On the planet Beacon, humanity survives in the shadows, just below the surface of a grey jungle, surrounded on all sides by salt seas and fierce predators capable of laying waste to entire villages.

Once a year, the desperate tribes of this hostile world are given a reprieve from their struggles as the sun peeks out from behind the moon and the moths are banished to far off lands.

 On the planet Reprieve, society has beaten back the night with torch and flame. People build great cities with the help of lost technologies and squabble over the space and resources needed to feed growing populations.

Once a year, the disparate clans of this thriving world hide in fear of a threat lured to their lands by a beacon in the sky. For one month, the moths upend the natural order until the moon goes dark once more.

# Why Mothlands?

 Mothlands is a setting of wilderness survival and world exploration. Players will be challenged with harsh environments, mysterious ruins, and the ever present threat of the setting’s supreme predators, the moths. Mothlands also offers opportunities for interpersonal and societal conflict between cut-throat rivals and independant nations vying for dwindling territory.

# Is it Sci-Fi or Fantasy?

 Mothlands takes elements from pulp science-fiction and uses them to craft a world with heady fantasy themes, but it’s flexible. The lost technology that once connected the worlds of Beacon and Reprieve might be a dilapidated space elevator wired to a nuclear reactor or a green swirling portal powered by glowing crystals. Regardless of the details, Mothlands focuses on personal drama, political intrigue, and the mysterious legacy of the predecessors: those who engineered it all.

# What are the Moths?

 In the worlds of Mothlands, a “moth” is a common name for many different creatures. What they share is an attraction to light, an imposing physicality, and the traits needed to travel between Beacon and Reprieve: the adaptation of enormous scaled wings reminiscent of a real world moth or butterfly.

Moths harbor no fear, nor hatred, of human-kind. They are possessed of strange forms and complex life cycles, and while they are not intelligent in the ways we understand, they are cunning. To face one is to tempt death.

**The Passage: How I Came to Live among the River-Wise**

 I am not of this world. I mean that not in the colloquial sense, though certainly at times I have felt like an outsider amongst the people who have welcomed me so warmly into their company. Even my captain, to whom I owe my life, my livelihood, and my family has not heard the whole of this story except once, in a tongue she did not understand, from a version of myself that seems so distant now.

 Today I travel back to that time. I relive that moment of loss and discovery. Today I relate to all my passage, from my distant home in the Twilight world you call Beacon.

 I grew up a young man in the village of Life’s Blood. not unlike the River-Wise, my people were considered scholars of the night sky and people of trade, but we were not travelers or shipwrights. My people rooted themselves to a village hidden beneath the canopy of a grey-red forest. Ours was known as Tribe-Home and it was a meeting place for nomadic peoples.

 One day, my father surprised me with a gift. I had been studying the mysteries of auger with a mentor, a knowledgeable sorcerer who had devoted many decades of her life to learning the secrets hidden within the puzzles of the Navigators. My father, seeing that I had devoted myself fully to my studies, had negotiated three difficult trades to acquire for me my first auger. One not yet attuned to another.

 It saddens me, looking back now, to relate to you that this gift would soon drive a divide between my father and I. One wider and longer than all the rivers of Reprieve laid end to end.

 The auger was a simple thing. An iridescent object, no larger than a milk-fruit’s pit, resembling both a lidded eye and the carapace of a beetle. A seam down the middle suggested something hidden within and so I wore it as an amulet around my neck, hoping the key would come to me as I went about my studies.

 I had been wholly unsuccessful in solving the secret of the object when one day, the first day of what we on Beacon call, “the month of Reprieve,” its purpose became clear to me.

 Our people gathered on the hilltop near our village to watch the migration of the Moths from our world to your own. It pains me now to think about how we celebrated this, but know that Moths harrow the people of Beacon year round. The Fallen Leaf have learned to stay out of sight and survive in the undergrowth but the month of Reprieve is the one season those of the twighlight are allowed the pleasure of traveling freely upon the surface.

On the dawn of that day, in the dim light of the still shaded valley, I saw something that no one else could, a beam of shimmering moonlight reaching up into the sky. Moths flitted in and out of this light, floating up into the space between our worlds like ash from a fire. Tracing it back, I could see the source was less than a leg’s journey from where I stood.

After confirming that only I could see this, I had resolved to travel there and plumb its secrets for fame and, looking back, for respect.

 It wasn’t an easy journey, even in the relative safety of Reprieve month, there are other dangers in the twighlight. Venomous plants, stinging insects the size of dogs, quicksand and root beds that give way suddenly and snap ankles like hollow reeds. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the origin of the moonlight, which I could still see clearly in the daybreak, was a dwelling. Constructed in the time of the Navigators. It still twinkled in places with colored lights. Its secrets were known to me as my people had visited this place many times before in order to commune with the spirits. We also knew it to be infested with moths. Their larvae squirmed and struggled in the nearby forests like maggots around a carcass.

 But now the place appeared changed. My eyes were drawn to a flat stage beneath a roofless sky. The lunar light, so bright here, seemed to emanate from the floor and I stepped there, into that bright circle, looking upward in amazement through to the dark center of Reprieve.

As my eyes adjusted I failed to notice the beginnings of the amulets activation, the opening of the iris. The unfolding of four soft wings patterned blue and green and gold. I noticed this only after they had begun to envelop me. After my feet had left the ground.

I floated upwards through the tear in the ceiling; through to the sky. Unable to stop myself. I fell softly upward, encapsulated in the luminescent wings, as though lightly weighted. I swam through the air as if suspended in the clearest river water. And I felt my heart pounding in my chest, realizing the danger I had put myself in

Gaining my wits about me, I angled myself towards the edge of the light but thought better of it when I saw how high I had flown, already many hundreds of feet above the forest.

In moments, I was through the sky, in an empty blackness between worlds. Though it was as dark as the night, the stars seemed brighter here, and I felt as though there were many I had never seen before. What’s more, I could hear the spirits speaking in my ear, louder than ever before, confused and jumbled but excited, too. Pondering this calmed me, helped me to focus and understand that, even if I were to die here, amongst the stars, I would perhaps be the first to see them in their full glory.

then came the fluttering of wings.

In the moonlight I flew amongst the Moths as one of them. To my great relief, they did not sense me amongst their terrible forms, floating as I was upon iridescent wings towards Reprieve. Whatever trouble the amulet had gotten me into, I was grateful for its protection.. they soon surrounded me. Thousands, and so many kinds.

Strained by an intense curiosity and terror, I could look no longer. I shut my eyes and wished myself to sleep. Blessedly it came.

As I awoke, lying on a stage so similar to the one I had left behind, I wondered if it had all been a nightmare, Staring out through the ceiling, I saw a strange blue sky and white clouds. This was not Beacon, where the moon remains still in the night sky year round and the sun is a hint of light dancing at the rim. I was lost, desperate and alone in this place. At least until I laid eyes upon the first sails I had ever seen, upon the ship that would be my home for years to come, drifting upon waters that would flow farther than any child of Beacon could hope to travel in ten life times.

-I am Formin Abasi of The Swift Bell and of Beacon and this is my accounting

Civilization in Mothlands

*The following is an accounting of the rulers, nations, and territories within and bordering The Twilight, on Beacon and The Untamed Territories, on Reprieve.*

#

**Regions of Beacon**

 **The Parched Lands:** Separating twilight from still lands is a ring of salt desert hundreds of miles in diameter, referred to as parched lands. Despite being free of Moths, few live in the bounds of this place for long, as freshwater rarely touches the earth here for more than a moment's time. Warm air from this region is an important source of heat and rain in the twilight.

 ***Factions****: ?*

**The Still Lands**: It is thought that the Moth’s themselves come from a place of near total darkness rumored to be somewhere beyond the confining ring of the parched lands. This place is referred to only as still lands.

Rumors from the edge of parched lands say that on a rare day of clear skies, during the month of Reprieve strange spires can be made out on the horizon, their glassy exteriors twinkling in the new light.

***Factions****: The Cypher, The Undead, Bright Warren, Rat-Kin*

**The Twilight of Beacon**: Beacon is a wild place. Nearly half the planet sees not a day of sunlight, thanks to the unique orbit of the world around both its twin and the sun. As such, Twilight exists in a region of near perpetual eclipse and is the only known area of the planet inhabitable by human life.

 Twilight is lush and warm, covered in grey jungle and red brine. Occasionally the region is swept by storms sweeping in from parched lands but otherwise the skies are astoundingly clear.

One would do best not to venture too high, however, as the canopy is the domain of moths and their offspring. What’s more, what little light shines here is harsh on the skin and eyes. The young translucent leaves of trees can filter out this harsh light but even in the month of reprieve, stargazing is a dangerous activity.

***Factions****: Tribe of the Fallen Leaf, Moth’s Blood Tribe, The Roach, The Keepers, The Ash Speakers, The Chronicler’s Covenant, Acrid’s Confidantes.*

# Peoples of the Beacon

 **Fallen Leaf**: The people of the village Life’s Blood are one of the few peoples of **Beacon** who are not nomadic. They have made their home in the undergrowth of the jungles surrounding the lake-spring from which the village draws its sustenance and its name. Far below the canopy, they train in stealth and careful movement and survive by trapping and hunting the enormous arthropods that venture from the tree tops to the forest floor.

 Though small, their tribe is respected. Their burrows are often used as gathering places for the other tribes of Beacon to negotiate and trade with one another. For this reason, The Fallen Leaf are considered to be skilled diplomats. Thanks to their propensity for trade, they are also host to a larger than average population of sorcerer scholars to the disdain of some.

 The village of Life’s Blood is also the meeting place for the elders of other tribes, making it a reservoir of familial knowledge. These elders make up **The Chronicler’s Covenant**: a group tasked with the preservation and proliferation of knowledge throughout the peoples of the twilight, regardless of creed or conflict.

 **Moth’s Blood Tribe**: A fierce tribe of hunter/warriors who pride themselves on their courage. They revere the moth’s as cunning predators. They also have a reputation for being more territorial and violent than other tribes on **Beacon**.

 Moth’s Blood warriors are well known for participating in periodic moth hunts, in which they band together to take down one of the large predators. A Moth’s Blood will risk life and limb to land the killing blow to the creature and so earn a trophy with which to honor their family.

 Though this practice is extremely dangerous, it has contributed greatly to the tribes knowledge of moth behaviour and physiology, as well as earning them martial respect from the other tribes of Beacon.

 Having managed a lasting peace with the other tribes for several generations, there are still grumblings of conflict within the family from time to time. One experienced warrior, **Acrid**, has slowly garnered support for new and more unified tribal order. He and his confidantes are patient, a trait that many Moth’s Blood lack, and their patience may just see them succeed.

 **The Roach**: An oddity of a tribe. Its members live largely alone in small family-based cells of two to three members. They regularly converge to share information and supplies with fellow Roach, agree on a destination and time, and separate again. They often encroach on the territory of other tribes but their small cells make them simultaneously less threatening and more difficult to snub out.

 Despite their focus on independence, members of this tribe share a strong familial bond and cultivate a living oral history that changes over time to reflect current events and newfound knowledge.

 **The Keepers**: Though they are most commonly known by other, more derogatory names, this taboo bending tribe refer to themselves as The Keepers in reference to their reverence of the holy fire. Fire is forsaken amongst the tribes of the twilight unless carefully controlled and respected. The Keepers push this superstition to its limit, building great bonfires during the month of reprieve and creating secret forges in which they craft metal implements and weapons.

 While their cultural practices garner them disrespect, their craftsmanship is highly prized in trade and in plunder. Few have been bold enough to declare war on them, however, for fear that their shelters will be set aflame and they will awaken to Moths at their doorstep.

 Driving many of these practices are a small but powerful collections of sorcerers within The Keepers known as **The Ash Speakers**. These individuals do not lead the tribe, but they do command a great deal of power and spiritual respect. Rumor has it they meet frequently at the borders of parched lands and conduct profane rituals with which they may speak to the predecessors themselves.

**The Hidden Races of Man**: In the dark hallways of still lands, descendants of the predecessors survive. Twisted by a life spent indoors, surviving on the ancient sorceries of auger, they struggle and they die. Their forms have been changed by demonic forces but their minds are still sharp. Whether they are human is another question altogether. They are **The Undead** and their wails and screams echo in the stillness.

Even here, though, there are temporary alliances that allow for villages and even cities to arise. Through posturing, manipulation, and the threat of violence, the perilous community of **Bright Warren** has huddled together in the lobbies and skyways of an enormous predecessor structure. Here, individuals from throughout still lands have gathered.

Hermits, families of rovers, and even a few bandits looking to retire or settle down as best they can have followed the broadcasts sent out by a powerful sorcerer known only as **The Cypher**, drawing them together to share in the heretofore inaccessible bounty of auger that surrounds them.

Still, some drawn in by The Cypher’s promises of belonging and luxury find his rules and regulations stifling, preferring to chew at the edges of civilization, forming their own hierarchies and pecking orders. These people are referred to by the people of Bright Warren as **Rat-Kin**, and their presence is a constant nuisance.

**Regions of Reprieve**

 **The Red Wastes**: A clay desert broken up only by scrub brush and deep canyons, the red wastes occasionally bloom into beauty after a deluge but are otherwise barren. The few Tecahtan settlements that survive here are largely dependent on trade between the settlements of the untamed territories and the peoples of the South as well as the white waters of the river Limnant, which is only navigable in late autumn and early spring.

 One blessing: most moth-breeds appear to have a distaste for the region and do not linger here long during the month of moths.

 ***Factions:*** *Overseer Klaara’Ro, The Corvid, River Dockers, Letter Ringers, Acquired Peoples, Bristler’s Den, Pride’s Favored*

**The Shallow Seas**: South of Tecahtan land is a vast peninsula bordered by great salt seas, the largest in the world. Though they are far reaching, they are not deep. As far as anyone can determine, a man could swim to the bottom of the darkest waters and survive.

Many rivers flow here, and in the salt marshes that surround these seas, life is vigorous and abundant. Many cultures have formed here, taking advantage of the natural resources and waterways to travel and to trade.

Unfortunately, moths seem to have a special fondness for the salty water of the shallow seas and larger settlements and kingdoms do not last long as a result.

***Factions:*** *Captain’s Counsel, The Starwatchers, The Scattered Peoples, Tanaga Greywater, The Remainer*

**Tear Bed Mountains**: To the West of the vast plains is a ridge of high mountains commonly known as the Tear Bed. These rocky spires serve as a natural barrier to travel between the plains and the untamed territories. Due to the difficulty of hunting in these mountains, their vulnerable position during the month of darkness, and inhospitable weather, the Tear Beds are home to few civilized people. One exception is the small kingdom of Wind Home, which has come into newfound wealth as the keepers of the Passage of Tears.

***Factions****: House Yiojino, Ji’Imbe That Speaks for Spirits, The Crestfallen, Those Who Stay*

**The Tecahtan Empire**: Founded several hundred years ago, the Tecahtans have touched many peoples across the southern hemisphere of the continent. Tecahtan villages are connected largely through a web of rivers and trade routes. This has proven highly important for a region not typified by any one terrain or resource except, perhaps, fresh water.

Travel through the empire can be difficult, due to the many waterways dividing the terrain and flowingWest and South, to the shallow seas. At its northernmost point is a desert of clay sands and scrub in which many of its most durable traditions were forged. Though settled the vast desert is a natural barrier to those wishing to make the journey to untamed territories.

***Factions****: The Spirited Way, Emperor’s Teeth, The Corvid, Tecahtan Citizenry, The Acquired Peoples, River Dockers, Mice, Letter Ringers, The Tradesman’s Throng*

**The Untamed Territories**: A region of evergreen forests, mountains, streams, and hot springs spanning thousands of miles. It is relatively untouched by modern day civilizations. It lies between the empire of Tecaht'na and the vast plains of the East. Though it is spotted with settlements and trading posts, no one power has yet laid exclusive claim to its bounty.

The River-Wise were the first documented peoples to explore the territory, but word of rare goods and untapped resources quickly attracted people from the East and South.

***Factions****: Freelands Settlers, Trappers Lodge, River Dockers, The Corvid, Letter Ringers, Crookhorn Clan, The Inquisitives, The Makers Congress*

**The Vast Plains**: An expansive region of flat earth broken up only by the occasional low hill, lazy stream, or worn canyon. The peoples of this region have organized into roving familial clans, though there are a few small kingdoms encompassing a handful of villages and hilltop castles. The plains are home to several species of robust herd animals upon which the people in this region rely for sustenance, their territories mirroring the migrations of the creatures as they travel across the plains.

***Factions****: Ridgecrest Clan, Featherback Clan, Cloudseeker Clan, Rin Darrow: The Stampede*

**The River Limnant:** This network of rivers, created by the chain of mountains splitting the continent from North to South, serves to both divide and unite the peoples of Reprieve. Many people, chief among them the River-Wise, call the waters themselves their home and spend their entire lives rowing, sailing, living, and loving on the currents, river, lake, and sea.

***Factions****: Captain’s Council, The Swift Bell, The Star Writ Sail, Pride’s Favored, The Night Sails, River Dockers, The Captain’s Council, The Emperor’s Teeth*

**Beyond the Shallow Seas**: No one truly knows what lies beyond the seas. Now and then, River-Wise ships sailing the shores will spot undiscovered islands on the horizon littered with strange bits of flotsam and debris resembling the materials of the predecessors. Whether this trash comes from some distant conclave of recluses or whether it has simply been floating from shore to shore for age upon age is up for debate.

# Peoples of Reprieve

**The Old Houses:** Before Tecaht’na, before the River-Wise set out on the rivers in their trade ships and barges, a small coalition of noble families ruled the peninsula East and South of the untamed territories. Ruling from hilltop fortresses, five families split the most fertile land between them, forming an alliances held together by iron, auger, and tradition.

Much of that iron, last mined a hundred years ago, has rusted now and only two of the houses remain. Having consolidated their power, **House Yiojino** and **House Micretia** watch the world pass around them from their islands of security.

**House Micretia,** of the marble isles, is rarely seen. Their ships occasionally appear off the shores, stopping to steal shepherd’s flocks in the night or raiding villages that build too close to their shores. The Witchwood occasionally have dealings with them, but few see them as trustworthy. With their thickly quilted tunics, their severely braided hair, and their aggressive hazel eyes, they project an air of superiority. One that has been worn down by many hard years of seclusion.

**House Yiojino**, on the other hand, has become more important in recent years. Their mountain stronghold, **Windhome**, overlooks **The Passage of Tears**, one of two known passages to untamed territories. The family is well known for their raucous parties, strong drink and an imposing stature equal to that of the Witchwood Clans.

Their kingdom, having once been located on the vast plains of the East, was relocated under the guidance of a prescient sorcerer. **Ji’Imbe That Speaks for Spirits** claims the location of the **Passage of Tears** was revealed to them by the predecessors. Now he acts as a judge for those who would seek to travel the treacherous route through the mountains, deciding who will go and who must stay.

Those unsatisfied with their plight, known as **The Crestfallen**, have formed a second village at Windhome’s doorstep, barely surviving in chilly hillside huts and makeshift tents. Meanwhile, those accepting their fate are allowed into the fortress walls, bolstering Windhome’s labor force.

 **Tecahtan Peoples**: Originating from an empire spanning much of the southern portion of the continent are a diverse people unified under a loose theocracy called **The Spirited Way**. Their capital is **Tecaht’na** and they are the Tecahtan peoples.

Their common religion is a form of animism centering around the unique power and qualities of non-human creatures. Of note is their belief that moths are the spirits of animals corrupted by demonic forces.

 Religious Tecahtans tend to bind their hair with beads of quartz, turquoise, and jade and are respected as great weavers, clayworkers, and artisans. It is also not uncommon for theTecahtan citizenry to openly display **Auger** with pride, as they believe these objects to harbor the benevolent spirits of animals.

 Tehcahtan settlers were among the first to establish trading posts and villages in the untamed territories, carving out the sides of canyons and hills to create dwellings from the bare rock and clay.

 The current emperor, **Mon’Na II**, keeps a loose grip on the reins of the empire, preferring to stay out of the management of the cities, villages, trading posts, and territories that fall under Tecahtan rule. Only the elite governor-generals and their servants, known as **The Emperor’s Teeth,** fall under his direct order and control.

The Emperor’s Teeth, being largely a military order, do themselves employ a loose network of spies and paid informants known as **The Corvid**. These loosely connected individuals keep them informed of the goings on of the citizenry, non citizen residents known as **Acquired Peoples** from throughout the region, and neighboring nations. Many Tecahtan in the untamed territories fall under their wing.

There are many other factions vying for influence in Tecaht’na beyond the palace walls. **The Tradesman’s Throng** champions the economic causes of Tecahtan merchants, attempting to tap into Corvid informants under the emperor’s nose. It’s flagship, **Pride’s Favored**, dominates the waters between **Desert’s Rest** and the shallow seas earning it a great deal of currency and favor.

Meanwhile, **Mice** run rampant through the streets at night, enticing the poor and dispossessed to the ways of thieves and sneaks, stealing from the rich citizens of the city and redistributing the wealth into the slums and down the riverways to villages acquired in war and conquest.

 **The River-Wise**: A disparate group of explorers, River-Wise have mastered the art of shipcraft. Their river boats connect the cultures of the region and allow for the trade of goods and information between the untamed world and the old nations. Their philosophers, astronomers, and engineers are among the most learned in the world.

 River-Wise value cultural exchange up to and including cross-cultural marriage. Their clothing is a milieu of elevated styles from throughout the peninsula. That said, they tend to share a heritage that can be traced back to their origins in the shallow seas of the far South.

 There is no single leader of the River-Wise, nor any consolidated government. There is the **Captain's Council**: a loose collections of captains, merchants, and fleet owners who meet quarterly upon **The Star-Writ Sail**, but its purpose lies mostly in mediating disagreement between members.

 Of course, the most revered River-Wise are its most famous ship captains, with **Shen Abasi of The Swift Bell** leading the fore in her expeditions to the untamed territories.

 **The Scattered Peoples**: All along the shallow seas are small communities consisting of one to three families. They find their purchase on the edges of tropical forests and seaside groves, comfortable in the abundance around them but weary of the seasons slow march towards the month of moths.

 Though separated by necessity, the people of the shallow seas do not live entirely in seclusion. Families gather in the day to share news and trade supplies. Hospitality is an important value in their culture, as travel is a tedious affair and shelter is an incredible boon on a long journey across the wilderness. Their astronomers, **The Starwatchers**, are among the most studious in the world and it is their knowledge upon which the River-Wise built their ships and sailed out into the world’s great streams and water flows.

 Sadly, every attempt to organize, to raise up seaside villages of their own, has been thwarted by man or by moth and this cycle has been ingrained in them such that their hope for more has dwindled. Those whose families have suffered as a result of this hubris know: the gods hate the night’s fire. The moon loathes the light and moths are the punishment we reap when we go against its decrees.

The victims of Moth attacks, those whose families and homes have been destroyed, are **The Remainer**. They are the orphans of the shallow seas, and they survive as a warning to all.

*Look upon these children and know, the gods have spared them for one reason only, to remind us all of the hubris of the North. It will not infect us. Let it be burnt down to the soil to rest with the dead. Let them go the way of the predecessors and be feed for fish and for worms. What the gods will not abide, neither shall we.*

 *-Tanaga Greywater, self proclaimed leader of The Remainer*

 **The Witchwood Clans**: Wandering in from the East, The Witchwood are a collection of clans pushed to the edges of their homelands by war and disease. They are not a unified people, but do share a common history and culture.

 **Ridgecrest, Featherback, and Cloudseeker** are the most prominent amongst those clans that remain in the Plains. Many more have disbanded, making the trek South, to the Eastern coasts of the Tecahtan Empire, or West, through the mountain passes of Windhome.

Their common name stems from their reverence and mastery of a collection of **Auger** passed down from generation to generation and bearing a resemblance to carved wooden figures. These objects are revered as harboring the spirits of their ancestors.

 The Witchwood are known for their unusual diversity of hair colors, which range from silver-white to red to dark black locks. Their clothes are pelts of fur, leather, wool, and down. Their shelters are simple animal skin tents but they are adept at disguising their homes and themselves with earth and vegetation to avoid the notice of others, moth and man.

 In recent years, a young and charismatic **Cloudseeker** warrior known as **Rindarrow: The Stampede** has made a name for themselves along the borders of the plains, staging raids on villages at the edge of Tecahtan Empire, denouncing both House Yiojino of Windhome and those who entreat them, all the while claiming to be the descendant of a great and noble predecessor hero.

**Religion in Mothlands**

Blessed is she who walks the well trod path for who came before guide her to safety. Blessed is she who strikes out seeking new pastures for she will guide the generations to come.

 -Witchwood saying

Religion and spiritual belief in mothlands are governed by three major forces: The remnants of the predecessors, the existence of the spirit world, and the complex cycle of destruction and abundance brought about by the migration of moths.

Interpretations of the significance of these forces varies greatly, however. The following is summation of each of the major religions and spiritual paths in mothlands.

**The Long Walk**: On the vast plains, the Witchwood march East to West, day by day, wearing the relics of their ancestors close to their skin. Now and then, the auger they wear will bless them with a vision from the past. These memories, passed down through the generations, are the basis of Witchwood belief.

“The Long Walk” is a poetic description of our life in this world. It describes the journey we make as we cross the earth, seeking security and fortune. The visions provided by the Witchwood remind us that, no matter how far afield we roam, there are those who have come before us.

Though not a religion on the rise, those who acquire Witchwood auger occasionally have a moment of revelation in which they tap into the figures power and begin to understand the strands that connect this life to the last.

**Rebirth**: On Beacon, there is one common belief held by all regardless of tribe: When we die, we are consumed. Whether taken into the earth by and and soil, scattered on the wind as ash by fire, or consumed body and soul by moths, what we are is transformed and redistributed throughout the twilight, only to return when our descendents have plucked the finest fruit, burnt the best fire, or slain the most malicious of moths.

Burial is, unfortunately, not an option for most people in the twilight. Few stay in one place for long and dead bodies quickly attract carrion eaters and fungal growths. Instead, loved ones carry an object with them representing the life of a fallen friend or family member and present it to the keepers of crypts in Tribe-Home. When a soul returns to this world, it is said, the offering awaits them.

**The Spirited Way**: The religion of Tecaht’Na is relatively new, rising alongside the Tecahtan empire. It interprets all the major forces of the world as the product of natural forces and animal spirits. The predecessors, it is claimed, failed to respect these forces and brought demons into the world.

It’s current spiritual leader is Emperor Mon’Na II, but other members of the royal family have served in the past. Worship is characterized by ritualized animal butchering, the creation of royal zoos where creatures from around the land can be admired, and the symbolic burning of various herbs and spices meant to appease the spirits. It has a few priests and priestesses, all of which are tied to the emperor’s house in some way, but their main objective is simply to spread the emperor’s word across the land.

The Spirited Way is the largest and fastest growing religion of Reprieve and it sees no sign of slowing.

**Star Worship**: In the shallow seas and the rivers, a form of astrology has taken hold of the psyche of those who depend on navigation and knowledge of non-existent seasons. Though Beacon dominates the sky, at its edges, the constellations and traveling stars of the night’s darkness hint at a world larger than our own and inspire the imaginations of people kept in rapture to the whims of the worlds’ cycles and fates.

Astronomers in these regions often serve a dual role as students of philosophy and oracles of fate. They read the stars with an eye for patterns and coincidence that harken back to past events and predictions.

Of particular importance are those stars that live between Beacon and the world of Reprieve. They streak across the skies like comets, blinking at the edges of the night, only fading as they cross well into the boundary of the moon. Sailors, in particular, depend on them for time keeping; counting the hours until daylight based on their trajectory across the moon’s surface.

Found throughout the land wherever rivers flow, constellation based decks of star-cards offer the power of prediction and serve to normalize the reverence of the constellations from shore to shore. Many sailors and gamblers alike have converted to the religion after having come to understand its unique predictive power.

#

# Technology of Mothlands

The people of the mothlands exist largely in a bronze age. Much of the worlds’ iron ore, if it were mineable, has been depleted. Precious metals, like gold, are also rare, though many cultures have access to these materials through contact with predecessor structures.

Scrap from ancient buildings is sometimes used in the construction of particularly durable tools, and various auger may be employed in the crafting and development of unusually advanced buildings and vessels. But to most in the mothlands items of copper or bronze are highly prized.

On Beacon, where mining is difficult, metal is even less common and bone, ivory, or chitin are more commonly employed. Some species of moths also have specially hardened structures that people of both worlds occasionally recover and employ.

One oddity of these cultures is that many common folk are at least partially literate, and all possess knowledge of written language, pictograms, and symbols. Even on Beacon, understanding these markings is important for those seeking to pass through predecessor territories or retell traditional stories and personal accounts.[[1]](#footnote-0)

And then there are auger.

# On Auger

In my translation of The Navigators’ language, the term auger appears again and again. Amongst the River-Wise, it is assumed this word derives from the tool of the same name. I believe The Navigators may have had something else in mind entirely. A similar word occasionally appears in reference to a substance meant to nourish and cultivate life, Another common word, augment: to change something for the greater, possesses familiar structure and connotation. Meanwhile references to a hand drill or other such tool are exceedingly rare. Perhaps this implies that auger were intentionally left for us to discover and utilize. A sort of parting gift. But if that is true, to what end are they guiding us?

 -Ekana Tajii, chronicler of The Star-Writ Sail

Auger are devices from the age of the predecessors that, despite a millenia of disuse, still manage to function. Such objects are made from advanced materials and are able to draw the energies they need to function from within their user, the environment, or internal batteries. They almost universally originate from within the ruins of the predecessors’ civilization.

Because the people of mothlands live outside the cultural context in which these devices were produced, and because interaction with the objects can sometimes be complicated by missing components or aging circuitry, divining their purpose is often a difficult ordeal. Those who make it their life's work to understand and utilize auger are known as sorcerers, wizards, witches, and similar. Mastering the art of auger attunement and manipulations may garner varying degrees of respect, depending on the culture, and many who find themselves in possession of one spend years of their lives hoping they will luck upon the secret to some incredible tool with the power to change their fortune for the better.

**Excerpt from “An Accounting of Common Auger” By Captain Shen Abasi of The Swift Bell**

I have come into contact with many auger over the years, and witnessed many more in useage. Here is an accounting of some that appear particularly common, as well as their value in trade in Freelands Crossing.

* **Witchwood Heirloom**: a fairly common sight here. The objects tend to be hewn into the rough shape of a human figure, but small enough to fit in the palm of a hand. They have a unique texture and feel, similar to the polished wood of a sweet-nut tree. Good luck trying to procure one for a fair price. Witchwood rarely deign to part with them.
	+ **Usage**: It is difficult to determine, but rumor is these auger impart some form of ancestral memory upon the wielders. Even my helmsman, Kiko, who wears one around their neck always struggles to describe the experience.
	+ **Value**: Negligible, except as an oddity. Rarely, a Witchwood clansman will come to town looking to reclaim one for their family. Those may fetch a good deal of loyalty or labor, but Witchwood Clanspeople find their trade in goods insulting.
* **Wittler’s Plane**: A thin fan shaped wedge, gripped between thumb and palm. In usage the blade may hum or vibrate slightly.
	+ **Usage**: Such auger shave through wood like a bow through blue water. Much swifter and safer than a metal blade, as they do not penetrate skin or flesh, my husband uses one to shave his beard. An essential tool for any shipwright or craftsman.
	+ **Value**: Great. I would gladly trade away a week’s worth of ships rations to replace a lost or broken plane. the time saved in repairing and replacing oars and rudder is invaluable.
* **Day Tracker**: A half-sphere with a glazed crystal surface, often rounded at the edges or held in a housing so as to be comfortable to hold in the palm of a hand.
	+ **Usage**: Day Trackers are a sort of sundial, keeping the time of day as well as the day of year via the illumination of lights from within the crystal. The dominant color indicates the time of day, from a vibrant ochre at noontime to a deep violet at midnight. The season is displayed as a pair of small blue orbs traveling along the edge of the rim, with a marking indicating the new year, at the end of the month of Moths.
	+ **Value**: Fair. These time-telling objects are highly valued by fellow travelers and those wishing to study the stars but few others. most merchants know this well. Personally, what I do not use I offer as favors to other captains.
* **Nursing Tap**: A silvery object, shaped like a wide nail, with a thick rounded end and a piercing end with a half-diamond shape. A rectangular opening nearly divides the flattened portion in two while the surface of the piercing end is porous.
	+ **Usage**: When hammered into a tree of size, the flat end can be suckled. While not particularly dignified, the sap like substance that flows from the tap is nutritious and energizing. it has little taste other than a slight hint of sweetness similar to sap of some desert plants
	+ **Value**: High. A ready source of sustenance is invaluable in times of desperation or ill fortune. If I could, I would give one to every member of my crew, but in doing so I might need to trade the crew away. A dilemma.
* **Serpent’s Tether**: Cord, coming in various colors and thicknesses, with variable texture, length, and give. I mean this literally, as the color, thickness, texture, length and give are all capable of being altered.
	+ **Usage**: Those skilled in commanding serpent’s tether are able to adjust its properties at will and with precision, giving the cord slack, making it slippery or rough, pliable or stiff.
	+ **Value**: High. rope and cord are a necessity aboard a ship, and serpent’s tether is the best one can buy. I will caution, however, that despite its many uses, this auger is particularly difficult to master, requiring not merely knowledge but manual and mental dexterity as well. In the hands of a novice, it is simply an overpriced rope.

Moths and Other Threats

 Foolish is the one who, in vigilance, stares at the sky, for there are earthly dangers that kill as quickly as a moth and without a sound.

 Foolish, too, are they who stare at the ground, for a moth’s wings are heard half as swiftly as their reflection in a vigilant’s eyes.

 -Mothblood poetry

Mothlands are, inherently, dangerous places. It is not only the presence of their namesake that makes them so. Plant and animal life on the twin worlds is robust and hostile. On Reprieve many dangerous and imposing predators dominate the landscape outside the month of moths. Meanwhile, Beacon is host to carnivorous plants, intoxicating fungal trees, and deadly stinging insects.

There are also many hidden dangers posed, not by flora or fauna, but by the carelessness of the predecessors. Their technology was not meant for the peoples of the mothlands, and many of their most dangerous inventions lie exposed and unguarded, waiting to be uncovered and misused.

Perhaps we should start there.

# Trials of the Predecessors

 **Shifting Spaces**: In the depths of some of the largest predecessor ruins, one may never be certain the path they’ve taken in is the path that will lead them out again. Doors close or shift. Whole rooms will climb or fall in space, grinding to a stop with no way out. The very materials that have allowed these structures to endure the elements for a millennia also make them dispassionate to the pleas of fist and stone.

 **Cursed Auger**: Not every auger is to be prized. Some possess flaws so great they can kill a man. Though such malfunctions are rare, a cursed auger can slowly poison a person, betray them in a time of need, or even drive their wielder insane.

 **Riddles**: It is thought that the predecessors were a people of intellect, and so it follows that some of their deadliest trials exist in the form of riddles. Appearing as mystically luminescent text on a wall or even suspended in thin air, the ancients challenge us with questions whose answers are lost to time. Some fumble through the riddles and find luck, others are rebuked and punished for their curiosity.

 **Transgressor’s Venom**: It has been said that the predecessors possessed the power to change a being’s nature; they cultivated the best qualities of man and beast and imparted them upon their offspring so as to transcend the cruelties of birth and disease. If this is the origin of the transgressor’s venom, why are its transformations so terrifying?

 **Demons:** Most spirits have no perception of those who look upon them, playing out scenes from their lives over and over as though stuck in time. They provide no context for their actions and they do not seek answers from the living.

 Demons are an exception. A spirit who responds might seem an amazing opportunity, but dealings with such beings are ill advised. Their minds do not work as ours and they may inhabit many strange and dangerous forms: flickering projections of light or animate living auger.

# Dangers of the Twilight Wilds

 **Root-Fall**: In the undergrowth, one’s footing is never quite certain. Thin roots may grow over gaps, leaves may come loose from their moorings, and litter piles might hide the entrances to pill nests or worse: moth-burrows.

 And if one ever has the misfortune of falling into a choker-vine patch, curse The Mistaken, for only luck and a sharp knife will save you.

 **Lures:** Moths do not hunt everything on beacon. Some plants have even learned to summon them, glowing at the touch of a warm body or under the weight of a creature of size. In turn, the moth’s meal feeds their roots.

 **Slivers:** You spot them on a fresh corpse, small black hairs standing straight out from the exposed flesh, but this body is too fresh to have been colonized by spores. Slivers wait for hungry scavengers to stop by for a meal, penetrating the skin and dooming their victims to a slow and agonizing death.

 **Flash Storms:** Rolling in from the rim, hot winds laden with mists from salt lakes flood in at incredible speeds. Any caught unprotected in the canopy are sure to be swept away and those who secure themselves risk being struck down by a flash of lightning.

The storms never last long, sometimes straining themselves to exhaustion in minutes.

# Beasts of the Untamed Territories

 **Crook-Horn:** Projecting from their spine, nape to skull, the antlers of these large grazers are forward facing with many branches and barbs. The males, known as “majesty,” are extremely aggressive and have been known to hold a man down with their forelimbs simply to extend a brutal goring.

 One clan of Witchwood, having relocated to the untamed territories, have claimed the Crook-Horn as their own, following them on their treks through the forests and wearing their antlers upon their crowns.

 **Stone-swallower:** With a smooth-textured skin perfectly camouflaged to blend into grey rock, stone-swallowers are physically imposing creatures who also have the unfortunate tendency to hunt in pairs. One of the creatures will startle the prey, chasing it straight into the enormous serpentine jaws of its mate.

Stone-swallowers are so named not only for their hides but also for their indiscriminate table manners; often swallowing stones or tree branches in their efforts to catch a meal.

 **Blood Snit:** Six short but powerful limbs support the long sleek bodies of a snit the size of a man, their beautiful coats belie the danger of blade-sharp beaks ready to burrow into the belly of their prey. Even hunting as a pack, blood snits are not brilliant creatures, but they move as silent as sin.

 Like all snits, these predators are occasionally prone to impressive displays of seemingly random movement and vocalization. Such fits are often the only warning one will hear when a snit is near.

 **Tree-Borne:** Living in the treetops of the thickest forests, enormous gangly creatures known as tree-borne suspend themselves between trunks, grazing in the night with long hooked forelimbs twice the length of a man.

 Considering their size and precarious position in the forest canopy, it is unknown how tree-borne hide themselves in the month of moths. Given their immense size, it may be possible that they are capable of holding their own against the terrors.

# A Mention of Moths

 **Ribbon-Spitter:** Ugly and inelegant, this moth looks and moves like a bulbous gnat on spindly legs, its four sets of buzzing wings helping it to dart towards prey with alarming quickness. Its primary threat is not a gaping maw, however, but four spindly antennae rimming its mouth like whiskers. From these it spits translucent forked tongues that twist and dart after prey like birds in chase.

 Ribbon-spitters prefer to scour stream beds and bogs. Their ribbons are especially suited for plucking hapless creatures out of the water and searching between rocks and crevices.
 They are one of the few species that do not burrow or hide in caves during the day, instead choosing to cover themselves in mud and dirt, going dormant until the light diminishes enough to return to the hunt. Their bulbous bodies, covered in muck, are easily mistaken for stone and earth.

 **Cloaked Stinger:** Gliding on silent wings the cloaked stinger sees everything within the glare of its visor-like eyes. Even in pitch darkness it senses the subtle movements of prey scampering to safety and dives to deliver a vicious strike from its club-like stinger, never halting in its flight. As its prey is incapacitated with pain it flutters down, carefully, to collect its meal.

 Cloaked stingers prefer to hunt on open terrain where there is less solid ground cover. Their ability to sense subtle movements in pitch darkness means even prey hiding in tall grass or reeds are not safe.

In the day, these moths prefer to suspend themselves from the ceilings of caverns or deep crags high up on the tops of mountains. The cold seems not to bother them much, perhaps thanks to the large downy wings for which they are named.

**Stalking Crawler:** Excepting its enormous white and crimson wings, a crawler might resemble other more common predators. What helps it stand out are its incredible strength, a tough carapace covered in white fur, and the pairs of red half-globe eyes that line each of its five head and body segments.

Stalking crawlers hunt in forested areas, where their ability at sensing and stalking prey serve it best. Even the largest prey can not sate their hunger; they kill indiscriminately, never stopping for a moment to enjoy their kill for more than a moment, preferring the game of the hunt.

When day comes and they become inactive crawlers burrow beneath the forest floor, covering themselves in turned dirt and litter. The muck dulls their bright coat, helping them blend into the terrain of Reprieve. One wonders if they ever rest on Beacon, arriving as they do in such a brilliant display of moonlight, clad in red and white.

**Armored Cutter:** Smaller than many moths, the armored cutter is nonetheless extremely deadly. In its pill form, it stands at about waist high, looking not dissimilar to many of the harmless leaf eaters of Beacon. Its body is stout and roughly ovoid in this form with four awkward legs scuttling it about along the ground. It’s wings are rarely visible, as it does not fly but twice a year.

But this is simply its resting phase. On agitation, its limbs unfold from its body, revealing powerful hind legs capable of leaping great distances in a moment. Two spear sharp pincers also appear at the front of its body, ready to sever tendons and open arteries. What’s more, their shells are formed of some of the hardest chitin, capable of repelling even those swords and arrows that strike clean and true.

Armored cutters hunt and hide only in the darkest places,preferring to stay as far from the light as their environs allow. They are the bane of those peoples who live in hillsides and caverns, as these are exactly the places cutters seek to live.

Disambiguation

**Auger**: An object descended from an ancient civilization of inventors and sorcerers. Their secrets survive almost exclusively in the form of auger, which take on many shapes and forms. They are understood to hold mystical secrets, both dangerous and enticing. Many superstitions exist regarding their origin and nature.

Auger are commonly passed down from generation to generation as heirlooms, though some may be traded away out of desperation or disuse. Activating them is often a puzzle and even within families the secrets of their usage can sometimes be lost for a generation or more.

It is believed by some that auger draw power from the individuals who wield them, burrowing down to some mysterious, possibly spiritual, reserve.

*Also:* The artisan’s drilling tool, for which these rare objects are named.

**Demon:** A creation of the predecessors possessed of supernatural intelligence. Such beings may have the appearance of spirits, sculpted metal, or even inanimate objects. They are dangerous to cross or to bargain with.

**Moth**: Apex predators of Beacon and Reprieve. Consisting of many species but most, if not all, possess scaled wings and imposing physical attributes. Possessed of the ability to traverse the space between worlds.

*Also*: Various scaly winged insect found on Reprieve. The people of Mothlands see this creature as a bad omen and many legends exist regarding a connection to their more dangerous namesake

**The Predecessors**: The ancient peoples whose ruins can be found beneath the soil and thick foliage of Beacon and Reprieve. Each culture has its own relationship to the predecessors, as well as unique names that reflect their attitudes toward those who engineered the now ancient structures and devices unearthed by the adventurous.

In general, the people of Beacon refer to this civilization in tragic or even negative terms. Perhaps the most evocative and emblematic name being that of the Moth's Blood Tribe who commonly refer to them as The Mistaken.

On Reprieve, modern cultures have spent a great deal of time and effort attempting to understand predecessor constructs and the spirit world and so their terms have a more reverent tone. The River Wise refer to them as The Navigators, alluding to the fact that their ruins can be found even in the most obscure and distant regions of the world.

**Spirit:** The memories of the predecessors survive in their works; contained in an invisible spirit world accessible to those with the will and desire to see it. The spirit world is a frightening and confusing place full of boundless information and incredible dangers. Only sorcerers know how to harness its full potential to effect change in the world.

**Sorcerer**: An individual possessing a rudimentary knowledge of, and affinity to, auger: objects exhibiting unexplained mystical power. Many sorcerers become obsessed with acquiring more and more varied auger, but that obsession is a dangerous one. There are other names for those who wield forces beyond the ordinary, but all have been touched by the predecessors’ technology in some way.



**TOUCHSTONES AND INSPIRATION**

**Tone**
The Dragon Age Series of Video Games - An epic quest highlighting interpersonal relationships, moral decisions, and political intrigue. *Also*: Avatar: The Last Air Bender (animation)

The Firefly Television Series - Rascals, low lifes, and daring dos team up to pay the rent and maybe accomplish something big while they are at it. *Also*: Saga (comics) or Cowboy Bebop (animation).

The Anime Moribito - Historically based fiction blending cultures with a low fantasy edge.

**Aesthetic**
Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind - A low tech world after the fall of civilisation. Big beautiful bugs and strange mushroom forests abound amongst ancient ruins and islands of civilization. *Also:* Apocalyptic pulp Sci-Fi/Fantasy of the early/mid 20th century.

The Numenera RPG Setting - Science as magic. *Also*: The Shannara Series (Novels)

The Comics of Moebius - Vibrant worlds with a rich culture and strange, yet earthly, creatures.

Bronze Age Cultures of Africa, Mesopotamia, the Orient, and the Americas

***Pinterest:*** [*https://www.pinterest.com/arsenic7/mothlands-inspiration/*](https://www.pinterest.com/arsenic7/mothlands-inspiration/)

1. *NOTE: Literacy changes culture, and none of the peoples of Mothlands are precisely analogous to real world cultures or races. Nor is it particularly strange to see what we might consider anachronisms. What existed once might exist again.* [↑](#footnote-ref-0)