

There is only one law in Katapesh: Do as you will, but do not interfere with trade. Business is Katapesh's lifeblood, as it has been since the Age of Destiny. It was then that the country's inhuman rulers arrived out of nowhere and established an enclave for unusual and illicit trade on a stretch of eastern Garund's desert coast. Over the centuries, the lawless outpost grew into a town, then into a city, and finally into the mighty trade nation it is today.

Bards say Absalom boasts the finest markets in the world, but those markets pale in comparison with the weird bazaars of Katapesh. The city's busy markets sell all manner of goods, ranging from the mundane, prosaic, and familiar to the illicit, dangerous, and outright bizarre. Buyers from all over Golarion come to Katapesh's great bazaars, which attract traders from as far away as Vudra, Tian Xia, and even other planes. On any given street, one might meet a Katapeshi gnoll slaver, a dwarven gemner from Druma, an oni from Minkai, or an erinyes whipmistress from Hell.

Katapesh's lax trade policies allow it to offer delights and wares unavailable anywhere else on Golarion, including its most iniquitous export: pesh, a powerful narcotic distilled from the spoiled milk of a rare cactus found in the country's southern desert. Addicts from across the world flock to the lurid pesh parlors of the capital to wallow in their degenerate indulgences. Even life is for sale here, and Katapesh is a cornerstone of the lucrative Inner Sea slave trade. Its bustling slave markets host a bewildering variety of chattel from all corners of Golarion: tattooed Varisian ecadysiasts, elven rhapsodists from Kyonin, Qadiran eunuchs, Tian acrobats, fierce Arcadian barbarians, and even intelligent apes from the jungles of the Mwangi Expanse.

Power in Katapesh rests firmly in the hands of a mysterious inhuman merchant council known as the Pactmasters, an elite ruling caste who never leave Katapesh. While they actively participate in Katapesh's diverse bazaars, the Pactmasters rely on hired human agents and friendly merchant princes in their dealings with outside nations. These bizarre beings wrap themselves in flowing veils and robes that completely cloak their spindly, 7-foot-tall frames from head to toe. Ornate masks conceal their featureless faces and muffle their deep, alien voices. Conventional wisdom holds that to look upon the face of a Pactmaster is to court madness.

As a free port, Katapesh has good relations with its closest neighbors, Osirion and Nex, and with Qadira and the Isle of Jalmeray across the Obari Ocean. Katapesh has economic ties throughout the Inner Sea kingdoms as well. The one notable exception is abolitionist Andoran, which seeks to curtail the slave trade in which Katapesh plays a substantial role, and whose Gray Corsairs most recently sank three Katapeshi slave galleys in the Inner Sea in 4705.

Ankhegs, blink dogs, and predatory dhabbas roam Katapesh's interior plains alongside troops of baboons and herds of gazelle, zebra, and Nexian buffalo. The western Uwaga highlands are home to savage gargoyle clans, behirs, dragonnes, and frilled razorscales.

The biggest threat in Katapesh's hinterlands, though, are the barbaric gnoll tribes. Accompanied by packs of trained hyenas, scattered bands of gnolls range across the plains in search of slaves. No longer content to raid the southern deserts of Osirion, the gnolls frequently attack isolated villages, travelers, and Katapeshi caravans. In true pragmatic indifference, the Pactmasters welcome both the gnolls and their captured slaves in the thriving markets of the capital, but in the backcountry, gnolls are despised and distrusted.

Despite the fear and hatred they engender, the Gnolls have not been an organized threat since the Siege of Solku 7 years ago. Persistent rumors out of the west speak of Noor, the Red Sultana, who gathers a horde of warriors under her blood-soaked banner to retake Solku before sweeping eastward across the plains.

**Government:** Katapesh's plutocratic merchant council has a strict laissez-faire, almost anarchic, attitude. The Pactmasters of Katapesh impose few laws on their subjects, but they effectively have absolute power should they choose to wield it. Although it has no standing army, Katapesh is protected and its laws enforced by the inexorable Aluum, metal-shod golems powered by the bound souls of elderly slaves. The Pactmasters devote much of their attention to business and other more inscrutable pursuits, leaving the day-to-day management of Katapesh's affairs in the hands of their factor, Pactbroker Hashim ibn Sayyid. While he has ambitions of his own, ibn Sayyid is content to serve the Pactmasters as long as their gold continues to fill his personal coffers.

**Katapesh:** The teeming metropolis of Katapesh, second in size only to Absalom, consists of closely packed stone tenements interspersed with wide stone plazas. These plazas provide space for the city's ever-changing temporary bazaars and fairs, as well as more permanent markets like the Peculiar Emporium and the infamous Nightstalls. A cluster of twisting marble minarets capped with shining iridium onion-shaped domes towers over the city center. These are the homes of the mysterious Pactmasters themselves, the entrances guarded night and day by faithful and vigilant Aluum. The most influential temple in Katapesh is the Immaculate Repository, where the clergy of Abadar—under the leadership of Master of the Vault Jalal Abdul-Abadar—offer banking, storage, and surety services to the city's merchants.

**Lightning Stones:** The Lightning Stones are a line of 20-foot tall pointed menhirs in the southern reaches of the Barrier Walls mountains, near the border with Nex. Lightning strikes these menhirs with unnatural regularity, causing otherwise invisible runes and glyphs within the stones to briefly glow after every strike. Garundi legend says this is where earth and air elementals square off in combat. Dwarven legend says the stones funnel lightning deep into the earth for aberrant purposes.

**Okeno:** The city of Okeno boasts the most profitable and varied slave markets in the hemisphere, known as the Fleshfairs. Okeno's notorious yellow-sailed slave galleys regularly ply the sealanes, carrying living cargo from Avistan, Garund, and beyond.

**Solku:** The walled town of Solku lies in Katapesh's western reaches. Gnoll tribes from White Canyon besieged the city in 4701, but their attempts to enslave the population were rebuffed at the Battle of Red Hail by paladins of Iomedae, who all perished in the battle. Today, a small but dedicated band of paladins of Sarenrae, the Dawn Vigil, remain vigilant against further gnoll incursions.

**Zolurket:** When the platinum mines of the small Dwarven outpost known as Tar Urkatka played out, the dwarves who worked there vacated the area. The mines and Dwarven ruins left behind gained the name Zolurket, Keleshite for "Dark Death." The few brave explorers to venture to Zolurket and return report that most of the mines remain intact and are haunted. Stories differ, though, as to the nature of the haunting. Some claim ghosts of dead miners, others a burial ground uncovered by mining, and at least a couple report a lich infestation. Other rumors also whisper that the mine isn't played out at all, and that the dwarves left for some other reason.

### **The Nightstalls**

The Nightstalls is Katapesh's most infamous market. Anywhere else in the world, such a place would be an underground black market, forever at risk of discovery and closure. In Katapesh, though, the Nightstalls can display its wares openly and proudly. While commonplace contraband like information, drugs, poisons, and smuggled relics can be found in the Nightstalls, most of its patrons come seeking more exotic and vile wares: diseases, diabolic contracts, cursed and corrupt magics, and even such rare magical components as the tears of a new moon, a madman's dreams, or the screams of a thrice-slain virgin. It is said that even souls can be bought and sold in the Nightstalls. All trade in the Nightstalls takes place under the watchful eyes of the Osiriani tiefling Khaf ira Blacktongue and her Duskwalker guild, who take a cut of every transaction.