

# The God-King

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*“Glory to the Pharaoh,  
Immortal Sovereign!  
Ruler of the Sixths,  
Keeper of Laws,  
Father of Kethaela,  
The Perfect Man,  
Son of the Volcano,  
Lord of the Dry and the Deep,  
The King of Kings and Queens,  
Master of Luck and Death!*

*He destroyed the Unholy Beast,  
He brought Fire upon the Sea,  
He became the Lover of all Queens  
And the King of all Kings,  
He survived the Volcano,  
He brought Andrin back from the Dead,  
He enforced his Order.*

*He protects us,  
He judges us,  
He guides us,  
He rules us,  
He sees us.*

*He shows us how to live together  
Together, we are stronger!”*

from ‘*The Glory Songs of the Pharaoh*’, incantation for the beginning of the seasonal ceremonies celebrating the God-King.

Belintar the Pharaoh, also called the God-King, is the immortal monarch of the Holy Country, its only ruler for nearly three centuries. He created the Holy Country in 1318 on the ruins of the Kingdom of Night, once ruled by Ezkankekko the Only Old One. He incorporated into it other local kingdoms such as Caladraland and the Leftarm Islands.

In an unmatched series of miracles and military victories, he brought down a thousand year old kingdom ruled by a demi-god and secured his grip on all the people of Kethaela.

The following text describes the political organisation of the Holy Country and the pharaonic magic as it could be observed during the years 16 · · ST, before the disappearance of the Pharaoh.

# 1 The Holy Country political organization

## 1.1 Government

Nowadays, the Holy Country is a theocracy composed of six great regions, called the Sixths (Esrolia, Heortland, Shadow Plateau, Caladraland, Rightarm Islands and Leftarm Islands), and of several smaller entities spread around Choralinthor's Bay. The leaders, chiefs, kings or queens of the region all owe allegiance to Belintar the Pharaoh. He maintains his power through religious ceremonies, military and economical might and a fine sense of politics. For the last three centuries, no one ever managed to overthrow the Pharaoh nor even resist him for long on his own land.

When Belintar established the Holy Country, he left the existing political structures standing, while taking for himself the controlling position.

### 1.1.1 The government of each of the Sixths

- In Esrolia, he is the Lover (in a religious sense) of the Queens, the only participant in the Year Fathers ritual, the unique male source of fertility for the great fields. He triumphs each year over the challenges chosen by all the earth goddesses to become in one body and one soul the son of Barntar, Orlanth, Argar Argan, Flamal, Vestkarthen, Elmal, Rozgali and many others. But in day-to-day life, Esrolia is still governed by a hundred tribal queens who form great political alliances, changing according to their needs.
- In the Shadow Plateau, he is the Big Boss, the one who vanquished Ezkankekko. He is the First Male on the Plateau. He proved to all that he was The Strongest and proves it anew each year during the ceremony reenacting the death of the Only Old One. Uz pretenders rush for the honour of fighting against him, but they are always defeated. The Shadow Plateau is ruled by the Allmother, an Uzuz daughter of Ezkankekko, who accepts Belintar's authority.
- In Heortland, the King of Kings bows to his rules because the God-King is just, strong, because Orlanth judged so and proves it anew every year. Dukes, barons and tribal kings also acclaim the God-King during the great annual ceremonies of the Gift of Law and the Founding of Tribes. Power resides the rest of the time in the hands of the High King of Heortland, whose vassals are the great dukes in the South, the independent barons and counts and the Volsaxi tribal kings.
- In the Leftarm Islands, the Pharaoh is the Talar of all Talars. These obey by pragmatism: Belintar proved he was magically more powerful than them by far as he broke the Bank of Casino Town. As an antique law of the Talars declares all Talars are responsible for Casino debts, rulers of the islands bowed before Belintar and sold him the islands and their freedom. Since then, every year, they ritually bring him part payment of the Debt, which still binds them to Holy Country for many centuries to come.

- In the Rightarm Islands, the Great Admiral of the Ships and the Old Wife both obey the King Under the Sea,<sup>1</sup> the Ludoch leading the submarine kingdom of the Sixth of Water. And the King Under the Sea recognises Belintar as his divine ruler, accepted by the sea gods. Every year, Belintar proves his is still the One, he who gave back the tides and currents to the islands people. The Pharaoh is also strongly linked to Dormal cult. Some whispers that the Sailor is the son of the Pharaoh (see the section 2.2) and this helped strengthen his position in the islands.
- In Caladraland, the High King on the Mountain is chosen by the priests who attentively listen to the volcanoes and to the Pharaoh, Son of the Volcano. Was he not thrown in Caladra's Mouth by the Bad Priests ? Did he not reappear unscathed, borne on a lava column ? Every year, the Pharaoh sacrifices himself in the Great Volcano, asking Caladra to judge him and to devour him if he is not worthy of ruling. And every year, he reappears, shining and crowned with flames, as Phoenix Caladrason rose from the Kingdom of Dead in the First Dawn.
- Elsewhere, the Pharaoh uses equivalent rituals which prove not only his sovereignty but also the gods' blessing and his ability to defeat any that would replace him. Thus in Porthomeka, the Son of Sky, ruler of earth and above, listen quite attentively to Belintar, his Councillor. In Righos, the God-King is the Fountain of Eternal Youth, the Keeper of the Purity for the Demivierge. In the Frog Marshes, south of Shadow Plateau, he is the Great Mudturner, who protects the clutch and matures the eggs. In Karse, he is the Great Mercantile, the head of the city council, reelected each three years unanimously. For the Wind Children in the Stormwalk Mountains, he is the Protecting Breath, he who stops the Bad Winds from Prax and insures pure air in the heights.

### 1.1.2 The Kethaelan government

All in all, the Pharaoh lets the Sixths and the independent regions (Karse, Righos) govern themselves. Since his enthronement, he changed just a few key things: Heortland's organization, freedom of worship and trade development between the Sixths.

From a non magical point of view, his actions are situated at a more 'federal' level: diplomacy, armies, voyages of discovery, fight against the enemies of Kethaela, etc.

Belintar stays the supreme and absolute ruler of the Holy Country. He allows for much freedom but all those who believed they could abuse it regretted it dearly in the end. All being said and done, the voice of the Pharaoh is sovereign in all circumstances.

**Magic.** At a magical level, the Pharaoh prevents a Sixth acting independently. He keeps for himself the majority of magical rituals of the Sixths. The Year Fathers ritual, as it was formerly practiced by the Esrolian queens, is strictly forbidden. The Pharaoh is the one and only Lover of all. In a similar way, in Caladraland, the human sacrifices to the volcano have been suppressed.

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<sup>1</sup>Nowadays, currently a Queen, called Oolanate.

Only Belintar sacrifices himself each year during a ceremony called ‘Son of the Volcano’ (see section 2.4).

**Justice.** Belintar let the Sixths decide their own laws, have them enforced and judge criminals according to their tradition. There are two exceptions to this general rule:

- Some laws are common to all the Sixths and imposed by the Pharaoh: freedom of worship (excluding Chaos worship which is a crime), respect of pharaonic authority and its representatives and to forbid assisting enemies of Kethaela. The breaking of these laws is judged before a Kethaelan court.
- Pharaoh’s cult members may ask to be judged by a Kethaelan court instead of submitting to the laws of their Sixth. They have to appeal at their local temple. Judgement is pronounced by a court of initiates sitting in the City of Wonders. Sometimes the Pharaoh himself comes to bring justice, and woe then to the liar.

There is a small corps of pharaonic officers charged with enforcing the few Kethaelan laws. They are authorized to act immediately and impose the required sanctions.

**Trade.** The Pharaoh did much to develop trade between the Sixths. The cult claims that each Sixth has unique goods to offer to the others. The present wealth of the Holy Country springs from this peaceful and mutually profitable trade. Many exchanges are still done in goods but the Pharaoh also coins money,<sup>2</sup> on silver hexagonal coins called ‘six-partied coins’.

Concerning foreign trade, the Sixths are free to deal with whom they like, provided their partners are not declared Kethaelan enemies. Actually, the cult cannot possibly observe the entire range of commercial exchanges. Only a few goods are subject to pharaonic edicts. Iron exportation is for example forbidden and all importation of this metal for personal use must be declared and is heavily taxed.

**Foreign relationships.** Belintar keeps in his hands all the foreign policy. A Sixth cannot send or receive an ambassador without the Pharaoh’s assent. Ambassadors sent in foreign lands have to represent the entire Holy Country and not just their tribe or Sixth. Ambassadors coming from outside are politely asked to deal only with the Pharaoh. The cult has a few spies living in neighbour lands. Their reports are transmitted to the Great Priest of the cult (see sections 3.4 and 3.5).

Following the dire defeats of the various expansion attempts after the Opening of the Seas, the official policy is to keep the present borders of Kethaela, not to expand them. Founding colonies (as Dosayako in Teshnos) must be directly approved by Belintar, since, according to the cult, they may endanger the six elements equilibrium.

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<sup>2</sup>The head represented is that of his present body, which allows the dating of the coins.

**Armies.** Every region of the Holy Country has to provide a militia or an army, whose size and function are fixed by the Pharaoh. Thus, while Esrolia provides great battalions of spear-bearing peasants, the Leftarm Islands train a few individualist sorcerers. The Kethaelan navy is formed by the great Black Galleys of the Shadow Plateau, preceded by the quick flotilla of Wachaza fanatics from the Rightarm Islands.

Only the Pharaoh can declare war for Kethaela and order the troop levy. He also is the supreme commander of all the armies and names the generals. He has the help of a military councillor who assists him in time of war and peace.

## 1.2 The Hexarchs

There are six hexarchs, one for each Sixth. In the same way as kings, tribes, towns or lobbies send their representatives at the Pharaoh's court, hexarchs are sent by Belintar to speak and act in his name in each Sixth. They express themselves in the name of the God-King and deal with matters concerning the Kethaelan central power. Their mission is to be the eyes, hands and voice of Belintar in each Sixth. They have both a political and a magical role. They are not rulers, as the God-King does not change local leaders if he has any choice. They are simply the main contact persons to deal with the Pharaoh.

Their true power varies greatly depending on the Sixth. In the Shadow Plateau, Rightarm Islands, Caladraland and Heortland, there already is a sovereign who rules the land. The hexarch in these Sixths acts only as a councillor. He is of course attentively listened to but his power is exercised through the local ruler. In Esrolia and Leftarm Islands, the political power is not in the hands of a single individual and the hexarch has in this case far more authority, because he is this unifying figure.

From a magical point of view, since the God-King cannot appear everywhere at once, the hexarchs often replace him during the ceremonies taking place all around the bay. For example, the various magical ceremonies of the Pharaoh's cult take place at the same time in each Sixth, but the Pharaoh only participates in one of them, usually that of the corresponding Sixth (see the section on magical ceremonies). The hexarchs have thus to play the role of the Pharaoh in their own Sixth, each time His Immortal Majesty cannot attend. Another of their roles, more a token, is to stand at the arrival point of the magical bridges when the Pharaoh invokes them during Sacred Time (see the section on magical bridges).

The hexarchs are all members of the Pharaoh's cult, but are rarely devotees. They must be a bridge between a Sixth and the Pharaoh, so they must belong both to the Kethaelan and their original culture. They visit the City of Wonders at times but mostly stay in their respective Sixths, where they belong.

Socially, the hexarchs are rich, powerful and respected. They are perceived as very close to the God-King and their favours are thus often courted. When an hexarch enters a city of his Sixth, he is welcomed effusively and with pomp. Little children throw flowers on his path, mayors bring him the city keys, etc. Festivities are not as important as those organized for the coming of Belintar himself, with great crowds, but an hexarch is clearly greeted as a powerful dignitary.

**Kankko One Hand.** The hexarch of the Shadow Plateau and Darkness. She is an Uz following the Practice of Orani Mor, Mother of Spiders, and of course also the Big Boss Practice. She lost her left forearm in an accident, took her hand and made fetishes from the bones. She draws a terrible magic from them. When she gives one of her bone-finger to someone, she always knows where he is and is able to send him visions in his dreams. Some say that her hand can also reassemble and crawl all by itself like a spider. She has a rather rough manner, as female Uz often do, but is totally upright.

**Admiral Herlemen.** He is the hexarch of the Rightarm Islands and Waters. He follows the shamanic practice of the Twelve Soul Birds and also that of the Swimmer. He is a former Admiral of one of the islands. He was promoted hexarch in 1600, which makes him the senior among his peers. From his former occupation, he kept very strict habits. He still rises up before dawn and asks for everything around him to be clean and tidy. He still takes part in sea missions with the Holy Country galleys. Nothing pleases the old man more than smelling spindrift carried by the sea wind.

**Asrilene daughter of Clymene.** She is the hexarch of Esrolia and Earth, a devotee of Ernalda the Queen and initiated in the Pharaoh's cult. A stocky woman, dressed in velvet clothes with golden embroideries. Her jet-black hair is put in a bun. She sometimes wears precious headdresses. She displays many rings and always takes a lot of care with her make-up. She is rather quiet about her origins, but likes her luxury and is used to being obeyed. Her days are spent going from tribe to tribe and from faction to faction, to control the queens and see what they are up to. Gossip says that she has an romance with one of her bodyguards, for whom she smartens herself up.

**Reidrik Ardikisson.** He is the hexarch of Heortland and Storm, an initiate of the Pharaoh's cult and devotee of Lhankor Mhy Lawthane. His father was a stickpicker, but due to his perseverance, young Reidrik became a renowned Lawspeaker in his original earldom. He was ennobled in 1607 and became an hexarch in 1610. He is somewhat disillusioned by the endless bickering between the narrow-minded traditionalists in the north of Heortland and the Aeolings in the south, so full of themselves. It is said that he nearly went away many times, but that Belintar always convinced him to stay one more year.

**Olotzi of Low Temple.** He is the hexarch of Caladraland and Fire. He worships the Lowlanders Twin Gods and is an initiate of the Pharaoh's cult. He is a plump, short man, a former scribe of the Low Temple, where he lived for a long time. He has a very sweet voice and tends to listen rather than talk. An outstanding administrator, he sees attentively to the payment of the taxes of his Sixth. This sometimes induces frictions with the Caladran nobles and priests. He has a good understanding with the wild Highland tribes, a rare achievement for a Lowlander. His greatest flaw seems to be his fascination for Teshnian rugs, for which he regularly spends a huge amount of money.

**Talar Melchidesech.** He is the hexarch of Leftarm Islands and Reason. He has his own Talar grimoire and also knows the grimoire of the Perfect Man. He

is a tall and lean man, with a wrinkled face and a hoarse voice, but he is still vivacious and his eyes are still gleaming. He likes to wear a long dark green velvet robe with puffed sleeves. He was born a Talar, but lost his title after leaving the Islands. He travelled in the Holy Country during this time, slowly ageing for decades and devoting his life to the God-King. He does not speak of the Talar he once was. As the Pharaoh made him his hexarch, he also forced the Talars to accept Melchidesech back among them. Anyway, by an ancient agreement, the Hexarch of God Forgot is always a Talar. Melchidesech is not so much a sorcerer as a leader and a manager.

### 1.3 The City of Wonders

Belintar rarely travels. He only leaves the Sixfold Palace to accomplish the various magical ceremonies in the Sixths (see the section on magical ceremonies). The rest of the time, he lives in the City of Wonders, built to his glory and to awaken admiration and respect : a city-sized throne with 10,000 subjects at his feet.

The City of Wonders is the magical, political and administrative centre of Kethaela (see the article on this subject). It was built according to a prophecy. Belintar obtained from Korenth and Choralinthor the gift of an island at the centre of the Bay, where he had erected an unparalleled city. It is the seat of his government and welcomes representatives from the Holy Country and ambassadors from neighbouring lands.

In the centre of the city stands the Sixfold Palace, so called for it is made of six wings, each built according to the architectural style of one Sixth. The God-King lives in the different wings of the palace according to the current Season, in sumptuous suites. There is only one throne room which can receive hundreds of guests, where the God-King holds his public audiences.

The palace is peopled with scribes, cooks, servants, grooms, guards, doctors, etc. It is known that any member of the Pharaoh's cult, when he comes to the City of Wonders, may have a room in the palace if he asks for one. Some of the key figures of the cult, such as the chamberlain or the Great Priest, live there permanently. There are also temporary guests: wise men, sorcerers, artists, merchants, poets, skalds, etc. In the palace are also the Pharaoh's cult archives and the treasure room.

All the foreign embassies are in the City of Wonders, generally in the Central District, not far from the Sixfold Palace (and from the Pharaoh). There are, among others, the anti-lunar embassy of Sartar, a representative from the Grazers, the languorous embassy of Teshnos, the lunar embassy of Tarsh, the clerk of the Quimpolic League and the royal embassy of Seshnela.

The Chamber of Representatives is a few paces away from the palace. This great circular building can hold several hundred of people. The representatives seat there and debate on velvet cushions and benches of precious wood. The speaker stands at the centre of the huge room. In the gallery, around the room, a space with stone benches is provided for the public, so that citizens may listen to the discussions. At the top, a circular balcony overhangs the room, where stand passing visitors and guards.

## 1.4 The representatives

### 1.4.1 The representatives' status

The representatives are the emissaries of different counties, baronies, tribes, towns, merchant companies, pressure groups, religious movements, temples of entire religions (the Rokari church for example), alliances, guilds, etc. all belonging to the Holy Country, sent to the Pharaoh's court.

They have to be accepted and acknowledged by the God-King after nomination by the community they want to represent. Any community can try and have a representative at the City of Wonders, but the God-King has the last word concerning the acceptance or refusal of a potential representative. A candidate officially becomes a representative only after being received by the God-King (and some are never received) and being publicly accepted as the representative of a group. It is already a significant political victory for a group to obtain a representative at the God-King's court. A community may also lose its representative or have him banned for a time, if they anger His Immortal Majesty.

There are on average 200 representatives but their number fluctuates. With their families and households, they number approximately 2,000 persons in the city, a fifth of its population.

They may represent groups of very different sizes, from a hundred to a hundred thousands. As can be expected, their means, renown and influence vary accordingly. Influential representatives may listen to the grievances of people outside their official community, if they plead their cause well. Small groups often cannot afford to have their own representative. They must call to a larger group (tribe instead of clan, duchy instead of county) or regroup with others to pay for one common representative.

### 1.4.2 The role of representatives

Their primary function is to bring to the God-King the grievances of the group they represent. For some, this means an annual trip of a few weeks to the City of Wonders, for others, this consists in living all year long at Belintar's court, for a few, it requires constant travels between the City and the continent. A representative's timetable varies thus according to the needs of his group.

The representatives as a whole form the Chamber of the Representatives, to which the God-King explains his grand projects and the political and economical directions for the coming years. The Pharaoh uses the Chamber in this way to rapidly 'broadcast' his decisions to the Holy Country citizens, in parallel to the hexarch's work in dealing with the rulers.

Sometimes, Belintar asks the Chamber to study a particular question: how to pay for the warfleet necessary in these troubled times, how to organize irrigation between Esrolia, Porthomeka and Caladraland, etc. The God-King might attend the discussions. In any case, the goal of these debates is only consultative. The final decision is always Belintar's.

Outside the debates suggested by the God-King, the representatives regularly meet to discuss current events, social problems or religious subjects. These debates have no direct consequences and could appear as entirely rhetorical, but everything happening in the City of Wonders is never far from the Pharaoh's ears.



Finally, the representatives have an active social life which occupies most of their time. The City of Wonder is the perfect place to listen to what is said, to learn what happens elsewhere and to discreetly (or not) meet representatives of other groups. This social dance happens during numerous festivities, where everyone keeps a close eye on the others, or during 'fortuitous' encounters where a small nod can speak volumes. They act as so many ambassadors meeting in a neutral environment. Many trade agreements between Heortling earldoms and Esrolian tribes were thus concluded. In this very unusual setting, everything is rapidly known, grudges are sometimes lingering but a jest can do more than violence. The Pharaoh's cult sees in this a perfect demonstration of Belintar's magic at work.

### **1.4.3 The First Representative**

Among all representatives, one of them has a particular role. He is the representative of the City of Wonders itself. He speaks for the local population, the most Kethaelan in the Holy Country. He is called the First Representative, or simply the First One, since by pharaonic decree, he always speaks first in the Chamber and direct the debates. He also has to determine the agenda, to decide who may speak and for how long, to direct the session and to report to the Pharaoh the conclusions of the debates suggested by His Immortal Majesty.

This office is traditionally given to an initiate of the Pharaoh's cult. Currently, the First One is even one of the rare devotees (see the section on the cult personalities).

### **1.4.4 The debates**

The debates take place at the Chamber of Representatives. The place is permeated with the Pharaoh's magic, which ensures than discussions are conducted in the higher interests of the Holy Country. Even the most crafty and devious person speaks carefully while standing in the centre of the room. The sessions are directed by the First One. The topics are proposed by the representatives themselves or imposed by the Pharaoh. The agenda is known days in advance and many representatives do not come to every debate.

Citizens can listen to discussions, but only representatives have the right to speak. Anyone who wants to present a cause has first to convince a representative to speak in their name.

From time to time, the God-King attends to the debates. The public shows then respect and fear. His arrival indicates that the topic is dear to him, but is also a way for Belintar to convey his interest to the representatives themselves. It is generally the occasion of several informal meetings afterwards.

## **1.5 Speaking to the God-King**

### **1.5.1 Etiquette**

The traditional salute to the God-King is to raise one's hand, with fingers and thumb spread out. The cult sees in this the Six Elements, in the form of the five fingers and the palm. Each Sixth has its own interpretation about which Sixth is represented by which finger and who is the palm. Everyone agrees that the

Pharaoh is the mind which moves the hand. This salute is also used towards hexarchs and officials.

Between initiates, greeting is done right hand to right hand, palm to palm, fingers spread out and thumb sticking out on both sides. Traditional greetings are in general prayers to the Pharaoh, like 'May His Immortal Majesty keep his body for a long time', 'Peace on Kethaela between willing persons' or 'Nice weather for the season, isn't it?'

When speaking to the God-King, one must pay deference and use one of His titles, be it a universal title used throughout Kethaela (sometimes even by ambassadors) or one of the local titles, different from one Sixth to the other. The use of a local title may be a disguised call to the God-King for him to consider the situation from this particular Sixth's point of view.

**Universal titles:** Pharaoh, God-King, His Immortal Majesty, Sixfold Sovereign, Master of Luck and Death, His Divine and Royal Majesty, Supreme Sovereign, Eternal Ruler, Father of Kethaela, Law-Keeper

**Local titles: Esrolia:** Lover of Queens, Great Lover, First Love of the Goddess, Protector, Defender

**Shadow Plateau:** Big Boss

**Caladraland:** Son of the Volcano, Sacrifice, Lord of Flames

**Rightarm Islands:** Purificator, Lord of the Dry and the Deep,

**Leftarm Islands:** Philosopher Man reference to the Philosopher's Stone and the belief in the Leftarm Islands that Belintar was created by sorcerers, as a golem, Talar of all Talars, Perfect Man

**Heortland:** Great King, King of Kings

**Porthomeka:** Councillor

**Newtling:** Mudturner

**Karse:** Great Mercantile

**Wind children:** Protecting Breath

Naturally, there is a bunch of airs and graces concerning etiquette proper: the distance at which to stop, how to talk to Belintar, how to salute him, how to answer his questions, how to take leave, etc. Newcomers will have to learn the protocol from the Chamberlain's assistants.

### 1.5.2 Public audiences

Twice per week, the Pharaoh holds a public audience for half a day, generally in the Throne Room in the Sixfold Palace. Anyone may attend, the limits being decided by the guards. However, only representatives, ambassadors of foreign lands and initiates of the Pharaoh's cult may speak to His Immortal Majesty. Beforehand, speakers should see the Chamberlain who decides the speaking order and the time allowed for each, according to priorities. Waiting for weeks or even a season to be heard is not uncommon.

People who are neither representative nor initiate have to bring their case to a representative, in the hope he will speak for you at an audience and present

you to the Pharaoh. Some representatives, known to be well liked by the God-King, are often pestered by many persons. As the representatives stand bail and are responsible towards the God-King for the behaviour and words of their 'guests', they tend to think about it before agreeing to bring someone at court.

Note that an initiate speaks only for him or herself. He can indirectly plead the cause of someone, of course, but cannot directly introduce someone to the God-King. It would be unseemly to usurp the role devoted to representatives.

### 1.5.3 The private audiences

Alongside the usual private meetings between the Pharaoh and his Chamberlain, his Great Priest, his military councillor, his treasurer and the hexarchs, Belintar spends around half a day per week in private audiences.

These audiences concern the same persons as the public audiences. Here also, one must be introduced by a representative when one is not a member of the Pharaoh's cult. Waiting for weeks is usual, but some know how to draw the eye of the Pharaoh.

From a practical point of view, these audiences are a way to speak at greater length to the God-King, and moreover without the usual crowd of courtiers listening.

## 1.6 The Pharaoh's timetable

The timetable is submitted to variations, but here is an example of a usual week:

- Half a day at the Chamber of Representatives.
- Half a day for the ambassadors of foreign lands, in public or private audiences.
- Two half days of public audiences.
- Half a day of private audiences.
- Two days' worth of various magical ceremonies. These sometimes require the God-King to leave the City of Wonders for a few days or even a few weeks.
- Two days' worth of Holy Country 'management' (with the treasurer, the Great Priest, etc.)
- Half a day spent in festivities, at the God-King's call or an influent person in the City of Wonders.

## 1.7 Key political figures in the City of Wonders

**The First One.** The representative of the City of Wonders (see his description in the section on the cult personalities)

**The Chamberlain.** Master of protocol, he organizes the Pharaoh's timetable (see his description in the section on the cult personalities)

**The ambassadors.** They represent the other lands or cultures around the Holy Country. See the article on the City of Wonders.

**The Great Priest.** The head priest of the Pharaoh's cult, head of intelligence (see her description in the section on the cult personalities)

**The treasurer.** This person is responsible for the management of the coffers of the Holy Country (and those of the cult). This position is currently held by Ilanna of Necropolis, a tall women with a stern face and greying hair. She is very serious-minded and talks only of her work. Her subordinates nicknamed her 'the mummy'.

**The Pharaoh's guard commander.** He is responsible for the guards of the Sixfold Palace and Central District, as well as for the corps of pharaonic officers (see the section on the Kethaelan government). The position is currently held by Orkozi, a Caladran from the Highlands, a small and stocky greying warrior in his fifties. He always goes barefoot, with the supple walk of a jaguar. In his youth, he was a great warrior and still has good reflexes, but was chosen for his leadership. He keeps cool in most situation, but the few who saw him angry still remember it.

**The Keeper of the archives.** His role is to classify and to preserve the huge Kethaelan archives: the cult annals, the reports of the Pharaoh's public declarations, the minutes of the debates in the Chamber of Representatives, etc. This position is almost always held by a member of the God-King's cult. Currently, the Keeper is Anton Mezaren, a Writer from Leftarm Islands, practising the sorcery of the School of Classifiers. He is a short man, with a strange apparatus on his nose, that he calls spectacles. He has a sweet voice and calm manners and almost never get out of the Archives Room, where he lives with a swarm of assistants.

**The harbour master.** He is in charge of the different harbours in the City of Wonders : the uz harbour, the one in the District of Winds and that of the District of Waters. He sees to the arrival of ships and the recording of cargoes. He also has to take care of the Pharaoh's ceremonial galley, not a small job. The current Harbours Master is a Pelaskian named Lemenu, known for his good-heartedness and his thundering laughter. He is well-known and well-loved by most captains around the Mirrorsea.

**The military councillor.** He helps the God-King on military topics : the warfleet management, deployment of armies, training of troops, menace evaluation, state of the borders, etc. This position is currently held by an Aeolian knight named Helrik Bilmarn, who fought for a long time in the Barons' March against the Praxian nomads. He acquired there a slight limp and a clear understanding of the balance of forces around the Holy Country.

**The Caladran goldsmiths representative.** Mechpotl the Diamond-Dealer is a big man with a paunch, about fifty years old, richly dressed and with rings

on all fingers. He is very rich, very pious and gives numerous wonderful feasts to honour the Twin Gods and to obtain forgiveness for his 'many sins', as he puts it. He is a very influential man, because he has the total support of the majority of Caladran people working on the sacred precious stones from the Volcanoes Land.

**The representative of the Rokari Church.** The Ecclesiarchal Nuncio Cuthbert was sent to the Pharaoh with the benediction of the Rokari bishop of Nochet, twelve years ago. He is a tall and lean man, austere and following literally the Abiding Book and the Works of Saint Rokar. He fights as strongly as possible against the disgusting manners of the City of Wonders and preaches to whoever is ready to listen to him (and even to a few who do not feel ready at all). The development of heresies in Esrolia, Heortland and the Leftarm Islands distresses him strongly. He continually tries to convert apostates and heretics from other churches.

**The representative of the Basket Faction.** Delbrina arrived recently at the God-King's court, following the unexpected death of the previous representative. Instructions from Matriarch Irmonga are very clear: she has to remind everyone and particularly the Pharaoh that Esrolia does not care about these novelties that are ocean navigation and wars. The poor representative, who took a ship for the first time as she came to the City of Wonders and who had never seen more than a hundred persons in one place, still has difficulties to adapt to the cosmopolitan life of the Pharaoh's island.

**The representative of merchants from the Karse region.** A very ambitious man, leaning on a vast net of business relations and knowing many key persons, Fellow Cenellos is an influent member of the Mercantile Council, which rules Karse the Beautiful. He has many enemies who are both happy to see him away from Karse and worried by the influence he seems to wield since his nomination as a representative. He spends a week in his town each season and communicates daily with the Council by messenger birds. Besides negotiating fruitful trade agreements, one of his unofficial missions is to hear as much as possible of what is said in the Chamber of Representatives.

**The representative of beetle breeders.** This position is currently held by Borgra from the Balg bloodline, a young Uz female who made herself respected by the elders. She lived for a long time among Kitoris, where she acquired a good understanding of humans. Since she arrived in the city, she also managed to establish good relations with Esrolian cattle breeders, so that she is now also the representative of a few northern tribes for breeding concerns.

**The representative of Vizel Barony.** Kuldren the Younger is the fourth son of the old Baron Kuldren of Vizel. He caused so much worry to his father through his misbehaviour and his extravagant spending, that the old count sent him to the Pharaoh's court, hoping his son would calm down. To his father's great surprise, Kuldren was recognized by Belintar as the representative of the barony. But alas, this new responsibility did not change the behaviour of this rake. He still has a dissolute life (against all Aeolian precepts), accumulating

lovers for a season or a night and gathering around him his own small court of ne'er do well and bored nobles.

**The representative of the Wind Children.** Yushuf Blackfeathers has been the representative for his people for the past ten years. He is a strong-willed Nar Sylla, marked by years and war. He does not like his position, for which he has to spend time in covered buildings and which takes him away from his endless war against Praxians and sand winds. Any who would have his help has better be respectful of Orlanth's virtues, for Yushuf is a Storm traditionalist.

**The representative of alynxes.** Alebash Vibriss is a young Yinkini from Whitewall. After winning some fame in the Masters of Luck and Death Tournament (see the section on the Tournament), he converted to the Pharaoh's cult and was chosen by Belintar as the representative of Her Suppleness the Queen of Alynxes, Yewaw White-ears, who lives not far from Whitewall. He has his heart set on doing his mission and travels far and wide between His Immortal Majesty and Her Beautiful Majesty. He knows the secrets of the Hedge Road (see the section on Hidden Paths) and certainly spends more time in Heortland, where dwells the majority of the Holy Country alynxes, than on the velvet cushions of the Chamber of Representatives.

**The representative of Newtlings.** Kurkuk is a placid bachelor Newtling (which is saying a lot), who is nearing adulthood and so will soon have to go back to his village in the Frog Marshes. In the meantime he gets on with his job as representative. It is not really demanding since Holy Country Newtlings are peaceful and satisfied. His greatest worries come from the contacts that Kethaela established with Newtling villages in the New Marshes, far to the west. These Newtlings are under constant raids from pirates, broos and tail hunters. They asked Kourkouk several times to plead their case and have the pharaonic warfleet come to their lands. True to his decision not to expend Kethaelan borders, the Pharaoh always refused, which put the representative in a difficult position.

## 2 The Pharaoh's magic

### 2.1 The Pharaoh's nature

The Pharaoh's nature is a much-discussed topic in Kethaela. Many answers and hypothesis, some quite absurd, have been proposed without shedding much light on the question.

As time passed, each Sixth formed its own 'official' opinion on the subject. These opinions are now commonly admitted as self-evident by their inhabitants.

Some claim Belintar was the Holy Country wyter incarnated in a human body, created to unify the Sixths as they should have been since Time began. Others see him as a heroquester fallen from the Sky Boat, or as the son of Choralinthor and the goddess Kethaa. In another place, he is a time traveller from a far-away future or a forgotten past. Yet somewhere else the opinion is that he is a magivore, a being feeding on magic to sustain his existence, thus his insatiable appetite for magic. A group of crazy sorcerers in the Leftarm Islands

even claim they created him as a golem, for a confused goal changing according to who you ask.

Belintar himself never gave any official answer, of course, and the mystery remains. The followers of the different hypothesis all stick to their positions. The Sixths inhabitants try somehow in this way to understand this being beyond them all.

A subject on which they all agree is that anyone in the presence of the God-King has no choice but to recognize his divine nature. He gives off an overwhelming aura and, when he looks at you, the rest of the world ceases to exist.

## **2.2 The Pharaoh's physical body**

The Pharaoh is immortal but his body is not. His physical body ages thrice as much as a normal person's. When his body becomes too old, the Pharaoh organizes an important magical ceremony called 'the Masters of Luck and Death Tournament' (see the section on the Tournament). During this ceremony the body occupied by the God-King dies and the soul of the sovereign migrates in the body of one of the participants.

The very first tournament took place thirty years after the creation of the Holy Country. The tournaments succeeded then to each other every ten to fifteen years. During his three centuries of reign, the Pharaoh occupied many bodies. He incarnated mostly in men, but also in women and in non-humans, as Uz, Ludoch and even a Newtling once. However, he aged even faster in those cases.

Some tournaments were separated only by a few years. This happened when the body Belintar took was already quite old, or when he displayed powerful magic, such as for the Building Wall battle. It also happened that his body died unexpectedly outside a tournament, from old age or violent death. In these cases, a tournament was quickly organized and the Pharaoh manifested himself and incarnated in the body of a champion, as for a normal tournament.

The god-king has no officially recognized children. It seems his inhuman nature does not allow him to procreate. All his fertility is expressed through the magical rituals of the Holy Country: it manifests in the prosperity of cities (Nochet, Karse, Rhigos) and by the abundance of grain. However some legends present a few Kethaelan heroes as his children. Dormal is one example. Are they really biological, 'human' children or spiritual ones? No one knows for certain and the Pharaoh himself never gave confirmation nor denial.

## **2.3 The powers of the Pharaoh**

The God-King \*is\* Kethaela. He has been linked for the past three centuries to the well-being and the destiny of the Holy Country. He feels all that is going on and all that affects it. This perception has different aspects (prophetic dreams, pains, visions, etc.) and are sometimes difficult to interpret. The God-King is not omniscient. However an event of great importance affecting the Holy Country cannot be hidden from him for long. He and the Holy Country are tightly bound through multiple magical links. These links have deep roots and cannot be severed without destroying both entities. Their destinies are thus linked and all that touches one of them also affects the other.

Each year, the Pharaoh strengthen his links with the Holy Country through the ceremonies commemorative of the great events which brought his enthronement. These ceremonies are spread throughout the year and are also reproduced during Sacred Time (see the section on magical ceremonies).

The Pharaoh impersonates not only the land, but also the inhabitants. He feels their needs and knows the main evolutions of ideas. In rare occasions, it may happen than men show him a way he had not thought about, but most of the time he is above the human futility of power struggles. He \*knows\*. Those who stand before him know that he radiates power and harmony. Some say looking at him is like seeing Kethaela as a whole in one glance. Even with the strongest willpower, lying to him is difficult. Trying to earn his favours is futile. His power is so impressive, that many people drop on their knees as they see him for the first time.

The power of the God-King doesn't stop to the land or its inhabitants. It also encompasses the magical forces which permeate the Holy Country. The Pharaoh controls and tames the Six Elements, which obey him: Air, Water, Earth, Fire, Darkness and Man. He made a pact with non-humans, spirits, daimones and other magical beings who inhabit Kethaela and those recognize is authority. He is the only one to know all the Hidden Paths (see the section on Hidden Paths). He unveiled many Kethaelan mysteries and used them to settle his power. Many magics at work through the land are thus known only to him.

A more personal power of Belintar is the ability of body shifting and incarnation. It allowed him to rule as the immortal master of the Holy Country during three hundreds years. This ability is, theoretically, not available to his worshippers.

## 2.4 The magical ceremonies

They take place at each season for the 'elemental' ceremonies and at a variable date for the Leftarm Islands ceremony. At each sacred day, a great official ceremony takes place in the associated Sixth. The main role is held by Belintar himself. Other parallel ceremonies of less importance and significance are done in the other Sixth at the same time. The role of the Pharaoh is in these cases held by an hexarch or, more generally, a member of the Pharaoh's cult.

At each ceremony, the participants, God-King included, reenact the creation of the Holy Country. The ceremonies are intense and magical, but cannot be compared to those taking place during a Tournament of Masters of Luck and Death (see the section on the Tournament), when champions help the Pharaoh in a heroquest of Kethaelan scale.

Besides the 'elemental' ceremonies, there are various little local ceremonies, explaining how the God-King became the supreme ruler : in Karse, in Rhigos, in Refuge, in Frog Island, among the alynxes, etc. There are also rumours about secret ceremonies on Zoo Island and on the Sacred Cranes Island.

**Purified Bay Day.** Sea Season, Harmony Week, Water Day. Where Belintar saved the waters of Choralinthor Bay from the terrible Black Gorp and showed to the islands people the power of Fire.

**Son of Volcano Day (Sacrifice Day).** Fire Season, Harmony Week, Fire Day. Where Belintar proved he was the Son of Caladra by throwing himself



into the flames and emerging unscathed from the lava, burning the False Priests who smothered the Volcano.

**Queens Lover Day.** Earth Season, Harmony Week, Clay Day. Where Belintar became in one night the lover of all Esrolian queens and showed he was now the one and only Son of the Year, forever.

**Big Boss Day.** Dark Season, Harmony Week, Freeze Day. Where Belintar killed the Lead Beast and vanquished the Only Old One, proving to Uz he was the Big Boss and ending Ezkankekko's Kingdom of Night.

**New King Day.** Storm Season, Harmony Week, Winds Day. Where Belintar killed Andrin, then saw his error (as Orlanth did) and brought him back to life (as Orlanth did), unifying the tribes and earldoms under his authority.

**Dice Day.** The date is determined with sacred dices during Sacred Time. This ceremony can be anywhere during the year. It is called Tax Day by the Talars of Leftarm Islands.

Where Belintar broke the bank in Casino, obtained the allegiance of all Talars of the Leftarm Islands and forced them to refund the Debt.

## 2.5 The Tournament of Masters of Luck and Death

The Tournament of Masters of Luck and Death is the great magical ceremony enabling the Pharaoh to change his body and to incarnate into one of the participants. Because Belintar, supreme and immortal ruler of the Holy Country for the past 300 years has to change regularly of host, when his current body becomes too old (see the section on the physical body of the God King). The tournament generally takes place during Sacred Time, except in particular circumstances. It is organized in the City of Wonders.

Anyone is free to participate in the Tournament is free. Any Kethaelan citizen who wants to prove his might is invited to have a go. People come from every Sixth and independent territories from the whole Holy Country. It is a very special time, when Kethaelan heroes can show their valour and earn considerable honour if they win one of the contests.

The tournament has two parts, each one a week long. During the first phase, the volunteers oppose each other through a set of trials and tests chosen by the gods and spirits during ritual divinations. Fourteen different champions triumph during these events. The second part is made of seven (six plus one) ceremonies reenacting the creation of the Holy Country. During this second phase, the Pharaoh chooses his new body. He then departs from the one he occupied and incarnates into the body of one of the fourteen champions. It may be a man's or woman's body but also an Uz'. The body the God-King lets behind him dies and is honoured according to the culture of its original 'owner'. As soon as Belintar takes a new body, it begins to age thrice as much as a normal human being. The tournaments are thus called every ten years or so. For the Holy Country's peoples, they are exceptional events, an occasion of great festivities.

No one knows according to which criteria (if any) the Pharaoh chooses his new body. Many think the choice is mostly dictated by political imperatives.

The God-King indeed rarely incarnates twice in a row in a body originating from a single Sixth. Thus, the six great regions of Kethaela can claim having proffered about the same number of bodies to the God-King. It may be that the Pharaoh chooses the body possessing qualities most needed for the coming difficulties of his land. Or it may also be that even Belintar has no choice in the matter.

The soul (or essence or spirit) of the champion giving his body to the Sovereign of the Sixths is promised eternal bliss in the Otherworld. And for the remaining thirteen champions (if they all survive the seven successive hero-quests), they can go home with the glory of being Champions of the Tournaments, Masters of Luck and Death, and with any strange magic they may have won during the quests. Some become members of the Pharaoh's cult but many just go back to their previous life. Due to the time between tournaments, there are between forty to fifty champions alive at any time in Kethaela.

The previous tournaments were held in 1577, 1587, 1595, 1607 and 1616 (the 1616 being officially the very last one).

### **2.5.1 The designation of the champions**

At the beginning of the tournament, the greatest heroes meet in the City of Wonders. There are hundreds of them, ready to participate for the honour of giving their body to the Pharaoh. All are volunteers, of course, and no one participates to the tournament if he does not want to give up his body.

The tournament begins on Freeze Day the first week of Sacred Time. It lasts a week, during which the participants fight at least once in various trials and events. Each of the first six days is associated to a Sixth, God Day being associated to the City of Wonders itself (some call it the Seventh Sixth for this reason). There are two contests on every day and two designated champions.

The trials are determined by divinations done at the beginning of the day, by priests and godar who come there for this occasion, under the scrutiny of the Pharaoh himself. The chosen events are told to the participants, who then decide to take part or not, according to their abilities. The contests are never the same from one Tournament to another. Moreover, they are not all physical. They test for all the qualities and abilities necessary to be a true Hero. The champions are thus chosen not only on their speed or strength, but also on their acute memory or their charming voice. Contests are strongly associated with the element of the day, one for each Sixth, Wild Day being associated with Man and the Sixth of the Leftarm Islands. Gods Day is for the City of Wonders and events these day are reportedly chosen by Belintar.

For each contest, the winner is chosen as champion. At the end of the week, there are thus fourteen champions.

Here are some examples of contests:

- Freeze Day: Strength and Endurance
- Water Day: Nimbleness and Acrobatics
- Clay Day: Will and Love
- Winds Day: Voice and Speed
- Fire Day: Fiery Speech and Justice

- Wild Day: Agility and Courage
- Gods Day: Memory and Wisdom

### 2.5.2 The heroquests

During the second week of Sacred Time, the fourteen heroes winners of the preceding week take part in ceremonies with the Pharaoh, to reenact the creation of the Holy Country. The Pharaoh's cult initiates present in the City of Wonders at the time are also invited to come, and most do. All the champions live in the Sixfold Palace for the duration of the ceremonies.

These ceremonies are real heroquests, far greater and more difficult than usual Sacred Time or pharaonic rituals. During one of these quests, while they are all in the Hero Plane, the Pharaoh lets his old body die and takes possession of a champion's body.

Here are some tales about the various heroquests:

**Freeze Day: The Fight against the Only Old One.** This magical ceremony consists in reenacting Uz allegiance towards the Holy Country and the fight against the Only Old One, the Uz demigod Ezkankekko. The dark songs of the darkness people and the vibrations of the drums take the champions and the Pharaoh progressively into the Hero Plane. They find themselves on a black and dry plain, weapons ready in the hand. Around them, bodies and shattered weapons cover the ground. Many Uz and humans have found death in the fight that just took place between the two armies. The Only Old One had sent all his forces against the Pharaoh's army. Now he is alone and the heroes can glimpse the dark outline of the Palace of Black Glass standing in the far distance. Here, the Pharaoh does not possess his old ageing body known to the champions in the Median World anymore. He is once again the handsome blond young man described in legends. The champions have also changed. They have the faces of the faithful lieutenants of Belintar. The Pharaoh exhorts his companions and launches the attack on the Palace of Black Glass. Now is the end of the rule of Ezkankekko.

The small group is only halfway to the Palace, when a terrible sepulchral laugh rings in the air and a rumble shakes the earth. A titanic form erupts from the ground and stands before the heroes. It is a kind of giant worm, darker than night, made entirely of lead. The monster throws itself upon the intruders to squash them under his weight. The Pharaoh's companions rush to meet it. Their blows anger it and draw its attention. Furious with the taunting of its preys, the beast howls its rage. The God-King sizes this opportunity to jump in its opened mouth and cut its throat with his huge iron sword. In a terrible crash, the monster's body collapses to the ground with a last jerk. Silence falls on the Shadow Plateau.

Belintar starts again towards the Palace, followed by his faithful companions. They arrive at the foot of the impressive tower rising in the night. Two huge lead leaves close the entrance. A sepulchral voice greets them. *"Enter, Belintar. Come. I await you."* The Pharaoh turns towards his companions. *"You served me faithfully and you proved your valour. But now I must fight alone this last battle."* He unsheathes his long iron sword and pushes one-handed the folding door which opens and lets him pass. The fight of the God-King against

Ezkankekko is a long merciless struggle of which each single moment would be enough to cover in glory the more valiant warrior. In their fight, the two fighters cleave stone and shatter walls of the Palace of Black Glass. But once more, Belintar is victorious and he drives his huge iron sword deep in the Ezkankekko's breast. The demigod freezes, knee bent, a hand on the handle of the cursed blade. He draws a last breath and his puff resonates in the empty rooms of the Palace, then silence falls on him like a lead weight. His body tightens and his features tense, distorting his face like a mask of anger or pain. A black stain spreads from the wound, without letting any blood drip, and gradually takes hold of his entire body. The Only Old One thus becomes a frightening lead statue, darker than the deeps of the Shadow Plateau, with black obsidian eyes, still pierced by the deadly iron. At this moment, the Palace he had built cracks everywhere before falling apart. The uproar of this collapse is like the echo of a last rage shout from his builder. The heroes and the Pharaoh have just enough time to go out. In the plain, the Uz arrive and swear allegiance to the new boss. With the end of the Kingdom of Night and the demise of the Only Old One, a new era begins for the six peoples of Kethaela, an era of peace and prosperity. The Holy Country is born.

**Water Day: The freeing of Choralinthor.** This ceremony reenacts the the freeing of Choralinthor. The heroes are taken to the Hero Plane. They incarnate fishermen and a few old wise men. The situation is serious in the Rightarm Islands. Choralinthor's waters are covered by a great gorp, a terrible chaotic mud which eats and destroys all life. Already, fishes have fled before this threat. The sea algae die as the gorp spreads. An increasing number of sticky shellfishes and dead sea animals are washed on the beaches. One must act quickly or the islands will be soon be doomed.

As the council of the islands gathers to discuss what should be done, a stranger arrives swimming near the coasts. He is a young blond man who calls himself Belintar. Great is the surprise of the fishermen since the seas are closed for many years and no one can sail or swim across them.

Hearing of the threat which hangs on the sea people, Belintar the Stranger proposes a solution to get rid of the gorp. The idea is to set fire to this chaotic mud and thus free Choralinthor from his grasp. Some fishermen take offense of the idea of using fire, their enemy, but others see the wisdom of this solution. However, the difficulty is to convince the King Under the Sea, since his help is needed to achieve this daring project. The fishermen agree to form a delegation and escort the stranger before the king, so that he could plead his case. Belintar speaks well and is supported by others. However, as he listens to him, the Lord of Waters enters in such a rage as makes the waves raise high in the sky. Here comes a stranger, whom no one knows, who dares ask him to make a pact with an enemy! His anger lessens somewhat when the fishermen tell him of the extraordinary arrival of the golden haired man. The seas themselves opened to let him pass. Is it not proof that he is a messenger of oceans' gods ? Belintar argues moreover that the enemy of an enemy is an ally, and that fire always fought against chaos, as water did. He concludes that union of the forces of the bay will see the birth of a new era of prosperity and will enable the defeat of the enemies of all. The king relents and admits that this suggestion has some panache, but he still doubts the success of this undertaking. He underlines that

he does not fear fire and that fire would be mad to come and die upon the sea. “*Whatever!*” exclaims Belintar. “*If fire fails in his task, at least the King Under the Sea will have the pleasure of seeing him perish before he is himself destroyed.*” “*Very good! Let him come. I await him.*” replies the king.

So it comes that the sovereign of the Sea People at last accepts to use fire to fight against the chaos eating the bay. Boats are sent on the sea carrying many torches. Ludoch come and swim along them. The fire sets the gorp ablaze and runs on the infected water. All day long and the following night, purifying flames alights the sea, refusing to die before having vanquished. Water takes part in the battle and unites with fire to harass the gorp and divide it in smaller and smaller parts. Water shelters fire as much as possible to better fight on his side. In the morning, no trace is left of the gorp and the fishermen celebrate victory. They kneel before Belintar and swear him allegiance. The King Under the Sea himself regrets his stubbornness. His blind hate could have resulted in the destruction of his kingdom. The sovereign bows before the stranger and offers him his crown. However, Belintar did not come on these coasts to rule as King Under the Sea. He accepts the allegiance of the Sea People but give back the crown to the sovereign, who will continue to watch over the fishermen of the bay.

**Clay Day: The Proof of Life.** This ceremony reenacts the moment where the Pharaoh became the lover of all the Esrolian queens by proving his fertility. The sweet Esrolian songs take the heroes to the Hero Plane. They arrive in the fields, not far from a small forest. In this day, the Esrolian queens assembled to choose new lovers. A crowd is gathered and contests are organized by the queens to test the candidates and select the more valiant men. Belintar the Stranger is one of the contestants. He wins the challenges one after the other, and soon he is the only candidate left. The queens observe him with both amazement and admiration but, at this very moment, the earth goddesses step in. Before allowing Belintar to become the lover of their daughters here assembled, they must ascertain his fertility.

One after the other, the goddesses come near the young blond man and each declares herself satisfied with her scrutiny. When comes the turn of the Dark Earth goddesses, they ask to see his blood. One of them cuts the arm of Belintar and he does not utter a word. The pharaonic blood flows and falls on the ground. The earth drinks it hungrily. There where the drops of blood have seeped through the earth, plants grow in plenty. Barley ears appear all around the Pharaoh. Belintar is declared fertile for the Esrolian queens. He becomes the lover of all.

**Winds Day: The King’s Justice.** The champions gather around the Pharaoh while the winds whirl round them. The songs and dances of the initiates fade gradually as they enter the Hero Plane.

They stand now on a high hill of Heortland. Around them, many tribal kings have gathered, for a terrible danger threatens the land. In the deep of the Print, chaos has awoken and prepares one more time to spread horror and destruction on the Orlanthi hills. However, no common ground is reached between the tribes. Each defends his rights and no one wants to cede advantage to his neighbour. The northern tribes ask for the help of the southern ones, who refuse to send

their warriors to their death defending the lands of others. Each new speaker tries to speak louder than the preceding one to make himself better heard and, soon, no word is understandable among all the shouting and the protests.

At this point, Belintar climbs the hill. The Kings quiet and look at the young blond man. They are full of mistrust and curiosity, for one already tells throughout the land the extraordinary deeds of this stranger arrived by the sea. He united behind him the fishermen of the Rightarm Islands; he submitted the priests of Caladra the volcano god; he became the lover of all the Esrolian queens and he broke the bank of Casino Town. Belintar moves forward in the middle of the gathered kings. Carried by the winds, his voice rings in the ears of all. He speaks of chaos which threatens men, women, children and cows. He recalls Orlanth's laws and the founding of the First Tribe. He describes the valour and the courage of the warriors. Soon they are all hanging from his every word. They feel honour and pride swelling their heart. "*All the peoples must unite to fight against their common foe, for together we are stronger but divided we are powerless.*" Belintar promises the help of the other peoples who follow his rule to come and fight alongside Orlanthi or give them wheat to feed them during the war. He is acclaimed by all the kings who swear him allegiance and ask to be part of his new kingdom.

**Fire Day: the Bad Priests.** This ceremony reenacts the allegiance of Caladraland to the God-King. Steams of hot water, heady perfumes and songs of exotic birds take the gathered heroes to the Hero Plane. They stand now on the slopes of the great volcano which rumbles under their feet. At the top of the mountain, the head priests have assembled to try and calm its wrath. They are on the point of sacrificing the young blond man named Belintar who tried to usurp their authority. One of the priests comes near the edge of the crater with the offering and is preparing to knock him over towards the devouring flames. But the Pharaoh acts ahead of him and springs of his own's accord towards the heart of Caladra.

The crowd gathered for the sacrifice holds his breath. The small figure of Belintar falls in the glowing deep and disappears in the lava. For a few moments, nothing happens. Then a tongue of flame shoots up, out of the volcano's mouth. Belintar stands at its top, carried by the flames. A fire spear burns in his hands. Armed with the volcano's power, he calls the wrath of Caladra on the bad priests. The flames engulf them and they fall in the crater.

The witnesses of this scene stay one moment as petrified but soon, all gather around the God-King. They bow before him, understanding that he is the Son of the Volcano and that he should be their sovereign.

**Wild Day: Luck and Logical Proof.** This ceremony reenacts the allegiance of the Leftarm Islands and the Talar to the Holy Country. the heroes are taken into the myths of the creation of Kethaela. They arrive in the middle of the legendary Casino Town. This crazy city is entirely devoted to money games. Gigantic game establishments, held by the Talar, welcome gamers come from the whole bay.

In the company of a handful faithful companions, Belintar walks the crowded streets of the city. The games are as astonishing as varied. Each time, part of the money lands in the pocket of the Talar and grows the bank. For where there

are winners, there are also losers. Blind luck distributes her favour but nobody ever beaten the Talar at their own game.

Casino Town is built on the slope of a hill, on four levels. Each level proposes games more magical and surprising than the preceding one. The lowest level is called the City of Games. Situated just behind Badluck Harbour, it is the biggest but also the gloomiest. To gain access to higher levels, one need to have already won at some game. Belintar tries different games while walking randomly in the town streets and Luck seems with him. He has now a sufficient amount of money to buy a handful of Luck Coins. With these in hands, he strides confidently towards the doors of the City of Luck.

In this second part of the city, the atmosphere is slightly different. People seem always as joyful as ever but tension hangs in the air. The gamers closely watch each other. Everyone plays big and each newcomer is a potential adversary. However no game seems able the defeat the young blond man. His adversaries leave with empty pockets and the stakes grow higher and higher. Servants from the Talar of Casino Town come and bow before him. They offer to lead him in the third part of the city, the one called the Great Game.

In this place, any loss is an irremediable defeat for all gains are played double or quits. Rumours say that the games found beyond the bronze doors guarding the Great Game are unknown in the rest of the city. None of this seems able to thwart Belintar's Luck. Game after game, the stranger wins all stakes and soon no game is left that has not seen his victory. At this moment, a golden liveried servant steps out of the fourth and last level and bow before him. *"My master, the Talar of Casino Town, has witnessed your achievements and admired your Luck to which no one seems able to resist. Would you please come and meet him in his palace ? He would be honoured to play against someone so talented."*

Thus, the God-King is led into the Lady's Castle, an impressive bronze building, perched on the top of the hill, which dominates the whole Casino Town. The game proposed by the immortal sorcerer, guardian of Casino Town, plays with metal cards, engraved on both faces. The game between the Pharaoh and the Talar last all day long and the following night. During all this time, the great tower clock of Our Lady of Gain which stands in the castle's court rings once for each game turn. Inconceivably, the impossible happens. As the game draws to its end, the God-King plays the master card figuring the Lady of Gain herself. The Talar of Casino Town, unbeaten for centuries, loses the game and his stake. With a small fraction of the money he just won, the Pharaoh buys the Leftarm Islands. The remaining debt is so huge that all the Talar, bound by an ancient agreement to honour the debt of the Bank, must bow before the God-King and promise to bring part payment each year. This debt represents now the taxes paid by the Leftarm Islands.

**Gods Day: Holy Country's creation.** In this last day of Sacred Time, great ceremonies honour all the gods. This a day of festivities for everyone and each celebrates according to his own rites and traditions. All Pharaoh's initiates gather to celebrate the Holy Country's creation. This time, no Heroquest needs to be accomplished and the champions are free to spend the day as they wish.

## 2.6 The magical bridges

There are six magical bridges. They are the links of Kethaela and unite the Sixthths. They were created during a heroquest, not long after foundation of the City of Wonders, in about 1320. Six great heroes, one from each Sixthth, participated in this heroquest. There was Marnilla, an initiate of Overdruva from Esrolia, Melch of Alabaster, from Caladralland, Josebius, from the Leftarm Islands, the Ludoch Shulufedis and Harmald from Heortland. They sacrificed themselves to give birth to the six bridges and never came back from the Other Side. Since then, their souls animate the Bridges, which come at Belintar's command.

During each Sacred Time, the Pharaoh calls the bridges from the City of Wonders and keeps them in position during the ceremonies. Each bridge links a District in the City of Wonders and a Sixthth. Travel on these bridges takes only a few minutes, in one direction or the other, by an astonishing magic contracting space and time (see the article on the City of Wonders).

The Darkness Bridge goes to the heart of the Shadow Plateau. It looks like a living and fluttering darkness whirlpool. The Water Bridge is a swift current transporting people to Deeper, in Choralinthor Bay. The Queens Bridge looks like a gigantic tree bending above the Bay, taking roots again in Nochet. The Storm Bridge is a terrible whirlwind taking people and throwing them in the middle of Durengard. The Flame Bridge is made from cooled lava. Varying from year to year, it reaches the Low Temple or High Temple in Caladralland. The Sorcerers Bridge is a graceful geometrical curve a pure light, linking with Talar Hold or Casino, depending on the God-King's will.

## 2.7 The Blue Star

The Blue Star is the Pharaoh's Otherworld. It belongs to the Sky Dome and is not a part of the Mortal World. It's visible by night in the sky as a small bright point of a light blue, twinkling above the City of Wonders.

Inside the star is a miniature representation of Kethaela. It's a meeting point between the Kethaelan religions' Gods World, Spirit World and Sorcery Planes. It is an echo in the Other Side of physical and magical events happening in the Mortal World. The star is inhabited by the souls of deceased cult members, who live there for a time before going to the otherworld of their culture.

Inside the star, there is of course no sunlight. The place is illuminated by a diffuse blue light, coming from everywhere at once.

In the centre is a miniature equivalent to the Sixfold Palace. There, visitors from the Mortal World arrive by the Blue Road (see the section on the hidden paths). This small palace has just one room for each Sixthth. Normally these rooms are uninhabited. There lives the God-King when he spends some time in the Blue Star. The palace is in the centre of a small village figuring the City of Wonders. This village has a harbour, six districts and a great building called Champions Hall. In this place there are portraits and woodcuttings of all the champions of the tournaments of Masters of Luck and Death since the Holy Country was created.

This small village is surrounded by a lake called the Small Blue Sea. Beyond it are lands reminding of the Sixthths. The lands of the Sixthth of Darkness is covered by a veil of obscurity and contains many tunnels where live the souls of



Uz initiates. The lands of the Sixth of Winds are made of hills where strong winds blow perpetually. The inhabitants call them the Storm Hills. There is a hill bigger than any other with a Storm rune marked on the ground. It is the source of winds in the Blue Star and is roughly in a place corresponding to Whitewall in the real Holy Country. He who says the right words can walk to Orlanth's Tula from there and the Storm Village. On the lands of the Sixth of Earth, blue wheat grows everywhere and a small wall made from dry white stones stand in the 'north', guarded by talking serpents.

In the star there is also a place dedicated to Dormal, at the junction between the Small Blue Sea and the Great Outside Ocean. This place appeared some time ago, when Dormal opened the oceans again. The Blue Star landscape is indeed modified by changes in Kethaela.

The Magical Bridges can be invoked inside the star. Here, they have human form, if still greatly elemental, and look like the six great heroes who sacrificed themselves to create the Bridges (see the section on the Magical Bridges).

## 2.8 The Building Wall

The Building Wall was created during the namesake battle against the Lunars in 1605. It was the only solution to resist the enemy assault. The Pharaoh was on a great hill not far from the battlefield. He took with him Maran Gor devotees and a Rightarm chaman called Coral Eater. Together they made a great and dark ritual during a whole day and the following night, as the battle raged below them. In the morning, the wall appeared among the fighters and devoured them all, Lunars and Kethaelans alike, in a great rolling mass of coral and stone. The battle was over in less than one hour, with more than 20,000 deaths on both sides. In the following days, the Wall continued to grow to the south-east and north-west, until it reached its current position, stretching across the great valley between the Shadow Plateau and Arkat's Hold in the Rockwood mountains.

Since then, the Wall is like a great beast and regularly needs to be appeased. Seasonal ceremonies are made in its honour by Maran Gor priestesses, who see it as another child of her terrible goddess. They all know that, let to itself, the wall is a savage and dangerous thing, and may grow even more and devour everything in its wake.

Legends tell that the Esrolian queen Apanase, who was among the troops when the Wall rolled over them, still live somewhere in its depths. She is at the head of a great army of all the dead of the terrible day and controls since then the monstrous daimon of the Wall, following in this the Pharaoh's orders.

## 2.9 the Hidden Paths

There are in Kethaela hidden pathways and roads, accessible only through rituals known to the magical creatures guarding them. These roads are a swift way to travel from certain places to others in the Holy Country, but some pass beyond the Mortal World and transport the traveller in other, more magical and more dangerous places. Most of these pathways are not for humans: they were created and are guarded by other Kethaelan races.

The number and location of these roads are well-kept secrets and only the Pharaoh knows them all. Some give access to the Wind Children eyries in the

Stormwalk Mountains, others lead to the Newtling lands of the Frog Marshes, hidden tunnels are cut in the basaltic caves under Caladrland and Uz know subterranean ways which reach far outside the Shadow Plateau

Taking these magical roads can be done only at the right starting place, at the right time and often calls for a small sacrifice to the guardian being. They can be found by the Kethaela Affinity of the cult members, if one knows what to look for, or by elemental magic: sensing that the air or the earth or the sea is not 'quite right' just there.

### **2.9.1 The Mirrorsea road**

[NB: This road has been described by Greg on the Glorantha Digest. We just wrote a little more, improvised some and changed the 'transformation chambers' described by Greg into a temple.]

The Mirrorsea is crossed by a strange road, which enables Ludoch to swim in the air and to go around in the great Holy Country harbours, as all the Pharaoh's subjects do. This road also exists underwater, and humans and trolls can visit the submarine Ludoch colonies in this way. It is the only road publicly known by Kethaelan peoples, as it is mostly based on air and sea magic but not much on the Pharaoh's.

A part of the road flows on the surface of the Bay as a current beginning near Nochet and ending near Deeper, passing not far from the City of Wonders along a North-West/South-East axis. Strangely, each person feels a current pushing her in the right direction even if other travellers pass along, flowing in the opposite direction. At some point along the way, the road leads to a floating village before plunging underwater. This village is entirely made of mirrorweeds (a sort of reed growing only along the Mirrorsea) and slowly drifts in the Bay. It was built by Newtlings at the request of the God-King and is still kept in good condition by the Newt People. They also take care of its 'navigation' along the current.

In the village is a great temple dedicated to Diendimos, the Ludoch Ancestor, the first Storm God to dive into the Deep. In his temple, Ceto priests lead daily ceremonies giving to people from the Dry the gift of breathing underwater and to Ludoch the gift of swimming in the air along the road. The Newt People and the Dolphin People live there in good harmony, each one being necessary to the life of the village (the Pharaoh's cult says there lies the real magic).

The road is unique on the surface of the bay, but divides in many paths once it reaches the coast, enabling Ludoch to swim easily in a good part of the Esrolian rivers system. Symmetrically, it becomes many little currents at the bottom of the bay and leads to many different Ludoch colonies in the Troll Straits and in the Rightarm Islands. All in all, it looks from above as two great rivers with their tributaries flowing to the floating village.

### **2.9.2 the road to the Blue Star**

There is a road, starting at the Sixfold Palace, which goes straight to the Pharaoh's Blue Star. Only a member of the cult can take it but, even among initiates, its existence is known only to a minority. To be told of this road and how to take it is a mark of trust.

To go into the Blue Star, an initiate has to climb by a clear night at the top of the highest tower in the Sixfold Palace. Right above the tower, the small Pharaoh's star is shining with its bright blue colour. The visitor has to look directly at it, and a thin blue path will go down silently, falling like a leaf at his feet. He then goes onto this bright road and raises in the sky as he walks. The city of Wonders can be seen below, as thousand of little lights in the dark. Beyond it, the dark bay surrounds the city as a cocoon. The city diminishes and then vanishes completely. The visitor is then totally surrounded by an intense blue light. He must keep his faith and walk while praying to the Pharaoh. He then arrives in the star.

### 2.9.3 The Hedge Road

Only Alynxes and the rare Yinkini initiates of the Pharaoh know how to take this small windy path which takes the traveller across all Heortland in a few hours instead of a few days. The road begins at some trees and sacred stones, on which one has to climb to activate the magic. The danger met along the road (such as the fabled Giant Alynx) are a secret jealously kept by each Alynx, but it is said it is better to have some meat with you.

## 3 The cult of the God-King

Belintar is a physical entity who takes an active part in Glorantha's events. He thus cannot be considered a God, in the sense of the Great Compromise. However, this mysterious character is, at the very least, one of the greatest Glorantha's heroes. As such, people who worship him can get magic from him.

### 3.1 Magic available to the God-King's worshippers

Belintar the God-King gives to those who worship him a part of his magic. Kethaela's magic is multiple and the Pharaoh himself represents this multiplicity. The cult of the God-King can thus take very different aspects, in order to adapt to the beliefs of Kethaelan people. These conceptual variations notwithstanding, all the people obtaining magic from the Pharaoh are considered a unique 'cult', a single political and magical organisation.

**Theist magic.** People of theist beliefs worship the Pharaoh as a God. It is the most common form of worship among Esrolians, Heortlings and Caladrans. The cult is composed mainly of initiates and a handful of devotees. These worshippers have access to a single affinity called 'Holy Country' or 'Pharaoh'. This affinity represents the magic of the God-King as the ruler of Kethaela. Among the more famous feats given by this affinity, one may cite:

- **Voice of the Pharaoh.** The voice of Pharaoh represents the supreme authority over all the citizens of the Holy Country. It allows the worshipper to speak in the name of the God-King and ensure his words shall not be ignored.
- **Eyes of the Pharaoh.** The God-King is Kethaela. His sight perceives the true nature of the Holy Country and its inhabitants. Nothing shall be hidden from Him.

- **Union of the Six.** The six elements and the six political entities which form Kethaela are united through the magic of the God-King and act together.
- **Reconcile Opposites.** Kethaela is a land of diversity and contrast but the God-King has always reconciled that which was unreconcilable and gained a greater strength.
- **God-King Awareness.** A worshipper always knows where is the Immortal Ruler of the Holy Country.
- **Kethaelan Awareness.**
- **Defend Kethaela.**
- **Gift of Citizenship.** This ritual allows the magical adoption of a newcomer as a member of the Holy Country. He then becomes submitted to the magical pharaonic laws which govern Kethaela but also gains the protection of the God-King.
- **Together we are Stronger.**
- **Understand Other.**
- **Find a Common Ground.**

This list is only indicative and absolutely not exhaustive. One can imagine many other feasts linked to the God-King's power.

**Wizardry.** For the wizards, there is a grimoire called the 'Grimoire of the Perfect Man'. This way of worshipping the Pharaoh is mainly developed in the Leftarm Islands. The grimoire contains spells which can be learned through the usual wizardry rules. They do not allow improvisation. The effects of the spells are close to that of the theist feasts.

**Animism.** Animism is mainly practised in the Rightarm Islands and in the Shadow Plateau. Shamans know that in Kethaela dwell spirits that were created from residual pharaonic magic. They are regrouped in a practice called 'The Swimmer Practice' in the Rightarm Islands and 'The Great Boss Practice' by the Uz. These spirits can be hunted by shamans in places tightly linked to the Pharaoh (the City of Wonders, the borders of the Holy Country, the sacred places, places where ceremonies to the God-King's glory took place, places where Pharaoh stayed for some time, etc.). Their power depends on the intensity of the pharaonic magic displayed on the site. The more powerful spirits are of course found in the City of Wonders. These spirits allow the shaman who holds them to perform pharaonic magic similar to the feasts of the theist worshippers.

Shamans, wizards and initiates who gain magic from the Pharaoh form the cult of the God-King. In this cult, a huge majority of people worship the Pharaoh simply at an 'initiate' level. These people accept and honour the founding principles of Kethaela while staying attached to their original culture and tradition. The few people who give their entire life to the cult of the Pharaoh (called 'devotees' from now on for simplicity's sake) were generally

deeply changed by their contact with the God-King. They live only for and through Kethaela. The cult of the Pharaoh has got only a dozen devotees, while estimations give a thousand initiates.

The magic of the Pharaoh works mainly inside Kethaela and affects principally its citizens. Any attempt to use pharaonic magic outside the borders suffers a penalty of -20. However the magical borders of the Holy Country do not exactly match the physical borders, even if they are quite close. Thus sometimes, pharaonic magic works in unexpected places. On the rare occasions when Belintar went outside Kethaela, his cult's magic was strongly affected, sometimes even missing.

**Secret of the cult.** The secret of the cult that can be learned by devotees after serving the God-King for a long time gives access to a new kind of magic, linked to Belintar. The secret is to understand how the Pharaoh and Belintar form a single entity with two aspects, each possessing a different magic. In rules term, when a character reaches this point, he develops a new affinity, a new grimoire or a new practice, which corresponds to 'Belintar'. The rare times when devotees have used this magic, it seemed strongly linked to the magical acts that created the Holy Country:

- **Arrive Swimming**
- **Son of the Volcano**
- **Iron Sword**
- **Lover of Queens**
- **Purify Sea Water**
- **Weave Chance**
- **Convince**
- **Understand**
- **Discover Hidden Secret**

Belintar himself possesses still other magics which are not specifically linked to the Holy Country but his worshippers can not have access to them. The magic of the God-King himself is described in section 2.

### 3.2 The Symbol of the Six

The figure 'Six' is highly symbolic for the cult of the God-King. Kethaela as a union is organised around the six elements and the corresponding Sixths. The notion of the six parts appears everywhere pharaonic magic is concerned and the cult uses it profusely. Architecture, religious texts, ceremonies organisation, every single element of the cult's life emulates this sixfold division into parts both different and complementary. The strength of Kethaela resides precisely in this diversity unified around the central figure of God-King, according to the beliefs of the cult.

One of the cult's teachings is that each Sixth, each culture of Kethaela has his own solution to a given problem and that it is always fruitful to study a situation from 'the six directions'.

### 3.3 Organisation of the cult

The worshippers of the God-King under his different aspects (theist, wizardry, animism) number approximately one thousand in the entire Holy Country. Members of the cult are between 100 and 150 in each Sixth, independently of its size, and the remaining ones gather at the City of Wonders.

A huge majority of the God-King's worshippers are simple initiates: they serve the Pharaoh but stay attached to their original culture. There are only a dozen devotees in Kethaela. They are persons whose life has been deeply affected, even turned upside down, by the Pharaoh and who were chosen by His Immortal Majesty. They devote their life to the Holy Country and left behind them their original culture.

Concerning the cult places, several small shrines are scattered among the Sixths and taken care in shifts by the local initiates. Each Sixth also has a Great Temple kept up full time by an important member of the cult. This task is often given to an adept who thus decided to devote his life to Kethaela. The Great Temples are situated on the six sacred places of each Sixth. The Temple of the Shadow Plateau is built in a large cavern, not far from the petrified body of the Only Old One. The Temple of the Rightarm Islands stands on the Arrival Beach, where the God-King rose out of the sea as he arrived in the bay. In Esrolia, the sacred building is in the city of Nochet, at the foot of the Queens' Bridge. In Heortland, it is found at the centre of Durengard, near the Winds' Bridge. The Temple of Caladra hangs on the slope of the great volcano, at the verge of its open mouth. And last, the Lucky Temple of the Leftarm Islands rises in the middle of Casino Town.

The God-King's religious buildings have both a religious and a political function. They are of course places of ceremonies for the sacred days of the Pharaoh. One may bring offerings, and members of the cult sometimes come and ask for help or comfort. But their use does not stop there. They also serve as town hall, embassy of the Holy Country in the Sixths, hospital, shelter and centre of intelligence.

Members of the cult do not wear particular signs indicating their beliefs. Nothing but his religious respect of pharaonic authority distinguishes a cult member from an ordinary citizen. The cult has also no proper hierarchy. Initiates meet in good fellowship and help each other when possible. The cult provides helps and resources to members who need it and also to any Kethaelan citizen. However a Great Priest, designed by Belintar, is the official head of the cult. His task is supervising the ceremonies, the temples and, more generally, all the cult organisation. He lives in the City of Wonders, inside the Sixfold Palace (see section 3.5).

Belintar's cult differs from traditional cults in that the subject of worship himself is present on Glorantha. His worshippers can meet him and speak to him. He thus stays the supreme cult authority, even if he does not usually interfere in the day-to-day chores.

All cult members have seen the Pharaoh at least once and many have even spoken to him. But even for those who meet him often, this is a moving and intimidating experience to face his god and speak with him. In his presence, his divine nature cannot be ignored. His worshippers feel in their very bones that they stand in front of the source of their magic.

### 3.4 Role of the cult in Kethaelan society

The Pharaoh is the Holy Country in a political but also magical and divine sense. His cult, by his very nature, is bound to reflect the diversity of the Kethaelan society.

The cult members belong to all the Sixths, in approximately equal parts. They are found in all the communities that form the Holy Country. Initiates belong to all social origins and all trades, with perhaps a little bias towards occupations based on contacts between people (merchant, artist, craftsman, professor, sailor, etc.)

The cult members work for the good of Kethaela and for the keeping of the harmonious equilibrium between the Sixths. Some do it by taking an active part in Kethaelan politic (hexarchs, representatives, leaders, priests, political councillors, ambassadors, etc.) and other do it at their own small level, by demonstrating around them the model of the good citizen. Some of them say high and clear that they worship the God-King, while others tend to be more discreet about it in their every day life.

The social fabric of the cult members spread in Kethaela serves as a political and magical base for the God-King. His worshippers are his eyes, ears and voice. When one of them speak in the name of the Pharaoh, it is a bit like the God-King himself would turn up. People around listen with full attention since they sense the presence of the Supreme Sovereign and know that His will express itself through His worshipper.

The cult members see to the upkeep of the temples and shrines. They take part to the magical Kethaelan ceremonies. Each also has to report regularly to his local temple the latest news of his area. The temple then forwards them to the City of Wonders where all these messages are centralised. A few initiates also serve as spies in the borderlands. Using the cult infrastructures, they transmit regular reports about what they observe and learn. Cult members who would leave Kethaela for the duration of a trip are expected to report back when they return, on what stroke them outland. The Great Priest at the head of cult is charged with collecting all the information received through the members' net. He is in this sense the head of Kethaelan intelligence.

### 3.5 A few key figures of the Pharaoh's cult

**The chamberlain.** He was once an Esrolian storyteller, but has been the Pharaoh's chamberlain for such a long time that everything else about him has been forgotten. His name is Anbalaster and is one of the rare cult devotees. He was a champion of the Masters of Luck and Death Tournament in 1587 (see section 2.5). He converted to Belintar's cult after his victory and stayed very close to the God-King. He is now quite old — in his sixties — and does not leave the City of Wonders anymore. As the keymaster and chief of protocol, he has to take care of the life in the Sixfold Palace. He very busy organizing the Pharaoh's timetable, the ceremonies and the great palace events, which are all under his responsibility.

**The First One.** This richly clad old man is one the most influent men in the City of Wonders and in the cult, despite what could appear as an honorific role (see the section 1.4.3). Lots of people do not even know his true name and

call him only ‘the First One’. He is named Omraden and comes from the City of Wonders. He practised many different trades before catching the eye of the God-King through the subtlety of his speeches and the cleverness of his analyses. Fine politician and ambitious, he converted to the Pharaoh’s cult and worked for a time in the temple of the City of Wonders. The God-King chose him to be the representative of His city, to the great surprise of the other cult initiates, since there was at the time many candidates older and closer to the Pharaoh. But His Immortal Majesty had once more proven his great judgement. The devious careerist became a perfect First One and, to the great surprise of watchers, his cunning was the exact solution for managing the Chamber of Representatives where everyone is constantly at each other’s throats (see the section 1.4). With the passing years, his faith in the God-King thrived for all to see and, very naturally, he became a devotee and discovered some of Belintar’s secrets. For everyone, his job changed him.

Nowadays, only new representatives make the mistake of underestimating this old man bent by the years. Many political plots which could have undermined the Holy Country fell through thanks to a few words placed by the First One during a session.

**The Great Priest.** This task is nowadays held by Hemernalda, a woman in her forties coming from Karse. Her friends call her Heme. She has dark hair, is small and slim but knows how to obtain respect. She is a devotee of the cult. She was appointed by the God-King five years ago as the head of the cult. Her job consists in seeing to the upkeep of the temples, to the organisation of religious ceremonies and also to the collect of news from the entire Holy Country, transmitted by the cult members. She is at the head of a vast net of intelligence which allows the Pharaoh to know of all Kethaelan events and beyond. She also receives the reports of cult members ‘working’ outside the Holy Country and decides on their missions.

**The Constant Guard.** His true name is Olemos of Righos. He is several centuries old but still serves the God-king, as he promised. During the conquest of the Kingdom of Night, he was a respected and important citizen of Righos, the merchant city of Esrolia, everlasting rival of Nochet. He was so happy with the liberation of Righos from what he called ‘the yoke of the Uz’ that he swore solemnly to the God-King that, had he been immortal, he would have served him for eternity. No one knows what the God-King did, but three centuries later, the Constant Guard is still here, true to his word, observing comings and goings of the palace visitors. Rumours tell that he possesses a fragment of the Pharaoh’s magic that the God-King would have put directly inside his soul. He is as skilled in fighting as a thousands years old Brithini warrior, already fend off by himself a whole drakkar of wolves-pirates. One says that when he fights, he becomes sometimes several men that are nevertheless One. No one knows what this means. The Constant Guard is always in the shadow of the God-King they are never far apart from each other. He clearly serves as bodyguard but his first use for the God-King is to recall to visitors they should not make unconsidered promises in front of the Pharaoh.



**The Keeper of the Temple of Nochet.** Normald Sweet Tongue is a man who managed to evade feminist oppression through the cult of God-King. Born in Willford, he is now forty years old and has been taking care of the temple for a half dozen years. During a visit of the Pharaoh in Willford, when Normald was a boy, he had a revelation and started on the path which led him to be one of the few devotees of the God-King. He is mostly known for his long discussions with anyone who visits the temple and for giving shelter to men beaten by their wives. His enemies are numerous in Nochet but he has the discreet support of part of the male population and men rights organizations.

**The Keeper of the Temple of Durengard.** Lady Hildegarde was born in a *very* Aeolian family in Mount Passant, who taught her respect for truth and rectitude. She is a strong woman, with a voice more powerful than many men. During journeys with her father at the High King's court in Durengard, she saw many masses where Saint Belintar Himself was present. She understood he was the perfect example of what one can become who follows the Esvulari Precepts readily, with his every breath. She then decided to follow this way of life, to try and be as perfect as the Saint Himself. From her point of view, this goal was reached when she became a devotee of the Pharaoh and understood the secrets hidden in the Book of Belintar. She is now fifty years old, with eight children from two ex-husbands and possesses a beautiful collection of Aeolian tankards.

**The Keeper of the Volcano Temple.** No one could have foreseen that Azmar was to become an important person one day. A little ashes-catcher in High Temple, he followed priests of the Great Volcano and took care of ashes they let behind them. Everything changed the day Belintar came to prove once more he was the Son of the Volcano. As priests crowded around the Pharaoh who had just reappeared on a lava column, a crowd movement pushed Azmar and a few other unlucky persons right into the crater. But before the astounded eyes of people present this day, a thin flame spat the little ashes-catcher back on the dust of the caldeira, right before the feet of Son of the Volcano. Belintar hold out his hand without saying a word and welcomed back Azmar with a smile. Too shaken to see whose hand this was, Azmar staggered back on his feet and found himself face to face with the God-King.

Azmar is now the Keeper of the Paharaoh's Volcano Temple. At 31, he is the youngest devotee of the cult, carefully watched by the priests.

**The Keeper of Arrival Beach Temple.** The first memory of Galen Conch-Blower is to swim to Swimmer Beach, the Arrival Beach were a temple to the glory of the Swimmer was built. During his childhood, whenever his parents didn't watch him closely, he ran to the reed temple and stayed there all day, speaking with the old keeper.

Years passed. Galen is now old and is proud never to have set foot on a boat, keeping his sacred word first as an initiate and then as a devotee of the Swimmer. He spends long hours on the jetty before the Temple, talking to shingle and undertow-spirits. Passing foreigners sometimes ask who is this wiry and tanned old man, who swims like a dolphin in the Bay. From time to time, he disappears for long swimming journeys, but no one knows where he goes.

**The Keeper of the Lucky Temple in Casino.** The office of Keeper of the Temple of Casino City is played each year with dices, among volunteer initiates of the cult. For the past five years, the winner has always been Melkior Double-Six, easily crushing his opponents whatever the game chosen by the God-King.

Melkior was not always like this. For a long time, he was just a simple student in stochastic sorcery, an honest but somewhat obscure branch of magic. He was merely gifted with an extraordinary memory, which was a great boon in card games, but not much else. One day, weary of his dull life and rejected once more by a girl, Melkior decided to become Somebody Else and entered Casino City to play to the ruin. There, he incredibly won access to the Great Game, the inner sanctum of Casino. No one knows whether he lost or won, but when he came out he was... different. He is now gifted with an insolent luck and if nothing changes, the other initiates are convinced there won't be a change of Keeper for a long time.

**The Keeper of the Petrified Body Temple.** There is an Uz hag in the Plateau. She is violent and dark, loves the forbidden fire, touches even iron and casts the evil eye on anyone who displeases her. Uz do not like her, but they cannot chase her away, because she is the terrible keeper of the temple to the glory of Belintar, built near the petrified body of Ezkankekko. She is named Durgu Kah and was never like the other females. Even as a child, she had a unwelcome fascination for iron and did not hurt Enlos. Everything Uz do, she did differently and still does. She lives without any Uzko around her, surrounded only by stinky Enlos that she seems to like. When an Enlo is hunted by an Uz and arrives to the temple, he can hope for her protection. The only Uz who have her unquestioning support are those who worship the Big Boss or are ready to overcome their ingrained biases.

**The Hexarchs** They are the representatives of the Pharaoh in each Sixth (see their description in the section on Hexarchs).

**The Conciliators.** Legends tell of a secret group of six persons forming the hidden arm of Belintar. These Conciliators take their orders directly from His Immortal Majesty and answer only to the Pharaoh's command. It is said that Belintar uses them in situations where his official visit is not welcome and to discreetly solve delicate problems without being seen. Of course, such rumours are totally unfounded.

**Other personalities.** Leo of Ismene is a Leftarm Islands Sorcerer and an initiate of the cult. He once was a champion in the Tournament of the Masters of Luck and Death in 1577 (see the section on the Tournament) and is now very old. He is particularly interested by languages and communication spells: with other people, at distance, with non-humans, with animals, etc. It is said he still has regular conversations with Belintar.