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Each month I detail a new location in the World Atlantis Broke and publish it as a port-of-call. These content packs can be used with any tabletop roleplaying game—steampunk or no—or simply enjoyed as colorful reading and dream-fodder.

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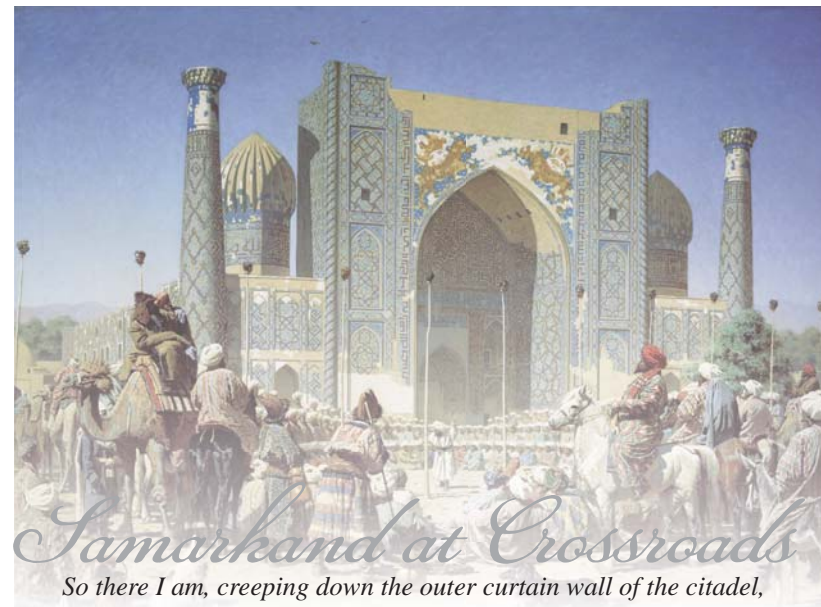
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The art used in this port-of-call is all by Vasily Vereshchagin, a portraitist embedded in the Russian army during its campaigns in Central Asia. He was decorated for his actions in the siege of Samarkand. Perhaps he is why, in our history, the Tura never breached the citadel walls. Vereshchagin's depictions of war were so realistic that generals would forbid their soldiers from seeing his exhibits for fear of eroding their morale.

His works have since passed into the public domain and are used here accordingly and gratefully.



So there I am, creeping down the outer curtain wall of the citadel, the damn camera sloshing back and forth across my shoulders. I'm trying to follow the directions, but the old castle has been built and rebuilt across centuries, so nothing is straightforward.

I slip through a door and up a tower, and finally I step out onto a balcony where I can get the perfect shot of the whole western wall.

It's only when the flash powder goes off that I see the mercenaries sitting there, quietly drinking as they wait for me to realize I've been captured. By way of consolation, they offer me a swig.

WELCOME TO SAMARKAND

You'll find in the following pages a description of the ancient city of Samarkand and its all-too-present woes. Long a key trade nexus on the Silk Road, the city has traded hands and rulers many times. Most recently, Russia swept down from the north and seized Samarkand from the Emirate of Bukhara... only to have it reconquered days later. Now with a Russian counterattack looming and the heir to the Samarkand beylik missing, tensions are running as high as the city is old.

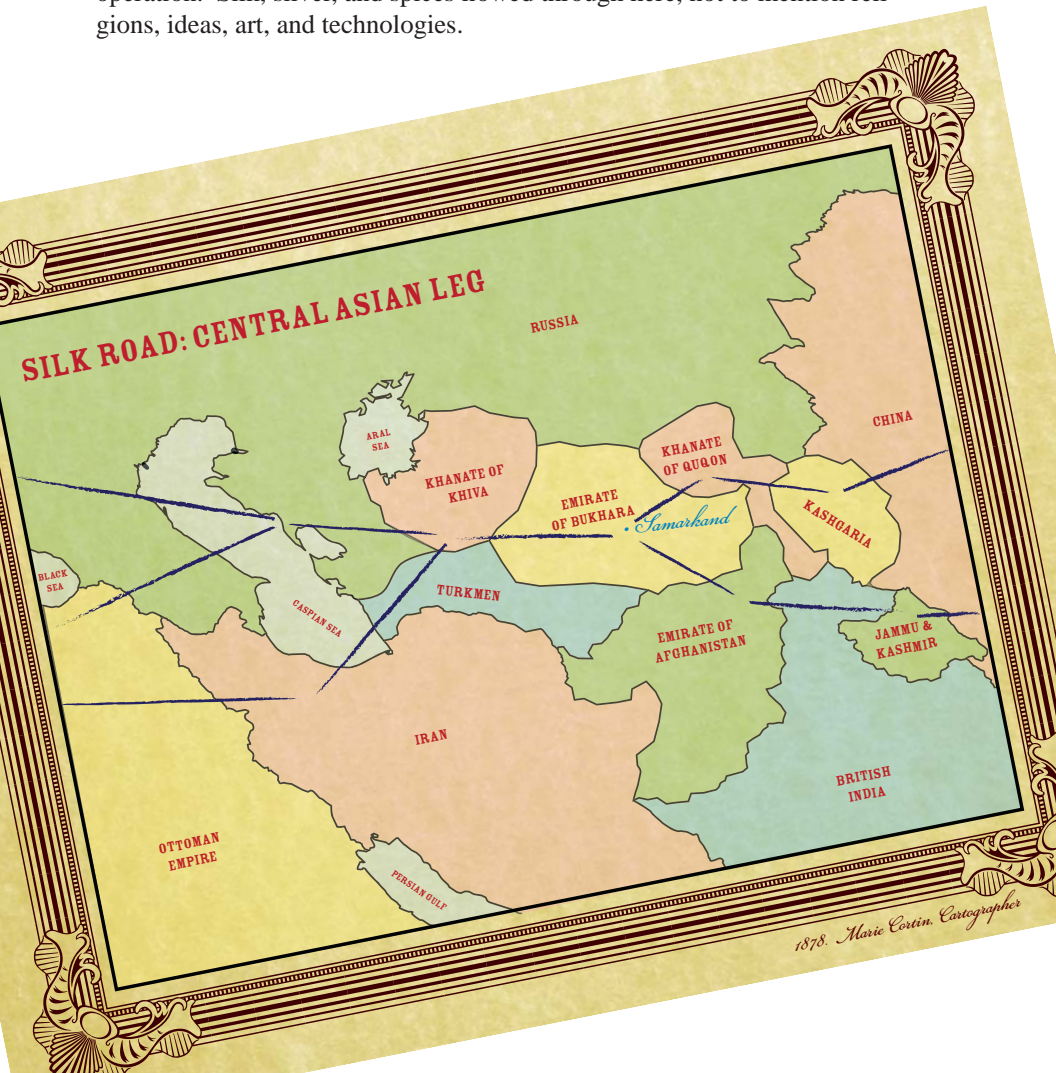
This port-of-call includes six game master characters enmeshed in the machinations, history, and dreams of Samarkand, ready and willing to pull the picaros into their drama.

Samarkand at Crossroads is a delicate port-of-call more vulnerable than most. Its tumultuous political situation is complicated by conflicting layers of identity and loyalty, with the fate of a city hanging in the balance.

THE FULCRUM OF THE SILK ROAD

Here is what is interesting about Samarkand: no one knows how long the city has been here. There are no steles, there are no monuments, there are no cartouches commemorating the foundation of the city. We have found no records in neighboring cities of the rise of Samarkand—it is always treated as a constant, an inescapable fact of existence, a city over the horizon, ready to trade. It is quite possible, then, that the city of Samarkand predates written language.

Whether this must mean that it was founded by Noah's children or perhaps was the city to which Cain fled I leave to the consideration of theologians. My interest is geographical. This city has connected the worlds of East and West for all of humanity's history. I have written of the Silk Road before, and this city must be considered the jewel of that road, the fulcrum of its operation. Silk, silver, and spices flowed through here, not to mention religions, ideas, art, and technologies.



FARSI NAMES

The ruling class of Bukhara is (distantly) of Iranian origin, and gives its children both Farsi and Arabic names. Sherkat's crew are also primarily Iranians, although like any airship she's collected a few crewmembers from elsewhere, too.

Farsi does not use surnames, although Farsi speakers might provide the name of their home city or district to clarify. "Bolour Samarqandi" is Bolour from Samarkand; Nouri Qavchinoni is Nouri from the Qavchinon neighborhood.

MASCULINE NAMES

- Amir
- Anoush
- Atash
- Bahman
- Behrang
- Cirrus
- Danush
- Esfandiyar
- Farhang
- Goshtasb
- Hafez
- Kavoos
- Khosrow
- Kourosh
- Mehrak
- Nouri
- Roozbeh
- Shahyar
- Tooraj
- Zartosht

FEMININE NAMES

- Afareen
- Ahou
- Bolour
- Belbar
- Dori
- Farangis
- Farrin
- Ghamzeh
- Goli
- Hasti
- Kimiya
- Mahasti
- Mahsheed
- Malakeh
- Nargess
- Oranous
- Pareevash
- Saman
- Sheefteh
- Vanda

GENDER NEUTRAL NAMES

- Almas
- Dana
- Derya
- Ehsan
- Gulshan
- Korshid
- Omid
- Shanaz

SOME LOCAL NAMES

UZBEK NAMES

As with the rest of the Uzbek language and many of their customs, this list shows many influences from neighboring cultures. Samarkand residents would recognize all of these as Uzbek names.

Uzbeks typically go by a single personal name, with any necessary clarification provided by supplying their father's name.

MASCULINE NAMES

- Alisher
- Aziz
- Bilol
- Doniyor
- Farrukh
- Hamza
- Jahon
- Jaloliddin
- Jamshid
- Jasur
- Makhmud
- Malik
- Parviz
- Ravshan
- Rustam
- Sayyid
- Shamshod
- Timur
- Ulugbek
- Umid

FEMININE NAMES

- Anora
- Artemiz
- Chinara
- Durdona
- Feruza
- Gulnora
- Indira
- Lola
- Nigora
- Olma
- Ona
- Parizoda
- Ravshana
- Shahnoza
- Shirin
- Tomyris
- Umida
- Yulduz
- Zarina
- Ziyoda

GENDER NEUTRAL NAMES

- Azar
- Dilshod
- Roshan

Up until the Ottomans closed it down to spite the West in 1453, of course, much to their own loss. But now we have taken to the skies and can circumvent the Turks of Constantinople entirely—even if the Russians' trade tariffs and transit fees are positively bruising. Still, trade along this corridor seems to have resumed, using Samarkand as a coaling station.

The city itself rests at the western foot of the Tian Shan mountains, which themselves eventually rise up to the Roof of the World. The Zeravshan river tumbles down from these frozen peaks into the desert below; Samarkand sits between mountain and desert as it sits between East and West, ever the mediator between opposites and the fulcrum of great leverage. Even with the waters of the Zeravshan, though, Samarkand's environs are arid. Combined with its elevation of some two thousand feet, the nights and winters grow biting dry and cold. Snow is not unknown here.

Like its sister cities along the Silk Road, the city of Samarkand used its position along this most valuable trade route to amass great wealth. This can be seen everywhere in its impressive, if somewhat worn, architecture. The Registan, a sort of central square of the city, is faced with three towering madrassahs, or colleges, each faced with an elaborate geometric mosaic in blues, reds, and gold. This square could challenge in majesty any city center found in Europe or the Far East. The rest of the city spreads in all directions, tall and sprawling sandstone edifices for a mile or more.

Beyond these sandstone walls lie green fields. To the north, these fields bracket the waters of the Zeravshan; to the south, the ancient Dargom canal carries the river's water across even more farmland. Between these two branches, the entire city is embraced by flowing water throughout the year.

The horizon of Samarkand is dominated by mountains on three sides; only to the west does the sun set over the arid plain. In that direction lies the capital, Bukhara, and then miles upon miles of desert, the Caspian Sea, and finally Europe. But my travels shall take me East, up the Roof of the World...



TO MY FATHER THE EMIR MUZAFFAR AL-DIN—

I have thrown off the yoke of the Russian oppressors, father. I would say am sorry if this puts you in a difficult position, but I am not. Foreign invaders seized one of the emirate's brightest cities and you did not even rise from your seat. You ordered me not to ride with my army to retake the city, but I cannot countenance such cowardly dictates, even from the Emir of Bukhara, even from my own father.

So I have liberated your city, father, and now you will have to act like an Emir who cares for the well-being of his subjects.

The Russians left a small force — some five hundred men — in the citadel. The bulk of Kaufman's forces, along with his airships, moved west towards Kattakurgan. Storm clouds cut off heliograph contact between the citadel and the airships. This was when we attacked.

It was a beautiful assault, my father. We would have made even Timur proud as we retook the seat of his ancient empire. The Russians' few patrols in the city were overwhelmed in the first hour. We rode through the streets with bared steel and torches, converging on the citadel. We seized the approaches and ringed the fortress with rifles. The Russians quailed behind the walls, knowing that any head they presented would be shot. The siege lasted only a single night; we breached the ancient wall the next day.

The fighting was fierce but the end was always clear. We routed the Russians and those cowering with them—turncoats and traitors to your rule. It was then that we discovered the Beg of Samarkand and his family, dead in his palace, left in the corners where they were shot. With such brutality on display, our forces seized upon the invaders and their lackeys and made them suffer the same fate that they had forced on a good man, his wives, and his children.

The Begg of Shahrissabz and Kitab were most affected by the display, for obvious reasons. They had fought like lions that day, hoping to liberate their fellow Beg, but I think they already knew that the laxity of your rule had already cost them their kin. Also at our sides, I should note, were a sizeable number of Qaraqalpaqs and Kipchaks brought by Ishan Omar Khan Makhdum-e Azami. I know you lose no love for him and the rest of the Makhdumzadas, but such alliances were necessary to win the city.

I send this missive in a trusted hand, father, because as disappointed as I am in your recent lack of action, I still owe you a son's love. And I tell you this in love: you must rise to your royal duties or they will be taken from you. If I must, I will take them from you before they are taken by someone else.

—Abdul Malik Tura, your loyal Hakim of Ghusar

ZANDOKHT SHERKAT, MERCHANT AND SPY

Tall, broad-shouldered, and trailing a mane of onyx hair behind her, Sherkat cuts a striking figure even when she merely crosses the room. She dresses down—just a flight jumpsuit—but the deliberate care of every movement she makes often draws inadvertant attention. Most of the time, she can deflect any such attention with her bright smile and forceful personality. When that doesn't work, she wears a concealed holster loaded with a bladed pistol, easily accessible through a slit at her hip.

The Sherkat caravan has been working the Silk Road for all of living memory; Zandokht is the newest generation in the family business. As trade has taken to the skies, Zandokht and her siblings have followed suit, and the “caravan” is now a trio of airships that pass each other going opposite directions every six weeks. All would be well if Sherkat's ship, the *Aaftaab Gardaan*, had not breached a gas cell over the Caspian Sea while smuggling silk into Russia. They were rescued by a British Navy ship, but in the course of the mid-air repairs, her illicit cargo was discovered. The British ship was conducting Sir Ronald Thomson to his new diplomatic post in Iran; he immediately blackmailed Sherkat into acting as his catspaw.

Sherkat came to Samarkand in order to gather intelligence on the city and deliver it to the Tura. While in port, a stowaway was discovered in her hold. Taking pity on the runaway, Sherkat offered the girl employment instead of punishment. It was only after Sherkat delivered the intelligence and the Tura took the city that she realized the real identity of her newest crew member, Fatemah Gul. She can only speculate as to the girl's value to Thomson, the Tura, or the quickly destabilizing situation on the ground. However, she does know the price Fatemah will pay if Sherkat does not help her escape.

Exemplars

- dun-colored utility jumpsuit
 - easily-concealed stabbing pistol
 - deliberate, sepia-skinned woman
- ### Classes
- Merchant (Business Connections)
 - Aeronaut (Captain)

Approaches

- with Grace
- with Misdirection

Languages

- fluent Farsi
- fluent English
- fluent Arabic
- fluent Mandarin

Amenities of Aaftaab Gardaan

- Bridge
- Cargo Hold
- Smuggling Bolthole
- Heliograph

Possible Wants

- deliver Fatemah to the Tura
- convince Fatemah to abandon her own gender
- extract payment from the Tura for her help in the seige
- cut her own puppet strings
- identify the ringleader of the Russian sympathizers

BARON FERDINAND VON RICHTHOFEN, GROUNDED GEOGRAPHER

A sizeable man with an equally sizeable beard, Richthofen manages to come across as prurient, reckless, and wild-eyed all at the same time. Dressed in slacks, a billowing shirt, and a matching vest, the jacket component of his suit always seems to have been misplaced somewhere. His sleeves and pants legs are cinched at elbows and knees, and over the silk trousers he has strapped a utility belt bristling with various instruments. Atop his receding hairline he sports a heavy pair of goggles.

Educated at Breslau and Berlin, Richthofen distinguished himself as a geologist and geographer in the mountains of Europe. In 1859, he was recruited for the Eulenberg Expedition, a Prussian diplomatic mission to East Asia. Shortly thereafter he worked in the American West discovering gold fields; he was there when Atlantis rose from the sea. While many of his colleagues drifted their interests from geology to the exciting new field of archaeology, Richthofen stuck to his rocks and mountains.

The advent of the airship broadened and simplified geographical surveys, and Richthofen leveraged his family's wealth to secure a small survey craft. On his way east to map the Roof of the World, though, he fell afoul of the second fall of the Samarkand citadel: a stray mortar destroyed his starboard engine. To add insult to injury, the local warlord "the Tura" suspects Richthofen may have ties to the Russian invasion, and has forbid the geographer from launching his airship even if he does get it fixed.

Exemplars

- magnifying flight goggles
- surveying utility belt
- pasty bearded gentleman

Classes

- Scientist (Technically Speaking)
- Aeronaut (Captain)

Approaches

- with Reason
- with Grace

Languages

- fluent German
- fluent French
- fluent English
- broken Mandarin
- broken Russian
- broken Arabic
- broken Thai

Amenities of the survey airship

Das Rote Gottaugen

- Observation Deck
- Cartography Room
- Coal Tender
- Bridge

Possible Wants

- repair his ship
- convince the Tura to allow him to continue his geographical survey
- obtain false flags from Sherkat to identify his ship as an ally
- acquire genealogical records of the Isro'il community to prove they are a Lost Tribe of Israel
- woo Fatemah Gul, who he has seen atop a neighboring mooring derrick



After Good Luck, Vasily Vereshchagin

ZÜHRE, MY LIFE AND SOUL—

I am writing this quickly to let you know that I am safe and unharmed. I did not know I would be travelling into a battlefield! Or rather, I knew I would be travelling into a war, but I assumed it would be a simple affair and over quickly. I hoped to ride the wake of the fighting and arrive after the dying was over. Instead, I arrived just in time for the counterattack that returned the city to Bukharan hands. The details of that are trivial, but I knew you would want to hear from me regardless.

A few thoughts on the Turks here before I take this letter to the airship courier. I know you are just as interested as I on the nature of this far edge of the Turkic world. I was led to understand that Bukhara was ruled by Persian emirs and its sister states Khiva and Quqond by Mongol-descended khans, all of them peopled primarily by Turks. The reality seems slightly more complicated.

The peoples here—Kazakhs to the west, Tajiks to the east, and Uzbeks in the middle—have seen invasions from the Mongols to the north and the Persians to the south over the course of centuries. With each wash of conquerers, the people pick up foreign customs and dress, and have been doing so for so long that it is difficult to say what any of them were originally. Kazakhs are definitely Turks; Uzbeks are probably Turks. Tajiks... perhaps they are Turks? Their speech is foreign, but perhaps they lost their original Turkic tongue in some ancient conquest.

All of which is to say, my task of convincing the people here that they have more in common with the Turks of their distant west than with their Mongol and Persian overlords will be difficult. I've no doubt that this entire region will eventually fall to Russia. Without petty tyrants forcing them into outdated molds, they will shed their backwards ways like snake skin. Then our real work will begin, uplifting our fellow Turks, educating them in the modern ways pioneered by Europe, and bringing our people out of savagery.

After I conclude this letter I will turn to writing for the newspaper. Again with the Russian words and grammar, so stiff, unyielding, and awkward. As always, I dream of writing in Turkish. One day, my love, we will publish a newspaper in the language of our people, uniting Turks in the heady world of knowledge no matter if they live under the Ottomans, the Russians, or petty khans and emirs dreaming of feudal glory.

But in the meantime, I write for the Russian paper. I will send you a copy of the manuscript, my love.

Your little lamb, Ismail

ISMAIL GASPIRALI, PAN-TURKIC NEWSPAPERMAN

With a spare, wiry build, Gaspirali seems to swim in the ill-fitting three-piece suit he wears in quiet defiance of the billowing local fashion. He keeps his close-cropped hair tucked beneath a red fez but cultivates an impressively wide moustache. A simple single-knotted tie cinches at his neck. More often than not, his spring-powered recorder is in his hand, ready to take down statements for his next article or to record the local dialect on the wax cylinder nestled inside.

Born in Crimea and educated in Moscow, Ismail Gaspirali sees the future for his people in the modern world of Europe. The only problem is that his people, the Turks, are a poorly-defined ethnic group spanning three continents and with little sense of shared history. Gaspirali has worked as both a teacher and a journalist—and most often both—from Russia to Crimea to Anatolia to Egypt. Everywhere he has gone, he has seen his people getting slowly left behind the ever-accelerating world of modern progress. He believes if the Turks can only realize their common cause, they can establish modern schools, simplify their splintered language, and stride forward into the prosperous light of the modern day.

Hired as a war correspondent, Gaspirali came to Samarkand in the wake of the Russian Imperial Army to cover its glorious victory. Events did not progress as expected, but Gaspirali is not overly concerned. As promising as he finds the prospect of Russian conquest of Turkish lands—and subsequent enfranchisement of Turks in the Russian Duomo—his real goal is to see first-hand the furthest edge of the Turkish world. If he is to see his dream of pan-Turkism come to fruition, he must first understand the many variations of his own people. What he has found in Samarkand troubles him, however, and he is finding himself moved to act for his brethren.

Exemplars

- tailored three-piece suit
- handheld wax recorder
- spear-mustachioed tan gentleman

Classes

- Journalist (Headline)
- Mondaine (Rumormill)

Approaches

- with Grace
- with Honesty

Languages

- fluent Turkish
- fluent Arabic
- fluent Russian
- broken Uzbek
- broken Egyptian

Possible Wants

- recruit the Tura to pan-Turkism
- organize Samarkand citizens to demand democratic reforms
- establish a secular school
- publish a broadsheet revealing the Tura's brutal massacre within the citadel
- convince Richthofen to catalog geographic features by their native Turkish names

ESTHER MOUSSAIEFF, ISRO'IL MATRIARCH

It may be easy to overlook Moussaieff at first, but not for long. Eventually eyes are drawn to her imposing frame draped in black and the palpable aura of grief and simmering anger that surrounds her. Her hair is pinned back and her face is drawn, carving new lines into features not quite old enough to bear them. Her hands pass a small prayer book back and forth, the only trace of anxiety that she betrays.

Tracing her ancestry back to the high-legencary rabbi Yosef Maimon, Esther was raised in the prosperous, religious household of her father, a pillar of the Isro'il community in the city of Bukhara. It was no surprise when she married well, to the jeweler, banker, and merchant Shlomo Moussaieff. His business required the couple to split time between Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva, and Esther immediately set to work quietly building and strengthening networks of family, business, and religious connections in each city. They had four children.

When the Russians came to Samarkand, Shlomo met with the invaders to welcome them to the city. He had great hopes for Russian rule. They offered much greater religious and economic freedoms than the casually repressive policies of the Bukharan Emirate and Khivan Khan. Shlomo would never see that day, however. He and his delegation of fellow sympathizers were caught in the citadel during the Tura's reconquest. When the Beg's slaughtered family was discovered, the entire delegation was executed. Esther buried him and sat Shiva for a week, receiving visitors to share their condolences. The widow dedicated that time to identifying and organizing those among her community willing to take up arms or sabotage the Tura's forces. Now as the week of mourning closes, she prepares to act.

Exemplars

- torn black mourning dress
- palm-sized prayer book
- stout ashen-faced matriarch

Classes

- Revolutionary (Unite!)
- Herald (Sanctify)

Approaches

- with Grace
- with Misdirection

Languages

- fluent Bukhari
- fluent Uzbek
- fluent Russian
- broken Arabic
- broken English

Possible Wants

- cripple Samarkand's defenses
- petition Gul Beg (wherever he is) to punish the Tura
- reveal Gul Begum's secret
- get a message out to the Russian forces, sharing critical weaknesses of the Tura's forces
- see the Tura dead



Kazakh with a Fur Hat, Vasily Vereshchagin

TO MY COUSIN, JURA BEG—

My soldiers collected the bodies of the noble family, for bathing and shrouding. The burials will occur at dawn. However, there was a discrepancy. By my memory, the Beg of Samarkand possessed six sons and five daughters. We found only five sons and five daughters.

Perhaps we will find the body of this missing son elsewhere in the palace. If we do not, then the boy — the youngest, he should be nearly twenty — is the proper Beg of Samarkand. I do not wish to inflate your hopes, but you may have one surviving nephew.

— Baba Beg

HELIOGRAPH #3827, DECODED VIA CIPHER A

To Sir Ronald Ferguson Thomson, Envoy Extraordinary to Persia—

The Tura continues to rebuild the city, shoring up the citadel he himself just breached, paying off the mercenaries who helped him, and strutting about as if he were a fabulous hero. I do not know why you had me help him; I regret it already. But I do as you command, my lord; your vision exceeds mine, even if your vantage point is distant Tehran and I float directly above the little Khanates you have taken such an excessive interest in.



Baccha, Vasily Vereshchagin

FATEMAH GUL BEGUM, MISSING HEIR OF SAMARKAND

Slight and retiring, there is nothing that Fatemah Gul desires more than to melt into the background and be blessedly ignored. The young woman hides her delicate features behind a curtain of her glossy black hair and wears a beige canvas jumpsuit two sizes too large. She carries a set of mechanic's tools with her as if waiting for an excuse to use them instead of make conversation. Very occasionally, though, there is a glint of gold and scarlet at her throat, betraying the presence of a pendant far too fine for the common laborer she pretends to be.

Pretending to be someone else and hoping not to be noticed is a common theme in Gul's life, which began in the Samarkand palace as the bey's sixth son. While Gul knew from an early age that she was female, she feared the consequences of refuting her family's assumption that she was male. She told no one, living in silence, shame, and fear, for the better part of two decades. She could not even bring herself to confide in her childhood friend, Abdul Malik. Her only escape was reading about the developing field of aeronautics; she even convinced her father to allow her to "crew" on a (quietly and very well compensated) packet airship running mail and cargo to the capital and back.

When the Russian invasion seized the Samarkand citadel, Gul managed to escape to the Afrasiyab mooring derricks. Her packet ship was not in port, so she snuck aboard the long-haul cargo ship, the *Aaftaab Gardaan*. She was discovered in short order and brought before the ship's captain, Zandohkt Sherkat. To her surprise, though, she was not thrown onto the street but offered a position in the crew, instead. More desperate than suspicious, Gul accepted, giving her name as Fatemah. Now she waits to see what will befall her childhood home, and struggles with whether she will return to it.

Exemplars

- inscribed ruby pendant
- heavy steel wrench
- tawny young woman

Classes

- Duelist (Taunt)
- Aeronaut (Sky High)

Approaches

- with Misdirection
- with Honesty

Languages

- fluent Farsi
- fluent Uzbek
- fluent Arabic
- broken English
- broken Russian

Possible Wants

- keep her identity secret
- get out of Bukhara
- gather support for her claim to the beylik
- fabricate an alternate heir
- a private audience with the Tura

PERSONS OF NOTE

ABDUL MALIK TURA, SAVIOR OF SAMARKAND

Literally head and shoulders above most of his peers, Abdul Malik has the shining demeanor of a man unaccustomed to losing. His smile is infectious and his bravado compelling; it also doesn't hurt that he is covered in expensive fabrics expertly tailored to his frame. His signature purple silk turban seems to float above his head, as effortless as the rest of his successes. Jewels wink from the hilt of his scimitar. The only note that might seem off about the man are the heavies and toughs that follow in his wake, far less polished than their employer and plainly dangerous.

The third son of the Bukharan Emir Muzaffar al-Din bin Nasr-Allah, Abdul Malik was never going to see the throne himself. As he developed a reputation as a black sheep, that possibility grew ever fainter, until his father sent him to the distant Ghusar district to serve as its hakem. It was there, outside the palace and confronted with the very real problems of Bukharan subjects, that Abdul Malik discovered a sense of responsibility for the common people. Without much in the way of resources from the capital, he made allies among the hill tribes and with local mercenary captains, and in time became so well-regarded the people called him Tura, a mark of respect.

When the Russians invaded and seized Samarkand, the Tura immediately sent word to the palace, but was disappointed with the lukewarm response from his father. So he rounded up his allies and marched on the ancient city; a week later he liberated it and was not just the Tura but a hero. The warm glow of that victory has not yet faded, but it is beginning to occur to Abdul Malik that he has no plan forward from here...

Exemplars

- sharp and jewel-hilted scimitar
- rich purple turban
- tall, bright-faced prince
- fractious mob of mercenaries

Classes

- Ringleader (In Charge)
- Mondaine (Charm)

Approaches

- with Honesty
- with Force

Languages

- fluent Farsi
- fluent Uzbek
- fluent Arabic
- broken Russian

Possible Wants

- find "Gul Beg," the missing heir to the Samarkand beylik
- commandeer airships in port to defend against the inevitable Russian return
- root out Russian spies within the city
- secure Gaspirali's endorsement
- marry Fatemah Gul Begum

I have picked up a new crewmate who might be of interest to you. Young and pretty, found on the streets of Samarkand shortly after the Russian invasion. And with a secret! At first I thought the child was a bacchá, a dancing boy, escaped from a cruel master. I think you have something similar in England? Boys who are admired for their feminine qualities and used by older men to sate their sexual appetites? I think someone referred to Eton as a clearinghouse for such business. Perhaps I misremember the details.

But I have strayed from my point. My new crewmate later insisted on being a mukhannath. I do not know an English word that has the same meaning. When they are born, the midwife says they are boys, but as they grow older, they come to realize that they are women. As you can imagine, there is often some confusion as to their status, but Muhammed said they are women, and I do as the prophet says. And as the British hand on my leash says, of course. I never forget this.

But all of this is not the secret I mentioned before. The girl's sad secret is that her father was the Beg of Samarkand. All her family is dead. This would leave her as the heir to the beylik—but only if she were a man. Of course the girl never claimed to be mukhannath before the fall of Samarkand, and her uncle and the Tura are quietly tearing apart the city trying to find his nephew. I know the hadiths, but I should tell you that this far north, where they are barely muslim, the status of mukhannathun are a little murkier. I do not think they would count her a woman; I do think they would consider her exactly the piece they need to consolidate power in Samarkand.

I must admit I have taken a liking to the girl, but I continue to live in dutiful fear of you and your office, your Excellency. I don't want you to discover I had rescued a potential heir to the Samarkand beylik and did not at least offer to hand her over to your tender mercies.

Would you like me to deliver her to be fitted with puppet strings? Or should I do the work myself? I can tell her that a British agent saved her from having her throat slit, and she must swallow everything she knows about herself, claim the title of Beg, and rule Samarkand in the interests of the far-off British queen who blackmailed a humble trader into doing her dirty work. Perhaps you are better suited to the work. I'll tangle it all up.

Or you could let me take her to safety. I try not to ask for much, but I'll make an exception this time. I know you are thinking that you can use her, but she would make you a terrible tool. If you let me keep her, or put her out of harm's way, I promise I will be your loyal, useful catspaw. I won't even make jokes about your hallowed childhood school.

Please advise, holder of my leash.

— your favorite puppet, Captain Zandokht Sherbat
A STEAMPUNK PORT-OF-CALL - 9

THE FOOLS.

I have retrieved Shlomo's body. They piled corpses in heaps outside the citadel, Russian soldiers and Samarkand citizens alike, for anyone who cared to collect them. A few of the Tura's men stood watch and jeered, or perhaps they were there exclusively to jeer. They called me a traitor's bitch and a whore of the invaders. And somehow they wonder why we welcomed the Russians into the city.

The funeral will be tomorrow at Makhallai Yakhudion, and then I will retreat to our home. I will observe all the proper customs; Shlomo certainly deserves it. But I will also be seeing every son and daughter of Isro'il in this city. They will come out of respect for my husband, but they will also come out of grief and desperation and anger. Justly earned anger from injustices inflicted upon us.

I will speak to them about their anger. I will counsel them as to its proper use. I will fan that anger aflame. And I will introduce those with the hottest fires within them to each other. And we will plan.

The Tura does not know how feeble his grasp on this city is. The strutting fool does not appreciate how small a fraction of the Russian force opposed his incredible victory, and he discounts the very idea that the city itself can turn against him. We shall show this vainglorious warlord that his dim-witted, brutish, bloody ways belong only in Samarkand's past, along with the emirate itself.

You might say this is not a holy use of my Shiva, but this can not be the first time that mourners plotted revolution in between blessings and prayers. They will pay for my husband's death, and after that is done, we will have a peaceful city where our community can bloom.

—Esther Moussaieff

COMING TO SAMARKAND

It's not hard to entice a crew of picaros to visit Samarkand. Not only is it "on the way" for just about any trip between East and West, the combination of its weak government and heavy trade traffic makes it a smuggler's paradise. Most picaros of any experience have been through Samarkand a few times.

To get specific, though, here are some reasons your picaros might select Samarkand as their next destination:

- If they need something hard to get or maybe not usually legal, they can get it at Samarkand. Shlomo Moussaieff has a solid reputation in imports and exports... or at least he used to, before the Tura killed him. Maybe his widow can help the picaros out.
- The geometric designs that cover the madrassa facades in the Registan are in fact a coded message from the seventeenth century.
- In order to track down an ancient Atlantean site, the picaros need a map with a level of detail not otherwise available. If the area in question is the Alps, the Carpathians, southeast Asia, Japan, Java, Celebes, the Phillipines, or the American West, well, the man to ask is Ferdinand von Richthofen.
- There's a price on the head of Abdul Malik Tura; was it the Russians who put out the hit, or perhaps the Tura's own father? Or someone else, seeking to blame one of the obvious suspects...
- An ancient summoning ritual was divided into twelve parts and given to each of the Tribes of Israel, to be passed down generation to generation as chants and blessings. Much of the ritual has been reassembled, but the Naphtali and Isaachar segments are still missing. The German missionary Joseph Wolff insists that the Jews of Bukhara are in fact the long-lost descendents of Naphtali and Isaachar.
- The picaros need to get aboard the regular packet airship from Tehran to London; Zandokht Sherkat knows exactly how.
- General Konstantin von Kaufman of the Imperial Russian Army would like some intelligence on the forces presently occupying Samarkand. What is it he's got that one of the picaros cares about?
- The picaros have come into possession of a dozen crates of top-of-the-line rifles and carbines. No better place to unload such a haul than Samarkand; its trade network will whisk those crates off to somebody who needs them faster than you can say Silk Road.