

The Holy Kingdom of Sefora (Seforad)

Seforad is a once extremely large trans-oceanic empire that claims to trace its roots back to one of the world's oldest civilizations. In recent centuries it has declined greatly and lost control of many of its colonies. This has fed much discontent and ferment at home.

Emblem: Upside-down golden crown on a violet and white starburst.

Capital: The Sunken City, Ediru. Ediru is built over a city built over a city built over a city built over a city... built over one of the most ancient cities in the world which may or may not have borne the same name. Some houses' basements open into the ruins of old dwellings which have been boarded up, some streets of the city are abandoned ruins from older eras bleaching in the sun, and the rising and shifting river Adlis has drowned and then preserved the remnants of some of the older settlements. There have been times when it was bustling, but now the river port has only a few hundred thousand people.

Largest City: Cutlelasta, a city of nearly a million in one of their older colonies that grew prosperous on trade in subsequently gold then timber then beef and now estrite

Other Large Cities: Quite a few including their ancient rivals and allies in the kingdom's heartland as well as several prosperous ones in the colonies that have not yet demanded independence.

Demonym: Zetian for those actually of that privileged ethnicity. The rest often introduce themselves by their colony or region name if not particularly loyal or as Seforadians, which is not really correct but is still in common use.

Currency: Sufs, in theory. Sufs were named for the currency of the realm in Sefora's time and were very small, squarish gold ingots imprinted with identifying information and a date in imitation of the currency of his ancient time. The currency held up well for a long time until the discovery of massive amounts of gold in some of the new colonies began to upset its value. As gold became much more common and the empire minted more sufs, they rapidly lost value. But the government of Seforad needed to mint even more to fund their ongoing wars of conquest and self defense at home, causing the currency's value to fall further despite all crude and heavy-handed efforts to stop the slide. Although the value of Sufs eventually stabilized as the gold boom ebbed and a time of relative peace followed, many had been impoverished by the significant inflation and confidence and value were never fully restored to the currency- which because it was meant to be a sacred part of the country's traditions could not be changed.

Worse was yet to come. When The Change came 164 years ago and not very long thereafter a means was developed of turning iron into gold, its value collapsed almost entirely over the course of a few years. To make matters worse, this was an era in which the government of Seforad was engaged in a vast number of wars against revolting colonies.

The currency to this day remains nearly worthless and is rarely used despite much too late efforts to prevent counterfeiting. People prefer to use foreign currencies or have even reverted to a barter system and the government finds it hard to make people accept sufs for their products even at gunpoint. Wealthy

manufacturers often sell things for government favors instead. Even dragons no longer usually bother stealing them.

Government: Theoretically a sort of permanent regency waiting for the promised return of the ancient prophet-king Sefora from his hidden home in the sacred mountain, Altakor. Although of course he has been either dead or hiding for nearly 2000 years, the government is still claiming merely to be an interim one warming the throne for him till he returns. Thus although the country is titularly a 'kingdom' it has no king.

Trying to hew close to the ancient days of Sefora, the government is headed by a ruling council that nominally has a representative from each of the great families of his day- with the leader being from his own sacred house. In actuality, no one has any real idea at all which if any ancient family they are descended from and so the upshot is that each province of the Seforad heartlands gets to elect a councilman for life. In keeping with Sefora's teachings, women are not eligible and furthermore cannot vote. Not many men can vote either, only those who can afford to have themselves certified free from demonic influence which costs a significant- though not enormous- amount of money. Elections are very rare anyway, usually just once in a lifetime so that sometimes people live and die without ever having a chance to vote if their representative is long-lived. Each representative is called a patriarch since in theory they are the male head of their great 'family' and when they make their journey to Ediru to take up the reins of power they take many trusted associates or cronies with them. These become the bureaucrats who run day to day affairs in their own province as directed and organized by their representative.

Rule beyond the homeland is done somewhat differently. The ruling council of patriarchs must vote unanimously to appoint some prominent citizen the governor of a certain region or homeland or perhaps the general of a certain army. They then may or may not grant his requests for men and money and material to organize and use as he sees fit. In practice, most of these governor-generals make sure their requests are setup to get political approval but other than denying these requests or recalling the governor completely, the council has little direct control over them. This sometimes leads to fairly apolitical and effective rule in a colony and sometimes in complete corruption and mismanagement. Being appointed a governor is often seen as a plum assignment indeed. On occasion, certain effective governors have become so powerful that they revolted against Seforad entirely.

Most political struggle revolves around either influencing councilmen to do what one wants to ensuring that your man wins the election when it finally comes.

The church of sefordam wields great but indirect political power. It is often they who decide which candidates are elected and who will actually be made a governor or general since no one wants to lose their approval and with it all legitimacy. The centuries of colonial rule have somewhat disorganized the church since it had to spread out through the whole empire. While it was once very structured and hierarchical, now all its different priests answer more to whichever among them is more popular than to whoever supposedly has the highest rank.

Population: No accurate census available, but many millions. Slavery and serfdom have been abolished piecemeal with the last holdouts eliminated less than twenty years ago- at least on paper. Citizenship is limited to men who can prove some religious education and at least 50% ethnic zetian heritage. All others are still usually granted most rights of citizenship in practice but live a precarious existence because if they offend the wrong person, they could be jailed without trial or otherwise mistreated. A very few colonies have managed to twist the arm of the council of patriarchs with threats of rebellion until they were formally granted citizenship and deemed honorary zetians.

There are significant organizations fighting for citizenship rights for women and others and they are making some headway, but are not working together very well and are often politically labeled as rebellious or heretical.

Area: Roughly 2,000,000 square miles, about half of this being the zetian heartland. At its peak about 200 years ago, it was nearly 8 million- still with only about a million making up the heartland.

Geographical Features: The empire is spread out over the world with more or less random colonies having not broken free. The zetian heartland is a broad plain hemmed in by ocean to the west and south and mountains to the north and east. Several large but sluggish rivers sprawl across it and long ago made it one of the most prosperous agricultural centers of the ancient world. The long channel of ocean that separates it from the lands to the south were once actually just a long chain of lakes and it is through that area that they were invaded many times. To the east they are bounded by the vast continent of Asur which they have never colonized significantly. Up north is what they call the Northern Waste, which is actually now fairly fertile in parts and is the seat of several powerful kingdoms with growing empires of their own. The land across the sea to the south is Purunt which was once densely settled in ancient times but has become increasingly arid. There are some Seforad settlements along its coasts which are all fairly recent since its ancient kingdoms were poor and fierce.

The empire spread by the seas to the west and then south and established many large colonies, a few of which it still retains.

Military: Shrunken greatly from its heyday but still one of the largest in the world- if perhaps less well organized and trained than those of some of the northerly countries.

Their land army consists only of Sefora's Holy Guard, a religious force that spends most of its time guarding holy sites and claims to have its origins in Sefora's personal bodyguard whose fancy old uniforms and armor they still use. They are also used as garrisons in fairly unimportant places and guards for religious and political figures and are generally better trained in pomp and ceremony than fighting despite their generally good equipment. They number perhaps 20,000.

Much bigger and more effective are the Violet Marines, which were the primary invasion force of the empire. They have a reputation for brutality and are no longer as disciplined and effective as they used to be. In the modern era they were adapted from a navally transported force to also be delivered by air.

About 150,000 are kept active at a time, but many more are ready to be called up when needed.

The Grand Fleet of Sefora is the empire's navy. It remains one of the largest in the world but is not very well funded because the air force has been more prudent politically. A few of their ships still run on sail power, but most have at least been retrofitted with iron plating and to run on the seawater-estrite reaction. Most of their vessels are meant more as transports than warships since it has been a long time since they fought a serious naval threat. They have several hundred ships available and can coerce some merchants into lending ships as well. The pride of the fleet are its 4 Jormund-class battleships which amount to giant floating artillery batteries with tremendous firepower and range. These have been instrumental in putting down several rebellions in recent decades because of their terrifying potential to wipe out any settlements near the coast.

The Holy Kingdom of Sefora's Aerial Reconnaissance Division is at least on paper the largest and most powerful air force in the world. They boast many hundred scouting blimps, hundreds of small airplanes for scouting or fighting other airships, dozens of enormous bombing zeppelins armed by specially trained alchemists, quite a few airstrips in important areas, mooring towers in great numbers in most important cities, about 50 carrier zeppelins (most have no planes at any given time however), and a wide variety of more heavily armed fighting blimps and zeppelins with machine guns and small cannon as well as some bombs. Every airship can also carry at least dozens of marines but they have very few dedicated transports. This fleet however is not in good repair and some of it is quite obsolete. That many of the carriers have no planes and some of the bombers too few bombs is indicative of somewhat poor planning and its general decay.

History: The river valley of Ediru was settled long before recorded history by people who might be the ancestors of the zetians. The whole region was filled with ancient city states and settlements of many peoples. The zetians were at time one of the most powerful among these and sometimes subjugated their neighbors, but at other times the reverse was true. Starting about 4000 years ago the area- already highly developed and full of grand buildings and monuments- began to face waves of invasions from the somewhat drier southern plains across the Lakeland to the south. These were sorcerous people who employed dangerous and powerful magics rather recklessly. They were rarely able to establish lasting kingdoms but did destabilize and plunder the whole area- as well as introducing to it much greater magical understanding. It was in this, the Time of Chaos, that Altakor is first recorded mentioned as a sacred place. One of its eruptions devastated a wildly successful army from the south. This was seen as a act of divine intervention and legends of miracles began to spread around it.

Between occasional bandit raids from the north, the sinister magicians of the south, and an occasional serious invasion from the east by one of the also ancient civilizations of Asur, it was many thousands of years before the region knew lasting independence. About 2000 years ago, the great Sefora rose to power as a prophet turned warlord. Charismatic and a skilled leader, he united the whole area under Zetian ethnic rule and drove out the foreign invaders, beginning to establish an empire. When one group in his coalition betrayed him however his forces were defeated while they were beginning to invade Asur and he disappeared- presumed dead by all but his followers who claimed that he had gone into hiding in the

sacred mountain and would return when the world was worthy of him. Sefora had always claimed to be chosen by the gods- or even a divinity himself- and the religion that sprang up around him only flourished more after his supposed death. Eventually it engulfed or obliterated all previous religions of the area and came almost to define Zetian culture.

Even with Sefora dead, the foreign invaders were never again successful- at least not widely. For about a thousand years the area was the center of a succession of kingdoms and republics of all descriptions. Some lasted more than a century, but there was no one stable country. Zetians were still not always in charge.

About 700 years ago, the country in charge was the newly formed Holy Kingdom of Sefora. It was not much different from many of its predecessors but had the good luck to emerge in a period with few major threats. It grew and prospered and engulfed all rivals, establishing a very vigorous and orthodox Sefordam religion and a somewhat popular political one that was not opposed to the church because it claimed only to be ruling till Sefora returned. This was also the era when the southern lakes that had been rising for a long time at last grew together entirely to form a new limb of the ocean. The southern zetians had been growing better at sea navigation for some time and this only encouraged them. Within about 200 years the zetians were beginning to go on trading voyages around to the south- and then to scout west. It wasn't long before they began to find lands across the sea. Overpopulated and militarily powerful, they were quick to begin to colonize the area. The overseas civilizations proved to be rich but less developed and made fairly easy conquests. Slowly but surely the empire grew by conquest for about 300 years until it was one of the largest the world had ever seen. This, however, benefited very few people. Sea captains and military leaders and those who could monopolize trade with the colonies prospered, but few benefits reached common people. Further, the massive increases in gold supply because of rich discoveries in the colonies greatly damaged their currency's value and the wars distracted resources that could have built up the homeland. Still, Seforad was one of the best places in the world to live during this period.

By the time of the Change 164 years or so ago there was increasing resistance in the colonies and more pressure from Asur and other civilizations. The government didn't stop pushing for more colonies and Zet, economically damaged, ended up overextended. Extremely difficult and bloody wars exhausted them and lost them some colonies. As their homeland began to dry up and was impoverished by poor government and too frequent wars, new kingdoms and rivals emerged in the warming north.

The slide into ruin has been very slow and gradual, but has been consistent for the last 200 years. The people of Sefora are now generally dispirited or angry.