

By Paul Norman

The Awakening has been a much anticipated expansion for Legend of the Burning Sands. I say "expansion", although in fact The Awakening is the first real Legend of the Burning Sands basic set, since the last two expansions contained only two factions each, and the original "Shadow of the Tyrant" set contained only three. While there was no doubting that Shadow of the Tyrant was a good set, the small number of available factions (plus the Assassins being difficult to play without rare cards) meant that a lot of games tended to be Moto against Senpet, which could get a little repetitive after a while.

The Awakening set gives us for the first time the full twelve factions of Legend of the Burning Sands, including the five completely new factions of the Yodatai, Ra'Shari, Ivory Kingdoms, Houses of Dahab, and The Celestial Alliance. It also contains over

three hundred completely new cards, and includes reprints of some of the more fundamental cards from previous sets in the starter decks only (although note that starter decks also contain new cards, including three of the new rares per starter).



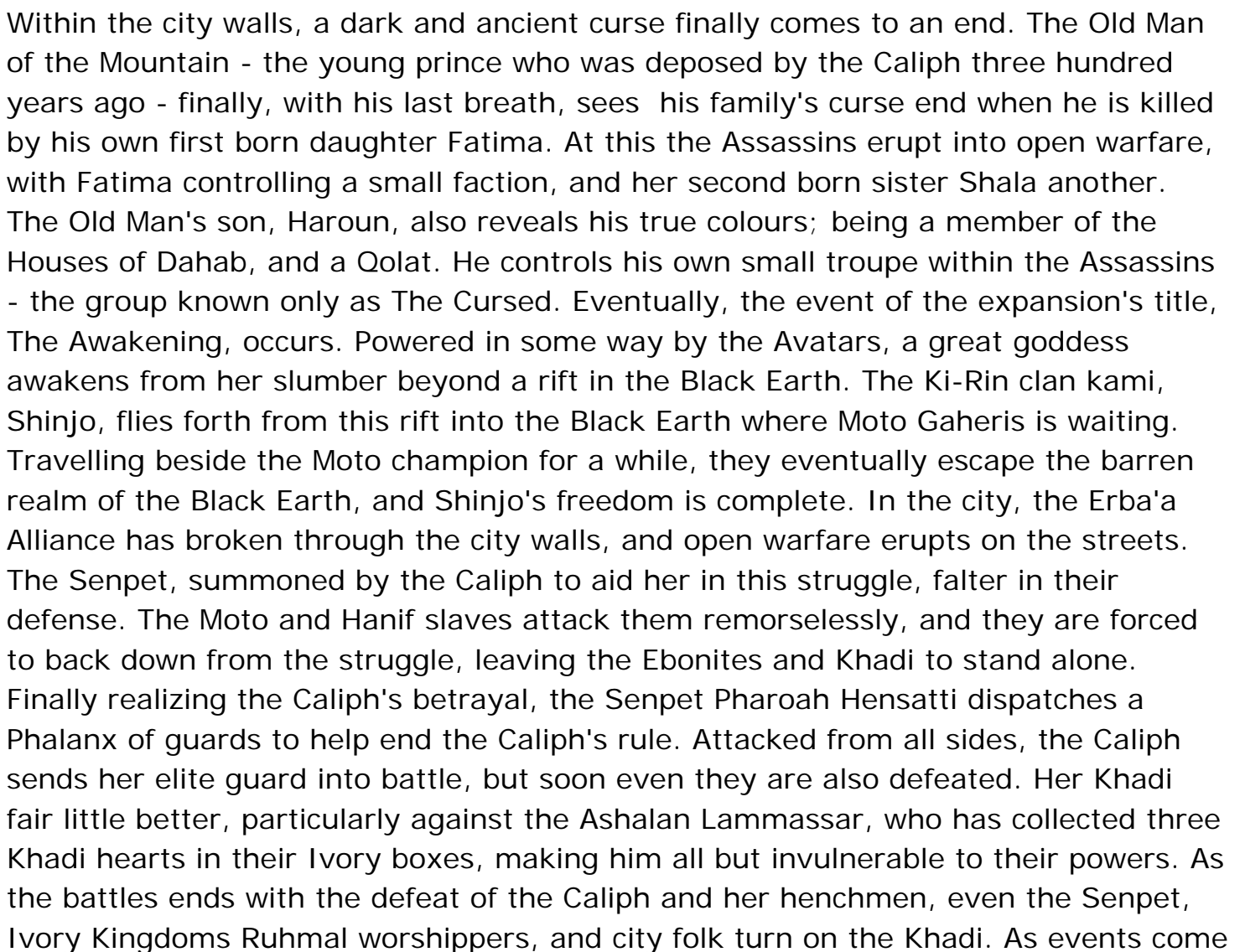
The Awakening set also concludes the first story arc of the Legend of the Burning Sands storyline. Following on from the storyline of Black Hand, Black Heart (the previous LBS expansion), the Moto Tar-Khan Kiyoshi has built a powerful Horde intent on storming the city of Medinat al-Salaam to end the rule of the Caliph and her Senpet allies. His forces are soon joined by the Yodakai and Ra'Shari factions. The Yodakai have already had preliminary clashes with the Senpet, with their Strategists slowly taking note of the Senpet's ways and tactics. The combined Horde (now known as the Erba'a Alliance), also swells its ranks with many former slaves of the Senpet, now hell-bent on revenge. The Senpet are unable to stop the Horde from advancing on the city, where they set about laying siege to its walls. Inside, the Ebonites attempt to rally the people of the city into defense. But even their formidable skills of organisation prove ineffectual, as the Yodakai wheel in catapults to pound the city walls.





Elsewhere, the previous heads of the Moto are undergoing their own separate trials. Believed lost by their people, the former Khan Gaheris and his wife Kara undergo divine experiences. In the secret Ashalan city of the Seventh Star, Kara trains under the Ashalan sandsmith Maymun, and slowly feels the power of the Goddess that makes her one of the four Avatars who will bring about the new age. Meanwhile, Gaheris' travels take him to the spot of land known only as the "Black Earth", where even he cannot guess the soul changing experiences that await him. Elsewhere in the sands, the rest of the Avatars gather. Little Amru, hidden by the Qabal in their attempt to keep the Avatars safe from the Khadi, searches for her surrogate father Hekau. But when she finally finds the mighty Qabal champion, he has changed forever; a mighty Jinn has sprung forth from his being. The other two Avatars are somewhat of a surprise. Zahra, one of the twins Janan is one of them.

After a ferocious battle with her twin sister Kamilah, Zahra struggles through the sewers to the City of the Seventh Star to fulfil her part in the prophecy. The final Avatar is not Selqet/Bayushi Kachiko, but in fact her fellow Scorpion, Shosuro Tage - currently with the Moto. Selqet herself IS rescued, however, by the mysterious stranger known only as "The Eye of Night". As many people have suspected, The Eye of Night is none other than Toturi's henchman Dairyia in disguise (who had vowed to follow Kachiko to the ends of the world if necessary, in order to discover the whereabouts of his Emperor).





to a close, two Ashalan attempt to flee the city. Named Sylmun and Bakira, they are the birth parents of the first Ashalan child to be born in centuries. The story ends with the installation of the Assassin Adira as the new Caliph. Only time will tell how strong her grip on the throne will be, and one suspects her tenuous grasp on power will hold only so long as the city's true powers allow her to. With the escape of Lady Shinjo from her imprisonment, Lord Moon has finally returned to the Burning Sands for the first time since the long ago Day of Wrath. But the prophecies and portents, including the capture of the child Onaja by a dark Jinn, point to this as the signal of a new, dark age for the Burning Sands and its inhabitants. Only time will tell how this new age unfolds.



That concludes my look at the storyline aspects of the new set, and these aspects all make for a thoroughly enjoyable tale indeed. Now for a look at some of the cards. The set obviously introduces the five new factions, and their various specialties. The Ra'Shari tend to favor card advantage over their opponents, both through their Stronghold, and through cards like their champion, The Living Memory, and the potent Hero Fazil. The Yodatai have many heroes that carry the berserk trait, and also have the champion with the highest Strength in the game in Aurelian. They also have a useful hero in Adrianna, who has something like the tactician trait, except the Strength boost happens both before the battle, AND doesn't deplete your cards in hand. Their Stronghold is a bit of an enigma, having by far the lowest number of City Points (they are the only faction who cannot start with five City Sections). However, the ability of their Stronghold does allow them to gain City Sections after destroying those of their opponent. This is made slightly more difficult by the fact that you must

bow the Stronghold to gain a section in this way though. The Ivory Kingdoms tend to favor archery attacks, and though their champion starts off with the lowest overall stats of any champion, she gains +2S/+2K permanently every times she destroys an opposing Hero in a battle or duel. The Houses of Dahab offer another interesting faction for deck building. They have easily the highest number of City Points of any faction in the game with their Stronghold, The Doomed City of Laraman, which is backed up by them having no faction restrictions on their City Sections. While a new City Section (The Last Stop) allows both the Qabal and Ebonites to play six City Sections if they want to, The Houses of Dahab are the one faction who can easily start with six City Sections, even without it (and The Last Stop does have a drawback, so I suspect most other factions will only play with at most five City Sections). On top of that, they are able to use several of the powerful Moto specific City Section, Secret Well. Combined with the 10 card starting hand, this provides immense card drawing. The other new faction, The Celestial Alliance, is a bit of a mystery at the moment in storyline terms (in fact they were called for a long time the "Mystery Faction" on the lbsinfo mailing list). They have a couple of strong points, including not being eliminated from the game because of zero Water, and they can also recruit unaligned Heroes for one less Copper. The Celestial Alliance also has one of the biggest champions in the game in Lurza, who has both a Strength and Ka that are even higher than Gaheris'! These factions blend in well with the LBS storyline, and indeed two or three of them were hinted at in previous sets. The Awakening also has a completely new card type in the Pantheon cards. These add a wonderful flavor to the game, because they depict the favor of the gods of the people of the Burning Sands - and being able to summon the very gods of the game to your aid is something that seems to add an extra dimension in some ways. The Pantheon cards have black borders, and enter play as an Open action. They remain in play somewhat like an enchantment does in Magic, generally having some global affect on the game (for example, Vishnu the Preserver reduces the Strength of all attacking Heroes by -1).



With regard to new versions of old card types, we see experienced versions of some familiar Heroes. Adnan, Haroun, Kara, Nim, Seff Seven Fingers, Shalimar and Monkey Man are among those who get experienced versions in The Awakening. Experienced cards always add a nice touch for gamers who already have the previous versions of the card. Each faction also has a completely new Ancestral item in their respective starter decks. Both the Ancestral items and Experienced Heroes offer some interesting abilities. The Awakening even offers a new way to win through the Omen card "Old Friends". To win via this card, a player must produce 30 Influence in one go, by bowing cards that they control. Certain cards in the set also directly play out the storyline of the expansion. Shinjo's release is depicted in "Voice of the Star", and the various "Goddess" cards. The Goddess cards are a set of four cards that also provide an alternative method to victory, but only if played in the correct sequence. If you can manage to set this sequence up successfully, then a "Kirin" City Section is created on your side at the end of turn, and you win the game if it is still in play at the end of the following turn. We also follow the story of the Ashalan child through the Heroes "Sylmun" and "Bakira", and through the Omen "Onaja". You also see the eventual death of the Old Man of the Mountain through the cards "Rite of Assassination" and "Immortality's End". "Ulterior Motive" and "Unexpected Rescue" shows the story of Selqet's rescue by Dairya, following on from the previous Black Hand, Black Heart card "The Tale of Selqet and the Eye of Night". Given their prominent role in the storyline, it's a slight disappointment not to see cards like Selqet (perhaps as an unaligned Hero) and Shinjo (perhaps as a Moto Pantheon card) in the set. LBS is obviously a game which must have its own separate identity from L5R, but - like it or not - many LBS players are drawn to LBS through L5R, and



there is no harm in shamelessly playing to that audience a little. That said, LBS does establish its own identity quite successfully, in particular through this new set and the large numbers of cards and rich storyline that it provides. We also do get the story of the Scorpion clan's eventual return to the land of Rokugan, through the Story card "Dark Journey Home". A number of the other most useful cards in the set include the Holding "The Scale Man", the Omen "A Coming Storm", and the Reaction card "Routed" (all of which see action in my Moto deck this month). Another potentially useful card is "War in the Streets", although this has certain problems associated with the current ruling/wording, and awaits errata from official sources before its true effectiveness can be gauged. In keeping with previous sets, most factions also seem to have the typical 3S/3K or 3S/4K Heroes that form staples in most decks. These are essential, because only a small handful of fairly poor Heroes can be brought out with just the Stronghold, and since few Heroes have 4 Strength or more, these tend to be the most cost effective. The Awakening has made an attempt to give many of the factions at least one Hero they can play with just the Stronghold, however, although these vary in effectiveness, and tend to be nowhere near as useful as the likes of Nepherus (who was released back in Shadow of the Tyrant).



To conclude my review, let me first say that The Awakening is an excellent set, which should appeal to both new and experienced players alike. For new players it offers the wealth of factions which were perhaps lacking in the original release, while at the same time maintaining many of the more fundamental cards in the starter decks for them. For the old boys who, like myself, have tagged along since the start, The



Awakening offers an awesome culmination of the first story arc, while at the same time hinting at a possible new storyline to come. The number of cards in the set is also phenomenal, being over three hundred new cards, and over four hundred cards in total if reprints in the starter decks are included. This means that there are enough cards for almost anyone, although a new player wanting to play one of the old factions may want to try picking up some cards from the previous expansions, to get Heroes such as Abresax, Kalesha Sesh, the unexperienced Haroun and Kara, and also the various champions of the old factions. Fortunately, the company has made this transition easier through the availability of old cards for dinari (for those who don't know, these are tokens you get on packs, which can be sent in for extra cards). All of the currently available cards are from Shadow of the Tyrant (the original release), and include some of the most powerful cards in that set (and indeed the game, since that set contained some really strong cards). These even include the clan champions that were released in that set, of which The Old Man of the Mountain is essential for Assassin decks (since he is the only way in which you can repeatedly force unrefusable duels). So in short, the availability of cards is not lacking, for either old players or new ones. This is accompanied by what is almost certainly the best LBS storyline to date from the pen of Patrick Kapera. Although no news of the next release has been forthcoming as of yet, there is no doubt that this set (and game) should do well if it is put to a large enough audience. It certainly has my backing.

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