

VI

Eastern Empires

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6.01. The Kingdoms of Angora and Algath

6.02. The United Sethian Kingdoms

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Gatharqas, founder of Algath intended to establish a tradition based on the model of Seilvhan in the founding of Algath. In the first years of occupation of the site, immediate agricultural and construction needs proved so overwhelming, and those that chose to seek out the place felt such desperation to escape the unrelenting squalor of Angora, that a spirit of volunteerism pervaded. As conditions developed and a city formed, some number of the new residents naturally prospered to some degree and having known no other way of life but the market economics of Angora, they conducted themselves in imitation. In addition, pressure mounted to establish some form of organized social structure and soon, like it or not, Gatharqas found himself frontrunner for the appointment of King. The situation grew tenuous and while industrious individuals attempted to prosper, others struggled to survive, and all clamored for the rule of law to adjudicate all grievances. Gatharqas reluctantly relented and accepted the appointment in the interest of the immediate preservation of order for his young city. He soon came to regard the act as an error, for his appointment confirmed for all, intended or not, the institution of a monarchy and the peripheral social structures that always accompany such institutions, the very things he intended to abolish. Texts indicate in his last years he came to resent with ferocity his appointment, and considered all his efforts and dreams a dismal failure. He died bitter, withdrawn and despondent.

Over the many generations of the hereditary line of Gatharqas, his passion and some might say his bitterness, lived on through his descendants and it became something of a tradition that the King should always argue on behalf of the downtrodden and this always only further served to solidify the institution. Over the years, came the additional influencing factors of several wars with Angora and the subsequent nostalgic sentiment that coincides with such events, combined with profiteers eager to pry rewards from a burgeoning economy, less than well supervised under the stress of war. At the time of the invasion of Oostrigr and the army of the United Sethian Kingdoms, Algath hosted an affluent commerce class with visions of the wealth and power of kings within their grasps, an expanding impoverished class barely clinging to some modicum of comfort and security, and an adolescent sister of a child holding the title of King in name only, attempting in vain desperation to reform and regulate an economy in spite of fierce resistance from a manipulative and opportunistic council influenced by personal economic motives contrary to the interests of their civic duties. The catastrophic events of the war with the Sethian army through attrition alone retarded the process to even more exaggerated extents and in the balance, the future of Algath remained well beyond any predictable certainty.

Olinau and Olien: Olinau accounted as a King of particular fanaticism that introduced and fiercely supported the establishment of ‘guild’ trade associations, representative of particular occupations and each guild appointed spokespersons to an advisory council. Olinau intended that the guilds and the advisory councils should ultimately replace the authority of the monarchy and its private councils, with equal representation of all occupations and therefore all citizens. Merchants and landowners initially cooperated, but as they detected Olinau’s ultimate scheme, they turned contentious. Olinau attempted to force the issue by abdicating the Kingship and a state near civil war erupted.

The merchants exercised just enough influence over some element of the King's Guard to arrange the arrests of some number of the guild representatives on charges of treason and conspiracy, effectively overthrowing Olinau for all practical purposes, then imprisoning him within his own home under a state of virtual house arrest for the rest of his days. With Angora forever keen-eyed for the slightest indication of vulnerability and the impending threat of chaos and bloodshed, the son of Olinau, Olien reluctantly agreed to resume the appointment of King. The court publicly announced that Olinau had 'taken ill' and was unable to fulfill his duties, even forcing him on several occasions to make public appearances, just short of bound and shackled, in demonstration of his 'endorsement' of the continuing traditional social order, but Olien infuriated by the humiliation, put a stop to the practice. With the kingship successfully passed to Olien, the crisis eventually concluded, restoring the situation to mere contention, suspicion and secretive plotting.

In such events, the royal family through generations found continuing motivation to preserve the tradition, passion and idealism of Gatharqas, including the likes of Reneta, 'Gath Agitator Queen'.

6.02. The United Sethian Kingdoms

The Sethian Crucible: In a long history of countless wars, the Sethian Kingdoms developed some unique traditions unlike others known at the time. Sethians preserved their histories primarily by oral tradition and the many kingdoms told contradictory stories but none denied that at some stage of their history, war became so endemic, it accounted as simply too impractical to continue by any recognizable conventions. Most of the kingdoms suffered so many casualties among the ranks of healthy young men that population reductions occurred, threatening continuing survival. Although several contradictory accounts occur, claiming credit for origination, one of the kingdoms introduced a new war tradition throughout all of the Sethian Kingdoms based on a form of sportsman's etiquette. Once established, the form of war changed forever and traditional assaults, sieges and defenses ceased. The first rule of sportsman's etiquette abolished property damage, and parties at war carefully arranged battles on a schedule and staged them in open conveniently accessible places. Victors, after annihilating their opponent, would simply march into a town and proclaim their new authority. Over generations, the tradition evolved into a bizarre and elaborate code of conduct and kingdoms maintained relatively small armies more easily replenished. Each war commenced with an initial challenge but even the challenge evolved into something more along the lines of a formal invitation and became an occasion accompanied with some degree of pomp and circumstance. Details and terms were subject to formal negotiations and bound by mutual agreement determining the date and hour, the location, the number of soldiers involved and the types of weapons and accessories. At some point, crowds of civilian spectators even became a standard and parties designated the field of battle with chalk lines so that spectators could be sure to find a good spot with an excellent view, safely out of the action. The opponents often mingled amongst each other in an organized and courteous fashion as they assembled to the field. Sethians considered all forms of engagement other than hand-to-hand cowardly and unsportsmanlike and so each side arrived equipped only with weapons and gear in conformance with the negotiated agreement. Ultimately, war became a public spectacle, a sporting event, and by agreement, opponents engaged at full strengths with swords and shields for instance, or clubs only, or axes only, or they might engage only in groups of a dozen at a time or one at a time while others waited their turn. (Sethians abandoned the bow and arrow at this time and did not reintroduce use of the weapon until fighting with other neighbors recurred.) Over time, sequential arrangements of smaller groups or individual encounters emerged as easiest for spectators to observe and appreciate the action, ultimately establishing three combatants per side as a rarely exceeded maximum. Eventually, most engagements rarely involved a total of any more than a few dozen participants and at last, the kingdoms developed a form of warfare they considered perfected, still involving all the circumstance and consequence but with limited controllable casualties. Upon conclusion of an event, parties paid bounties, conceded territories and assigned appointments of new authority and all of it occurred with the accompaniment of grand celebrations and demonstrations of conspicuous ceremony. Consequently, for some number of generations, spectators gathered, contestants took the stage, stood in organized ranks, patiently waited their turn and then engaged and hacked each other to bloody shreds all in a 'civilized and sportsmanlike' fashion.

Most of the kingdoms naturally developed some form of sport in their own internal organizational structures and so it became customary that all appointments of rank occurred by determination through sport as well. Internal sports contests however generally involved less than lethal terms, for in an appointment, the contestants presumably represented the best and finest of the kingdom, and lethal contests would cause casualties better spent on a rival, and so two men might face each other barehanded and punch, kick, eye gouge and choke until one should emerge victorious.

Oostrigr came of adult age during this era and as a young man, endured many a pummeling as he sought out advancement through the ranks but he quickly developed methods and strategies that rendered him virtually invincible even though he did not account as a particularly large or strong man. Rumors followed Oostrigr contending that in privacy he subjected himself to rigorous sessions of otherwise astonishing torment and pain in the interest of sports ‘conditioning’ and that he even struck blows to his own head so that he might through familiarity and routine, casually overcome injuries that might otherwise reasonably cause the incapacitation of unconsciousness. (Speculation suggests this might in fact have explained his peculiar disposition to some extent.) He quickly became an audience favorite, popularly adored by the people of Euxinboorst, his adopted hometown. Though he boasted many scars earned in legitimate sport with rival kingdoms, many believed that some if not most of the gruesome disfigurements upon his face were in fact self-inflicted. Several accounts describe him as having entered the stage of contest for an appointment, after some observed him in reasonably fine condition on only the previous day, with several prominent fresh and horrible wounds on his face. This kind of enthusiasm and fanatical discipline inspired great extents of love and admiration among his spectators and peers, and struck terror in the hearts of his opponents.

Oostrigr eventually earned the rank of General and with his popularity, he rallied the residents of Euxinboorst in an uprising against the king, easily overwhelming the personal guard then dispatching the king himself in the form of a public execution. He then earned even greater love still by insisting the determination of the kingship occur by contest as opposed to simply seizing the appointment of his own accord as the spoils of his victory over the guard. Oostrigr thrashed his opponents in the contest and accepted the crown of Euxinboorst at the age of thirty-nine, after which he immediately dissolved the monarchy and named himself the appointed representative of the people.

He introduced in conventions with the other kingdoms a proposal to determine and resolve all challenges and invitations by non-lethal contest as opposed to the traditional sport that caused such appalling slaughter for so many ages. He ultimately became the elemental force behind the consolidation of the ‘United Sethian Kingdoms’ eventually winning through contest the appointment of Supreme General over all Sethian armies. Concurrent with these events, the United Sethian Kingdoms discovered a newfound might in unity, and conflict with Angora and Algath as well as with other neighbors, renewed with some degree of frequency. Eventually Oostrigr at last found himself in a position to pursue what in all likelihood accounted as the lifelong vision that haunted him. Oostrigr marched with the aggregate army of the United Sethian Kingdoms for the purpose of conquering his known world and establishing an empire of such magnitude and spectacular glory that his name would live forever and so he would thus, once-and-for-all, achieve immortality.

The account of his march is as recorded within the texts.