**Chapter 3:**

**Factions and Guilds**

Many guilds, factions, and other conglomerates that are not political bodies hold power and sway over the lives of those who inhabit Northern Media. Each of the most significant ones are described here, with just enough detail to give them structure and an idea of how they operate and their major roles in society, but vaguely enough to allow room for modification to most easily fit into your DM’s world with minimal work.

The Adventurers’ Guild

Formed in the closing cycles of the War of Flames, the Adventurers’ Guild was founded by the immortal Setal. After witnessing first-hand and living through two separate cataclysmic and world-endangering events in the forms of the Age of the Dragon – which he feels personally responsible for – and the War of Flames, as well as desiring a way for the common people to be able to defend each other without the need of armies, alliances, and militias, Setal believed the best way to achieve these goals was to enfranchise those who wanted to strike out on their own and explore the world, and who in so doing inevitably confront great threats and slay horrible monsters.

In addition, Setal saw 3 major problems with the current state of civilization: the first, and biggest, being that the various races of the world did not have a lingua franca, a common tongue, with which to communicate; the second was that the world did not have a common currency with which to do trade and collect taxes; the third was that the world did not have a common calendar with which to describe the current day, month, and cycle. The first was solved with the creation and proliferation of the Common language – both spoken and signed – which is now used in most of the civilized world; the second issue was resolved with the printing of the Aeon currency, which is now the universally used currency on Northern Media and is accepted in most places in Ahkos and Frigus; and the last issue was dealt with via the creation of the Bahamian Calendar, detailed in Chapter 2: Calendar and named after the dead Titan Bahamut, whose bones make up the foundation of Setal’s home city, and the one in which he started the Adventurers’ Guild.

For adventurers themselves, it primarily offers 2 services: quests for the taking, given to it by the local populace, and a place to sell their acquired treasures. When someone gives the Guild a quest, it also gives a reward for the completer of the quest, a small piece of which is taken by the Guild, which is one way through which it makes the money it needs to run. The other way is through reselling the treasure sold to it by adventurers.

In return for its services, the Guild asks for only 2 things:

1. To not deliberately work against the Guild, the punishment for which varying depending on the severity of the offense, from a fine to having a bounty placed on the offender;
2. To answer the call of the Guild should it ever go out, the punishment for failing to do so being a bounty being placed upon the head of the offender.

The Aetherian Guild

The Aetherian Guild is a conglomerate of thousands of Aetherians the world over, who use the Guild as a way of keeping in touch, training new generations of Aetherians, collecting and preserving knowledge, learning about the mysteries and powers of Aether, and of selling their services to those who desire them. Sometimes, the Guild will take control of a source of a particular type of Aether – especially Quintessential – but this is an infrequent occurrence, and that source will usually be sold to the highest bidder. The major decisions of the Guild are made via democratic vote, with other, smaller decisions and logistical tasks (including the Guild’s finances) being handled via committee.

The Aeon Bank

Emerging alongside the rise of the Aeon, the similarly-named Aeon Bank is Northern Media’s single largest bank, and is used by millions the continent over as a safe-keeping repository for their wealth. Particularly popular with adventurers, the Bank rose to prominence at first as a subsection of the Adventurers’ Guild, but split off to become their own entity as the Aeon – and by extension, the Bank – continued to grow and gain popularity with the people. In addition to its money-holding services, the Bank also converts other forms of currency – both old and contemporary – into Aeons, allowing for an easy transition from one currency to the other. Though not explicitly led by Setal himself, due to the overlap with adventurers and being its founder, the executive branches of the Bank and the Guild are often in close contact with one another.

The Alchemy Guild

The Alchemy Guild is one of the oldest guilds on all of Aethra, having existed – at least in some form or another – since the days of the Age of Learning. The Alchemy Guild serves two primary purposes: the first is the training and licensing of alchemists, so that they might practice their craft safely and for the good of the people; and the second is to control the sale and production of gunpowder, primarily through control of its ingredients. Only licensed alchemists can purchase the ingredients for gunpowder from the Guild at guildhalls, and to be discovered selling gunpowder without the proper certifications will typically invoke the wrath of the Guild – something no one wants, as at best it means they will no longer provide their services to you (either indefinitely or for a time they determine), and at worst they may place a bounty on your head. This is by no means a perfect system – alchemists can always be trained in secret or abandon their vows, and gunpowder ingredients can always be found or stolen, or bought, sold, and grown illegally – but with a substance as dangerous as gunpowder, any system that helps stymy and supervise its development, sale, and use is better than none at all.

The two secondary purposes of the Alchemy Guild are the creation and sale of concoctions and enchanted items, as well as the acquisition of any discovered relics. Because of this, there is a great deal of interaction – and even some overlap – with the Aetherian Guild, leading their members and leaders to become familiar with each other and often creating interesting – and sometimes disastrous – feuds, though the two guilds have always held a respect for each other, no matter their disagreements.

The Alchemy Guild is led by a committee whose members are elected. Though this is a lifetime appointment, committee members can be impeached if they violate the responsibilities of their office and/or the values of the Guild.

The Cabal

Originating as a united force of various militaries to fight the invading Scorched during the War of Flames, what was originally known as The Cabal of Northern Heroes has since fallen from its former graces and devolved into something else entirely. As the War is largely over, the Cabal no longer goes on active campaigns against the Scorched that inhabit Southern Media, but it has taken up the role of patrolling and protecting the Dwarves’ Bulwark mountains from any further invasion. In so doing they contain the Scorched within Southern Media and keep the denizens of Northern Media safe.

However, due to both its history (and the reputation it used to hold) and its current role in the world – especially Northern Media – the modern-day Cabal exists in something of a paradoxical state. In short, to join the Cabal is seen as both a great honor and a horrible punishment. They protect the continent, but from a decreased (and often downplayed) threat. Historically they’re heroes, who slew Scorched by the score and protected the innocent, but today they simply march through a couple hundred miles of mountains and watch the border, occasionally skirmishing with rowdy Scorched. They are a necessity, but many believe they don’t do anything and should be disbanded. The Cabal have fallen greatly from their former glory, but no one else will take on the job that they perform and so they must continue to exist.

In fact, more often than not, the Cabal recruits their new members from criminals, orphans, royal bastards, and other vagabonds that simply have no better options. To join the Cabal is, for most, a life sentence, though rare exceptions do exist. To become one of them is to lose your current life for one of misery and hard work with little reward, but also to protect the continent and join a (former) league of “great heroes”, absolving yourself of any past crimes and bringing great honor to yourself and your family.

The Cabal is led by a small committee consisting of representatives from each subsect – two from recruitment, one for finances, and three representing the actual main force that patrols and watches over the Dwarves’ Bulwark. These representatives choose their successor from a pool of the most accomplished soldiers in the Cabal. If more than one representative selects a soldier, then the soldier is allowed to choose which sect they represent – otherwise, if they are chosen, then they must succeed the representative that chose them.

The Church of Aether

The Church of Aether is a religious sect devoted to the worship of the 12 gods – described in Chapter 6: Gods and Titans – and, by extension, the 12 forms of Aether and each element. Some of the Church’s temples may focus on a particular grouping, such as Corporeal, Ethereal, or Quintessential, or even on a particular god and their element, such as Fire, Magic, or Dark, but most every church that worships one or more of the gods and their respective element(s) belongs to the larger Church itself. In very rare instances, the especially devout may be rewarded by their favored god in the form of making them an Aetherian, skipping the need for ingesting Aether and the subsequent suffering from Aether Sickness, though again, this is a rare and unreliable method of becoming an Aetherian, especially for the Quintessential elements. The Church is led by a council of 13, with each element being represented by a single Holy, and the thirteenth being the Holy Speaker, who plays the role of arbiter during disputes and acts as the Church’s public speaker and face. Ideally, the Holy Speaker does not owe allegiance to any one element or subsect of the Church, but values and worships each one equally.

Kiervik Derkil

Roughly translating to “The Night Hand” in Bahric (also The Hand in the Night, the Hand of Night, or other similar phrases), Kiervik Derkil is easily the largest and most powerful criminal organization in Northern Media. They are a collection of smugglers, thieves, drug distributors and, when the need arises, assassins who are not afraid of working outside the law to get what they want. They are no stranger to silencing any who get in their way, typically through bribes, though when those fail they are perfectly willing of using more permanent and cheaper methods. Other, smaller criminal organizations do operate within Kiervik Derkil territory, but never without express knowledge and permission from them, and usually with some form of payment to allow their continued existence, and these smaller organizations usually end up being absorbed into Kiervik Derkil anyway. Though they do face harsh opposition from both governmental bodies and others who oppose their ways – including competition from other mafias – they are still justifiably feared throughout the continent, and far more often than not spoken of in hushed whispers. They are led by the Nighthand family of Bahraks.