

# Wilderness

Houses of the Blooded



*Wilderness*  
Houses of the Blooded

Written & Designed by  
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(C) 2012 by John Wick. All characters and situations are entirely fictional. Except for orks. They'll kill you, for real.

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# How to Use this Book

Greetings, fellow gamers. This is Jesse Heinig, friend to John Wick and your translator for *The Wilderness*, the ven sourcebook about Shanri, the Great Enemy. If you already own *Houses of the Blooded*, then you know about the ven, the Great Game, and the fact that this is a sourcebook designed to give you new insights into the ven relationship with the wild and dangerous lands of their world. If you don't have *Houses of the Blooded*, you'll need a copy of that to play this game, so go ask your game store owner if he has it, or purchase a copy online. I'll wait—after all, this book will still be here when you're back.

Got it? Read it? Played it? Great. Now we can put a twist on the formula.

## Ven Literature and the Adventure Story

*The Wilderness* relies on three primary sources that gave us insight into a heretofore little-known part of ven literature: the adventure story. Unlike the opera of *Houses of the Blooded*, the adventure story is a tale spun by unBlooded ven, the low-caste *vet*, to pass the time when they have a rare evening free of hard labor.

Since the adventure story doesn't follow many of the conventions of high opera—it's a totally different artistic form, and one the noble ven don't use—you may find some of its conventions different. John's writing in *Houses of the Blooded* provided a specific tone based on the operatic style, which helped to evoke the flavor of ven high opera. This book is a little bit different. While it uses the same game rules, you may find the style a bit more straightforward. Less alliteration, less repetition.

Of course, there's also the fact that my translations and extrapolations of ven source material aren't quite the same as John's. Don't let it throw you.

As you proceed through this book, you'll find a passel of material to include in your regular *Houses of the Blooded* stories, as well as some new ways to spin a tale of the ven. Naturally, you can simply pick and choose what you want. Insisting that a game group use every rule in every book is Bad Form. Using the material that helps your game is Good Form. Should go without saying. Regardless, John



and I have worked to make sure that everything in this book should give you *some* level of inspiration. You wouldn't buy a book full of contradictory rules, meaningless complications, and filler text, right?

(You don't need to answer that, especially if you've got a significant collection on the shelf.)

With the material in *The Wilderness*, you'll be able to include a new veiled House in your stories, expand your horizons to new types of provinces in the distant hinterlands, learn the forbidden and dangerous ways of the Talashan, and even charter adventuring companies to explore in the most dangerous wilds of Shanri. This, of course, also means that you'll run into strange new kinds of orks, unearth new resources, and perhaps even tell a completely different kind of story.

Here's a quick primer on what to expect from each chapter so that you know exactly where to look.

## Chapter 1: How to Use This Book

You're reading this section. It tells you where to find everything and gives a short summary of the material. This is becoming tiresome meta-commentary and on the edge of breaking that rule about filler text, so let's move on.

## Chapter 2: The Wild Places

Out at the edges of the map, beyond even the wild provinces that ven nobles hunger to tame for resources, lie distant islands and undiscovered archipelagoes. In places so far from the center of society, the very face of Shanri is different. Travel long enough and your ships will find lands unlike anything that anyone has seen before. Sere deserts, filled with strange plants, poisonous animals, and miles of worthless sand—which can be melted into valuable glass. Borean taiga, covered in permafrost and coniferous forest, home to caribou and reindeer, cold and hostile—but rich in hides, fish, and oils for hardy hunters. Savage jungles, replete with all manner of stinging, biting, venomous, and brilliant plants and animals—perfect for a



safari and a hunting trip of epic proportions. And, most desolate and dangerous of all, the glassy black volcanoes, belching smoke and fire, land of obsidian and Trouble.

Thanks to the new material translated for this book, we have a better understanding of the ven process of discovering some of these distant lands. This, of course, translates into new ways to incorporate them into your Great Game.

Naturally, expanding out into the wild meant blazing new trails (literally and figuratively) and developing the right skills for that sort of work. A typical Roadman wouldn't last long trying to map out a volcanic basalt plain, after all. In concert with many of the new places, the Houses instituted some new types of Vassals and some new improvements to their Holdings. You'll want to take advantage of them before your enemies do, of course.

## **Chapter 3: Trouble**

The ven consider talking about Trouble unlucky; that's a way to attract it. Perforce, much of their exposition about problems is veiled in allusion, metaphor, and poetic language.

Turning that sort of thing into useful game material means presenting you with useful examples, so this short section provides you with some information about new kinds of orks that have popped up in the faraway lands where the ven rarely tread. If you've read the ven source material, you might narrow your eyes and mention that some of the orks described here are clearly made up, since they don't actually appear in any ven literature. Consider it a dramatic liberty to spice up your wilderness expeditions. Besides, there's no telling whether Shanri would have come up with some of these devious designs herself, given enough time.

To go hand in hand with the new orks, I've also provided some new notions of Trouble that might crop up. Ven from the big cities and the settled, civilized estates become used to certain kinds of Trouble cropping up. If you're running a Great Game, then it's occasionally useful to change it up.

## **Chapter 4: The House of the Boar**

The Boar is one of the veiled Houses, a House that has a limited role in ven society and one that wasn't obvious from the early documentation translated



wilds and deal with the problem, whatever it was. They're just unBlooded, so if they die, it's no loss; if they succeed, then the noble reaps the benefits of having Trouble quelled and gains the acclaim of the people for successfully resolving the problem. And plenty of unBlooded are willing to risk a dangerous trip into the woods as an alternative to abject poverty, criminal punishments, or worse...

Thanks to some scant information gleaned about the ven art form of the adventure story, we now know that the unBlooded often told tales about "local heroes done good." While there is evidence that this sort of thing happened only rarely, it's just too entertaining to pass up, so in the best tradition of ven research work, I've polished it up a bit, embellished on the formula, and provided a way for you to use the material for your own adventure stories. With John's help, this gives you an entirely new way to play *Houses of the Blooded*. In fact, it's not really *Houses of the Blooded* at all, because it's about the unBlooded.

With the use of chartered adventuring companies, your nobles in *Houses of the Blooded* can send groups of... well, let's call them "expert problem-solvers" out into the wilds in hopes of dealing with particularly hard-to-reach Trouble. More importantly, you can run your own games of chartered adventurers. With this material, you can tell the adventure stories of ignoble dirt struggling to rise from the common life of the *vet*h to a glorious prominence... or of their horrible demise along the way.

## **Chapter 6: Peasant Magic**

While noble ven practice sorcery using the power of their blood, the common folk cling to dangerous superstitions. Dangerous because most of the Blooded view them as such. But peasant magic gets more than a passing mention in ven history, and as such, it deserves a section in this volume.

## **Chapter 7: Ork**

Orks are always a danger in the wilderness and this chapter gives you a whole ton of new ork traits as well as two new (and very dangerous) species of orks: the Thrudin and the Serpent Men.

## What to Do with All of This Stuff

If you're already running a Great Game, then the material in *The Wilderness* is just a season away. An explorer can come to one of the big parties, touting the strange resources found in a faraway land. A rival noble can hire a chartered adventuring company to solve a problem. New forms of Trouble can crop up. A member of the House of the Boar can arrive and take an uncharacteristic role in the Game of Houses.

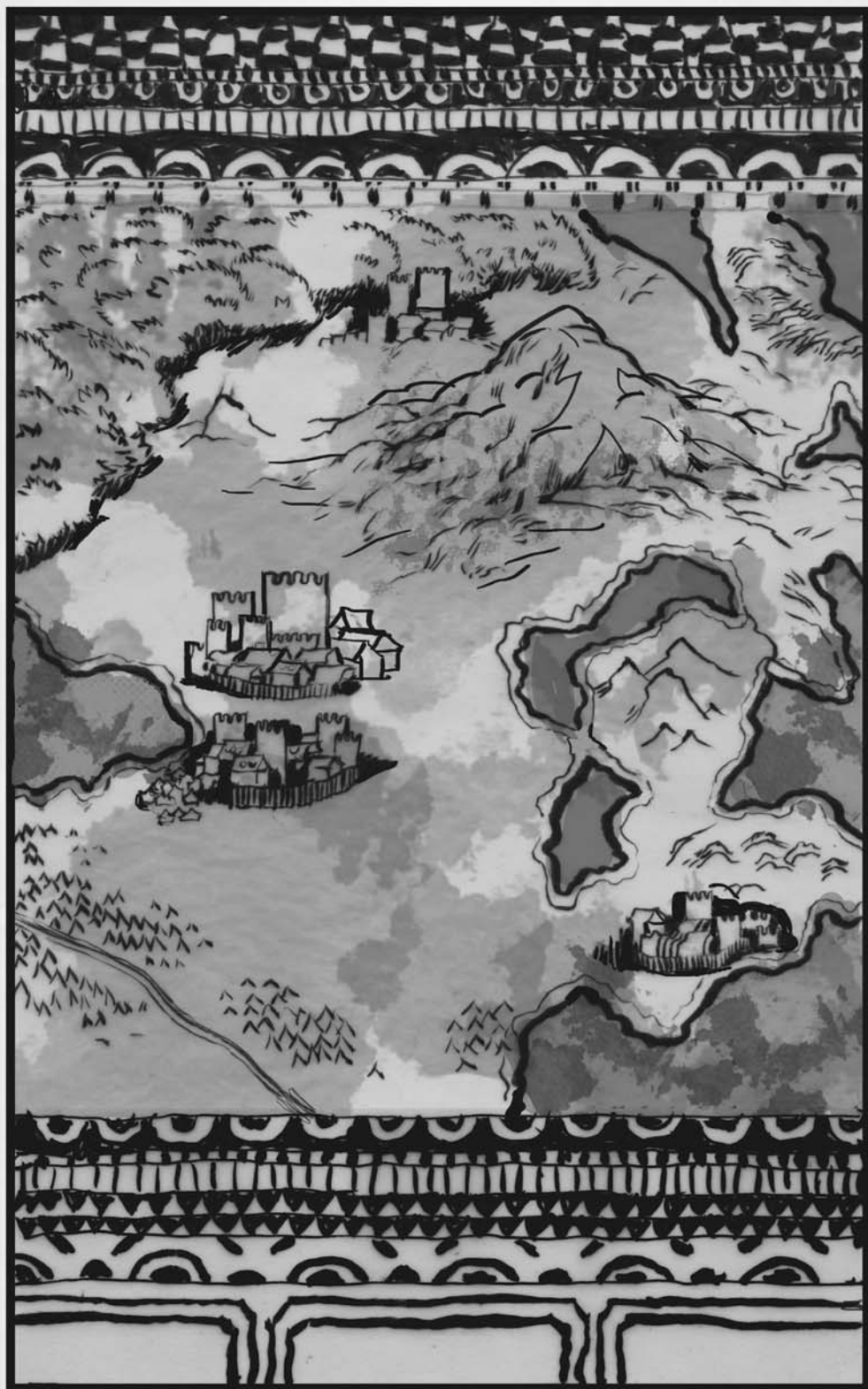
Of course, you don't necessarily need to throw in everything all at once. If your players are happy with their local politics, you don't need to use the new types of provinces and developments; let the players build up their assets and rely on their usual vassals. Drop in a Boar to mix up the politics a little bit and use a bit of new Trouble. You can ease the players into enjoying some of the new material, and present it in a process of discovery. Maybe a noble shows up with glass artwork, or rare incense. Obviously, the players will want to get their hands on this, and suddenly the race is on.

Just remember, the ven stories—even the adventure stories—aren't about *things*, they're about *people*. Given enough time, any ven noble can get his hands on glass or incense. The important questions are who he'll step on along the way, and who he'll impress with it. Every new *thing* in this book is just a hook for you to put a new twist on your ven literature, be it the Game of Houses or the adventure story.

Enough idle chatter. Time to get to the heart of the wild. I've already used up two thousand words just telling you about the rest of this book, after all.







# *The Wild Places*

On the edge of civilization, out beyond the borders of the map, lie untamed lands ripe for the plucking. Naturally, ven who meet with little luck in the Game of Houses may decide that they have better chances in conquering unclaimed territory rather than struggling over the hotly-contested lands of the Republic. Those nobles who decide to expand outward quickly discover why so few ven move into the wilderness: The dangerous lands beyond civilization are barren, difficult to tame, filled with orks and trouble, and hard to develop. Industrious ven have learned to exploit these exotic lands for special resources, but hard times are always one failed harvest or sabotaged province away.

Ven who expand their holdings into wild places gain a mixed blessing. Land in a desolate frontier is still land, and carries with it a certain measure of authority. A noble with provinces in the hinterlands may still grant dominion over this territory to a vassal, though it might be hard to attract a vassal who'd want to manage such distant provinces. The city-born nobles and the cultured nobles of the Senate consider "country gentlemen" to be rustic and inferior, so ownership of large tracts of marginal, provincial territory can be as much a social burden as it is a boon.

## **Traveling to the Wilderness**

The wilderness—or the hinterlands, distant provinces, the waste, or any number of other terms of various levels of pejorative description—lies outside of the usual territory of the Republic. Provinces in the wilderness always lie far outside of the beaten path. Even the closest ones to the central Republic are places difficult to reach by boat, with no roads, few trails, and many travel hazards.

In the seasonal Game of Houses, traveling to or from a wilderness province always takes one additional Season, above and beyond the Seasons required based on its location. Thus, traveling from the Western wilderness to the East would take three seasons instead of two—two to go from the West to the East, and one to go from the wilderness to civilization. Going from the Western wilderness to the Western



Republic would take one season. Traveling from the Western wilderness to the Eastern wilderness would take four seasons!

Nobles who travel to the wilderness must contend with the possibility of ambush, orks, and natural hazards. Wilderness provinces tend to have a high degree of Trouble (see the individual descriptions of the provinces, later).

## Wilderness Provinces

Nobles who settle in the wilderness can harvest the bountiful resources of the provinces there. Running a wilderness Province, though, usually means spending a lot of time in said wilderness. A Baron whose fief lies all the way out in the hinterlands will have difficulty spending time at court; a Count who has Barons in the hinterlands may have difficulty suppressing rebellions, dissent, and general Trouble in these far-away places!

So why would any clever ven want to have a province in the hinterlands? For any number of reasons.

First, a Province in the wilderness is far enough away from the Republic that it's difficult for the politics of the Republic to affect it directly. Who wants to spend months and months traveling to some forsaken region on the most distant end of the Republic? Easier to engage in subterfuge and skirmishes with one's neighbors—and usually more profitable. This means that a noble living in the wilderness will usually be left alone, unless he has a local neighbor or someone at court has a personal grudge.

Second, some places in the wilderness hold special materials that can't be found anywhere else. If you need glass, or obsidian, or incense, you have no choice but to head to the far-distant wilds.

Third, land is land. A Baron who claims several Provinces in the wilderness can still claim fealty from others and turn those holdings into a County or more. Naturally, other nobles may reject that claim, but then, don't they always cry foul at someone else rising in station?



Of course, one cannot always expect the wilderness to remain unpopulated forever. The wilderness is also very susceptible to Trouble. Worse still, places in the wilderness are not only inaccessible, but often less developed and smaller than places in the Republic. Some wilderness Provinces may consist only of a tiny island surrounded by salty ocean. Others may be locked full of mountains and deserts, unable to produce food. Since a Region can't be arbitrarily combined with some other province—if your island is a month's travel from the Republic, you might lump it together on paper but it still takes a long time to ship food out there—some wilderness provinces can be very difficult to sustain.

The wilderness does have its share of exotic terrain. One of the advantages of having a Province in the wilderness is access to some of the unusual products of the harsh and foreign lands. Here's a little bit of description, to give you an idea of what these new Regions are like.

## **Deserts**

Deserts are some of the most inhospitable places that any ven will ever visit. Scorching in the daytime and freezing at night, they test the endurance of any traveler. The sun beats down and cooks anyone caught outdoors, and there's no cover from the sand, the wind, and the dry air. Finding enough water to survive is a serious concern. Only at small streams, wells, or oases do any outposts of civilization manage to survive.

The desert is home to a wide range of strange plants and creatures. Snakes. Lizards. Blue-stemmed poison grass, thorny plants that look like people, stalk-bearing plants with narrow leaves that can slice an ungloved hand to ribbons. Someone who knows the secrets of these plants and animals can survive in this barren land, but anyone else will be buried in the sand.

Some of the desert plants and animals produce useful materials, though. Eye of newt isn't just an old literary device—it's a useful ingredient in sorcery. Some of the rare, hardy plants have hallucinogenic properties, which can give insight into magical workings. Many of the animals are poisonous, but with their glands crushed, distilled, or added to a potion, they provide powerful magic. Harvesting these resources is a chancy operation, though. Sometimes nomadic settlers will sell things that they uncover. Farmers may be able to eke out a harvest of useful plants. It's a hit-and-miss operation.

## Jungles

In contrast to the dry deserts, jungles are humid and warm almost year-round. A riot of color and life fills the jungle constantly. Though it's hard to grow any sorts of crops here, the trees are burgeoning with fruit, and there are many, many animals to hunt.

Unfortunately, the bright plumage is a warning. Most of the plants and animals of the jungle are poisonous. Not just somewhat poisonous—*deadly* poisonous. So much so, that when you send workers out to collect specimens, the workers die if they so much as *pick a plant incorrectly or touch the wrong part of a beast.*

Worse still, the jungles may not grow crops well at all, but the thorny bushes, twisted trees, and riots of moss and fungus all spring up very well year 'round, and the tree cover makes it nigh-impossible to see the sky. This means that navigation is woefully difficult. It's all too easy to get lost in the jungle... and then something hunts *you.*

Men who learn to survive in the jungle sometimes manage to harvest useful toxins from the native plant and animal life. More often, they develop an intense desire to return to the comforts of civilization.

## Taiga

The taiga is a frigid, windswept land of constant cold. In the summer, the taiga collects small pools and ponds; in winter, it is covered over with layers of snow. The poor land has just enough nutrients to support vast forests of narrow coniferous trees that provide shelter for various birds and furry creatures. Herds of caribou, reindeer, and even muskox cross the taiga, eating sparse vegetation that crops up in the sheer splits of craggy rocks.

For all that the creatures of the taiga are not nearly as hostile or poisonous as the beasts of desert or jungle, the taiga is just as inhospitable. A traveler can freeze to death in minutes if caught outside in winter. The narrow trees are difficult to harvest for lumber without specialized tools. While game is reasonably plentiful, many of the animals hibernate through the coldest months. If a traveler can't start a fire and melt snow, water may be impossible to find outside of



the summer months, when brief rain showers fill shallow pools, which quickly freeze over at night.

Skilled trackers and hunters in the taiga can bring down game animals with plenty of meat and fur for keeping warm and fed, but this is a chancy proposition. The large herds move often and a hunter must follow them or subsist on tiny burrowers like rabbits and squirrels. Some low plants produce berries, but these are almost always poisonous. An inexperienced traveler can become snowblind and then becoming lost is a very real possibility—worst of all, staggering north into the Taiga, where nothing grows and few animals survive at all.

## **Volcanoes**

Found on remote islands or in the midst of the most dangerous mountain ranges, volcanoes are among the most forbidding—and most breathtaking—sights of exotic terrain. A volcano in the background is a constant reminder of Trouble; something about the smoke-belching, magma-flowing peaks draws orks like flies to a lantern. The land for miles around a volcano is often parched, blackened, sometimes even swept by wildfires. The volcano leaves behind igneous rock such as basalt, obsidian, and granite. Traveling across such terrain can be difficult, especially since the threat of an eruption—even a small one!—can quickly change a once-easy path into a fiery deathtrap.

Volcanic regions generally host a wealth of minerals, gems, and metals, though. For those ven who have the workers (or slaves) necessary to perform the labor, a volcano provides all manner of sparkling valuables. The gems and geodes found in volcanic stones can make a noble ridiculously wealthy, and the opportunities for industry are also great—but at a high cost; volcanoes require significant work to be made at all useful, and are never truly tamed.

Still, some ven find the mighty plumes of smoke and fire to be striking symbols of vengeance, terror, and power.

## **New Wilderness Regions**

The four new Regions described here are usually found in the distant wilderness. While it's possible that the Republic might house a lone volcano or a small strip of desert, the ven flock to the lands of the Republic *because* they are fertile and

productive. Wilderness lands are dangerous and difficult to cultivate, hence why so few even bother to live there!

Also note that most Regions in the deep wilderness don't produce anything until they've been improved. Your desert may be your beautiful home with windswept dunes and painted rock landscapes, but it won't produce anything useful until you devote resources to making it valuable. It has all the sand you'll ever want, though...

When you develop a Region of barren wilderness—a Desert, Jungle, or Taiga—it has the ability to produce a particular kind of Resource, but it only generates that Resource on a successful roll. The same is true of Volcanoes with improvements. Roll a number of dice equal to the rank of the Region; if any of the dice come up as an even number, you claim a Resource from the Region. If they are all odd, the normal Resource is not harvested. On a failed roll to produce a Resource, no special penalty occurs; the harsh climate and rugged terrain simply meant that the limited resources of the area were not sufficient to produce a quantity of goods. If you score multiple even numbers, you may claim multiple Resources, but no more than one of each Resource that the area would normally produce—thus, a Rank 3 Desert with no Holdings can still only produce one bushel of Herbs, even if you roll even numbers on all three dice. (There's just nothing else to collect there.) Conversely, if a Rank 3 Taiga has a Sawmill, a Tannery, and a Furrier, you must choose which Resources you will keep—Lumber, Industry, Furs, or the usual Food that a Taiga can produce—securing one Resource for each die that comes up with an even number. For this reason, you'll want to make sure that you are not relying solely on harsh wilderness Regions for your base needs! To improve your odds of collecting special Resources, you'll want to hire on Vassal Bands of nomads and tribesmen (see p. 25).

### **Example of Wilderness Resource Generation:**

Talviro Steele has a moderately-developed area of Jungle. It's a Rank 2 Region, with an incense plantation improvement and roads. When Talviro's player reaches the Resource harvesting phase, he rolls 2 dice (because it's a Rank 2 Region). If neither



die comes up even, he gains no Resources from the Jungle. If one die comes up even, he can take either the Poison that a Jungle can produce, or the Incense that his plantation can produce. If both dice come up even, he can take both Resources, but only one of each. If he later improves the Jungle to a Rank 3 Region, he will roll 3 dice when harvesting, and he could add another improvement, such as a Game Reserve, and choose to gain a Resource from this instead.

Note that Volcanoes always produce Trouble, and the more “normal” forms of Regions still produce their normal Resources even in the wilderness. So, if you have a Forest sandwiched in the middle of your Deserts, the Forest will still produce Food or Lumber without requiring a special roll.

Of course, depending on the style of your game, you might decide that some of these regions are appropriate for your native Republic. If your game features the ven as a sort of Polynesian-islander culture, then their home Regions might include jungles and volcanoes, but exclude the more mundane hills and forests.

By the same token, if you want your noble to hail from the wilderness or from some barren corner of the Republic, feel free to take a few of these Regions. In general, though, make sure that your Narrator considers them appropriate to the game. Charting up a few deserts in the middle of breadbasket farm country is Bad Form.

**Desert:** Rural, Trouble 1. Produces Herbs on a successful roll. A Province cannot have a Desert Region if it also has Jungle or Taiga.

**Jungle:** Rural, Trouble 2. Produces Poison on a successful roll. A Province cannot have a Jungle Region if it also has Desert or Taiga.

**Taiga:** Rural, Trouble 1. Produces Food on a successful roll. A Province cannot have a Taiga Region if it also has Desert or Jungle.

**Volcano:** Rural, Trouble 3. Produces Trouble. Having a Volcano in a Province adds one Trouble to every other province in the Region! If a Province has multiple Volcanoes, this adds up! A Volcano’s base Trouble rating of 3 includes this modifier for itself. (See the *New Wilderness Holdings* to determine why you would ever want to have a Volcano in your Province.)

Remember, since all of the special wilderness Regions are rural, you can improve them with various Holdings that augment rural areas, such as Roads or Shrines. A Holding that doesn't produce Resources is not subject to the vagaries of chance production based on your Resource rolls (above).

## New Wilderness Holdings

To make the most of your special Regions, you need equally special Holdings. Courtly ven who visit the wilderness often find the trip uncomfortable and unprofitable, but adaptable explorers find ways to acclimate to the harsh realities of the landscape. This means new building techniques, new kinds of trade, and new Resources.

### Caravanserai (Desert)

**Benefit:** A caravanserai provides a place for traders and merchants to stop over in an otherwise barren desert, thereby encouraging trade with the inhabitants. This functions like a Port: Once per Season, you may take a free Season Action to trade Resources with another noble. See *Houses of the Blooded* p. 243.

### Furrier (Taiga)

**Benefit:** Rabbit skin, mink coats, reindeer antlers, arctic fox... all of these make elegant clothes and functional winter wear. Furs are a special addition to Goods, explained later on p. 19.

### Game Reserve (Jungle)

**Benefit:** Like a Game Reserve in a Forest, this Holding allows you to host Parties in a Jungle, and allows your Jungle to produce Food. See *Houses of the Blooded* p. 242.

### Gemstone Quarry (Volcano)

**Benefit:** The rare gems found in igneous or flux stone can be cut and set into brilliant displays of beauty. Jewelry made with gemstones makes for a very high-value Luxury. Gems are a special kind of Luxury Resource, explained later on p. 19.



### **Glassblower (Desert)**

**Benefit:** The glassblower turns worthless sand into beautiful art. With potash and certain other rare reagents, the glassblower can even make colored glass. Glass is a special kind of Luxury Resource, explained later on p. 22.

### **Incense Plantation (Jungle)**

**Benefit:** An incense plantation harvests essential oils and fragrant wood for use in the Incense Luxury. Incense is a special kind of Luxury Resource, explained later on p. 22.

### **Irrigation (Desert)**

**Benefit:** Drawing water from a nearby river or up from artesian wells allows the piled silt of the flood plains to become fertile growing land. Irrigation allows a Desert to produce Food.

### **Magma Smelter (Volcano)**

**Benefit:** Purifying ore into metal usually takes a smelter and a *lot* of fuel. With careful use of magma, it's possible to burn away the impurities of ore and produce metal out of stocks that are low grade or otherwise nominally useless. A Magma Smelter allows a Volcano to produce Metal.

### **Obsidian Quarry (Volcano)**

**Benefit:** Your slaves quarry out the black, translucent stone from the base of a volcano, or places where magma meets water. Quarrying obsidian is so dangerous and painful that only slaves will do such work—it's a slow death of thousands of torturous cuts. Obsidian is not sturdy enough for use in large-scale construction, but it does have its own mysterious uses. Obsidian is a special kind of Resource, noted later on p. 22, but its true value will be made apparent in the Demonology appendix (p. XX).

### **Sawmill (Taiga or Jungle)**

**Benefit:** The Taiga and Jungle are both home to broad swaths of trees. While these trees may not reach the massive size of the great forests in the Republic, they are still a useful resource when exploited with work crews and the right tools. A Sawmill allows a Taiga or Jungle Region to produce Lumber.



## Tannery (Taiga)

**Benefit:** The Taiga is home to a great many game animals with useful skins, oils, and sinew. A Tannery allows your Taiga Region to produce Industry.

## New Resources

### Furs

Furs add to the quality of your Goods. When you produce Crafts (see *Houses of the Blooded* p. 246), you can use Furs in addition to Industry to make fur-trimmed hats, cloaks, boots, dresses... whatever you can think of. While wearing Goods trimmed with Furs, you can bank one additional point of Style above your Beauty score—but fashion changes quickly! The bonus banking ability of Fur-lined Goods only lasts for one year after their creation. After that, they've become *passé*. Better have a new hat for *this* Season!

You can also use Furs as regular Industry, thereby making reindeer-skin cloaks, rabbit-leather shoes and so on, but why would you waste such a valuable Resource?

### Gems

Gems are a new form of Luxury. You may use Gems for all of the normal Luxury benefits, such as inspiring Art, improving Loyalty, donating to show Devotion, or paying a Hireling. Most importantly, when you make Art with Gems, you create a piece of Jewelry. You can wear this Jewelry yourself or give it to someone else; it has all the usual benefits of Art (banking Style, providing an Aspect, giving Style to the owner). Art made with Gems in the form of Jewelry has one other, special benefit: It aids in initiating or meeting the challenge of Romance (*Houses of the Blooded*, p. 222).

While an artisan might use Metal to make a necklace or a ring, truly artistic Jewelry always includes Gems. When you make Art using only Gems, the end result is Jewelry—a ruby-studded necklace, suitable to display your passion. A bracelet adorned with brilliant lavender chalcedony, showing your desire to play and live in the moment. A



gold-and-silver crown with deep blue sapphires, signifying a wise ruler. A ring of red gold, with a single yellow diamond... the madness of love.

You may add the rank of a piece of Jewelry to your dice rolled for a Beauty risk when you initiate or meet the challenge in a Romance. To do so, you must give the item in question to your counterpart—placing a necklace about her smooth, unblemished shoulders, or slipping a ring onto an elegant finger... Jewelry is the promise of having so much Luxury that you can afford extravagance for your Romance. Thus, it fuels the potential of that Romance. When a Romance ends, though, the Jewelry is sometimes a liability... this is not a *game mechanical* penalty; simply remember that the Jewelry that you gave to a lover today may appear on someone else's hand next Season! Worse still, if you give someone Jewelry and then proceed to a Liaison, the Jewelry may well become evidence of the infidelities (read *The Three Musketeers* if you really can't figure out how a piece of Jewelry could cause such headaches).

Like any other Art, Jewelry can bank Style, grant Style and give a bonus Aspect, but it must be displayed to do so—meaning that if you give Jewelry to a romantic partner, it's going to be on display for all to see!

(Also, in case it wasn't apparent, you may only give one piece of Jewelry in the course of establishing a Romance. You can't shower someone with multiple pieces to gain bonus dice from all of the ranks of Art. Bad Form, that.)

## Counterfeiting Jewelry

It would be remiss of me to invoke *The Three Musketeers* and not include guidelines for making a counterfeit piece of Jewelry.

Normally, making a piece of Jewelry is an action taken across many Seasons. It is Art, after all. If you are making a counterfeit piece, though, you are not looking to study a gem for its best cuts, try different patterns to find the right angle of light, or work out which colors complement each other—that's already done; you just have to copy the original.

When you make a counterfeit, you spend only one Season Action (or a single Story) and the Jeweler uses his *Courage* Virtue instead. The Jeweler must be ready and willing to make fast, daring cuts and able to stay up into the late hours to finish the piece, while making sure that it's passable as the real thing!

A counterfeit piece of Jewelry has a Rank, just like any other piece of Art. It functions just like the original, so long as the original is not around and nobody knows it's fake. A Cunning risk that gains more wagers than the piece's Rank will determine that a counterfeit is a fake. Obviously, having an Aspect useful in making Jewelry, appraising gems, or spotting deception will help here.

If a counterfeit piece has a Rank lower than the original piece, anyone can automatically tell that it doesn't have the luster and sheen of the original. It's a poor copy.

Also, if the original and the counterfeit are in the same place at the same time, neither of them grant bonuses until the counterfeit is revealed. At that point, the original gains its bonuses again.

One last note. As long as the counterfeit doesn't have a Rank below that of the original, it may be possible to pass off the counterfeit as a real thing. This is a matter of persuasion, so it's usually a contested risk between the ven inspecting the counterfeit and the one trying to pass it off (using Cunning for the inspector and Beauty for the conniver).

If a counterfeit piece is passed off as the real thing, it gains the benefits instead—at least, until it is revealed to be fake by someone else!

## Glass

When you construct a Castle, Shrine, Temple, or University, you may expend Glass in the construction. This causes the structure itself to become a work of Art. (See *Houses of the Blooded* p. 247-249.) Using Glass in this fashion causes the structure to take an extra Season (or more, if it's a high rank of Art) to complete, because you are building the structure *and* creating Art at the same time. The end result, though, is that the building itself is Art, with all of the usual benefits: when you unveil the structure, you may gain Style, visitors can invoke the Aspect of the Art, and you gain bonus Style points. Since the building itself becomes Art, it cannot be stolen like a painting or a statue—only conquered!

When you use Glass to make a structure into a piece of Art, you must use *only* Glass for the creation of its artistic component. Therefore, you must expend a number of Glass Resources equal to the rank of the Art that you create.

To unveil the Art invested in a structure with Glass, you must host a party at the structure, and you must do so in the Season in which the structure is finally completed. Otherwise, the novelty is lost. Plan in advance!

## Incense

The Incense Luxury causes vivid dreams in those ven who inhale its spicy smoke. Given to a Shrine or Temple Region, this adds an extra +1 Loyalty (on top of the +3 Loyalty for giving a Luxury to one Region, as noted in *Houses of the Blooded* p. 263). You can also use Incense *in place of* a Relic when you construct a Shrine, since the Incense allows ven to commune more deeply with the *suaven*. When you attempt to gain Devotion, each Incense Resource that you spend counts as *two* Resources (see *Houses of the Blooded* p. 306), not just as two dice. Thus, you can spend one Incense Luxury to move from Devotion 2 to 3; alternatively, you could use it like any other Luxury and gain two bonus dice on your roll to appease the fickle spirits and *suaven*.

## Obsidian

This strange black stone is too brittle to use in construction, too sharp to wear for simple ornamentation, and too dangerous to mine regularly. Obsidian has special uses for ven who study sorcery and *darker* occupations, which you may find in the Demonology chapter later in this book...

# New Vassals

To manage your distant Provinces—or even to help with your local ones in the Republic in new ways—you can hire on some new kinds of Vassals.

## Masons (Band Vassal)

The Mason is a specialist in engineering and design. How does a soaring ceiling stay up without columns to support it? How does the foundation of a building manage to make the floor perfectly flat? How does a shaft of colored light shine through a glass window to illuminate a secret keyhole only on one day of the year? Through architecture—the magic of engineering and mathematics.

The Mason’s trade is an unusual one, in the sense that it is considered a form of magic by most ven, but it does not use blood sorcery; and the architect can create works of Art, but they are also functional.

Masons can complete buildings and improvements more rapidly than normal. A Mason band’s Rank determines how quickly it builds improvements. A Rank 3 band of masons, therefore, can build in one Season an improvement that normally takes three.

## Explorer

The explorer is a hardy ven who trailblazes in dangerous, distant lands. Instead of sending out parties of wary roadmen or leading your own expeditions, you can send an explorer—properly outfitted with gear, porters, and samples of your generous largesse—to map out new Regions for you.

An explorer may use a Season Action to map out a Region in a province that you control. Similarly, the explorer may use her Season

.....  
: **Contradictory**  
: **Research**  
: If you own *Coronets, but Never*  
: *Crowns*, you may notice that  
: book has rules for a Vassal  
: called “Architects” that sound  
: very familiar to the Mason  
: Vassal below.  
: Both Mr. Roby and Mr. Heinig  
: have used the same research,  
: but have come to different  
: conclusions. The Shanri  
: Research Institute is working  
: to determine which reading is  
: more accurate, but until then,  
: please consider them the *same*  
: Vassal for the purpose of having  
: Vassals in your lands.  
: .....

Action to enter a neighboring unexplored Province, once you have your own Province fully mapped out. An area mapped by an explorer gains a type that you assign—forest, mountain, jungle, and so on—but does not come under your control unless you use an action to develop it from wild land to settled.

## **Jeweler**

A jeweler is just below the swordmaker in the ven hierarchy of craftsmen. He makes Art that is ornamental, not both beautiful and functional like the swordsman. The jeweler's Art, though, is the flip side of the coin: love and revenge are inextricably linked, after all. The sword is the Art of revenge. The jewel is the Art associated with love. (Poetry? *Please.*)

A jeweler can create Art by using Gems (collected from Volcanoes; see page 17). A jeweler typically has an Aspect related to one type of jewelry: different jewelers specialize in rings, bracelets, crowns, or necklaces; a jeweler of high rank may have skills with all of them. This means that the jeweler uses his Aspect (and rolls 3 dice) when constructing a piece of jewelry, unless the jeweler is trained to the level of a full Vassal, in which case he uses his Beauty score plus appropriate Aspect.

When a jeweler makes a piece of jewelry for you, it always has the jeweler's mark upon it. This means that the jewelry gives the wearer one less point of Style, but the jeweler keeps one point of Style for himself. (See *Houses of the Blooded*, pp. 247-249.) The jeweler always has the last remaining point of Style from an item, so his reputation remains until the last point of Style fades away.

## **Master Mason (Master Vassal)**

Once you have a rank 3 band of Masons, you may hire on a Master Mason. The Master Mason is a full NPC, and gains Season actions to build structures just like the band, but of course he has a full suite of Virtues and Aspects to do so.

Your architect can use his Season action to perform the planning for a building that is a work of Art on your behalf (see the new *Luxury of Glass*, on p. 22). The architect can use his architecture Aspect to roll three dice for the risk on creating Art, meaning that he can plan and execute a simple piece of Art on his own. Alternatively, you may draft the plans yourself, at the usual cost in time, and then leave the architect to handle the actual construction of the building (thereby using his actions for the last two Seasons, when the building is finally completed).

A Master Mason may choose to use his Cunning in place of his Beauty when performing an Art test to design a new structure.

When a Master Mason assists you in the creation of a building, you gain one less Style than usual for its artistic merit; the architect gains the last point of Style instead. Your patronage brought the project to fruition, but without the special magic of geometry and perspective, the building would be nothing more than a figment of imagination, after all. (See *Houses of the Blooded* p. 249 for the rules regarding Style from a piece of Art.) The architect always has the last point of Style from his artwork, so his reputation lasts until the final point of Style fades away.

### **Nomads/Tribesmen (Band Vassal)**

Nomads and tribesmen are savage ven! Under your “civilizing” influence, they help your settlers and roadmen to survive in dangerous lands. These bands are small groups of ven that excel at living off the land in the barren stretches of waste that make up the distant provinces. Nomads and tribesmen, therefore, help you to make the most of your dangerous territory. They can point out the best places to collect materials, teach your settlers how to hunt and find water, and avoid storms, wildfires, and other natural hazards.

When you deploy a nomad or tribesman Band to a Region of dangerous terrain like Desert or Taiga, you roll extra dice equal to the Band’s Rank when determining how many Resources that Region produces in a given turn. This cannot cause the Region to produce more Resources than its improvements would normally generate, but means that you are far more likely to squeeze out all of the benefits of the savage lands. With a rank 3 Region and a rank 3 Band, you roll six dice, giving you decent odds of collecting three or even four Resources from a developed but desolate Region!









# Trouble

Any sensible ven knows that you don't go looking for Trouble... Trouble comes and finds you. *Asking* for Trouble is just that. Who wants more Trouble on their doorstep? Even if every problem is an opportunity, it's still a problem first.

Even so, some ven inexplicably decide to leave the comfort of the courts and go out into the world to stir up Trouble. Sometimes they have great dreams and ambitions. Often, those dreams are shattered on the cold, unyielding stones of reality.

The chapter "The Wild Places" explains some of the various provinces of the wild in an overview useful for someone managing lands and estates, but the actual day-to-day fight for survival in these places is significantly more challenging. In this section, we'll look at some of the more common sorts of Trouble that tend to strike ven who wander too far from civilization.

## Using Trouble Well

Before getting into the details about various kinds of Trouble, it's very important to understand the role of Trouble from the perspective of the Narrator.

Trouble is sauce for the goose. Trouble is a way to make a dramatic situation even more dramatic. Trouble is *not* always the best way to generate a story on its own.

While Hemingway could write a compelling story about Man vs. Nature, such conflicts do not often make for dramatic gameplay. Rolling a Strength risk to see if your character succumbs in a sandstorm in the desert, or a Cunning risk to see if your character becomes lost in the jungle, is just another die roll. It lacks dramatic tension of its own.

Thus, Trouble in the wilderness exists to exacerbate an already tense situation. Just like a trap or a trick in an ancient ruin might be a way to increase the dramatic tension while the ven are already under pressure, environmental problems are a way to add extra pressure to an already dramatic situation. A sandstorm by itself is generally boring... a sandstorm that whips up right after a valuable prisoner escapes is a problem. Dying of thirst after crossing a desert is boring... suffering

from dehydration and then entering a duel with a nomad over the right to drink from an oasis is a way to raise the stakes.

Thus, when you as a Narrator use the environmental sorts of Trouble described below, you are *raising the stakes* against your players. Don't just throw these out as random challenges in themselves, but rather as ways to increase the tension of the dangerous, difficult, and dramatic situations in which the players are already struggling!

## Troubles in the Wild

In the wilderness, all kinds of Troubles arise that never crop up in the civilized lands. In civilization, all you have to worry about are murder... and duels... and fires... and politics... well, maybe more than a few things. But the Troubles of the wilderness are different because they usually don't have ven behind them. Rather, Shanri herself is out to kill you.

### Getting Lost

The wilderness is... well, for lack of a better word, wild. There are no signposts, no roads, no directions. No towns. No easy way to get your bearings, unless it's by noting the direction of that looming volcano in the distance (and you certainly don't want to go *there...*).

Generally, getting lost is a kind of Trouble that just costs you some time, unless you never find your way back. Let's be honest, though. If you never find your way back and you just die somewhere out in the wilderness, there's no drama in that, and that doesn't make for a good story. Thus, getting lost is a precursor to some *other* kind of story.

Finding your way through the wilderness is generally a Cunning risk—you need to pay attention to the signs of nature, remember landmarks, and use your sense of direction. The Narrator should call for this risk only when the circumstances will make losing your way a potential story hook.

Time is running out on finding the ancient tomb. Your map says an antidote to a deadly poison is written on the walls of



the tomb. You need that antidote. You need it. If you don't get it, your lover will die. And time is running out. If only you could find your way back to the path you lost two hours ago...

If there's no compelling drama to be told by getting lost, or if you're traveling along a well-known road with a contingent of armed bodyguards and plenty of supplies, there's no need for the risk. Conversely, if you want to take a shortcut, or you have no food or supplies and are trying to live off the land, or if you want to beat someone to a destination... *then* a risk may be appropriate, with wagers to determine how quickly you arrive at your destination, if ever!

As usual, a typical risk is a TN 10 Cunning roll. Succeed and you determine the outcome... fail, and the Narrator will explain where you wind up.

### **Lost Stories**

Once you've gotten lost, the story takes a turn in a new direction. This could be as simple as your ven wandering into civilization several days later, looking tired, haggard, and thoroughly annoyed. More interesting, though, is an opportunity to throw your hapless ven into a dangerous and strange situation.

Of course, if a solitary ven is making an overland trek while other players' ven are engaged in other activity, this risks sidelining the entire group. In such a situation, the other players should slip into roles appropriate to the situation, as guided by the Narrator. The player of the lost ven can set the stage with her one wager from the initial Cunning risk (if a wager was made, that is), but after that, the Narrator and the other players will take the new scene in a different direction. Some ideas that may springboard your creativity include...

**The ven stumble across an encampment of brigands.** Poverty-stricken farmers, freedom fighters, criminals, or heretics—any of these might live in the wild, away from towns and cities where they'll be harried by the law. A band of noble ven might be seen as potential captives for ransom, or could engage the leaders of such a group in a duel for supremacy. Or perhaps the brigands have information about the lord of a neighboring province, or the current rumors and undercurrents that have not reached the local lord's ears.

**The ven discover a lost shrine.** Perhaps the shrine is dedicated to one of the lesser family *suaven*, or it might be a once-great temple that has fallen into

ruin thanks to neglect or a curse. It may have a crypt, perhaps with sleeping ancestors beneath, or it could be a perverted shrine to one of the dark *suaven*.

**The ven encounter other lost travelers.** Players aren't the only ones who can become lost on the road. They might encounter old enemies long thought gone, missing persons, fellow nobles who lost their way, even remnants of a bodyguard contingent whose noble patron was slain. The aged and mystical hermit who lives deep in the wild is also a staple of fiction.

**The ven discover a ruin.** Always a wonderful segue into an adventure, ruins from the time of the sorcerer-king can be filled with orks, treasures, and hazards.

**The ven stumble across a mystical site that defies explanation.** Be it a magical spring that heals wounds, or a secret grotto with a pool that turns wood into gold, or a grove of trees whose fruits can cure any disease, such a place would be a rare and wondrous property to hold... which, of course, means that when the ven figure out what it does and return to civilization, word will soon get out and conflict will explode over the place.

**The ven are stranded in the wilds with only each other.** Getting lost is an excellent time for the ven in a group to be pitted against one another. They must rely on each other for survival, and some may make demands or swear oaths in order to secure the help that they will need just to have food and shelter. Old tensions may flare to the surface, buried romances come forth in the remote reaches where nobody can see, and the true character of each ven is revealed in the crucible of survival. Challenge the ven with struggles for their food, their water, their shelter, and the threat of dangerous orks as they try to find their way back to civilization, and then see how they respond... and who rises to the occasion.



## Getting Found

Typically, ven stories focus on high drama and operatic politics. Those are hard to come by on remote desert islands, so principal characters should never stay lost for long.

In general, unless the troupe agrees that they want to tell an extended story of being lost in the wild (like the tale of all the ven being shipwrecked somewhere and making a new life on a haunted island), characters should find their way back to civilization by the end of the Season. Being lost for an entire season can certainly take its toll, though—enemies may have put plans in motion, heirs may be divvying up the lands, widows and widowers may be remarrying!

As the saying goes, when one door closes, another opens...

## Deprivation

Being lost in the wilderness is no dinner party. In fact, there's usually no dinner.

Deprivation, broadly, refers to the various wants that can leave a ven weak and frail—hunger, thirst, and exhaustion. The strongest Bear will fall in the face of hunger. The most skillful Wolf will make mistakes when deprived of sleep. The wiliest Elk cannot think his way to water in the desert.

Very simply, deprivation is a type of Injury. Going without a particular need causes the ven to suffer an Injury appropriate to that deprivation. Like all Injuries, this can be tagged by opponents—if you are faint from hunger, your enemies will find it easier to outmaneuver you!

The amount of time required to suffer an Injury from deprivation depends on the type of deprivation.

**Exhaustion:** Suffer one level of Injury for every full day without adequate sleep. This includes restless sleep because of lack of shelter—a ven freezing to death on the taiga, while icy sleet pours upon him through the meager shelter of a few branches, will not gain any restful sleep!

**Thirst:** Suffer one level of Injury for every full day without sufficient drink. A ven who understands the vagaries of the wild might survive by imbibing fluids from plants, but this is a chancy, meager existence.

**Hunger:** Suffer one level of Injury for every week that passes without sufficient nourishment. The ven may be hardy, but a handful of pine nuts and a few stripped cattails do not make for a week's worth of meals.

Injuries suffered due to deprivation can only heal through replacing the lost requirement. That is, Injury suffered from hunger only heals when the ven finally has enough to eat. The Injuries heal at the same rate that they were sustained—thus, a ven who suffers from a rank 5 Injury of dehydration will take 5 days of being refreshed in order to recover. (Fortunately, the recuperative powers of the ven are far greater than those of average humans, and thus long-term effects of such deprivation are not severe.)

### **Death by Deprivation**

Although it's possible to suffer a rank 5 Injury due to deprivation, and thus to be mortally wounded, there's little drama in such a fate. Starving to death in the wilds may be a reasonable risk of travel, but it is not one about which stories will be told and operas crafted—so it is not a likely fate for ven in *Houses of the Blooded*. (Of course, this sort of fate is more likely to befall foolish commoners who go traipsing about in the wild, as explained in *Chartered Adventuring Companies*, later in this book.)

Deprivation is, rather, a way to put a character on the thin edge before another risk. A starving Wolf may be dangerous, but may also succumb to enemies who might normally never challenge her sword. And an intransigent enemy who refuses to sign a contract may be a bit more amenable after a few nights in a damp dungeon without food, drink, or sleep.

This, of course, puts a timer on your activities in the wilderness. If you're telling the story of a group of ven who've become lost, and they don't have any water, you only have a few days before the Narrator or the troupe needs to move the story into a position where the ven will finally find something to drink—an oasis in the desert, a hot spring in the taiga, a clear pond in the jungle. Of course, there may be hazards associated with this, like the nomads who guard the oasis



or the poisonous snakes and dangerous orks that reside near the jungle pond. In such a case, the deprivation that the ven suffer is simply another barrier to their continued survival!

### **Temptation**

Once a character suffers Injury due to deprivation, temptation begins to set in. The ven will look for any chance to satisfy his needs—perhaps even being tempted to lie, cheat, and steal. (Well, moreso than usual.)

Resisting temptation is a Courage risk. When the ven sees an opportunity to satisfy a need that has caused Injury—such as stealing an associate’s canteen of water while trying to escape the desert—the Narrator may call for a risk to determine whether the ven succumbs to temptation.

Of course, on a successful risk, the player still decides the results. The ven might still succumb to temptation, but with a few wagers to spice up the scene.

### **Living Off the Land**

The best way to avoid deprivation, aside from having wagons and courtiers and attendants and supplies, is to know how to survive in the wild. This is not exactly common knowledge among most ven, although the Bear and the Falcon are often fairly rugged, and the Boar are especially proficient in this arena.

Living off the land is a Cunning risk, as you must rely on your observation, your knowledge of edible plants, and your ability to set snares and skin animals in order to survive. Aspects appropriate to the terrain may, of course, be invoked to add dice—a ven who is a veteran hunter will have an easier time surviving in the woods, but perhaps not in volcanic badlands.

A successful Cunning risk to live off the land provides enough food, drink, and shelter for the ven for enough time to move on to the next important scene, which might be a day, a week, or a Season. Wagers may be used to provide for additional people. Note that if the players cannot score enough wagers to provide for their entire group, the scene will automatically shift to the first time that they start to suffer Injury due to deprivation, as desperation sets in and they realize that they must find some other way to survive!



Living off the land is neither glamorous nor particularly stable. A ven who has to subsist from the land for any length of time will likely become quite dirty, haggard, and unkempt. Naturally, such an individual is unlikely to be taken seriously when showing up at a castle and *claiming* to be a noble... and there will certainly be rumors and stories about the *humiliating* circumstances under which the individual survived!

## Ork Trouble

The further one goes into the wild, the more varied and dangerous the orks there become!

See Chapter 7, Orks, for more information.







# Blooded of the Boar

**Families:** Bagha, Surgh, Suvo, Thraka

**Motto:** Not Until I'm Dead

When the various Houses claimed lands and established the new civilization from the ruins of the old world, many of the Houses spent their strength in war and politics against one another. While all the choicest lands and the richest provinces were quickly snatched up, the Boar conserved their strength and hoarded their resources, then set out into the farthest reaches of the world to find unclaimed places where other ven would not contest their rule. Beyond even the borders of the House of the Bear, the Boar traveled into desolate wastes and wilderness areas ravaged by orks. While the other Houses bent the land to civilize it, the Boar instead settled in these savage regions and became part of the frontier, living among the strange creatures and learning to survive in hostile climates. Through sheer tenacity, the Boar managed to thrive in these desolate places.

Because the Boar reside so far from the other Houses, they do not partake in the games of politics and romance that are common to the rest of ven society. Indeed, scandalous rumors about the House circulate in courts and parties—gossip about ven who consort and live with orks, who revere no *suaven*, or who have become cannibals and demon-worshippers. While such tales are, of course, overblown whimsy and fantastical stories, there must be *some* reason that the Boar do not mingle with civilized ven, and that they so rarely entertain visitors in their own homes...

...and what homes they are! Other ven may build their manses in the ruins of the sorcerer-kings' palaces, but the Boar often carve their fortified, eccentric estates directly from the magnificent landscapes of the wild, or from fortresses conquered from nomads or even from tool-using orks. Built to survive in frigid arctic wastes or sweltering deserts, these homes often bear striking features and unusual designs, along with massive defensive structures to keep out orks and strange animals. Few ven travel to these places, by invitation or by design, except those who desire to trade with the Boar for exotic goods found only in the wilderness.

## Virtue: Tenacity

The Boar treasure a Virtue of their own. Like the sacred animal from which their House takes its name, ven under the banner of the Boar exhibit an incredible degree of resolve. In spite of physical hardship, injury, disease, oppressive climate, hunger or thirst, the Boar carry on and pursue their goals with dogged, tireless determination. When all other means have failed, when failure seems certain, when Strength has faltered and Courage is threadbare, the Boar continue against all odds through sheer, stubborn Tenacity.

*If you choose Tenacity as one of your Virtues...*

...your character has a raw, unflinching determination to keep going in spite of all odds. Failure is nothing more than a setback. Wounds are merely a hindrance. You don't quit until you're dead.

*If you do not choose Tenacity...*

...your character's resolve and determination can be broken. Morale flags and the determination to continue weakens in the face of adversity. Your character may give up on a particular tack and look for other ways to solve a problem, succumb to wounds, or decide that the price of victory simply isn't worth the cost.

Your Tenacity adds to your character's ability to resist wounds and overcome hardships. Every point of Tenacity is an additional level of Injury that your ven can sustain (see Injury in *Houses of the Blooded* page 201).

For example, if you have a 2 Tenacity, the rank of Injury necessary to knock you down is 7 (5 + Tenacity). Likewise, if your Tenacity is 4, the rank of Injury an opponent needs to give you to knock you down is 9 (5 + Tenacity).

Keep in mind, though, that even with Tenacity, your Injuries can still be tagged. You also continue to suffer Scars if you take five or more ranks of Injury—you just keep going in spite of the wounds, and remain able to carry on, even if crippled or mortally wounded. Injuries beyond five ranks still take one Season to heal for each rank.



## Risks of Tenacity

After you have failed a contested risk, spend a Style Point. You discard all your wagers from that roll and, instead, gain a number of wagers equal to your Tenacity.

You may only spend your Tenacity wagers after your opponent has spent his wagers.

Unlike many of the other Virtues, Tenacity is not an “active” Virtue. You don’t make a Tenacity wager in order to accomplish a task—at least, not directly. Rather, you use a Tenacity wager to carry on when you normally wouldn’t be able to do so at all.

Tenacity comes into play after your *ven fails*, or when your *ven* has been thwarted. Through Tenacity, you gain a chance to recoup your losses and regroup from your failure. You may carry on in spite of horrible losses.

Naturally, being such an inspirational (or obsessive) figure is also a great way to generate Style. It’s not necessarily glamorous, but there’s a certain romance to the hero who just won’t quit. The one who walks straight into his certain doom after taking a mortal wound, determined to kill as many foes as he can. The one who walks tirelessly through the desert for five days without food or water, just to deliver a message to a lover before dying at her feet. The one who didn’t have the Courage, or the Strength, or the Cunning to win the battle... but made the cost of the war so great that no enemy could claim victory, either.

### After the Pain

Tenacity is almost never an opening roll. You use Tenacity in response to situations that have raised the stakes for your *ven*. In such a case, you use a Tenacity wager to turn around your defeat and eke out of it some kind of victory.

In other words, you use Tenacity after failing in a contested risk.

This doesn’t necessarily mean that you can turn around any wager and use your Tenacity to overcome your foe. If someone befuddles you with Beauty or outmaneuvers you with Cunning, you can’t call for a new wager with Tenacity and then reverse the situation. You can, however, use your Tenacity to keep struggling even after you’ve been manipulated or injured, and perhaps spend your wagers to

eke out a nominal benefit in spite of your initial loss. In effect, you can snatch some piece of victory from the jaws of defeat.

### **Example of Using Tenacity Wagers**

You've been outmaneuvered by a member of the Elk family. You lost a Cunning wager and inadvertently signed a contract that indicates that you'll deliver thirty bushels of grain within two Seasons—but the fine print of the contract states that if you don't deliver, you must pay damages in double the losses, which will cripple your finances. There's no way that you can deliver this much grain in two Seasons, but your stubborn Boar characteristics to work in order to make some kind of victory out of this difficult situation.

You roll dice and make wagers of Tenacity. You end up with three wagers. The Narrator says, "While there's no way to come up with that much grain from your estates, you may be able to make a substantial portion of it. More than anyone expects. Enough that it might impress an ally to help you."

Now you set your wagers in motion. One wager says that you're going to secure an extra 50% of the usual amount of grain from the harvest. Your people scrape and go hungry. Your house only offers the most meager fare to its guests. Even you and your spouse feel the effects. But you shrug it off. You persevere. In the face of adversity, you refuse to quit. And it pays off. You tighten your belts and deliver as much grain as you can save to honor your obligation. People notice this kind of dedication. Maybe some of them think you're foolish. The smarter ones know better. You're the kind of ally they want—someone who will honor debts, someone who will make sacrifices, someone who will go the distance.

Next, you know that you're going to be bankrupted. But in ven society, you only own what you can hold. So you invite your creditor to come to your lands and take what he can carry. You put your stocks in your ancestral steading—a rocky promontory located in the middle of the most inaccessible, hottest, most trackless, most dangerous desert imaginable. Nobody even wants to set foot within a week's journey of the place. Any simple road warden who tries to cross it



without knowing the oases, the natives, the poisonous plants, the orks that lurk under the sand, is as good as dead. So here's my money. Come and get it.

And then you throw your third wager to indicate that you're going to stick to your trade partner like glue. He knows what you're doing all the time. You always show up to keep him informed. His grin grows wider and wider as he realizes that you'll never make the payment and you're going to lose your money, your lands, your goods to him. Then the day comes... and suddenly he realizes that he has to actually take possession of everything. He doesn't have any way to do so. He's soft—he lives in water-rich southern lands, pampered in airy estates with plenty of food and plump servants and fine clothing. But a contract is inviolable. He *must* come take possession. So you hold him to it. You stick with him. And you invite him to come see your lands, and all the treasures that he'll soon own. No, not invite—you *insist*. After all, you are indebted to him. You worked to the bone to make your payments. You fulfilled *every legal obligation*. If he doesn't want to come to the desert and take what's his... well, perhaps you'll just *hold it in trust* for him. Maybe charge a little interest. And of course you'd love to sign a new contract for a deal for the next two seasons.

## Weapons of the Boar

Although the Boar are uncivilized and strange, they still remember the old traditions. They respect the power of the sword. It is the sword that slays orks in combat. It is the creation of the sword that separates the noble and intelligent ven from the savage and uneducated nomad.

*How* the Boar wield the sword, though, is part of their House's traditions. A Boar fights not to win, but to make the encounter so costly to the enemy that nobody *wants* to fight the Boar.

## New Maneuvers

While any ven could learn to use these maneuvers, only the Boar would be so reckless as to use them with any regularity.

### Ride (defender/attacker; 2 wagers)

**Requisite:** Bind 1, Tenacity (you may not use this Maneuver if you have Tenacity as a weakness)



You step in as your opponent attacks and you ride your weapon along his. Instead of blocking his blow, you use his own weapon as a guide to strike him. Of course, if your opponent follows through with his maneuver, this means that you may impale yourself—but to the Boar, this is a small price to pay for the chance to make a fatal strike.

After the opponent attacks, use your wagers to ride his attack. Each additional wager that you spend allows you to take one rank of Injury to automatically score one rank of Injury on the enemy. Since your enemy is in the middle of a strike, he cannot Parry this attack; his only option is to Dodge it—a very difficult proposition.

### **Final Blow (attacker; 3 wagers)**

**Requisite:** Injure 3, Ride 1, Tenacity (you may not use this Maneuver if you have Tenacity as a weakness), rank 5+ Injury

You use the last of your strength to strike a terrible blow against your enemy. When you perform a Final Blow, you can spend your wagers to cause ranks of Injury to your opponent, just like the usual Injure Maneuver, but your opponent cannot Parry or Dodge the attack. In the process of doing so, though, you aggravate your wounds and expend the last of your strength. You automatically fall unconscious at the end of the Maneuver, though you may have just enough time to spit one final dramatic invective before you collapse into a heap.







# Adventuring Companies

Normally, Blooded ven want little to do with the unBlooded. They're little more than dirt, after all. Certainly some unBlooded are *useful* dirt, but still... they're not people, just possessions. Who talks to dirt?

Turns out, though, that just as many ven keep useful vassals, sometimes a particular bit of dirt proves especially useful in dealing with problems. Roadmen keep travelers safe and allow trade to flourish. Spymasters collect dirt on neighboring nobles. Every sort of vassal has some utility, but occasionally a problem arises that the usual dirt just can't handle. If a strange sorcerous power is emanating from an ancient ruin, or a host of dangerous orks is picking off guards on the borders with unusual precision, or an uprising occurs in a remote village due to a curse-inflicted plague, what sort of vassal handles that business for a lord? Most nobles are too busy with intrigue to be out "roaming the countryside" and risking their necks in such dangerous circumstances—but the right sorts of unBlooded dirt could handle these problems. Thus were formed *chartered adventuring companies*.

A chartered adventuring company serves a simple purpose: Handle troubles that the noble can't or won't handle personally or through other vassals. The noble picks a group of opportunistic unBlooded with special talents, who all work through an intermediary to sign a mutual contract. The noble writes down his demands and outlines the sorts of work that the company must perform. The company writes down its requests and swears to uphold the liege lord's good name through their words and deeds. Once signed, the contract becomes a binding legal document that creates a patronage deal between the noble and the company.

Of course, nobles don't always feel compelled to keep their word with dirt. Since a chartered adventuring company is, perforce, made up of unBlooded dirt, the occasional unscrupulous noble might sell out the company. Renege on terms. Refuse payment for services duly rendered. Legitimate, but risky. These unBlooded companies are made up of people with tenacity and special talents, after all. A company that has solved problems for the noble might have a following of common people who revolt if the folk heroes are betrayed, or a

competing noble might snap up the company and use them (and their special knowledge) against the former employer. Better to keep these unpredictable and talented sorts of dirt at arms' length but well-employed and happy—and if they need to be taken out of the picture, well, there are plenty of ork-infested hinterlands that are just too dangerous for any ven, skilled adventurer or not, to survive out there.

## The Adventuring Company in Ven Drama

Just as the usual nobles' dance reflects ven opera, and the pulse of the cities (detailed in the *Slumming* sourcebook) follows the tradition of low theater, the adventurer's tale also invokes a particular style of ven drama. It's not a theatrical drama as such; it's closer to the bildungsroman style of contemporary fiction—that is, the journey of discovery, telling of a common ven who, through extraordinary circumstances, rises to prominence and a position of influence. Among the ven, this sort of drama isn't performed, it's told in an oratory style. When a group of unBlooded laborers gather around at a public house at the end of a workday, or an unBlooded traveler stops to share the hospitality of a distant relative in a neighboring province, the company present might share fanciful tales of high adventure, drama, treachery, and the occasional campy lowbrow humor.

Since the *adventure story* is not a part of ven theater, it's a form of “art” (to use the term loosely) that nobles don't appreciate. Some nobles have never even heard of the form, and would find the idea of sitting around a firepit on wooden benches and telling tall tales a ludicrous and crude waste of time. Conversely, the opera *Tiriol Mwrr and the Cult of the Winged Serpent* was, in fact, adapted from an adventure story, albeit with significant changes to turn it into a suitable stage piece with romance and convoluted politics in addition to its action. In general, though, nobles leave adventure stories to the unBlooded. After all, nobles already *have* lands, titles, and benefits. Why would they want to hear stories about unBlooded people striving for such things? Meanwhile, the unBlooded in their hovels and villages drift off to sleep with dreams of wealth, fortune, and perhaps even the chance to join one of the Houses...



One slight exception does occur. UnBlooded *tavala*—the closest equivalent would be “bards”—are, on rare occasions, invited to entertain nobles with their skills in musicianship, rhetoric, comedy, and storytelling. From time to time one of these *tavala* will relate an adventure story. In fact, it’s from just such liaisons that adventuring companies are born, when a *tavala* serves as an intermediary between a group of talented unBlooded and a noble in need of some “special help.”

## Contracting Adventurers

A noble ven—any of the sort that would occur in the usual opera—can contract an adventuring company quite easily. After all, there are any number of none-too-bright young farmers’ sons and apothecaries’ daughters who would be only too happy to leave the muddy, poverty-stricken villages in search of wealth and prestige.

Since a noble doesn’t deal with unBlooded on equal footing, and most unBlooded aren’t even literate or competent to understand the terms of a contract, both parties rely on a *tavala* as an intermediary. The *tavala* opens a dialog with a noble (through the auspices of being a hired performer), proposes members for the adventuring company, and uses his limited knowledge of noble society to make sure that the contract isn’t entirely one-sided. Obviously, the *tavala* also wants a good deal, but the unBlooded don’t push matters too hard—an annoyed noble can simply refuse or even have them executed for presumption, after all.

Once a noble uses a *tavala* to consolidate a group of adventurers, both parties must agree on terms of a contract. The usual contract includes a list of the parties involved and the expectations of both sides. Typically, the noble is expected to provide upkeep, tools, and occasionally certain benefits to the company. The company, in return, agrees to carry out the noble’s tasks in spite of any danger or personal stake, to bring the noble’s banner with them and show the people that the noble has taken an interest in the welfare of the land, and to uphold the noble’s good name by being on their best behavior. Breach of contract by the noble usually results in the company simply deserting, while breach of contract by the unBlooded may result in penalties up to death.

In terms of the Game, your adventuring company is a new type of Vassal:

## Adventuring Company (Band Vassal)

A chartered adventuring company wanders the land dealing with exotic problems and handling issues that are too complex, too esoteric, too dangerous, or just too damn undignified for Roadmen. While Roadmen keep the highways orderly (“safe” is perhaps not the right word), the adventuring companies deal with problems *off* the road, out in the wilderness and the places where Trouble happens. Usually, the company doesn’t interact directly with the noble patron; rather, they carry his banner and act in his name (and suffer appropriately if they betray that trust). Unlike Roadmen, the company is usually small in number, and additional Ranks in this Band indicate higher quality rather than greater size. When particularly esoteric trouble arises—trouble that normal Roadmen can’t handle—a noble may dispatch a company to deal with the problem. Conversely, a simple company can’t stand up to a large group of trained Roadmen in battle, so they must be deployed cautiously if used in hostile territory (that is, performing special missions in someone else’s land).

## The Adventure Story

Instead of just contracting a company with your ven noble, though, you might tell a different story altogether: The adventure story. It has a long tradition among the unBlooded. While it is often a crude story with simple, predictable plot points and stereotyped, overused character roles, it can be a refreshingly straightforward contrast to the convoluted politics of the Game of the Houses. In fact, the story of an unBlooded ven striving to rise to prominence, clawing all the way up to sponsorship and eventually joining a House—or failing in the process—can be an intriguing way to establish motivations for a character coming up from the bottom to join the machinations of the courts.

When you tell an adventure story, you’re telling a different sort of tale than the usual opera of high ven theater. You’re telling a tale of bloody violence, conquest, underhanded dealings, and mystery. Like the higher forms of ven drama, though, the adventure story almost always includes certain key elements. It follows a semi-predictable



formula that has served as the model for passing down stories from generation to generation among the unBlooded. These stories include specific plot elements and characters, just like the operas of the Blooded.

A good adventure story includes uncertainty, action, ancient treasures, a possible betrayal by a member of the company (usually a Thief), forbidden secrets held by a member of the company (usually a Witch), brute stupidity winning out over common sense (usually by a Warrior), and a moral conflict answered in simplistic terms (usually by a Priest). The whole story is told in framing fiction by the *tavala* (the Bard), often in the form of the *tavala* relating the tale as a personal experience (whether it was or not).

When a company performs directly for a noble, the *tavala* (and the rest of the company) tell the tale of their adventures just like a typical adventure story, with the *tavala* setting the stage in order to answer the questions of the patron. The rest of the team explains in their areas of expertise, while the *tavala* smooths over inconsistencies and embellishes when necessary to make sure that everyone in the company looks like they did their jobs.

So, of course, you can use the *Houses of the Blooded* rules to tell your own adventure stories. Here's how you do it.



### **A Certain Kind of Adventure Story**

The adventure story may strike you as a particular kind of story that you've seen before—the sort of story that you'd tell, perhaps, with some other game, in some other style, maybe with alliterative initials that evoke notions of underground prisons and majestic monstrous flying creatures. Turns out that there are some similarities. Enough, in fact, that you can take the basic outlines from some of those stories and turn them into adventure stories among the ven. A noble could contract a company to travel from his isolated fortress through the dark woods and to a hillside complex of caverns teeming with orks (B2). Or hire a company to sail a ship to a distant isle peopled with barbaric ven and inhabited by giant lizards and gargantuan reptilian birds (X1). Or perhaps enjoy a company to track down the hidden fort of a group of slave-traders



who've been preying upon travelers and bringing danger to the region, all while working secretly with hidden masters from a neighboring realm (A1). The details will change as the story unfolds through the players' wagers, but the core notions and jumping-off points are infinitely adaptable.

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## Differences in the Adventure Story

Since an adventure story isn't a blood opera, it has significant structural differences from the usual ven drama. It's often more concerned with mass murder and mystery than with politics and romance. This also means that the rules of the game are a bit different.

First off, an adventure story is a tale of the unBlooded. It's a story about courageous (or foolish...) young ven trying to make names for themselves by doing daring (or dumb...) things. Since they're unBlooded, these characters have no Houses, no Blessings, no Holdings, no Vassals. They just have their wits, their Virtues and their Aspects.

Second, an adventure story is always an oration, generally told by a *tavala* (bard) to a noble. The usual conceit is that the *tavala* is explaining to the noble what happened when the company went forth to deal with a problem. For this reason, the adventure story unfolds just like a ven opera, but it is essentially in the past tense—the story usually begins with a semi-ritualistic call. The noble opens with “When I sent you forth to *perform such-and-such deed*, there were *such-and-such dangers*. What happened when you traveled forth from my castle?” The *tavala* then replies, “We set forth from the castle to confront *such-and-such danger...*” and the tale begins in earnest. As the tale unfolds, each member of the company contributes in the areas where they participated, until the tale reaches its conclusion.

Third, when the tale is over, the *tavala* closes by highlighting the successes of the various members of the company. Since the company all signed the charter together, they all rise and fall together, but it is the words of the *tavala* that determine who is remembered and



who falls into obscurity with history. Unscrupulous *tavala* have been known to use their oratory to claim all the glory of a story for themselves, leaving the company destitute and without a good reputation—but such *tavala* can also find themselves the targets of bloody-minded vengeance.

All of these changes mean that you have to make a few tweaks to the *Houses of the Blooded* rules when you run an adventure story as your game. The key changes are summarized below, and then presented in detail on the following pages:

- **UnBlooded characters.** The ven in these stories are unBlooded, so they have no House benefit and they lack the many advantages of the nobility. They almost always fit into specific roles in the story, represented by new unBlooded Aspects.
- **Style and Glory.** You can't be unBlooded and have Style (unless you're a well-dressed bard, that is). In general, unBlooded characters don't have Style points. Instead, the company as a whole has Glory. You can use Glory points to do all the things that you'd do with Style: refresh Aspects, show up at a dramatic moment, trigger various abilities and so on. You just have to pull it from the company's communal pool. The company gains Glory by overcoming perils, and the bard determines whose Glory lasts beyond the tale at the end.
- **Benefits.** In the blood opera of *Houses of the Ven*, the Blooded generally don't evolve and improve very much. They can learn maneuvers if inclined to the sword, can gain new vassals and lands, can earn new Blessings from the *suaven*, but they already own so much that it's hard for them to go up except by gaining titles from fealty. The unBlooded, on the other hand, start at the bottom rungs of society. As unBlooded characters gain Glory, they earn benefits from their patrons. These benefits grant them access to privileges normally reserved for the nobility, like the right to wield a sword, the right to own a horse, or the right to visit a temple to one of the *suaven*. Eventually, an unBlooded character may gain a patron and become a Vassal, or even gain so much recognition that she goes through the ritual of Blooding and joins the nobility herself!

## Crafting the UnBlooded

When you set out to tell an adventure story, you need an unBlooded company to participate. UnBlooded ven are still ven, even if they aren't people. This means that they have Names, Virtues, and Aspects just like noble ven. There are some differences in how these are determined, though, and unBlooded adventurers also lack many of the special advantages of the nobles.

### Names

Your unBlooded ven adventurer has a name, of course. As per usual ven custom, this name has a meaning. Among the unBlooded, personal names usually relate to a specific job or to a prominent characteristic. A ven from a blacksmith's family might have a name that literally means "blacksmith's third son." A ven born under an auspicious moon might have a name that means "auspicious moon." UnBlooded ven tend to be more straightforward with their names than the Blooded; subtle nuances are not the forte of illiterate peasantry.

As usual, when your Name is appropriate to a Risk, you gain a bonus die on the Risk. The Narrator, of course, determines when your Name is appropriate to a Risk. Since unBlooded ven tend to have Names associated with common jobs, their Names will come up in performance of those jobs or in related areas. The "blacksmith's third son" gains a bonus die when forging tools or appraising weapons. The "auspicious moon" gains a bonus die when trusting to luck under the moonlit night sky.

### Virtues

As with their Blooded superiors, unBlooded ven have the six Virtues: Strength, Cunning, Courage, Beauty, Wisdom, and Prowess. UnBlooded ven have the usual spread of 4, 3, 3, 2, 2, and a weakness to distribute in their Virtues. Since the unBlooded don't have the benefits of a House, they don't gain a bonus point in any Virtue.

## Age

The vast majority of unBlooded adventurers are Spring ven—young, capable, spry, ready to face danger and hardship with minimal complaint. Older ven tend to be too cautious, too settled, or too stiff with age to take up the lifestyle of the adventuring company. As a result, almost all adventuring company ven are Spring aspected.

Exceptions do occur, but the primary model for the adventure story is, after all, parallel to the bildungsroman literary genre. The tales explain young and daring unBlooded who make names and fortunes for themselves, then settle down as vassals or even become Blooded in their maturity. Playing an older adventurer presupposes that one was either a very unsuccessful adventurer while young (which usually results in death) or took up the mantle late in life. Very strange. Not usually suited to the adventure story.

## Aging for the UnBlooded

You may recall how aging works for the Blooded (it's on page 272 of the *Houses of the Blooded* book, in case you forgot). For the unBlooded, though, aging is not just an inevitable process, it's a weight pressing down. Life among the peasantry is hard. Grim winters take their toll. Shanri demands hard labor for every sprout and every herd animal that the commoners raise up for sustenance. Long days of grueling work give way to cold, cold nights. Pestilence, hunger, and deprivation give peasants worn hands and lined faces long before their time. Those who don't have the benefits of noble station and the associated lifestyle must come to grips with early Solace or death.

Each Year, an unBlooded character automatically gains 6 points of Age. No roll of the dice—the unBlooded become old and worn out quickly. This means that the unBlooded can expect to live for about forty years after reaching maturity, and then either die or enter Solace. It also means that unBlooded pick up new Aspects fairly quickly, but that's to be expected when your livelihood is on the line.

Finally, many unBlooded die of disease, wear, or just plain ennui. When an unBlooded character is about to enter Solace, make a Strength risk. If the risk succeeds, the character enters Solace normally; since Solace is pretty much an all-or-nothing affair, extra wagers are not useful in this case. If the risk fails, the character dies over the winter, probably due to malnutrition or plague. You may recall that the ven never get sick—as mentioned on page 39 of *Houses of*

*the Blooded*. But remember, that's talking about the Blooded. The unBlooded don't have the primal fire of sorcery running through their veins to gift them with long life and an easy dismissal of all the cares of the harsh world.

Of course, an unBlooded adventurer with a contract can choose to gain the privileges of a high lifestyle. An unBlooded character supported by a noble in this fashion uses the usual aging rules for nobles, and can expect to live much longer—but also to gain new Aspects more slowly (since the cushy life isn't conducive to learning like the school of hard knocks).

## Aspects

Since most unBlooded adventurers are Spring ven, they have two Spring aspects. One of these Aspects is a typical Aspect, though of course the unBlooded lack the sophistication and political finesse of the Blooded. UnBlooded won't usually have Aspects such as "Love the Shoes" or "Scholar" unless there's some compelling reason for it, like an unBlooded who served as a valet or one who was trained as a scholar in order to work as a tutor for young noble children.

In addition to the one usual Aspect that a Spring adventurer possesses, an unBlooded adventurer has a second Aspect that is descriptive of the role that the individual plays in the company. While all ven are, on some level, out for themselves, the chartered adventuring company is perhaps as close as ven ever come to true common cause. All for one and one for all. The company succeeds, fails, or dies together. For this reason the company must have people with a wide range of Aspects in order to accomplish the unusual and dangerous tasks that are set out in adventure stories.

Since the adventure story is a type of ven drama, most such stories have a set of predictable roles. Variations do happen, but the most common adventure story involves exactly *five* company members who undertake a mission for a noble. One Aspect of an unBlooded adventurer always describes this role in the company and relates to the job that the ven performs.

The five key roles in an adventure story are all Aspects that you can use when you make your unBlooded characters. In general, you shouldn't overlap these Aspects; each one should appear once in your adventuring company. In a few cases, some characters in an adventure story will have two of these Aspects at once (but no other Aspect), or one of the Aspects will be replaced with an uncommon Aspect that appears in some variations on the form (see page 72 for additional unBlooded adventuring Aspects).

Note that you've seen some of these Aspects before, on pages 163-166 of the *Houses of the Blooded* book. The descriptions here help to flesh them out a bit more, and offer a few extra twists for your unBlooded companies.

### **Tavala (The Bard)**

**Invoke:** Call upon this aspect when you are relating a story, impugning someone's reputation, or embellishing upon a tale of glory. The *tavala* also has two special functions related to this aspect: the *tavala* can spin the tale of the company, and oversees the distribution of Glory at the conclusion of a tale.

**Tag:** Opponents gain bonus dice when calling into question the accuracy of your narration or pointing out that the bard, as a traveler and storyteller, is not part of any system of authority or settled society.

**Compel:** Forced to speak a painful truth—be it speaking truth to nobility or lampooning someone who is deserving of humorous derision. The *tavala* also is a juggler of many skills, which means that the bard usually has a limited attention span or is only a dabbler in many things without having a strong conviction to or devotion for any one thing.

The Bard is the single most important member of the adventuring company. Without the Bard's influence, the company would never have been able to meet with a noble and form a contract. The *tavala* tells the story of the company's successes, embellishes on glorious deeds, and skims over failures. A skillful *tavala* can impress a noble patron sufficiently to garner amendments to a contract that grant special benefits, in effect giving members of the company fame and fortune that affords them rights normally reserved for nobles. A *tavala* can also ruin someone's reputation, so it is paramount that the *tavala* be appeased by noble and common ven alike. While adventuring with the company, the *tavala's* role is to deal with situations that rely on trickery, social acumen, and diplomacy.

A successful Bard usually often uses benefits to gain invitations to special parties and events. This will allow him to spin more tales and win more Glory, which will eventually result in patronage. Bards also use benefits to wear the noble's colors and to gain access to fine clothing and jewelry, so that they can use Style like the nobility.

Ven with the Bard Aspect usually have high Beauty and reasonable Cunning and Courage. They often have a weakness in Strength (though sometimes the Bard is a hardy and experienced traveler).

### **Shalvar (The Warrior)**

**Invoke:** Gain bonus dice whenever you use a tool to murder something. This could be an ork, a door, a boulder, a fellow member of the company...

**Tag:** Your enemies gain bonus dice when they out-think you because you have no real education.

**Compel:** Cause you to rashly jump into a problem and use violence or action as the solution.

The Warrior is, in the dramas, often a blacksmith's son or farmer's son. Occasionally the Warrior is a woman, though this is rare; in such tales she is usually a barmaid from a large city. The Warrior solves problems through violence, often because he or she lacks any sophistication for other solutions. The Warrior's role is to deal with difficulties that rely on brute force, like crashing down a stuck drawbridge or murdering a troop of orks.

Unlike the *senvu* (the Swordsman, on page 165 of *Houses of the Blooded*), the *shalvar* is not necessarily known for being an honorable duelist. Rather, *shalvar* translates more closely as "brawler," someone who starts fist-fights in taverns with Roadmen. It's not a flattering appellation, but it gets the point across.

A successful Warrior often uses benefits to gain the right to own an *ilderim* (a horse; see *Houses of the Blooded*, page 35), to carry a sword instead of a tool, to learn maneuvers, or to earn a place as a vassal Swordsman.



Ven with the Warrior Aspect usually have high Prowess and reasonable Strength and Courage. They often have a weakness in Cunning (though sometimes the Warrior is a canny ambusher).

### **Dalada (The Thief)**

**Invoke:** When sneaking into some place unseen, shimmying up cracked walls or ropes, listening carefully for guards, disabling small locks and traps on boxes of valuables, or otherwise performing actions that will get your hot little hands on someone else's loot.

**Tag:** When calling upon your dubious nature, either to get you in trouble or to rely on your moral failings (like your sensible but cowardly aversion to violence, or your greedy susceptibility to bribery).

**Compel:** Get you to try to swipe something in a dangerous situation: stealing an artifact that you know to be cursed, hiding money from the company, or swiping a share of treasure from one of your fellow company-members.

The Thief is usually a village scoundrel, though sometimes he is a vagabond from the big city on the run from Roadmen. The Thief can be male or female, but almost always has one of the operatic characteristics of a villain (red hair, gray eyes, or pale skin). In a few stories, the Thief has a twin; in every such story the twins betray the company, but meet a terrible end. The Thief's role in the company is to handle situations that rely on adroitness, sneakiness, and a criminal mindset.

A successful Thief often uses benefits to gain pardons from crimes, to gain ownership of special artisan's tools used by locksmiths, and to gain patronage as a vassal Master Spy.

Ven with the Thief Aspect usually have high Strength and reasonable Cunning and Wisdom. They often have a weakness in Courage (though sometimes the Thief is a plucky rascal with more courage than sense).

### **Q'Val (The Priest)**

**Invoke:** To sway someone in a moral dilemma, offer bolstering confidence, understand the nuances of the *suaven*, or perform holy rites when presiding over a community ceremony like a wedding or funeral.



**Tag:** When putting you in an awkward position of clashing morals, like making you decide between lying to your company or revealing a secret that was told to you in confidence. The *q'val* also has a tendency to miss the problems of the mundane world while focused on the issues of the invisible world.

**Compel:** Cause you to try to take the high road and emulate the best virtues of the *suaven*. This could mean protecting the shrine or good name of one of the *suaven*, or serving the people in emulation of one of the *suaven's* high-minded characteristics.

Commonly, the Priest oversees marriages and funerary rites among the unBlooded. The Priest serves as a village councilor who offers moral guidance and handles the work of interring commoners who enter Solace. Since only noble ven may visit the shrines of the *suaven* and venerate them, the Priest deals only with the cocoons of the unBlooded. Few unBlooded reach Solace, though; most die due to trauma or starvation in particularly harsh years when they become frail due to age. The Priest can be male or female. The Priest's role is generally to provide moral guidance, which often puts the Priest at odds with the rest of the company, because the Priest hopes to find better solutions than the Warrior's violence, to avoid the criminal compulsions of the Thief, and to stay away from the forbidden arts of the Witch. In almost every drama in which the company meets its end, the Priest and the *tavala* are the only survivors, the *tavala* because someone has to tell the story and the Priest because only he or she was humble and virtuous enough to escape the perils of the adventure.

A successful Priest often uses benefits to gain the right to visit the noble *suaven* and earn their blessings, to bear the symbols of the *suaven* in conjunction with the noble's heraldry.

Ven with the Priest aspect usually have high Courage and reasonable Wisdom and Beauty. They often have a weakness in Prowess (though sometimes the Priest is a militant warrior of faith).



## **Senvada (The Witch)**

**Invoke:** When using herbs, poultices, or eccentric knowledge learned by an outcast living on the outskirts of town. Especially important with Cunning or Wisdom wagers involving occulted secrets and the power of the sorcerer-kings.

**Tag:** Your social outcast status makes you a social pariah, unskilled in the things that “common” ven do (like farming or fighting). This makes it harder to interact socially with other ven because the *senvada* have always had a sinister reputation.

**Compel:** Keep a secret from the company, because only you can be trusted to understand secret knowledge. The *senvada* pursues the knowledge and artifacts of the sorcerer-kings, to tragic ends.

The Witch is often an apothecary’s daughter, a midwife, or an illegitimate daughter of one of the Blooded. She knows forbidden secrets and practices the arts of peasant magic. The Witch is almost always female; male witches in the dramas usually meet a terrible end. Rarely, a story has a pair of twins that are Witches; in these stories, the Witches always betray the company in exchange for the secrets of sorcery, but ultimately die because of their hubris and villainy. The Witch’s usual role in the company is to understand secret or forbidden knowledge, and occasionally to call upon peasant magic to overcome complications (though this can, itself, cause even more complications in the long run).

A successful Witch often uses benefits to refine her Conjuring, to gain access to poisons, and to earn patronage as a vassal Apothecary.

Ven with the Witch Aspect usually have high Wisdom and reasonable Cunning and Courage. They often have a weakness in Beauty (though sometimes the Witch has a seductive, otherworldly allure).

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### **More, Less, or Multi-Aspected**

In the traditional ven adventure story, all five of these Aspects appear. They are, in a sense, the archetypes required to “make the story go.”

But what if you don’t have enough players to cover all of the aspects? It’s Tuesday night and your friends are working overtime, and now you only have three players. What do you do?

Simple. Since your adventure story is always told in the past tense—“We went forth and did these things, and we have returned to tell you about it”—just throw together some character sheets and names for the missing Aspects. Then, during the course of the adventure, you can describe what happened that caused them not to make it back with you! Maybe they died, betrayed the team, fled to another province, stole all of your money...

Or, you can make one of your ven a character with multiple archetypal Aspects. Your Bard might also be the Thief, or your Warrior might also be the Priest. Of course, if you do this, the character doesn't have any other Spring Aspects. This “multi-class” character can handle the roles for two of the archetypes, though, at the cost of not having any other breadth in Aspects.

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## Devotions

UnBlooded ven do not have the privilege of visiting the tombs of the *suaven*. While an unBlooded ven could enter Solace, most unBlooded don't have the monetary means to be kept in state somewhere, and few even survive their Winter of age; one bad famine or plague can wipe out the weak and infirm among the elderly. The result of all of this is that unBlooded ven generally don't have Devotion, and don't gain Blessings. This is not to say that the unBlooded have no faith; rather, they simply don't have access to the *suaven* in any way that would garner Blessings.

Of course, those useful dirt who prove their mettle may garner a special dispensation from the nobility. One of the benefits that an unBlooded ven may gain is the ability to earn one rank of Devotion. Each additional point of benefits grants another rank of Devotion, up to the usual maximum of five ranks. The Priest is the archetypal ven most likely to gain Devotion in this fashion. And even unBlooded can gain Blessings from their Devotion, in spite of their low station—

after all, anyone who has gained the benefit has clearly *earned* it, which means that the useful piece of dirt is perhaps worth a *bit* of notice by the revered ancestors.

Devotions are also used by the Talashan, the Speakers to the Soil. See Chapter Six: Peasant Magic for more information about this.

## **Maneuvers**

UnBlooded characters are not skilled in maneuvers. Of course, any ven can use the Injure (rank 1) maneuver—you just need to hit someone. But unBlooded characters don't learn fencing, don't train with swordmasters, and aren't even allowed to touch or pick up (much less own) swords. For this reason, unBlooded ven don't have maneuvers. In fact, those unBlooded who fight—the Warrior, usually—have to rely on tools of the trade: a hammer for the blacksmith's son, a pitchfork for the farmer, a truncheon for the barmaid.

As a benefit, an unBlooded ven can garner a modicum of training from a swordmaster at the behest of a sponsoring noble. This enables an unBlooded character to learn a maneuver. Using this maneuver with a tool, though, is always less effective; the player must set aside a wager for "...and I do it with a tool instead of a sword" whenever making a maneuver in such a fashion. An unBlooded character who has gained the benefit of carrying a sword, of course, becomes highly dangerous if he also learns a maneuver or two.

## **Vassals**

UnBlooded characters don't have Vassals. They work for the nobles—they don't have people working for them.

You can't use benefits to gain Vassals. Only if you are raised to the station of a Blooded House can you gain Vassals.

## **Holdings**

As with Vassals, unBlooded characters don't have Holdings. The typical unBlooded commoner-turned-adventurer is lucky to live in a large one-room home made of mud with a thatched roof, fed by a garden plot and a field all on land owned by the local noble. By the same token, unBlooded usually don't have any personal possessions besides an item used in their trade: a hammer, a bag of herbs, a holy icon or a pair of soft-soled shoes.

As a benefit, an unBlooded adventurer can gain access to an item of special quality. This could be a sword, a horse, a charm amulet, a set of lockpicks, or a similar item. Obviously, swords and horses function as described in the *Houses of the Blooded* rulebook. Other items might grant a single bonus die on certain tasks, if the Narrator deems them appropriate.

## Sorcery

UnBlooded ven almost never practice sorcery. This is because, without the ritual of Blooding, they have a much lower amount of magical energy in their blood. UnBlooded ven are, quite literally, dirt *because they have no magic*.

That said, it is *possible* for an unBlooded character to perform sorcery, but the magic in their blood is so weak that it's very difficult. Even if an unBlooded character somehow learns sorcery, it takes *three times* as many Wounds for an unBlooded character to perform a sorcerous ritual. This means that many rituals will simply be too dangerous to perform at all! And, of course, unBlooded characters who practice sorcery are breaking the law and may be put to death at any time—or even used as scapegoats.

UnBlooded ven who study the occult arts usually learn some form of peasant magic (see Chapter Six).

## Bonus Points

Unlike their Blooded superiors, the unBlooded do not have any bonus points at the time of character creation. They don't have the advantages of luxury, education, and a dissolute lifestyle to allow them opportunities to gain extras. UnBlooded characters must gain these extras through benefits earned with Glory (described earlier).

## Style

The most important alteration to an unBlooded character is the total lack of Style. UnBlooded characters have a really hard time being stylish. They don't have fine wardrobes, elegant parties, and high art

to complement them. Instead, they spend a lot of time in squalid conditions, fighting filthy orks and struggling to overcome embarrassing problems that the local noble won't handle himself. That's hardly Stylish—but it can be Glorious.

In general, unBlooded adventurers have no Style points. This would mean that they can't do anything that requires Style, but they do have a few ways around this limitation...

The first and most important way to do the things that you'd do with Style is to gain Glory. This is described shortly. Don't sweat it for the moment; the section below will explain it all.

The other way to gain Style is to bank it in your wardrobe, just like a noble. How do you get an expensive wardrobe? Benefits, of course. You can gain and bank one point of Style by using a benefit to gain a Stylish accessory, such as a master-crafted musical instrument, a jeweled medal in recognition of your services, or a matched set of tabards bearing the heraldry of your noble sponsor in conjunction with the emblem of your company. Once you have a Stylish accessory, you can gain and spend Style in the normal fashion.

(See page 111 of *Houses of the Blooded* for banking Style. Just remember that if you're unBlooded, you *only* hold Style by banking it in an item of your wardrobe.)

## **Glory**

For the un-Stylish unBlooded, the goal isn't to win at the Game of Houses. It's not about one-upsmanship, political allegiances, and moonlit dalliances. It's about hard-fought victories over terrible odds, about earning recognition for one's unique talents, about coming home with the wealth of ancient treasures and the respect of one's peers. In short, adventuring is a route to garnering the notice of your fellow ven—a route to Glory!

(As a quick aside, yes, you should use some kind of markers or chits for your Glory, and yes, you should definitely use the Style point tokens if you have some. If you don't, then buy some!)

When an adventuring company performs dangerous and difficult tasks, its members gain some renown. The stories of their heroics spread and become tales retold by the peasants. The nobles listen and determine that perhaps this bit of dirt is useful enough to keep around. Defeat enough nasty orks and solve enough

problems and you can gain the Glory that will ensure your name is remembered!

When you start an adventuring story, put some kind of shallow dish or bowl in the middle of your group—on the game table, on the floor, near the Narrator, whatever works. Your company will use this to keep track of their Glory.

Each time you start a new adventure story, begin with an empty bowl. Then, put in one point of Glory for each person on the contract. For each hazard that the Narrator adds while describing the journey at the outset, place another point of Glory in the bowl. If the band has to travel across a mighty desert, fight their way through ruins, discover a lost magical oasis, and return with an enchanted fruit, that's four extra Glory just for the hazards that the band will face along the way.

When you do something Glorious, like murdering an ork with panache, evading a deadly trap in a sorcerer-king's ruins, or talking your way into an enemy noble's castle to spy on his secret army, you gain Glory points. Put them in the dish!

Anything that would normally net you Style can earn Glory for your company. Similarly, anything that would cost you Style can cost you Glory. For instance, if you need to refresh an Aspect, you must spend Glory from the pool. In the larger context, you start telling your patron noble about how you do *that special trick*

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**Saying "No" in an Adventuring Company**

Remember, since you spend one Glory to Compel a member of your band and the target gains one Glory, it costs nothing to use a Compel on another adventurer in your company—but if that player wishes to say no, it costs a point of Glory to do so. If the group starts arguing over the outcome of a particular risk or scene, both party members are drawing Glory from the same pool, and it will quickly become expensive!

Thus, if a member of the company Compels you or states something true about your character, it's beneficial to the group as a whole if you accept. If you take it gracefully and turn it into more meaty story, the Narrator may even give you more Glory for it!

And remember—while nobody can stop you from taking Glory from the pool, if you hog all the Glory, your character may not be invited back next time the group wants to sign a new contract!

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*again*, to which the noble simply waves his hand dismissively with a snide comment about how he's heard it before...

Keep in mind that because your Glory is all in one shared pool, certain applications don't work quite the same any more. For example, if you decide to Compel another member of the company, you spend a point of Glory (taken from the pool) and give it to the target (given back to the pool). So, you don't earn or lose any Glory for making a Tag or Compel on your own company—although if the Narrator decides that it's Good Form he may award additional Glory. Conversely, when you Tag or Compel the Aspects of the Narrator's creatures (like the orks that you will doubtless encounter), then you may have to spend Glory from the company's pool. When the Narrator Tags or Compels your Aspects, the company gains Glory. The company can also gain Glory by letting the Narrator pay with Glory to make things true, like stating the nature of some upcoming hazard, determining something about the orks you face, or putting a trap on that secret door that you just found!

One special exception. Since you're all bound together by fate and by contract, it does not cost Glory for you to kibitz with a member of the company who is present in the same location with you.

Since everyone in the company uses the same pool of Glory, this can lead to some definite complications! Some party members may decide to use up all the Glory for themselves before it can be used by anyone else. Others may resent this when they go to use Glory and find that it's all gone. Such is the tension of relying on your fellow adventurers to watch your back!

### **The Dramatic Rewrite**

One last thing about Glory. Remember how we said that the Bard is the most important member of the company? Remember how the Bard's Aspect allows him to take control of the story? Here's how that works with Glory.

You use a dramatic rewrite when you're about to make a risk and you don't think that you can gain the privilege that you need. Maybe the success of your company hinges on your ability to kill a giant poisonous serpent before it strikes and bites the Baron's daughter—but Prowess is your weakness. What do you do? You have the Bard *make it up*, of course.



The Bard is the one who tells the story of the company's adventure. This means that when the chips are down and things look grim, the Bard can punch the story up a little and maybe make you look better than you really were.

To do this, spend a point of Glory. It's mandatory. Everyone knows that you probably couldn't pull off what's about to come. They politely let the Bard tell it his way, because otherwise he'll just get angry at the interruption and leave without finishing the story.

Then, you can do two things. First, you can use the Bard's Virtue instead of your own. If you try to stab that snake and your weakness is Prowess while the Bard has a Prowess score, you use the Bard's Prowess instead.

Second, the Bard can choose to activate his Bard Aspect. If it's already used it needs to be refreshed, which costs another point of Glory (or Style, if the Bard has some from an accessory). It's better than nothing, though, in case you didn't have an appropriate Aspect for the risk at hand.

So maybe you couldn't stab that giant snake in time, but your companion the *tavala* shouted for you to jump in front of the Baron's daughter. Then while you picked up a stick to fend it off, the *tavala* stabbed it in the back of the head. When you get back and tell the story, the Bard doesn't want to make it look like there was any ever doubt as to the outcome, so he tells everyone that you actually dove and rolled across the floor, flipped the Warrior's hammer into your hand as you sprang to your feet, and crushed the snake right between the eyes as it struck. Nobody really believes that the scrawny Priest really did it, but the story is just too damn good for them to complain. It's not very Glorious to lie about your accomplishments, but it's probably better than the alternative, which is telling the story of how you came back to the castle with the Baron's poisoned daughter thrown over the shoulder of the Thief.

## Benefits

At the end of an adventure story, when the Bard has told the noble how the mission concluded, the company will share out its remaining Glory and determine who gains benefits from it. It's up to the Bard to decide who shines and who falls, so make sure that you stay on the good side of your bard!

The very last roll that should happen when a story ends is the final tally of Glory by the Bard. Roll the Bard's Beauty; invoking the Bard Aspect grants the usual three bonus dice. Of course a Bard with a proper name may gain a bonus from it, and the Bard may claim a bonus die from having a perfect musical tool, if one was earned in an earlier adventure. Make wagers as normal for a risk. You want to succeed on this roll!

If the Bard gains privilege from this roll, he gains *benefits* for the company. Every member of the company gains one benefit automatically, if there's enough Glory to go around. Each wager allows the Bard to take one more Glory from the pot and turn it into a benefit for one party member. The Bard can share these out however he likes: he can keep them all, give them to one person, or split them up as fairly as possible.

If the bard *fails* the roll, then his story is not well-received. He keeps half of his wagers, and may grant up to that much Glory to members of the company for benefits.

In either case, the Bard may only share out benefits as long as there is enough Glory to go around. If the Bard succeeds with several wagers but there are only two Glory tokens in the pot at the end of the story, then only two benefits will be shared out.

The following is a list of things that you can gain as benefits:

- Right to bear a sword (usually comes with a sword given to you by your patron).
- Right to own an *ilderim* (a horse—see *Houses of the Blooded*, page 35).
- Right to visit a *suaven* shrine (and gain 1 Devotion to a *suaven*, with its concomitant blessing).
- Right to study occulted arts (and gain 1 rank of Conjuring).

- Right to study martial skills (and gain 1 maneuver).
- Right to practice the ways of the *talashan* without being arrested (and gain 1 Devotion to an element—see Chapter Six: Peasant Magic).
- Right of safe passage through the private lands of the patron.
- Gift of a perfect tool (a non-weapon tool such as a masterfully-made musical instrument or a set of locksmith's picks and probes).
- Training, education, or a brief stint learning something new and unusual (and gain an Aspect, up to the usual limit of half your Wisdom, rounded up—see p. 254 of *Houses of the Blooded*).
- Access to a single boon, by request, such as a pardon for a criminal relative or restoration of a family farm plot.
- Gain wealth and treasures (money for spending on whatever the Narrator deems appropriate).
- Gain support for a high lifestyle for one Year (at the end of

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**Optional Rule: Slow Advancement**

Since adventuring characters leave play after achieving ten benefits, they tend to go on three to six successful adventures before they march off into the sunset. This may be unsatisfying for you, if you really like the dynamic of the adventurers in your company and want to tell many, many stories with them. You can choose to extend their careers by using the Epic Adventures rules (presented later), or you can make their climb to the top a little slower.

To slow down advancement, just require an adventurer to gain an amount of Glory equal to the number of benefits that he already has before he gains a new benefit. So, if your warrior has earned two benefits—say, a sword and a maneuver—he must gain two Glory from the Bard to gain a third benefit. After that he must gain three more Glory. A highly-experienced adventurer will have to go on many, many adventures to gain the Glory needed for those last few benefits!

If you use this rule, you'll need to keep track of Glory gained toward the next benefit. Just note it down on your sheet. That way, even if you don't earn enough Glory from one story, you can finish the job with the next story.

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which the character makes an Age roll like a noble ven rather than automatically gaining 6 Age points).

- Access to a valuable and Stylish accessory (a jaunty hat, velvet cloak, well-made boots, any item of clothing that can bank Style, and the ability to gain 1 point of Style or spend 1 point of Style from it).
- Invitation to one noble event (allows the unBlooded character to participate in one Blooded game).

Once you have earned *five benefits*, you will receive an offer of vassalage. Your patron (or, if your Narrator feels like complicating your lives, someone else) will offer you a job suited to your skills: the Warrior might be offered a job as a Swordsman, or the Thief might be offered a job as a Master Spy. This comes with all of the usual duties, and permits the character access to more of the resources—and prestige—of the patron. It also means that you are now able to attend any Blooded event where your patron is present, although you must still be careful around the nobles, as they can kill you for just about any perceived slight!

Once you have earned *ten benefits*, you will receive an offer of fealty. A patron will offer to ennoble you and bring you into one of the Houses through the ritual of blooding! This turns your character from an unBlooded character into a fully-Blooded noble. After you spend one Season as a noble, you gain access to any Vassals, Holdings, Devotions, or other benefits that you would normally have as a brand-new noble character (as described in the base rules). You don't gain any bonus points, but you do keep whatever you may have gained from earlier benefits.

It's possible to refuse an offer of fealty, but this usually makes you an enemy of the person who made the offer. Refusal is fairly common among talashan, witches, and champions, though, who have a lot to lose and little to gain by joining the nobility. Regardless, such a character moves on to some esoteric pursuit or great fate, outside the scope of the usual grind of the adventuring lifestyle.

## **Epic Adventures**

While an adventuring character retires after gaining ten benefits—either becoming a noble, or going off to some strange ending—you might decide that you want to run some games with particularly powerful and resourceful

adventurers. Hey, as long as you're having fun, do it!

If you do this, anyone who has already accumulated ten benefits is an *epic hero*. These characters have proven their mettle time and again and they have shown that they are larger-than-life. Like all culture heroes, they also possess feats and powers beyond the ken of mere mortals!

Epic adventurers are mythic figures. Obviously such people never *actually* existed among the ven, but they are the center of whimsical tales about mighty warriors and mystical witches. Since epic adventurers are just the subjects of flights of fancy, they will never actually show up in a Blooded setting; nobles might *gossip* about this sort of story, but those kinds of ven are obviously not going to just walk through the door.

Epic heroes continue to gain benefits from adventures, but their options expand mightily:

- Gain one point in a Virtue (may only be taken once).
- Gain an additional rank of Devotion, even over a total of 5 ranks (but no more than 5 in any one *suaven* or element, and no more than 10 Devotion total).
- Gain one rank of Conjuring, up to a new maximum of 10.

### Starting with Benefits

Depending on how grim you want your bildungsroman, you might decide to start off with a free benefit for everyone. This would give the Priest a single blessing, the Witch a little bit of peasant magic, the Warrior a sword, and the Thief... well, something sketchy. The Bard, of course, would take a dashing accessory to gain a point of personal Style.

If it helps, you could think of the number of benefits that a character has earned as a sort of "level," and start a character at the first level, third level, fifth level and so on...

You should do this if you want to have some more "things" that help to differentiate the characters in your adventure story. Otherwise the Priest doesn't really have a Blessing to set him apart from everyone else, the Witch can't do anything magical, and so on.

But don't give one person some benefits while withholding them from everyone else, unless you've already planned for how that will contribute to the story. Giving someone extra bonuses while everyone else is marginalized is generally Bad Form, after all.

- Gain an Artifact.
- Gain any of the other usual benefits listed previously, *except* that an epic hero will never appear at a Blooded event, serve as a vassal, or swear fealty to anyone.

If you decide to play adventures with epic heroes, it's highly recommended that you use the optional rules for slow advancement (in the sidebar on page 69).

### **The Dirt Noble**

One last note. If you've survived long enough to acquire ten benefits and you've earned nobility, you're no longer unBlooded. No more adventuring for you. It's time to settle down, make a good marriage, and manage your new assets.

But everyone knows where you came from. Once dirt, always dirt.

If you have an unBlooded Aspect, you will always be recognized as a jumped-up commoner in the eyes of the nobility. It doesn't matter if you later become a Count. You're still the "nouveau riche." And snotty old nobles don't like new upstarts.

This counts as a special Tag that any noble can use against you (except others who came up from the dirt like you did). When you are trying to wheel and deal with the nobles of the Houses, they can Tag to gain bonus dice against you because you're just a commoner made good. You may have been legitimized by the ritual of bleeding, but everyone knows that you still have a little dirt on your shoes.

Of course, you can always duel over an insult like that. But those nobles study dueling since they're old enough to hold a sword, and even the Warrior excels at murders rather than duels.

But there are other ways to have your revenge when you've been slighted—like chartering a company of adventurers to spy on and ruin your enemy's lands...

### **Additional Unblooded Aspects**

Earlier I mentioned some additional unBlooded Aspects that occasionally crop up in the adventure stories. Sometimes these replace one of the archetypal roles. Other times, they show up as additional characters, or one of the protagonists has

two roles. Feel free to mix and match. You can probably figure out their uses pretty quickly.

### **Ushalaven (The Barbarian)**

**Invoke:** When using animal instincts, savage brutality, and the ways of the uncivilized.

**Tag:** Miss the nuances of a subtle interaction or erudite observation, thereby giving an opponent an edge.

**Compel:** Make a scene when dealing with culture or civilized people, because you don't understand them.

The Barbarian is an outlander, a reaver, and a slayer. He (sometimes she) survives by animal cunning and strength of arm. The Barbarian hails from a distant village with strange customs and is uncomfortable and sometimes comical in normal society. His role in the company is to use his strength and his ferocity to handle straightforward threats. When the Barbarian appears in stories, it is usually in place of the Warrior.

A successful Barbarian often uses benefits to gain the right to own an *ilderim* (a horse; see *Houses of the Blooded*, page 35), to gain a masterful tool, or to acquire great wealth. Barbarians sometimes gain patronage as Roadmen or Masters of the Hunt, though usually only among the Falcon or Boar Houses.

Ven with the Barbarian Aspect usually have high Strength and reasonable Prowess and Courage. They often have a weakness in Wisdom (though sometimes the Barbarian is a cunning explorer).

### **Rajan (The Champion)**

**Invoke:** When defending the weak or protecting the downtrodden.

**Tag:** When an enemy tries to see through a lie that you tell or make you uncomfortable with decadence and wickedness.

**Compel:** Force you to stand on principles.



The Champion is a rare figure in ven stories, simply because the archetype doesn't show up much in the society. On the rare cases when the Champion appears in stories, he or she (either, equally) is generally a devotee of Jonan Drax, *suaven* of Justice, either knowingly or in deeds. The Champion is usually the only child of a humble peasant couple (traditionally, the poorest in the village) who grows up as a friend and protector to the other members of the company in their youth. The Champion's role is to defend the other members of the company through his or her natural aptitudes and convictions. In the few stories in which the Champion appears, it is generally in place of the Warrior, and the Champion often suffers greatly for his or her moral stance as opposed to the Warrior's straightforward no-nonsense approach to life.

A successful Champion often uses benefits to learn maneuvers (especially defenses), to gain Devotion, and to earn the right to carry a sword. A Champion who swears fealty can become a Sheriff or Swordmaster, though in some stories the Champion refuses an offer of Vassalage and instead wanders into the unknown lands to right wrongs and battle the wicked.

Ven with the Champion Aspect usually have high Courage and reasonable Strength and Prowess. They often have a weakness in Cunning (though sometimes the Champion is a far-sighted planner who understands the nuanced plots of the wicked).

### **Vozem (The Haunted)**

**Invoke:** When communing with supernatural creatures, such as spectres or ancient minions of the sorcerer-kings.

**Tag:** Focusing on otherworldly sensations leaves you oblivious to the material world, and easy to surprise or attack.

**Compel:** Makes you “talk to thin air” or behave eccentrically in some fashion.

The Haunted is another rare archetype because many peasants believe it's bad luck to invoke spirits, ghosts, spectres, and sorcerer-kings in their stories. The Haunted, whether male or female, is touched with strangeness from a young age. Sometimes the Haunted suffers epilepsy, albinism, or narcolepsy, but the Haunted also has a strange allure and a tendency to talk to people who aren't there. In ghost stories, the Haunted always has a special affinity for magical beings and



is often the only person who can lift a particular curse or handle an artifact safely. The Haunted's role in a company is to deal with arcane mysteries and to bear the brunt of magical threats. Stories featuring one of the Haunted usually do not have the Witch, and instead pit the Haunted's unnatural abilities against the Priest's reticence to deal with such otherworldly entities.

A successful Haunted often uses benefits to learn Conjuring, to gain invitations to special events, and sometimes to make eccentric requests that have no apparent meaning at the time but later turn out to be prophetic. Some Haunted go on to become Court Scholars.

Ven with the Haunted Aspect usually have high Beauty and reasonable Cunning and Wisdom. They often have a weakness in Prowess (though sometimes the Haunted has lightning-fast reflexes thanks to warnings from ghosts and spirits).

### **Talashan (The Speaker to the Soil)**

**Invoke:** Understand the nuances of the natural world, and communicate with animals.

**Tag:** Uncivilized demeanor and frightening reputation make it hard for you to deal with other people without them either dismissing you or being afraid.

**Compel:** Cause you to object to the "civilized world" and refuse to deal with tools, machines, cities, etc.

The Talashan is an unusual archetype because it is one that most ven don't like to acknowledge. The Talashan communes with the natural world, which is seen as an adversarial force in ven literature. This means that the Talashan is also on the cusp of being an adversary. The Talashan can be male or female (female being slightly more common, simply due to the association of women and fertility with Shanri and the power of the natural world). Since the Talashan often understands the ways of nature and has a savage instinct, though, this role occasionally shows up as an alternative to the moral guidance of the



Priest; instead of speaking philosophically about the flaws of society, the Talashan objects to the decadence of civilization.

The Talashan's role is to ease the company's travel by understanding the ways of the wild, and to use that knowledge to find useful plants, to avoid dangerous orks or kill them by knowing their weaknesses, and to craft poultices and potions imbued with the power of Shanri itself. Stories with the Talashan usually do not include the Priest, because the two have very incompatible mindsets and usually wouldn't work together.

A successful Talashan often uses benefits to gain the right of passage through a noble's lands, the right of practicing the Talashan ways without being molested or arrested, and the right to keep animal pets. Talashan almost never swear fealty; those that do generally become Masters of the Hunt.

Ven with the Talashan Aspect usually have high Wisdom and reasonable Cunning and Courage. They often have a weakness in Beauty (though sometimes the Talashan is a nymph-like being possessed of unspoiled natural beauty).

### **Drendaven (The Woodsman)**

**Invoke:** When using the bow, wilderness traps, or tracking skills.

**Tag:** Rustic living means that you aren't familiar with the latest gossip and styles, and you are at a disadvantage with "city folk."

**Compel:** Itchy feet make you want to leave the city and get back to the woods as soon as possible.

The Woodsman is a protector of travelers, a hunter, or a lumberjack. Sometimes he is a poacher. Usually male; a woodswoman in the stories is generally a foil for the Witch and a romantic interest who turns down a dalliance in order to return to the forests that she loves. The Woodsman deals with wilderness survival, and uses tracking and woodcraft to evade or ambush enemies rather than confronting them head-on like the Warrior. The Woodsman usually replaces the Warrior in stories, with a slight twist on approach to handling problems.

A successful Woodsman often uses benefits to gain access to a masterful bow, to earn the right to pass through private lands, or to practice maneuvers (used with

tools, usually an axe). A Woodsman can rise to become a Master of the Hunt or Roadman.

Ven with the Woodsman Aspect usually have high Strength and reasonable Prowess and Cunning. They often have a weakness in Beauty (though sometimes the Woodsman, or especially the Woodswoman, is a charming archer or naïve but beautiful denizen of the deep forests).

## General Aspects

The prior unBlooded Aspects are archetypes—“classes,” if you prefer—that represent specific roles that usually occur in the adventure stories of the peasantry. That’s not to say that they are the only Aspects useful to chartered adventurers, of course. Here are a few other general Aspects that could be useful to adventurers or nobles, depending upon the situation. Most of them tend to come with the territory of the lower classes, but life takes people to strange places, so who’s to say that they would be wholly inappropriate for a noble?

### Armor-User

**Invoke:** Gain bonus dice to resist injuries from weapons, ork attacks, or physical traps.

**Tag:** It’s harder for you to climb, swim, or dodge while wearing heavy armor.

**Compel:** You need to stop and adjust your armor occasionally, or even take a brief rest because it’s heavy and cumbersome.

You may recall that the ven don’t wear armor. In fact, there’s no mention of armor at all in any of the documentation about ven culture. This Aspect is, therefore, something of an assumption, a useful addition in much the same fashion that giving women equal social station is a convenient stretching of our understanding of the ven.

A character with the armor-user Aspect wears some sort of armor: heavy leather pads with metal studs, riveted metal plates to deflect



weapon blows, perhaps a rounded helm and steel-shod boots. This gives the character significant bonuses to defense when facing off against orks, naturally, but it's also hot, heavy, uncomfortable, and costly to maintain.

More to the point, armor is *not* useful in duels. Any ven worth his salt will put one of the elegant, finely-tipped ven swords right between the chinks in a set of armor and easily kill the opponent. Armor is also a sign of low class: it means that you don't trust in your own fighting skills enough to defend yourself. Naturally, a *vetb* peasant wearing armor is not going to be challenged to a duel by a sword-wielding noble; he'll just be executed if he's troublesome. And why wear armor unless you plan to get in trouble?

If you choose this Aspect for your character, assume that you have some sort of armored ensemble to help protect against the Mass Murder of orks or the pointed blades and poisoned darts of trapped ruins. The exact specifics of the armor aren't important; whatever the armor, it helps to protect you, but it also weighs you down. (See the sidebar "Why Don't Weapons Add to My Dice?" on page 193 of the *Houses of the Blooded* book if you've forgotten why your gear is not as important as your Aspects and Virtues.) One last thing. If you're an armor user, you can't gain Style from your wardrobe. It doesn't matter if you have a jaunty hat with a feather in it. Your dirty, smelly, clanking studded leather breastplate and steel pauldrons might look intimidating, but they have no Style whatsoever. If you gain the benefit of Style from your adventures, it's up to you to decide whether you want to use your armor or keep the Style. One or the other. Not both.

## **Beggar**

**Invoke:** Convince people to aid you without an immediate benefit in return.

**Tag:** Your lack of personal wealth and authority means that it's hard for you to compete when people are throwing around money or titles.

**Compel:** Just a little something to get you by... something to tide you over or help you through this tough time...

Being a beggar is one of the worst, most humiliating predicaments that any ven, even one of the unBlooded, can ever live through. After all, unBlooded communities survive by a system of exchanges and communal property. Being a

beggar basically means admitting that you need something from the community, but have nothing to offer.

This does mean, however, that you can expect other ven to ignore you or revile you if they know about your “career.” That in turn means that nobody will bat an eye when you go loiter by the manure pile behind the farm, or slip down into the well that is rumored to lead into the ruins of an ancient crypt...

## Craftsman

**Invoke:** Create an item of beauty or functionality.

**Tag:** Your focus on mundane craftsmanship means that you are distracted by appreciation for well-made tools and for pieces of art. You can be persuaded to make deals for special tricks of the trade or for elegant pieces of workmanship.

**Compel:** Spend time organizing your tools, practicing your trade, or making annoying comments about how your skills as a craftsman relate to the situation at hand.

The humble craftsman often occupies a staple role in ven adventure stories. Usually, the craftsman is also a Warrior or a Priest, and his craft is the trade that he uses to support himself. On rare occasions, a craftsman will show up in opera, but usually as a very minor character who has a buffoon-like sensibility and few lines of dialog.

The Craftsman Aspect allows you to decide on a particular trade for your character; this could be Carpentry, Blacksmithing, Farming, or any other useful skill. It may be easier for you simply to use the name of the trade in question for your Aspect, but they’re all covered under this catch-all for convenience.

## Drunkard

**Invoke:** Drink someone under the table or recognize rare, valuable, and tasty vintages.

**Tag:** At a disadvantage due to some double vision, clumsiness, or the usual after-effects of a bit too much drinking.



**Compel:** You just need one more drink for courage, one for the road, and then you'll be ready to go...

Drinking spirits is an established part of ven culture; it heightens the taste for other amusements, clears the palate in a sumptuous meal, or (for the unBlooded) takes the mind off of the drudgery of regular life. Of course, overindulgence is something to be frowned upon—sometimes. Every party needs a good bawdy drunk to bring laughter and revelry... but eventually it's time to send the drunks home.

Being a drunkard in ven culture, then, can be a double-edged sword. It does get you invited to parties, because people expect a drunkard to be entertaining. But it also means that everyone is watching for you to slip so far into the bottle that you can't climb out—and remember that the ven aren't known for giving a helping hand to those at the bottom.

## **Mariner**

**Invoke:** Handle a boat or ship, or know about the sea, oceanic weather, fish or other marine life.

**Tag:** Your opponent knows that an old salt like you is uncomfortable on land, and that you often pepper your speech with salty language.

**Compel:** Changes in the pressure cause you to feel the sea in your bones; maybe you'll sit down and tell a story of the ocean...

Mariners, fishermen, and sailors occupy an important part of the ven commoner's life. Fish provide food for coastal communities. Travel to the different islands is necessary for trade. Any ven who spends significant time on shipboard learns all the work of the trade—and it's a demanding trade, requiring knowledge of weather patterns, sailing skills and a lot of constant work scrubbing decks, hauling cargo and fighting against wind and rain.

Mariners have little respect in ven culture in spite of their absolutely important role; respect is typically reserved either for the nobles who own the ships, or the captains and navigators whose specialized skills and experience are absolutely necessary to their successful voyages. A typical fisherman or boatswain is just another tradesman, likely one with a thick accent and a "piquant" odor.



# Peasant Magic: Witches and Talashan

The Blooded tell themselves that they know all of the useful magic. That the dribs and drabs of leftovers from the era of the sorcerer-kings is more than enough for any ven. That the unblooded peasants, the dirt, must live dreary lives because they don't have that Blooded spark to give them real panache.

But, the unBlooded have their own magic. When the ven use blood to empower their sorcery, they give of themselves so that they can take hold of *power*. There are other ways to deal with the hidden world...

UnBlooded stories tell of two types of magic practiced only among the peasantry. Usually, the practitioners of these arts appear only in the heroic epics of the ven. They almost never appear in operas; when they do, they are unBlooded villains, enemies of the piece or madmen who believe themselves as great and powerful as the sorcerer-kings.

## **Talashan—Speaking to Shanri**

The Talashan are speakers to the soil. They eschew the city lifestyle, living instead in rustic primitivism. Shanri, they claim, is not the Great Enemy. She is the Great Mother—the nurturing giver of life to all ven. To the Talashan, Shanri is the originator of the ven; the sorcerer-kings are considered nothing more than corrupted myths and wishful nightmares.

The Talashan refuse to corrupt themselves with the city lifestyle. They avoid the use of grand castles, refined metals, and luxurious comforts. Shanri, they claim, gives them everything that they need in order to live well. In return, they honor her by working with her. They do not till the soil to demand that she grow crops—they ask of her bounty and give thanks when they hunt. They do not scar the land with mines and quarries and stone roads—they follow the trails of



animals and the courses of streambeds. To live as a Talashan is to live in Shanri's shadow, respectful of her bounty and thankful for her grace.

Of course, Shanri is like any mother. Though she is nurturing and healing, she can also be wrathful. She takes vengeance on those who misuse her gifts or abuse her children. She refuses to help those who sully themselves, or who presume too much upon her favor. The Talashan recognize this wrath, too, and they humble themselves to avoid drawing her ire.

The Talashan, naturally, are at odds with the noble society of the ven. Talashan do not embrace progress. Talashan live off the land, instead of improving it with shrines and roads and farms. Talashan do not sully themselves with sorcery; they ask only for the Mother to provide for them, instead of making demands with the arcane power of blood. For this reason, the Talashan are counted among the enemies. They serve the Great Enemy, in the eyes of the Blooded.

Even so, the Talashan can have their uses... and it is therefore not unknown for a noble to set aside this prejudice for a time, even grant pardon to a Talashan living in her lands, to make use of the Talashan's skills.

And such skills they are...

### **Elements of Shanri**

Each Talashan speaks of the six elements of Shanri, the Great Mother. The stone, which is her body. The metal, her weapons. The herbs and plants that grow from her, and the animals that consume them. The fire that waits within her wood and forests. And the sky above, which shows her wrath.

Every Talashan learns to commune with the elements of Shanri. Hearing their voices is difficult at first. The elements whisper quietly. Only a ven who clears her mind and prepares to listen with an open heart will hear the call of Shanri's elements.



When a neophyte Talashan learns to hear one of the elements, she will be able to converse with them. Through this discourse she can ask what the elements desire, and also ask favors of them, as a brother or sister. After all, the Talashan is as much a child of the Great Mother as any of the elements.

With time and practice, a Talashan might learn to commune with many of the elements, but there is always a peculiar void for every Talashan. Each speaker finds it impossible to hear the voice of one element. This differs from speaker to speaker; some Talashan cannot hear Fire, while others cannot hear Metal, or Plants. No amount of meditation or practice can overcome this deficiency.

**Animals:** The creatures that roam the world are a part of Shanri. A Talashan who learns to commune with this element can speak with these creatures, understand them, and ask favors of them. Birds might come at the Talashan's call, or a weasel sneak into a room and steal a small item. Wild animals rarely attack a Talashan who understands this element. This element does not commune with ven, or with speaking orks—to deal with such creatures the Talashan must use speech.

**Fire:** Fire arises from wood, and flourishes in forests and savannahs. Fire is a dangerous element, and a difficult one to master. Fire speaks with a wisping tongue, and it is always hungry and eager to grow and spread its grasp. A speaker who communes with fire can encourage fire to spread, or sway it to sleep with a lullaby.

**Plants:** The growing plants of the living world provide shelter and food. Talashan who commune with this element speak to trees, bushes, weeds, even blades of grass. Each plant speaks according to its nature. Trees are slow and ponderous, seeing much but spending most of their time lost in thought. Poisonous herbs are bitter and spiteful. Given encouragement, a plant can be made to writhe, to move, to grow or to shrink away from a place. A Talashan can also coax a plant to give up its fruit, or to refrain from poisoning someone who has offended it.

**Metal:** The element of metal is hardest to commune with, for it slumbers deep in the earth, rarely disturbed. What metal exists on the surface of Shanri is usually taken up and forged into tools or weapons, with which communication is difficult; the spirit of the item is bent to the will of the craftsman and loses much of its volition. Talashan who speak with metal can help metal to bend or

to remain strong, to throw off corrosion or rust or give in to such corruption.

**Sky:** The great sky is the face of Shanri, whence she shows her pleasure or wrath. When she is pleased, the sun shines down and crops grow. When she is generous, she brings small showers of rain to nourish plants and animals alike. When she is wrathful, she sends storms to punish with wind, lightning, hail, ice, and worse. A Talashan who communes with the sky can learn all that it has seen, send messages on the wind, or even call for Shanri's wrath.

**Stone:** Stone makes the body of Shanri. Stone pulverized into earth and soil is always underfoot, and the rocks themselves are quiet and solid witnesses to the passing of ages. Communing with stone allows the Talashan to learn what the rocks have seen, to borrow the stone's toughness, and to cause stone to part or give way in places where it blocks passage or supports a structure.

It is important to note that some things are explicitly *not* elements of Shanri. The oceans and rivers, though they cross the land, are not part of Shanri. This is why mariners make sacrifices to the ocean, and consider it bad luck to carry a Talashan aboard a ship; the ocean always tries to cover the stone. Similarly, the stars are not part of the sky, and therefore not part of Shanri. They look down, impassive, watching without judging, but they are beyond the ken of this world or of the people who dwell upon it.

### **Devotion to the Elements**

The Talashan do not have devotion to the *suaven*. Indeed, why would any ven worship another ven? Such reverence is unbecoming, when it is clear that Shanri grants life to everyone. This is the Talashan way of thinking.

Talashan therefore have Devotion to the Elements. A Talashan might have much Devotion to one Element, or a small amount of Devotion to most of them. A Talashan may have up to five ranks of Devotion; she may have two ranks of Devotion to the Sky and three to the Fire, one in each Element, or any other combination.



Note that a Talashan who is part of a chartered company (see Chapter 5) may be a neophyte who has not yet learned to hear the elements. Over time (with benefits) these Talashan may gain Devotion to use in communing with the elements. Eventually the Talashan may reach a total of five ranks of Devotion, after which she must use her benefits for other things.

## **Communing with the Elements**

Through devotion and patience, a Talashan speaks to the elements. She learns to listen to them, and to entreat them with her requests.

When you choose to speak with the elements, you roll a number of dice equal to your appropriate Virtue + appropriate Devotion. You may set aside Wagers, of course, and you will need Wagers for certain aspects of the magic. The Talashan Aspect (see page 75) may be invoked to grant three bonus dice to a risk when communing with the elements.

Here are a few examples, so that you know how to combine Virtues and Elements.




A Talashan wishes to entreat the spirit of an extinguished campfire, to make it blaze up again—it is only sleeping, after all. She wants the embers to flare up and create enough fire so that she can feed it and give warmth to her and her friends for the night. She rolls Wisdom + Fire. Wagers can be set aside to make the fire flare up faster, or to help it to last longer with less fuel.

Later, she decides to ask the stones for information about who was encamped in this place before her. She rolls Beauty + Stone to encourage the stones to speak with her and tell her of the other travelers. The stones explain that five orks camped there the night before, and the orks made the campfire. (A wild tale; everyone knows that orks don't use tools. But stone rarely lies!) The player has an extra wager and decides that the orks were also carrying spears and hunting on the lord's game preserve.

The next day the group sets out again, and a heavy rain starts to obscure their passage. The Talashan entreats the Mother to lighten the rain so that they may travel more easily, and she rolls Beauty + Sky to ask for

assistance. She succeeds in her risk and the rain lightens to a happy drizzle, and with her spare wager the player decides that puddles form in the footsteps to show the trail of where the orks went.

Later, the company encounters a pair of angry roadmen, who demand a “toll” for passage. The group refuses and a fight breaks out. The Talashan whispers to the spirits in the roadmen’s metal swords, asking them to bend away from her. This is a very difficult act, because the metal has been beaten and subjugated into its form, and she must ask quickly and desperately instead of showing patience and reverence. She rolls Courage + Metal to try to make her skin anathema to the steel, setting aside three wagers—two because she is working with a tempered element, and one for haste.



As always, when you make a risk and succeed, you may determine the outcome. Thus, a Talashan might speak to the elements and not get exactly what she planned, or learn of some new and unexpected twist on the current story.

Each time a Talashan speaks to the elements, the player must decide upon the request, and also decide upon wagers to make the act easier. Asking too much of the Mother may draw down her anger, and of course the elements rarely move quickly. When you entreat the elements, you should consider the following wagers:

**Charity.** Usually, a Talashan offers something to an element in exchange for a service or favor. The Talashan might offer a song to a stone, a piece of incense to a fire, or a handful of sweet food to an animal. In exchange for a wager, the Talashan may ask that the element grant charity, and help as a gift instead of a trade.

**Haste.** The elements do not like to be hurried, especially Stone and Metal. Asking an element to act quickly may require a wager. Otherwise, the process of communion may take minutes or longer.



Some of the wisest Talashan spend years in communion with the elements in order to learn their deepest secrets.

**Subtlety.** When a Talashan communes with the elements, the elements remember. Another Talashan could ask the elements about this. If you wish to keep the elements from telling another Talashan of what you did, this may require wagers—the more wagers you set aside, the more wagers another Talashan must make to convince the elements to tell your secrets.

**Tempered Elements.** An element that has been tempered by the ven has been beaten into submission. This means that it is harder to commune with a domesticated animal, a farm-grown plant, or a worked metal tool. The Talashan must set aside *two* wagers to commune with a worked element. Otherwise, the voice of the element is nothing more than a subtle whisper, barely heard, and it lacks the strength to help. A manufactured element cannot be roused to action: A Talashan cannot ask a lock to open, or a stone wall to crumble; the element lacks the will to defy its tempered nature.

**Wrath.** Asking Mother for help causes her to become annoyed, and eventually angry. This draws down Shanri's Wrath, which makes it harder to request more favors. Set aside a wager in order to ask for a favor without incurring any Wrath. If you have already incurred Wrath, then you must set aside additional wagers simply to make the entreaty.

### **Shanri's Wrath**

Calling upon Shanri's elements risks drawing her ire. Ask too much of the Mother, and she becomes Wrathful.

Each time that a Talashan calls upon the elements, she gains a rank of Wrath. It is possible to set aside a wager in order avoid this consequence, but on a failed roll the Talashan gains the rank of Wrath regardless of the outcome.

Each rank of Wrath requires the Talashan to set aside a wager on all future attempts at communing with the elements. Once the Talashan reaches five ranks of Wrath, the Mother refuses to hear any further entreaties. Communing with the elements becomes impossible until the Talashan manages to soothe some of the Mother's Wrath.

To soothe the Mother's Wrath, the Talashan engages in some service or ritual that reaffirms her commitment to the Mother's way of life. She may help nurture a wounded animal back to health, spending time and effort with the wild creature. She might head into one of the cities and preach the Mother's way, risking arrest or execution. She might dance under the night sky, pleasing the Mother with her Devotion but exhausting herself. She might pour her blood out over the Stone, showing her commitment but suffering Wounds. In any case, the act shows Devotion in a tangible way. The Talashan shows that she, too, will sacrifice of herself in order to care for the Mother, in return for all that the Mother has done for her.

A Talashan may perform acts to soothe the Mother's Wrath even before she has drawn down all of the Mother's disfavor (that is, before reaching five ranks of Wrath). It is always wise to appease Shanri whenever possible.

Worse still, when a Talashan reaches five ranks of Wrath, Shanri may choose to make her displeasure known. Storms and bad luck, animal attacks and earthquakes may strike in places where Shanri is displeased. A Talashan who has incurred too much Wrath may find herself struck by her Mother. Taught a lesson. Disciplined, like an unruly child.

(If Shanri shows her Wrath during a scene, the participants in the scene should gain Style or Glory if they survive, but her Wrath may also automatically grant an Aspect to the scene, such as "Storm-Tossed" or "Smoke-Shrouded."

### **Limits to the Elements**

While the elements have great and powerful secrets, they are not without their limitations. A Talashan must be mindful of what Shanri can and cannot do.

.....  
: **Calling the Wrath** :  
: It's possible for a Talashan to :  
: *deliberately* invoke the Mother's :  
: Wrath. Foolish, but possible. :  
: :  
: Any time an element is called :  
: upon to wreak great damage— :  
: making a volcano erupt with :  
: Fire, quaking the ground with :  
: Stone, summoning a storm with :  
: Sky, and so on—the Talashan :  
: automatically calls down the :  
: Mother's Wrath. The Talashan :  
: immediately goes to five Ranks :  
: of Wrath. :  
: .....

**The elements cannot create something from nothing.** A fire that has smoldered to embers can be coaxed to rise again, but a Talashan cannot cause fire to suddenly spring into existence where there was none before. Thus, a Talashan could entreat a torch to reach out and burn a guardsman, but she could not cause an explosion of fire to fill a room where there was no fire before.

**The elements have no dominion over the dead.** A dead animal or plant has only a little of the element left in it, enough perhaps to whisper, but not enough to animate or restore life.

**The elements cannot command water.** While a Talashan may use the elements creatively to affect water, such as asking Stone to crumble so that a flash flood is averted or asking the Sky to pour down rain, the elements cannot influence rivers, oceans, seas, or streams. All the water that flows over Shanri is something different from her. This also means that fish are not animals.

**That which has been subdued has little will.** An element beaten into submission by the ven loses its will and its essential nature. It is hard to commune with an element that has been subdued. A steel sword is turned from raw metal into something that serves the ven, while a stone wall of a castle has been shaped and cut into a prescribed form. In such cases it is harder for the Talashan to commune with the element, and impossible to rouse it to action.

**The elements are not ven; the ven are not elements.** While the ven are *of* Shanri, they are not *part* of her. To communicate with one another, the ven already have the gift of speech. This also means that the elements cannot directly heal or transmute the ven, but it is possible to affect the ven indirectly, such as by convincing an herb to give up healing powers as a balm or by asking the sky to send lightning down on an adversary. Curiously, this rule seems also to apply to any ork that speaks (as if such a thing existed...)

### **Changing Devotion**

As a Talashan grows with time and experience, she may change her devotion, just like a tree changing its leaves from summer to fall. As a Season Action, a Talashan may shift one rank of her Devotion from one element to another. She may never place a rank in her weak Devotion, though—that element is forever barred to her.



A Talashan who does not yet have five ranks of Devotion may gain additional Devotion by practicing the secret rites of the Talashan, thereby earning the Mother's approval. To do this without persecution by guards and roadmen, of course, requires special dispensation, usually earned as a benefit from working in the employ of a noble. Of course, some Talashan spend their whole lives in the deep wilderness, where they may practice freely... but a Talashan who never interacts with other ven is a Talashan without a story to tell.

### **Talashan Among the Blooded**

When Talashan walk among the Blooded, they are adversaries. Servants of the Great Enemy. Workers of strange magic. Companions to orks. The Talashan are not welcome among the cities and estates of the Blooded, and they know it. Some nobles tolerate the passage of a Talashan who does not cause trouble. Other nobles place a bounty on the heads of the speakers, and execute any Talashan caught in their lands. Of course, this can lead to the execution of any dirt who is even thought to consort with Shanri.

The commoners also treat the Talashan with wary deference. The Talashan have no love for "civilized" communities, after all. Talashan advocate that the ven should leave their homes and live in the wild, provided for by Shanri. The farmer, thinking of his many children to feed and his taxes to pay, balks at this notion. Common folk thus respect what the Talashan can do, but are also quick to ask a Talashan to go on her way.

Most Talashan spend as much time as possible in the outdoors. When Talashan interact with the Blooded, it is often because they believe they are fulfilling a request from Shanri, or out of a sense of loyalty to a friend or comrade. Rarely would a Talashan spend extended periods of time among civilization, especially the decadent and dangerous world of the nobles.

Of course, sometimes Talashan *do* show up in the blood operas of nobles. Usually, the Talashan has a noble patron, someone who tolerates the Talashan's eccentricities—this is generally a requirement,



because the Talashan is almost always antagonistic, and of course as unBlooded dirt who practices forbidden rites, the Talashan is a criminal as well.

Perhaps most notably, a Talashan *never* practices sorcery. The Talashan consider such practices abominable.

**To restate: A Talashan never practices blood sorcery. This also means that a Talashan will never willingly become Blooded. A Talashan who undergoes the rite of Bleeding loses the ability to commune with Elements, but may choose to become apostate and gain Devotion to the *suaven* instead.**

## **Witches and the Haunted—Conjuring**

In adventure stories, the ven tell tales of witches and ghosts. While ghosts and spectres are often considered taboo topics in the high society operas, they feature prominently in the heroic epics told by commoners. Ghost stories are quite a staple among young commoners who try to scare one another with tales of vengeful spirits—although such tales are always tempered in communities that have a Witch or one of the Haunted living nearby.

Peasants don't use blood magic; their blood doesn't have the primal power of sorcery in it. They also don't speak to the soil, like the Talashan. The farmer may try to coax plants to grow, but he does so with tools and irrigation and tilling of the land, desperate to coerce the earth into giving up its fruits instead of asking politely to live off the land.

What some few peasants do understand is how to commune with the spirits of ancestors. Such spirits are common enough to be found in any sizable community, and especially in certain haunted places where the dead gather...

### **Ghosts and Spectres**

Witches explain (to those who bother to listen) that there is an important distinction between ghost and spectres. A ghost is the spirit of one of the dead common people. UnBlooded leave only sorrowful, quiet ghosts. Blooded ven, by contrast, leave spectres that are vengeful and angry. At least, that's what witches say. Maybe spectres are something else. Servants of the sorcerer-kings. Ven who have lost themselves to terrible curses and Artifacts. But Conjuring seems to work on spectres—sometimes—so witches claim that spectres, too, are ghosts.

Not all ven leave spirits behind when they die. Some ven seem to have no spirit—those who are directionless and aimless often have no ghost. Similarly, a ven who dies satisfied and content rarely leaves a spirit behind. Those who die extremely unhappy, wrathful, or embittered often leave behind a ghost.

Ghosts, being entities of sorrow, rarely interact with the material world. Usually they simply watch invisibly. A ghost may hang around the house of its family, wringing its hands helplessly as they suffer indignities and famines. Or it may come out under the light of the moon to plow a field over and over again, repeating the routines of its life in an endless display. Ghosts that have enough awareness to understand their condition can wander freely, though most choose to stay near their families and homes.

Spectres, as entities of vengeance, are much more inclined to appear in the physical world and to cause danger. A spectre often seeks to wreak havoc upon the living, simply to fulfill its desire for revenge on those who remain behind. Often, a spectre has specific targets for revenge, but may have outlived them; in such cases a spectre may haunt a castle or ruin for years or even centuries, tormenting anyone who crosses its path. Fortunately, spectres seem more tightly constrained to remaining in specific places, for reasons that are not entirely clear.

### **Calling the Ancestors**

Witches call upon ancestors to intercede on their behalf in the physical world. This is a taxing process for both parties, so witches learn various chants to call to ghosts, ceremonies to appease them, and special potions and fetishes that make it easier for ghosts to focus their influence.

In most places, it is a simple process to call a ghost. Witches can also call ghosts to attend them over some distance. For the ghost to manifest takes some time and work, so usually the witch must sing a special song, hold an item of importance to the ghost, or perform an appeasement ritual to bring a ghost to heel.



Of course, a witch doesn't have to call upon her *own* ancestor. A witch who has little respect for her ancestors might keep some heirloom specifically for this purpose, though...

Calling a ghost uses Conjuring. Witches (and occasionally other commoners) who practice Conjuring have a rank in this ability. With time and practice, a Witch may improve this ranking—this usually happens with benefits gained from working for a noble, which represent dispensations to practice hidden arts, special gifts of peculiar items and reagents, and a place to work.

When a Witch calls the ancestors, she pits one of her Virtues + her Conjuring against the ghost's power. This means that you *choose* the power of the ghost that you summon. If you summon a weak ghost, you may only need to beat it when it has two dice to roll. If you summon a powerful ghost, you may have to set aside many wagers to get it to do what you want—and if you *fail* the roll, the ghost may well decide to do something to *you*, instead! More dangerous still, you must set aside wagers to compel the ghost to various services, and it is especially hard to compel spectres. Each compulsion is a battle of wits and wills, when the Witch tries to convince the ghost to do her bidding in exchange for the chance to touch the mortal world again—but if the Witch fails to gain mastery, the ghost may use her for its own pleasure.

Each time a Witch summons a ghost or spectre, check off one of her ranks of Conjuring. Once they're all used up, she can't summon any more help unless she spends Style or Glory to entreat the spirits once again.

### **What the Ancestors Can Do**

The dead are often limited in their ability to affect the world of the living, but the Witch uses her Conjuring to give the ghost power to intercede in the material world. The Witch may be host to the spirit, or may give the spirit a chance to touch the world and bring out its own supernatural nature.

A summoned ghost or spectre can never give more ranks, cause more wounds, grant more dice, or otherwise cause some effect that is higher than the number of dice it rolled for its power when summoned. As a ghost performs tasks, it commits some of its power. This does not cause it to lose dice, but means that it can't perform any task that would take more power than the ghost has left to use. When a ghost uses up all of its power, it vanishes, exhausted. A ghost will never

remain past sunset or sunrise in any case, unless somehow trapped with an Artifact, sorcery, or some other more powerful magic.

**Curses:** A ghost can be summoned to follow someone around and cause bad luck. Someone cursed in this fashion hears strange whispers, loses small objects (hidden by the ghost) and causes bad reactions in people. This gives the victim the Tag: *Cursed*. Cursing someone in this fashion requires two points of the ghost's power.

**Emotion:** A ghost can project an emotion to a subject, causing someone to feel hate, love, wrath, jealousy, sorrow, or some other feeling with great intensity. This is how Witches make "love potions," as the soporific potion makes it easier for the ghost to influence a subject. This grants a Tag of the emotion to the subject for a scene, at a cost of two power.

**Healing:** A ghost can give up some of its essence to heal an injury. Each wager set aside in the conjuring allows the ghost to heal one rank of an injury at a cost of one power.

**Haunting:** A ghost can act as a poltergeist, knocking on doors and causing strange balls of light to dance about. This gives a scene the Aspect: *Haunted* at a cost of three power.

**Influence:** A ghost can influence the mortal world, allowing it to unlock a lock, throw a bar off a door, slide a key across a floor, or perform another simple act that could be done with one hand or by making an item act as if haunted. This costs only one power.

**Information:** A ghost can answer questions about the area where it is conjured. Each question answered costs one power.

**Possession:** A ghost can possess a conjurer and use its knowledge or speak through her mouth. If the conjurer loses the risk, though, the ghost may do *other* things in the body! Possession pits the ghost's power against the target's Courage, if the subject isn't willing, and automatically costs power equal to the subject's Courage in any case.

**Wounding:** A spectre can injure someone, with each wager allowing the spectre to inflict one Injury rank (limited by its power, as usual).



Only a spectre may inflict injury in this fashion. Causing a wound costs one power.

### **Wagering for Control**

When a magician summons a ghost or spectre, wagers determine how much the ghost can be compelled to do, and the outcome of the risk determines who is in control of the encounter. Ghosts often want to use bodies for their own pleasure or to finish an incomplete task; spectres often wish to commit violence!

Conjuring may also require extra wagers, depending upon the specifics of the conjuring:

**Haste:** The conjurer tries to compel a ghost or spectre with great speed or under duress.

**No Implements:** The conjurer does not have poultices, fetishes, cauldrons, and other implements to make it easier for the ghost to appear.

**Silence:** The conjurer demands that the ghost not reveal any secrets to any other magician who calls it up later.

**Spectre:** Compelling a spectre always requires two extra wagers.

The Witch or the Haunted may use their Aspect for bonus dice on the risk.

**Example of Conjuring:** Vitia is a young and inexperienced Witch, with the Witch Aspect and one Rank of Conjuring. To find a way past a rusted gate in a ruin, she attempts Conjuring to summon a local ghost.

Vitia activates her Witch Aspect and decides that she will compel a ghost by engaging it in a contest of riddles. Since this relies on knowledge of the world, she uses her Wisdom virtue, which is a 3. She gains 3 dice for her Virtue, plus three dice from her Witch Aspect, plus one die from her Conjuring Rank. She sets aside three dice for wagers, rolls four dice, and attempts to conjure a ghost with a power of 4 dice. Since the ghost could not score a total of 10 if it set aside enough dice to match her wagers, she will automatically have control—if she rolls a 10 on her four dice!

When Vitia conjures the ghost, its power of 4 dice means that it rolls 4 dice for any task that it attempts. Vitia asks the ghost one question

(using up one point of power), sends the ghost to winch up the gate (for a second point of power, with the ghost rolling its original power of 4 dice to perform the task), and then forces the ghost to use a point of power to heal a Rank 1 injury that her friend currently suffers (costing a third point of power). Although the ghost has one point of power left over, Vitia only set aside three wagers during the conjuring, so the ghost only grants three services, and it vanishes.

If Vitia wants to conjure another ghost later, she had better refresh her Witch Aspect, or her low number of dice means that she will only be able to safely conjure a low-power ghost!

### Conjuring and Elements

Is it possible for a Talashan to also practice the arts of the Witch?

Can one ven have Devotion to the elements and also master Conjuring?

Yes, but it is *very* unusual.

Conjuring stems from ancestor reverence. Reliance on spirits of the dead.

Elements stem from animism.

Reliance on spirits of natural places and living things.

These two practices are at odds.

Not *wholly* incompatible, but not allies, either.

Perhaps there was a time once, long ago, when all ven believed in spirits and the two forms of magic were one... but even if that were true, it is no longer the way of things.

## Ork

Orks play a special part in ven literature. In many ways, they are the physical incarnations of Shanri's wrath. Most ven will openly deny any concern for orks, belief in "ork wisdom" or even that orks are sophisticated enough to use tools. And, for the most part, the ven are right.

But that doesn't mean they are *completely* right. There are many cultures of ork in Shanri that not only use tools, but weapons as well. They have their own traditions, their own ceremonies, their own rituals. Their own culture. Many of the wilderness travelogues speak of encountering orks, learning their languages... some even report of ven "going native," turning their back on ven culture to join the orks.

The ven used orks as literary devices throughout their literature, but in curious ways. Some authors used the orks to illustrate the brutal savagery of Shanri. In these works, orks are thoughtless brutes, capable of little more than recognizing clubs and sharp instruments as crude weapons. In these "savage tales," the ven are the focal point, not the orks. Orks are little more than obstacles to ven protagonists.

In other works, there is an attempt to make orks "noble savages." And yes, it is just as disrespectful and degrading as when that term was used in North America to describe its natives. The orks are primitive, yet capable of bumbling speech. They can use tools, but when they do, the effect is used as little more than cheap comedy and slapstick. Orks want to do the right thing, but they don't know how to, and need to be led by the ven, like children, toward the correct solution.

And then, there are what I like to call the "Beauty and the Beast" stories. In these stories, a ven--usually young and impressionable--wanders too far out into the wilderness. She (its almost always a she) is saved by or saves an ork warrior. She is wounded and carried back to the tribe where she learns the ways of orks. The romance with the tribe lasts only briefly while her lover or husband (usually a lout) arrives to save her from the barbaric beasts. You can imagine where the rest of this is going. Needless to say, the young girl is forever transformed by the orks' ways and carries them back to ven society where she has been transformed forever.



She usually carries a trinket from her time with the orks and the book almost always ends with her touching it and remembering.

Finally, there are the stories that treat orks as they may have been: races not as technologically sophisticated as the ven, but still cognizant enough to have their own culture, their own traditions, their own tools and weapons. These stories are not as romantic or dramatic as their relatives which is why they were less popular, and thus, more difficult to find. It is here that ork culture is seen as a counterpart to ven culture. What virtues the orks valued, how they treated the weak and infirm, their women and elderly. Here, I believe, we get our only true look at orks in Shanri. Granted, they are still looked down upon by the ven author, seen as lesser creatures, but at least they get what I consider to be a fair shake.

Needless to say, it is difficult to determine what is true about orks and what is fabrication. The ven certainly romanticized them (as they romanticized everything else), but it is intriguing to think that perhaps orks were more than just literary metaphors. They were living creatures who, while different from the ven, had their own lives. You may use orks as you see fit--romantically, as comic relief, archeologically--but be deliberate in your choice. What role do orks play in your Shanri?

## **New Ork Traits**

### **Brave**

Most orks have an animalistic view toward the ven: they are dangerous or food or both. But a few orks have a more sophisticated view. They recognize the ven for what they are: true enemies. These orks are not afraid of the ven. They do not run away when threatened, do not suffer bullying and may even understand the concept of a trial by combat.

For rules purposes, an ork with the Brave Trait has the ork equivalent of the Courage Virtue. It starts at rank 2 and goes up one rank each time you add this Trait to the ork.



## **Breeder**

Some orks breed quickly. No, faster than that. Orks with the Breeder Trait are always found with a litter of children. The children scramble about, kicking shins, pulling on scabbards and otherwise causing mischief. And sometimes harm.

Ork children will also defend their mother from harm in the same way the Personal Guard Vassal protects their master from harm. Use the same rules found in the *Revenge* chapter on page 179.

## **Chimera**

A chimera is a particularly deadly kind of ork that transforms itself as needed to the situation. The Chimera Trait is like a placeholder. Every round, the Ork can switch out its Chimera Trait for another Ork Trait. It shivers and pulsates while it transforms right before the ven's eyes. The ork can do no other action during the round other than switch out its Trait.

## **Crawler**

This ork can crawl along surfaces. It can even crawl upside down. This advantage allows it to move out of range of hand-to-hand weapons as well as the ability to attack from distances.

## **Creeper**

An ork with the Creeper Trait may move without being heard. It is as silent as a shadow.

**Invoke:** Gain three dice when trying to move without being heard.

## **Cute**

Orks with the Cute Trait appear to be completely harmless and disarm any notions of danger within the ven.

**Invoke:** Gain three dice when trying to convince another that you are completely harmless.

## **Gills**

This ork breathes underwater but cannot live on the land.

## **Jumper**

Jumpers can move *fast*, springing from one opponent to another. At the end of each beat, an ork with the Jumper Trait can move from one opponent to a second opponent. He also gains a free strike against his new opponent when he does so.

## **Pets**

This breed of ork has domesticated other orks as pets and hunting companions. Whenever you encounter this breed of ork, you also encounter its companion.

## **Quiet**

This ork is silent, subtle and stays away from ven as much as possible. It is not necessarily afraid of the ven, but it knows how to keep out of their sight. It gains an Aspect, “Ven Hunter” that helps it hunt down the ven. This ork has no Fear rank. That means ven do not need to make a Courage risk to face it. This Trait also makes hunting ven a little easier.

**Invoke:** Gain three dice for ambushing your prey.

## **Rider**

This ork has domesticated other orks, using them as mounts. See Horses found in the core book, page 35

## **Slow Digestion**

This ork has a large enough mouth and digestive system to swallow a ven whole. While inside, the digestive juices paralyze him; he’s considered *helpless*. Every round he remains inside the ork, he takes an Injury. The Injury aggravates every round. If he remains inside the ork for six rounds, he dies.

## **Sorcerous**

This breed of ork may use sorcery. The ork knows a number of rituals equal to its rank.



## **Spines (Weapon)**

This Trait already appears in the core book (page 412), but I wanted to make it clear that spines count as projectile weapons.

## **Stationary**

This ork doesn't move. It remains in place, waiting for enemies. Trying to move the ork is a Strength risk with a target number equal to five times the ork's rank.

## **Swimmer**

An ork with the Swimmer Trait can move through the water at great speeds.

**Invoke:** Gain three dice when moving, attacking or defending yourself in the water.

## **Webs**

This ork uses webbing to catch its prey. Once caught, its target cannot even use Strength to break free. Only burning the webs will release him.

## **Creating Ork Items**

What's the benefit of hunting orks? Creating ork items!

Kill and skin an ork with the Chameleon Trait and you can make a Chameleon coat. Hunt down an ork with the Tough Trait and you can tan up his hide and make yourself a Tough jacket.

Ork Traits can be converted into Ork Items with a Season Action. Each Ork Trait can be made into an Ork Item, however, multiple Traits cannot be put into a single Item. One Trait, one Item.

To transform an ork pelt into something useful, you will need either the Ork Hunter Aspect (found below).

Of course, you also have to *get* the Ork pelts to make the Items. And that cannot be done with a Season Action. Nope. You actually have to go out and *get them yourself*.

## New Aspects

### Orkfriend

You have spent time among the more “civilized” orks and realize they are more than just mindless monsters. They have their own languages, their own culture and even their own sense of honor. You may communicate with orks, win their trust and favor and warn them about impending danger from your ven cousins.

**Invoke:** Gain three bonus dice for knowledge of orks and their ways.

**Compel:** Show disgust at the indulgent, disgraceful and dishonorable ways of your cousin ven.

### Ork Hunter

You’ve spent years tracking and hunting orks. You know the best places to find them and the best ways to take them apart to get what you need.

**Invoke:** Gain three bonus dice for hunting and skinning orks for their Ork Traits.

**Compel:** Your time in the wilderness has given you a certain... aura. Or, maybe its an aroma. Either way, your uncouth behavior often offends your fellow ven.

## The Mother of Monsters

This book would not be complete without a word or two on the Mother of Monsters, the fashuaven Mahl, how she interacts with her children and how she interacts with the new Ork rules.



## **The Cult of Mahl**

The Cult of Mahl is one of the smallest in Shanri, but it is highly devoted. Like most Dark Suaven, Mahl appeals to those who have been cast out or ostracized from ven society. She preys on the lonely and the weak, subverting them with promises of power and revenge.

The cult has no formal hierarchy. Generally, Mahl only accepts women as priestesses, for only women can bear the “mother’s milk.” The ritual that transforms a ven into a Priestess of Mahl is painful. Even torturous. A woman must enter the woods (at night) singing a particular song.

Scholars speculate the song itself is sorcerous, for there is mention of blood in the ritual. Some references say the woman must be menstruating while singing the song while others claim she must be pregnant.

When the woman enters the woods, orks surround her. They take her to a stone slab or cave and cut her skin with symbols of Mahl. She then mates with a male follower and becomes impregnated with a child (or her child is transformed by the ritual). The child born to her is an ork.

With the successful birth, the new priestess of Mahl has a rapport with all orks. She may speak to them, regardless of their breed, and command them as she sees fit. Also, she may give birth to more orks, mating with priests as she desires.

The priests of Mahl are called just as the women are, called out to the wild. Many mountain men find themselves hearing the Song of Mahl, drawn to its haunting melody. Priestesses are called (or perhaps *call*), but men are seduced. Mahl sings to them, promising dark pains and pleasures. Forbidden things. They become the Lovers of Mahl, servants to the Dark Suaven.

## **The Bloody-Eyed Widow**

Much speculation swirls around the attribution of Mahl as “the Bloody-Eyed Widow.” Some ven scholars note the similarity between Mahl’s title and the title of Falvren Dyr, “the Bloody Wolf.” Some have suggested that Mahl’s husband was killed by Falvren Dyr and “the widow,” denied proper Revenge, went out into the wilderness seeking it. Others see her as Dyr’s sister who was denied her true love

by her bloodthirsty brother. Some scholars deny any such links at all, calling them simple speculation.

Regardless of any links with the Patron of Wolves, the “widow” title remains. A look at the lyrics of *The Song of Mahl* suggests a possible explanation. “My love was killed by a broken man,” is telling. The followers of Mahl have always held a deep hatred for the followers of Ashalem Avendi, and some stories describe the Falcon Suaven as a man who walked with a limp, had only one hand, or was somehow disfigured.

Whatever the case may be, there is some link between Mahl and the Falcon and Wolf Suaven. As further evidence surfaces, we will keep you informed.

### **Blessings**

Listed below are the Blessings of Mahl available to those who give her Devotion. Those who follow Mahl earn Ork Points equal to their Devotion. They may use these Ork Points to “refresh” their Blessings, rather than use them once per Season.

### **Command**

This Devotion works exactly as the Command Ork Trait: the devoted may command orks, directing them as he sees fit.

### **Mother's Milk**

This Blessing may only be used by a Priestess of Mahl. She squeezes her breast, bringing forth a thick, milky substance that smells like rotten eggs. Any who drink it become maddened by it, gaining a Free Aspect: Mahl's Madness (see sidebar).

### **The Song of Mahl**

(The Song of Mahl was recently discovered by ven scholar Rob Justice as he was researching the Lead Belly song, *In the Pines*. Mr. Justice noticed similarities between the two songs and they are striking. Lead Belly (Huddie William Leadbetter) arranged the song from an old Appalachian folk tune, *Black Girl*. It may be the only circumstance of ven culture finding its way to North America.)

*Where have you gone,  
My sweet-eyed daughter  
Tell me where have you gone  
You are barefoot and alone  
Barefoot and alone  
Singing a black tongue song  
The trees they sing they sing to me  
A song I cannot ignore  
The darkness calls on my knees I fall  
A song I have heard before  
My love was killed by a broken man  
And I am all alone  
But the trees they sing they sing to me  
I will be alone no more*

.....

**Mahl's Madness**

*Invoke:* Gain three bonus dice for any strike risk.

*Tag:* The madness makes one reckless. An opponent may tag this Aspect to gain two bonus dice when trying to outsmart or trick this ven.

*Compel:* The madness can be compelled to make this ven attack any other ven or ork or any target, really.

.....

**Summon the Children**

The Devotee may summon orks by singing the Song of Mahl. She may summon orks with Ork Traits equal to her Devotion. Each Ork Trait has a rank equal to her Devotion as well.

**Dark Mother's Seduction**

Only usable by priestesses, this Blessing gives free dice for seducing a male ven (and only a male ven). The rank of the priestess's Devotion is the number of bonus dice she gains for any seduction risk.

**Mother's Rage**

Only usable by priests, this Blessing gives bonus dice for any violence risk. The bonus dice are equal to the Devotion of the priest.

**The Pains of Birth**

Only usable by priestesses of Mahl, this Blessing allows her to give birth to a child ork. The child has a number of Ork Traits equal to her Devotion, but they are all rank 1. The ork gains a number of bonus ranks in his Traits per Season equal to his mother's Devotion.

A priestess may give birth to a larger ork (with more Ork Traits), but only at a cost. She may trade Injury ranks (a single Injury, not multiples) to add ranks to her child's Ork Traits. A mother may only devote five ranks of Injury to her child. After that, she becomes incapacitated.

**The Widow's Revenge**

There are two ways to interpret this Blessing. It provides bonus dice (equal to Devotion) for any risk against either those with Devotion to Ashalem Avendi or Falvren Dyr. We leave that decision up to the Narrator.



## Ork Vassals

This section details new vassals for your lands. These orks are willing to serve you, but always at a cost. Each ork has his own cost and his own benefit.

Ork Vassals have Ork Traits as well. Every rank an Ork Vassal has gives it two Ork Traits. Master Vassals have eight Ork Traits (making them rank 8 Orks).

A word of warning: dealing with orks is always asking for trouble. Be careful here. This is dangerous ground.

### Ork Talker

You have met an ork who speaks both the language of the ven and the language of an ork tribe. Without an ork talker, you cannot earn any other ork vassals. The rank of your ork talker determines the number of ork vassals you can have. You may only have one ork talker per Province.

### Friendly Ork Tribe (Band)

You have discovered a friendly tribe of orks in your lands. You may have only one Ork Tribe in each Province. The Tribe can provide you with exotic Resources, but only if you pay the price.

For each rank you invest in a Tribe, that Tribe provides you with one random Resource (roll on the nearby chart) per rank per Season. That means a rank 3 Tribe will give you three Resources per Season.

However, you must pay the Ork Tribe one Luxury per rank of the Tribe at the end of the year. If you do not, they pick a random Region and start causing Trouble. Quelling an Ork Tribe's Trouble costs a number of Season Actions equal to the rank of the Tribe.

### Ork Army (Band)

You have won over a tribe of orks to fight for your cause. An Ork Army serves in exactly the same way as a Secret Army (see Violence), but with a catch.



An Ork army may be in the same Province as your Secret Army, but there is a chance the two may not get along and start Trouble. Every Season, roll two dice: one for your Secret Army and one for your Ork Army. If either die rolls lower than the current rank of either Army, they fight and cause Trouble. Both Armies are unavailable for the Season unless you quell the Trouble. This takes a single Season Action.

### **Ork Hunter**

An Ork Hunter scours your lands, looking for Trouble. He operates much like a Master of the Road, but with one very important distinction: he transforms Trouble into Resources.

If you send an Ork Hunter to quell Trouble, he earns you one random Resource. Roll on the nearby chart to determine what Resource you get.

### **Ork Witch**

An Ork Witch is a powerful and dangerous Vassal. She can use her Season Actions to put Curses on enemies (as per the Sorcery, “The Curse”).

However, she demands a Resource for each Curse you bestow. You cannot pay her at the end of the year; you must pay her when you need the Curse.

Also, the Ork Witch can smell Trouble coming from a mile away. Whenever you roll for Trouble, you can use one of the Witch’s Season Actions to roll fewer dice for your entire Province (whichever one she is in). The number of fewer dice you roll is equal to the Witch’s rank.

At the end of the year, you must pay the Witch one Luxury Resource. If you do not, you don’t just lose her service, but she puts a Curse on you and any allies you might have (up to her rank).

### **Ork Chieftain (Master)**

If an Ork Tribe gets large enough, you can invest in an Ork Chieftain. Chieftains are valuable because they help keep the Tribe under control. If you have a Chieftain, you pay the Tribe one less Luxury per Year.

Ork Armies are not fed by food (they can hunt on their own) but by Luxuries. At the end of the year, you must give your Ork Army one Luxury (wine or spices) or they leave your service.

### **Ork Warlord (Master)**

An Ork Warlord is the head of an Ork Army. He is a mighty ork who has won the respect (or fear) of his fellow orks and is willing to lead them into battle.

An Ork Warlord is exactly the same as a General, but he must be paid in Luxuries (wine or spices) rather than Food.

## **Player Character Orks**

### **John's Friendly Warning**

Before we begin this conversation, I feel I should say a few words.

First, I wanted each *HotB* supplement to be a different way to play the same game. Jess accomplished that with the adventuring company rules. You don't take the role of a noble playing a game of treachery, sex and revenge, but instead, take the role of unblooded veth trying to gain access to that game. I liked that.

Many of my local players (and a few distant ones via email, texting, etc.) encouraged me to open my mind to the possibility of playing orks. Like veth, orks are not Blooded nobles. And, I did say that I wanted each supplement to be a different way of playing the same game. I saw their point and agreed with it... with a few caveats.

This addendum gives you rules for playing orks in the world of Shanri. However, I urge you to avoid a few pitfalls. Consider this to be my Ariadne string. I'm showing you the dangers before you get to them so you can sidestep them and keep your game from self-destruction.

A temptation exists to turn orks into comic relief. Avoid this. Orks are not clowns. Yes, they can provide humorous insight into the hypocrisy of the ven (servants can do this as well; we'll talk about



that in the *Slumming* book), but try to avoid straight up comedy with orks. It can wreck all the work you've built establishing mood and atmosphere.

I have used orks as comedy, but sparingly. Just as Shakespeare had a lot of success using comic relief, but he used it in specific scenes for a specific effect. I've done it, too. After a particularly dramatic scene, I've thrown in a stubborn but beloved servant to lighten the mood before getting on with further business. A whole party of orks all mocking of the ven is fun... for about five minutes. Then, it gets old and everyone gets distracted. (I've also found that as soon as people run out of ideas, that's when the Monty Python jokes start rolling in. And there's no kind way to shut down that train.)

Also, if you choose to play an ork in ven culture, be warned. You will be shunned. Folks will try to silence you. Even try to kill you. Orks are also a reminder of the sorcerer-kings and how the ven are nothing more than their creations. Seeing a walking, talking ork carrying a spear reminds the ven of their slave origins. Be careful. It's probably best to keep your mouth shut unless you're around friends.

Ah, ven friends. Yeah. Think about that one for a while.

In short, playing an ork is tough. Playing *the other* in any game is tough. But there's a whole lot of you out there who want to do it. I'm a guy who believes in giving players what they want... just not always the way they want it.

In this case, I'm giving you ork PCs. Play orks with dignity, passion and emotion. And, yes, a little sarcasm and satire. That's what they are for.

Here are your ork player character rules, folks. Don't make me regret my decision.

— JW

## **Making Ork Characters**

### **Step 1: Concept**

Think about what kind of ork you want to play. How are you going to interact with the other characters? Are the other characters also playing orks or are they playing ven? Are they playing Blooded or unblooded ven?

These are important questions. Yes, you are playing the outsider, but as a player, you have a responsibility to find ways to fit in the group. Roleplaying games are

community storytelling games. Your character should fit. Not only that, but your character should *create* stories, not cut off the potential for stories.

## Step 2: Ork Traits

When you make an ork character, you get a number of points to pick Ork Traits. Specifically, you get 10 points. You can buy any Ork Traits you like, but the Narrator has veto power.

You cannot purchase any Ork Trait over rank 3 at character creation. You are a young ork and don't have full control over your orky powers just yet. Of course, the Narrator can make exceptions to this rule if she likes.

I highly suggest picking up one or more of the following Traits: *Village*, *History*, *Myth*, or *Ven-Friendly*. These will give you enough “sophistication” to join ven in their adventures and schemes.

## Step 3: Details

Orks do not have Vassals or Domains. If an ork has the *Village* Trait, he may have family back in the Wilderness, but he doesn't own anything.

## Ork Points

Orks also receive five Ork Points. Ork Points are like Style Points, but are used differently. Orks use Ork Points for these purposes...

## Ork Truths

You can use Ork Points to say true things about the world — but there are limits. An ork can say things about the wilderness, other orks, or life outside ven cities. This costs one Ork Point.

But once inside a ven city, Ork Points aren't much use unless you use them to point out things the ven couldn't or wouldn't notice. Say something true about the things in the sewers, observe veth children acting like an ork, or noticing that Lady Peacock's dress is made from



your brother's skin? That's an Ork Point. Again, you can only use Ork Points to say things are true about orks, not the ven, their society, etc.

An ork can also offer Ork Points to his fellow players to kibitz ork behavior. To make them more orklike. They likely will refuse, but he can offer.

### **Refresh Ork Traits**

Like Aspects, Ork Traits must be refreshed. An ork can use Ork Points to refresh his Ork Traits. Once he uses an Ork Trait, he cannot use it again unless he spends an Ork Point to refresh it.

### **Increase Ork Trait Rank**

An ork can use Ork Points to increase the rank of any Ork Trait up to five. This costs one Ork Point. An ork can also use Ork Points to increase a Trait beyond five, but that costs two Ork Points per rank.

### **Gaining Ork Points**

Orks gain Ork Points for acting like an ork. In other words, for not acting like a ven. The point here is to act like *the other*. You are not a ven. The more ways you can show that, the more Ork Points you get.

An ork may have as many Ork Points as he can earn. There is no limit and he can keep them between game sessions.

### **Can Ven Gain Ork Points?**

Oh, yes they can.

If a ven acts far outside respectable behavior, or exhibits behavior that other ven feel would be "uncouth," he may gain Ork Points. In other words, if you act like an ork, you gain Ork Points.

If a ven has more Ork Points than Style Points, he gains the Aspect, *Uncouth*. See the nearby sidebar.

## Going Native

When a ven gains twenty Ork Points, he can declare himself, “Gone Native.” This means he completely rejects ven culture and society and now considers himself “more ork than ven.” There are a few consequences...

First, the ven in question no longer collects Style Points; she only collects Ork Points. She may, however, use Ork Points as Style Points. That means she can still say things are true about the world, suggest truths to other players, etc.

She also has the *Uncouth* Aspect *permanently*. She cannot get rid of it.

But remember this: orks represent everything the ven are not. One could interpret that as acting with compassion, caring, love, generosity, trust... these are “uncouth” to the ven. At least in public. But it’s a part of the world the ven can discover... if only they could learn to speak with the orks.

## New Orks

### The Thrunin

**Ork Traits:** Blind Spot, Brave, Claws, Fangs, Venom, Glare, Pets, Rhino Hide, Tool, Tongue

The Thrunin are a nation of orks living very near ven civilization. They are intelligent, organized and powerful. They fear the ven and keep their existence a secret. The Thrunin were first recorded in a travelogue credited to “Vriyanna Sinjin.” The book was dismissed as speculative fantasy at the time of its release and sold very poorly. However, its contents provide us with a startling look at orks and deserves mention here. Below are some of the more controversial excerpts.

### Uncouth

*Invoke:* None

*Tag:* Used in social situations by other characters. They gain two dice to persuade others of your despicable behavior.

*Compel:* Others can use this Aspect to make you act resentful toward ven society or say something that criticizes ven behavior.

## Creation Myth

In the time before Mother grew angry, the Ancestors lived in a great city. They were fierce and mighty, and they possessed all that was. One of the Ancestors, named Tkit saw that Mother was lonely. He took her into himself, and gave her his children. These he made strong and wise. He named them Thrudin. Mother loved Tkit for this gift. She treasured the Thrudin and blessed them with intelligence and gave them magics. Tkit taught them to care for the world. He taught them how to hunt and how to kill properly. He taught them of honor and loyalty.

Tkit had a sister, Kvien. Kvien was jealous of Mother's love for Tkit and the Thrudin. She created children for Mother, and Mother loved them, but not as well as she loved the Thrudin. Kvien burned with jealousy, and she created many more children, of various colors and shapes. Her creativity impressed Mother. However, mother saw none among Kvien's children she preferred over Tkit's.

Kvien's heart burned with anger. She left her family and walked into the Wilderness. She was gone for years, and creatures came from the wilderness, many terrible and wicked to behold. Finally, she returned. She was thin, and frail, pale and frightened.

"What have you done, Kvien!" Tkit cried when he saw her.

She only wept until she died. From her body sprang one last child. Tkit named him "Ven".

It was then that the Wrong Ones appeared. They looked like the Ven, but taller, more beautiful to behold. Tkit knew them for his sister's children and took them into his city and loved them for her sake. Mother too, delighted in them and gave them gifts for they were clever and strong.

From there, they grew in stature, and adopted the Ven as their own.

The first Thrudin born of Tkit was called Waeil (the name has been passed down through generations). He saw the Wrong Ones for the danger they were and tried to warn Tkit, but Tkit would not believe him.

When the Wrong Ones rebelled, they attacked the Ancestors and there was War between them. The Wrong Ones had no Honor. It was then that Waeil left his honor with his mate, Vaaril, and left to do War upon the Wrong Ones. He led



many Thrunin and they joined with the Ancestors to fight the Wrong Ones.

In the battle, Tkit was injured. His blood seeped into the ground, and he told Waeil that to grow strong enough, they must eat his flesh. Waeil wished to refuse, but in the end, while weeping, he struck Tkit's death blow. To honor him, he fashioned a sword from Tkit's chest sheath. That night, he and his warriors ate of Tkit's flesh, and they did grow strong.

Thus, they went into battle. During the fighting, Mother found the remains of Tkit's body. She created a raging inferno which consumed his body. From that day forward she turned her back on all her children. She took back her magics and cursed them.

During the battle, the Wrong One's magic turned sour, for some had come from Mother. Though the Thrunin had lost Mother's magic, they had the strength of Tkit's blood and flesh. Even so, the battle raged fierce for five days before the noises stopped.

No one survived that battle. When Waeil's honorbearer, Vaaril came to see it, she found his body torn asunder by magic, his claws still linked in the sword's pommel.

Vaaril took the blade. She kissed Waeil's cold lips and burned his body that he might join Tkit.

The Ancestors cast the Thrunin out of the City. Vaaril led her children deep into the wilderness. She had 10 sons and daughters and from each of them was a strong tribe. At first, they lived at peace with each other, following the principles of Honor that they were taught. Vaaril taught them of the strength of the Ancestors, and of the gift of Tkit's death.

Some years later, a young LongClaw went back to the city and found it was gone.

They thought the Ancestors had left them, until one was seen alone in the distance. Vaaril led a group of warriors to his side. His name



was Bku. Bku gave them permission to eat his flesh if they were strong enough to slay him.

Those who had not gone, hid their jealousy in their hearts. Among these were the ShadowFang and the SilverTail tribes. Each of these had kept ven as pets. However, the ven were more clever than they thought and helped incite the feelings of injustice.

Vaaril grew old, and on her death, they burned her body, so that she might join Tkit and Waeil.

This is why all thrunin must burn their dead. If not, they are trapped in their flesh until it turns to dust before they are released.

After Vaaril's death, the Shadowfang and the SilverTail attacked the IvoryBlood and soon there was great war among the tribes and they nearly slew each other. The survivors fled to all over Shanri.

Ancestors were found then, sporadically. The Thrunin remembered Bku and hunted them and grew strong. They blood of the Ancestors brought back the old ways, the ways of Honor and Honorkeepers. And thus the tribes grew strong once again.

## **Belief System**

### **Riven - eating of meat**

Anything that can breath has a spirit. The spirit is what allows them to breathe, thus it lives in the lungs. When any creature dies, or is killed, the spirit is trapped in the flesh. Burning the flesh breaks the bonds that hold the spirit. Eating that flesh before a sun-cycle brings the spirit into the ones eating it. The spirit is where one's strength is.

Eating Thrunin who have died allows their spirits to travel with their descendants, giving their descendants strength until they can return to Iblin.

If, however, more than a sun-cycle passes before the flesh is eaten, then the spirit is released into the world. Mother's anger wipes it of any ability to remember what it once was, and it becomes another malevolent part of her, lost forever.

Yes, Spectres frighten thrunin.

## **Stteehl - the Hunt**

Always before a hunt, the Shaman dreams of an Ancestor who comes to them and tells them it is time. The Warriors gather together, and the young ones whose time it is to be testing also go to hunt the Ancestor.

It may take months before they are successful. On the battlefield, they burn and eat the lungs of the Ancestor. Only those who have hunted eat, and it is how the young ones become Warriors, for they have the Ancestors within them.

There, they use Ancestor Blood, mingled with ink to make the tattoos which mark the faces, and mark them as warriors of their clan.

They return to their clan, and there is much feasting. During which, the newest warriors and the shaman take the heart sheath into a secret place. There, with rituals which no warrior would ever talk about, they fashion their mighty swords, knives, spears and heartsheaths (breastplates). One Ancestor's Heartsheath can usually provide two weapons and two heartsheaths.

## **Vttivt - Honor**

Taught to them by Tkit. Honor is the way of Tkit. Honor is for those of the clan only. Outside the clan, there can be no honor. Kvien's children twisted the world. Thus to show honor to a ven would be ridiculous.

Honor encompasses:

- Honesty, saying what they mean, and acting upon it is valued
- Loyalty, protection of the clan is vital. The weak and infirm are kept safe from danger, but there is shame in being weak. Every child seeks to be a warrior so they may bear Honor and defend their brothers and sisters.
- Courage & Strength to do what needs doing
- Following the rituals passed down since Tkit.



### **Vttivtkit – Honor Bearer**

One who allows the Elder thrunin, or the warleader, or any thrunin of some authority to behave without Honor - towards one who deserves no Honor. If one of the tribe deserves exile, the Elder will give his Honor to his Vttivtkit before striking off the Exile's tattoos. The same with going into battle.

### **Praett - Mating ritual**

Only warriors can take mates - of other warriors. To take a mate is a fierce ritual that can only happen during the hunt. Afterwards, both are marked with a new set of tattoo scars which marks them as belonging to each other and worthy of bearing offspring. The ritual also is what makes them fertile. Few undertake this without some affection for their mate, for it is a lifetime event, and no member of their clan would dare take one as a lover while the other yet lived. It would result in being cast out of the clan.

Lovers happen among those not mated. Usually the flitting from one to another only happens before they become warriors and grow up. Warriors rarely have more than one or two lovers, unless they have extremely bad luck of losing all their lovers to death, etc. There are no offspring from lovers unless both are the surviving partner of a mated pair.

### **QwoaNiVttik - Heretics - those who deserve no honor**

The different tribes of Thrunin were split apart by differences which they cannot remember. Each of them has a different idea on what will bring back Iblin. Why they must kill each other, even they cannot remember, but those who do not subscribe to their beliefs are Heretics, and Heretics must be slain completely. If the heretical solution was followed - then Iblin could be forever prevented from returning, and the Thrunin and Ancestors would never get to go home.

There are ten official tribes of Thrunin.

A few of these split internally, but carrying the same name means they hold to the honor of that clan - they would have to take a different name and marking to call their motherclan QwoaNiVttik

### **Zxait - Exile**

Only the deepest of punishments. To be exiled from the Thrunin, one's tattoos scratched off, to be left alone to wander the wilderness until death comes. No one to ever carry them to Iblin.

## **Qwith - Love**

An ideal. Seemingly out of place in this fierce culture, love is encouraged. Younglings are encouraged to take lovers, to learn about the minor points of love.

To love is considered part of the clan. It is complete acceptance. It is trust. Sometimes it is passion. Younglings often mistake it for being merely passion. But the older ones know that love is like wine. The best love is the oldest.

## **The Three Deities of the Early Thrunin**

These three deities are mentioned in some early Thrunin text, but little else is known about them.

**Arotrios** - Father - The First of the Three - it is said that he represented the Knowledge of Power.

**Lerna** - Mother - It is said that she represented Practical Knowledge.

**Khloo** - Spouse - It is said that he/she represented Secret Knowledge.

## **Sistht: The Serpent Men**

**Ork Traits:** Fangs, Poisonous, Glare, Lays Eggs, Smell, Sorcerer, Tools, Tongue

Deep beneath the Cities of the ven is an alien empire. An empire not very different than the one above it. The Empire of the Serpent Men. The Sistht.

The Sistht (*sis-th-t*) live in the subterranean ruins far below the ruins on the surface. The Sistht know about the ven but do not interact with them. They know better. They know that if the ven discovered





the existence of another race created by the sorcerer-kings, there would be war. Thus, the Sistht remain silent.

But they have encountered the ven on rare occasions. And, on those occasions, the encounter did not go well. The ven may or may not know about the Sistht and what they do know may or may not be correct. But they do show up in ven art from time to time and secret journals written by Blooded of the Serpent scholars do mention them. What is true about the Serpent Men of Shanri? Here's everything we can say for certain.

### **Lost Children of the Sorcerer-Kings**

The Serpent Men also acknowledge the sorcerer-kings as their creators, but they do not have such a fearful attitude toward them. The Sistht are also not so reticent about seeking out their creators' knowledge.

They can also use sorcery with just as much skill as the ven. Because of their rigorous research, they often know rituals the ven have never discovered. Because of their lack of fear, the Sistht also perform rituals the ven would never dare try.

This means the Serpent Men never receive DOOM! for using Artifacts. The Sistht do suffer from a different side-effect called Corruption, which you can find out about a little later.

The Sistht prefer to use knives but have also been known to use swords, although they are very different from ven swords. They look more like scimitars and are very light. The Sistht do not use bows.

The Sistht tend to live alone. They are reclusive and do not like visitors, appreciating solitude for their studies. The Sistht do not have family units nor do they have any emotional attachment to mates. Sex is a desire that is fulfilled and then forgotten. When a mother gives birth, she does not even bother to protect the eggs; they will survive or they will die. It makes no matter to her. It's no wonder there are so few of them.



## **Pearls**

The Sistht are not only masters of blood sorcery but have discovered another of the sorcerer-king's secrets as well: they use pearls to communicate and spy upon others. The pearls must be taken from giant oysters living in the deepest waters. These pearls are as large as a child's head. Only a perfect pearl can be used as a scrying device.

Once a Sistht finds such a pearl, he uses his blood to enchant it. The pearl can then be used to watch distant locations and even overhear conversations.

### **New Ritual: The Pearl**

To create a scrying pearl, the ven must acquire the correct materials. He needs a pearl—large and perfect—from the bottom of the waters of Shanri. Then, he bleeds on the pearl. The ranks of Injury bled upon the pearl give it additional properties, listed below. Remember: a ven does not need to use his own blood to power this ritual, but all the blood must be spent *at once* to create the desired effects. Once the blood has been spilled, the ven only needs to spend a little blood to activate the pearl's powers.

While using a pearl, the user places his hand upon it, closes his eyes and becomes subsumed in complete concentration. He may walk about the scene as if he is there, but he cannot interact with objects. While using the pearl, he is considered *helpless* and cannot defend himself (or even sense intruders).

#### **5 Injuries: See**

The user can see any part of Shanri. He commands the pearl to show it to him, and he can see it. He cannot hear anything, but he can see what is happening there. The user must bleed at least one Injury worth of blood to activate this power.

#### **10 Injuries: Listen**

With additional blood, the user can not only see but also listen in on any vision he witnesses. The user must bleed at least two Injuries worth of blood to activate this power.



### **15 Injuries: Communicate**

At this level, the user can speak to others in the vision as if he were in the room. They cannot see him, but they can hear him. The user must bleed at least three Injuries of blood to activate this power.

### **20 Injuries: Travel**

Finally, the user can travel to any location he can witness with the pearl. He may not take others with him. The user must bleed at least four Injuries of blood to activate this power.

### **Venom**

Sistht venom is a *dire poison* on par with the other deadly poisons found in the core book. It is a slow-acting neurotoxin that shuts down the body's central nervous system. Without the correct antivenin, the target will die within one minute. Until that time, he is *helpless* as he vomits, shudders and eventually becomes paralyzed and unconscious.

The ven currently have no antidote for Sistht venom, although some clever scholar may discover a way to make it one day.

### **Djjo**

The djjo appears as a kind of feline creature, although much larger than the standard cat. It usually only appears on the plains. It is quick, agile, silent and incredibly deadly. The djjo's eyes gleam when light is shined upon them and they see very well in dim light. It's name means "lantern death" in the Old Tongue.



Djjo are pack animals. They hunt in teams and use tactics to bring down prey. Ven hunters seldom encounter one djjo, but rather, encounter many, hunting for food in the wild.

The djjo's talons are venomous, causing paralyzation. One scratch can down its pray in a matter of moments. Thus, the hunting tactics of the djjo are simple: surround an animal, close in, distract it, force it to run into a larger pack, then get in

one scratch. After that, the chase is over. The djjo wait for the target to slow, then fall. Then, the feast begins.

**Ork Traits:** Claws, Creeper, Deadly, Fangs, Jumper, Nocturnal, Pack, Quadruped, Quiet, Venom

### **Burrower**

Burrowers are large worm-like creatures found in jungles. Burrowers are solitary creatures who appear to procreate asexually; their young are born through their skin during the wet and rainy spring.



A burrower can grow anywhere from ten feet long to over seventy feet long. It senses vibrations above it and rises up from the ground to eat cattle and other larger animals. While carnivorous, burrowers do not need to eat often. A single cow or sheep can be digested multiple times in a burrower's many-chambered stomach. When it does attack, it uses barbed tentacles around its maw to grab its food and drag it back underground where the sheep or cow (or ven) suffocates. Then, when its prey is dead, it becomes slowly digested.

While traveling underground, a burrower's hide becomes tough. Its sticky skin picks up stones as it travels, making it appear to be made of stone. In fact, a burrower's hide is incredibly soft. Burrowers also have no bones, making them little more than giant earthworms.

**Ork Traits:** Burrowing, Fat, Rhino Hide, Slow Digestion, Tentacles, Terror

### **Ghuvan**

The ghuvan is a relatively peaceful beast. It has four legs, a tortoise-like shell and a large horn on its head. Ghuvan prefer to be left alone. They are herbivores and tend to avoid contact with other ork.

Some (more sophisticated)





ork have learned to domesticate the ghuvan, using them as work animals. Riding a ghuvan is tricky, but possible.

Despite their size — nearly ten feet tall from toes to shell — the ghuvan are quick. Their name means “thunder runner” in the Old Tongue, and when a herd of ghuvan move, you can hear it from miles away.

**Ork Traits:** Cowardly, Herd, Horn, Hooves, Quickness, Rhino Hide, Soft Spot

### **Oolshow**

The oolshow (“night thing”) is a deadly reminder of the days of the sorcerers-kings. Unlike other orks who at least appear to be natural creatures, the oolshow is a clearly a thing created by sorcery. Ven historians note that many of the oldest writings mention this creature as a kind of guardian used by the old ones

to maintain discipline among the ven when they were slaves. The oolshow are mostly gone now, but some still remain.

An oolshow may only exist in darkness. Not shadow or dim light, but darkness. This is why the ven always keep rooms lit, even if by one single candle, and never travel in complete darkness.

When an oolshow attacks, it drains its victim of blood. The attack is quick and deadly, leaving behind a withered corpse. Strangely, the victims of an oolshow also emit the same sticky fluid that is released when a ven approaches solace, making the victim appear as an emaciated suaven.

Oolshow are difficult to fight. They move as quick as the darkness itself and may only be struck by a weapon made from orichalcum. Oolshow may also be trapped in a cage made from the same material. At least, that's what the historians and scholars say. If any ven has successfully captured an oolshow, none are saying. And once caught, who would be foolish enough to let it back out?

**Ork Traits:** Camouflage, Deadly, Fangs, Insubstantial, Invisibility, Jumper, More Ork than Ork, Quickness, Terror

### **The Horned One**

More of an “ork legend” than an actual ork (and who believes ork legends?), the Horned One is a tall figure appearing as a ven with a horrible mask. He has horns growing from his head (or his mask) and he may command beasts to do his bidding.





Many ven scholars believe legends of the Horned One are simply ork misinterpretations of old veth rituals. Or, perhaps, they are legends spawning from seeing q'val or talashan. Whatever the case may be, the Horned One has yet to make an appearance to any ven... at least, any ven willing to admit it.

**Ork Traits:** Chimera, Command, Glare, Horn, Hunter, Intuition, Invisibility, More Ork than Ork, Pets, Tricky

### **The Thraka**

*(The Thraka are a breed of ork I have researched before. Some of you may have seen them in a previous book with my name on it. I had a lot of fun revisiting them. I hope you do, too. — JW)*





The Thraka are a tribe of orks living in the distant north, as far from ven observation as possible. They are known to the Thrunnin and the Serpent Men, but try to keep their distance from them as well.



## Biology

Thraka are large, humanoid creatures. They have green skin (of different shades), tusks and use tools. Thraka skin cells can process sunlight through photosynthesis. Although not as complete as a plant, they can go a great deal of time without sustenance, living only on sunlight.

Thraka stand anywhere from five feet tall to seven feet tall. They are muscular — stronger than the typical ven — and quick. Thraka are highly-skilled hunters, but do not have good night vision, preferring to hunt during the day.

Thraka also have no sex taboos. Concepts such as heterosexual, homosexual, and bi-sexual make no sense to the thraka. They see sex as a pleasurable activity they partake in with friends. Some thraka select a favorite: a relationship that resembles ven Romance (without the tragedy and Revenge). Favorites are (semi-)exclusive lovers with strong emotional bonds, but this does not necessarily preclude sex with other thraka.

Thraka have a lifespan of about fifty years. However, thraka live in a dangerous world, and more often than not, they meet with violent ends. Few thraka die of old age.

## Myth

Thraka believe in four gods. The first is Keethdownmga, the Mother of the Thraka. While many ven scholars may be quick to associate Keethdownmga with Mahl, this would be a mistake. Thraka view Keethdownmga as a loving (but stern) figure who loves her children. Thraka believe that when a female ork becomes pregnant, it is because Keethdownmga has sent her a child. Thraka pray to Keethdownmga, but know that she wants her children to be strong and self-reliant. Therefore, most prayers to her are thanks for blessings rather than appeals for help.

The second god Thraka worship is Gowthdukah, the God of Wisdom. Thraka say that Gowthdukah can no longer speak because he went to the Tree of Wisdom to gain knowledge for his people.



The Tree demanded that Gowthdukah cut off his tongue so he could not share his wisdom with the other Thraka. Gowthdukah did so, gained the wisdom, then created the thraka language to share that wisdom with others. Gowthdukah is a mysterious figure and Thraka seldom pray to him, but often relate stories of meeting a mute Thraka on the road and learning a bit of wisdom after accompanying him on a dangerous adventure.

The third god Thraka worship is Bashthraka (meaning, “big warrior”). Bashthraka is the God of War and the God of Storms. He is not a very bright Thraka and often gets himself into problems because he doesn’t look before he leaps. But he is also the greatest warrior in the world, so when he fights, he always kills what he fights. In fact, it is a tradition among the Thraka that whenever Bashthraka kills something, everyone in attendance finishes their cup. (Long Bashthraka stories end with many drunk Thraka.) Bashthraka is known for his famous spear that he carries with him wherever he goes.

The last Thraka god is Pugg, the God of Tricks. Pugg is small with a broken foot (Bashthraka broke it for one of Pugg’s tricks). He is clever, but not wise. He is tricky, but not strong. Often, Thraka tell stories of how Bashthraka gets himself in trouble and how Pugg gets him out of it. (One such story can be found at the end of this chapter.) Pugg is also responsible for all the trouble in the world: a concept we will address in a moment.

Finally, Thraka believe in an afterlife, but also believe they have been cheated out of their rightful place. “Thraka heaven” is guarded by a giant toad named “Gorlam.” Gorlam eats any Thraka who tries to pass into heaven and remains in his stomach, suffering forever.

## **Culture**

Thraka are migratory creatures, always on the move. They feel that if they are moving, there is less chance of the ven finding them. (Thraka call the ven “ahlvsees,” a term that has many meanings, but is generally translated as “petty people.”)

Thraka move in tribes they call *gathum*. Thraka are matriarchal. They believe that females are sacred and holy beings who receive new orks from their mother goddess, Keethdownga. (Thraka have not yet figured out that sex makes babies.) Thus, male thraka do their best to protect their females from other ork tribes and

the ven. The head of the gathum is a *bashdownmga*, or “Great Mother.” The bashdownmga makes all the important decisions for the tribe and is revered for her wisdom.

The bashdownmga has many warriors (*thraka*) at her command, and they do as she wishes. The gathum is made up of many families. While thraka recognize parentage, a child in the gathum is seen as the gathum’s child; everyone is responsible for the gathum’s children, and thus, its future.

Thraka tribes revere many of the same sacred animals the ven do. Their tribes include totems such as the falcon, the wolf, the elk and the serpent, often drawing spiritual inspiration from those same totems. Thus, a tribe may be a “wolf gathum” or an “elk gathum.” Thraka make banners for their tribes, flying them with pride.

Likewise, thraka have domesticated many animals such as the wolf, the elk and the reindeer. (If the Blooded of the Elk or Wolf ever found out the Thraka “domesticated” a sacred animal, the hunt to extinguish the Thraka from the face of Shanri would be on.)

Thraka gain their cultural name from their most important members: the hunter/warriors who wield spears and shields. This particular combination is called “thraka,” named after the Thunder God who also wields a spear and a shield. He is Bashthraka, and those who follow his example are simply, “thraka.” Thus, every Thraka carries a spear and shield with which he hunts and kills enemies of the tribe.

## **Trouble**

Thraka believe in something called *troola*, or “trouble.” Thraka believe troola is a sentient force that seeks out the foolish and punishes them. Thraka have a saying: “Don’t go looking for trouble because trouble is already looking for you.” Pride is not a virtue in Thraka culture. Humility in the face of a violent world suits Thraka better.

## **Carrying**

As migratory creatures, the concept of “carrying” is important to the Thraka. The more you can carry, the more useful you are to the tribe.



But even more important is the allegorical “carrying.” Thraka speak of “carrying” as the ability to manage your own duties and responsibilities. “Don’t take on more than you can carry.” Thraka who attempt to do so only put more weight on the rest of the tribe.

## **Humor**

Thraka also have a peculiar sense of humor. A typical Thraka joke may go something like this:

*Ablvsees use swords.*

*Swords are short. Spears are long.*

*Ablvsees are dumb.*

Thraka also act like ven in ridiculous ways, mocking them and reinforcing their own virtues.

*I’m a ven. I sleep with my sister. Oh, what a tragic life I lead.*

In short, Thraka view ven as creatures who spit at trouble, then complain when it spits back.

*Ablvsees are dumb.*

## **Honey**

Thraka love honey. (They call it sooeeta.) They view it as a magical food. It never spoils, tastes like nothing else, and is dangerous to “hunt.”

“Hunting honey” is a particular skill Thraka develop. After all, a thraka has to steal a bee’s nest to get it. (Thraka haven’t figured out beekeeping yet, either.) Thraka have different ways of hunting honey, but when they do get it, they use it for many things. They use it for healing salves, to soothe teething children and as a sweetener in food.

But most importantly, Thraka use honey to make bala. (We would call it, “mead.”) Bala is a sacred drink reserved only for warrior-hunters leaving the tribe to commit violence. If a Thraka may not return to the tribe, he is granted the right to drink bala. A cup of courage. The elixir of the Gods.

## Eating

Speaking of eating, Thraka eat just about anything. (*Poola* is their word for “desperate food” that tastes awful, but allows you to survive.) Thraka even eat each other.

Thraka believe that old canard, “You are what you eat,” but they also believe, “You are *who* you eat.” Thus, if a famous and skilled warrior-hunter dies, the honored Thraka are allowed to eat him, so they might carry his spirit with them. “You are gone, brother. But I will carry your spirit with me.”

Likewise, Thraka will *not* eat certain things because they do not want to carry the spirit of such a thing. Thraka would almost never eat a ven. Almost.

## Warrior-Maidens

Finally, Thraka believe that women are magical, but not until a Thraka female has become pregnant. Until then, she is not a dowmga (mother), but a *dayla* (maiden). She learns to fight like the males of her tribe and is considered a warrior-hunter until she becomes pregnant.

A few dayla are personal bodyguards of the bashdowmga. These are called Dowmgaday and are considered holy warriors hand-picked by the bashdowmga herself.

## Thraka Traits

Some Traits are listed below with an asterisk (\*). Thraka from a particular Tribe may have only one of these Traits.

Art\*, Breeder, History\*, Hunter, Muscle, Myth\*, Pack, Pets, Quiet, Regeneration, Rider, Tools, Tricky\*, Village

## A Thraka Glossary

The following is an incomplete glossary of Thraka terms.

*bala*: mead, aka “Thraka’s Drink”



*baladrún*: meadhorn

*bandoona*: love braid

*banta*: formal duel authorized by the bashdownmga

*basha*: clean

*bashdownmga*: head downmga of gathum

*bashorkum* head orkum of gathum

*bodalay*: sorcerer-priest

*dadoon*: those who doon

*dandoona*: one who is in love

*dayla*: maiden, female thraka.

*dooladay*: winterhome

*doon*: backstab, treacherous death.

*doona*: to have sexual relations

*doonda*: inflamed; infected

*downmga*: mother ork

*downmgaday*: maiden ork, mother-to-be,

*dunta*: hunting

*eshoola*: last wound; fatal wound

*eetalday*: resting place – migratory campsite/village

*eyandro*: merciless; one who demands

*ganala*: law, “this is the way”

*gathum*: tribe

*gayla*: feast (after a dunta)

*gunbloo*: punishment by drowning to death.

*Mowgd*: Weakness. Literally Yellow.... A

*Lohda*: "To carry."

*noona*: to be in love.

*orkum*: household

*orkus*: plural of ork

*poola*: desperation food.

*shanda*: punishment by burning alive.

*shayla*: wounds by weapons

*shoola*: great shunning; tattooed and expelled.

*shoona*: what one caught and showed to the downmga

*shusha*: tact

*sooeeta*: honey, aka food of the gods

*tala*: bard

*taldoolay*: city

*tanda*: arrow wound

*tandoo*: pushed through

*tanee*: punishment by beating & shunning until bruises heal.

*thraka*: warrior ork

*thwaku*: to take by cunning

*tlanda*: foohardy bravery (intoxication)

*tlandan* story of being saved by serendipity

*tooanda*: monthly gathering to resolve issues in the gathum



*vroonda*: “the ordeal of love”

*zhoosha*: place in society; role and experience

*zoom*: bees

## **How BashthraKa Got Love Sick (and How Pugg Got Him the Cure)**

*The following story is typical of Pugg/BashthraKa stories. It involves BashthraKa stumbling into Trouble and then Pugg using his wits to get him out of it. It is a rare story (that never appeared in the original Orkworld book). It also uses some terminology from the Orkworld book, but I'm sure you'll be able to figure it all out. I hope you enjoy it.*

— JW

### **Part One: Apples**

It was a fine day, a sunny day. That there sun, he shone down his light all over the green-green and he made it all warm and sleepy for all us down here. So warm and sleepy, our eyes are only half open, and our heads are only half thinking.

“It is a fine day,” Pugg said, looking at the world all thick and slow from the sleepy sun. “A fine day... for a trick.”

So that's Pugg, that little fox, walking through the world with his little bag, all ready to thwak someone good. See, inside that bag of his, he's got himself something that's gonna cause all kinds of trouble. See, he's got himself a love potion.

It wasn't easy to make. He needed an ahlysees tear, and that was no mean thwak, I'll tell you that. He needed sweat from a shtuntee's beard, and he sure got him a burn down his backside running from that one. Lastly, he needed a dragon's laugh, and the story he told to catch that in his bag... well, that's another story all together now, and we don't want to be telling too many stories all at once.

But even Pugg can't say no to that hot hot sun for too long, so when he gets himself tired, he starts looking for a wide tree dropping shade right down so he can take himself a little sleep. And who should he see walking through the fields but his own big brother, carrying seventeen hands of troll heads over his shoulder.



“Hey there brother of mine!” Pugg calls out. “What you got there?”

And here comes Bashthraka, stomping up the green field, a big, wide smile on his face. “Trolls!” he shouts, showing the seventeen hands of heads he’s got, holding them together by their long troll hair.

“Why do you have troll heads?” Pugg asked.

“They thought they could make stew out of Bashthraka! So, Bashthraka killed them! Now, Bashthraka’s taking the heads back to mom. She makes good troll ear stew.”

“It’s true,” Pugg said, remembering the last time he was at home, smelling the stew brewing and bubbling in their mother’s big, black pot.

“Brother,” Pugg said, shouldering his pack, his little fox smile starting to spread on his lips. “You look tired.”

“Bashthraka never gets tired!” said Bashthraka.

“Oh, but you look tired. And the sun, it’s so hot. How long have you been carrying those troll heads?”

“Not long enough!” Bashthraka said. “Bashthraka still has a long way to go before he gets back home to mom and her pot!” And with that, Bashthraka started pounding his way toward Keethdownga’s magic house.

But Pugg caught up with him, jogging along side Bashthraka’s huge feet. “Are you sure you don’t want to stop under these shady trees and rest just for one moment?”

Bashthraka shook his head. “No!” he said, and he kept walking, his footfalls shaking the trees, making fruits fall from their branches.

Pugg caught one of the apples with his free hand and looked at his big brother’s backside as it kept moving away. Then, he opened his mouth, bared his teeth and took a big, wet, juicy, noisy bite right out of that apple.

And as soon as he did, Bashthraka stopped... and turned slowly.



“Are those apples?!” Bashthraka asked.

Pugg took another big, wet, juicy, noisy bite right out of the apple and smiled as he nodded. “Uh huh.”

“How many apples do you have?” Bashthraka asked.

“I’m only carrying one right now. The rest are all over the ground, just waiting for someone to come carry them.

Bashthraka dropped the troll heads, and they hit the grass with a heavy squish! as he ran toward the apple tree, picking up apples and popping them in his mouth, gulping them down faster than he could grab them. He might have chewed one, but nobody can say for sure.

When all the apples were gone, Bashthraka rubbed his belly. “Good apples!” he said, and turned back to the troll heads.

“Is that all you’re going to eat?” Pugg asked.

Bashthraka nodded. “Bashthraka is done with apples! He wants troll ears!”

“There are more apple trees right over there,” Pugg said, pointing them out to his brother.

“Didn’t you hear Bashthraka?! He said he was done with apples and he wanted troll ears!”

“It’s just that... well, I ate some apples yesterday, and I ate more apples than you did.”

“What are you saying to Bashthraka?!” asked Bashthraka.

“I’m not saying anything. I just thought you could eat more apples than that. That’s all.”

“Bashthraka can eat all the apples he wants!” shouted Bashthraka. “How many apples did you eat yesterday?!”

“Oh, about ten hands or...”

**“TEN HANDS!!! IS THAT ALL?!!! BASHTHRACA WILL EAT TWENTY HANDS OF APPLES!!! YOU’LL SEE!!!”**

And with that, Bashthraka ran off into the apple orchard.

“I’m sure you will,” said Pugg, a little smile on his face, and he sat under a tree, pulling his cap down, resting his eyes until his big brother came back.

Bashthraka ran through the apple trees, ripping them from the ground roots and all, eating them whole. He ripped up apple trees here and there, hither and thither, there and yon until there were no more apple trees left in the entire valley.

Then, when there were no more apple trees, he found a grove of cherry trees, and he ripped them up and he ate them down.

When there were no more cherry trees, he found a grove of pear trees, and he ripped them up and he ate them down.

When there were no pear trees, he found a grove of juniper trees, and he ripped them up and he ate them down.

On and on he went, until finally, his stomach started to bubble and his big mouth made burps that even the Great Toad Gorlam could hear. And when he was done, he went back to little Pugg and he sat down right next to him under that bare apple tree.

“Are you done?” Pugg asked.

“Bashthraka thinks Bashthraka ate too much,” said Bashthraka.

“Well, why don’t you rest it off. Sit down here with me and we’ll sleep till morning. By then, your stomach should be just fine.”

“All right,” said Bashthraka. “Bashthraka will sit down here,” and he did, “and he’ll close his eyes,” and he did, “and he’ll...”

Silence...

Pugg smiled. “And he’ll rest right by me while I sleep so no nasty troll or dwarf or elf will come and make trouble for me while I’m resting my eyes.”

And for once, Bashthraka didn’t say anything.



“Good night, big brother,” Pugg said, and he fell asleep.

## **Part Two: Trouble**

Perhaps it was his trouble that woke Bashthra first. Or maybe it was Pugg’s trouble that kept him asleep. Nobody knows, and its best just not to think about such things, let alone say them out loud.

But for whatever the reason, Bashthra woke first, and when he did, he felt all those apples trees and cherry trees and juniper trees rolling around in his stomach, and when he did, he said:

“Bashthra is thirsty!”

He looked around, but he didn’t see anything to drink. Then, he spied his little brother Pugg, all sleepy under the shade of the apple tree and he smiled.

“Bashthra’s brother always has a bottle of bala in his pouch! Bashthra will thwak just a little sip!”

He flipped open the flap of Pugg’s pouch and right there, right inside, was a little bottle of something. Bashthra took it out of the pouch just as Pugg started to wake.

“What is it brother?” he asked, his eyes still full of sticky sleep and his brain still full of wandering dreams.

“Nothing!” Bashthra shouted, the thought that maybe it might have been kind of a good idea to whisper missing his head by about two fingers. And before Pugg could drag himself out of his dreams, he popped the cork off the bottle and drank down the liquid inside.

“Ah!” said Bashthra. “That was...”

And then, for the second time, Bashthra didn’t say anything. Because the love potion Pugg had hiding in his bag, the one he was saving, grabbed hold of Bashthra’s spleen and squeezed.

It squeezed stronger than a dragon’s coil.

It squeezed stronger than a shtuntee’s bum.

It squeezed stronger than a downy's goodbye hug.

It squeezed.

Pugg jumped to his feet, only just now realizing what happened.

"What did you do?" he shouted.

Bashthraka just rose to his feet, his eyes focused on something across the field.

"You drank the love potion!" Pugg shouted. "You big oaf, you drank the love potion!"

"Be quiet, little brother," Bashthraka said softly, gently pushing Pugg aside. "And speak not in such dismelodious tones in the presence of such a beauty."

"Dismelodious tones?" Pugg couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Did you just say..."

Bashthraka turned softly on his heel and put his finger over Pugg's lips. "Hush, little one," he said. "Before you disturb the restless beauty who rests in yonder pasture."

And with that, Bashthraka bounded across the fields, rushing with his arms open toward something just beyond Pugg's view.

"This is some trouble," Pugg said. "He even left his spear behind." Pugg picked up Bashthraka's spear and watched him, still bounding away. "I've got to do something about this..."

Then, Pugg stopped.

Then, Pugg smiled.

"I've got to do something about this," he said. And, with Bashthraka's spear in hand, he bounded off after his big brother, certain indeed that the next few days were going to be a whole lot of fun.



### Part Three: Bashthraka's Love

"Brother?" Pugg shouted, peering through the woods. "Where are you?"

No answer.

"He'll get love sick over the first thing he saw," Pugg muttered to himself.

"Whatever that was."

Just then, a space between the trees, and Pugg found his big brother, his arms wrapped around something. Bashthraka's huge shoulders blocked out Pugg's view.

"Sweet, delicate one," Bashthraka whispered. "How did I live without you? How did I make it through a single day without you?"

"Hello, brother," Pugg said, trying to get a better view of who it was Bashthraka had gotten love sick for.

"Good morning sweet Pugg," Bashthraka said. "How are you today?"

"Fine. Just fine." Pugg tilted on one foot. "You mind introducing me to your... friend?"

"Not at all," Bashthraka said. "Brother Pugg. Allow me to introduce you to my love."

Bashthraka opened his thick arms, and Pugg looked. Resting there, in the dirt, just below Bashthraka's knees was a tiny evergreen sapling, not more than one winter old.

"She's..." Pugg began, doing his best to swallow his laughter. "She's..."

"Beautiful, isn't she?" Bashthraka asked.

"Oh, she's a beauty all right," Pugg said. "And what a healthy green she is."

"Yes," Bashthraka said, gently caressing her needles and branches. "Healthy and green."

Pugg bit his tongue so hard, he felt blood oozing through his teeth. "But, she's rather quiet, isn't she?"

Bashthraka nodded. "I don't know why," he said. "Perhaps she's shy?"

“No,” Pugg said. “It’s because she’s angry.”

Bashthraka leapt to his feet, his knees shivering. “Angry?!?” he shouted, his voice tottering with fear. “Is she angry with me?!?”

“Yes,” said Pugg, his eyes narrowing. “You haven’t performed the love ritual, my brother. What do you expect her to be happy?”

Bashthraka fell to his knees. “But Bashthraka’s never been in love before! Bashthraka doesn’t know what to do!”

“Then listen carefully, my brother,” Pugg said, his voice all scolding like his mother’s. “You have to go out into the world without your spear and prove your love.”

“How! Tell Bashthraka how!”

“Pain proves love, my brother. Go out and find pain.”

It was Bashthraka’s turn to narrow his eyes. “Are you telling Bashthraka that in order to prove he’s in love, Bashthraka has to get beat up?!”

Pugg nodded. “That’s exactly what I’m telling you, brother.”

Bashthraka looked at Pugg. Pugg looked at Bashthraka. Then, Bashthraka looked at the sapling.

And the sapling looked back.

“Spuh!” Bashthraka cried out. “Bashthraka’s love wants Bashthraka to go get beat up!”

“And the more beat up, the better,” Pugg said. “Now, go get beaten. And when you’re done, come back here, and your love won’t be so shy anymore.”

Bashthraka sighed and rose back to his feet. He reached for his spear, but Pugg held it away, shaking his head. “No shield, either,” he told Bashthraka, and Bashthraka dropped his spear on the ground, turning away. He cast one long, lonely, forlorn look at the sapling, and gave it a sad wave goodbye.



## **Part Four: Fighting**

On the first day, Bashthraka walked to a dark, stinky swamp. There, he found a troll, eating what was left of a dwarf, which shows you that trolls will eat just about anything. Trolls are dumb.

“Troll!” shouted Bashthraka. “Bashthraka is love sick, and the only way for him to prove his love is for you to fight him!”

The troll looked up and when he saw Bashthraka, he dropped it down into the swamp. “I don’t want to fight you,” the troll said. “You’re Bashthraka. You’ll kill me!”

“Fight Bashthraka so he can prove that he’s love sick!”

The troll took a step back. “Uh, please. I’m just a troll. I’m too skinny and my nose is too big and I’m dumb enough to eat dwarves. I don’t want to fight you.”

“You won’t help Bashthraka prove he’s love sick? You are one dead troll!” And with that, Bashthraka charged the troll and ripped off his arms, twisted his legs in a knot and poked out his eyes. And then, Bashthraka killed him.

On the second day, Bashthraka walked through the tall, cold, snowy mountains. There, he found an ogre, surrounded by gold and gems and jewels, which shows you that ogres collect useless things they can’t carry. Ogres are dumb.

“Ogre!” shouted Bashthraka. “Bashthraka is love sick, and the only way for him to prove his love is for you to fight him!”

The ogre looked up from his gold and jewels and when he saw Bashthraka, he dropped them down, and they spilled down the snowy mountainside. “I don’t want to fight you,” the ogre said. “You’re Bashthraka. You’ll kill me!”

“This is the second time someone won’t help Bashthraka prove he’s love sick!”

“If I fight you, you’ll kill me,” the ogre said.

“If you don’t fight Bashthraka, Bashthraka will kill you!”

“Well, when you put it that way...” And with that, the ogre jumped up and ran through the snow, running for his cave.



But Bashthraka is quicker than some fat, ugly, one-eyed ogre who collects gold and gems and jewels and other useless things that he can't eat, and he pulled off his ears, and ripped his skin right off his body and plucked his toes off his feet like grapes off a vine. And then, Bashthraka killed him.

On the third day, Bashthraka wandered into the desert, and there he found an army of men and an elf, sitting in his floating chariot. All the men had chains around their necks and ankles as they pulled the floating chariot along, the elf sipping wine as the others carried his weight.

"Ven!" shouted Bashthraka. "Bashthraka is love sick, and the only way for him to prove his love is for you to fight him!"

The ven looked up from his wine and when he saw Bashthraka, he set it down beside him and said, "I don't want to fight you. That would take just too much effort. I'm exheriting myself a bit much even talking to you now, so why don't you go on your little way, little ork, and perhaps I will not flay you alive and sup upon the marrow in your bones and make carpets from your hide and fingernail clippers from your teeth, for I am Lord Aelderdandendalon dan der..."

"IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOUR NAME IS!!!" Bashthraka shouted. "Bashthraka doesn't care about proving his love sickness, he's just going to kill you because you're a stupid, weak, hallow-boned, big eyed, stupid ven!"

"Oh dear," said the elf, and commanded his man-slaves to kill Bashthraka.

The army charged, all ten and ten and ten and ten hands of them. They attacked Bashthraka and Bashthraka killed them all.

And when they were all dead, Bashthraka looked up at the elf, standing all alone without a single slave to even lift his hand for him.

"Now," said Bashthraka, "you will fight Bashthraka, and you will help him prove that he's love sick!"



“What in the world are you talking about you big, loathsome creature? Do you have any idea who you’re talking to? I am Lord Ael... agh!”

Bashthra’s hand was around the elf lord’s throat as fast as a snake strikes.

“Bashthra told you what Bashthra thinks of your name.” And with that, he squeezed.

Squeezed tighter than a dwarf holds his greed.

Squeezed tighter than an elf holds his pride.

Squeezed tighter than a man holds his fear.

Squeezed almost as tight as the love that held his liver. Almost.

And when he squeezed, that elf’s head popped right up into the sky and fell down with the same sound a melon makes when it hits the ground.

Plop.

But watching the head pop, Bashthra was suddenly very sad. He turned away from the sand valley where he killed the army and walked back to his love.

(But, if you go to that valley today, the sand is still red from the blood of the army he killed, and you can hear the dead elf’s head whispering, hoping to find its body.)

### **Part Five: Toad**

Pugg saw Bashthra walking back to the little sapling, his head hung low, his shoulders slumped.

“What’s wrong brother,” Pugg asked.

“Nobody will beat up Bashthra,” Bashthra said.

“I’ll beat you up,” said Pugg.

Bashthra’s teeth gnashed and his hands squeezed.

“All right. Mabye I won’t beat you up.”

Bashthraka lowered himself to the tree, touching its needles so soft. "I'm sorry," he said to the tree. "I tried to get beat up. But nobody will fight me. Everyone in the world is afraid of me. Everyone but..."

Bashthraka's eyes popped open.

Pugg dropped the spear.

"You better not be thinking..." Pugg began, but Bashthraka was already on his feet.

"There's only one thing in the world that can beat up Bashthraka!" Bashthraka said. "And that's the Great Toad Gorlam!"

Pugg jumped after him. "All right," he said. "This isn't funny anymore. This is serious. Brother, you have to listen to me."

Bashthraka grabbed Pugg by the neck and he squeezed. Not a lot. Just enough.

"Bashthraka is going to prove that he's love sick. One way or another. And there is nothing and Bashthraka means nothing that you can do to stop Bashthraka."

"Big brother," Pugg managed to spit out through his squeezed throat. "If you go down to the center of the world and face the Great Toad Gorlam, you'll die."

"Better to die love sick than die..." Bashthraka shook his head. "You know what Bashthraka means." He tossed Pugg down to the ground and Pugg ran after him, clutching at his sore throat.

"Brother, if you go there, at least let me go with you."

"Bashthraka goes alone."

Pugg was desperate. He looked around him, looking for something anything he could use to trick his brother from going to meet the Great Toad, but his mind was full of panic and dread, and when that happens, there just ain't no trick to be found.



And that's when his eyes fell on the little evergreen sapling. And that's when his eyes lit up like stars in the black, winter sky.

"Well, kick me," Pugg said. Bashthraka turned to see what kind of trick his brother was trying to play now, and that's when he saw it, too.

With big, heavy footfalls, Bashthraka walked no, that's not right he staggered back to the grove and dropped on his knees before the little tree. One of his huge hands reached down just slightly and touched the pink flower that blossomed there between the branches and the needles.

Pugg was looking at the tree, so he didn't see the little tear that fell from Bashthraka's eye, and he didn't hear the little whisper his lips made.

"Thank you," he said.

Then, like a thunderstorm, he grabbed Pugg by the throat and lifted him high in the air.

"YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO BEAT UP BASHTHRAKA!!!"

"nah," Pugg managed to say. "nahrry."

"YOU HAD BETTER BE SORRY LITTLE BROTHER!!! THE NEXT TIME YOU SAY YOU WANT TO BEAT UP BASHTHRAKA, BASHTHRAKA WILL... BASHTHRAKA WILL..."

Bashthraka threw Pugg down and picked up his spear and threw it in the air, into a giant hawk that was there, looking down at the little sapling's brand new blossom, hoping it might get a bit of desert for the rabbit it just ate, and Bashthraka's spear split it in two.

"BASHTHRAKA WILL KILL YOU!!!"

And with that, Bashthraka got back his spear, picked up his shield and stomped away across the field, picked up his troll ears and marched on off to Keethdownga's magic house.

Pugg shook his head and rubbed his throat. Then, he looked at the little sapling, it's blossom all bright.

“You caused me a lot of trouble, little one,” he said, picking up his pouch and his cap. He turned away, walking after his brother. “The very seed of the Tree of Troubles herself.”

And as he walked away, the wind came through the valley and whistled through the needles and branches of that little tree, and Pugg turned around and looked, cause he was sure he could hear that little evergreen laughing.

And that’s how Bashthraka got love sick and how Pugg got him the cure.



# Demonology

Every ven shivers with pleasure at the thought of partaking in something forbidden. The study of demonology is relatively new to ven society, and everyone recognizes that demons are perilous in the extreme. It's no wonder, then, that the Houses clamor for expert demonologists, so that they can take advantage of yet another means to wreck vengeance upon their enemies and to sate their jaded tastes – regardless of the cost.

The Serpent Kalora Mwnn initially thought that he'd uncovered only another artifact of the sorcerer-kings when he came home from an expedition to the volcanoes with a large obsidian mirror that would answer questions put to it. With practice, though – and a few of the right questions – he learned that the obsidian shards from the volcano could provide him with a source of power unknown to other ven. The chance to use this advantage in the Game, despite its risks, guaranteed that Kalora and his family would pursue the knowledge of demons to its most potent end. Sadly, Kalora didn't survive long enough to see the results of unleashing demonology on an unsuspecting realm. A pity about his suicide.

## **A Brief History of Demonology**

The ven remained ignorant of demons until Kalora Mwnn returned home from his ill-fated expedition with the obsidian mirror that became the most famous symbol of the practice. Kalora could speak to the mirror and hear a voice that issued from it, although only his few students ever learned to hear the voice as well. The voice apparently gave him instruction and advice, and it happily taught him the means to summon and communicate with other demons. Of course, the ven realize now that one demon would be only too happy to unleash the rest of its kind upon the ven, through the medium of teaching demonology to an ambitious Serpent . . . but the demon can't be put back in the mirror now, so to speak.

Some ven who study history note that the tales of the sorcerer-kings include a limited number of references to dealings with "other beings," and conclude that the sorcerer-kings likely practiced demonology as well. Summoned demons, of

course, are only too happy to confirm, deny, or refuse to answer this question, as the mood strikes them.

Kalora learned a great many secrets from his mirror-demon, but he shared only a few. The first secret that he shared was that of the End Pact, through which a ven attunes himself to the study of demonology. Without this pact, the ven have no innate ability to communicate with, call to, bind, or summon demons. Later, he grudgingly shared the names of several servitor demons, thereby paving the way for summoners. He penned a short treatise describing the manifold depths of demon lies shortly before his own suicide. Few ven bother to read this book; it is typically described as preachy, convoluted, and of no practical value.

## The Nature of Demons

Even the most rudimentary instruction regarding demons focuses on the fact that they are creatures of deception. For all that the ven style themselves glamorous and witty, cunning and unchallenged masters of civility, demons sometimes give the ven competition. It's because of the skill and panache with which demons attempt to manipulate their ven conjurers that demons are not classified as orks, but rather as *rhas thaumum*, or "truth tellers" -- a nod to the fact that a demon uses the truth, in varying shades, as its most precise and deadly instrument.

Unlike the ven, a demon does not rely on a physical form, nor does it require sustenance or worry about the rigors of age or disease. Demons often have a wide range of capabilities, making them excellent spies, assassins, and seducers. Some can manifest illusions, or befuddle the wits; others simply delight in the spilling of gore. What every demon loves, ultimately, is the chance to manifest on Shanri and engage in its own Game with the ven.

When a demon first appears, it usually manifests as a cloud of black smoke. Depending on its inclination, it may take a physical form. Most demons have a specific physical shape that they find pleasing, but this varies from demon to demon. It's a mistake to assume that a particular shape indicates a specific demon, though; almost every demon can change its shape if it so desires.



## **Demonic Vices**

Demons don't have Virtues like the ven. Rather, they have Vices; instead of having a set of traits that describe the demon's choices of talent or study, all demons share three common Vices. A demon uses these broad traits to perform its various tasks, and to measure its preferred means of destroying its foes (and its summoner).

The three demonic Vices are:

*Deceit* measures a demon's slippery tongue. A high Deceit aspect means that the demon enjoys lying and twisting the truth, even moreso than usual. Deceit is the aspect used when a demon creates an illusion. Deceit is also used to resist a summons, and to contest attempts to compel honesty. A demon typically uses this trait any time it performs a task that would call for Cunning or Wisdom from a ven.

*Charm* recognizes that quite a few demons can be personable, even likable, and able to convince ven to consider them friends. A demon with significant Charm can engender trust, sometimes even to the point of convincing a summoner to grant it a bit more autonomy than he should. As such, Charm resists attempts to make a binding. Charm also fuels a demon's ability to place enchantments on others. A demon will typically use this trait any time it performs a task that would call for Beauty or Courage from a ven.

*Violence* showcases the fact that every demon, on some level, derives visceral satisfaction from tearing mortal flesh apart and turning its surroundings into a bloody abattoir. A demon uses its Violence aspect when it engages in battle, when it attempts to intimidate through show of force, and when it tries to resist dismissal. A demon will typically use this trait any time it performs a task that would call for Strength or Prowess from a ven.

Most demons have Vices ranging from 1-5. It's possible for a demon to have a higher Vices, but rare; the knowledge of a demon with such an aspect would be a valuable secret for a summoner.

Obviously, a demon with higher Vices is better at doing various tasks for its masters, but it's also harder to control. A clever demon with a high Deceit or Charm rating may even trick its summoner into an awful (but probably deserved) fate.



## Demonic Traits

Just as demons don't have the same Virtues as ven, they usually don't have Aspects. A demon usually won't have much use for "Love the Shoes," for example. Instead, like orks, demons have Traits.

Most demons have two Traits. Each Trait represents one particular skill or area of strength that the demon excels in. Like Ork Traits, a demon's Traits may have tags, invokes, and compels. In the latter case, the demon may have specific *rules* that force it to perform tasks in relation to its Traits. For instance, a demon may have the Trait of "Sharp and Deadly Claws," which it uses to tear people apart, but also have the associated compel of "Unable to touch an unarmed person." Forcing the demon to abide by such a rule follows the usual procedure for a compel.

## Learning Demonology

Studying demonology comes with many secrets, but the most surprising one is this: It's actually rather simple.

That's right. Demonology isn't terribly hard. It doesn't take years of dedicated study, nor poring over ancient tomes of sorcerer-kings, nor sacrificing horribly valuable unique treasures or people just to earn a small favor. It is, all told, rather easy. In fact, one could make the case that some demonologists are downright lazy.

The first step in becoming a demonologist is to perform the End Pact. This requires the aid of an existing demonologist, simply because it's impossible to call or compel a demon before taking the Pact. After that, it's just a matter of learning names and their associated summoning, binding, and dismissing rites. A rite usually isn't too difficult; it's an invocation, a sort of personal call, made by the ven, accompanied by a tool or, in some cases, a small sacrifice. Often, just a drop of blood shed by an obsidian knife will do.

Once a ven starts down the path of demonology, it's just a matter of asking the right questions. Many demons are only too happy to give up the names and associated Summoning rituals for other demons. Learning to Bind or Dismiss is a slightly more difficult matter. Some



ancient texts of the sorcerer-kings contain clues about demonology. Occasionally, a particularly unlucky ven will stumble across an artifact that might bind a demon or show how to do so. And, of course, a more experienced demonologist could choose to pass on his knowledge, if he thought that he could gain some advantage by doing so.

In game terms, a ven can learn a specific Summon ritual associated with one named demon by using a Season action, with the use of the obsidian resource (which comes only from volcano regions). Learning a Bind or Dismiss ritual requires an Adventure. Even then, the Adventure usually provides only the impetus or initial notes; a Season action is still required, with the requisite obsidian resource, to complete the process of puzzling out the Bind or Dismiss ritual.

## **The End Pact**

In order to open oneself to demonic voices and learn to summon demons, a ven must perform the End Pact. The End Pact is, like much of the rest of demonology, quite simple: The ven simply speaks to a summoned demon (generally, brought up by a mentor, but sometimes conjured via an implement like the obsidian mirror) and agrees to give up his dreams in order to realize his hopes. It's that easy.

Of course, it's a trick.

At first, nobody thought much of the End Pact. Demons proved remarkably useful, so "giving up one's dreams" seemed to be a small and abstract price to pay. Only very recently have the ven discovered that a demonologist who makes the End Pact no longer receives dreams from the suaven. It is even suspected that a demonologist who enters Solace may not be able to communicate through dreams, the way most slumbering ven do.

Is there a way around the End Pact? Well, it might be possible to get a demon to attune a ven to the voices and the language through some other means. Or perhaps there's a way to escape its terms. Nobody has yet succeeded in Binding a demon to do so, though.

Once you've gone through the End Pact, make sure to put it on your character sheet. It's not going away, after all. This does mean that you can learn demonology

rites. It also means that you can no longer gain any benefit from any suaven. Bit of a trade-off, there.

## **Summoning**

Summoning a demon is as simple as calling out the demon's name and making an offering to it. The offering is primarily symbolic; the summoner is showing that he wants to bargain. The traditional offering is one drop of blood, spilled with an obsidian knife.

Each summon, though, requires that the summoner know and be able to pronounce the demon's name. Demon names don't come from the ven language. That means that a little practice is necessary to master them.

Even if a demonologist issues a summons, there is no guarantee that the demon will respond. The initial summon is a contested risk, pitting the summoner's Cunning versus the demon's Deceit. If the demon wins, it can choose to appear, or not. If it loses, it is forced to make an appearance, if it isn't already Bound by someone else.

Once a demon is Summoned, it's time to make a deal – that is, a Binding. A demonologist doesn't have to make a Binding, but if he doesn't start, the demon simply disappears in a puff of acrid black smoke. In fact, the demon can't even choose to stay in such a case – it is automatically pulled back to the nether. At least this keeps them from running rampant every time they're Summoned and let loose.

## **Binding**

After the Summons works, the demonologist makes a Binding. A Binding is, essentially, a contract. Since the ven have quite bit of experience with contracts, many demonologists pride themselves on being able to make strong, binding contracts without loopholes, for which they get maximum benefit for minimal cost.

The Binding is a semi-formalized process in which the summoner states terms, and the demon responds with a counter-offer. Assuming that the summoner doesn't offer terms so pathetic as to infuriate the demon and cause it to disperse without bothering to negotiate,



this becomes a contested risk between the summoner's Beauty and the demon's Charm. Each side tries to convince the other to accept its offer.

If the binder wins, he gets to name a task or term for the demon to undertake. He must specify an appropriate payment in return. Each extra wager grants the binder an extra term. If the demon scores more wagers, it can place conditions on its employment.

Conditions of employment are usually quite convoluted. Budding demonologists learn quite quickly to include the clause "Take no harmful action against me."

If a demon doesn't like where a particular bargain is headed, it can always choose to disperse and return to the nether. It's not held to bargain against its will. Thus, it's important to offer something that it may actually like as a payment; otherwise, it may just leave and add the summoner to its list of people to torment later.

If a binder dies while a demon is left with uncompleted tasks, its contract nullifies unless it included an extra clause to extend beyond the binder's death (which takes a wager). In that case, the demon just disappears, generally happy to have left a partially-completed mess in its wake.

## **Dismissal**

Once a demon is Bound, it must attempt to perform the terms of its contract. Hopefully, the summoner decided to put a time limit on it, or to pressure it for completion in some form, because otherwise it may just hang around, ruining peoples' lives, dragging the summoner's name through the mud, and generally making a violent supernatural nuisance of itself.

For such occasions, there's Dismissal. The ritualist essentially decides that he's going to terminate the demon's contract. It's an automatic part of Binding; if you've Bound a demon and you know its Dismissal rite, you can try to Dismiss it.

A Dismissal rite relies on calling out the demon's name again, then destroying something with which you were going to pay it. If you offered it a valuable artifact from the ruins of a sorcerer-king, for instance, you'll need to crush, incinerate, or otherwise destroy that artifact. You're basically telling the demon that you've had enough and it's not getting paid.

Once you start a Dismissal, you'd better hope that it works. The Dismissal is a contested risk between the ritualist's Wisdom and the demon's Violence. If the demon wins, it abrogates the terms of its contract, but it's allowed to seek vengeance on its summoner. It may stick around for a while to kill family members or spread lies, or it may just come barreling down to kill the one who called it up and treated it so callously. Once the original binder dies, the demon immediately disperses. Otherwise, if the Dismissal works, the demon instantly disperses into smoke and returns to . . . wherever demons go.

Failing a Dismissal doesn't make it impossible to try to Dismiss the demon again. It just means that now the demon knows you're trying to get rid of it.

It's also possible to Dismiss a demon that you didn't Bind in the first place. You still need to destroy a piece of its payment.

Of course, sometimes a demon barter for a payment that you can't destroy, such as a personal secret or an evil deed done in the silence of midnight. To Dismiss a demon that's accepted such payment, a ven must offer it something of value in return. In such a case, the ven can't destroy the demon's payment and abrogate its contract; instead, he offers to bribe it to violate the contract. While a demon normally can't violate a contract, the act of Dismissal puts the onus on the ven trying to Dismiss the demon; he is offering the demon better terms. The simplest term is a drop of blood shed by an obsidian knife – the same term generally used in a Summoning. Of course, if the demon was offered a lucrative payment, the ven will have to do better than that. If the demon doesn't want to be Dismissed, it may even show up to negotiate in person, thereby making sure that it receives appropriate compensation – or causes enough trouble – before it disperses.

## **Fighting Demons**

Let's hope you never find yourself facing down a demon and in a position where you must actually fight it. It's not pretty. Depending on its talents, a demon might fight by using its magic, or it could just try to tear you apart.



Demons that take on physical form can suffer injury, just like a ven. Most such demons use the same system for tracking Injury. A very small demon might not be able to sustain as much damage, while a demon with a large corporeal form might be able to take more. This depends upon the individual demon.

Doing battle with a demon follows all of the usual rules for dueling, although of course the demon probably isn't using a weapon. There's one special exception, though.

Demons use your own vices against you. They lie to you because you practice deception. They seduce you because you lust. And they can kill you because you're afraid.

Before a demon can attack someone physically, it must have permission. That doesn't mean that the demon has to ask who it can kill, though. "Permission" generally comes down to one of two things. Anyone who has taken the End Pact has effectively given permission, because he has sacrificed his dreams. And anyone who is *afraid* of the demon has given permission, because he *believes* that it can hurt him.

This means that a demon must make a contested risk of its Violence against a potential victim's Courage before it can mount a physical attack. If the victim wins the contest, then the demon can't engage him in physical combat unless he decides to give consent. It can use its magic to charm him or trick him, but it cannot lay one corrupted talon on the courageous ven.

As an aside, if you wind up in battle with a demon and you manage to destroy its corporeal form, congratulations! You've just sent it back to wherever demons come from. It'll most likely be back later, and it'll remember.

## **Sorcel Shem, the Dark Suaven of Sorcery**

Blessings: Obsidian Heart (new, see below), The Softest Spot, I Bear Wisdom's Price, I've Forgotten More than You'll Ever Know

When a demonologist finds the influence of the suaven cut off, it's a bit unnerving, but it's worth the trade, isn't it? As it happens, there's one suaven that can still reach past the End Pact and influence or aid followers. Naturally, no good could come of this. Sorcel Shem, the *fashuva* of Sorcery, still has the ability to commune with followers who've taken up the mantle of demonology. No civilized

ven would ever pay homage to one of the dark suaven, naturally – just like nobody practices sorcery, nobody wages war, and nobody ever cheats on their spouses, of course.

Sorcel Shem can perform a great many useful tasks for a demonologist. While cultists of Sorcel Shem typically gain Blessings related to sorcery, the *fashuva* can also provide a little help for the demonoic prodigy, in the form of a particular Blessing:

### **Obsidian Heart**

Gaining the benefits of this Blessing requires that the demonologist carry at least a pound of obsidian on his person, in contact with his skin. Not a big problem; most demonologists have an obsidian knife anyway, for enticing demons, and it's a simple matter to bind it via a set of wrist wrappings and keep it hidden under a long sleeve. So long as this condition is met, the summoner gains the ability to puzzle out the Binding ritual for any demon that he sees. While it still takes a season of work, the summoner doesn't need any special instruction, artifact, or teacher – he simply gains inspiration directly from Sorcel Shem; the rite comes to him in dreams. This still requires a Season Action, and uses up a resource unit of obsidian (from Volcano Region, as listed in the “new regions” section of this book).

All that Sorcel Shem wants in return is a little reverence. Some respect. The occasional bloody heart cut out of a living ven victim on a marble table with an obsidian knife. Nothing you wouldn't do anyway.

### **A Few Demons**

Here are a few of the demons that a ven might summon, bind, or try to dismiss.

#### **Liliandra, the Seductress**

Form: Liliandra's corporeal form is that of a supremely beautiful ven woman with long red hair that has a white stripe in the middle, delicately pointed ears, long-lashed eyes and a curvaceous body that



cries out to be touched. Her lips are red, her eyes are green, and her movements all say “love me.”

### **Deceit 5**

Liliandra enjoys pillow talk, sweet nothings, and delightful little compliments, right up until she’s tearing out and eating your heart. Then she tells you what she really thinks.

### **Charm 6**

Even women from the House of the Fox have a hard time competing with Liliandra for seduction. At least one has summoned her to try to learn her tricks, in fact.

### **Violence 3**

Liliandra prefers not to fight; she likes to get other people to do it for her.

### **Trait: Sensual Temptation**

*Invoke:* Liliandra gains three bonus dice when she tempts someone into a sensual act.

*Tag:* Liliandra abhors violence, preferring to use honey words to bring destruction. You gain two bonus dice in any Violence contested risk against her.

*Compel:* She also enjoys debauchery, and can sometimes be distracted by a particularly tasty, beautiful, or delicate trinket.

### **Aspect: Shape of Seduction**

*Invoke:* Liliandra can create the illusion that she is whatever someone wants to see – a lover, a family member, a friend. She pits her Deceit + this Aspect against the other person’s Wisdom

*Tag:* While her illusions are convincing, those who know Liliandra is about (and using illusions to trick family members) can spend a Style Point to tag this Aspect for two bonus dice to know the illusion is false. To use this Tag, however, he must know Liliandra’s name and speak it aloud.

*Compel:* If a ven suspects Illiana is using illusions to fool him, he may spend a Style Point to force Liliana to take her true form. To use this compel, however, he must know Liliandra’s name and speak it aloud.



*Price:* Liliandra will sometimes bargain for rare jewels, silken clothing, or exotic liqueurs, but what she really likes is to ruin romance. She will generally accept as a price any deal that involves a character in a romance willingly giving up his or her affections to Liliandra and allowing the romantic partner to learn of it.

### **Guggothgnir, the Breaker**

**Form:** Guggothgnir's physical form is that of a ten-foot-tall humanoid with a bull's head, a shaggy mane, retrograde legs and hooves, a long tail with a barb on it, and four-fingered hands that end in talons. His teeth are sharp and pointed, and his muzzle is crusted with dried blood.

#### **Deceit 5**

Guggothgnir enjoys violence, but he is also fairly crafty – which sometimes surprises demonologists who expect him to just be a brute, based on his appearance.

#### **Charm 3**

Guggothgnir usually relies on fear and malice, rather than honeyed words, to sway people.

#### **Violence 6**

Guggothgnir is a formidable opponent in combat, and difficult to banish. He is headstrong and enjoys eating the corpses of his foes.

#### **Trait: Feral Combat**

*Invoke:* Guggothgnir gains a bonus die when biting, clawing, and goring his enemies.

*Tag:* Guggothgnir's violence is nearly mindless; a clever ven can spend a Style Point and gain a subtle advantage.

#### **Trait: Blood-fury**

When Guggothgnir tastes blood, he enters a blood rage that overwhelms all other desires.



*Invoke:* Guggothgnir gains three bonus dice on any successive attempt to bite a victim. In other words, once he's bitten a victim once, he can invoke this Trait to gain more dice to do it again.

*Compel:* The smell of fresh blood, however, can also lead him into uncontrollable rage or hunger, and can be used to lead him.

*Price:* Guggothgnir enjoys feasting on the flesh of sentient creatures. He especially likes ven. He will usually agree to a bargain that allows him to eat a piece of the binder's flesh as the binder watches.

## **Shnalhulluhu, the Prowler**

Form: Shnalhulluhu manifests as a simple dog, usually gray with red eyes. Its tongue lolls out of its distended jaw and its fur is patchy. Despite its appearance, Shnalhulluhu can speak, and its jaw does not move when it does so. Its voice is low and smooth. Calm and certain.

### **Deceit 5**

Shnalhulluhu usually speaks in a soft monotone, and almost always includes a snippet of truth in any of its lies.

### **Charm 4**

While it's not especially charming, Shnalhulluhu is not above manipulating people, especially if it thinks it can convince them to betray their friends or family.

### **Violence 4**

The dog-form of Shnalhulluhu is not well-suited to violence, but its mouth distends an unnatural amount when it decides to rend someone.

### **Trait: Treacherous Whispers**

*Invoke:* Shnalhulluhu can cause any ven it can see to consider a treacherous act, and this seems to come from inside of the ven's own head, as if it's one of his own thoughts. It pits its Deceit + this Trait against the ven's Wisdom (plus an appropriate Aspect) to persuade him to do something that may be harmful to a friend, ally, or family member. Shnalhulluhu prefers small, petty acts of betrayal with this to blatant backstabbing.

### **Trait: Hidden Movement**

*Invoke:* Shnalhulluhu can move about unseen; it does not become invisible, but rather causes people around it to ignore it.

*Compel:* This Trait can be compelled to cause Shnalhulluhu to fade away and look for an opportunity to sneak up on a new victim. To use this compel, a ven must recognize Shnalhulluhu for what it is and call out its name.

*Price:* While Shnalhulluhu will take the usual bribes in flesh, its preferred price is to watch the binder do something to betray a friend or family member.

### **Oakoanathiki, the Eye in the Smoke**

*Form:* The Eye in the Smoke usually remains in the form of a cloud of black smoke, but a bloodshot red eye sometimes floats in the midst of the cloud and fixes its gaze on someone. It emits a chorus of whispers as it moves and writhes.

### **Deceit 6**

Oakoanathiki is a consummate liar, and claims to know many secrets. It is quite knowledgeable, but it only says things that will be harmful in the long run.

### **Charm 3**

There's really no sense trying to communicate with Oakoanathiki in a civilized fashion. It has little desire to interact socially.

### **Violence 4**

Oakoanathiki can kill by forcing its smoky form into a victim's lungs.

### **Trait: Shapeless**

*Invoke:* Oakoanathiki gains a bonus die on tests to avoid physical damage or to fit into small spaces.

### **Trait: Damned Secrets**

*Invoke:* Oakoanathiki trades in secrets, and it can use its knowledge to deduce or know secrets about people.



*Compel:* It can also be compelled to pursue a valuable secret or to engage in discussion about something over which it has special knowledge.

*Price:* Oakoanathiki relishes secrets, obviously, but the secrets that it finds most precious are those of the binder with whom it makes a pact.

## **ZezeK, the Many**

*Form:* Zezek appears as a common imp: Approximately the size of a young child, with dark red skin, spiraling horns, clawed hands and feet, retrograde legs ending in hooves, a tail with a spiked tip, and a mane of scraggly black fur.

### **Deceit 2**

Zezek loves to tell stories and lies, but it often makes them so outlandish that they aren't believable.

### **Charm 2**

Zezek is not an especially charming demon – in fact, it can be somewhat grating.

### **Violence 2**

Because of its small size, Zezek is not very powerful in physical combat; it is easily batted aside, and its claws are little more than a scratch and a nuisance.

### **Trait: Shared Power**

Zezek can appear in multiple places at once – in fact, the only limit on its number of manifestations is the number of summoners available to summon one – and as such it gains bonus dice equal to the number of Zezeks in the same place at the same time. Zezek doesn't even need to have its bodies working together to gain this bonus; each Zezek simply becomes meaner, smarter, and tougher. Put too many Zezeks in one place and they may become crafty enough to outwit or outfight a major demon lord . . .

*Price:* Zezek is always eager to appear, and will usually agree to a Summoning and Binding with just the base price of a drop of blood spilled by a knife of obsidian. Better still, Zezek likes to hang around, and many summoners can call on Zezek simultaneously; it can appear in any number of places at once, with a different body in each spot. Thus, quite a few novice demonologists rely on Zezek as a “guardian imp” or “familiar,” easily conjured when first learning the craft, and handy to keep around for a long time.

## **Crhaxxhachathon, the Ingot**

**Form:** Crhaxxhachathon looks like an animate metal statue. Unlike the ven, its body is bulky, heavily muscular, wide, squat, and slow, with large flat feet, a tremendous jaw, and flaming pits for eyes. It looks as if it were constructed from a multitude of metal plates a handspan in width and length, all hammered together and folding as they move in unison.

### **Deceit 2**

The heavy metal form of Crhaxxhachathon is ill-suited to speech, and it rarely engages in conversation with more than a grating moan.

### **Charm 2**

Crhaxxhachathon has little use for conversation, but it almost seems socially slow and awkward.

### **Violence 5**

Crhaxxhachathon typically pounds its foes into sausage with its metal fists, although it sometimes cooks them with its command of fire (below).

### **Trait: Walker in the Waste**

**Invoke:** Crhaxxhachathon has a strange synergy with harsh lands, and gains three bonus dice on all violence-related tasks when it is in desert or volcano terrain.

### **Trait: Command of Fire**

**Invoke:** Crhaxxhachathon can breathe out waves of fire, and its body radiates heat. With a successful contested risk of Violence + this Trait against a target's Strength, it can generate a cone of fire that scorches anyone directly in front of it. The target takes a rank 3 Injury which can be increased with wagers.

**Tag:** Crhaxxhachathon suffers from extreme cold, though, and exposure to cold water, snow, ice, or sorcerously-generated frost can force it to back away; such forces can damage it, causing its metal plating to rupture and spew out quickly-cooling lava.



*Price:* Crhaxhachaton consumes precious metals and gemstones. For a wealthy noble, this cost is fairly trivial, but it especially likes family heirlooms.

### **Ingol-Arilandru, the Obsucred**

**Form:** Ingol-Arilandru usually appears as a creature with a large serpentine tail extending from a humanoid torso. Her lower face is usually hidden by a veil, and four horns grace her head: two stubby ones on her forehead, and two larger curving ones near each temple. A diaphanous gown like white mist conceals her torso, and her arms and hands have a strange way of reaching further than they would appear to be able.

#### **Deceit 5**

Although Ingol-Arilandru is very direct, it also excels at concealing important facts by omission. Often, it will rely on a very stark and naked statement to draw away attention while it fails to address some important point. In this fashion, it easily distracts and misleads the weak-minded.

#### **Charm 3**

Among the demons, Ingol-Arilandru is among the most forthright. She rarely stoops to flattery or socializing when she can receive a much more satisfactory result with brutal pronouncements, such as telling a ven in graphic detail about how she will kill and devour him.

#### **Violence 4**

Ingol-Arilandru can call forth a pair of obsidian kukri when it chooses to fight; she simply seems to reach into a shadow or corner, and pulls her arm back with the ugly knife in hand. She also enjoys the squirming of captives in her serpentine coils.

#### **Trait: Entrallment**

*Invoke:* Ingol-Arilandru can perform a sinuous dancing motion that has a hypnotic effect on viewers. She pits her Charm + this Trait against the subject's Willpower. If she wins, the subject becomes sluggish and unwilling to look away, although he can still talk. Since she can still move and slither while performing this strange dance, Ingol-Arilandru will sometimes use this technique to get close to weak-willed ven before she strangles or mutilates them.

### **Trait: Foe of the Suaven**

**Invoke:** Ingol-Arilandru has a specific negative relationship with the suaven. No sorcerer knows the details, but she has a special hatred for their followers and their holy places. Ingol-Arilandru gains three bonus dice when she works against someone with a Devotion rating of 4 or more for any suaven (except Sorcel Shem).

**Compel:** Ingol-Arilandru can also be compelled to seek out and destroy shrines, offerings, and holy places dedicated to the suaven.

**Price:** A would-be binder of Ingol-Arilandru can appease her by destroying a token or relic of the suaven, of course. She also tends to accept the offer of an innocent's life – she has a special sweet tooth for children. Experienced demonologists say that she distends her veiled jaw and swallows them whole.

## **Demonic Artifacts**

As mentioned previously, Kalora Mwnn was ostensibly the first ven to learn the workings of demonology through the auspices of his obsidian mirror, which whispered secrets to him in private. His obsidian mirror – which has since changed hands – was not, it turns out, the only cursed item with demonic influences upon it. Ven explorers in the ruins of the sorcerer-kings have since discovered a small range of items, some unique, some ubiquitous.

Fortunately for the ven, most artifacts have no inherent resistance to being destroyed, if someone is determined to do so. But it's so much more valuable to trade it away . . .

### **Obsidian Mirror of Kalora Mwnn**

*Appearance:* The obsidian mirror is a four-foot diameter circle of polished obsidian, a foot thick, with jagged edges. It reflects like a normal mirror, except that the smoky surface seems to distort images, especially faces. It has no hooks or holes for hanging or placement; Kalora had a special wooden stand made for it.

*Function:* The obsidian mirror has a trapped demonic spirit of some sort in it. While the demon captive in the mirror has never given up



its own name, it is only too happy to teach other names and bindings to someone who questions it. The mirror can, as a Season action, act as a tutor to teach nearly any summoning or binding for just about any demon. It can also guide a ven through the End Pact.

*Price:* In order to gain knowledge from the mirror, the user must be alone in a room with it. While the mirror seems congenial, it has an insidious tendency to tell the listener uncomfortable facts, all while apologizing profusely. Ven who talk to the mirror repeatedly seem to lose track of time, and find themselves closeted away with it for hours each day; a Courage test is necessary to avoid this fate after consulting the mirror for a season.

### **Jewel of Vede**

*Appearance:* The Jewel of Vede is a polished, shining piece of obsidian set in a lovely silver necklace. It is adorned with hematite (bloodstone) and never seems to suffer from dust or tarnish. One is apparently in a suaven tomb with its former owner. Another was seen, but not recovered, in a sorcerer-king's ruins.

*Function:* A wearer of the Jewel of Vede can bank two points of Style into the necklace. It also holds a bonus die of its own, usable on a Beauty test once per day. Even someone with no Beauty score can use the jewel's die in this fashion.

*Price:* The wearer of the Jewel of Vede suffers from a wasting curse. Over time, the wearer loses weight and becomes overwhelmed with lassitude. All during this process, she becomes more angular, more symmetrical, smoother in gesture and more languorous in speech; it makes the wearer achingly beautiful while killing her. Once an "owner" takes the jewel, she suffers the curse, and loses one point of Strength every season. When she runs out of Strength (or if she had none to start with), she dies at the end of the season, leaving a beautiful, perfectly-preserved corpse. The only sure way to avoid the curse is to gift the jewel to someone else, in which case the former owner regains lost Strength at the same rate (one point per Season). Possibly, a demon lord or master sorcerer could undo the curse, but likely only if the jewel were destroyed in the process.



## **Bloody Kukri of the Ophidian Queen**

*Appearance:* The bloody kukri is a fairly common item – at least four have been found in ruins – and one is occasionally left behind by Ingol-Arilandru when she manifests physically. It is a kukri made of jagged obsidian, two feet in length with a nasty hook and a sharpened inner edge. It never fractures or requires maintenance, although it can break if struck with sufficient force against a hard object, or if subjected to extreme heat or cold. These kukri always have a slight sheen of blood on them somewhere, no matter how well cleaned.

*Function:* The bloody kukri functions as a weapon, of course. While a ven who doesn't use a sword typically has the aspect of "Tool," which can be tagged to give the opponent two bonus dice, doing so has a nasty side effect – if the knife-user manages to score an injury, it automatically upgrades by one point. A two-point flesh wound becomes a three-point serious wound. A five-point mortal wound leaves the victim dying and is done with such sudden violence and drama that it steals a Style point from the victim and gives it to the knife-holder. Of course, this sort of knife is not appropriate for a duel; it's not a sword, after all. You can really only use this weapon if you intend to murder someone.

*Price:* Bloody kukri have to get their blood from somewhere. On any day that the owner does not use the kukri to injure someone, the owner suffers from a rank 1 Injury. This usually manifests as bruising and the occasional bloody nose. The Injury never gets worse (it doesn't stack from day to day), but someone who knows about it can, of course, tag it for bonus dice. And if you decide to cut on your retainers to avoid taking the injury yourself, you'd better watch out for the inevitable assassin.

## **Brass Censer of Gathol Nghaa**

*Appearance:* The censer itself is a deceptive item; it is made of brass, circular and a foot and a half in diameter, with several holes around its upper surface. The bottom has a set of brass "feet" for standing it up on the floor or a table. A set of three evenly-spaced clasps have brass chains attached, and the chains meet at a ring, so that the censer

can be carried. Inside the censer is a small bowl for holding incense or herbs. The inside is accessed by opening a hinged lid. The censer also has tiny pieces of obsidian studs all along the meridian of its outer surface, but these are easily overlooked by the uneducated.

*Function:* When the censer is filled with oil, herbs, or incense and lit, it produces clouds of thick, white smoke. The clouds can quickly fill a room up to twenty feet on a side, and will persist until dawn. So long as the smoke fills a room, anyone within is completely immune to any sort of magical scrying or mundane spying. Servants listening at the door can't hear anything. Sorcerers with divinatory tools can't see anything in the room. Only people actually inside of the room can see and hear what goes on.

*Price:* The brass censer bespeaks treachery and secrecy. Anyone who uses it carries with them a faint odor of cinnamon and sage, as well as the incense or oil used. Subconsciously, other ven find themselves unsure of how to approach or deal with the censer's owner. All retainers of a ven who uses the censer drop in Loyalty by one level; this drop lasts until the next season (unless the owner uses it again, in which case the penalty remains). This drop is not cumulative if the censer is used multiple times.

Handwritten text in a stylized script, possibly a form of shorthand or a specific dialect, arranged vertically on the right side of the page. The characters are fluid and interconnected, with some resembling loops and others resembling simple strokes.

# Q'val: Blooded Devoted

While the Q'val of "Adventuring Companies" are undoubtedly unBlooded, there is an oddity in ven culture which is worth exploring in your own games of Houses of the Blooded roleplaying. This oddity is none other than the Blooded Q'Val: the ven who have foregone land, vassals and title in order to follow the ways of their Suaven. While some continue to be ambitious and use their newfound influence to weave plots and machinations into the lives of the Noble Ven, most Q'val sincerely emulate the highest virtues and the very lives of their favored Suaven.

(Note: when a distinction must be made, the Blooded Q'val is indicated with an upper case "Q" as opposed to the unBlooded Q'val using a lower case "q")

In this chapter, we will explore character creation for the Blooded Q'val, rules specific to running and playing within a Fellowship of Q'val, the Q'val Season Action system: Acts of Devotion, as well as additional rules for the use of Relics, Shrines and Temples in your Houses of the Blooded games.

## Character Creation

When creating a Q'val character, the process is very similar to the character creation rules found in *Houses of the Blooded*, the main difference being that the Q'val do not hold land and do not have vassals.

The character does not start with a Domain, Province or Regions. The character also has no Vassal under their shadow and needs not swear fealty to a lord of his own.

To create your Q'val character, you can follow along page 85 in the Houses of the Blooded main book and skip the Domain section of character creation. In addition I have added modified rolls for some of the Background items, which better reflect the starting life of your Q'val character.

Advantages that the Q'val hold in lieu of lands and vassals remain the many blessings bestowed upon them by the Suaven, and lie in the deep ties they keep with networks of ven worshippers, as well as members of their order.

## Devotion

The Q'val are not limited to 5 Ranks of Devotion, like other Blooded characters. Instead, 7 Ranks are available to them.

Starting Q'val characters gain 3 ranks of Devotion for free, like any other character in Houses of the Blooded. Additional ranks may be purchased with Bonus Points, up to Rank 5. Although they may eventually obtain 7 Ranks of Devotion through Stories, I recommend Rank 5 to be the maximum Devotion a starting Q'val should have for their favored Suaven.

The 7 Ranks of Devotion of the Q'val include two new ranks within the worship of the Suaven: High Priest and Grand Master.

Here is a list of Devotion Ranks and the appropriate titles:

- Faithful (1 Blessing)
- Devotee (2 Blessings)
- Acolyte (3 Blessings)
- Anointed (4 Blessings)
- Priest (5 Blessings)
- High Priest (6 Blessings)
- Grand Master (7 Blessings)

A note on the starting Devotion level of Q'val in your game: if you wish to allow Q'val to start out as Priests of a certain order, or even High Priest or Grand Master, go for it. In my experience, it has affected the stories told in the following manner: with the default beginning Devotion at Rank 3, it emphasized the discovery of the Suaven's life, the communion and exploration that comes with powerful spiritual quests and experiences; with characters starting out as Priests (Devotion Rank 5), the quests become much more driven by the needs of the Order and political plots find their way into the stories about as much as the spiritual discovery; as High Priests and Grand Masters of an order (Devotion Ranks 6 & 7), the players are the ones holding the deepest secrets of the Suaven, often secrets that would cause sanctions by the senate and make the cult of the Suaven illegal, stories become filled with concerns about how the cult is run, often more so than emulating the life of the Suaven.

## Character Creation Outline

### Parents' Houses (Roll 1d6 for Father and Mother)

- 1: Bear
- 2: Elk
- 3: Falcon
- 4: Fox
- 5: Serpent
- 6: Wolf

### Parents Ranks (Roll 1d6 for Father and Mother)

- 1-3: Baron
- 4-5: Count
- 6: Marquis

### Siblings

Roll 1D6. This number indicates your birth order among your siblings.

Roll 1D6, subtract 1. This number indicates how many siblings you have that are still alive.

For each surviving sibling, roll 1D6. Even indicates a male, odd indicates a female.

### Marriage

Your character may have been married before becoming a Q'val, although it is not very common. The reason for that is that most marriages are arrangements and more often than not.

Has your character been married (Roll to see if you have been Married)

- 1-5: No
- 6: Yes

In the rare cases of married Q'val characters, the Q'val is assumed to be the Ytola, or submissive, in the arrangement, and the vassals always appear to belong to the Yvestra. Married Q'val are rare because most successful marriages require some level of devotion to the arrangement, devotion that a Q'val cannot usually spare. There are clear exceptions and they make their way into the stories of the ven. Players and Narrators would do well to keep them in mind.

## Children

Roll 1D6 only if you have been Married

- 1-2: no children
- 3-4: one child
- 5-6: two children
- Starting Devotion

Your character's starting Devotion to his favored Suaven is Rank 3 (Acolyte).

## Bonus Points

You have 5 Bonus Points to be spent as per the Houses of the Blooded rules.

## Q'val Fellowship

The term *Q'val rehn* roughly translates as "band of brothers," and describes a group of Q'val who have an active contract together. This contract is not usually a Blood Contract, but it can certainly be one if the members agree. It defines the conditions under which the Q'val will work together and is usually defined by a High Priest or Grand Master of the Order before sending out a group of able Q'val outside of a shrine or temple, and into the dangerous Shan"ri or the treacherous High Society of ven culture.

There are two ways to generate a *Q'val rehn* contract:

The first is with a contested Wisdom or Beauty Risk, using the Q'val characters that have just been created or even after a few stories have been played. The Player who gains Privilege defines the first truth about the contract, then decides who gets to spend the next Wager.

The second method should be prompted by the Narrator before the players have a chance to create their characters. In this case, the Narrator defines three Truths about the contract, then each member may take turns (clockwise from the Narrator's left) and offer one Truth at a time. The group should stop when they are satisfied with

the terms of the contract, or if the Narrator feels enough has been defined to begin character creation.

The *Q'val rehn* contract should be used as a tool for the players and Narrator to define the coming Stories, or an entire Campaign for that matter, depending on how much importance you wish to give it. It should generally define what the Q'val are trying to accomplish as a group and how the Q'val anticipate certain obstacles.

As a group, the band of brothers should feel free to revise the contract as things progress, which can mean new Style spent or a new Wisdom or Beauty Risk is in order.

Finally, because the Q'val can be a practical lot, the contract should have ending terms, which can be as simple as retrieving a lost relic, or as vague as the members of the *Q'val rehn* reaching some form of enlightenment (possibly Solace).

Q'val within the same Order tend to spend their days, nights, meditations, long pilgrimages, spiritual quests with the same fellow priests. They get to know one another quite intimately, in a manner that is unique in ven society.

### **Fellowship Risks**

Being in a *Q'val rehn* means the band can make "Fellowship risks" together. Here's how it works.

In contested risks involving more than one Q'val Character from the same Fellowship, the Q'val who gains privilege decides whether his fellow brothers are keeping half their wagers as usual, or if they can keep all of them (assuming they themselves at least beat a "10").

I will say that again to make it plain. When one or more Q'val from the same Fellowship engage in a contested risk, and the Q'val win privilege, all the banded brothers may keep all their wagers or half their wagers, as the leader of their band sees fit. He may say, "Keep all your wagers," or he may say, "Keep half your wagers." It is up to the leader.



## Betrayal

Because Q'val rely on each other so much in fulfilling the wishes of their Suaven, and because the very survival of the order relies on the trust they build, they often build bonds stronger than blood or the ven's concept of friendship. ("A friend is someone who has not betrayed you yet.")

If the Q'val have been betrayed by any member of their order, they cannot benefit from the Fellowship Risks rule until trust is restored. This either means fulfilling Revenge or the Wrath of the Suaven upon the guilty party. Of course, this should be part of a Story.

Alternately, the Narrator may wish to speed up the process and may assign a number of passing seasons before the Fellowship Risks rule can apply again to the betrayed character.

No punitive Aspects are added to the traitor or the betrayed Q'val. Not being able to apply the Fellowship Rule is punishment enough.

In ven literature, this sort of betrayal is rare. Since Q'val do not tend to have a prominent place in pillow books and operas to begin with, and because they are not usually central to stories of betrayal, we do not see this as a common occurrence. Although, in such works as *The Tragic Betrayal of Guthrin Bannin*, the theme of betrayal taints the stories in a drastic way.

## The Betrayal Rule

To betray another Brother of the Order is taboo, and often is the turning points in the life of the Q'val who dare endure their Suaven's Wrath and lose the trust of his brothers in exchange for power.

When a character betrays any other member of his order, the Fellowship Rule no longer applies, even among members who have not betrayed each other.

In its stead, the the Traitor gains a number of Free Wagers equal to his Devotion Rank at the time he betrays the order. He may use them in any risk as he sees fit until they are spent. That is, he can keep them and use them freely later in the game, but once he uses one, it is gone.

Additionally, it is highly likely that the connection to the Suaven turns to Wrath. Highly likely.

Even if the traitor does not gain Privilege in a Risk betraying other members of the Order, he still gains a number of Wagers equal to his Devotion Rank for the Suaven.

It pays off to gain the trust of so many ven for so long.

.....  
: **The Tragic Betrayal of**  
: **Guthrin Bannin**

: *The Tragic Betrayal of Guthrin*  
: *Bannin* is a ven opera that  
: breaks from tradition in that  
: the central character not only  
: betrays the order of Ashthuura  
: Thorne, but the opera writer  
: himself betrays the audience. It  
: first appears to be a cautionary  
: tale about a man who uses  
: sorcery and artifacts of the  
: Sorcerer Kings to fulfill his  
: ambitions. At the end of the  
: second act, the opera changes  
: tone as the unexpected happens.  
: I'll leave it at that, in case  
: you have a chance to read the  
: manuscript. I'd hate to spoil the  
: end for you.

: Because we continue to emulate  
: ven literature with this game, it  
: should be important to ensure  
: traitorous behavior among the  
: Q'val changes the tone of your  
: current story drastically, at least  
: until trust is restored and the  
: Fellowship Rule applies again.  
: .....

.....  
: **Restoring the Fellowship**

: Even when the traitor is nowhere near,  
: Brothers of the same order are expected to  
: continue with their duties, but their trust in  
: each other has been broken... They cannot  
: use the Fellowship Rule again until trust has  
: been restored within the order.

: This usually means the death of the Traitor  
: (or Traitors).

: After the Traitor is redeemed, punished,  
: banished or killed, a number of Seasons  
: equal to the Devotion Rank of the Traitor  
: must pass following his punishment or  
: redemption as deemed appropriate by the  
: Grand Master.

: If more than one Q'val betray the order,  
: it takes a number of Seasons equal to the  
: highest Devotion Rank among them.

.....  
: **Respect Among the**  
: **Ven**

: The Q'val are highly regarded among the  
: ven for two chief reasons.

: They spend their lives maintaining shrines,  
: performing rites that please the Suaven,

protecting pilgrim lords and ladies along treacherous journeys, guiding others into Solace, or more commonly, forming a covenant with existing Suaven.

As blooded ven, they sacrifice much of their ambition and desire to be a Q'val. After all, Q'val hold no lands and no vassal swears fealty to them. Because there are very little chances that the Q'val will Blood anyone, the unblooded do not pay them the same respect as landed nobles. That doesn't mean that unblooded ven would be disrespectful, on the contrary; they simply will have a tendency to ignore them the way they themselves are ignored, hence the saying "*niul asva Suaven yul asva suventa.*"

If the ven ever needed a third reason to show respect to a Q'val, they would only need to understand that while the Q'val are guided by the Suaven, they can also guide the Suaven's Wrath.

Let us look at one Q'val as an example: Lady Ecks. It was Lady Ecks, High Priestess of Talia in Western Shanri and one of the most famous Q'vals in ven history, who saved the Province of Ashkelmar from Emperor Jaymen Steele. In many pillowbooks it is told that she seduced him and Talia put her Blessings upon them.

In other tales however, as in the epic Operas of the high courts, it is told that she boldly threatened the Emperor, claiming that if his Imperial Guard marched on Ashkelmar, his heart would be fleeting and frivolous, and the hearts of those he so loved and longed for would be cold to his romantic advances. In other words, she poetically warned him of Talia's Wrath, should he follow through with his plans of conquest.

A Q'val stopped the Emperor Jaymen Steele in his tracks. With only a threat. Or, possibly, a single night of pleasure. That is the power a Q'val holds. The power of the Suaven.

**"Niul asva  
Suaven yul asva  
suventa."**

*"To be in ignorance of a Suaven is to be ignored by its wrath"* is an old adage whispered by ruk as they pass shrines that are foreign to them. The ruk have a fair reason to fear the Suaven. They also know that disrespecting the shrines and temples of a Suaven is as grave an offense than disrespecting the Q'val.

The ruk have an unassuming solution for both the Wrath of the Suaven and the wrath of any Q'val they may come into contact with: they remain ignorant of them. Those who ignore the rites and the whispers and any of the blooded Q'val and the Suaven they worship, may live a longer life, free of the Wrath some grant so freely.

Keep these things in mind when creating your character. As a Q'val, you are equally feared, welcomed, mistrusted and misunderstood. You are the door between the invisible world and the treacherous world of the ven. And while you have no land of your own, you do hold a different kind of power. A power your fellow ven can never obtain, no matter how powerful they have become.

## Acts of Devotion

In the eyes of the Q'val, Seasons accomplish a different purpose than for a noble ven with land to manage. For that reason, the passage of time is measured differently as well. There are still four Seasons — Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter — but the phases for Season Actions have changed. In fact, the Q'val don't get Season Actions at all. They get Acts of Devotion.

The Season management system in this book is simplified in comparison to what it is in *Houses of the Blooded*. After all, the Q'val have a narrow focus. Their Devotion dictates much of their lives. Most of the time, they are told what to do by the Grand Masters of their Order and the passage of time is seldom marked by an Althua or a harvest. Instead, the Q'val have solstices, rites and festivals, days marking important events in the wakeful days of their Suaven: dates that resonate in the memories of the sleeping ven.

Trouble arises constantly within the networks of shrines and temples and while the Q'val do not focus on resolving the issue due to immediate consequences, they are expected to spend some time protecting the Suaven. It may not mean dutifully protecting the cocooned, dreaming ven himself, but it may mean protecting Resources from bandits, driving Ork bands away from surrounding lands, protecting pilgrims as they travel the dangerous roads of Shanri...

While there are no rolls for "Trouble" and no phases to speak of, as there was in the standard Seasons system, every Q'val is expected to spend at least one Act of Devotion per year "Protecting the Suaven." One Act of Devotion per year doing something concrete for the Order. Every Q'val is required to do so. This means that even High Priests and Grand Masters are expected to do the same, and perform the equivalent of "Quelling Trouble" in the region of their Shrine or Temple.

This yearly due can be part of a Story, if the Narrator wishes it. In fact, I wrote this Season management system with that in mind. That is to say: there is no roll for

Trouble because I expect the Stories to be a part of whatever Trouble arises.

Instead of land management, the Q'val must manage their Faith and Devotions. That is the very focus of fleeting time for the Q'val: how to divide their time between one endeavor of pure Devotion, for another endeavor of pure Devotion. Most ven will tell you there are no selfless acts, but those who know better will tell you the Q'val are the exception that prove the rule. The devoted Q'val only improves himself to serve his Suaven, and often because the Suaven prompts the idea to begin with.

The duty of all Q'val has always been maintaining the Shrines and Temples of the Suaven. The time a Q'val has available is spent within a preferred Shrine or Temple properly consecrated and devoted to their Suaven, be it menial labors and tasks, assisting in rites, or inspiring other ven to enter a new phase of their lives, the Q'val are deeply attached to a Shrine or Temple. Most of the details associated with the duties of each Q'val will vary from one order to the next, and is as broad in concept as the Suaven are in personality. After all, not all Suaven are pleased by the same customs or rites, and not all Suaven bestow the same blessings.

When the Q'val are not performing their expected tasks, it is because they are inspired by the Suaven.

For that reason, Q'val characters don't spend Season Actions. They perform Acts of Devotion.

### **Acts of Devotion**

All Q'val are inspired by their Suaven. Each Q'val gets one free Act of Devotion per Season.

The Q'val also get additional Acts of Devotion equal to half their Wisdom rank, rounded up, just as other ven use their Cunning to determine bonus Season Actions.

Inspiration comes in many forms, but Acts of Devotion are usually spent accomplishing one of the following options:

- 1. Build a Shrine: establish a new beacon of faith in an urban, civilized or wild region.
- 2. Commune with the Suaven: receive true insight from your Suaven.
- 3. Promote the Cult: visit noble ven patrons and wrestle their faiths, and their coffers, back to your Order.
- 4. Protect the Suaven: don't forget that at least one of your Acts of Devotion must be spent this way each year.
- 5. Recover a Relic.
- 6. Shrine Development.

If you are familiar with the standard Season Actions system, you will immediately notice that some Actions seem unavailable to the Q'val, such as Compose Opera,

.....  
**Favored Virtue**

In some games during playtesting, we have found that using the Virtue favored by the Suaven to determine how many Acts of Devotion a character can perform each season worked well. Feel free to do that if you find that Wisdom becomes a Virtue that should be secondary to your story.

Personal Training, Research Sorcery, to name a few.

You will see that Commune with the Suaven covers most of what certain Season Actions accomplished for a character. Communing with the Suaven is a big part of what the Q'val do and can take many, many forms, so you will want to pay close attention to that one.

Additionally, some of these Acts of Devotion allow you to increase your Devotion Rank by investing points of "Accomplishments." Pay close attention here too, it will be important when we get to increasing your Q'val's Devotion Rank.

And now, in further detail, if you would please follow me...

**1. Build a Shrine**

Before a group of Q'val gathers to erect a Shrine, they first need a Relic of the Suaven they worship. See "Recover a Relic" under Acts of Devotion for more information on how to find Relics of your favored Suaven.

The Q'val can erect a rank one Shrine without the help of Resources from their Order or from ven noble patrons, but they must possess one Relic. Building a rank one Shrine requires no Resources, but it requires six Acts of Devotion to be spent over the course of a minimum of two consecutive seasons.

*For example:* Thruihl Jalan wishes to Build a Shrine. He has an appropriate Relic and four Acts of Devotion available each Season, but he only wishes to devote two Acts toward Building the Shrine this Season. Next Season, he can choose to finish building the Shrine if he spends four Acts of Devotion, or he can continue to divide his Acts of Devotion, perhaps stretching the Shrine’s construction over the course of six Seasons, if he only spends one Act of Devotion per season toward building the Shrine.

A group of Q’val can work together to build a Shrine, but will still take at least two seasons to build.

*For example:* Three Q’val, with four, three and two Acts of Devotion to spend each season wish to build a Shrine. They have an appropriate Relic, and even though they can pool together more than six Acts of Devotion each season, it will take at least two seasons to complete.

### **Noble Assistance**

If a noble ven spends a Season Action to “Build a Holding: Shrine” and spends the appropriate amount of Resources (one Lumber and one Stone), only three Acts of Devotion are required from the Q’val erecting the rank one Shrine, and it can be built in a single Season (a Relic is still required, of course). I am certain you realize the clear advantages for the various Orders to work closely with noble ven.

When the Shrine has been built, each Q’val who participated in building it can invest two points of “Accomplishments” into this Shrine at the time of completion. “Deeds” are used to increase the Devotion of Q’val characters and is explained further, on page XXX.

## **2. Commune with the Suaven**

Communing with the Suaven is most of what the Q’val spend their time doing. They perform the rites, whisper the prayers and otherwise perform any sort of task that will please the Suaven. The tasks are as broad in scope as the Suaven’s views.

Throughout the communion, the Suaven dreams at the devoted ven, and through meditation, dream-guided research and focusing on Relics, the Q'val can accomplish any of the following acts.

### **Gain Insight**

Communing with the Suaven allows the player to establish truths about the sleeping ven before solace.

They can establish three truths this way.

If Wisdom is not their weakness, they can also make a Wisdom Risk, thus gaining further insight. Privilege should be used to indicate what the insight is about. Wagers are used as usual.

Remember, this Act establishes truths about the Suaven before it entered Solace.

This Act of Devotion allows the Q'val to invest one point of "Accomplishments."

### **Secrets Revealed**

Through intense meditation and by pleasing the Suaven through rites and prayers, the Q'val is allowed to gain insight from the Suaven. The player can use this insight by setting three truths each about an NPC, a Place and an Object, at the end of the season. When appropriate, the Narrator may decide to offer some or all established truths to pertain to the next Story. This is a great way for players to set up the next story or even to offer twists to a current one.

This Act of Devotion does not allow the Q'val to invest a point of "Accomplishments."

### **The Dreaming Ven shapes the Devoted**

Through Aspects of the Relics held in certain Shrines and Temples, the Q'val is able to accomplish an array of acts, vital to the Suaven, and closely related to the nature of the Suaven or of the Relic that will be the focus of the Q'val's communion this Season.

Through these acts, the Q'val can accomplish the equivalent of the following Season Actions: Compose an Opera, Craft Goods, Create Art, Personal Training, Research Sorcery.



This Act of Devotion does not allow the Q'val to invest a point of "Accomplishments." The Suaven is already rewarding the Q'val.

If the Season Action equivalent normally requires Resources to be spent, so does this Act of Devotion require an equivalent sacrifice. The Resources (or an equivalent satisfactory to the Suaven, i.e. Narrator's discretion) must be available at the site of worship, or wherever the Q'val is practicing his rites.

### **3. Promote the Cult**

The Q'val attends a social event sponsored by a ven noble in order to promote the Order.

Make a Beauty Risk, gain additional dice equal to your Devotion Rank (for example, a Priestess of the Black Rose with a Devotion of Rank 5 to Talia visiting an Althua would add 5 dice to the Beauty Risk). You can spend Wagers to determine how the nobles attending the Althua received the influence of the Suaven, you can also receive promises of tithing which will be collected by the order at the end of the season: every two Wagers will grant you any Resource of a type that is available in the Host's Domain (though it does not mean the Host of the Althua is the one providing the Resource in the first place).

### **4. Protect the Suaven**

Orks. Rival cults. Wars of noble ven. Ruk revolts. These are some of the seasonal troubles that may spring up to threaten the places of worship, noble patrons, unblooded and blooded ven on a pilgrimage, and the Relics held within the Shrines and Temples.

Protecting the Suaven as an Act of Devotion can cover all of these instances, not simply the physical protection of the cocoon holding the sleeping ven itself, but everything that is linked directly to the Suaven and its proper worship.

This Act of Devotion allows the Q'val to invest one point of "Accomplishments."

## **Finding a Relic in the Ruins**

When exploring Ruins, a ven can spend a style point to find an Artifact (*Houses of the Blooded*, p.296).

When exploring Ruins, a Q'val character can spend a style point and discover a Relic. Of course, the Relic is most likely also an Artifact that once belonged to the Suaven before Solace, and holds its own Doom.

When a Relic is found in this manner, the Q'val does not benefit from investing a point of "Accomplishments", since it is likely he was guided by the Suaven herself, rather than his own determined devotion. In the end, this is up to the Narrator to decide whether this should be added to the list of "Accomplishments."

## **5. Recover a Relic**

Recovering a Relic is done in two seasons.

One season during which the Q'val studies the life of the Suaven, in order to determine what the Relic is and where it might have been lost. (See Commune with the Suaven: Gain Insight above to get an idea of how the first step in Recovering a Relic should be taken.)

A second season is dedicated to traveling, exploring and actually finding the Relic. This second step allows the Q'val to invest a point of "Accomplishments."

## **6. Shrine Development**

Increasing a rank one Shrine to a rank two requires a total of four Acts of Devotion, to be spent over the course of two or more consecutive seasons.

Increasing a rank two Shrine to a Rank three requires a total of six Acts of Devotion, to be spent over the course of two or more consecutive seasons.

More than one Q'val can work toward developing the Shrine.

No additional Resources or Relics are required to increase the rank of the Shrine. Only Devotion and time.

Q'val cannot increase Shrines beyond rank 3.

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# Sources

## Alban & Vriyana

Paul Tevis provided us with a translation of *Alban & Vriyana*, one of the most infamous operas in ven history. The Falcon, Vriyana Sinjin (who has gone native, lives with orks, tattooed her face and even carries an ork sword) encounters Alban Yvarai, a notorious rake. Vriyana may or may not be based on the historical figure Yvriana Sinjin, a Falcon who often spoke in the Senate regarding the plight of orks and veth. Alban is certainly well-known to ven scholars for his appearance in many operas and pillowbooks.

The author of the opera, Icol Shu (House unknown), wrote two versions. The first was performed only once, but was such a dismal failure, he determined to re-write it. He claimed his first draft “clung too close to the truth” for ven audiences. He made Vriyana more “acceptable” and made Alban more “sympathetic.” He also changed the music, making it more “uplifting” and less “confrontational.”

*Alban & Vriyana* provides a unique and sympathetic look at the orks of Shanri. It is also our only source for the Thrunin. Vriyana claimed to be a member of the Thrunin tribe and that her tattoos and sword came from rituals she performed with the orks. Over one third of the opera is devoted to Vriyana’s interactions with the orks: the first time the creatures were given speaking lines on the stage. Of course, this was one of the reasons Icol Shu was forced to make changes.

Apparently, the opera did not appreciate the change.

After his alterations, performances of *Alban & Vriyana* often turn into disasters. Actors are injured, sets burn down, chandeliers fall from the ceiling. One performer even died on stage.

The most famous performance involved Xander Yvarai in the role of Alban. While the director of the opera chose to perform the revised ending, on opening night, Xander performed the original songs, said the original lines and improvised his way through the entire performance. The other performers were outraged, but at the same time, could not turn their eyes away from him. It was said the director

was weeping through the entire performance; whether that was out of fear or admiration, no one can say. At the end of the opera, during the final duel, Xander was injured when the tip of his opponent's sword came off. The blade nearly caught his heart: Xander was saved by inches. Later, he would say that it was not luck that saved his life, but "the approval of the opera."

## **The Winter Journal of Her Lady Cliona Jalan, the Baroness of Tatters**

Cliona Jalan's journal, provided to us by Keith Fyans, provides a terrifying tale of a winter party gone wrong. Lady Jalan decided to hold her party in an old castle on the edges of civilized Shanri. She invited Falcons, Bears and other "brave ven to deal with the orks in my lands in return for blessed and forbidden favors."

They should have known better.

The journal details the events of the party including interactions with orks, spectres, the puzzle house itself and the appearance of what may have been a Mahl, the Mother of Monsters.

The party begins as most do: feasting, drinking, cavorting. The next morning, the hunters head out into the woods to deal with Lady Jalan's orks. Unfortunately, none of them return by nightfall. As the moon climbs higher into the sky, the party turns into a horror story. The spectres in the castle possess two of the guests who cause murder wherever they go. A dark shadow whispers promises of power to the young men in exchange for intimate favors. Lady Cliona herself was seen with bloody hands wearing a yellow dress, wandering the halls, calling for her dead husband.

For three days, the castle suffers more horrors until the hunters finally return... only three of the original party. The three restore some sanity to the house, but already, the blood is deep. The remaining ven return to civilized Shanri shaken and changed. From that day forward, Lady Cliona wore only yellow.



The journal is obviously a fictional account of what may have been a real event. Lady Cliona has appeared in other fictions (she has become an iconic character; a kind of “Lady MacBeth” for the ven), but this was the first. Others followed with different reasons why she went mad, suggesting that she may have been a historical character whose chaotic life inspired many stories.

## **The Black-Toothed Boar**

Provided by Steven Skidmore, *The Black-Toothed Boar* is one of our chief resources on the veiled House. The plot of the book takes place before the House of the Boar was veiled. It does not address the reason why the House was ostracised by the Senate—a sad fact—but it does give us a look at the character of the Boar through the voice of its protagonist.

The book, written by an author using the obvious pseudonym “Wratch Vassad” (pitch-blood bastard), tells the story of Aban Thraka, the Baron of Oagura. While most ven books are journals, this one is not. It is told with a third person omniscient point-of-view—a fact that has led many scholars to believe the volume is a clever forgery. Aban is the illegitimate son of a Boar and a Serpent. Exiled by his father at a young age, he is cast down among the veth and the orks to survive the best he can. Not only does he survive, but his adventures lead him back to his father’s house. He murders his father, marries his sister and lives the rest of his life pestering his neighbors, inciting them into duels and taking their lands.

The book gains its title from the fact that Aban Thraka lost most of his teeth in a battle with an enormous ork. He replaced them with hand-made obsidian teeth, giving him, “a smile that looked like a demon’s grin.”

The Black-Toothed Boar is told with a dry wit, often mocking many elements of ven culture. The Baron doesn’t give a tinker’s cuss for etiquette or protocol, all of which he says, “Are designed to confuse, belittle and bewilder men of lesser wit. I am not such a man and I do not suffer tomfoolery.”

## **The Army of the Wilderness**

Renam Phillippi Atunes sent us a translation of *The Army of the Wilderness*, a collection of essays and stories about Ramon Adrente, a Wolf swordsman who lost his family to a Serpent in a deadly political rout. Alone and without allies,

he retreated to the wilderness and nearly died during his first winter. A local mountain man took pity on him and gave him the skills and knowledge he needed to survive. “Now, go out and do it,” he told Adrente, setting him on his own.

Ramon Adrente did better than that. He not only survived, but found tribes of orks and won their trust. Then, he united the tribes under a single banner and marched them against the home of his Serpent enemy. The battle was a complete victory: no ven ever anticipated an ork army storming their gates, let alone a well-organized, well-disciplined ork army led by a fully trained Blooded of the Wolf. But rather than take the castle as his own, Adrente burned it to the ground and retreated back into the wilderness.

Adrente’s army became known as “the Army of the Wilderness” and was one of the great horrors of ven culture. He showed up at battles and fought both sides, destroying every enemy in his path. (Some texts suggest that Adrente’s army was the chief reason for the “No Armies” law in Jonan Drax’s code.)

But Ramon Adrente’s victories did not give silence to the ghosts in his head. All his life, he was haunted by voices and visions of the ones he failed to protect. He hoped to find solace in life with the orks, but to no avail. In the end, rather than go into Solace, he surrounded himself with the leaders of his army, ate and drank with them, and then, at the end of the night, he drank poison. He gave specific orders that his body should be burned and that each leader should be given a pouch to carry to the farthest reaches of Shanri, where they would be spread over water.

