfling population, it is also true that the halflings tend to live in their own sections of town and do business with their own kind. But a halfling with a talent for business can rise quickly in Amn society, just as a human can.

Gnomes are rarely seen in Amn; the appearance of one in a town would be a cause of great interest. Half-orcs are also almost unheard of, with the exception of the town of Purskul, which has a sizable half-orc population (see below).

Languages

Amn is a merchant nation. As such, a traveler could enter the country speaking practically any known language, and somebody could be found fairly quickly who could handle the translation chores.

However, anyone who wishes to rise in Amn society must know Thorass, the ancient language of trade and commerce that is the ancestor of the “common” tongue spoken throughout the Realms. All contracts and legal documents are written in Thorass, and all court proceedings, government meetings and high-level trade negotiations are done in that language. Generally, the higher up in Amn society one is, the fewer other languages one has to speak.

Social Customs

Amn is a land where money talks, and wealth is the sole judge of social status. This leads to a number of interesting facets to Amn society that are different from practically anywhere else in the Forgotten Realms.

Knowledge and wisdom are not prized and revered traits in Amn; neither are exceptional talents in music, athletics, fighting, art, or any other pursuit. The only measure of success is material wealth. The inspired artist who refuses to “sell out” and dies penniless is a reviled failure, a freak; the mediocre artist who, through shrewd dealing and tireless self-promotion, becomes fabulously wealthy, is a role model for others.

The display of wealth is the only way to gain and retain status. It is not uncommon for a family to scrimp and save for a year, then blow it all on a party for the entire town that is completely beyond their means. Even the simplest and most humble stores have trays of expensive sweets and other delicacies for their customers. And big-money merchants regularly give each other the most outrageous and ridiculous gifts as tokens of goodwill before embarking on delicate negotiations.

Dress, as you may imagine, is gaudy, bright, intricate, and all too expensive. Elaborate headdresses are common among the women, while the men are more fond of long capes of the finest material. Elaborate embroidery, often using real gold and other precious metals, is also common. The only exception is at the very top of the social ladder—the upper crust of Amn society, refusing to become involved in the “petty status games” of those less powerful than themselves, dress in very simple clothes, with a minimum of ornamentation. (Of course, this is in itself a petty status game, but this is a complex society.) However, these clothes are always perfectly tailored, cleaned and pressed, and are always of the highest quality fabric and construction.

Even the common slang expressions of everyday life in Amn reflect a preoccupation with money and business. Some examples:

- *Sold—Convinced.* “I sold my wife we weren’t at the tavern, but at your workshop fixing that cabinet, so you’ve got to sell your wife the same thing in case they get together.”
- *Bought into—Understood.* “I really bought into that message today, Your Holiness.”
- *Good Business—*A standard greeting, this can mean “Hello,” “Goodbye,” or even “Get lost.”
- *Found The Pearl—*Enjoyed good luck. “So, Mikos has put 500 danter into this wagon, and he’s got no takers. Then, he really finds the pearl. Some rich out-of-towner breaks down right in front of



his shop, and buys it right there, at full markup."

- *Lost The Pearl*—Suffered bad luck. "Then, Mikos' wife hears of the deal, and spends the entire purchase price on a new headdress. Talk about losing the pearl!"

- *Foreclose*—To kill. Can refer to practically anything. "I finally caught that stoat that had been rummaging through the trash out back. Foreclosed on him real good, too." Or, "He was just asking too much and not giving me enough security, so I just foreclosed the whole deal."

- *Outbid*—Was more impressive or convincing than. "Since the innkeeper's crossbow outbid their beer mugs, the brawlers quieted down real fast."

- *Take Delivery*—Acquire. "Did you hear Deurthon and his wife took delivery on a new son?"

- *Red Ink*—Bad News. "Red ink, friend. The tavern's closed."

- *The Ink Couldn't Be Any Redder*—Things couldn't be any worse.

- *Finance*—To get something you either couldn't afford or didn't deserve. "You must have done some serious financing to get such a fine husband, Meg."

Amn society has a very paradoxical attitude toward the less fortunate. On the one hand, most people believe that "poverty is the ultimate sin" (to quote a famous Amn proverb). On the other hand, donating large amounts of money to charity is one way of showing off just how wealthy you are. The result is significant amounts of money given to the poor, none of it for the right reasons.

Nearly all the charities operating in Amn are run by various churches. There are, however, a few private charities that operate "for profit." The ultimate in free enterprise, these charities solicit donations and actually do help the poor, sick, and disadvantaged, but keep a large percentage of the take for themselves. In an area where more than one of these "for profit" charities is in competition, each tries to gain the most donations by doing the most for the unfortunates in the area; this is

very good for the poor, who benefit from the better treatment.

Moving about in Amn society is a tricky proposition, because there is a very high degree of attention paid to status, etiquette and protocol. Fortunately, almost every rule of Amn society derives from one simple precept known in Amn as "The Golden Rule": He who has the gold makes the rules.

This means, in general: The poor defer to the rich; the rich defer to the richer; and when in doubt, the person who is paying for it gets to decide.

Monsters

Amn is a civilized country, as such, monsters are rare, and practically nonexistent in the big cities. Of course, there's also a good deal of open country in Amn, and monsters are not uncommon there.

There are several tribes of ogres living in the Cloud Peaks, as well as several groups of hill giants. The largest threat in the area, a family of cloud giants that raided caravans in the Fang Pass, was defeated nearly 15 years ago. Mount Spear-top is rumored to be the home of several immense sleeping dragons, but little stock is given the story.

The central agricultural region of Amn has been rid of intelligent monsters long ago, but there are still incidents of lone farmers, single families, or the occasional small village being attacked by a hungry beast. Typical monsters include jackals, bears, wolves, owlbears, and the like. More rare but still seen are such monsters as the purple worm, anhkheg, bulette, gargoyle, gorgon, werewolf, umber hulk, and wild o' wisp.

Of course, the Troll Mountains and Trollford in the northeast part of Amn aren't named that for nothing. A large military presence in Eshpurta has convinced the remaining trolls to pick their targets carefully, but they are still a danger. Recent reports indicate that large bands of goblins and orcs have joined forces with the trolls in the

northern end of the Troll Mountains. In some cases, reports claim that troops of orcs and goblins actually are commanded by trolls.

As mentioned above, the cities of Amn are for the most part monster-free, except for the occasional experiment gone awry or other summoned or magical monster resulting from human interference: various undead, elementals, familiars, demons, devils, daemons, and golems, plus liches, aerial servants, beholders, and the like.

Last, but not least, there is something (or several somethings) at the bottom of Lake Esmel. Numerous sightings have been reported, and several boat disappearances have been blamed on the monster, or "Esmelda" as she (or he, or they) has been dubbed by the locals, but no monster has ever been caught. (For more on Lake Esmel, see "Places of Interest," below.)

History

Amn has had the good fortune to be in an area abundant in natural resources—some say Amn is the richest land on the continent. This has worked in Amn's favor for generations, because even when the land was conquered, the new masters were gentle, looking to gain wealth from the land, not put it to the torch.

Amn has been a center of trade and commerce for as long as anyone can remember. Oral traditions handed down from father to son tend to support the theory that Amn has been a trade center for at least 800 years. Unfortunately, written records are difficult to find and incomplete. It seems the typical Amn citizen was too busy trying to make money to write down what was going on.

Amn has always been more interested in the present and the future than the past, and this makes an accurate history difficult to nail down. The best records, the business papers of the oldest trading companies, are jealously guarded. It seems the fear of revealing "trade secrets" is stronger than the call of history; as a result, the average citizen knows



very little about Amn history.

It appears that the Amn of 100 years ago was very much like the Calimshan of today. That is, each major city was basically an independent entity, banding together for defense when necessary, fighting for control of territory and profitable trade routes the rest of the time. A particularly brutal trade war began 24 years ago, with each city exacting prohibitive tariffs on goods imported from other cities. Soon, the trade war escalated, and city troops began to raid caravans sponsored by other cities. In a matter of months, trade had been brought to a halt, a number of cities were under siege, and the war threatened to engulf the entire region.

Into the breach stepped a young merchant with some magical training named Thayze Selemchant. Thayze was very smart, very charismatic, and very well connected (the Selemchant trading house was one of the oldest and richest in Athkatla.) Thayze secretly contacted representatives of the five other richest merchant houses in Amn, and started to plan.

The first part of the plan involved the careful sprinkling of rumors about outside threats. One rumor involved a pirate invasion from the Nelanther, another was about a massing of orcs just on the other side of the Cloud Peaks. Thayze even started a rumor about an elf army in the Forest of Tethir, ready to pounce on a divided Amn. None of the rumors were true, but they began to turn people's thoughts toward unity, not war.

Thayze knew that if he was to take control of Amn along with the other members of his council, he would need broad-based popular support. Rivalries between cities and merchant houses were still high; to get that support, Selemchant and the others agreed to drop their family names and never use them again.

So when news of a "Council of Six" spread throughout the land, a group that would unite Amn under one rule, governing for the benefit of all instead of one city or trading company over another, many people accepted their rule. The

Council raised an army (at great personal expense) to quell the few pockets of resistance that remained, and have been in total control of Amn for the past 22 years.

Government and Politics

The Council of Six still has a firm grip on Amn, and their true identities are still unknown. What started as a deception necessary to gain the trust of the people has become a sign of power backed up by the full force of Amn law. Speaking, writing, or revealing the real name of any member of the Council is a crime punishable by slow torture and painful death.

The head of the Council is known as the Meisarch. The other five members are known (in order of rank) as the Tes-sarch, the Namarch, the Ittarch, the Pommarch, and the Dahanarch. It is widely known that the members are representatives of the most powerful trading houses, but nobody (except the council and their closest advisers) knows which houses are represented, and who the members of the Council really are. When a member of the Council dies, all members below him move up a notch on the Council, and a new member (usually a powerful merchant) is chosen to become the new Dahanarch. This has happened twice so far in the history of the Council.

The Meisarch, Thayze Selemchant, has grown very powerful in the past 22 years. He is now a 9th level magic-user of Chaotic Neutral alignment with a Strength of 18/56 and an Intelligence of 18. He has hundreds of personal servants and bodyguards, all trained from birth to be absolutely loyal to him. There are a minimum of 15 bodyguards with the Meisarch at all times, all of 6th level.

The Meisarch is also living proof of the truth of another old Amn proverb: "Decay follows power as night follows day." The Meisarch is a petty, bitter, jaded man, engaging in perversions and debaucheries that would make a harlot blush. Politically, he changes positions

at a whim (and with no warning), and will crush a person, family, or business simply for the fun of it.

The other members of the Council are not much better. Fortunately, one of the major tenets of the Council is, "The business of Amn is business." Free to make as much money as they can, the merchants of Amn do quite well, and the money they bring in provides even the lower classes with a reasonable standard of living. Whether the Council, or the merchants, or just good luck is responsible for all of this is not very important. To quote another Amn proverb: "No matter who prays for the rain, everyone gets wet."

The Council of Six is responsible for defending Amn, both economically and militarily. To accomplish this, the Council has its own army (independent of the various town militias) and spy network. Current troubles for Amn include the constant pirate activity off the coast, and disquieting rumors of a goblin and demon army in the lands to the north of the Cloud Peaks.

The Council also has the power to set tariffs, rates of exchange, and interest rates for all businesses. This power has only been used once, to correct some imbalances brought on by a kickback conspiracy between a Riatavin trading house and some Thay merchants.

The Council's love of free enterprise ends when it comes to activities that could threaten the government. Freelance companies of adventurers are not permitted; if a group of adventurers wishes to operate in Amn as mercenaries for hire, they must be registered and licensed by the national government. Small bands of adventurers have their uses—and the Council of Six demands a modicum of control over those uses.

By the same token, magic use (and magic-users) are also very closely watched. When a magic-user (of any sort) reaches 5th level, he or she is given three choices: register with the government and do one month of service each year for the Council, but otherwise be free to do whatever he wants; banishment; or death. The first option



is the most popular, though a few principled mages (notwithstanding the traditional Amn notion that there is no such thing as a principled mage) opt for banishment.

The average citizen of Amn has little to do with the Council of Six, anyway. The decisions important to daily life are made locally, by a Town Council. Rural areas are usually under the jurisdiction of the closest town large enough to have a council. Criminal matters are decided by a judge, who is appointed by a Town Council. Each Town Council appoints as many judges as it thinks it needs. Judges are usually chosen from the upper classes and serve for two years (although it is not unusual for a judge to be reappointed after his two years are up if he wants to continue). Appeals to a Council Judge (answerable directly to the Council of Six) are possible, but rare.

Restitution and fines are the most common punishment for petty crimes, up to and including minor theft. More serious crimes are also punished by fines, but the fines are usually so high that the offender has no choice but to become an indentured servant (that is, a slave). If possible, the victim of a violent crime is often given possession of the offender as part of the restitution. The death penalty is standard for murder, treason, and other capital crimes.

Religion

It might come as a surprise given Amn's preoccupation with money and wealth, but Amn has a very strong religious streak. The Council of Six has a strict "hands off" policy toward religion, with the exception of those religions that criticize the Council—those are quashed rather quickly. Accustomed as they are to dealing with people of all races and backgrounds, a good Amn businessman would never let a difference of religion get in the way of a good deal. With no official sanction or deterrence, therefore, nearly every religion known to the Forgotten Realms is prac-

ticed somewhere in Amn. A few are more common than the rest, however, and they are listed below:

Waukeen



Also called "Merchant's friend" by her many worshipers in Amn, Waukeen is the Neutrally aligned goddess of trade and money. Many business negotiations begin with a prayer and small ceremony in her honor, especially if both parties in the deal are believers. It is also common for a tradesman to donate a (small) percentage of particularly profitable business deals to Waukeen's church. Most of Waukeen's believers, however, feel that appeasing the goddess is more for avoiding bad luck than attracting good fortune. As another Amn proverb goes, "The trader's skill finds the pearl; the fates lose it."

Lathander



Lathander, the Morninglord, is the god of (among other things) creativity and new beginnings. He does not have an unusually high number of worshipers in Amn, but he is mentioned here because it is common for devotees of other religions to make a special offering to this Neutral Good god when beginning a new venture or forming a new company.

Selune



This Chaotic Good goddess has dominion over the moon, the stars, and navi-

gations. Also called "Our Lady of Silver," she has been known to aid lost travelers in the dark of night by providing a little magical moonlight by which to see. Almost every merchant or caravan rider has, at one time or another, offered a prayer to Selune in the middle of a dark, forboding night.

Sune



That Sune is worshipped by many people should not be a surprise—she is the goddess of love and beauty, and is the most beautiful of all gods and goddesses in the Forgotten Realms. What is surprising is how many otherwise-mercenary citizens of Amn are among her worshipers. In fact, Sune is the second-most worshipped deity in Amn, behind only Waukeen (of course). Sune's followers tend to be vain and a little overly fond of ostentatious display, and her worshipers in Amn have no trouble living up to that reputation. Sune's temples are among the most magnificent in all the world; a new temple to the Chaotic Good goddess that may be the biggest ever built is currently nearing completion in Es-meltaran.

Chauntea



Chauntea, also called the Earth Mother, is the goddess of agriculture. As such, she has many worshipers in Amn, among both the producers of food and the traders. A bad harvest hurts the merchants, investors, and speculators as well, and many of them have been known to make an offering to this Neutral Good goddess near harvest time.