

[Out Of Character Note: Between the last game of Season 8, held in November 2019, and the first game of Season 9, held in April 2020, three years have passed In Character. The below summary takes this time dilation into account. Events from "three years ago" happened OOC in 2019.]

RECENTLY, IN THE WORLD OF KISHAR...

Three years ago, war rocked both the city of Kishar and the world as a whole.

THE KISHARI CIVIL WAR

In the fiftieth year of the reign of Sultan Sulaiman, while the city prepared to celebrate, the Sultan suddenly died under mysterious circumstances. His recently-returned sister, Banner-Admiral Taslima aibna Osman, accused his heir, Princess of the Blood Saleema aibna Sulaiman, of conspiring with the al-Zarka family to assassinate him, and made a play for the Sultanate. Saleema, in turn, accused Taslima of the same, as she had been gone for many years as the Admiral of the Expeditionary Armada and had little legitimate claim to the throne. The resulting fighting divided the city into factions, with many organizations and people picking sides. Fighting broke out, eventually culminating in a sea-based siege and the destruction of significant parts of the city. During the final battle, two unexpected arrivals changed the course of events. First, the Maha'viran navy arrived to support Saleema, challenging Taslima's former monopoly on the port side of the city. Second, ships from the Nocturnal Empire appeared in a surprise attack against both navies, with secret agents of the Empire springing up within the city itself.

The threat of an external force bent on conquering or destroying the Ruby City, along with the abrupt revelation of information about the Sultan's assassination that was gathered by the Adventurers Guild, provided a reason for Saleema and Taslima to set aside their difference and unite against their foes. The Maha'viran navy assisted the newly reunited city in routing the Nocturnal Empire's forces. Amidst widespread destruction, Saleema aibna Sulaiman ascended to the Sultanate under her new reign name, Sultan Eisma. The new Sultan appointed Taslima aibna Osman the head of the Sultan's Might, and the two former rivals have worked closely together ever since.

The Kishari Civil War, while now three years in the past, left an indelible impression on the city. Some residents died or fled permanently, and parts of the city are forever changed. The Copper Bazaar, one of the areas where fighting was most intense, was thoroughly destroyed and many people died there. Rather than rebuild the bazaar, the city built a memorial plaza in its place. Other, smaller changes include the destruction of various parts of the Docks District, including the Chapterhouse of the Adventurers Guild that once stood there. Other effects are less tangible but no less real; the Ruby City's pre-eminence among the Jeweled Cities and much of its wealth and international prestige have all diminished. Whereas before, Kishar was a major center of learning, many scholars fled to other cities. The Nocturnal Empire's attack, along with the arrival of refugees from the Great War of Flame, led many native Kishari to become more xenophobic and isolationist. The city is rebuilding, but it is not the thriving world power it was a few years ago.

THE GREAT WAR OF FLAME

While the Ruby City mourned the death of Sultan Sulaiman, news arrived that the icy Northreach city of Wuldkest had been burned in a great and terrible inferno. Refugees arrived in the Ruby City with very little information and even less resources. As farlanders, they were only begrudgingly welcomed.

Then, perhaps a month later, refugees from the Hinterlands arrived, claiming that a great creature of flame had destroyed their home of Belgia. These refugees were followed not long after by further bad news for the Hinterlands; Ardan burned too.

By the time the Flame Lord struck Embra-Jaka's capital of Kimbasha, the Adventurers Guild saw the pattern and knew what was coming for them. A benevolent Efreet, known as the Prince of Swords, met with members of the Guild and explained the situation. Over a millennium ago, the Djinn and Efreet waged a great and terrible war over the Diamond City, and while the city was saved, few Djinn survived. The survivors of that once-proud race had been imprisoned in magical bottles by the Efreet. Their servants were destroyed or enslaved as well. The Efreet went about their business, somewhere unknown, until the Adventurers Guild unlocked the mysteries need to unveil the Diamond City. Thwarted through a series of tricks by the Prince of Swords, the Flame Lord sought the people responsible for revealing the Diamond City, and eventually, he arrived in the Great Wastes with his army proceeding him.

The ensuing battle had many casualties. The Adventurers Guild joined with various gnollish tribes, servants of Sulith, Sultan's Might soldiers, and others to hold back the army long enough to lure the Flame Lord to a ritual circle underneath the Diamond City, where the Engines of Fate were manipulated to push the Flame Lord into another dimension, much like the Diamond City itself had been for over a thousand years. This permanently damaged the Engines of Fate, and the City no longer has the defensive capability to shift dimensional planes.

Refugees from the various nations, displaced by the war in Kishar or the burning of their cities, fled into the welcoming arms of the Diamond City, which scholars eventually revealed to be called Samazar. This new-and-ancient city also saw Kishari refugees and opportunists arrive and, in the wake of the war, has begun to thrive. The Desert Outpost below the city was largely destroyed during the war but has been rebuilt with taller walls in the years since, and the war – while the trauma of a lifetime for many Samazari citizens – is beginning to fade into memory.

SINCE THE WARS...

The Ruby City of Kishar has been rebuilding, the Diamond City of Samazar has formed their new and innovative government and social structures, the Onyx City of Ulfdar has isolated itself, and the Pearl City of Isildar remains captured by the Nocturnal Empire.

In the Ruby City, the Sultan Eismaña (formerly Princess of the Blood Saleem aibna Sulaiman) has ruled over a calm and subdued reconstruction. Early on, she declared that the former Copper Bazaar, site of much fighting and death, would be rebuilt as a Memorial Plaza in honor of the individuals who lost their lives in the Kishari Civil War and in the battle against the Nocturnal Empire. Individuals from both sides of the civil war are commemorated here. Statues honor especially heroic figures and a plinth lists the names of all who perished. The Copper Bazaar has reformed nearby, along the edges of the Public District, and continues to serve the common people of the city.

A little over a year ago, the Sultan had her first child, a daughter, Princess of the Blood Samara aibna Eismaña. Upon the princess's first birthday, the Sultan declared the former Patriarch's District, "The Matriarch's District" instead. This has not been a controversial move, except with a few traditionalists, who meanwhile have greater changes to deal with.

The Ruby City is now home to fewer people in general, as some fled due to the Civil War. However, it is home to proportionally more farlanders, as refugees from other countries decimated in the Great War of

Flame arrived in significant numbers. While some moved on, others found work in the port city and stayed. Many found themselves in poorer districts of the city, such as the Sorrows, but other have thrived. However, in the wake of these changes, xenophobia has increased. The loss of Isildar – and to many, the loss of family, friends, or colleagues – left a wariness of foreign powers and their people. Furthermore, the discovery that the Nocturnal Empire had many sleeper agents within the city walls shocked everyone. That many of these agents appeared to be native Kishari has not stopped the common citizen from looking upon farlanders, and dragonkin of any nationality, with suspicion. The City Militia and the Jin Shi keep the peace for the most part, but xenophobic hate crimes are not unheard of.

The Badashi Palace was badly damaged in the war but repairs have been fully completed in recent days. The Sultan declared a day of holiday both to celebrate reconstruction and to honor those who came before, especially those lost in the conflict. Much to the relief of the people of the city, the day of celebration went forward without any problems, and the city feels calmer in its wake.

In the Diamond City, the lot of many refugees is much better. Due to its magical protection, the city deteriorated very little over the centuries, so while some buildings have been modified, little new construction has been necessary. Existing buildings have running water and indoor plumbing, which was a pleasant surprise to many of the city's new residents. The Jin Shi and the Samazar Sentries keep the peace, enforce laws, and serve to help the city's residents and visitors, with each district housing a small *kouban* where assistance of many kinds can be found.

Samazar is overseen – rather than ruled – by the Diamond Assembly, a group of representatives agreed upon by the general population during the early days of settlement. Some positions are semi-permanent – such as the head of the Jin Shi having a seat on the Assembly – and some are regularly elected by the people they represent – such as the community leader from the Embra-Jakan population. A simple charter lays out the Diamond Assembly's structure, election requirements, and legal functions. The Assembly passes laws, regulates trade, oversees large organizations within the city, and holds the power of the purse. Taxation of the citizenry is fairly minimal, though there are always those who will complain nonetheless.

In the Pearl City, the Nocturnal Empire reigns, and few residents made it out of the area alive. Some remain, conquered, but many citizens, included all high-ranking officials of Organizations, were executed publicly, with replacements selected at the direction of Nocturnal Empire officials. A few exiles from the Pearl City have permanently resettled in other Jeweled Cities.

As for the Onyx City, less is known due to their increasing isolation. During the Kishari Civil War, rumors had led some to believe that Ulfdar would attack Kishar directly during its moment of weakness, but this rumor never materialized. The Onyx City is perhaps now the most prominent and wealthy of the Jeweled Cities, having challenged Kishar over the centuries for pre-eminence. The merchants of Ulfdar picked up the trade that once routed through Isildar – and some that passed through Kishar. However, the recent construction of the anDwapeh trade road has increased existing tensions between the Onyx City and anDwapeh as well as those with the Outpost, the Diamond City, and the smaller city of Senabi, which benefits directly from trade that previously routed through Ulfdar. Guards and merchants from the Onyx City tend to be a bit less friendly than one might hope. There is as of yet no meaningful, open conflict.

The Nocturnal Empire solidified its grip on Isildar and, in the last three years, has expanded further into the continent. Their expansionistic tendencies pose a clear threat to the Jeweled Cities and perhaps, to other nations as well. Fortunately, the Sultan's Might remains strong in Kishar under the leadership of the Sultan's aunt, Banner Admiral Tasleema aibna Osman, and the forces protecting Ulfdar are equally skilled

and numerous. Khazdar and Shalazar are protected by the presence of these cities between them and the foreign aggressors.

Quietly, though known to few outside the Adventurers Guild and those with spy networks, a resistance organization is thrumming in former Kaewan. Opposing the Nocturnal Empire from within is **The Army of Flowers**, a secretive and dispersed movement that works primarily based on carefully targeted sabotage and anti-propaganda efforts. Three years ago, the Army quietly sought assistance and training from the Adventurers Guild. While their efforts mostly remain small in scale, they are a clear and dedicated thorn in the side of the Empire.

The Djinn of the Diamond City, six of whom were known to the Adventurers Guild and who were sacrificed in the great ritual to defeat the Flame Lord, have since been completely unheard from. No further djinn bottle prisons have been found. Despite this, there are still those who say that the site of the battle with the Flame Lord retains an ethereal quality, and that perhaps the sands below the Diamond City have more secrets yet to come...

A Magical River sprung forth from the ground beneath the Diamond City, due to the healing of the great Shrines in the desert that power the Engines of Fate. This river now flows northeast through the desert to the sea east of Kishar. The Lightning Stones gnoll tribe and others have built settlements in this fertile land and thriving farms and orchards now supply both the settlements and the floating city. The so-called Desert Forest is home some wilder individuals as well as a variety of wild animals, some of whom fled the Lady's Forest in front of the advancing Nocturnal Empire army.

Strange and legendary animals have been sighted in and around the Desert Forest. Reports have come in from scouts and wildfolk about creatures out of story books – but so far, nothing has been proven, and some say the rumors are nothing but fever dreams.

The Formians, strange ant-people of the Great Wastes, remain a threat – at least, the Red ones do. Green Formians, while peaceful, are rarely if ever seen. The cooperative, highly regimented species communicates largely by scent, so peace talks have not yet succeeded.

The Dragon Spirit freed from the Kuronuma family sword by Jiro Kuronuma has never been found. The spirit could potentially be rebound into the sword with the efforts of master smiths and ritualists, but the spirit would still need to be located first.

The Mage who enslaved Hiwani, by transforming them into animals controlled by magical gems, has never been captured. His subordinates, include the dwarf Marta, were arrested, and most if not all of the Hiwani affected have been freed by smashing their control gems.

Abina, the woman responsible for the assassination of the last Sultan, and also known to have previously drugged and tricked the former Princess, remains at large. Her exact relationship with the Ambassador of Maha'vira, Del'ahari, was never conclusively defined.

Del'ahari has not been seen in the Jeweled Cities since the successful of his treaty to legalize the worship of the Twins in the area in exchange for military assistance from Maha'vira.

The Prince of Swords has likewise not been seen for the three years since the Great War of Flame.