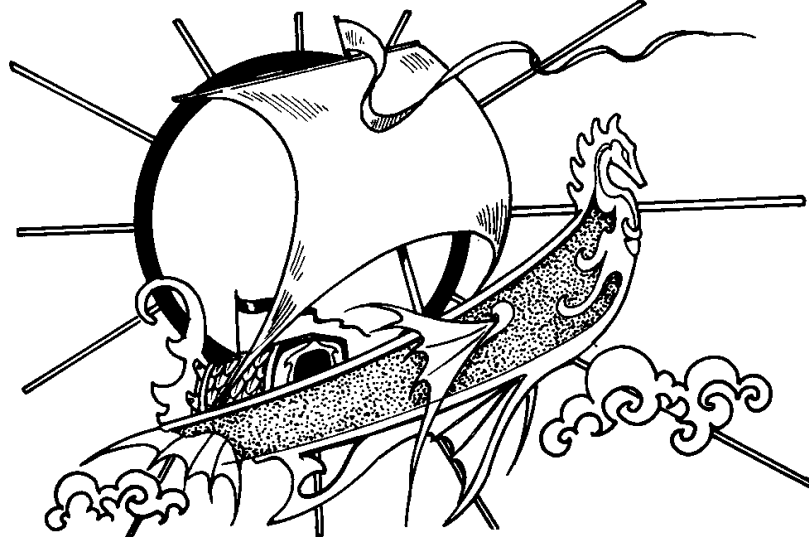


Region/Culture Lore: Sel-Kai and Eidolon



From the western sea to the edge of the world,
are ports of every kind
But one city is a dream in the sky:
Eidolon comes to mind!

Her streets are paved with silver and gold
Of pearl her towers are wrought
Name a city with such wealth?
Eidolon, or naught!

Floating on the breast of a cloud
She gleams in the morning light
Who is queen in our hearts?
Eidolon is, by right!

Where else can we spend our gold
on pleasures of every kind
When our pockets are heavy with coin
Eidolon comes to mind!

—Sel-kai sailors' song

1 Introduction

Eidolon! The name is legendary from the shores of the Bladelands to the plains of the nomadic Jan. A glittering jewel, a treasury floating on a cloud, a testament to the power of coin, Eidolon is the unassailable heart of the richest trade empire on the Shadow World. The Prince of Sel-kai resides in Eidolon, his gleaming white marble palace towering over rings of landscaped terraces. The rest of the ‘Upper City’ is dominated by guildhalls and shops trading in the most exotic luxury goods. About the towers and rippling banners circle a swarm of sky-ships, the merchant fleet of the Prince. Like bees they serve the hive, but their cargo is merchandise, not pollen, and the gold is metal, not honey.

By any measure of mortal lifetimes, it is an ancient city: for fourteen centuries it has hovered serenely above the rolling hills of Sel-kai. But Eidolon is young compared to her land-bound sister, Sel-kai City. Many times the size of Eidolon, the ‘Lower City’ is where the bulk of commerce takes place; it remains the backbone of the Sel-kai economy. Sel-kai City has existed for four and a half millennia, growing from a small cluster of wood and thatch cabins on the bank of the Sharhya to a sprawling metropolis of islands topped by stone towers straddling the delta. Hundreds of bridges span the dozens of canals at many levels, linking the twelve districts of Sel-kai City.

In the Black Oak and Library districts, towers rise higher as the wealthy and powerful seek to dominate their rivals. Meanwhile the pilings supporting the Sighing Docks and Canal Maze slowly sink into the muddy bottom of the river.

2 Sel-Kai, An Overview

2.1 Life in Sel-Kai

In a metropolis as large and complex as Sel-kai City, it is difficult to capture the essence of day-to-day life in a few words. The lower classes labor in sweatshops or on the canals most of their waking hours to make a scant living. The wealthy spend their time in leisure activities such as conversing, studying, and creating works of art and literature. Between these extremes are thousands of artisans and those in service professions who make a fair income yet lack the wealth to have real luxuries.

While there is little ‘heavy industry’ in the city itself, still the air is ripe with a cacophony of smells. The reek of fish, tanning agents, fabric dyes, sewage, smoke from cooking and smelting fires, incense, oils and perfumes all fill the atmosphere in Sel-kai. Sometimes a visitor feels inundated—as is often the case with rural peoples coming to a large city—but after a few days the nose grows accustomed to these strong odors.

2.1.1 Population and Health

Sel-kai, like any city in a medieval environment, owes much of its growth to the influx of people from rural environments rather than genuine internal population growth. Even with

healing herbs and magical disease-prevention techniques, living conditions for the majority of inhabitants in any large city are rather unhealthy. Medicine is delivered inconsistently. The concept of a ‘doctor’ is virtually unknown, there are a few Lay Healers who serve the wealthy, but the majority of Sel-kai’s inhabitants turn to herbalists or apothecaries for remedies to their ills. Herbs and chemicals are available to those with the money, so the well-to-do are generally a healthier group than those who live in the poorer districts. Healing of wounds and certain diseases is available through a handful of religious orders, but such is only administered to the devout, or after a considerable monetary gift is given.

2.1.2 Religion and Science

Despite the relative intimacy of the Kulthean pantheons, and the very real effect gods can have in the day-to-day lives of mortals, the very multiplicity of religions has limited church powers as a force in most Shadow World societies. Only in certain areas where one faith or cult dominates do religious leaders carry considerable political and cultural authority. Otherwise they are limited to a secondary importance, called upon only when more pragmatic means of solving a problem are exhausted.

In Sel-kai, religion has seen a continuous slow decline in importance from even this unsure footing. With the advances of ‘technology’ (many introduced by the Loari Elves of Námár-Tol) and a growing humanistic, artistic community funded by wealthy merchants, religion—as real as it is—finds itself increasingly in a position as a superstition, recreation or minor inspiration. This is not to say that the names of various gods are not on the lips of virtually every citizen every day, usually as part of an angry or surprised oath, however.

Currently there are perhaps a dozen religions recognized on an equal footing with lesser guilds. In addition, the Cult of Andaras and Church of Neela are each of sufficient following and importance that they have seats on the Privy Council.

2.1.3 Education

As with so many things in Sel-kai (and in any medieval to renaissance society), the wealthy and privileged continue to maintain their supremacy not only through raw wealth but through the additional power that a superior education can give them. Laborers (sailors, boatmen, casual laborers) rarely know more than the rudiments of reading and writing (those that are ‘learned in letters’ are fiercely proud of it); they are taught by parents at home. Domestic servants are sometimes better educated. Interestingly, the skilled laborers (artists and artisans) are becoming better educated in some ways than the merchant nobility. This is due to the well-organized guild system and excellent schooling provided by guildhouses.

The wealthy range from extremely knowledgeable (those who attend universities and learn several languages, science, literature, mathematics and extensive history) and somewhat educated (some skill with mathematics, careful training in the Shay language and a smattering of Erlin).

2.1.4 Money and Coinage

Sel-kai mints its own silver, gold, bronze, and copper currency, and also prints a currency, though this is used almost exclusively within Sel-kai (few outside of the isle will take paper money, despite the robust Sel-kai economy). This paper is useful when making large transactions, and can be converted to coin at the mercantile centers or any large bank.

While most merchants will accept coin that is not Sel-kai mint, they will covertly mark up the price of goods bought with ‘outsider’ money, mistrusting its quality. Generally, visitors would do well to convert their cash at a bank, moneylender or mercantile center before going on the inevitable buying spree. Their coin will be (usually) analyzed fairly and their Sel-kai coin happily accepted at any vendor in the realm (or most other places as well).

A Sel-kai silver piece (the most common monetary denomination) is commonly called a sellin, a gold piece an orlin. Plural is sellini or orlini.

Currency	Abbreviation	Breakdown
Diamond note	dn	= 100 gold pieces
Platinum note	pn	= 10 gold pieces
Gold note	gn	= 1 gold piece

Coin	Abbreviation	Breakdown
1 gold piece (orlin)	gp	= 10 silver pieces
1 silver piece (sellin)	sp	= 10 bronze pieces
1 bronze piece	bp	= 10 copper pieces
1 copper piece	cp	= 10 tin pieces

2.2 Anatomy of the City

Sel-kai City is over forty-four centuries old. Think about it. Four thousand, four hundred years is ancient by any standards. It has survived floods, earthquakes, fires, attacks, and just about every political upheaval imaginable. Certainly it is not the same city it was even five hundred years ago, but it has about it a certain atmosphere of great age, a half-forgotten scent of a lost era... or perhaps it is just rotting fish under the piers.

Built upon hundreds of platforms of varying stability, Sel-kai is literally a vast maze of small islands in the river, and most of her major streets are in fact canals. The City rests in the Sharhya river delta, a fan of waterways which rise and fall, sometimes inundating Sel-kai, and sometimes leaving the city squatting upon a stagnant mire. These events are fairly rare, however, and the water level seldom dips or surges more than three feet away from its usual summer height. Thus the Sharhya provides transportation and sewage—and the flowing waters also supply power to the innovative waterwheels scattered through the city. But one does not drink from the Sharhya below the First Bridge far upriver from the City. Popular lore says that one sip of ‘canal water’ spells a grisly demise.

2.2.1 Transportation

Sel-kai's intra-city canal system is virtually unique on Kulthea— certainly there is nothing to rival it in size. While most important cities are situated on the banks of a river because of the trade advantages, few have brought the river into themselves with such intimacy. Horses in Sel-kai city are illegal; the only carts are hand-drawn. This makes for a quieter and (in one way) cleaner environment, and has allowed the builders of the city to make streets far more narrow than possible in other urban environments.

Two basic kinds of craft ply the narrow, twisting waterways of Sel-kai: narrow, agile skiffs used for passenger travel, and flat-bottomed barges used more to carry cargo and merchandise. Smaller barges can still be operated by one person, but most have at least two crewmembers. These craft are all operated principally by poling, as the canals are rarely more than ten feet deep—and some canals are literally too narrow for long oars!

Hundreds of bridges span the canals, linking islands on more than one level. Some spans are of stone, but most are of wood with elaborate truss structures. Sel-kai's bridges are not only beautiful but often wonders of structural engineering. Designers have come from continents away to study the bridges of Sel-kai. Periodic dredging of the canals and riverways adjacent to the city is necessary to prevent them from silting up.

2.2.2 Food and Water

Virtually all of the city's food is brought in by boat, supplied by the surrounding countryside and nearby islands. Some drinking water is obtained from a few deep wells, but potable water is primarily secured from rain, collected from the roofs and held in cisterns. All larger buildings have gutter systems to trap rain and divert it to underground cisterns. From there it can be pumped back up when needed.

2.2.3 Sewage

Sewage is a simple matter in Sel-kai: dump it in the river. But while the Sharhya River is constantly flushing away undesirable material, there are still disadvantages to this system. After all, one is essentially living above one giant open sewer. In the hot, late summer when the river grows sluggish, the smell in the inner canals can become unbearable.

The more well-equipped homes and palaces actually have interior plumbing, including a sink, bathtub and toilet. Hot running water is not available (but there are servants to attend to that for the wealthy). Less prosperous households use either the more common chamberpot or often a privy.

2.2.4 Heating/Cooling

While snow is not very common in Sel-kai, there can be bitter cold snaps, made more penetrating by the ever-present dampness. Residents heat their homes by burning wood and charcoal in small stoves and fireplaces.

Sel-kai has the advantage of some of the best glassblowers and cutters in the known world, allowing them windows of unprecedented size and design. Most can be covered with shutters or opened to allow cooling breezes to waft through the apartments.

2.2.5 The Islands

Little of Sel-kai is actually built upon naturally formed land. However, at the heart of most of the districts lies an island originally formed by the flows of the Sharhya. It was upon these sandy hills that Sel-kai began. Docks were built to make access from land to water more easy, and wood pilings were driven in some areas to control erosion.

It took only a few decades of prosperity for the city to outgrow the few solid land masses in the delta. Most of the land on either side was useless marsh, so the city leaders began the project of expanding the existing islands. Deep piles were driven and the docks were extended and interlinked. Soon structures sprang up on the docks themselves. The river was dredged and the silt used to create more islands. Piles were driven to hold back the earth, and crushed rock was mixed in to create a firmer foundation. Some islands actually have stone or concrete foundations, but the former are few and the latter are all new, concrete being only a recent development.

2.2.6 Buildings

The more important buildings of Sel-kai (and the ones on solid ground) are constructed of stone, while the vast majority are built of locally-made brick. Structures on docks are of necessity also made of wood, as any sort of stone or masonry would be much too heavy. Most of the brick buildings are faced with a stucco, either tinted or painted. Roofs are usually terra-cotta, though there is an occasional copper or tin sheathed structure. Many buildings in the city are actually made mainly of wood, a fact which makes the residents pyrophobic.

Flooring is usually polished wood, though villas and government buildings often have beautiful polished marble floors. Less wealthy homes built on solid ground have either brick on the bottom storey or even packed earth.

Interior walls are of wood, often accented with tapestries. Wood is in tremendous demand in Sel-kai, and the inhabitants have had to pay considerable sums for oak, firs and larch from the Silaari hills, and even as far north as Jaiman.

2.3 The Classes

The merchant-lords of Sel-kai have firmly established their dynasties, as have most of the craft guildsman, leaving the laborers with little chance to rise above the near-poverty level in which they have existed for untold generations. Yet the reality of the rigid class structure of the city, fails to daunt the spirit of enterprise in the lower classes, and sometimes the lines of status are crossed.

2.3.1 The Wealthy and Nobility

Sel-kai has always been a place controlled by coin rather than blood-right or religious authority. Although some of the powerful mercantile groups have evolved into dynasties resembling more conventional nobility than corporations, it is still wealth which allows them to remain in political power. Even the Prince of Sel-kai is usually a man chosen because of his business and diplomatic skills.

As the centuries have passed, certain families have arisen as the merchant-nobility. Ullizi, Taminger, Vorhese, Baragon, Elgata, Jurgon and Tharal are all names with a lineage going back for hundreds — sometimes thousands — of years. These are but a few of literally dozens; however, the merchant class is by no means a small elite group. It should also be remembered that only the most wealthy of these families possess a life of leisure; most still work long days in offices or travel hundreds of miles to far-flung branches. Many younger members of distaff branches have little to look forward to except a life in a dim chamber with a worn barka, counting someone else's sellini.

2.3.2 Artists and Artisans

While generally not on the same level as the merchant class, the artists and craftsmen of Sel-kai hold a special station. The leaders in this community have on occasion risen to a level of prestige which effectively makes them as celebrated (and wealthy) as their merchant beneficiaries. But artistic skill is not as easily handed down to offspring as is business training.

Current luminaries are treated with anything from awe to grudging professional respect. A few are true celebrities, mobbed when seen in public by adoring (usually youthful) followers.

In Sel-kai, artists and artisans are not just those who create works of art, music and architecture, but scholars, athletes (there are monthly games held in a great complex inland) and most professional spell-users. Less glamorous members of the middle-class are traders, accountants and the more skilled clothiers and various smiths.

Apprentices: Children (usually but not exclusively boys) enter apprenticeship at about age 12. They are employed as semi-skilled workers by a Master Craftsman for 5-7 years. Apprentices work in larger shops and guildhalls, often performing support chores and running errands. As they grow older and more familiar with the craft, they are permitted to do simple, repetitive operations disdained by Masters and Journeymen. When a youth is deemed ready, he is elevated to the rank of journeyman.

Journeymen: Each journeyman serves directly under a Master Craftsman for 2-3 years; at the end of this period he is required to take a test to prove his skill. This examination often takes the form of an actual work of craftsmanship, judged by a committee of Gilded Craftsmen. Assuming the Journeyman passes, he is elevated to Craftsman and given full Guild membership.

Master Craftsmen: These are the most accomplished in their field, recognized by their peers as true artists. Whether these men (and sometimes women) work stone, gold, steel or cloth, they are respected members of Sel-kai society. While their trade does not usually convey the same elitist glamor as the upper echelons of the merchantmen, they have a niche which has its own stature and honor.

2.3.3 Laborers

The majority of any city's inhabitants in a society such as Sel-kai's is formed of menial laborers—those who carry out the designs and manipulations of the upper classes.

Service Professionals: Actually, this group hovers on the class scale somewhere between the artisans and the real labor classes. Service people include those who operate taverns and inns, those who are shopkeepers, but not accredited craftsmen.

Casual Laborers: Among those who perform construction and other labor-intensive crafts, casual laborers make up by far the greater part of the work force; the skilled workers usually only performing selected tasks or in a supervisory role.

Servants: Household employees of the wealthy merchant families, these domestic servants make up a relatively small portion of the manual labor force. The more attractive offspring of labor families are often chosen for the 'honor' of domestic service.

Boatmen: Boatmen must be distinguished from the men who man the larger sailing vessels. These pilot small craft designed only for transport in and about the city, and perhaps up the Sharhya river. The boatmen are among the city's most interesting groups, as they have formed a loose association amongst themselves. They are known to look out for each other, and a peculiar system of honor exists between these men and women whom the upper classes consider to be little better than vagabonds.

Sailors: These are the crewmen of the numberless ships based out of Sel-kai and Eidolon. Officers of private vessels are almost always appointed from among the merchant families themselves. The Prince's navy has officers who have risen through the ranks, but the majority are men who came from an easier background. Most crewmen are rankless sailors and can expect to remain so for their professional lives.

Sailors consider themselves a rank above dockworkers and other casual labor professions, for crews of sailing vessels are well-trained and pay is commensurate with skill and length of time on board. Crews of the glamorous skyships often make three times their ocean-bound cousins, but the training is rigorous and the risks considerable.

Dockworkers: Strong men who labor long hours on the docks of Sel-kai City, these are usually in the employ of the mercantile houses and warehousemen. Many are only casual labor, hired for the day or until a specified number of loadings/unloadings is complete.

2.3.4 The Poor

Every city has its indigent population and Sel-kai is no exception. (Eidolon has no such group, but as mentioned before, it is not a true city. No vagrant could afford a trip to the sky-city, and any caught stowing away would be summarily returned to the earth.)

2.3.5 Public Service

This category includes the interior police force, the military, and the hundreds of bureaucratic public servants. These come from nearly all the classes, as younger sons or daughters in merchant families can find better-paying work in the government than within their own family. There are many positions in the mint, customs and inspections divisions, or even in palace administration. Intelligent laborers capable of passing various tests may qualify for the military respected Guardians of Peace (called Wardens in the cities; Marshalls in the countryside).

2.3.6 Criminals

While the City Wardens are not to be underestimated as an efficient and dependable protective force, there is an inevitable crime element in Sel-kai City.

Gangs: Several gangs plague Sel-kai City, especially in Canal Maze, North Delta and Sighing Docks. Youths—usually boys between 12 and 20, sons of laborers—form intimate fraternities with elaborate initiation rites and loyalty oaths. To give more acute meaning to their groups, they claim territories and ‘defend’ them against similar groups. While these gangs usually only create trouble for each other, their violence can sometimes spread to innocent bystanders. Most gangs have distinctive garments or jewelry which ‘brothers’ wear to proclaim their membership.

Upscale Crime: Smuggling is an ongoing (though not overwhelming) threat to Sel-kai’s tax revenues, as is the booming black market inevitable in any city. The government blames the boatmen, while they in turn accuse the ship captains of dishonesty. Raids occur regularly—with enough frequency to keep operations well below crisis proportions—but bootleg merchandise continues to find its way into the shadowy shops of Sel-kai. There is no sign of this status quo altering significantly.

Street Crime: By far the most dangerous threat to the visitor to Sel-kai is a random street assault. The lone, unwary and ostentatiously dressed adventurer out wandering in Canal Maze late at night is quite likely to wind up fish food in a canal, relieved of all his

wealth. The more fortunate are merely robbed or knocked unconscious, but there are many in the city who would not think twice about slitting some rich fool's throat for a handful of silver.

3 The Realm of Sel-Kai and Environs

Sel-Kai is far more than a mismatched pair of cities; it is a realm unto itself. While the Prince of Sel-Kai can claim only a few hundred square miles of territory, the seven isles and peninsula which make up Sel-Kai are fertile lands strategically placed. At the mouth of the Sea of Tears and beside the westerly currents of the Melurian Straits, Sel-Kai is well positioned to receive ships from many directions. The climate is mild, and while the seas can sometimes bring violent weather, the people of the wealthy little realm are willing to accept the occasional tantrum of the Sea-god Shaal along with his graces.

3.1 The Lands

Following is a summary of the lands under the control of the Prince: seven islands and a long, fertile peninsula.

3.1.1 Teaque Island

Furthest west of the lands claimed by Sel-kai, Teaque faces the long atoll known as the Black Snare. The narrow straits between Teaque and this great barren stretch of rock and reef have been the death of many a ship through the centuries. Teaque has more rocky shores than the other isles, and while there are several plantations scattered across it, it is the only isle of Sel-kai which is still primarily given over to forest.

3.1.2 Murini Island

The southern shores of Murini are calm and the beach smooth, while the northern face of the isle takes the brunt of storms from the north. Shipwrecks are common—as are treasure-seekers hunting through the broken hulls of vessels tossed upon the shore. Fortunately, the cliffs along this face protect the inland areas, and the island is populated with a number of farms and country villas.

3.1.3 Sel Island

Home of Sel-kai City and the heart of the realm, Sel is also the largest of the islands. Just over 100 miles in length, Sel is roughly star-shaped, with five peninsulas. Sel-kai City is located at the head of the long, narrow Sharhya Bay, in the heart of the river delta, fed by numerous mountain streams. Above the city of course hovers Eidolon, somehow protected from all types of inclement weather.

3.1.4 Resenda Island

A long, narrow isle north of Sel, Resenda is furthest north of the cluster, and suffers the fury of storms from the turbulent Melurian Straits. As a result, the northern coast of the isle is not densely populated. However, several sugar plantations are located on Resenda—mostly in the southern foothills. In addition, Resenda is the location of three important naval bases: part of the defensive perimeter about Sel-kai.

3.1.5 Quente Island

Quente lies furthest east of the isles (though the Kai'sa peninsula does curve further towards the sunrise, it lies far to the south). This island also has a naval base, and at the tip of that eastern spur there stands a tall slender tower, an important navigational beacon for sea and air pilots alike. At the pinnacle of the two-hundred foot tall spire burns a brilliant blue light, visible for miles through all but the thickest clouds and fog.

3.1.6 Travii Island

Smallest of the Seven Isles, Travii lies within the sheltered Moon Bay, the northeasternmost enclosure of the Sea of Tears. Travii boasts many palatial villas and a small naval base, as well as a sizeable town on the northern point. All coasts are fine black beaches (testament to the volcanic origins of the islands) and a temperate climate is the rule almost year-round.

3.1.7 Whalena Island

Another sheltered, pastoral environment, Whalena supplies a large corn crop to Sel-kai City, as well as spices and medicinal herbs. Less rocky than her sisters, this island has the greatest percentage of arable land.

3.1.8 The Kai'sa Peninsula

From the northern tip where it faces the Sharhya Bay to its roots on Silaar, this twisting tongue of land extends nearly 200 miles. It supports a checkerboard of bountiful fields and plantations, and its shores are rich with seafood. Along the south there is a stone wall manned by Sel-kai troops, guarding this spit of lands from incursions by barbarians of the northern Silaar mainland.

3.2 Weather in Sel-Kai

Sel-kai City falls under the “Sheltered Coasts” category, as it is nestled deep in a narrow bay. Overall the weather in this region is relatively mild, but the constant dampness can make a chilly day seem bitter and humidity can render a hot day unbearable.

Winter temperatures generally reach highs from 20-50 degrees, while Summer highs tend to be no higher than the mid-80's. As noted, the humidity levels tend to be high with moderate amounts of rain/snow expected in all seasons.

3.2.1 Eidolon Weather

The sky-city seem impervious to even the most severe weather, and in fact is a haven for skyships caught in dangerous winds or storms. Rain during the day is unheard-of, while late evening drizzles keep the city's grass and many ornamental trees well watered, and her cisterns full.

3.2.2 Flooding

Sel-kai City is regularly inundated, usually in the spring and fall seasons, though the architects of the city have taken precautions. Only the most severe floods rise enough to cover the highest platforms. Most landings are actually floating jetties, of course—able to rise and fall with the changing water levels.

Occasionally, however, the Sharhya proves who is in charge, however, and once every fifty years or so she takes control to the bottom storey of almost every building in the city. Stone breakwaters constructed upriver (as well as the spread nature of the delta) prevent the current from being damaging in itself, but the rising water wreaks enough havoc to disrupt trade for at least a few days. The loss to the city in trade tariffs alone during such a inundation can be counted in the thousands of gold coins.

3.3 The Trade Network

Sel-kai's list of principal trading partners includes all the major cities and powers in Emer and southern Jaiman. A list of secondary sites and links would be enormous.

There are designated routes to and from all principal trade partners set on regular schedules, often with one or more land, sea, and air connections, in order of increasing speed and convenience. Special and chartered shipments are also not uncommon, with many more destinations available at irregular intervals.

Regular passenger service is still a relatively new concept, but all regular routes generally accomodate passengers at the discretion of the caravan leader/captain. Rates for such can vary greatly, but are slowly standardizing due to market forces.

Principal trade partners include:

- Danarchis
- Stroane
- Sarnak
- Lankan Empire

- Nuyan Khôm
- Námar-Tol
- Kaitaine
- Lys
- Malqanar
- Haalkitaine
- Lethys

3.4 Rivals

Naturally, a small realm as wealthy as Sel-kai is bound to have at least as many enemies as friends. Only the skilled maneuvering of the charismatic Prince has allowed the country to remain on good terms with so many for so long. Nevertheless, there are the inevitable rulers who envy Sel-kai's wealth and would rather have a share of it on their own terms.

3.4.1 Praeten

Sel-kai's principal rival on the seas is the small (albeit aggressive) realm of Praeten. Controlled by a despotic ruler known as the Honakh, the country has refused trade offers from both Danarchis and Sel-kai. The Honakh has called such proposals 'insulting' and insists that any attacks by his ships on trade vessels are 'defensive measures' employed against 'trespassing spies.' He has asserted his ownership of all waters fifty miles out from his shores—a ridiculous claim.

3.4.2 The White Swan

The White Swan is the name associated with a pirate lord believed to operate out of a hidden port in southern Jaiman. His ships attack primarily merchants from Lethys. While ships bearing the flag of the White Swan are not terribly common in the waters about Sel-kai, they are small agile craft—and dangerous. Such ships are said to fire ballista bolts with exploding warheads, a weapon unheard-of on Kulthea. Even the swift merchants of Sel-kai fear these dark pirates and rarely put up a fight.

3.4.3 Raiders of Thanor

The plains of northern Silaar are essentially a vast prairie dotted with ruins. Where a rich empire once stood there lies now only skeletons of cities and homesteads. But the land is not deserted: barbarian raiders inhabit scattered camps in this wilderness, attacking unwary travellers and guarded caravans alike. That is why the Nuyani prefer to send their goods to Sel-kai by sea rather than across the desolate plains.

3.4.4 Urulan

Recently there have been stirrings in this realm long since thought dead. Sleek grey ships bearing a black flag with a white swan have been sighted off the Resenda coast, and Sel-kai scouts attempting to contact or pursue these craft have been left in their wake. Swift ships to be sure, and some say that they can only be of Loari construction. The Prince has ordered that more detailed information be gleaned, but definitive reports have yet to come in.

3.5 Sel-kai Holidays and Important Dates

The following is a list of more important holidays and other notables dates in Sel-kai. Note that Sel-kai, being controlled by commercial interests, has fewer holidays than average; the merchant barons feel that more holidays result in more grumbling by dockworkers, accountants, etc. who are forced to work on those days to handle the necessary flow of goods.

1·1 New Year's Day. Reann revered.

1·8 Bad Luck Day. The eighth day of each month is considered bad luck to begin any new projects, ventures, or relationships. The reason why is lost in the past, though the number eight has dark magical implications in many Kulthean societies.

1·22 Birthday of Agren Navalak, perhaps the greatest prince in the history of Sel-kai.

1·35 Moon Winter. Jaysek revered.

2·1 Spring Games. The Games are held thrice yearly at the start of Spring, Summer and Autumn. A variety of track and field competitions, as well as wrestling, archery, and others are held. The Games are open to all who pass qualifying tests, but in general only the wealthy and certain specialists participate. Young members of noble families often compete against each other, sometimes bending the rules to do so.

2·30-33 Lawgiver Days. Kuor revered.

2·35 Moon Spring. Baris Blessings Day.

2·66 Night of the Satyr. Revelries are held in a giant evening street party.

2·67 Repentance Day.

3·1 Summer Games.

3·14 Anniversary of the rise of Eidolon into the sky. Celebrations often run several days.

3·35 Summer Moon. Orianna, Phaon revered.

3·35-44 Kieronalia, the festival of the Orhan god of revelry. These nine days are marked by celebrations of music, dancing and feasting. Indulgence in food, drink — and other physical pleasures — is widespread.

3·45 Water Day. A period of appreciation of Neela and fresh water (and recovery from the Kieronalia). Only water is consumed.

4·1 Autumn Games.

4·35 Moon Autumn. Iloura revered.

5·1 Fall Starry Night. A night of contemplation and preparation for the coming winter.

5·35 Moon Fall. Shaal revered.

5·35-37 Wine Festival.

4 Sel-Kai Government

4.1 Symbols of Authority

Each of the three branches of government has a seal and a scepter which serve as emblems of that division's power.

4.1.1 The Seals

Large, ornate golden artifacts, the seals are worn about the neck on a gold chain. The Prince, the First Speaker of the Conclave, and the Chief Adjudicator of the Tribunals each wear the seals and use them when approving important documents. Each seal has a different, very detailed design, and is set in a different color of wax with accompanying ribbon.

4.1.2 The Scepters

More purely symbolic items than the seals, the scepters are carried by the three primary representatives of the three branches of government (the Prince, the First Speaker of the Conclave, and the Chief Adjudicator of the Tribunals) into major sessions and ceremonial occasions. On a day-to day basis, the Conclave and Tribunal scepters rest on pedestals in primary chambers, while the Prince's scepter is stored in a vault.

4.2 The Prince and Court of Sel-Kai

Since the Princeship is not dynastic, the court is (theoretically) not as entrenched as it might be were the rulership based on family. However, since Rylec Qaterris has ruled for over 200 years, his family has quite firmly positioned itself in the royal palace. While the rest of the family members have little official power based on their relationship to the ruler of Sel-kai, many of the prince's relatives do serve as ministers, and a few hold ranking positions in the guild hierarchies.

4.2.1 Powers of the Prince

While not an absolute dictator, the Prince is granted sweeping powers which enable him to operate with considerable freedom. He may sign trade agreements without prior approval; these can be subject to subsequent veto by the Grand Conclave, but only by a two-thirds vote—virtually unheard-of. He has the power to levy and set taxes and tariffs.

The Prince controls all real estate on Eidolon; he alone may nominate a family or guild to Inner Council status (subject to ratification by that council).

The Prince also has the power to grant pardons. Chief of the military forces of Sel-kai, the Prince may declare war, mobilize troops, and sign treaties—though all such actions are subject to Legislative review.

4.2.2 The Prince and Family

Following is an overview of the Prince's immediate family.

Rylec Qaterris, Prince of Sel-Kai: The Prince refuses to reveal his exact age, but since he has ruled for more than two centuries and looks to be no more than thirty years of age, it is clear that Elven blood flows in his veins. He is already accounted one of the most gifted of Princes, ruling with charisma and an even hand. The only question which swirls ever about his reign is when (or if) he will retire—and who will succeed him. The last Prince who tried to name his heir left his successor with a rebellious population. Rylec is mute on the subject, saying only “I think I have a few good years left in me; let's worry about my retirement a few years down the road.”

Lady Wensia: The Prince's wife and mother of his children, Wensia is a quiet woman now in her fifties. She is the Prince's second wife; his first died in her eighties someone hundred years ago, never having borne him offspring.

Lord Barrin: At thirty-one, Barrin still retains a boyish look, though his sullen moods and frequent scowl can counteract that appearance. Tall and lean, he is skilled swordsman and has some Mentalist abilities as well. He is unfortunately resentful of the fact that he will not inherit the realm since Sel-kai is not a dynastic monarchy.

Lady Arisia: Twenty-eight year old Arisia is a willful young woman who has repeatedly resisted her father's attempts to marry her to sons of prominent Guildmasters. She is determined to wed who she pleases when she pleases. A lovely young woman, her auburn hair is the envy of many girls in the aristocracy.

Lord Caillin: Twenty-three and still full of youthful energy, Caillin has always had a knack for getting into trouble—though as he has gotten older, the trouble has become more serious and difficult to dismiss as boyish mischief. Caillin is also a handsome youth, and

seems to take great joy in pointlessly flirting with the many attractive and eligible daughters of the Merchant Barons. Rumor has it that he frequents the Red Door, a brothel catering to ‘unusual’ appetites.

4.3 The Prince’s Privy Council

Advisors to the Prince, these men and women are appointed by him and serve until dismissed, they resign, or upon the death of the Prince. They have some independent power, essentially acting as administrative assistants to the Prince. The Privy Council currently consists of seven members; they are referred to as ‘ministers.’ Each has specific authority and responsibilities as noted below.

4.3.1 Defense

Oleg Goloran is Minister of Defense, and as such is commander of the Prince’s Fleet, the army, and all other police forces. Goloran is not a very popular man, though it is not due to any actions of his own; rather it is due to his inability to control the Chief City Warden, Zatali Dackett. He is frequently at odds with Justice Minister Ahni-sha Vahsai.

4.3.2 Commerce

Upon first meeting him, Boren Alsec does not inspire confidence. The the short, rotund little man is a wizard at calculations and numbers, and for the few complex operations he prefers not to do in his head, he is unmatched at using the barka (a calculating device using small colored beads on knotted lengths of silk string). With a flawless memory for numbers, Alsec is invaluable to the Prince. He also has an intuitive grasp of the complexities of the Sel-kai trade network, a feat few indeed can boast.

4.3.3 Security

The Itanian Warlock Koren Maas is the Prince’s Minister of Security, a very different role than that of the Defense Minister. He is a powerful Seer and the Prince’s personal Truthsayer. As Security Minister, Maas oversees a network of spies spread across Emer and beyond. He also is commander of a force of what might best be described as ‘secret police;’ undercover enforcement operatives who are constantly investigating possible threats to the realm.

4.3.4 Justice

The Minister of Justice is also the Chief Adjudicator, the head of the country’s justice system. She appoints all judges and presides over the final court of appeals.

The Linaeri-elven woman, Ahni-sha Vahsai has distinguished herself as a superior administrator with a brilliant analytical mind and unparalleled judicial skills. She is a Mentalist of no mean talent, using her powers of the mind to further the cause of just law in the realm.

4.3.5 State

Minister Enik Foor is an imposing figure and an impressive diplomat; fluent in two dozen languages including their dialects and familiar with countless cultural niceties, he is indispensable on journeys to foreign lands.

4.3.6 Interior

Kestran Valmarana—retired head of the famous Valmarana Trading Company—is Minister of the Interior. As such he administrates the resources of the land, keeping track of the small realm's reserves of food and raw materials.

He is also in charge of the Customs and Tariffs Sub-Ministry and the postal service.

4.3.7 Other Offices

In addition to the Ministries, the Prince is served by a variety other offices. Two are the most notable: the respective mayors of the two primary cities.

Mayor of Sel-Kai City: A Laan of some breeding and no little ability, Pol Landoq has been Mayor of Sel-kai City for almost four decades. The job has aged him prematurely: Laan at eighty should not be so grey-haired. The Mayor rarely smiles, and frequently dodges social responsibilities, sending his wife to preside over celebration dinners and canal barge procession instead. He makes no attempt to hide his opinion of the Eidolon Mayor, but then he has little regard or use for the floating city itself.

Landoq has been asking for the removal of Chief Warden Zatali Dackett for years, but Rylec has been curiously reluctant to fire the corrupt man. It is no secret that Landoq and Qaterris have had a falling out in recent years, but some suspect that Qaterris has an agenda of his own.

Mayor of Eidolon: The chief administrator of this airborne paradise has little to do besides preside over social occasions and make sure that maintenance services remain flawless. Mayor Soven el Kaisor has proven that he is quite skilled at the former, and knows how to delegate the latter. The handsome, charming Erlini gentleman has even managed to remain on friendly terms with the opposing factions during the increasing Elf/mortal tensions. He can also party with the best.

4.4 Conclave of Merchants

There are two subgroups within the Conclave: the Inner Circle (consisting of only the heads of the wealthiest merchant families and certain of the 'High Guilds') and the Grand Conclave, including the other guilds and representatives of the private citizens of the various districts in the city and countryside.

There is an ongoing struggle among the Guilds not allowed in the Inner Circle to be appointed so. The Prince has the power to nominate a guild, subject to a majority Circle ratification. As one might assume, it is rare that a Guild is added. A Guild—or guild member—must do something quite remarkable to gain the attention of the Prince and respect of the Circle.

The Inner Circle representatives—and to some extent those of the Grand Conclave—are the ‘nobility’ of Sel-kai. Unlike the Prince, they are not elected to their post. Succession to the Guildmaster position is almost always by descendant, except in the almost unheard-of situation of a deposed head or a Guildmaster who has disowned his offspring and names another heir. Even in this case the master usually adopts the heir to maintain the family name.

As can be imagined, this structure has created a group of extremely powerful and wealthy families in Sel-kai. It requires a powerful and diplomatic Prince to keep these men and women from tearing the country apart.

4.4.1 The Inner Circle

The following ‘High Guild’ representatives make up the Inner Circle, an elite and extremely powerful organization.

Merchant Families:

- Tagleb Ullizi
- Eduard Gerion-Tyes
- Iliana Gugulon
- Chandri Vorhese
- Xyrus Betaran
- Dasal Maari-Tasaka
- Andreus Jourges al Moodh III
- Kyse Pharnese
- Aldaran Elgata
- Kellis Alaxatan
- Selima Jurgon
- Barmis Maledaar (inactive)
- Kitteran Centarus
- Hengiis Tharal
- Kestran Valmarana
- Berek Dolnegan

High Guild Representatives:

Alchemists: Lorgo Vidiaru

Goldsmiths: Magnar Baragon

Jewelwrights: Cirius Taminger

Scribes: Tanis Chei-xatar

Shipwrights: Fuget Marn

Sky Captains: Helios Zetar

Church of Neela: Mother Devera Monali

Cult of Andaras: Eminence Varan Morax

4.4.2 The Grand Conclave

The membership of the Grand Conclave includes the following representatives:

Actors, Animal Trainers, Apothecaries, Architects, Armorers, Artists, Astrologers, Bakers, Bookbinders, Butchers, Carpenters, Clothiers, Cobblers, Courtesans, Fishmongers, Glassblowers, Grocers, Healers, Herbalists, Hostellers, Lampwrights, Leatherworkers, Locksmiths, Masons, Millers, Miners, Minstrels, Potters, Seers, Sailors, Silversmiths, Swordmakers, Vintners/Brewers, Wainwrights, Woodwrights, and each of the remaining Sanctioned Temples.

4.5 Justice

The justice system of Sel-kai is usually quick and (for the most part) just. Decisions are handed down by tribunals of judges; how elaborate the due process of law is depends on the severity of the crime (see Crime and Punishment, below).

4.5.1 The Tribunals

The courts of Sel-kai are overseen by the Justice Minister; judges are appointed by the Prince to a life term. This includes the Chief Adjudicator, whose primary responsibility is policing the laws of the state (including the Prince and the Councils). Different types of tribunals judge various categories of crime, from boat mooring infractions to high treason. Judges wear flowing black robes with red, blue or green sashes, depending on their field. The Chief Adjudicator wears a golden sash.

4.5.2 Crime and Punishment

There are three classes of crime in Sel-kai: Civil, Criminal, and Capital. Examples of each type—along with punishment guidelines—are given below in approximate order of severity.

Minors are usually given slightly lighter sentences unless they are repeat offenders.

If a fine cannot be paid immediately, either property is impounded, a payment arrangement is worked out, or the offender is placed on a labor detail at 1 bp/day to pay off the debt (scheduled after imprisonment, if any).

Posting of Laws: Large placards at the West Gate and all along the docks proclaim the laws in Erlin and Shay. A parchment copy may be bought at the Prince's Lower Palace for 1 cp.

Civil Offenses: Generally minor or non-violent offenses, these have correspondingly small penalties. No permanent record of any crime is kept except for the license-related ones. Note also that only Assault and Slander offenses are even heard in court; others are only heard under appeal. In any case there is no counsel, only the accused and the arresting City Warden act as defense and prosecution.

Lack of boater's license: Anyone piloting a boat, ship or skiff in the city limits (including the harbor) must be licensed. Punishment: First Offense: 1 sp; Second Offense: 1 gp; Third Offense: 10 gp and a night in jail.

Lack of business license: All business operating (buying, selling, maintaining an office) in Sel-kai must be licensed so they may be taxed. Punishment: First Offense: 1 gp; Second Offense: 10 gp; Third Offense: 100 gp and a night in jail.

Improper boat piloting: There are a few common sense boat operation rules for the canals. Those not following them are usually strangers or drunk. Punishment: 1 sp; repeated offenses have (rarely) resulted in boat confiscation.

Drunkenness: Rarely enforced, this is a law against obnoxious intoxication in public. Punishment: A night in jail.

Vagrancy: It is illegal to loiter overnight in any public square or park. Punishment: A night in jail.

Assault (Minor): Administered to those caught fighting (usually in taverns) when no serious harm has been done and no weapons drawn. Punishment: A night in jail or 1 gp.

Slander: Public defamation of character is a little less clear than the above offenses, but is technically illegal. Punishment. 1-1000 gp paid to victim and 10 gp for court costs.

Criminal Offenses: All more serious crimes, these involve a trial of sorts. A defending counsel is appointed and a prosecutor presents evidence to the tribunal. The judges then decide whether the accused is guilty, and name a punishment. Permanent record is kept of all convictions, and punishment can double or triple for each repeat.

Petty Theft: Usually property under 10 gp in value. Punishment: twice the value of the item repaid plus 10 gp court costs.

Assault (Major): An assault becomes major when the victim receives wounds requiring medical attention and/or if a deadly weapon is drawn. Punishment: Medical costs plus any expenses resulting from injury (loss of income) plus 50-500 gp fine to victim plus 50 gp court costs.

Tax Evasion: These are businesses or individuals who falsify records in order to pay less tax or deliberately failing to pay tax Punishment: Taxes plus 100% penalty plus interest plus 50 gp court costs. Repeat offenses may involve incarceration in addition to multiple penalties.

Tariff Evasion (Smuggling): Attempting to smuggle goods into or out of Sel-kai without paying appropriate tariffs. Punishment: Tariff plus 100-500% penalty plus 50 gp court costs. Dangerous materials and certain deadly drugs are also fined and usually incur imprisonment. Repeat offenses may involve incarceration in addition to multiple penalties.

Burglary: Breaking into private or government property (including warehouses, ships, boats, etc). Punishment: (can be combined on top of Assault, Theft, etc.) 20-100 gp plus damages plus 10-70 days imprisonment plus 50 gp court costs.

Bribery: Punishment: Varies tremendously depending on th official, but usually involves a fine of 100-1,000 gp and at least ten days in jail.

Grand Theft: Punishment: Twice the value of the item repaid plus 35-350 nights in jail plus 50 gp court costs.

Forgery: Punishment: Varies tremendously depending on the document, but usually involves a fine of 100-1,000 gp and at least ten days in jail. Forging currency means at least 70 days in jail and a 1,000 gp fine.

Manslaughter (unintentional killing): Punishment: Depends on the circumstances, but unless clearly self-defense, there is at least a 70 day jail sentence and a 100-500 gp compensation to victim's family.

Capital Offenses: These are the highest offenses; the penalty for most is death.

Arson: A city like Sel-kai cannot afford any firebugs. Punishment is severe. Punishment: For minor damage: Public flogging and repayment of damage; For severe damage or repeat offense: Public flogging, repayment of damage, then banishment.

Rape: Sometimes depends on the violence of the act or if the circumstances are unclear. Punishment: First Offense: flogging; Second or Violent Offense: Death by axe.

Murder: Pre-meditated killing. Punishment: Usually death by axe; multiple or brutal murder is punished by torture, public flogging, then death; if circumstances are unclear (i.e., guilt is not established without doubt) life imprisonment is imposed.

Treason: Against Sel-kai can include selling of secrets, plotting revolution, plotting against the Prince. **Punishment:** Torture (to extract the extent of the betrayal as necessary), public flogging, then life imprisonment or death by axe.

4.6 Guardians of Peace

The internal security force of Sel-kai, the Guardians include the City Wardens in Eidolon, Sel-kai City and all other metropolitan areas, and the Marshalls who enforce laws in the countryside. They are essentially a police organization, but generally made up of more intelligent and capable men than is the military. An additional branch is the Prince's Guard, an elite group whose exclusive responsibility is the safety of the Prince, his family, and the Privy Council.

4.6.1 City Wardens

Though armed with short swords, they prefer to use small clubs when subduing minor offenders. Captains carry compact crossbows. Wardens all wear grey leather breeches and boots, black tunics with red collar and cuffs, and red-trimmed grey cloaks. They are headed by Chief City Warden, Zatali Dackett.

Over the last several years, the reputation of the Wardens has slowly changed from a trusted group of public servants into a pack of bullies and bribetakers.

A rising opinion among the populace is that the "Red-capes" as upon they are called (now sneeringly), cannot be counted on to protect Sel-kai citizens from crime. While in reality the great majority of the Wardens are still honest men and women, there is an increasing percentage who care little for the law except how it can be used to line their pockets. Dackett is the worst of the bunch, often taking bribes to make sure that his men are away from burglary sites and similar crimes. It is only a matter of time before Defense Minister Oleg Goloran either boots Dackett or the Prince replaces them both.

4.6.2 Marshalls

These country law enforcers are allowed more leeway in their methods because of the necessity of operating in a more rural environment. Most travel on horseback, and are armed with broadswords and short (riding) bows. Marshalls generally wear green and brown, with a red sash or hood as symbol of their office.

4.6.3 Prince's Guard

The elite of the police forces, they protect the Prince, his family and advisors from any potentially threatening situation. They wear black tunics and breeches, and carry a variety of weapons and equipment. Some of these men and women are armed with the coveted Loari dart guns.

4.7 Taxes and Customs

The wealth of Sel-kai is dependent upon taxes and tariffs, and you can be sure that the Prince makes sure that imports and exports are carefully monitored. As with any huge trading port, there is a certain percentage of smuggling and a thriving black market, but this is kept to a manageable level.

4.7.1 Tax Collectors

These men actually collect the tariffs and taxes from the trading companies and retailers located throughout the cities of Sel-kai. All tax collectors have a personal imprinting seal which embosses documents, and wear a medallion proclaiming their office.

4.7.2 Customs Officers

Sel-kai utilizes a system of elaborately printed seals to insure that trade goods are not tampered with as they enter the port prior to storage. Customs officers are constantly swarming over the docks of Sel-kai City and Eidolon day and night, armed with cases of these stickers. Like the tax collectors, all customs officials have a personal imprinting seal which embosses documents, and wear an identifying medallion.

4.8 The Prince's Fleet

Sel-kai has only the Guard to serve as a standing army; her impressive navy is more than enough to dissuade any would-be invaders. Over two hundred sea vessels and fifty skyships make up His Highness' fleet, an impressive force easily mobilized from the dozen bases located about the realm.

4.8.1 Warbirds

Swift, agile, and easily able to evade any attack, Warbirds are the Prince's airborne attack force. Armed with a variety of incendiary bombs, skyships can easily rain destruction down upon enemy sea craft while remaining out of reach themselves. They have no match in Kulthean warfare—with the notable exception of dragons.

4.8.2 Battleships

More mundane than the warbirds perhaps, but still an important part of the Sel-kai defensive strategy, the sea-going battleships are larger than their flying cousins. They are thus able to bear heavier weaponry and more men.

4.9 Post Office

One of the most efficient systems in the known world, the postal service delivers a letter within a week (ten days) anywhere in the realm for a mere tin piece. There are two deliveries daily in Sel-kai City and Eidolon. A letter mailed in the morning may arrive across town by that afternoon—certainly by the next morning’s delivery. Small parcels may also be delivered for an additional fee. The Post Office has arrangements with trade companies to deliver mail to selected locations outside of Sel-kai, including Haalkitaine, Lethys, and Kaitaine.

5 Groups of Note

Noted below are families, organizations and other groups who have power and influence in Sel-kai and beyond. They include the merchant nobility as well as the underworld....

5.1 Merchant Barons

These are the nobility of Sel-kai; the families who wield vast power through money and the authority which accompanies generations of mercantile experience.

The list of families is:

- Ullizi
- Gerion-Tyes
- Gugulon
- Vorhese
- Betaran
- Jourges al Moodh
- Baragon
- Pharnese
- Elgata
- Alaxatan
- Jurgon
- Maledaar
- Centarus
- Tharal
- Valmarana
- Dolnegan

5.2 Eridan Sky Trade Alliance

The largest association of the Eidolon sky fleet, the Eridan Alliance is a group of independent skyship captains who have formed an association for their mutual protection and profit. These ‘free-lance’ ships are for hire, as opposed to the fleets of trade ships owned by the various merchant-barons. All members of the Sky Trade Alliance operate skyships, and while they are technically freelance, many are under contract to one merchant family or another.

5.3 League of Traders

Similar to but smaller than the Eridan Sky Trade Alliance, the League is made up almost entirely of ocean-going vessels. League ships are also known to operate more on the fringes of the law, willing to do an occasional smuggling run or travel to dangerous, uncivilized areas.

5.4 Alliance of Seers

The Alliance of Seers is not a secret organization, but the membership roll is a secret, and the alliance is an elusive group, accessible only through third parties or messages.

While some in Sel-kai government consider the Seers a rather sinister organization, the group has supplied important—and sometimes explosive—information to the Prince at critical junctures in the realm’s history. Such revelations have sometimes meant the downfall of an entire family.

Their help is often sought by the wealthy and powerful, but rarely do they respond. Their motivations remain as clouded as their membership, but history would indicate that they have the best interests of Sel-kai in mind.

5.5 Andasai College

Virtually all students are training for some sort of Mentalism-related profession. Many younger members of wealthy families attend. Enrollment is about 200, with all students following various facets of the mental arts.

5.6 Coven of Moralis

A rather large following—especially for one who is considered one of the more ‘evil’ gods—Moralis’ church in Sel-kai attracts several hundred to services held every ten days. Moralis is a perverse deity, one of the Dark Gods. He has been called the god of Love and Pain, and ‘services’ consist of violent orgies which some of his followers do not survive.

5.7 Temple of Neela

Of the two dozen or so ‘primary’ religions in Sel-kai, Neela has perhaps the largest and most devout congregation. Her association with the sea, and her reputation for calming the more fiery disposition of the greater Orhanian god Shaal make her a natural choice. Followers of Neela can be either male or female, though females tend to rise higher in the bureaucracy. Unlike the Eissa or Baeris temples, priests of Neela do not specialize in healing.

5.8 Fellowship of Boatmen

A loose association of the men (and women) who operate the countless barges, skiffs and gondola-like slips constantly plying the canals of Sel-kai. Considered ignorant laborers by

the upper classes, the boatmen are actually more intelligent, organized and cognizant of the politics of Sel-kai than they are given credit. The boatmen are a critical cog in the complex machine of Sel-kai: they transport the majority of goods between the docks and other parts of the city. Many also carry passengers and messages.

5.9 The Underworld

This is the criminal side of Sel-kai organizations, with complex politics and a hierarchy all their own.

5.9.1 Cartels

Tied in with the thriving black market, this is a sophisticated network of criminal organizations currently operated by several rival group leaders. There are frequent assassination attempts, power plays, and territorial disputes—all a part of business on the wrong side of the Prince's Law. Some of these groups are deeply involved with the drug trade and other smuggling, as well as blackmail and 'protection.' They have part or sole ownership of many of the brothels and vice houses in the lower city and their operatives are everywhere.

The White Hand: This is a violent, ruthless organization which deals in extortion, 'protection' and drugs (among other things). The sign of the White Hand is just that: a palm-print in white paint. Those who find the sign on their door had best cooperate with the demands sure to follow or perhaps find their establishment destroyed.

The Blue Gulls: This innocent-sounding name is actually the moniker for the largest fence/smuggling organization in the city. Drugs form a major staple of the Gulls' operation, but they also smuggle goods not necessarily illegal, but usually carrying high tariffs. The Gulls are not a violent group by nature, but they are protective of their 'territory.'

Medusa: The name of the organization—and the suspected head of that organization—are the same, and the name is not an empty threat. The heads of those who have betrayed this criminal matriarch are often delivered to their associates: beautiful granite things, exquisitely detailed. It is common knowledge that an angry glance from the Medusa can turn you to stone.

5.9.2 Gangs

Less sophisticated than the organized criminal operations mentioned above, the gangs are nevertheless sometimes used as tools for the purposes of the cartels. They are also responsible for much of the petty crime in the city.

Nightwings: A city-wide gang of youths, mostly of Laan descent. The Nightwings are skilled burglars and spies, and though they shy away from violent crime, they are able to defend themselves. Adept climbers all, they travel by leaping or swinging by rope from rooftop to rooftop.

Golden Hand: Chief rivals of the Nightwings, the members of the Golden Hand are young men primarily of Talath or Myri origins. They fight using golden hand-guards resembling brass knuckles and tend more towards muggings and robbery than crimes of stealth; some also resort to prostitution to make quick money. Golden Hand members are rumored to steal babies to sell to House Dolnegan, though none will admit to even associating with the ‘dirty house.’

Silver Wolves: A gang mainly of young females, the Silver Wolves engage in a variety of small-time criminal operations, from extortion to blackmail to petty thievery, and occasionally prostitution.

Smoke Ring: A small group of young but talented magicians, the Smoke Ring seems devoted to largely harmless (but often embarrassing to someone important) pranks.

Green Thorns: A group of Erlini Elves, the Thorns are more mischief-makers than anything else—though perhaps their idea of mischief is the Chief Warder’s concept of serious crime. The Green Thorns are what might be called radical naturalists. They free captured animals, they destroy things which they think are too close to ‘technology.’ This philosophy often places them at odds with the Loar Elves of Námár-Tol who have a steadily growing presence in Sel-kai.

Red Dragons: Perhaps the most vicious of the well-known gangs, the Red Dragon brotherhood is made up of a racial mix of young men, including Laan, Shay, Half-elven races and Dyari. They wear black silk with a circular red dragon emblem and fight with a pair of long knives. They claim most of the Canal Maze as their territory, and are known to murder without remorse—and even for entertainment.

5.10 Council of Nine

Powerful spell-casters all, the Council of Nine perform specialized and secret tasks which they deem important to the security and benefit of Sel-kai. They do not have the official sanction of the government, but this gives them the freedom to act on the borders of legality. They are not as ‘obvious’ as the Grey Ring (see below), their activities often going completely undetected. Rumor has it that the Prince actually knows the membership of the Council and contacts them when he needs a ‘special’ favor.

5.11 Gargoyles

A loose association of canal urchins, the Gargoyles are considered “thieving little delinquents” by the upper classes, but in reality few of these children are actually career criminals. They get work running errands for vendors and dockmen, and are an excellent information network for those they trust. They don’t usually agree to work for “Uprivers” (the slang for the more wealthy of Black Oak) but do help out the boatmen and independent traders.

5.12 The Grey Ring

One of the most powerful and mysterious groups in Sel-kai is the association which calls itself the Grey Ring. The number and exact nature of their membership is unknown, and only a few names have been even tentatively linked with this order. When asked, these prominent citizens officially deny any association, but it is generally assumed that they are at least members of the Ring, perhaps members of the Inner Table. They are: Agonar of Teusilya, Lirasil Lightbinder, Tantali Shay, Cestus al Jorni, and Karnas the Green. Other alleged members who do not even make their home in Sel-kai, include a shadowy Paladin known only as Dana, and the Loremaster Elor Once Dark.

The symbol of the Cabal is a ring of grey metal (platinum) engraved with runes along the inner and outer surfaces; it is assumed that each ring is unique and has specialized powers, but the members are not talking.

What is known is that the focus of this group is the Shadow Tower, located in the southern moor about fifteen leagues west of the Lower City. An ancient bastion, it is the last standing keep of what was once a great citadel. Popular legend states that the elite of this group meet around an oval table of stone, and thrust down into the top of that table is a great two-handed sword of blue laen. It is an intelligent sword capable of speech—perhaps inhabited by the spirit of a former member of this occult gathering. The Ring is also very old; perhaps as old as its ruined headquarters. Civic records in Sel-kai city mention Grey Ring Justice being meted out as long as 1,000 years ago.

The purposes of the Grey Ring are at least as arcane as its members, though it seems clear that at least one of its goals is a certain vigilante justice. Every so often a violent crime or series of crimes baffles the Prince’s Guard. Invariably, a body (or bodies) appears on the steps of the Lower City Administration Hall, dead of no determinable cause and wearing a platinum ring. The deceased is proved to be the perpetrator of the crimes.

The Grey Ring is more radical than other civilian justice groups such as the Council of Nine, and the Prince has been forced to issue public warnings regarding such behavior. Fortunately, the Grey Ring seems to deem its services only infrequently needed, so the disturbing appearance of bodies is rare.

6 Sel-Kai City Layout

A summary of the different city sections is provided here. Individuals will have more detailed descriptions available of the section(s) of Sel-kai that they are more familiar with.

6.1 Sighing Docks

A long string of wooden docks along the Whitefoam river, the Sighing Docks serve traffic coming from inland regions and therefore supply much of the city's foodstuffs. Most of the perishable warehouses are located along this fork of the Sharhya, and nearby are the tanners, the foul odors of their work mercifully carried out to sea (most of the time).

6.2 Library Quarter

Aptly named for the massive domed structure dominating this district, the Library Quarter is given over primarily to larger residences and sedate shops. One of the older districts, it is nevertheless generally kept in good repair. Many of the city's most wealthy have villas here, and many civic buildings are also located in this quarter.

6.3 Twelve Bridges

Once perhaps this district sported exactly twelve bridges; now there are several times as many spanning the grid of canals which help to link the northern docks with the city center. Twelve Bridges has become an interesting mix of trade schools, shops, mid-sized residences and workshops.

6.4 North Delta

The center of many of the crafts in Sel-kai City, North Delta embraces dozens of dyeing houses, tanneries, smithies, papermakers and weavers. There are also some docks along the northern side, though much of the river fork along the west is shunned because of sunken wreckage and stagnant marshes.

6.5 Black Oak

Black Oak is an oasis of grand beauty in an increasingly run down city. The district is home to Sel-kai's tallest structure: the Baragon Palace, home of the head of the Goldsmiths' Guild. This towering villa is nine stories high, and takes up an entire island.

This area gets its name—not surprisingly—from the stand of huge old oak trees ringing the central island.

6.6 The City Center

Encompassing the huge lagoon in the center of Sel-kai City, the adjacent isle and the Prince's islands to the immediate east, the City center is the heart of the food market and the city government.

6.7 Avenue of the Gods

This district includes an area from the main gate heading east along a wide promenade to the Arch of Atarnus, the entrance to the Marketplace. The promenade itself is called the Avenue of the Gods because it is here that nearly all of the principal religions practiced in Sel-kai have constructed their temples and shrines.

However, the region just within the Outer Main Gate is dominated by inns, taverns, and stables along the main road, and shops (many of questionable repute) in the narrow streets behind.

Along the northern side of the Avenue of Gods lie most of the religious havens of the more benign gods, while just across the road can be found temples to some of the more cruel, debauched, and brutal deities. The southern region is avoided by the faint of heart, especially after dark.

6.8 South Commons

Containing the city's second-largest food market area, the South Commons is also the home of much of Sel-kai's lower class.

6.9 Granite Knoll

The home of many glassblowers, metalsmiths and woodworkers, Granite Knoll is the other major crafts quarter (besides North Delta) in Sel-kai city.

However, this section of the city is thinly populated along the southern edge because of the stagnant, weed-choked water. The city dredges and clears the river periodically, but the weed grows very fast and in the summer the air is thick with foul odors...and mosquitos.

6.10 Old City

A claustrophobic's nightmare, the Old City is a tightly packed cluster of buildings along the southern arc of the Great Circle. Some of the oldest structures in Sel-kai are here, their upper stories cantilevered out over narrow streets so far that people can reach out of a window and touch someone at a facing window.

However, the Old City has a certain charm missing from the NW quadrant or the southern areas. The inhabitants are fiercely proud of their neighborhoods; the streets are (relatively) clean, and crime is kept down by a vigilant group of civilian law-enforcers.

6.11 Canal Maze

A rough part of the city, Canal Maze is thick with taverns, run-down inns, and brothels. The division (south and east of the Southern Hook canal) is a sharp one between relatively safe Old City and this undeniably rough district. To wake up in the morning and see a body or two floating in the canals is not unusual.