

G U R P S[®]

FANTASY II

Adventures in the Mad Lands



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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

GURPS

FANTASY II

Adventures in the Mad Lands

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INTRODUCTION

The Mad Lands rise like a rock leviathan from the dark and turbulent sea. The coastline reaches out into the cold water with thousands of crooked fingers; these are fjords and inlets carved millennia ago when glaciers scraped across the land's surface, doing battle with its hard igneous rock.

Yet there are signs of life. Nestled in the jagged arms of the fjords are settlements. Long wooden buildings rest on whatever flat planes the rock grudgingly provides. Smoke rises from a rudimentary smithy. Women tend small terraced gardens. Men sit on meager slivers of beach where the land meets the sea, repairing surprisingly large and sturdy-looking boats. Children race sure-footedly along the sharp and slippery rock faces, laughing and screaming with delight.

Anywhere people can live, they will live. And the Mad Lands do support human life. But it is a tough life rife with dangers. Not only is the land distant and isolated, with a punishing climate and cruel terrain; it is haunted as well. And the things that haunt it are no mere ghosts and monsters - though the Mad Lands have at least their share of these - but gods. This place is too close to the gods, or too close to the wrong sort of gods. They are bizarre in aspect, and capricious or downright predatory in action. Some of them are monstrous versions of familiar animals; others are hideous mixtures of features only a madman would combine. People do not worship the gods here - they fear them, avoiding them if possible and being destroyed by them if not. Those destroyed by the gods may not be merely blasted into oblivion - often, they are robbed of their humanity. They become monsters, threatening the lives of former friends and loved ones. The

constant attacks by the supernatural have shaped the Madlander culture. Its ideas of proper behavior, virtue and even what it means to be human are all molded by the specter of doom . . . doom from mad gods that are worse than any demons.

But despite it all the Madlanders keep their nobility, courage, and a fatalistic sense of humor. This is a land where simple survival takes heroism. There may be conflicts in a Madlander party, but there will be no treachery. When every living (and undead) creature is a danger, any true human is a precious ally, no matter what a pest he may be in the village!

Players in a *Mad Lands* campaign build characters fit for the heroic act of survival, protecting their fellow villagers from the terrible threats that menace the land - crazed foreigners, inhuman sorcerers, and various monsters. They fight, not for riches or power, but because they must. Humanity endures.

Enter a dark fantasy, where mankind is weak, but never merely a pawn. Confront monsters and worse, to die fighting for your people, or to triumph by living for one more day. Confront the mystery, the horror and the grandeur that are the Mad Lands ...

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Roleplayer. This bimonthly magazine includes new rules, variants, new races, beasts, information on upcoming releases, scenario ideas and more. Ask your game retailer, or write for subscription information.

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Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set*, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the *Basic Set* - e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set*, Third Edition. Page references beginning with M refer to *GURPS Magic*.

About the Author

Robin Laws lives in Toronto with his wife, Valerie. Previous writing assignments include a several-year stint as movie reviewer for radio station CHAY-FM. His children's play, *The Monsters Under the Bed*, has received several productions. (Don't worry - they're not skinless or anything.) In the world of roleplaying, Robin recently contributed design material to Atlas Games' *Over the Edge*. *GURPS Fantasy II* is his first book. His next project is *Unauthorized Broadcast*, an *Over the Edge* adventure.

Portions of this book originally appeared in slightly different form in the gaming APA *Alarums and Excursions*.

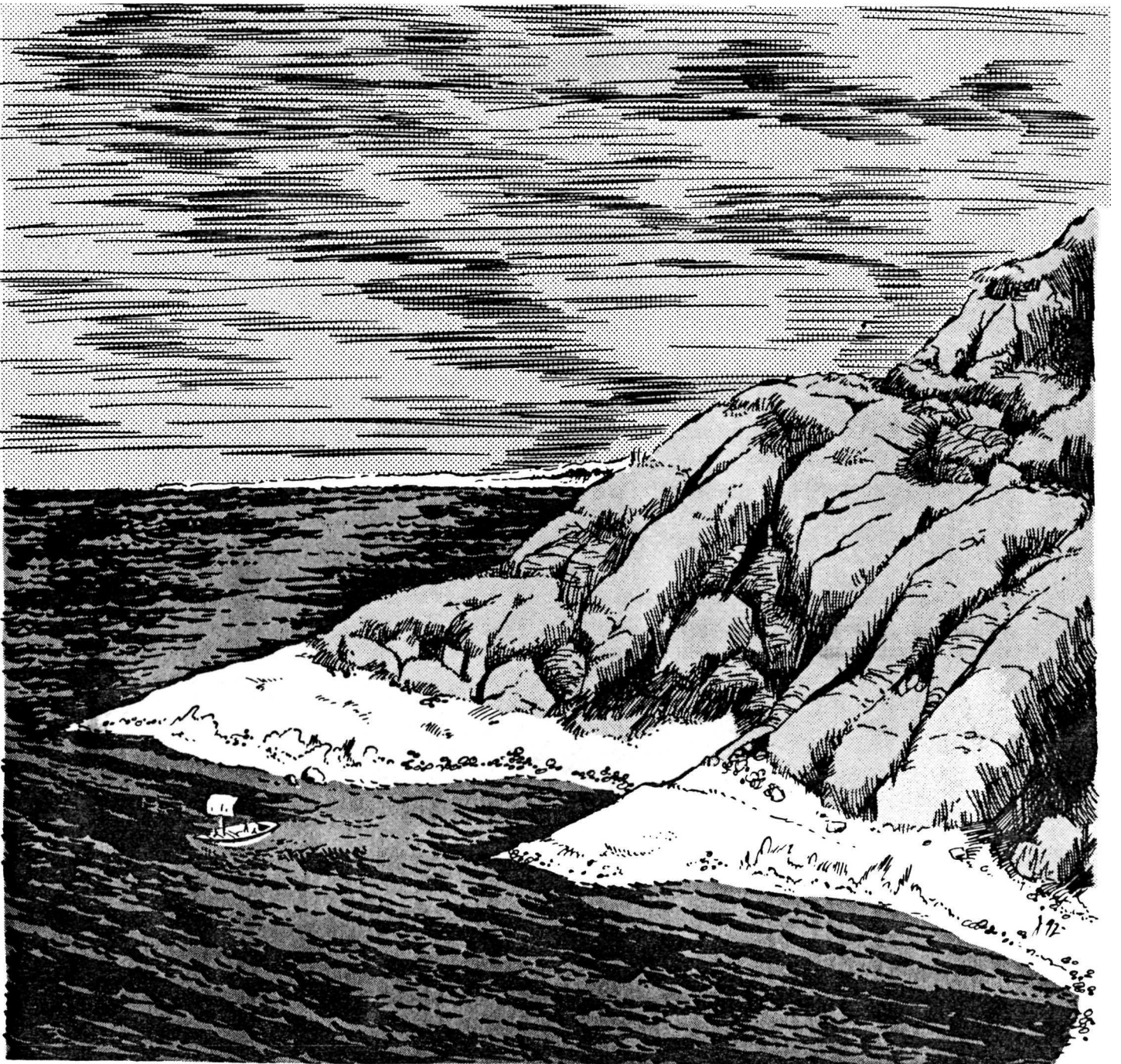


1 THE LAND

The Mad Lands are a tough place to live. The terrain is all sharp edges, the climate a contrast of extremes. Grudgingly, it provides the essentials for living: tiny patches of arable land and a population of game animals. The turbulent sea exacts its own price for its treasure, a rich stock of edible fish.

Isolated in a forgotten corner of their world, the Madlanders maintain their way of life with little influence from outsiders. Those few visitors who straggle here are viewed with suspicion, much of it deserved.

Most importantly, a look at the physical details of the Mad Lands - the bizarre night sky, the strange craters and tunnels - reveals the marks left by the unpredictable deities whose madness shapes this place.



Terrain

At base, the Mad Lands are a vast expanse of ancient igneous rock, thinly blanketed with soil. The rock is mostly granite of an unusual color, nearly as dark as slate. Some of it, particularly in the interior and northern regions, is shot through with quartz and other crystalline rock. These veins range in color from deepest black to pink to cloudy white.

The landscape has been marked by repeated glaciation, the most obvious examples being the fjords that reach out into the sea from the Mad Lands' southern coast. Foreign map makers have compared them to the fingers of an arthritic giant. The glaciers have left various odd features behind them, notably eskers, drumlins and moraines. Eskers are ridges of gravel, often three to four miles wide; they can twist across the landscape in a snake-like pattern for dozens of miles. Drumlins are elliptical hills that rise from the earth like giant half-eggs; they're usually found in swarms, their narrow ends pointing to the southeast. Moraines are odd-shaped ridges of rocks, clay and other sediments.

In addition to scratching, gouging, and otherwise sharpening the rocks they grind against, retreating glaciers leave behind rock from elsewhere. This has given the Mad Lands many eerie formations, from mysterious piles of gravel sitting neatly in the middle of nowhere to monolithic chunks of rock perched enigmatically on cliff sides, in ravines, or in the middle of scrub plains.

A second, more unusual force acts to modify local features, placing them in surprising places and disrupting natural patterns. The central fact about the Mad Lands is that they are home to a number of unpredictable, dangerous gods (see *The Gods*, pp. 53-62). When these beings physically manifest themselves, they often violently change the terrain. Three of the gods often travel in large leaps, and they can land with enough force to break down a cliff side or shatter a hilltop. Gakox Pezep, the most prodigious of the leaping gods, typically leaves a trail of craters in his wake. Most of the Mad Lands' lakes - invariably small and unnaturally round - were originally Gakox Pezep impact craters that have since filled with water.

Another god whose activities have greatly altered the landscape is the gopher god, Zewa Zab, who over thousands of years has burrowed countless tunnels through the bedrock. Some of these have since collapsed, becoming ravines of varying sizes. Others have since filled with water, becoming fast-running streams or rivers.

The other gods, as well, have added terrain features - many of them strange and irrational. The laws of nature can be permanently suspended by the supernatural residue the gods leave behind them. Some of Zewa Zab's rivers run uphill, for example. Others run for a while, are interrupted by some other formation, and then pick up again miles away. It is said that one particular uphill river in a remote northern location features a reverse waterfall.

Climate and Seasons

The Mad Lands' climate is comparable to northern temperate regions on Earth, but is subject to great extremes. Madlanders expect punishing weather conditions and grow nervous when a stretch of mild weather continues for too long. A lengthy lull means a ferocious storm to come.

Winter. Madlander winters arrive quickly and take their time leaving - usually they last about five months. Temperatures are very cold, the average being 0°. A very mild winter day might have a high of 28°; on the coldest days temperatures can dip as far as -20°. Humidity is high, making for a damp cold that seeps into the bones. High wind-chill factors can double or even triple discomfort levels and



The Night Sky

The night sky of the Mad Lands is as peculiar as the features of their landscape. The stars appear in no discernible pattern from night to night. There are no commonly recognized constellations, no bright stars to navigate by. One night the sky can be dominated by huge and elaborate swirls of stars; the next a few lone specks of light might hide off in a corner near the horizon.

The exception to this is the moon, which progresses across the sky in a predictable way, and waxes and wanes according to the same cycle as our Earth moon. Madlanders call the moon "Hunter's Friend" and refer to it as male. This is a figure of speech only; they don't think the moon is an intelligent being.

Astronomers from other parts of the world become extremely distressed when visiting the Mad Lands; the randomness of the stars tends to put their basic assumptions about the universe into question. Madlanders are more sanguine about the behavior of their stars - they've never learned to expect regularity in the heavens.

There are, however, occasions when the contents of the sky are alarming to natives. Sometimes the stars appear in an obviously representational pattern: a face, an object, or (most terrifying of all) an image of one of the gods. In the Mad Lands, any omen is a bad omen, and most people refuse to go out on a night when the stars carry such a message.

The night sky is completely different when viewed from a vessel on the ocean. From the sea there are recognizable constellations that move at a slow regular rate through the sky from night to night, and a pair of bright stars that can be used for navigational purposes. Some Madlanders have reasoned that this is proof that the gods control the arrangement of stars over the mainland - as is well known, the gods have no dominion over the sea.

This phenomena can be used by GMs to create atmosphere or reflect the story's theme. Make the contents of the sky obliquely mirror the mood of the adventure. If the scenario has sufficiently cosmic overtones, the sky might even provide important clues. Like any device, this should not be overused.

Using Weather Effects

It's all too easy to forget about weather when running a game. Many adventures tend to assume nonstop balmy, uneventful weather. Climatic events can be extremely useful - not only to create mood, but to add challenges within a scenario or even inspire plot lines.

The tough environment is deeply ingrained in the Madlander mindset. Nobody in a low-tech culture is isolated from the effects of the weather - it carries too many dangers. GMs should help their players to remember this by regularly mentioning appropriate weather effects.

For example, characters adventuring during the winter should have to confront its dangers, from frostbite to snowblindness. Frozen or icy surfaces will be harder to climb. Mobility will be reduced, even with snowshoes. Each season also brings its advantages: deep snow can break falls, and is a great medium for trackers to follow prey. The PCs and their fellow Madlanders aren't the only ones who must adjust to changing weather: many animals hibernate during the winter, for example. And some monsters, like the skinless (see p. 72) are adversely affected by extreme cold.

Other seasons will have their own hazards. During heat waves, dehydration and sunstrokes are typical hazards. The flooding brought on by spring's heavy rains can affect a whole community, perhaps forcing a party to delay other plans in order to pitch in during an emergency.

Another reason to keep the weather always in mind is *verisimilitude*, the illusion of realism that fiction writers achieve by mentioning small concrete details. If the GM tells his players that their characters can see their breath on a cold day, this specific image helps them to imagine the game world. GMs should always be thinking of such sensory details, weather-related or not: if the players know what the village smells like and how the wind feels on their characters' skin, they will be drawn farther into the game's fictional world.

Finally, weather can be used to reinforce the emotional mood of a scenario. If the party is disillusioned, the GM can mirror this by describing a grim and overcast sky. Or he can contrast the group's sour temper with a bright and sunny day. Violent weather can also heighten the drama of a situation, as when a thunderstorm comes crashing down on combatants in a furious battle.



danger of frostbite. Snowfalls are heavy, particularly along the southern coast. By the end of the season, snow depth in exposed areas can reach four to five feet.

Spring. Madlanders always hope for a gradual onset of spring, with days above the freezing point interspersed with colder days. This pattern allows the snow to melt in stages. More often, however, temperatures rise abruptly above the freezing point, with an early spring average of 37° and fluctuations between 28° and 45°. This brings rapid melting of accumulated snow, which can cause dangerous flooding over the rocky coastal outcrops where most villages are built. Buildings can be damaged and precious soil washed away. All villages build channels to direct melt water away in flood years. Sometimes these precautions are not enough. The hazard is increased by the heavy rainstorms that sweep up from the sea during this period: 16 inches of rain will fall in the average spring.

The rest of the season, perversely enough, is cooler than the first month, with average temperatures of 35° and fluctuations from 32° to 40°. The heavy precipitation remains consistent, though. Despite the rain, Madlanders consider this comfortable weather and when it's dry begin to don their summer clothes.

Summer. After around two and a half months of spring, temperatures suddenly rocket upwards. Average temperatures jump to 75°. Although it rarely becomes cooler than 68°, each summer brings at least a couple of heat waves during which

the temperature can top 98°. Rainfall decreases a bit to an average of 10 inches for the season, but humidity is high, and the rain that does fall takes the form of violent thunderstorms. Summer lasts around three months.

Autumn. Autumn lasts for only about a month and a half, starting with a steady temperature drop to an eventual average of 44*. Temperatures then fluctuate only modestly, with typical lows of 40° and highs of 49°. Precipitation stays the same as summer's. There isn't much of a transitional period between autumn and winter; the weather can change from cool to cruel overnight and stay that way until spring.

Flora

The Mad Lands are covered by a dense boreal forest. Coniferous trees predominate, with a few hardy deciduous species mixed in. Leaf-bearing trees progressively thin out towards the north. Conifers are represented by various species of fir, pine, and spruce. Birch, aspen and poplar are the most common broad-leaved types. Some stands of oak, elm and maple can be found near the Togethian border. The Madlander versions of these trees all have extra-thick layers of bark to insulate them from the climate's ravages. In another local adaptation, the broad-leaves have all become fast sprouters. This allows them to recover quickly from forest fires and, more crucially, appearances of the god Zuutak (see p. 62) who won't eat conifers but loves to munch on a nice stand of birch or poplar.

There are also a couple of trees known only in the Mad Lands. The *gevo* is a small tree with very tough bark and wood. It takes quite a bit of effort to cut one down, but this hard work will yield tools that will withstand blows that would shatter wood from any other tree. It is also highly resistant to fire. The *totewug* is a type of chestnut tree that produces a highly tasty nut the size of a small orange. These appear after the rainy spring season has ended.

Grasses and wildflowers are found only sparsely in the Mad Lands, in the southernmost areas. Most of the land is covered by a lush bed of lichen, much of it extremely colorful. Peat bogs are common in the northern interior. They occupy depressions in the landscape, including Gakox Pezep's craters.

The Mad Lands are also home to a wide variety of exotic tubers unknown elsewhere. These occur only rarely in the wild, but are the subject of extensive horticulture (see *Food and Drink*, p. 34).

Bordering Lands

These lands are not the sort of place that attracts foreign visitors. However, despite its isolation, its hazards and the hostility of its people towards outsiders, some do arrive here from time to time. Cultural differences between Madlanders and their neighbors are a rich source of possible scenarios. Below are brief descriptions of the three places closest to the Mad Lands, and of the region's dominant "civilized" power.

Togeth

Togeth is the nation to the east of the Mad Lands, separated from them by a modest mountain range. Its whole area was once entirely mountainous, but several centuries ago it was dramatically changed in the defining event of Togethian existence.

Before the change, its inhabitants were no more numerous than those of the Mad Lands; both were tribal societies whose technological development had reached only the early Iron Age. The two groups were otherwise radically different; Togethians were organized into rival clans which engaged one another in bloody warfare. Living a nomadic existence, they depended on foraging, hunting

Population Distribution

The population of the Mad Lands is far from evenly distributed. Nearly all of its roughly 25,000 inhabitants live somewhere on the coastline. The vast majority of these live in the southern portion of the region, in villages sheltered at least to some degree by the fjords or giant peninsulas there. There are a few scattered villages on the southern shores of *Itapi At*, the large gulf that cuts into the northern half of the territory.

There are no major settlements on the north shore of *Itapi At*. It's too cold, the population density of dangerous animals and monsters is higher up there, and it's too far from good fishing waters. Likewise, there are no inland villages: no Madlander settlement can afford to live on hunting alone, and the chances of frequent encounters with gods and monsters are too great.

This is not to say that the interior and north shore are entirely uninhabited by humankind. There are a handful of very small settlements - a few dozen people per encampment at most - made up of various exiles and outlaws from Madlander society. They supplement their hunting catches with goods raided from coastal villages. No self-respecting Madlander expects welcome or hospitality at an interior settlement - these people are the enemies of all decent men and women, and should be killed if possible. They no longer consider themselves human; neither do their victims. These renegades can be assumed to have made terrible pacts with local monsters in order to live unmolested by them.

Population has remained stable for centuries. Given the many ways to die horribly in the Mad Lands, a village is successful if it merely replaces its losses. Barring some incredible change in local conditions, this pattern will continue indefinitely.



The Land

The Madlander View of Togeth

The information presented here on Togeth dwells on its violent tribal past, even though, from the Togethian point of view, this is ancient history. As far as Madlanders are concerned, however, their neighbors haven't changed a bit. Madlanders have no concept of historical or social change (see *Sense of History*, p. 24). They can't even conceive of the possibility that Togethians could suddenly stop being murderers and thieves.

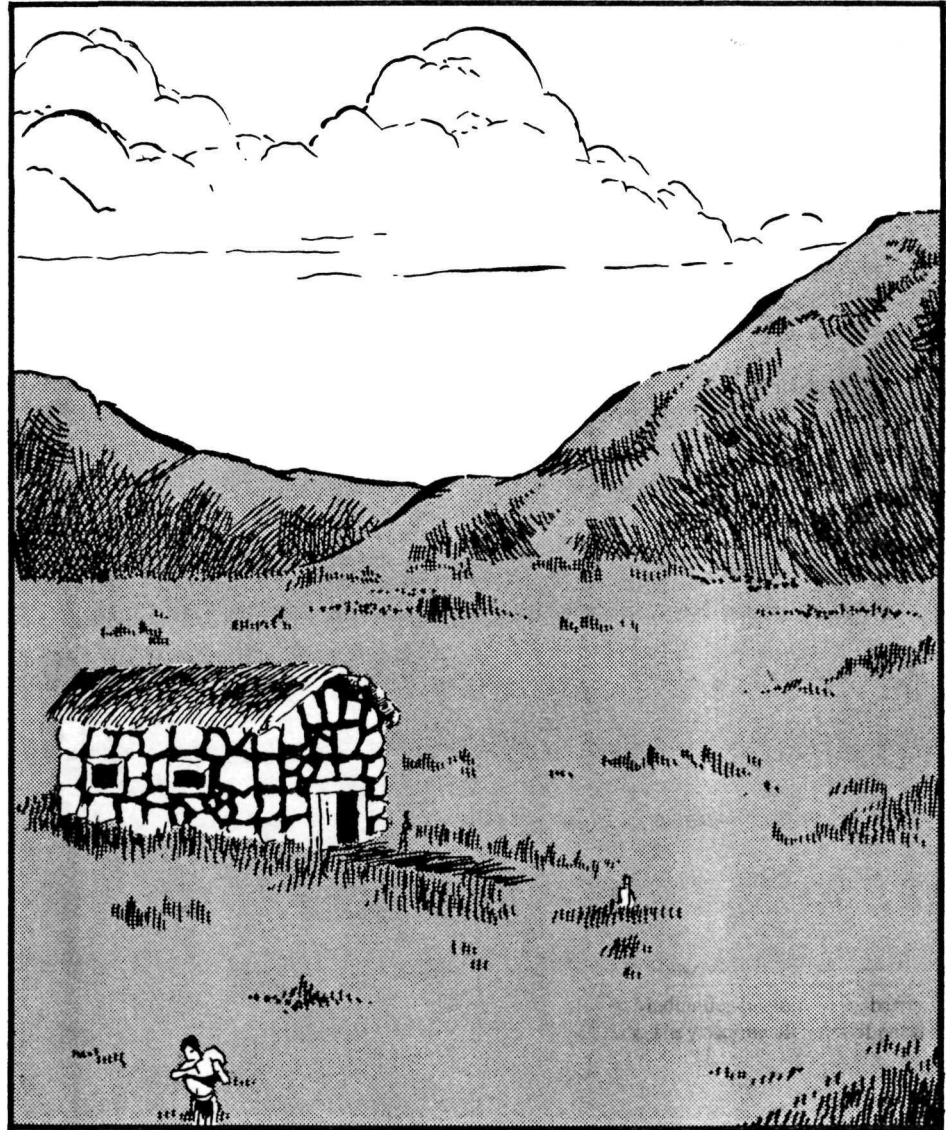
No non-Madlander is considered fully human, but Togethians are truly beyond the pale. Tales portray them not only as evil, but as dimwitted, animalistic and smelly. One of the more humorous stories of the Mad Lands' culture hero, Zo Do Wabda (see p. 25) involves his getting into a boasting match with a powerful inhuman sorceress who wants to kill him. Zo Do Wabda challenges her to make a nearby pigdog walk and talk. The result is, of course, a Togethian. Both Madlander and sorcerer are so disgusted that they join forces to destroy it, and Zo Do Wabda is saved.

The Togethian View of Madlanders

Needless to say, the aristocratic young bravos who are most likely to take an adventure tour into the Mad Lands have no way of understanding the instantly hostile reception they will inevitably get here. They see themselves as cultured sophisticates. Since any Madlanders they meet try to kill them, Togethians understandably view them as killer savages. Togethians characterize Madlanders as mindless, barbaric and sneaky. They ascribe all sorts of perversions to them, including, ironically enough, the worship of a wholly imaginary host of demons. If they're respected at all, it's as deadly opponents, and artifacts acquired on expeditions to the Mad Lands make impressive trophies in noble manors. This is not the sort of respect that obligates a Togethian adventurer to act honorably towards Madlanders, who are not thought capable of honor and therefore do not deserve it in return.

and raiding for survival. During lean years these raids would extend into the Mad Lands; defenders fought as fiercely as attackers, with no quarter given.

One particular Togethian named Srideen, the son of a tribal chieftain, came to the realization that the incessant cycle of raiding was slowly destroying his people. As tribal chieftains relied more and more on raiding to maintain their own power, each clan was able to devote less time to hunting and gathering. Even successful raids brought progressively more meager returns, since all tribes were producing less. Each generation was becoming smaller than the one before. Raiding the Mad Lands was only a stopgap; the heavier casualties Togethians suffered there were too great a sacrifice.



Srideen realized that the clans had to be united in order to stop the raiding. Paradoxically enough, he implemented his plan by waging warfare on an unprecedented scale. He fought not for spoils but for conquest, and brought all the clans under his rule after over a decade of carnage. But he knew that he had nearly annihilated his people in the process of saving them. He prayed to the Togethian god, also named Togeth, for guidance.

Beware what you pray for; you might get it. Togeth answered! He told the new overlord that he was going to change the Togethians into peaceful farmers. To this end, the god leveled the mountains and replaced them with flat, fertile land. He altered the stormy climate to a pleasant one that allowed for multiple growing

seasons. This staggering event was known afterwards as the Greening. Then Togeth told Srideen to get to work and build a totally new society.

What resulted after a bit more chaos and warfare was a tech level 3 society, borrowing and adapting much of its culture from Savarginia (see p. 12), which became the main market for the enormous quantities of wheat the new fields produced. The present-day Togeth has a population of 500,000, distributed more or less evenly on large plantations throughout its territory. There is also a large city, Thoucault, on the southern coast. Togeth is now a class-based society, with the descendants of various clan heads and allies of Srideen owning most of the land. Most people are technically free farmers who work for the large landowners. In Thoucault there is an increasingly influential middle class who are taking over the service industries once run by Savarginians. As the economy continues to diversify, specialist occupations from scholarship to craft work to piracy grow. Newly developing in the city is an underclass of the disenfranchised poor.

Togethians group themselves into extended families. Their society is patriarchal, with sharply defined roles for women. Togethians respect lineage, authority, and loyalty to family and community. They pay lip service to concepts of "civilization" derived from their idealized image of Savarginia.

Government is by oligarchy, administered by a small council made up of representatives of the most prominent families. A largely ceremonial army is mostly made up of non-inheriting sons of noble families.

Religion in Togeth is monotheistic, centered on the god of the same name. However, there are a number of widely-varying sects with their own vision of the deity. These include groups that focus on agriculture, rulership, soldiery, mysticism and intellectualism, among others. The god himself has not spoken since he reshaped the land, centuries before.

Togethians in the Mad Lands will most likely either be lost or in search of exotic adventure. Only the wealthy can afford to travel, so it is likely that they will be members of the landowning or upper middle classes. Togethians, especially those at the top of the social heap, regard themselves as uniquely blessed, innately superior by divine right. They have a romantic admiration for their own tribal past but regard their neighbors as stinking savages. These beliefs are a recipe for conflict when Togethians and Madlanders meet.

Madlanders long ago learned that the safest thing to do with a Togethian is kill him immediately. They remember the Togethians' raiding days, and don't know that things have changed. The Madlander word for "Togethian" is *Gaget*, which translates roughly to "Kill them now!" Women, children and the elderly may be allowed to flee ... as long as they don't display any sorcerous or shamanistic inclinations. Madlanders know that the Togethians actually *worship* a god, which makes even the most feeble-seeming among them not just insane but dangerous.

As things stand, there is little opportunity for meaningful interaction between the two groups beyond the level of pitched combat. Although anything is possible in a world of adventure, it's hard to see this changing in the future.

The Whiteness

Arctic conditions prevail in the large area directly to the north of the Mad Lands, known as the Whiteness. The Madlander word for the area is *Patvik*; its people are called the *Viwte E*, or "frozen-brains." In the language of its inhabitants, the Whiteness is *Dal Wiim* and they are the *Sap Cid*.

The Whiteness is covered by snow ten months of the year ... and the snow of the Whiteness is sentient. The Sap Cid regard this intelligent, self-aware snow, taken in its wholeness, as a deity. In practice, however, the snow divides itself into thousands of separate intelligences that take on different physical forms, personalities and memories depending on the time of the year. The Sap Cid have a variety



The Madlander View of The Sap Cid

Madlanders find the Sap Cid (or, as they are called in Madlander, the *Viwti E*) to be a particularly inscrutable people. Sometimes they're as dangerous and hostile as one would expect foreigners to be: several tales tell of innocent Madlanders being slaughtered just for wandering into *Patvik* during the summer and picking a few berries. Then again, the *Viwti E* come to the Mad Lands at other times of the year and offer interesting trade goods. Typically they bring dried berries, blubber, and tools carved from bone or ivory. In exchange they want tubers, alcohol, and iron weapons and tools. When trading they are respectful and even speak Madlander, albeit in an extremely comical way.

The obvious conclusion is that living in a land that is cold five-sixths of the year has permanently frozen their brains. This explains much of their inconsistent behavior. It explains too their absurd claims that they can talk to snow and get it to do them favors. Also, the *Viwti E* try not to talk about it too much, but it seems they, like other crazed foreigners, worship gods.

Madlanders are very careful about trading relationships; there are many tales of *Zo Do Wabda* (see p. 25) being duped into buying things that turn out to have a sinister purpose. Or ones in which traders bring goods so wonderful that he becomes dependent on them and grows lazy, which indirectly leads to his awful demise. Generally the traders in these stories are Savarginian, but Madlanders are also careful not to become dependent on goods from *Patvik*.

Despite their often amusing nature, one must therefore always be careful around the *Viwti E*.

The Sap Cid View of Madlanders

For their part, the Sap Cid admire the Madlanders; at the same time they secretly pity them, forced as they are to live under wild gods who cannot be negotiated with. They're aware of the suspicion Madlanders feel towards them and always try to behave deferentially in their presence. What they aren't aware of is how hysterically funny the Madlanders find them. They don't, for example, get the joke behind the term "Viwte E"; they think it means "Survivors of the Cold."

Some trading groups never return from the Mad Lands; many are taken by gods or monsters. But there are also stories of misunderstandings with Madlanders that lead to terrible violence. Their goods are valuable enough to be worth great risk, but the Sap Cid always remember that Madlanders are unpredictable and best approached with caution.

The Madlander View of the Northern Tribelands

It goes without saying that all foreigners are insane, but as far as crazy outlanders go, the Ittevtati Otap are regarded with relative equanimity. Even though the way they speak the language is subtly disturbing to the Madlander ear, and sometimes the things they say sound shamanic, they're not known as a hostile race. The truly suspicious theorize that they have a long-term plan to lull Madlanders into trusting them, but the majority regard them as the next best thing to human.

Unlike the Viwte E, they've never been known to attack a Madlander. There is even the odd story or two wherein a visiting Ittevtati Otap helps to defend a village from a terrible threat. When they come to trade, they often want items of little value (spoiled tubers in particular) and their own trade goods are never too good to be true.

They're certainly odd, and no Madlander would want one to marry his daughter. Often they don't seem to be paying attention to the world around them, which is a quick way to get killed in the Mad Lands. And while they claim not to worship gods, sometimes they seem to indicate that they have sorcerous powers - though no one's seen them using them.

Madlanders feel that if any foreigners can be harmless and interesting, the Ittevtati Otap can. But of course no foreigner can *really* be trusted, which is just one of the things that makes these people confusing.

of complex relationships with these intermediate manifestations of the snow. Some are vital to human survival in the Whiteness, but others are hostile. Several other gods representing forces of nature are also recognized and propitiated.

The Sap Cid, whose population totals around 25,000, are organized into roughly 70 semi-nomadic bands. These bands are tied together in a complex web of relationships. Every band has around a dozen allied bands, each owing it a slightly different set of obligations. Also, each has an equal number of rival bands, with which it carries on intermittent warfare. The Sap Cid have their own distinct conception of warfare; subject to an extensive set of rules and traditions, it's usually highly ritualized and nonviolent. On the rare occasions when warfare does involve actual harm, it becomes very bloody indeed.

The Sap Cid live by hunting sea mammals, with limited gathering - mostly of berries - during the snowless months. Trade with Madlanders and Northern Tribelands exists on a small scale. Tech level is 0.

Social organization within the bands is egalitarian, with decisions reached by consensus. Bands are unofficially led by individuals who have established strong relationships with particular snow beings. These leaders can be male or female.

The Sap Cid value community loyalty, reliability, skill, and harmony. They observe a staggering number of taboos and social rules, and go to great lengths to bring wrongdoers back to the correct path.

Sap Cid journeying to the Mad Lands will most likely be on a trading mission. Only a small group from a band will be sent. These will be middle-ranking individuals; community leaders are too valuable to risk, and the young and inexperienced will face too much danger in the Mad Lands. Transactions are carried on in the Madlander language; the Sap Cid traders know it well enough for basic communication.

Sap Cid count the area's intelligent seals (see p. 75) as legitimate prey; Madlanders view the seals as more human than the Viwte E. The Sap Cid are aware of this and are careful not to hunt smart seals from Madlander territory. But the seals themselves sometimes stir the pot by making agreements that require Madlanders to avenge them against the Viwte E.

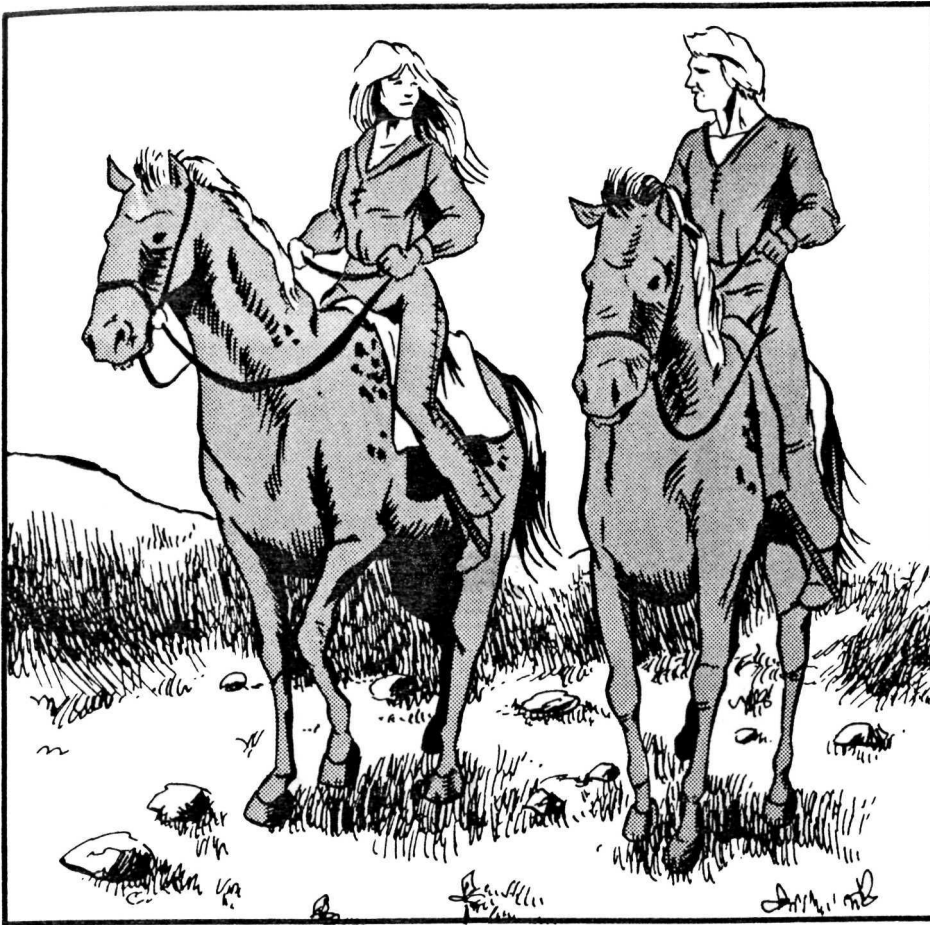
On the basis of the little they know of the Whiteness, Madlanders are not anxious to travel there. They assume that the snow beings are as lethal as the unnatural things that stalk their own land. This is not far from the truth: the snow usually tries to repel any non-Sap Cid who enter the territory. Those who are not discouraged by minor weather effects will be subjected to more serious attacks. It is easier to cross from the Mad Lands into the Whiteness in the snow less months, but this is when Viwte E are most likely to give visitors a hostile reception. This is berry-gathering time, and tensions run high between competing bands; this territoriality will also be directed towards outsiders.

Scenarios involving the Viwte E are most likely to cast them as visitors to the Mad Lands; however, if PCs end up traveling to the Whiteness, the GM will have a wide range of challenges to give them.

The Northern Tribelands: Land of the Questers

The hilly area to the north of Togeth has a much milder climate than northern Togeth or the Whiteness, even though it's on the same latitude. This is because southerly winds from the ocean sweep over the miraculously balmy shores of Togeth and bring a moderating effect to its northern neighbor.

This territory is home to a people the Madlanders call the *Ittevtati Otap*, which means "confusing ones." They refer to themselves as *Exgryen*, or "Questers." They're hunters and horticulturalists, and have domesticated the horse. Now and then they stage a raid on a Togethian plantation, although the purpose often seems to be symbolic.



The Northern Tribelander View of Madlanders

The Exgryen have a myth to explain the Madlanders, whose existence doesn't make sense. How can they live in the severest of lands, with no spirits to guide and protect them? Once, the story goes, the Madlanders did have spirit guides of their own. But they were a stubborn people, and they refused to open their minds to the mysteries that the spirits were trying to show them. Eventually, the spirits gave up in disgust and left them. This allowed the hostile gods to move in and oppress the people.

On the other hand, the Exgryen have a saying that all tales tell more about the teller than the told about. Maybe the Madlanders are a mystery that will yet be revealed. Until then, they must be treated carefully, since they can respond suddenly and violently to perceived threats. They are in their own way a remarkable people, and the last thing a Quester would do is tell another how to find his life path. The Mad Lands remain a sad mystery.

The Madlander View of Savarginians

Madlanders may not understand their neighbors, but at least they know enough about them to create stereotypes. Viwte E are buffoons, the Ittevtati Otap are vague but friendly, and the Gaget are just plain evil. But Savarginians seem to behave differently each time they come to visit. This has led the Madlanders to conclude that Savarginians are so completely insane that they can't even decide which form of madness to stick with. Consequently they are called *Va Ekappi O*, which roughly means "Who are these people?"

Stories may disagree as to the exact nature of the *Va Ekappi O*, but all portray them as dangerous. Sometimes they're sorcerers or god worshipers, or both. Other times they're raiders, no different from the Gaget. In still other accounts they try to swindle the Madlanders with trade goods that bring disease or bad luck. In the tales, whenever Zo Do Wabda (see p. 25) trusts a *Va Ekappi O*, he ends up dead.

Madlanders don't ever allow themselves to trust Savarginians. They may not kill them on sight, but won't hesitate to destroy them if they seem to be bringing any sort of danger from their land of insanity.

The term "the Tribelands" is a Togethian misnomer; these people aren't actually organized into distinct tribes. Though technically primitive, they're actually an individualistic people with a very loose social structure. They group together in informal settlements for mutual benefit - it's easier to hunt in groups, and tending crops ties one to specific places. The Questers have no leaders. If a dispute can't be resolved by group consensus, one of the parties will leave the group of his own volition. Disciplining rule-breakers is not a major issue; Quester culture tolerates a wide range of behavior and has few taboos and rules. Serious deviation - actions that jeopardize others - mean expulsion from the group. If the violator resists exile he is slain.

Every individual has his own spirit guardian. Each Quester has a personal set of unearthly powers granted by his spirit; everyone is a shaman. They refer to themselves as Questers because they believe that they all have a mystic destiny to fulfill. Their spirit guardians guide them step by step towards their mysterious goals. When a Quester completes his mission, he dies in bliss and becomes a spirit guardian himself. If he dies before the goal is reached, he is reincarnated with a new guardian and mission.

The Exgryen value self-reliance, mystic knowledge, curiosity, and openness. People from other cultures view them as detached from reality; actually they're just looking at a different version of it.

Questers journeying to the Mad Lands will be traders, or will be following the instructions of a spirit guide. In any case, they will be tense and uncomfortable, because the supernatural atmosphere of the Mad Lands prevents normal contact with their guardians. It also makes it difficult or impossible for them to use the magical abilities their spirits have given them. Traders face the perils of the Mad Lands in order to obtain certain tubers, which are important spell components. Individuals on a spiritual quest obey their guardians without question; nothing important can be obtained without risk.

Because of the tuber trade, a basic knowledge of the Madlander tongue was acquired centuries ago by some Questers, and passed down through the generations. The result of this transmission by non-native speakers has been an odd dialect that Madlanders find puzzling. Still, it allows for at least partial understanding between the two very different cultures.

Savarginia

Across the sea from the Mad Lands is Savarginia, the principal civilization of this part of the world. Savarginia is not a nation or an empire but simply a large, heavily populated area inhabited by an ethnically homogeneous people with a common language. It's not a political unit; Savarginia is dominated by a number of independent city-states, each with its own unique - and often wildly eccentric - social structure. Between the cities are many smaller settlements, from hamlets to large towns, each more or less under the control of a nearby city-state.

Savarginia is a tech level 3 society with a highly developed economy. In some ways it can be considered to be above TL3, because it has perfected highly sophisticated magical techniques, and does with sorcery what a TL4 or 5 society might do with technology.

To understand the baroquely complex, absurdly wondrous nature of

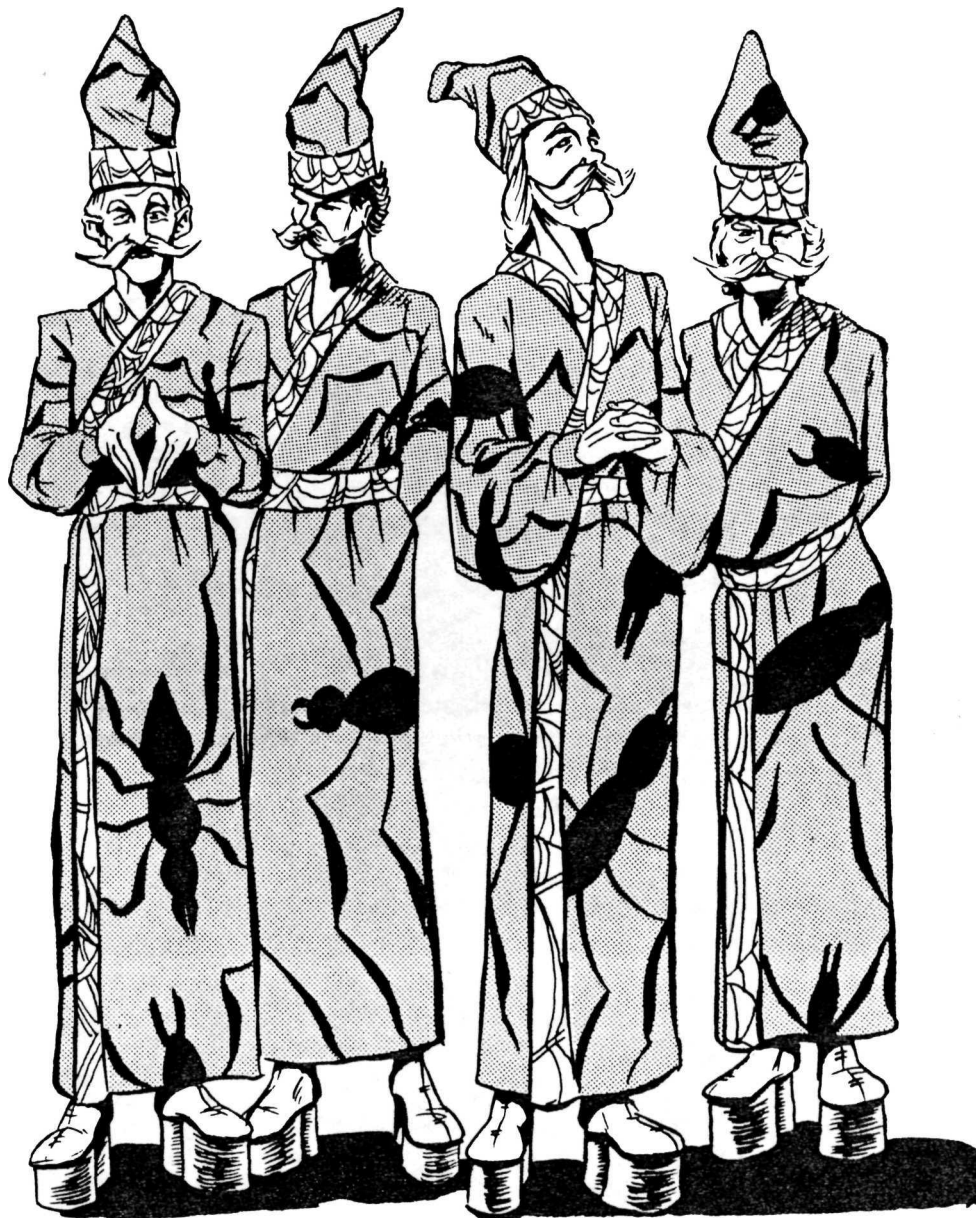


The Savarginian View of Madlanders

Savarginian reactions to Madlanders will vary depending on the city of origin of the people in question. But in general Savarginians will condescend, confident in the absolute superiority of their own civilization. They consider Madlanders drab, gloomy and superstitious. Savarginians walk into any situation thinking their sophisticated combat techniques and powerful magic makes them natural masters. This attitude has killed many Savarginians visiting the Mad Lands. (For one thing, their magic is not entirely reliable here - see p. 107.) But they never seem to learn.

Natives of each city-state will have a different reaction to Madlanders. Folks from Gerlandes, City of Iniquity, will consider Madlanders prudish and boring. Denizens of Sheisho, City of Chance, might on the other hand admire their knife-edge existence. Quality Madlander workmanship will gain the admiration of those from Weymost, City of Tradesmen. But travelers from Armes, City of Gold, react to their moneyless economy with deep-seated revulsion, while those from Maywhan, City of Merchants, will be frustrated.

Within Savarginia itself, differences between its societies are a never-ending source of conflict. When Savarginians encounter the even more radically dissimilar Madlander way of life, the results can be explosive.



Savarginia, one must look countless centuries into the past, to the actions of two beings called Colven and Barigos. Both were ridiculously powerful sorcerers who had grown bored smashing planets and turning gods into paperweights. Each of them took delight in contests of all sorts, and after playing to stalemate 223, 319 consecutive games of *gykhadde* - a variant of chess played with mutant bats - they decided to annihilate their physical selves and use the resultant energy in a competition to see which of them could create the most unlikely societies.

Thus was born the land of Savarginia, with several dozen impossible cities rising full-blown from the dust. This, however, is not the current Savarginia. Every so often, according to no discernible cycle, the entire land remakes itself overnight, rearranging itself into a new pattern of improbable places. Sometimes a single city will melt away, to be replaced the next morning by an even crazier one. Presumably, the sorcerous game continues on a geological time scale. The last major change happened over 60 years ago, and this was the appearance of a single new city.

There are currently 30 major city-states in Savarginia. Each city's entire social and political structure is organized around a single concept, often a preposterous one. Most rely on magic for their continued existence.

Although it is hard to generalize about Savarginia - every truism about it is contradicted by at least one of its odd cities - Savarginians in general value excitement, pleasure, novelty, and extreme ideologies. They delight in magic and technology, compete with one another for wealth and power, and live for wonders and marvels.

Savarginians could visit the Mad Lands for any number of reasons. Many come from Lenhewex, the City of Scholars, to study Madlander society. Magicians from Towepe, the City of Sorcerers, might well be in pursuit of arcane secrets from the soulless (see Chapters 7 and 8). Kidnappers could come to gather spoils for Anyeam, City of Slavers. When Savarginia is involved anything is possible, except for the obvious.

The Greater World

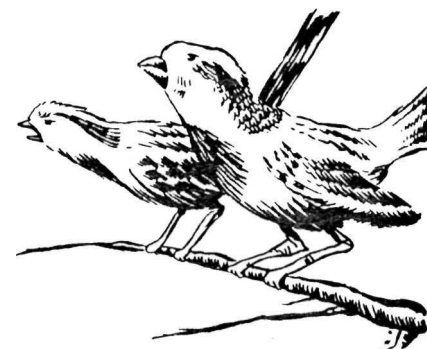
Basic details on neighboring peoples have been provided here both to put the Mad Lands into a context, and to provide GMs with opportunities to set up plots involving foreign visitors. To insert the Mad Lands into an already existing world, the first thing to do is find an isolated location for it. The Mad Lands' climate means they will be at an extreme latitude (although it might also be interesting to put them in a tropical area and blame the wind and snow on their crazed gods). Preferably they will be in the northern hemisphere of the world; otherwise some major adjustments to the map will be necessary, and all references to "north" changed to "south" and vice versa.

The Mad Lands' neighbors should be isolated, ideally for different reasons and to different degrees. Avoid any nearby empires that would logically seek to colonize or assimilate the Madlanders. Although invaders would have a hard time subjugating the Mad Lands given the god problem, they would still be able to disrupt Madlander culture enough to make it completely different from the one presented here.

Finally the GM will have to look at the cultures he's putting next to the Mad Lands, figure out how their economies and societies work, and how they would interact with the Mad Lands'. This process should also inspire many scenario ideas.

For hints on placing the Mad Lands on Yrth, see sidebars, pp. 109-112.

Madlanders themselves have no concept of a wider world. They know there are other lands where weird foreigners dwell. To them, there are only two spatial categories: here (in the Mad Lands) and not here (anywhere else.)



The Cities of Savarginia

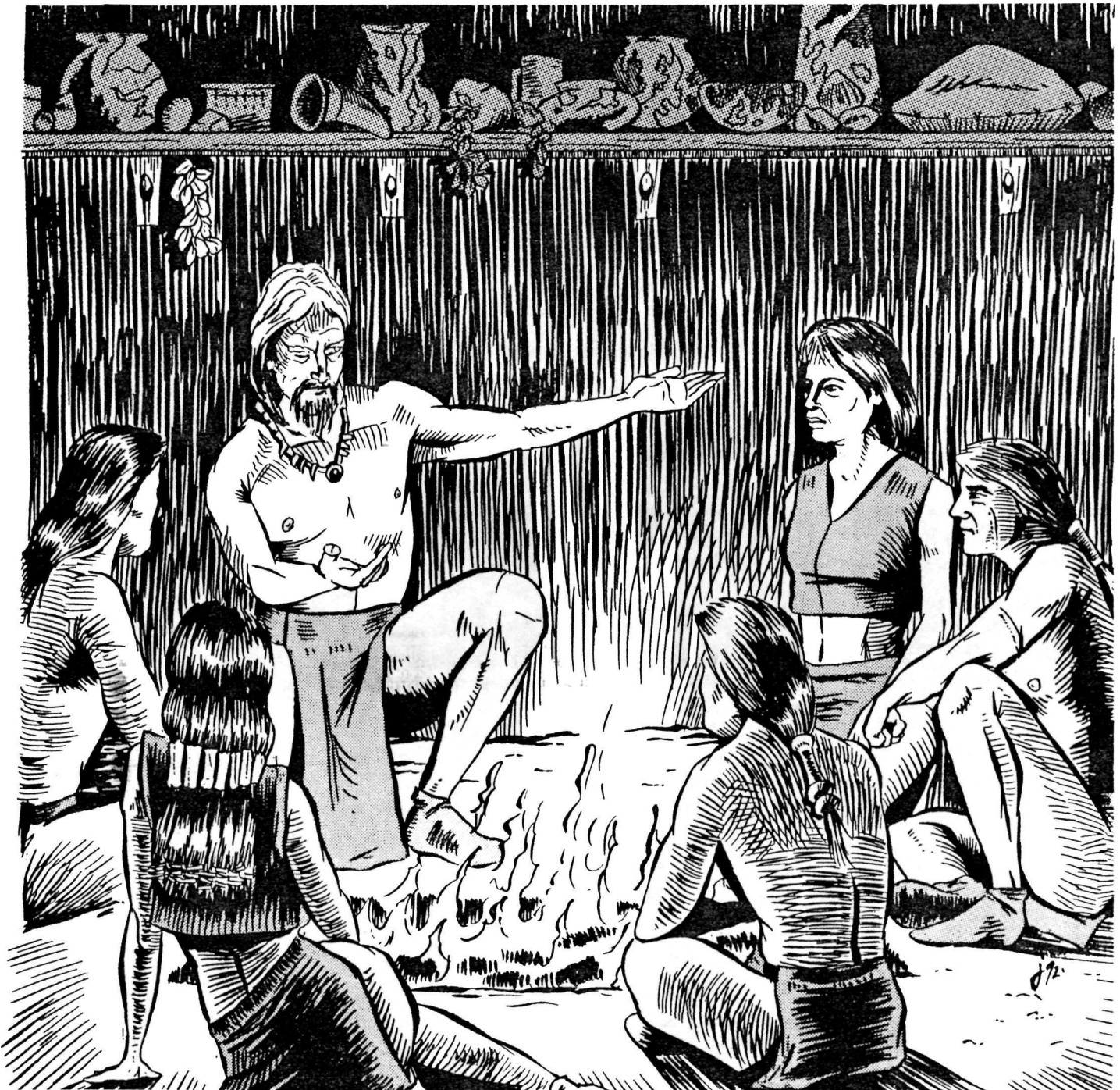
The current major city-states of Savarginia, in alphabetical order, are:

Andthyn, City of Judges
 Anyeam, City of Slavers
 Armes, City of Gold
 Cetewale, City of Silence
 Deuxwar, City of Stilts
 Dorigene, City of Grays
 Encreesen, City of Webs
 Erstonde, City of Architects
 Eynebloo, City of Mazes
 Gerlandes, City of Iniquity
 Graunten, City of Clouds
 Hislonges, City of Priests
 Lengerthanne, City of Stars
 Lenhewex, City of Scholars
 Lyketh, City of Emotions
 Maad, City of Mirrors
 Maywhan, City of Merchants
 Nuswerkes, City of the Dead
 Ouseydest, City of Tunnels
 Rreyneamon, City of Dragons
 Sheisho, City of Chance
 Strelabie, City of Nymphs
 Thocam, City of Women
 Towepe, City of Sorcerers
 Ventusinge, City of the Fickle
 Voyden, City of Carnivals
 Vysgrete, City of Soldiers
 Welleand, City of Reversals
 Weymost, City of Tradesmen
 Yesye, City of Children

Savarginian cities have been known to spontaneously sprout from the magical soil - or abruptly vanish. GMs can therefore feel free to add or subtract cities from this list according to their requirements.

2 MADLANDER CULTURE

Madlander culture is ruled by the profound uncertainties of life in a savage land. Other tribal groups might envy their economic base: although they must work hard, Madlanders are prosperous enough to spend time on arts and recreation. But every moment of their lives is shadowed by the possibility of sudden supernatural catastrophe. Two linked impulses drive every aspect of Madlander cultural behavior - the need to extract a living from sea, garden and forest, and the need to protect the community from a nightmare array of arcane dangers. These needs are reflected in all matters, from their attitude to foreign trade to the riddles they tell after dinner.



Economics

The Madlander economy is based on hunting, fishing and horticulture. Hunting is practiced by the village's able-bodied males in the summer and fall, and, to a limited degree, during the winter. A wide variety of animals are hunted for meat, hide and fur.

In a typical year, hunting yields around 40 percent of a village's protein. The rest is caught during the short fishing season. While men are out finding meat, women are engaged either in horticulture or secondary production. Farming relies entirely on the wide variety of tuber plants that grow in the meager soil. Most are edible; others are made into other important products, such as medicines and preparatory agents for wood or hide items. Along with food preparation, women do most of the craft work, making clothing, pottery, medicines and tools.

Men are responsible for a few crafts only: ironworking, weapons manufacture and building. They also acquire any raw materials - timber, ore, clay for pottery, and so on - for which a journey outside the safety of the village is required.

Only one product is made by individuals of both genders: *zoxibek*, the pungent alcoholic drink brewed from fermented tubers.

Madlanders have no currency system, no individual ownership. Society is communal; every possession is held by the whole community. The Madlanders call their code of non-ownership *wedo*, which translates as "best (for the village) user." Under *wedo*, an individual may use a particular item on a regular basis - a hunter might have a favorite spear he always carries, for example - but if someone else needs it, he can use it without apology. When disagreements arise over who has the greatest need at a given time, the nearest clan elder arbitrates. If no clan elder is available, the oldest available neutral party decides. Under the protocols of *wedo*, the onus is on the party who wishes to use an item currently held by another. It's extremely difficult, for example, to convince an arbitrator that the claimant has a more pressing need for an article of clothing or hair bauble than the person now using it.

Successful claimants in *wedo* arbitrations must argue that their use of an item would benefit the entire community: issues of personal fairness are not considered relevant. For example, it's hard to conceive of an argument that would convince an elder to award a particular racing vole - one exactly trained over a period of months by its current holder - to another. But such things do happen: a claimant might persuade the arbitrator that the holder's excessive devotion to vole racing has led him to shirk his hunting duties. It's not unknown for elders in especially heated disputes to award the item in question to a third party, driving home the point that attachment to possessions is a damaging trait.

It might be argued that some items, like houses or boats, belong more to a certain clan than the entire community. Such questions are beyond the Madlander mindset - it would simply never occur to one clan to demand another's boat. It would make even less sense to ask for another's house.

If items in a person's care are lost or damaged, he must arrange for their repair or replacement. Social pressures encourage care with community supplies; people who habitually lose or wreck things are regarded as having an Odious Personal Habit.

In this conception of property, "community" means "village." Each village is expected to fend for itself; settlements are not obligated to sacrifice their own prosperity for less fortunate ones. Madlanders are generous people, though: villages with surpluses are usually more than willing to help others in trouble. Requests for aid will not be made lightly; no Madlander wants to appear lazy or incompetent.

If a village suffers a disaster - natural or otherwise - other nearby communities typically do their best to help. They are not *obligated* to sacrifice their own



Foreign Trade

The economy of the Mad Lands is very nearly closed. Some villages carry on limited trade with the Viwte E and Ittevtati Otap, but none of the products they bring are essential to the Madlander way of life. Instinctively, the Madlanders have always avoided becoming reliant on products they can't harvest or make themselves. Many tales warn against the exotic goods traders from Savarginia might bring. Madlanders will only bargain with Savarginians if the goods they offer are attractive but useless. The Savarginians have yet to figure out the logic behind this curious attitude. Madlanders will even refuse manufactured items from the Savarginians that they will accept from the Ittevtati Otap ... the reason being that the latter only get them through raids on Togeth - and therefore can't offer a consistent supply. If there is no consistent supply, such pieces will remain interesting novelties instead of becoming common items that will turn into necessities.

Relations with Togethians or the soulless are too hostile for trade with them to be an issue.

The Ittevtati Otap usually want tubers - and even prefer spoiled to fresh! (What they don't tell the Madlanders, who they know would be horrified, is that rotten and fungus-infested tubers are a vital ingredient for certain magicks.) Sometimes they want even more useless items, usually as part of the obscure mystic quests their spirit guardians require. Madlanders are happy to give these things away, but the Ittevtati Otap insist on giving something in exchange - herbs and dried food plants from the Tribelands, and sometimes steel weaponry or similar goods taken on raids against the Togethians. They might also give the Madlanders apparently useless items that, strangely enough, will later turn out to be extremely useful in dealing with some unanticipated threat.

The Viwte E rely to a degree on the medicines Madlanders brew from various tubers. In exchange for these they provide dried berries and blubber from various arctic mammals. Madlanders don't need these foods (except in times of deprivation) but consider them delicacies.

prosperity to do so, but personal ties between villages frequently lead the fortunate to go beyond the call of duty to help out.

Hospitality fuels smaller-scale economic exchanges between communities. If a band of adventurers finds itself low on supplies or equipment, it can drop in on the nearest village and expect to be provided for. Such guests are expected to stick around for a while, swap stories, swig a bit of *zoxibek* and otherwise provide an excuse for a party. Again, social attitudes prevent this practice from being abused: Madlanders love to give but are faintly embarrassed to receive.

The social cohesiveness needed for survival in the Mad Lands makes this system of distribution work. Greed remains an alien concept here, because individuals are better rewarded when they act for the benefit of the community.



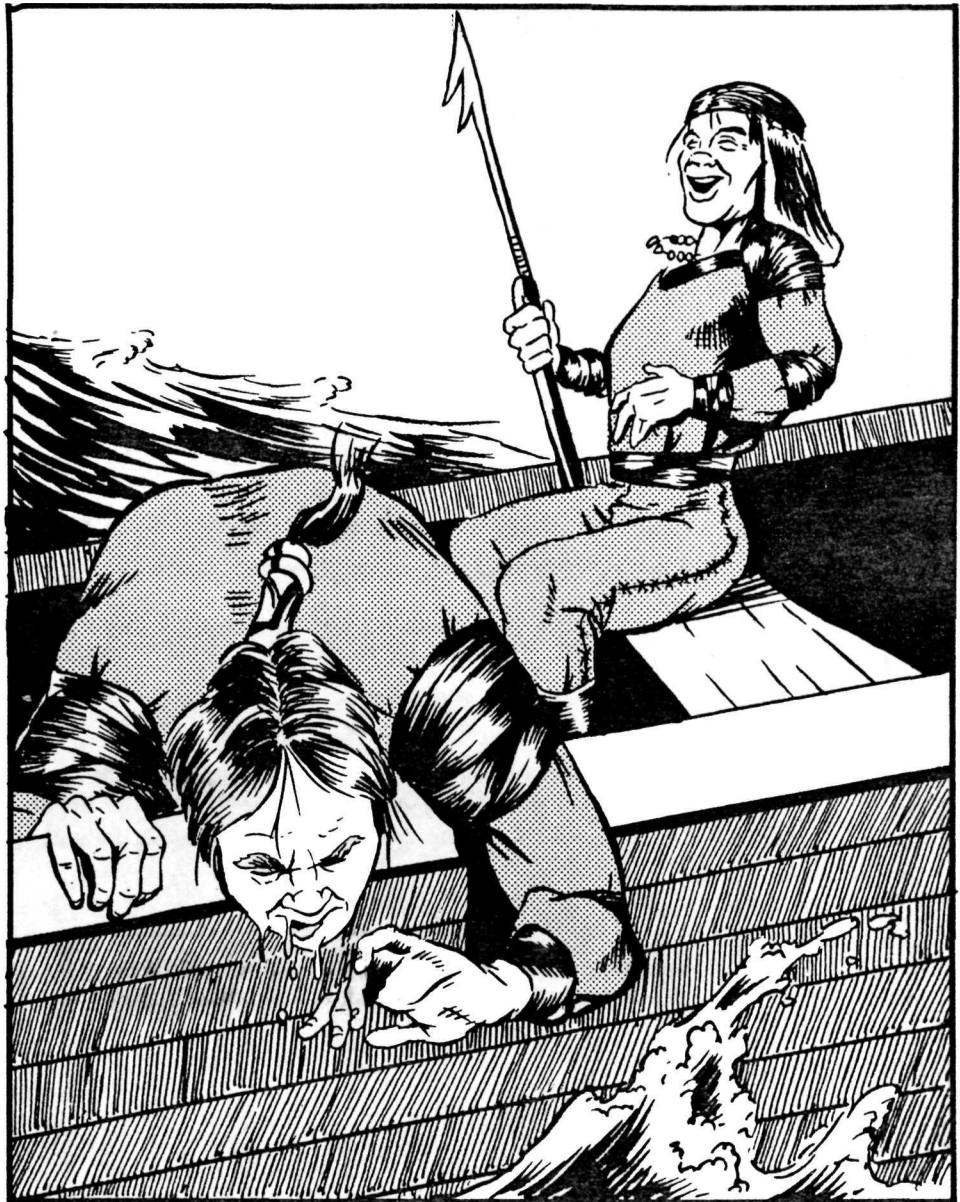
Fisher/Hunter Jokes

The rivalry between hunters and fishers mainly expresses itself in relentless teasing. Each group has a series of derogatory nicknames for the other, and a set of stock jokes with their rivals as the butts.

Some of the insulting terms hunters use for fishers include: "bear toys," "cod slayers," "net heads," "brine slurpers," "skunk attractors," "they-who-quake-with-fear-at-the-sight-of-baby-voles," "trail fartars," "weak feet" and "stinky men."

Fishers respond with cries of "sinkers," "deck sliders," "pine cone eaters," "kneelless," "starless wonders" (referring to the different navigational methods of hunters), "fearless squirrel trackers," "whale bait" and "boat painters" (a seasickness joke.)

While these japes might seem cruel, they're an important release valve for tensions, particularly on expeditions. Both the forest and the sea are hazardous places, and the half of the party that feels out of its element is going to be nervous. Apprehensive men are less useful than secure ones, a danger to themselves and others. The command group defuses this by making light of the relative incompetence of the others. By making the joke&rough ones, they reinforce the manhood of the guys being joshed - maybe they earn shoot an arrow (or a harpoon) but they sure can take a joke. The rough joking also serves to get the target group's collective back up, making them more aggressive as they return the repartee, and thus more confident. This too helps performance when the crunch comes.



Fishers and Hunters: The Great Rivalry

Economic roles lie at the heart of the most important distinction between Madlander men of the same village - that between fishermen and hunters. While all able-bodied males are socially obligated both to hunt and to go on fishing expeditions, almost all of them are better at one than the other. As they come of age, young males come to identify with one of the two vocations, and will specialize in skills that relate to it. A fisherman is happy, secure and in control during a fishing trip; he'll see hunting as an unpleasant and dangerous duty. Hunters hate

the smell of fish and the rolling of the ocean but are perfectly content to go out into the wilderness and mix it up with bears, pigdogs and the like.

This becomes a social division; even during leisure time hunters tend to congregate with other hunters, and fishers with fishers. If you ask a Madlander man to identify himself in one sentence, he will not refer to his people or his clan or his village: he will say, "I am a fisher" or "I am a hunter."

Hunters tend to go out with the same hunting parties from year to year; a fisherman may remain with the same crew throughout his life. Hunting parties are small groups made up of four to seven men, almost always with an age spread of only a few years. Novice groups will sometimes be led for a while by a single older and more experienced male, but there is a distinct social difference between leader and party. That said, hunting parties are more subject to fluctuation in membership than fishing crews; typically they'll consist of a small knot of close friends, augmented on an ad hoc basis by a varying number of "floaters" who bounce from group to group as required. (The PC group may well form the core of a hunting party, with NPCs drifting in and out of the party depending on its mission.) Also in contrast to fishing crews, hunting parties needn't necessarily be from the same clan. This means that some hunting parties get split up by different clan affiliation during fishing season; this separation from his usual cronies serves to compound the stereotypical hunter's sea anxiety.

Fishing crews are larger than hunting parties, consisting of eight to twelve fishers who ride herd over a roughly equal number of seasick hunters on each boat. These crews will contain men of all age groups, from veterans to beginners. Consequently, young fishers tend to identify with veterans in their group, while novice hunters are often proud young bucks anxious to prove their prowess to the village's old fuddy-duddies.

Madlander society plays down social tensions. So this rivalry tends to be expressed in teasing and competition in games and sports. But when serious disputes arise, more often than not the men arguing will be on opposite sides of the skill divide.

Cultural Values

Madlander social behavior has evolved to protect its people from the multiple dangers of life here. People are brought up to believe that all of their actions, no matter how inconsequential they may seem, have a bearing on the survival of their friends, family and other members of the community. This way of thinking is reflected in all aspects of Madlander life.

Proverbs

Madlanders love proverbs. Nothing is more reassuring than the idea that all of the wisdom in the world has already been gleaned, that it's been polished over the centuries into pithy, easily-understood nuggets. When something terrible occurs, a well-chosen proverb fosters acceptance, showing that such things are commonplace. When an event calls for celebration, the same proverb can be an important reminder of the need for vigilance against hidden dangers.

Most proverbs look on the bleak side of life. This might lead one to conclude that the Madlanders are a gloomy people. Not so: proverbs in any culture are little bits of advice, mostly warning how to avoid misfortune. Madlanders don't need sayings to help them understand joy. Pessimism here isn't a character flaw, it's a realistic assessment of the situation.

First there are stock phrases of condolence: "Well, at least you aren't dead." "The killer whale eats the salmon's luck with its bones." "It could have been much, much worse." "He who eats the poisoned tuber saves others."

Then there are reminders of various natural laws and other facts of life: "The

Sense of Humor

Humor is a coping mechanism, and there are few places that provide more things to cope with than the Madlands. Making fun of life's fears diminishes their power. Madlanders teach themselves to laugh in the face of death; a person with a sharp sense of humor is as admirable as a courageous monster fighter or a skilled healer.

The Madlander sense of humor can seem a little dark to outsiders. For example, there's the common joke about the fisher, the hunter and the skinless:

A fisher and a hunter are walking through the woods. Suddenly, they find themselves face to face with a skinless, a terrible monster. Without warning, the skinless reaches over and, with one terrible stroke of its fist, strikes off the left arm of the fisher. (Unless the joke is being told by a fisher, in which case it's the hunter who gets his arm torn off.)

"Well, it could be worse," says the fisher, "you could have taken my right arm."

The skinless grabs the fisher's right arm in both hands and tears it off his shoulder.

"Could be worse," says the fisher, "you could have taken a leg off too."

So the skinless pushes the fisher over and stamps repeatedly on the man's left leg, grinding it to a pulp.

The fisher hops up onto his one remaining leg and says, "Could be worse. See? I've still got a leg to stand on."

Whereupon the skinless knocks him over again and twists off the remaining leg. "It couldn't be worse now, could it?" the thing hisses at the fisherman.

"Sure it could," grins the fisher. "Still got my head attached, don't I?"

So the skinless reaches over, sticks its bleeding fingers through the fisher's scalp, and twists his head off, tossing it into a nearby bed of pine needles. The skinless spits at him in contempt and begins to stalk off into the woods.

"Could be worse," the fisher's head calls after him, "you could have torn off my friend's arm, too!"

To a Madlander this is a deeply satisfying joke, not sick at all. It recognizes a terrible everyday fact of life - people get maimed or killed by monsters all the time - but makes it seem absurd and therefore less frightening. It downgrades the importance of the monster, since it's the man's stupidly cheerful courage that forms the butt of the joke. And finally it allows its hearers to accept the inevitability of death, gaining power over it by refashioning it into a silly story. The Madlanders themselves wouldn't be able to articulate the theory behind their humor, if asked to explain it, they would just shrug and say, "It's funny, that's all."

Invective

Madlanders have an unusually harmonious society, but like any people, they sometimes use harsh words, insults and curses. A look at the terms that Madlanders find insulting reveals much about their values.

Madlanders love to tease one another - it's both a way of enforcing correct behavior and of releasing tensions that might otherwise become divisive. There are many gentle insults that imply more affection than rancor. People who talk too much are *pi atwi* - bright birds. Someone who is insufficiently relaxed is a *wigtibidat*, or squirrel. A young person who fails to show respect for his peers is *davte*, a minnow. A *boiatu* (type of tuber) is a sleepyhead. Those who react poorly to teasing will be called *etnigaps*, or pine cones.

Other terms are considered more hurtful, if not actually profane. No one wants to be called a *ude etde* (stupid), *poket* (lazy) or *fa'mvj'r* (a drunkard). Use of these insults is provocative, and will often escalate into a dispute that the clan elder will eventually have to arbitrate.

Even more serious curses include *to uwot*, which means "whelp of a pigdog." A glutton is an *abpe*. *Pavge* is a serious fighting word: it means "useless." To call someone *wavapp*, a liar, or *gaget*, a Togethian, is also an invitation to combat. All of these grave insults can also be used as profanity: one might express frustration at a pot one has dropped on one's foot by calling it a *gaget*, or call the sky *wavapp* when it bursts forth with a sudden rain. Adults will discourage children from using these words.

The fact that Madlanders derive their swear words from character traits that hurt the community, rather than from sexual and bodily functions, the way we do, speaks volumes about their attitudes.



sea is harsh but the land is wicked." "Only bad streams flow up." "A bearded tuber bears no good news." (This is a warning against poisonous molds.) "*Gaget* look better with holes in their heads." "The wind is too fickle to make a wife." "When you bargain with a heightless, look at his hat, not his eyes." "Welcome a stranger if you can pronounce his name."

Some proverbs contain more metaphoric, general words of advice: "Think of the danger that might be underneath before you lift a rock." (This is a much shorter sentence in Madlander!) "Like a rotted tuber, a man gone bad does not change back." "Trust your elder; trust your uncle; trust your mother; trust your spear." "Stones would speak if they cared." "Tall trees are the first that Zuutak (see p. 62) eats." "Death can come in beauty, like dew on a spider's web."

Others affirm the equality of all people (meaning Madlanders only, of course): "You're as doomed as I am." "We each have ten toes, five senses, two hands and one death."

Madlanders make extensive use of stock similes. The twist here is that they all have reverse meanings; to be "polite as a pigdog" is not to be polite at all. Other popular similes include "talkative as a tuna," "happy as a crayfish in a cookpot," "small as a whale," "hospitable as a snowdrift," "wise as a haddock," "natural as a three-eyed squirrel," "worth a shaman's promise," "funny as a corpse," and "honest as a seal."

Then there are the obscure old proverbs that make no sense whatsoever, even to Madlanders. These include: "The sun goes backwards if you polish it," "It takes a heavy stone to slay a lover," "A noble stance imagines eyeballs," and "Deeds of the air are like marrying your dinner." Presumably they meant something at one time but the meaning has since been forgotten. Now they're trotted out whenever something completely inexplicable happens, as if their import will one day become apparent once more if only people keep applying them to odd situations. Madlanders value the wisdom of the past so highly that they are reluctant to admit any could be lost.

One thing you won't hear Madlanders do is swear by the gods. This is thought to attract them. It's considered safe to mention the gods by name, but only as part of a statement of fact. Only a shaman would use their names in any sort of exclamation.

Gender Roles

Madlander society is egalitarian. Although labor is divided along gender lines, the contributions of the two sexes are considered equally important. Tubers and craft items are as essential to survival as meat and fish. Hunting and fishing are dangerous. But so is childbirth. Madlanders are well aware that their continued existence depends on maintaining their population. All the bear meat in the world goes to waste if there are no children to feed it to.

This is also true of many other tribal societies that do place women in an inferior position to men. But the Madlanders lack the internally competitive outlook that would lead men to use their advantages of strength to subjugate their women. Madlanders do not survive by fighting one another for meager resources; they do so by banding together against the monsters and gods. This communal approach applies as much to gender relations as it does to distribution of resources. Conversely, the villages have not developed into a matriarchy because there is no particular gain in excluding men from decision-making.

This is because wisdom and experience, which neither sex has a monopoly on, are the most highly respected traits here. Strength and skill are important, but mean nothing if not used well. As an ancient proverb has it, "Bears have strong arms, but bears build no boats." Age is equated with wisdom; people have to be smart to live a long life here. The hierarchy of a Madlander village, loose as it is,

does discriminate. But it does so on the basis of age, not gender. Both men and women can become clan elders.

Madlanders consider the two sexes to be substantially different in ways that don't impinge on their fundamental equality. Because men and women spend their time engaged in separate pursuits, the meaningful relationships between them are of romance or kinship. Close, platonic friendships between men and women are rare.



Men bond together in boat crews and hunting parties. There are too many different women's tasks to allow for the formation of cliques; the female population of the village forms a single large social unit.

So men and women often disagree. Women see the fisher/hunter split as typical male foolishness, and can't take seriously the constant posturing it inspires. Their sense of humor is more refined, and their banter, both with each other and with the men, tends towards the elaborate and subtle. Men like timeworn insults and jokes; women are more amused by complex allusions and multi-level word play. Most new jokes are invented by women; the ones that remain popular over time turn into the hoary chestnuts treasured by the men. Most women's humor, however, goes right over male heads.

Men find women, with their complicated jokes and unsystematic thinking, to be greatly mysterious creatures. The more mysterious a woman appears to a man, the more attractive she will seem. Other character traits Madlander men find attractive are intelligence, compassion, and skill - a woman noted for being the best in the village at a given task is reckoned to be a great catch.

GenderChange

Although Madlander society regards the genders as equal, it does provide distinct roles for each. Further, it lacks the oppressive social system needed to enforce these rigid gender boundaries. Little enforcement is needed; the vast majority accepts without question these divisions as part of their upbringing. Few women want to hunt, and few men are interested in making pots. Madlanders don't question the fundamentals of society the way we do.

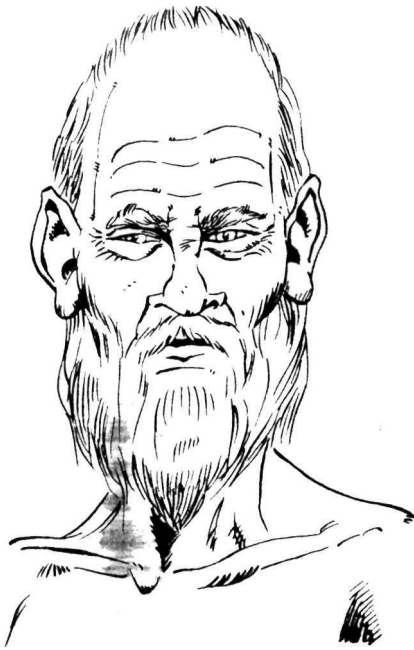
Nonetheless, there is the rare person who can't adjust to the required sex role behavior. An unusual social release mechanism has evolved to accommodate such people. At any time after coming of age, a person uncomfortable with his sex can, after gaining the approval of his clan elder, declare himself to have switched genders. There is no particular ritual to cement this change; the person merely makes a brief announcement to all other members of the community at a village meeting. At this time sex changers remove their current clothing and put on the traditional garb of the sex they're adopting.

The changed individual is then regarded by all as being of a different gender. It typically takes a few months for all of the members of a community to adjust to the announcement and consistently remember to think of the switcher as having changed. No stigma attaches to them; after a while their former gender is forgotten completely, and villagers will be confused when foreigners react to someone as if they were still their former sex. A Madlander visiting a new village and seeing someone apparently of one sex in the garb of another will understand immediately.

A new gender extends not only to economic roles but to other aspects of life as well: a new woman could take a man as a mate and vice versa. The elders would not permit an already-married person to change sex, unless the husband or wife also wished to!

This is a rare phenomenon; many villages will have no switched inhabitants. When it does happen, the most common change is from man to woman; these are about 75 percent of all cases.

It is unheard of for a gender switcher to renege on his/her decision and ask to revert to birth sex; clan elders are expected to ensure certainty before approving the change.



Leadership Traits

At first glance, the selection of clan elders appears to be completely arbitrary: all one has to do to attain the office is outlive everyone else in one's clan. But a long life is a remarkable thing here; Madlanders figure anyone who has managed the feat of living to a ripe old age has to have some valuable advice to pass on to others.

Of course, some clan elders are better equipped to fulfill their obligations than others. And since consensus is so important in making decisions, other members of the community who display leadership qualities can be as influential, or even more so, than a given clan head.

If one were to ask a group of Madlanders what they admired above all, the most common reply would be "great deeds." Someone whose efforts have contributed to the well-being of the village will be granted respect accordingly when they stand up at a village meeting. Included here would be great cooks, skilled healers and fine builders, as well as the more obvious bear slayers, whale harpooners and monster killers.

In practice, though, persuasiveness is at least as important as a history of grand exploits. If a vilKge hero is also a mumble-moutn, his words can easily be eclipsed by a less experienced fellow with greater communication skills. The openness of decision-making provides a great opportunity for PCs with good Diplomacy, Bard, or Leadership skills - or with players adept at roleplaying - to exert influence beyond their age and achievements. Of course, their suggestions have to make sense to be taken seriously!

Through persuasive speaking at village gatherings, characters may gradually earn reputations as community leaders. They may be able to inflate their standings as eminent pot makers or mighty hunters. Every great hero knows the importance of solid PR.

Physically, the Madlander man's ideal of feminine beauty involves low, heavy hips and thighs, a generous bosom, and a high forehead. Shorter women with wavy hair are generally thought to be sexier than tall women with straight hair.

If men tend to idealize women, imagining mystery even where none exists, women tend to sweetly condescend to the men. Madlander women like to think that they understand men inside and out - which isn't necessarily true. Men, they think, are all the more endearing for their unintentionally amusing ideas and behavior. Bragging and swaggering are cute if not taken to extremes. The ideal mate is brave, emotionally direct, and competent.

The physical ideal for men includes developed musculature (particularly around the arms and chest), a height of 5'5" at least, and thick, solid facial features. Scarred or weatherbeaten faces are more handsome than callow, unwrinkled ones; long, straight hair is preferred to short and wavy.

Sexual Mores

Madlanders fully understand the role sex plays in reproduction. The birth and care of children is a vital priority. No one is more carefully protected than pregnant women and small children. Sexuality is important, because it ensures the continued survival of the village.

However, it is also recognized as a source of pleasure. Its two functions are not viewed as contradictory. Madlander philosophy has never developed a puritanical or ascetic strain: nobody here has ever suggested that physical gratification, sexual or otherwise, is a bad thing. Because their world is such an unyielding place, its people take their pleasures where they can find them. They have suffering to spare and see no need to seek additional forms of discomfort.

Self-destructive pursuit of pleasure, or that which harms the community, is not approved of- no one would admire a hunter who went off to a dalliance when the rest of the men were fighting an assault of headless. But the relevant taboos here are against self-destruction and selfishness, not against sensuality.

Madlander men and women mate for life - there is no sanctioned divorce procedure. Even couples who have become completely estranged are still regarded as married until the death of one partner. Strict monogamy is not expected. This is a combined result of relaxed attitudes toward pleasure, and a communal way of life. The nuclear family is not the important unit here; rather, it's the clan and then the village. Neither is considered to be threatened by extramarital liaisons.

Still, some discretion is expected. Sexual jealousy isn't as prevalent as in other cultures, but care is still taken to avoid hurt feelings. These encounters take place discreetly away from the village. So do premarital affairs; young men and women prefer to take their first fumbling steps toward romance away from prying eyes. The Mad Lands climate being what it is, the time frame for such encounters is limited. Thus the common nickname for summer, "Sex Season."

Social Organization

Cohesiveness and unity are the central impulses in Madlander social organization; large groups are better equipped to deal with the hostile land than smaller ones.

The largest social unit is the one encompassing all Madlanders as a people. The culture is remarkably homogeneous; there are no significant conflicts between communities, and no factional struggles within them. War and raiding between villages is absolutely unknown - only outcasts would do something like this, and they are by definition no longer human. Whereas all foreigners are considered half-human at best, Madlanders identify with one another and recognize a degree of obligation toward others of their kind. Specifically, if another

Madlander is hungry and feeding him would not deprive one's village, one must feed him. If one has water to spare and he is thirsty, one must let him drink. If he is hurt, one must heal him if the village has medicine to spare. These obligations are toward individuals; villages with surpluses are not bound to share them with entire communities in need. Communities are expected to shift for themselves. In many circumstances, though, Madlander generosity will exceed the dictates of obligation, as long as the welfare of the home village is not endangered.

The village is the next, and most important, social unit. All economic activity is geared toward supplying the needs of the community. Obligation of the individual toward his village is absolute. He is expected to sacrifice even his life, if need be, to protect it and ensure its continuance. The needs of the community are mostly self-evident and unchanging. Villagers labor to bring in and prepare food and other needed supplies; they fight to protect themselves from attack.

Specific ways of reaching these goals are determined by the village leadership, which technically consists of the elders of each clan. In practice, policy is made consensually whenever possible. Important decisions are discussed at meetings of the entire community, where any adult is permitted to speak. Influence belongs to the persuasive. Only in extreme circumstances will the elders make a decree before a consensus has been reached; maintaining village unity is crucial.



Aging

Advanced age is perhaps the most admired trait in Madlander society - as can be seen from the fact that it is the sole requirement for clan leadership. Age is proof positive that one has what it takes to survive. The wisdom of the elderly is a precious commodity, and villagers are anxious to preserve it. So they do their best to protect their aged members. If an elderly villager and a younger one both require the attentions of a healer at the same time, the older one is attended to first. (Assuming, of course, that the severity of each person's complaint is roughly the same - no sensible healer will work on an elder's ingrown toenail when a hunter has a broken leg.) If food is in short supply, the aged are fed first, followed by pregnant women and children. When the village is attacked, the best fighters will surround the elders to protect them from harm.

Ironically, it is the old folks themselves who often question the wisdom of this policy. Often they feel they have lived more than their share of years and are willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others in their prime. Belief in the primacy of the aged is deep-rooted, though, and the clan elders are most likely to be overruled at village meetings when they propose strategies that expose them to risk. If an oldster insists that his wisdom is being overrated, this is merely taken as further evidence of his virtue, and more reason he should be protected.

In reality there are foolish elders as well as wise ones. Despite popular belief, one can live to a ripe old age without learning anything in particular from the experience. The foolish are the most likely to insist on their rights above all else.



Enforcement

Any cohesive society must also be a tolerant one, or it will spend inordinate time and energy on policing its members. Madlanders tolerate a wide range of eccentric behaviors. Only actions that harm the village or place it in potential danger are addressed.

Conduct that harms the village but does not subject it to major danger - someone not contributing his fair share of work, say, or an Odious Personal Habit that becomes too annoying to tolerate - is corrected informally. Patient persuasion is used by prominent villagers under the guidance of the subject's clan elder. If this fails, a teasing campaign is mounted. These are usually effective. If the individual does not change his ways, the village must decide whether to simply tolerate them forever or, if they are sufficiently serious, to go on to the next step.

Behavior that threatens the village - suspected magic use, or severe antisocial acts - is examined at a special village meeting called an *epetva*, or tribunal. A tribunal can be called at the request of any three adult villagers. All, including the defendant, are allowed to speak, to bring up evidence and to argue in favor of or against the actions in question. The clan elders then confer alone and arrive at one of four possible rulings.

The defendant may be exonerated completely. If this happens, he may request that those who called for the *epetva* be tried themselves for causing division in the community. The elders alone rule on this request, which they will grant if they decide that the callers acted maliciously.

Another possibility is that the defendant is ruled guilty of harmful acts but is granted a reprieve, allowed to continue to live in the village provided he corrects himself. If he does not, another *epetva* can be called at any time.

If ruled a danger to the village, the defendant can be exiled. An exile may never return - if he does so, he will be regarded as a monster, not a human, and every attempt will be made to kill him.

Especially dangerous individuals will be taken out into the forest and tied to a tree, where it is assumed they will be set upon and slain by animals, monsters or gods. If they escape this fate and attempt to return, they too are treated as monsters.

Certain decisions are reserved to the assembled elders alone: for example, the fates of those called before a tribunal (see sidebar).

Villages subdivide into 11-13 clans, each clan an extended family of 50-75 members which lives together in a large longhouse, or *wavobak*. Clans are named after types of fish. The clan's oldest member is its head, or *elder*. They represent the clan at village meetings, leading them in cooperation with their fellow elders. Elders are also the sole arbiters of certain matters concerning their clan members. They must consent to marriages, the names of children, and gender changes (see p. 19). Behavior of clan members is their responsibility; they are expected to modify the conduct of those who exhibit problems, before those problems affect the community. The authority of elders is largely moral; it derives from tradition and their counseling skills.

Dispute Settlement

Even in the most harmonious societies, honest disagreements arise. Madlanders try to settle these as quickly and simply as possible. When two disputants can't reach an agreement themselves, they approach a clan elder. If both are from the same clan, they choose their own elder. If they are from different clans, they approach the eldest head of a clan other than their own. The elder then attempts to mediate. If no agreement is possible, the elder makes a binding decision. His ruling can be appealed to a full community meeting, which is rare: it's considered most unseemly and appeals are almost never won. The party requesting the appeal usually loses the sympathy of the other villagers just for doing so, regardless of the merits of his argument.

Living Scared

Because of the lunatic deities that beset their land, Madlanders must organize their entire society around basic survival mechanisms. Religious belief and practice are central to any culture, but here the gods are so malign and strange that any relationship to them must be avoided. The result is a society structured around absences.

Ceremonies

Rituals are complex, ordered procedures of religious observance that seek to gain some boon from divine forces. Madlanders avoid them like poison. Boons granted by their gods are inevitably catastrophic. Only the insane would seek to attract godly attention at all, let alone make requests of them. Madlanders not only have no deliberate rituals; they try to avoid accidental ones!

Even if they don't have religious practices, there still remains a core of critical passages in life that cry out for some sort of ceremony to mark their importance. These ceremonies are informal but heartfelt.

Birth is the first critical passage, as one emerges from unbeing and joins the community. Madlanders consider life to begin at birth, not at conception; until the baby can be examined, one can't be sure that it's a human life. As soon as the child leaves its mother's womb, the clan elder, in consultation with the attending healer, examines the baby for any visible defects. If it's malformed in some way - or has the suspiciously sharp features that mark it as a changeling (see p. 91) the elder rules that it isn't human. He immediately carries from the *wavobak* and dashes it against the rocks of the shore. This is considered to be a miscarriage. If the healer and elder declare the baby to be human, it will from this point be considered a full member of the community, eligible for its complete protection. Even if birth defects later become apparent, the child is still considered fully human until it proves otherwise by displaying magical powers.

In the case of a human birth, the elder asks both mother and father to name the baby. The first suggestion by either becomes the child's provisional name. As soon as the mother is feeling well enough to move about, a village meeting is held in which the child's name is submitted for approval. The only ground for rejection is duplication. If the child has the same name as someone else either living or recently dead, it's prone to possession by his ghost. Likewise, someone named after a living person can be possessed by his ghost if predeceased by the namesake. If no one at the meeting can remember anyone with the name of the new child, its elder pronounces its name official. Otherwise, the parents are asked to come up with another name, and the process continues until an acceptable one is found.

The next important passage is from childhood to full adulthood. Here the subject adds responsibility for the welfare of the village to his right to its protection. For both men and women, it is a rough, playful initiation, in which other grownups from the new adult's clan grab the initiate, hoist him above their heads, and run him down to the sea for a thorough ducking. Boys are initiated by men, and girls by women. Females are initiated at the time of their first menstrual period; they're instructed to tell the oldest female clan member when this happens. Boys are given a choice of initiation time, either the first day of hunting or the first day of fishing after their thirteenth birthday. They choose according to their favorite vocation.

The next ceremony for most will be marriage. Couples wishing to be married inform their respective clan elders. (Marriage within a clan is forbidden.) The elders get together with the potential bride and groom and discuss the possibility at length. When both elders agree that it is a good match that will stand the test of time, they call a village meeting at which the couple announce their intention to marry. Any villager may then raise objections of any nature to the match. Unless any of these objections sway the opinions of either clan head, the marriage is then announced as official. (Otherwise the couple and their elders return to consultations until the objection is resolved or the engagement broken off.) The groom and his male relatives then go to their *wavobak*, remove his personal effects and take them to his new wife's longhouse, whose clan he now joins.

The final passage is death. If his fellow villagers aren't careful, this will not be an end, but yet another transition - from valued community member to possibly hostile spirit (see pp. 69-70). Not even the most revered of elders is free from such a possibility. The more virtuous one is in life, the more dangerous one's ghost will be if it returns. Accordingly, measures are always taken to prevent a dead person from coming back as a ghost. Typically, the corpse's mouth and eyelids are sewn shut; the head, hands and feet are chopped off; and the remains are tossed into the sea. If a death occurs inland, on a hunting trip for example, cremation is an acceptable alternative to a sea disposal. Care is taken that no two "funerals" be conducted in precisely the same way, lest they take on ritualistic power and deliver an effect opposite to the desired one. Minor variations of the order of actions seem to be enough to prevent this.

Mourning of the dead is discouraged: it merely helps the ghost to find its former home if it wants to come back for a haunting. Any possessions he had *wedo* over (see p. 15) are immediately given to another villager for use - if they're left idle, the ghost might use them to find its way back. If they're destroyed, his weapons in particular will travel with him to the spirit world, and he'll have use of ghostly versions of them if he returns. On the other hand, if the new user simply changes or redecorates them slightly, the ghost won't recognize them.

If these precautions are taken, an exemplary villager will almost never manifest as a ghost. The rare exceptions are usually people who have either died with an important matter unfinished, or those who go so suddenly they don't realize



Concepts of Causation

Madlander belief has two diametrically opposed notions of cause-and-effect. It all depends on location.

Anything that happens on land happens for a reason. Negative experiences are always attributable to malign magic. This applies to matters trivial or grave, from stubbed toes to death by disease to village-wide famine. Nothing happens by accident. What isn't usually clear is which specific magical being - shaman, sorcerer, monster or god - is responsible for the evil at hand. Defendants at tribunals may be accused of causing certain events, but in general Madlanders figure it's too hard to find the culprit behind every setback. According to popular belief, distance isn't much of a barrier to magic, so the malevolent entity might be hundreds of miles away. In particular, the gods are reckoned to make bad things happen without even trying - Bubzavav, stung by a hornet in an isolated portion of the interior, might send out waves of irritation that would cause women throughout the Mad Lands to drop pots and jars.

If something positive happens on land, it's an aberration - the malign magical entities have for some unknown reason failed in their nefarious plans. If a good growing season yields a bumper crop of tubers, village sages will explain it by saying, "Someone's spell sure failed somewhere." Good things are never the result of active favor by spellcasters - such a thing isn't possible, since such beings are by definition malicious. The best to hope for is that the gods and wizards will interfere with each other occasionally, giving humans a moment of peace.

On the sea, however, where the gods have no power, things are thought to happen absolutely randomly. Whether a given event is good or bad, it lacks metaphysical meaning. Nothing is accidental on land, but on the sea, everything is. On the ocean, luck genuinely exists, whereas on the land good luck is merely a temporary absence of bad luck that will later rebound on the victim.

This is how Madlanders think; they may or may not be correct. It's up to the GM to decide how accurate these beliefs are.

Sense of History

Madlanders have a strong attachment to tradition but no concept of history whatsoever. Their culture is entirely oral, with no written language. This means that the only events from the past that are remembered are those with mythic resonance, the ones that make good stories. These will be heavily altered in accordance with dramatic logic, making it impossible to separate fact from embellishment.

Also important here is the need in the Mad Lands to forget the dead so they don't return as ghosts. Madlander forefathers are revered without being characterized individually. To memorialize any particular dead person is an invitation for a haunting. As soon as a hero dies, the tales of his deeds are attributed to a mythic character like *Zo Do Wabda*, to avoid attracting his ghost. Thus, many *Zo Do Wabda* tales no doubt began in fact. This enforced amnesia means that the keeping of history as we know it is impossible. The past remains a vague territory, inhabited by generalized groups of people. Like so many things in the Madlands, it should be left alone in case it contains hidden dangers.

Madlanders don't see time as a progression from one point to another. They don't see themselves as being different from their counterparts of centuries past. Nor do they trouble themselves with questions of their own origins, or those of their various customs or practices. Madlanders have always been here and, assuming they're clever enough to survive, always will be. The Madlander experience has no beginning or end: it's all middle.

One type of myth common to other cultures is unknown here - the origin tale that explains how someone first invented the essentials of life, like hunting or pottery-making. Likewise, there are no creation myths. When asked to explain the origins of something, a Madlander will just shrug; these are pointless, boring questions to them.

Madlanders don't bother to break the past up into categories. "Long ago" covers everything from the dawn of time to just before living memory. Time is not a line moving forward or a circle without beginning or end; it is two blocks, one representing the past, and the other, the present. Every important discovery and valuable idea came to light "long ago." That's all the history a Madlander needs.



they've passed on. Such ghosts may not be malicious, but they are no longer part of the community and cannot be welcomed.

Bad people, on the other hand, may return as ghosts despite all precautions (see p. 70).

Mythology and Folklore

Of all the arts, the one most highly developed by Madlanders is storytelling. In life, Madlanders spend most of their time reacting to events beyond their control, but when they tell stories, they get to shape incidents so that they're appropriate and dramatically inevitable.

Madlander stories carry both wisdom and information. Many of them are cautionary tales, describing a variety of awful fates one can avoid if one does the opposite of the character in the story. Others, in which the main character succeeds or even triumphs, are more than just escapism - they typically contain important information about Madlander monsters and other dangers.

Tradition is highly valued here, and many stories have been handed down over centuries with very little change. It's reassuring to hear the classic old tales; the fact that they have survived for ages serves as a reminder that the Madlanders as a people have survived, too.

Zo Do Wabda Tales

The most popular characters of local folklore are Zo Do Wabda and his wife Vidigi, who are the Madlander Everyman and Everywoman. Zo Do Wabda's character traits vary from story to story: he's alternately clever and gullible, humble and boastful, suspicious and trusting. When he embodies the first trait in each pair, he triumphs over disaster. Far more frequently, he has the latter characteristics, and disaster overwhelms him. When the tales portray Zo Do Wabda as clever, his wife Vidigi is usually foolish; when he's naive, she's a fount of wisdom.

This makes Zo Do Wabda and Vidigi versatile enough to star in almost any sort of tale. Many stories start their lives with other characters but gradually get folded into the Zo Do Wabda canon over the years. Sometimes he's the heroic star of a thrilling adventure, thwarting the heinous plans of monsters and gods. More often he's not half as heroic as he thinks he is. Even seemingly heroic tales often veer abruptly into horror or grim humor. Madlanders deal better with unhappy endings than we do. It's considered very poor storytelling to put an upbeat ending on a traditionally dark tale, but acceptable to make a usually escapist tale go bad - this possibility always increases the suspense.

The hundreds of Zo Do Wabda tales freely contradict each other - for example, he dies in many of them under differing circumstances. Although he and his wife are constant characters, the names and personalities of their relatives change at the teller's convenience. Sometimes they have children, who also vary in name, number and age. Audiences are not bothered by these "lapses in continuity."

Zo Do Wabda and Vidigi are usually in their thirties, but some tales tell of their courtship as younger folks, and a few make them elderly. It is considered poor form to leave either of them out of a story, even though one may appear only briefly. Stories that require an unmarried protagonist will feature other characters.

"Zo Do Wabda and the Dream of Doom"

Here is a typical Zo Do Wabda tale, one that has been told around Madlander campfires for centuries:

Zo Do Wabda awoke one night in a cold sweat, bolting up from his pallet. Vidigi was awakened by his sudden movement, and saw that he was terrified. She tried to comfort him as quietly as possible, hoping not to disturb the others in the *wavobak*.

In the morning, Vidigi realized that Zo Do Wabda had not gone back to sleep after his terrifying dream. He looked pale and deeply frightened. She sought to snap him out of his withdrawn state by confronting him.

"What sort of husband are you," she asked, "to be scared like a vole by a dream in the night? Sometimes dreams are terrifying! But they must be forgotten, lest you call them into being."

Zo Do Wabda replied quietly, "Believe me, my dear wife, I have tried, tried very hard, to banish the memories of this horrible dream from my consciousness. But it was so vivid, so true, that I am sure it is bound to happen."

"Nonsense!" said Vidigi. "Dreams mean something only when they are sent by shamans. And even then, they are not bound to happen; they mean only that a shaman has taken an disquieting interest in you. This dream was not dreamt on the sea; it was dreamt on land, and so partakes not of the *zoxibek* of destiny."

"No, this dream was true," Zo Do Wabda said. "I can feel it in my very bones; it is bound to happen. This alarms me greatly, for the dream ends in my death, chewed up by Zewa Zab."

"Again I say you speak nonsense. Dreams are messages from the soul. They can help us or guide us. Only when dwelt upon do they come true. Only when shaman-sent are they malign. And you have no shamans angry at you, do you?"

"No, I do not," Zo Do Wabda said.

Other Zo Do Wabda Tales

The example given is but one of countless tales of Zo Do Wabda. The following are brief descriptions of some of the other classic stories he's featured in. Summaries that end with an ellipsis should be assumed to end with the phrase "and disaster ensues."

A Savarginian teaches Zo Do Wabda how to trap ...

Zo Do Wabda is impersonated by a tricky seal, who sleeps with Vidigi.

Vidigi mourns her dead husband for too long a time ...

Zo Do Wabda rescues Vidigi from the soulless with the use of a long stick, some dried porcupine gut, and some rotten tubers.

Zo Do Wabda tricks Togethian raiders into thinking they're pigdogs.

Zo Do Wabda takes a shortcut from a time-honored route in order to show up his pokey friends ...

Zo Do Wabda takes advice from a disembodied voice which promises to make him irresistible to women ...

Zo Do Wabda and Vidigi spitefully call a tribunal against one of her uncles, and almost end up being exiled themselves.

Zo Do Wabda doesn't believe Vidigi when she says the ghost of his mother is attempting to possess her through her dreams ...

Zo Do Wabda and Vidigi are killed by a shaman. Because the shaman spends an inordinate amount of time gloating over these murders, they're able to find him from the spirit world, come back as ghosts and wreak their vengeance on him. Then they go completely insane and destroy their own village.

Vidigi feels sorry for a skinless child and tries to adopt it

Zo Do Wabda encounters an undead child who turns out to be the twin brother who died before he was two. The powerful and monstrous child follows him around and is finally tricked into fighting a bloodless that attacks Zo Do Wabda. Both monsters are destroyed, and Zo Do Wabda goes happily home. There he finds out that he was actually a triplet, and his other undead brother is waiting for him in the *wavobak*

Zo Do Wabda wakes up one morning to find himself in a nightmarish spirit land populated entirely by dangerous lunatics. He becomes really concerned when he realizes he's actually been transported to Togeth. He finally escapes after meeting a none-too-bright Togethian warrior, Zo Do Wabda convinces him he's turned into a giant eagle. He then flies Zo Do Wabda home.

Inventing New Zo Do Wabda Tales

GMs, and players with storytelling characters, should find it fairly easy to come up with original Zo Do Wabda tales, since the requirements for the genre are so flexible. Zo Do Wabda stories break down into several common types, as follows. (For any type of tale, Vidigi can be substituted for Zo Do Wabda, who then takes a subsidiary role.)

Cautionary Tales. Zo Do Wabda does something no fyladlander with half a brain would even consider, and disaster ensues. These stories commonly begin with an introduction in which Zo Do Wabda boasts of a particular gojaiquality he has - one which he will turn out not to have at all when put to the test. Vidigi then reproves him; he ignores her. Then he finds himself in a situation that requires the trait in question, and fails in a spectacular fashion. Usually he dies in a way ironically appropriate to his boasts. Sometimes, of course, it is Vidigi who boasts of her common sense or skill, and is proved wrong.

Heroic Adventures. Zo Do Wabda triumphs over an adversary the audience will recognize and hate. These tales consist of a brief introduction explaining his motivation - here, Zo Do Wabda is brave and smart, so the trouble he's in can't be a result of his own foolishness. Typically he faces three contests of increasing difficulty and wins them in surprising ways. In heroic adventures, the villains will be ridiculed and made to seem foolish, unless they're gods.

Tragic Adventures. Typically, these start off in just the same way ... but the hero fails, often through no fault of his own. Or he destroys the monster but sacrifices himself to do so.

These are the most common forms, but anything is appropriate as long as it fulfills the basic functions of Madlander stories: to remind hearers of the risks life presents, to warn against specific foolish behavior, or to provide humor and diversion.

"Then you have nothing to fear. You must go hunting just as planned, and forget this dream, or find the positive guidance in it."

So Zo Do Wabda went hunting, and, through a complicated turn of events that does not concern us here, became separated from his companions in the forest. He became lost, and soon he found himself in a dark and unpleasant part of the woods. Then he heard a disturbing flapping sound. He turned around and saw a shape like a flesh-colored blanket swimming through the air toward him: a boneless.



Normally he would have been driven insane with terror at this circumstance, but on this day Zo Do Wabda just stood there, waiting for the boneless to approach.

"I do not fear you, boneless," Zo Do Wabda said as the creature approached. "For, as disgusting and deadly as you are, the death you plan for me is nowhere near as awful as the one I am fated to have. You are nothing, a minor obstacle, a mere diversion before the truly dreadful doom that awaits me." And after saying this, Zo Do Wabda turned and walked away from the boneless, as if it were not there.

The boneless became enraged by this pointed show of disrespect, and quickly seized Zo Do Wabda in its suffocating grip. But Zo Do Wabda did not bother to resist. "This is nothing," he said, "compared to what will kill me." Further infuriated by his refusal to defend himself, the enveloping boneless began to shake



Zo Do Wabda wildly, so much so that he lost his footing and began to roll down the edge of the rocky hill he was standing on.

It was a jarring and bumpy ride, rolling down the hill, bouncing against sharp and jagged rocks, wrapped in a boneless. When Zo Do Wabda stopped rolling, he realized that the boneless was no longer moving. He rolled off its limp form, discovering that it was pierced in many places and oozing blood. It was dead, slain by the countless punctures inflicted by the rocks of the hill. Zo Do Wabda shrugged and continued on his way.

Eventually he worked his way up to the top of the hill, where he encountered a strange figure dressed in armor of loathsome shining gold. The being leered at Zo Do Wabda through its burning yellow eyes, which shone out from its stone-gray skin. It was a soulless, and from its foul smile, Zo Do Wabda knew it expected him to be frightened.

"I do not fear you, soulless," Zo Do Wabda said as the immortal half-man approached. "For, as cruel and amoral as you are, the death you plan for me is nowhere near as awful as the one I am fated to have. You are nothing, a minor obstacle, a mere diversion before the truly dreadful doom that awaits me." And after saying this, Zo Do Wabda turned and walked away from the soulless, as if it were not there.

"You insolent little piece of mortal scum!" hissed the soulless, who without further delay leaped upon Zo Do Wabda, overpowered him, and tied him to a tree. The soulless proceeded to remove countless arcane torture devices from his skin-colored bag, many of them gleaming with rank sorcerous power. "You will beg for mercy from newly made mouths before I am through, spirit-bound slime," it said.

And indeed, the tortures it inflicted on Zo Do Wabda that day were truly unspeakable; but despite his pain Zo Do Wabda remained unafraid, thinking that this was not nearly as awful as being slaughtered by one of the gods. The soulless grew more and more irritated with Zo Do Wabda, who was making the torture session most unenjoyable for him.

"You are but a madman," the soulless said, "and unfit to bleed on my scalpels. You do not appreciate true agony, and I have grown bored with you. There would be no entertainment in killing you. I leave you to the crows." And the soulless packed up his sickening contrivances and quit the scene.

Zo Do Wabda was reflecting on possible ways of getting down from the tree when a hunched, wizened figure stumped into view. On a normal day, the being's three-foot stature and blood-colored hat would have plunged Zo Do Wabda's heart into ice-water fear, for he was now encountering a heightless. As we all know, heightless not only have a full range of shamanic powers but can only be killed in one particular secret way, that way differing with each individual heightless. But Zo Do Wabda was unafraid.

The heightless scampered over to Zo Do Wabda, cackling and lisping. "You will not find it thztho eathzthy to bore me into thzthparing you, human. I do not kill for recreation, like the effete thzthoullethzththzth. I kill to prolong my life. I care not whether you fear me or not; you are about to die, and your blood ithzth about to decorate my pretty cap." He removed the straps binding Zo Do Wabda to the tree, and pulled a long fishing blade from his belt.

"I do not fear you, heightless," Zo Do Wabda said as the sputtering little obscenity approached, "For, as sinister and invulnerable as you are, the death you plan for me is nowhere near as awful as the one I am fated to have. You are nothing, a minor obstacle, a mere diversion before the truly dreadful doom that awaits me." And after saying this, Zo Do Wabda turned and walked away from the heightless, as if it were not there.

He turned back a moment later, after hearing a heavy thump of something hitting the needle-covered forest floor. It was the heightless, dead as a stump. The

Other Tales

Zo Do Wabda tales aren't the only ones told around Madlander campfires. Other popular stories include:

"The Three Elders and the Skinless Chieftain," in which three clever clan elders - one blind, one deaf, and one with no sense of smell - use their disabilities to defeat a terrible monster horde. There are a number of heroic adventures centered around this trio, of which the "Skinless Chieftain" is the most often demanded.

"The Flipped Madlander" is a humorous epic telling the story of Dedipi A, a mischievous seal who disguises himself as a newborn baby and tricks a clan elder into declaring him human. Dedipi A actually becomes a treasured member of the community who helps his village increase their fish catch and single-flipperedly fends off an attack by Savarginian pirates.

"Bev Twe It" is a bawdy tale of a young woman in pursuit of the perfect husband, for whom she has demanding specifications. She ends up being tricked into marrying the village idiot, but in the end comes to value him above all her previous suitors.

"The Siblings" is the story of a twin brother and sister who are so attached to one another that the woman declares herself a man in order to accompany him on hunting expeditions. A jealous villager, secretly a shaman, brings them before a tribunal, charging them with having an unwholesome relationship. They successfully expose him, but the story ends with the sad implication that the hero and heroine are indeed gripped by an unconsummated passion.

"The Haunted *Wavobak*" is a seemingly mundane account of residents of a clan house as they interact throughout a typical day. As night approaches, a subtly eerie feeling slowly builds, until finally it becomes apparent that all of the characters are ghosts. The story ends with a party of living people taking shelter in the longhouse, being slain one by one by the ghosts, and being adopted into the clan. Told by the right teller, this is an extremely chilling story, too scary to be told unless the village is undergoing a lengthy period of good fortune.

As with the Zo Do Wabda stories, these are just a few representative examples. GMs and players should use them as models when developing their own tales.

Hunting Signals

Madlander men employ a very specialized set of gestures on hunting expeditions. When stalking game - or hiding from monsters - silent, long-distance communication is vital. Since they are designed to be seen from far away, hunting signals are broader than many Madlander gestures. This is a relative comparison: hunting signals are a complex set of hand and finger positions, without much blatant arm-waving. If signals are too big, they'll attract attention from prey or predator. Also, if men from another village happen upon a dramatic signaler they might think they're seeing sorcerous gestures and try to carry him off to a tribunal (see p. 22).

A typical set of signals includes around 150 hand and finger positions, which represent types of animals and monsters, numbers, positions, and distances. Signalers can also announce around a dozen standard strategies or maneuvers, like "charge," "divide into two groups and converge on position," "slowly advance on position, remaining hidden" or "run away!"

Hunters from all villages use hunting signals, but variations from village to village have developed over the years. Although underlying principles are the same all over, men from neighboring settlements might use the same hand position to refer to different animals. Variations in the system increase over distance; hunters from adjacent villages would be able to match a majority of signals, but two men from hundreds of miles away would have very few of them in common.

Like the signals used by baseball players and coaches, hunting signals are not a true sign language. They can't express concepts or emotions, or impart any information unrelated to hunting. Understanding of village hunting signals is part of language training for young Madlander men; it is not an additional required skill.

A Madlander can learn the signals of another village after 1d hours of instruction and a successful roll against IQ. Once they're learned, to use them in the field he'll have to remember the new meaning of a signal and forget the one he's known for years. This requires another IQ roll each time. After 1d weeks of continuous use, a hunter will automatically understand another village's signals. It will take him 1d days of IQ rolls to refamiliarize himself with his home system, or with any other system that he's learned once and set aside.

In game terms, this means that the GM may allow the players of a hunting party to communicate freely even while setting up a complex ambush or in the midst of battle.

secret single way to kill this heightless had been to turn away from it in contempt, and Zo Do Wabda had just done so. Its centuries-long career of murder and bloodshed was now over. The heightless was already decomposing, dissolving into fertilizer for the pine trees.

Zo Do Wabda gradually made his way back to the village, where he rushed to his beloved wife Vidigi and clasped her in a hug of triumph and liberation.

"You were right, my love!" he cried, weeping tears of joy. "Dreams do have positive messages: this one taught me not to fear. I was so sure that I was going to be slain by Zewa Zab that it made me fearless to other threats, and it saved my life three times!"

Zo Do Wabda told Vidigi the tale of his adventures in the forest, and when he had finished, she embraced him once more, sobbing at having come so close to losing her only love.

"You were right, you were right," said Zo Do Wabda. "I will never doubt your word again. I will never feel fear again."

As he said this, the ground underneath him parted. The gopher god, Zewa Zab, burst out from a tunnel and bit Zo Do Wabda in two with his monstrous buck teeth, spraying blood all over. It gnawed on his head until it was unrecognizable, bit off one of Vidigi's legs for good measure, ate the village's entire tuber crop for the year, and disappeared underground once more.

From this story comes the proverb, "This is nothing, compared with what will kill me." This proverb is used to dismiss a minor misfortune. A Madlander may laugh at death by saying this when he knows he's about to die.

Language and Nomenclature

The Madlander language is exclusively oral, with no written counterpart. The Madlander words presented in this book are of course rendered in the Roman alphabet, and are approximations of their actual sounds.

Madlanders use comparatively few of the sounds that the human voicebox can generate. To an outsider, the Madlander tongue seems harsh and blunt. The language is dominated by hard, sharp consonants. Only the consonant sounds corresponding to the Roman letters b, d, g, k, p, n, t, v, w, x and z are used. Vowel sounds corresponding to the five primary Roman vowels are also used - a, e, i, o, u. The letter "y" is not useful in transcribing Madlander.

Madlander does not employ compound vowels - vowels only appear singly, separated by consonants. This creates a staccato effect that adds to the tongue's hard, punchy tone.

Madlander also employs a break which functions as an almost silent tenth, consonant. The spaces in names like Zo Do Wabda or Dopod Abwep aren't divisions between sub-units (as we divide between given name, middle name and surname); they're soundless letters. Madlanders distinguish these breaks from divisions between words by pronouncing the former with an almost inaudible glottal click produced at the bottom of the throat. Most non-native speakers miss these clicks.

Generating Madlander Names and Words

Both GMs and players will need to come up with Madlander names for their characters; there are several ways to do this.

First, one can simply look at the possible letter combinations described above and experiment with them until an appropriate name is arrived at. Since players won't need to generate many names - just their PCs and any relatives important enough to appear in their character biographies - they will likely prefer this method.

GMs might want to generate names en masse, however, in order to have a list of correct names to assign to new characters on the spur of the moment. The best way to do this is to take existing words or names and mutate them from English (or another language) to Madlander.

First, assemble a list of words or names of any language. Make a list pairing unacceptable consonants with Madlander ones: c = b, f = d, h = g, and so on. Then substitute the latter for the former. (On a word processor, this can be done quickly to a long list of names with the global replace function.) Finally, insert breaks in each word to separate compound vowels.

Gesture

Like most cultures, Madlanders supplement verbal communication with gestures. Madlander gestures tend to be very subtle and undemonstrative. Their non-verbal communication is so economical and precise that the uninitiated might miss it altogether. The Savarginians, for example, describe the Madlanders as stony and emotionless because they don't use the elaborate and florid gestures they themselves favor. As they're thinking this, a parry of Madlanders negotiating with them will be viciously lampooning them with a barrage of tiny winks, tics, waves, and foot taps, all loaded with scurrilous meaning.

What follows is a description of some of the most common or interesting Madlander gestures. It is not recommended that GMs attempt to force their players to use these when playing Madlander characters. (If the group contains any compulsive method-actor types who think it would *be fun* to try to use gestures, that's another story.) Instead this material is presented so the GM can make occasional reference to it in his descriptions of events. Gestures are learned with the Madlander language; characters need not have a separate skill to use them.

The most important gestures are those used to announce sudden danger. In situations where all bystanders should immediately flee, the hand is flattened horizontally and drawn across the forehead in a quick, broad movement. This is the broadest Madlander gesture, since everybody in the area has to recognize it and act right away. It's accompanied by a shout identifying the nature of the threat.

Sometimes it's necessary to alert companions to trouble without letting the enemy know it's been spotted. The gesture here is a rolling twitch of the shoulders followed by a small, rapid pointing out of both elbows.

One of the first thing children learn is to be constantly on the lookout for either of these warning signals and to react to them appropriately. Only an idiot or shaman would deliberately use them when no threat exists. No blame attaches to someone who gives a false alarm due to an honest mistake; as the Madlander proverb goes, "Better to be safe than to have your spleen torn out by an obscenity from the darkest pits of night."

Why It's Called "The Mad Lands"

The term "the Mad Lands" is used by the people of neighboring areas. The Madlanders themselves, like most tribal societies, think of their land as "the world," and themselves as "humans." In Madlander usage, it's simply assumed that any reference to humanity means their own people only, unless "foreign devils" or "insane outland scum" are specified. Likewise, Madlanders have names for foreign places, but unless these are used, any geographical reference is assumed to be to the Mad Lands.

The Madlanders know that foreigners refer to their country as "the crazy place," but they think that's hilarious. For all the Mad Lands' harshness, its people believe that all outlying areas are worse. And by their own standards, believing as they do that all gods and magic are deadly dangerous, they're right!

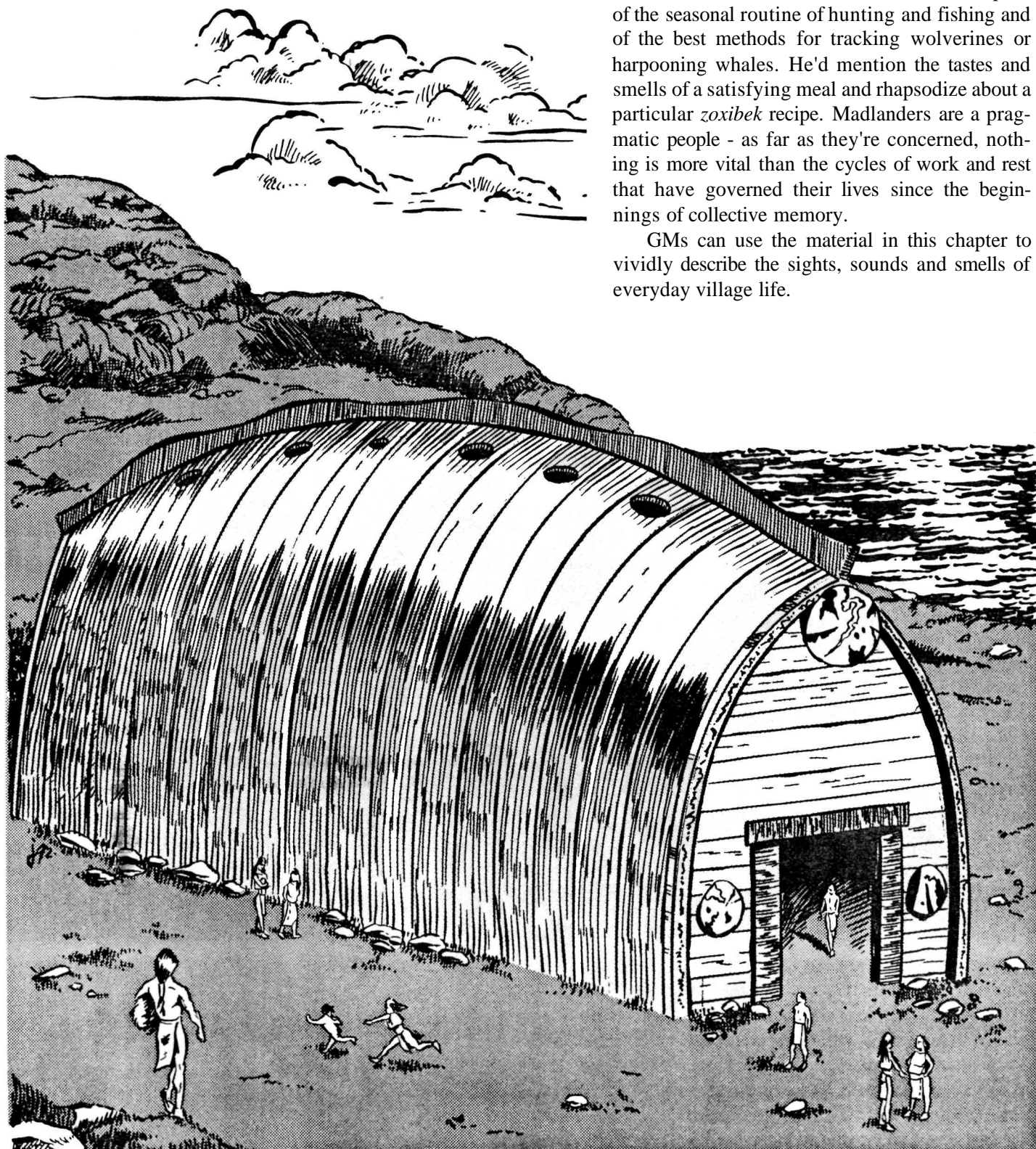


3

DAILY LIFE

A Madlander who is asked to describe himself and his people would be unlikely to spend much time discussing philosophy. Instead, he'd talk about the concrete details of his life. He'd speak of the seasonal routine of hunting and fishing and of the best methods for tracking wolverines or harpooning whales. He'd mention the tastes and smells of a satisfying meal and rhapsodize about a particular *zoxibek* recipe. Madlanders are a pragmatic people - as far as they're concerned, nothing is more vital than the cycles of work and rest that have governed their lives since the beginnings of collective memory.

GMs can use the material in this chapter to vividly describe the sights, sounds and smells of everyday village life.





Hunting Expeditions

The size of hunting parties varies. Clan elders discourage solitary trips into the forest, but a few determined loners still go out by themselves. Solo hunters most often stick close to the village perimeter and collect small birds and mammals. Even most perimeter trips include another hunter as backup in case something goes wrong, however. Typical size for a party going into the bush is four to six men. Bear-hunting parties add another two or three men.

Weapon skills useful in hunting are Bow, Net, Sling, Spear and Spear Throwing. Those skilled in the use of swords or other weapons not normally used for hunting will take them along, too, in case monsters are encountered.

Every man on a hunt is expected to have at least a smattering of ability with Camouflage and Stealth.

Other necessary skills need not be held by all: Area Knowledge, Naturalist, Survival (Woodlands) and Zoology will be specialties of various party members. Experience with Traps is useful - not so much to set them up as to spot and disarm the ones monsters leave.

Hunting parties are also expected to bring home particular valuable materials, like iron ore or medicinal plants, if they come across them. Some hunters will

Dangers of the Hunt

Numerous perils face a hunting party in the woods.

Many game animals fight back: hunters risk being mauled by bears, charged by stags, bitten by wolves or pierced by porcupine quills. Other creatures can inflict injury too, bringing snakebite, hornet stings and insect-borne diseases. And even the most benign animal is a threat if it's rabid.

Accidents with weapons are another major cause of injury. Even the most experienced hunter can hit the wrong target in the heat of the chase. A hunter mistakenly injured by another is expected to deal with it graciously. According to Madlander etiquette, this means minimizing the seriousness of the incident through a thorough but good-natured teasing of the man responsible.

Intelligent monsters often lie in wait for hunters; hunting seasons are their main opportunities to snag human prey. Many of them are capable of quite sophisticated traps.

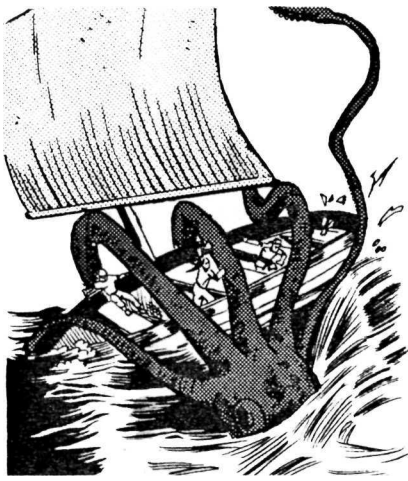
Outlaws live a miserable existence as exiles in the bush, and will welcome any opportunity to ambush a party, loot their equipment and take their catch. Utterly deranged types may attack even if they don't have a decent chance of winning.

When Madlanders run into Togethians - who are always assumed to be violently hostile - it'll be in the forest, since the *Caget* travel overland from their home country. If renegades from the Whiteness or the Northern Tribelands are hiding in the Mad Lands, they'll also be found in the interior; well-armed and confident groups might attack native hunters.

Winter weather is unpredictable: sudden snowstorms can strand a party miles from civilized help. Exposure is always a threat. A hunter who gets separated from his party at any time of year is in serious trouble if he doesn't have the Survival skill to make it on his own.

The unnatural Mad Lands geography contains traps for the unwary. Steep cliffs, churning rivers and collapsing tunnels can all bring sudden catastrophe.

The most dreaded possibility, however, remains contact with a god. Hunting parties will be reluctant to enter areas which a god has touched. For further information, see Chapter 5.



Dangers of the Sea

Although the sea isn't home to gods or monsters, its dangers are no less deadly.

Storms are the most feared and most common hazard. The sturdy, low-slung Madlander fishing vessels can withstand high waves, but a full-fledged storm can sink or overturn them. Rescue is difficult at best in such conditions: other crews will be doing their best to avoid capsizing themselves. Water temperatures during fishing season are rarely low enough for hypothermia to be a risk - otherwise, there would be no pelagic fish around. The chief cause of death during a storm is drowning.

Drowning is in fact always a danger. Poor swimmers will be terrified of being tossed overboard, even in circumstances where the rest of the crew is available for a quick rescue.

The sea is home to fewer dangerous creatures than the land, but those few are terrifying indeed. Single *wipid*, or killer whales, are formidable on their own (see p. 77). A coordinated attack by an entire pod can decimate a fishing fleet. Giant squids are very difficult to kill, and can keep an entire crew at bay (see p. 78).

Seals can wreck nets or try to steal catches. They'll resort to sabotage if cod are scarce; if they feel insulted or cheated they'll do so out of spite. Killing a seal is considered *muid* (see p. 76), so they have to be dealt with nonviolently.

Pirates are also an occasional threat. Usually manned by Savarginians (though the odd ship of Togethians has been reported), fleets of pirate vessels sometimes attack fishing fleets in order to capture slaves for markets in the more decadent city-states. Smaller operations try to pick off single vessels blown off course. Pirates may prefer to stage raids on unprotected villages for women, children or goods. Fishing fleets generally try to orient themselves to prevent pirates from getting through to their communities, but may still have to fight a defensive naval battle to drive them off.

accordingly learn Botany and Prospecting. On occasion, a mission will be organized specifically to get lumber or ore rather than game.

The head of a party will need a high Leadership rating; he won't be able to issue instructions to men with a higher skill than his own. He should recruit a second-in-command with some Leadership ability to take over if he's killed or incapacitated. Likewise, he'll want at least two men with good First Aid abilities in case one of them is hurt.

Most parties will be composed of a few hunters riding herd over a few fishers; strategies will be devised to accommodate the fishers' lower ratings at relevant skills. Note also that a fisher's Leadership skill is considered to be halved when dealing with hunters in a hunting situation. (In unusual situations, like a monster attack, a fisher with a higher Leadership rating than the hunt organizer might well take over.)

The most prized prey are bear and deer, each of which provides large quantities of meat and the hides most used in clothing. Both are stalked in a systematic way by small teams of hunters.

However, Madlanders can't depend on abundant supplies of either animal. Deer populations are subject to great fluctuations from year to year. Human hunters often face great competition both from various monsters and from carnivorous gods, who also count venison as their favorite meat. It seems that the gods Gakox Pezep and Bubzavav (see p. 57 and p. 56) are hungrier some years than others; at least this is how Madlander hunters explain a bad deer season.

Bears have more stable populations, but they're more dangerous to hunt. Madlander bears are tougher and meaner than their counterparts elsewhere, and perhaps a bit smarter, too. Only the most highly skilled and experienced hunters go after bear. Even with all of the obscene horrors that prey on mankind here, the humble bear is responsible for more wounds inflicted on Madlander men than any other creature.

This means that Madlanders depend on a variety of other animals to fill out the hunting sector's contribution to food stocks. Rodents, otters, rabbits, porcupines, and songbirds are among the smaller animals collected. Catching these animals is time-intensive considering the amount of meat they yield, but the risks are smaller and their populations more stable. Madlanders collect these animals with missile weapons; they use trap lines only in periods of extreme desperation. This is because monsters, especially bloodless or heightless, will stake out animal snares when they find them, in order to ambush trappers.

Some animals are not hunted. Seals are left alone for moral reasons (see p. 76); pigdogs and skunks are considered inedible.

Fishing Expeditions

The fishing season begins in the springtime, when fish begin to migrate to shoals along the Madlander coastline. Madlanders send out fleets of small boats equipped with drift nets to catch them. Most of these migratory fish are pelagic - species that live near the water's surface in the open ocean. The most prized is the tuna, a large creature that yields lots of meat; several varieties similar to bluefin, mackerel and albacore are caught here. Smaller pelagics, ocean perch and herring, are also taken. Several varieties of squid prey on the migratory schools and are in turn fished by man. Certain nonmigratory fish, primarily cod and flatfishes, are also taken during the same season. A few boats in any fleet specialize in crab fishing, catching the tasty crustaceans with ingenious box traps.

Given the opportunity, Madlanders engage in small-scale whaling as well. Fishing vessels are equipped with harpoons in case a killer whale comes within range; these animals also pursue the pelagic fish. Whale catches don't happen every season; a successful one is cause for celebration. They're riskier prey than

tuna or squid; pods of killer whales have been known to overturn fishing boats when one of their number is harpooned. On the other hand, they yield so much meat that the risk is often taken - especially if fish stocks are below normal, or if the hunters on the boat egg the fishers on by teasing them as "valiant herring slaughterers."

The overall biomass of harvestable sea creatures is comparatively stable from year to year, although populations of individual species may swing dramatically. Numbers of squid, for example, can go up and down drastically from season to season. Cod stocks grow and shrink according to a multi-year cycle.

The Madlanders' main competition for the fruits of the sea is the local seal population (see p. 75), which feeds year-round on cod, crab and other non-migratory fish, and feasts on squid and herring during the season. Seals sometimes try to trick fishers into heading away from the densest schools of fish; other times they will trade information on the whereabouts of tuna - which are too big for them - in exchange for herring or cod. They also encourage Madlanders to go after killer whale pods, since the whales are their chief predators.

Each clan fields at least one fishing vessel - two if a clan can provide enough able-bodied men. Crews range in size from 15 to 20. Clans with too many men for one fishing boat but too few for two will put the extra men on a crab vessel, which requires fewer men. (Hunters jockey fiercely for positions on crab boats, since

Life in the Wavobak

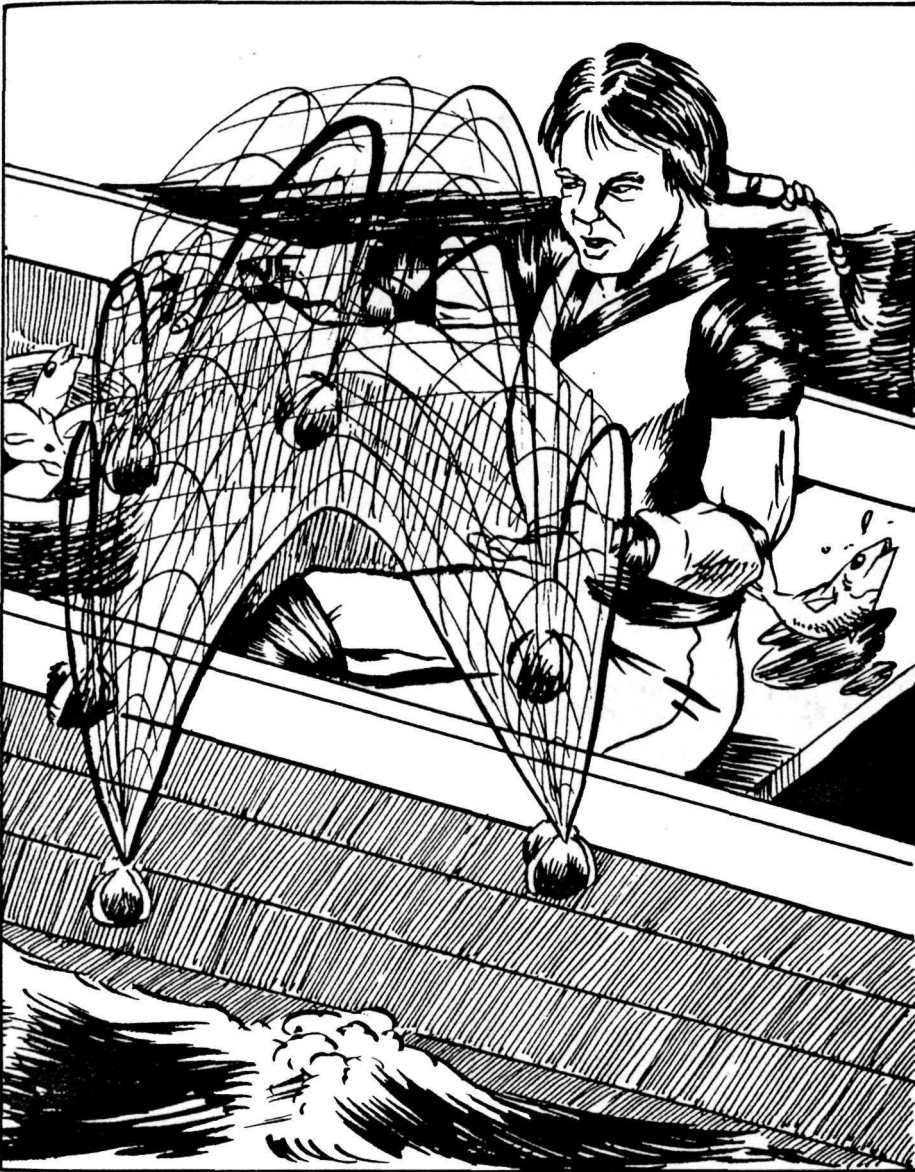
The clan house is the central axis of Madlander daily life, especially during the cold months, when its fires are kept stoked and the interior temperature is high enough for folks to strip down to summer clothing. When it's cold, the tendency is for clans to socialize amongst themselves - although guests from other longhouses are always welcome. During summer nights, the village comes out of doors, and the social web connects the entire community.

During the winter, the *wavobak* is hot, somewhere around 80°. The humid air smells of burning spruce and pine; on extremely cold days the smokeholes are left closed, and an eye-burning haze wafts down from the roof. Clan members lounge around enjoying the heat; the honest reek of perspiration soaks the air. If food is cooking, this adds flavor to the heady mix of aromas. Stored food - preserves, dried meat and fish - supply a constant but subtle layer of odor underlying all of these.

The air will also be thick with sound. The low crackling of the fire is now and then pierced by the popping explosions of burning sap. A dozen or so conversations compete with one another in volume, as clan members tell tales, gossip, plan expeditions and meals, joke and tease, and play games. Children scream and chatter. Older folks shout their conversations from platform to platform, not wishing to stir from their settled positions. This chorus is punctuated by the snoring of early dozers.

As they talk, many clan members will be working - making, repairing or decorating pots, nets, weapons, clothing, jewelry, barrels, and so on. Kids will be running about, terrorizing their parents each time they narrowly miss leaping into the fire trough. Couples will be cuddling.

In the summer, cooking, craft work and socializing take place around the village's central fire pit; the *wavobak* will be quiet. Its atmosphere smells fresher, but nature keeps the temperature and humidity up. Sometimes a breeze from the sea will breathe cool, salty air through the opened doors. At night, as the clan sleeps, the sound of waves breaking against the shore will creep into the building, washing over the snores of sleepers and the slaps of hands against flesh as biting insects whirr about



Medicinal Tubers

Life in the Mad Lands provides plenty of opportunity for injury, and its people don't have the access to the healing magic taken for granted in most fantasy backgrounds. GMs will need a mechanism to allow Madlander characters to recover quickly from harm; otherwise, they'll find their campaigns developing a viciously high mortality rate. The following solution perhaps nibbles a bit at the edges of believability, but players accept narrative conveniences that keep their characters breathing! It's not impossible that medicinal tubers are an anomaly - an example of *beneficial* magic. A Madlander would be sickened by this avenue of speculation, however.

Some tubers, worthless as food items, contain active ingredients which have remarkable natural healing properties when correctly distilled into medicinal balms and solutions.

Foremost among these is the salve known as *vivtak*, a sweet-smelling brown paste made from two rare tubers and a specific type of mushroom, none of which have been domesticated - they must be gathered out in the bush while in season. When this salve is placed on a wound, it heals 4 hit points per day provided the patient remains at rest. It restores only hit points associated with the wound it's placed on. *Vivtak*, given time, will heal the gravest of injuries, but will not regenerate lost tissue or reattach severed body parts.

Wippi ak is a nauseating brew of similarly rare tubers and squid brain extract. It acts as a universal antidote, clearing the system of any poisons within 24 hours. It also cures physical addictions - to *zoxibek* for example - although this typically takes 1-2 weeks of small dosages, and does not remove psychological dependencies.

The salty powder *kanpev* erases all of an individual's memories of the last 2d+24 hours when ingested. It is useful in helping those who have just undergone traumatic experiences that might lead to madness if not forgotten. At the GM's discretion, a subject who has undergone *kanpev* treatment may suddenly have all of the horrible memories rush back on him if he runs into a similar situation again. Roll vs. IQ to avoid this effect; subjects involuntarily being dosed with *kanpev* also roll vs. IQ to resist.

Madlander-healers have at their disposal other natural treatments for common diseases, but none with the miracle-cure properties of these three. Supplies will be precious, held only by village healers - there's rarely enough to allow routine hunting or fishing parties to take any. Occasionally, for a mission where great risk is expected, a few doses of *vivtak* might be sent along. But most of the time, casualties must be hauled back to a village to receive treatment.

their workloads are easier and provide fewer chances for embarrassment.) If this distribution would mean an excess of crab boats, the extra men from each clan will amalgamate themselves into an extra drift-net crew.

Boats will be captained by the fisher in the clan with the highest combined average in Seamanship and Leadership. (A hunter has his Leadership rating halved the moment he steps on deck.) Valued crew members will be those with high ratings in Area Knowledge, Fishing, Naturalist, Navigation, Seamanship, Weather Sense, and Zoology. Breath Control and Swimming are useful individual survival skills. Detect Lies, Diplomacy and Fast-Talk come in handy when negotiating with seals. Crab fishers will need Boating rather than Seamanship. Around half of any crew's men will be hunters with low skill ratings in these areas.

Food and Drink

Madlanders take enormous pleasure in food. Great attention is paid to the textures, smells, and tastes of the most casual meal. Even small children can expound like gourmets on the effects of different quantities of a given spice. Madlander food is heavy in texture and strong in flavor. Outsiders find most dishes overpoweringly pungent, but Madlanders are attuned to their subtleties.

The uniqueness of Madlander cuisine is derived from the wide variety of tubers - plants with enlarged underground stems that are eaten as vegetables - found here. They grow quickly in a single short season that begins with planting near the end of spring and ends with a harvest several weeks before the end of summer. Cultivation takes place in the sandy soil of the village itself, in small, carefully tended plots. Village women scrupulously care for them, since they face a number of threats that can cause spoilage or destroy them entirely.

Tuber plots must be vigorously weeded. Wild grasses and flowers compete with the tubers for scarce nutrients. Also, most of the spice tubers are likely to absorb flavor from other plants which root next to them.

Insects are also a major threat. Several moth species deposit caterpillars on tuber plant leaves; if the leaves are eaten the entire plant will yield undersized, withered vegetables or die altogether. Village women must examine each leaf regularly during caterpillar season; there is no way to combat them except removing them individually by hand. Songbirds feed on caterpillars, but are best kept off the plants with nets, since they tend to shred the leaves while catching them. Instead, the picked-off worms are given to hunters, who bind them with fine netting into balls for use as bait when collecting birds.

Hungry gods, particularly Zewa Zab and sometimes Bubzavav, are another menace to tuber crops, less common but infinitely more devastating. If a god decides to visit a village and devour its harvest, the only thing to do is run for cover and hope no people get eaten for dessert.

The soil needs extensive fertilization to remain rich enough to sustain crops. But, due to the flavor-absorbing properties of many of the tubers, this must be carefully done. The soils are treated only after the crops are harvested, when they are overlaid with a blanket of mulch containing tuber leaves and stems, fish and mammal entrails, and human waste. As these decompose over fall and winter, they leach nutrients back into the soil. By the time next planting comes, the active ingredients that might affect the flavor of the tubers have dissipated.

Once harvested, the tubers must be stored according to exacting specifications. Fresh tubers are placed inside large pine barrels which have been coated inside with beeswax to prevent their contents from tasting "piney." They are then sealed shut with wax to protect them from infestation by beetles and weevils. Lids must be resealed after each opening. The barrels are stored on shelves high overhead in the *wavobaks*, their bottoms and sides coated on the outside with a fish oil

Cooking

Madlanders have developed a number of different cooking methods to add variety to their dishes. Food is cooked over wood fires with cookware of clay or iron.

Meats and seafood can be grilled, pan-fried, boiled, or cooked in the *kavi a*. The *kavi a* is an enclosed pottery dome about three feet in height, with a three-foot diameter base. A small opening on one side is covered with a hide flap, which is moved aside when placing or removing food. Before cooking, the *kavi a* is heated in a fire for several hours, until its inner surfaces are searing hot. Food is placed inside the dome on skewers, or, if it's sufficiently sticky, is slapped right onto the sides. Grilled meats are usually marinated in thick, spicy sauces to add flavor; pan-fried foods are cooked in heavy, spiced fish oils. Boiled meats are usually found in soups. Tubers may also be cooked any of the above ways, or in clay steamers.

Food preservation is practiced on a large scale. Tubers are made into preserves and stored in waxed barrels or clay pots. Fish are dried on racks, closely guarded from marauding sea birds and seals that come in the night. Meats are dried and treated with *nivi* to make trail jerky.

During cold months and rainy days, cooking is done indoors. The center aisle of each *wavobak* has a cooking station for each family. All of the clan's cooks coordinate their meals so that each is responsible for large quantities of each dish, which are then served to the whole clan at mealtime. In good weather, however, the cooking for the entire village is done at a large central fire pit, where all cooks will put together a great smorgasbord of delights.

A typical communal meal would include dishes like robin's egg and bear paw soup, *bozatu* pancakes, *kavvi* preserve stir-fry, pan-blackened squid, mashed *kakew* in venison gravy, grilled whale blubber marinated in a sweet *zoxibek* sauce, tuna steaks, herring crisped in the *kavi a*, vole and stag kidney stew, fresh *katti* and ground porcupine in *pi ev* fish sauce, washed down with spring water and a choice of flavored *zoxibeks*.



that field mice and squirrels hate. Even with these precautions, persistent vermin can infest a barrel or two.

Other tubers are prepared before storage. The first step of preparation is shredding, done with sharp iron graters. Some tubers are then stored freshly shredded in brine-filled barrels. Most are subsequently dried out in the sun on racks of fine netting. The nets must be constantly watched during the drying process to shoo off marauding birds and rodents. (Young boys are taught to use slingshots during tuber drying, bagging unwary pests as their first game.)

The most commonly-cultivated tubers are:

Bozatu. This large, starchy vegetable, much like a slightly sour potato, is the workhorse of Madlander cooking. Whether mashed, fried in fish oil, boiled or dried into flour to make the flat cakes that are the closest thing the villagers have to bread, the *bozatu* is the staple of the local diet. Around 60 percent of the total tuber crop of any village will be *bozatu*.

Kakew. The small tuber root of this plant makes a sour/sweet spice when dried and powdered. It is the only tuber with edible leaves - those of other plants are too bitter for human consumption, and some have mild poisons that induce nausea. The *kakew* is cultivated mostly for the leaves, with all but the best roots being discarded or traded away. *Kakew* greens are at their best when fresh, boiled or pan-fried, but they're also preserved in brine to be eaten out of season. Many Madlander children dream of a land where no pickled *kakew* is served.



Builder's Pride

One longstanding stereotype in Madlander tradition is that of the pompous, know-it-all carpenter. Many jokes and stories deal with builders who puff themselves up with pride, believing that their particular skills confer special wisdom on them. Even in *Zo Do Wabda* tales, the role of comic-relief walk-on is often filled by a builder who demands extra space in a *wavobak* because he helped replace its roof, or who tries to tell a captain how to run his boat because he installed its deck.

These comic builder characters specialize in elaborate rationalizations to support their claims. For example, one popular anecdote is that of the boastful carpenter who insists that he should be clan elder despite his youth. He explains that in repairing the longhouse, he came to understand the building as if it were alive, and merged his soul with that of the building's wood. Since much of the *wavobak* is made of trees hundreds of years old, that makes him spiritually older than everyone in the village, and therefore deserving of great moral authority. At this point in the story a great menace rears its head, demanding to eat a clan elder. The carpenter rapidly develops a completely opposite rationalization, but is so obnoxious that the creature eats him anyway.

As with any stereotype, this is often unfair. Most carpenters acutely resent this characterization and go out of their way to argue with storytellers who perpetuate it. This approach unfortunately tends to make the builder look exactly like the caricature he's fighting against. Other carpenters instead become extremely meek and deferential so they won't be seen as typical. Others actually embrace the stereotype and have a jolly old time being utterly obstreperous; since they're expected to behave like irritating martinets anyway, they figure they might as well make the best of it. Some even become carpenters because they think it's a license to be vexatious.

It isn't clear why this stereotype developed; carpenters have different theories to explain why they're picked on all the time. The tradition goes back into the mists of time: maybe the first Madlander to figure out how to bend a plank was insufferable, and his personality has tainted the vocation forever.

Kawi. This plant yields a long sword-shaped red vegetable which is sweet when cooked lightly and slightly bitter when blanched. It is shredded and preserved in brine to make a heady equivalent of cole slaw.

Pi ev. The edible part of the *pi ev* plant is an underground cluster of brown chestnut-sized roots. A few grizzled types may eat them raw, but they're powerfully hot and salty, like radishes from hell. Dried and powdered, they make an authoritative flavoring, valued for its ability to spice up bland meats and mask the unpleasantness of gamy ones.

Katti. A flat, curiously-shaped vegetable that resembles a "U" or horseshoe, the *katti* has a juicy, sweet orange flesh. Treasured because it's tasty even when raw, *katti* is an essential element of any pack of trail rations. It's also served mashed as a hot vegetable, and is dried and powdered to make a sweetener for other dishes.

Nuwidap. A smaller, sweeter relative of the *bozatu*.

Te ekke. The *te ekke* is a white, spherical tuber with no flavor of its own. It is, however, the tuber most susceptible to flavor contamination from other plants or substances in its soil. This actually makes it a prized food item, since it can be made to take on any number of different flavors. Expert cooks and brewers carefully grow small plots of *te ekke* with other plants, from wildflowers to tree seedlings to grasses, so its roots will absorb various subtle tastes. Other substances laced into beds of growing *te ekke* plants can also serve as flavoring agents: fish oil, meat gravy and imported berry juices are commonly used. Seasoned *te ekke* tubers are sometimes served as cooked vegetables but are more often made into spices.

Nivi. Otherwise inedible, this rosy brown root, after being soaked in brine for a year and then subjected to a drying process, can be reduced to a powder which acts as a powerful preservative of most dried fish and meat. The fish or venison jerky in any ration pack will be treated with it.

Alcohol and Society

Nuwidap, *kavvi* and *katti* are the primary ingredients of *zoxibek*, the Madlanders' only alcoholic beverage. Thick, dark and foamy, *zoxibek* is a formidable brew with a throat-constricting sweetness and a sour aftertaste. In its strongest form, it can kick like a moose, and - as a joke of the Northern Tribelands goes - it smells like one, too. Madlanders love it.

Both men and women brew *zoxibek*, and great status goes to folks who develop popular brews. Sweet tubers are mashed and left to ferment, sealed in either wooden or clay vessels: every brewer has his own highly specific method. This mash will be flavored with a range of "secret ingredients," usually a number of differently treated *te ekkes*. After fermentation, the liquid is decanted and mixed with spring water, and is then aged further. The final brew may then be diluted further before serving, to the taste of the drinker.

Children are given highly weakened *zoxibek* to drink; after reaching adulthood they're allowed to drink the pure stuff. After a while they usually start to dilute it again.

Although Madlanders love their *zoxibek*, they don't love alcoholism. A brewhead is of no use to his people and is a drain on resources. Considerable pressure from peers and elders is placed on anyone who seems to be relying too much on its intoxicating effects.

Architecture

The *wavobak*, or Madlander longhouse, is the apex of local architecture. *Wavobaks* tend to be built to the same basic specifications, even though occupancy can vary by as much as 30 percent depending on the current size of a clan. This is to avoid the necessity of rebuilding the longhouse if clan size increases a genera-

tion or two down the line. A *wavobak* lasts for decades; its life will probably be extended considerably by piecemeal repairs. Some older *wavobaks* will retain none of their original timber. New ones are usually built from scratch only after a house is destroyed. Fire is the *wavobak's* main natural enemy; supernatural menaces also claim their share.

These buildings look very much like oversized boats, with a stern on each end, flipped over onto the ground. This is no coincidence; the same techniques used in boat building are used in architecture. A *wavobak* is approximately 36 feet long and usually somewhere between 17 and 18 feet wide. Average height is 18 feet from the tallest point to ground level. Madlanders are used to living at close quarters and feel secure when their homes are crowded.

Wavobaks don't have floors; instead, the ground is exposed rock. This has been worked to smooth any sharp edges, and a trough is cut in the rock lengthwise at its central point as a fire pit. Sleeping areas are usually covered in a several-inches-deep layer of wood chips and shavings, which are periodically changed. Living spaces for each nuclear family are separated from one another by hide curtains; when the number of families in a clan changes the curtains are rearranged to give everyone equal space. Above the living areas is a wooden platform that comes out about seven feet from the wall, seven feet from ground level. The platforms are used for storage during the summer time; during the winter, when the fires are lit and the warmest air rises, the ground level is used as storage and the platforms as living areas.



Jewelry and Ornamentation

Both sexes adorn themselves with baubles. Men favor bracelets and necklaces; women like ear and nose rings as well as various types of hair fasteners.

Madlander jewelry is made mostly from animal by-products. Few gems occur naturally here; even the semiprecious stones that are found - quartz and amethyst crystals, most notably - are avoided for adornment. This is because they're associated with soulless magic (see p. 100).

Men use necklaces and bracelets to display their past accomplishments. If a fisher participates in the harpooning of a killer whale, he'll often request some of its teeth and string them on a necklace. Similarly, hunters adorn themselves with bear claws or pieces of stag antler.

Souvenirs from monster encounters must be treated with caution: no one wants to discover he's accidentally donned a shamanic fetish as a fashion accessory. Trophies from slain creatures or foreigners are usually smashed or altered in some way before being strung on as jewelry. For example, someone who captures a Savarginian's emerald ring will pry out and discard the stone before stringing the setting on his necklace. Ears or fingers of certain enemies can be pickled and added to a trophy string, those which, according to Madlander lore, are unlikely to come back as vengeful ghosts (see p. 70). Pickled trophies are considered acceptable when the slain are Togethians, headless, heightless, skinless or soundless. (Heightless trophies are particularly treasured, because the creatures are so hard to kill.) Doing this with Madlander outlaws, or combatants from the Whiteness or Northern Tribelands, is thought barbaric. Savarginians are a gray area - generally they'd only be pickled if they'd been particularly brutal opponents. Taking trophies from soulless, bloodless or the undead is thought to be risky - there might be nasty supernatural repercussions.

Women's jewelry is usually made of worked and polished bone or seashells. Several species of clam live along the shoreline, and although they aren't eaten because they carry disease, their shells can be made into quite attractive, colorful jewelry pieces.

Women also use porcupine quills extensively, dyeing them a variety of colors and sewing them to tunics, cloaks, and hat brims in patterns according to their clan styles.

Hairstyles

Madlanders have thick, dark hair. Most folks have straight hair; the remaining 20% sport nothing more dramatic than gentle waves. People born with light-colored or curly hair will be seen as freakish and regarded with suspicion.

Men cut their hair once a year, just before the first departure of the fishing fleet. This is part of each man's individual preparation for the rigors of the season; fishers look forward to it (calling it "shedding the burden") while hunters dread what they call "the scalping." Fishers tend to cut more than hunters; they may shave their scalps completely, where their land-loving brethren will leave enough stubble to resemble a crew cut. A man's wife - or mother or aunt if he's unmarried - assists.

Men with long hair may let it fall naturally, or tie it up in one or more ponytails. Single tails are commonest, though some individualists may sport up to five. Fishers are more likely to use tails than hunters.

Women's hair grows faster and longer - if it's not cut, it can reach waist-length. Most keep their hair just past shoulder-length, in long, thin braids - eight would be an average number - which have objects laced into them, like carved and polished clam shells, hollowed-out and lacquered crab legs, dyed gut strings, songbird and mouse skulls or colored porcupine quills.

Both men and women color their hair, mixing natural pigments with animal fats to make a coloring agent that can be easily washed off. The most popular artificial color is white - Madlanders revere age, so white hair is seen as attractive, conferring status. Actual white-haired folk who care about fashion top this by wearing colors that wouldn't show up on a dark-haired person: scarlet, bright yellow, turquoise. Inventive types use streaks of different colors, or even paint clan patterns into their hair. Light-haired people often wear black hair coloring to hide their unusual appearance.

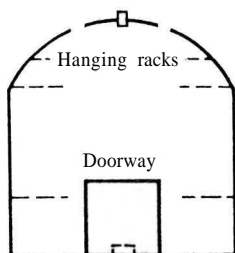
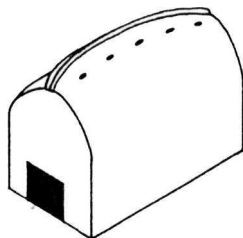


Cut into the roof along the center line are a series of smokeholes. These can be covered with hide to regulate temperature. There is a large door at each end of the building; during the winter they're fitted with wooden pieces that reduce the size of the entranceways to the barest minimum. In the hot months, the doorways are left wide open. The longhouses are positioned to catch the best cross-breeze during the summer for cooling.

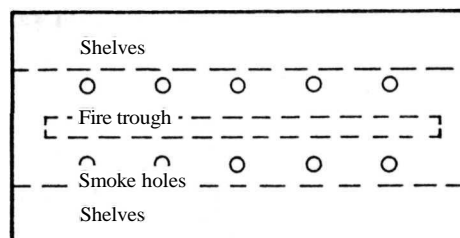
The curving roof is constructed with planks bent according to a slow, exacting process which uses animal-gut cords to warp them into the desired shape. Often the planks used in a *wavobak* will be ones rejected at some point in the boat-building process; a leaky roof is less disastrous than a leaky hull. Wooden pegs are used to fix planks together; although the boatbuilders have the ironworking technology to make nails, they reject them on aesthetic grounds.

Wavobak

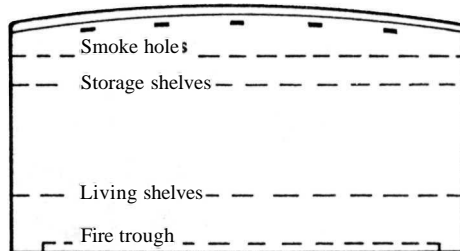
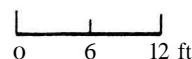
(Madlander Longhouse)



Section view



Floor plan



Side view

Tech Level

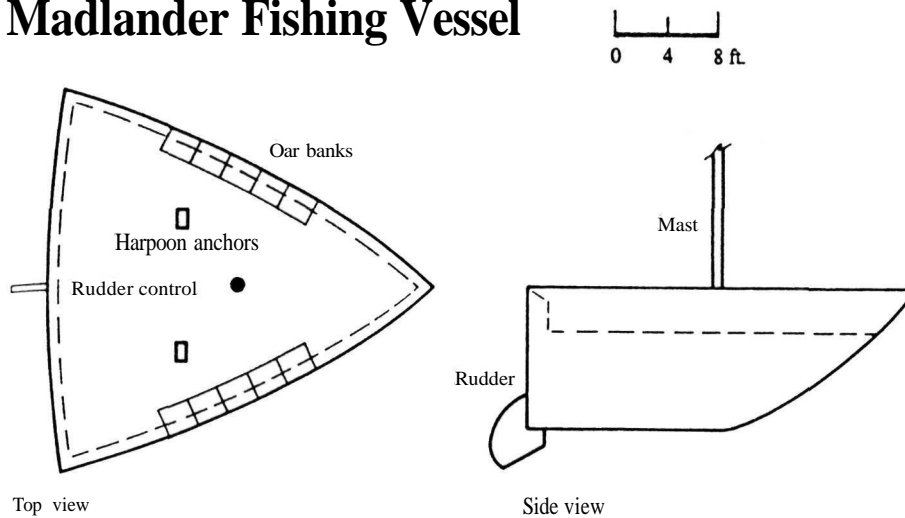
Madlander culture's tech level, 2, is attributable to their basic iron-working ability. They do not, however, use the wheel or have a written language. At some point in the distant past, the Madlanders learned iron-working techniques from another culture - most likely from captured Togethians, who in turn probably learned from Savarginians. Madlanders have not expanded the possibilities of iron past a few basic uses. In fact, it's probable that their competence has degraded over the centuries.

Madlander smiths make only a few items from iron - swords, knives, spearheads and hatchets most commonly. Harpoons and anchors are also made in local smithies. Techniques for making other items have been lost, and conservative Madlanders see no need to develop them. They're culturally biased toward making items out of wood or bone. Ironworking is done by males, while woodworking is considered female labor. Because women devote more time to craftwork than men, most useful items will be made of wood. If women learned smithing techniques, one might see a broader range of metal items. But again, deep-rooted conservatism prevents such a development.

Women also make a wide variety of items - almost all cookware - out of clay. In addition to a smithy, each village has its own kiln.

To acquire raw materials for both technologies, men must venture far into the interior on prospecting missions. These trips for ore or clay can serve as openers for adventures.

Madlander Fishing Vessel



Boatbuilding

Madlander fishing vessels are sturdy, squat constructions built for safety and durability. Speed and maneuverability matter little; the important thing is getting to where the fish are and hauling them in. The major threats to crews are storms and killer whales, both of which cause casualties by overturning vessels. So the boats are designed to be as stable as possible. They don't need to be much more than big steadfast rafts with space for men and their catch.

Boats are named after fish, plants or animals, never after humans.

The standard Madlander fishing vessel is about 28 feet long; its stern, from which the nets are trawled, is the same width. A hold below deck is used to store the catch. The crew sleeps on deck on sleeping pallets; the only shelter from the elements is the hide sail, which is taken down in a storm and set up as a tent.

This single sail, made of treated deer hide, is the main means of propulsion. It attaches to a short mast that rises up from the center of the deck. The boat also has five oar stations on each side for propulsion when the wind doesn't cooperate. For navigation, a large rudder is controlled by a lever near the stern; lever and rudder are connected by gut cord run through a series of wooden pulleys.

Boat builders make the hull with planks slowly bent into shape by gut cords; planks deemed unsuitable are used for housebuilding. The planks are fastened with wooden pegs and a powerful glue made from rendered fish and game by-products. It takes a crew of ten under the supervision of a master builder about two months to build a new boat.

Below the waterline, the hulls are equipped with a series of small wooden spikes that protrude from the planking. These are sharpened before each expedition. They're intended to discourage killer whales from ramming the sides of vessels. The measure isn't much use against a determined or enraged whale, since the spikes aren't long enough to inflict serious harm. Experiments with lengthened spikes haven't worked too well either; the whales can come at them sideways and simply break them off. A hull lined to the teeth with spikes creates too much water resistance. The topic of anti-whale defenses is a hot one around the fire pit; it's the source of the proverb, "If we



Typical Songs

Madlander songs use poetic imagery to deal with inner emotions. They are long, from 20 to 40 minutes. Usually only one song is performed at a single sitting. Their narratives are slimmer than those of popular tales; repetitions of lines are common, and words are used to explore at length one particular state of mind - most often melancholy. Madlander "hurtin' songs" bind the community together and help them deal with life's tragedies. Song sessions are often held after a death; since Madlanders cannot mourn specific loved ones, they use song to release their sorrow in an oblique way that will not attract ghostly attention.

Some popular Madlander songs include:

Atgevot and Ge Teba. This epic alternates its point of view between two characters, one male and one female; it weaves men's and women's voices together in a complex pattern of harmonies and lyrical meaning. Atgevot, a young man kidnapped by Savarginian slavers, describes his tribulations over the years as he passes from owner to owner in that awful land across the sea. Back in his home village, a woman named Ge Teba pines for Atgevot, whom she loved, seemingly unrequitedly. The song follows each as they age, Atgevot undergoing one hardship after another and Ge Teba retreating into a shell of regret. He doesn't think of her until finally, as an old man, he lies dying in a prison cell in the City of Dragons; he sees a vision of her and imagines what his life would have been had he been able to woo and marry her. The choral lines reach a swooping, ecstatic climax as both die simultaneously.

Be Edgak's Lament. An outlaw living as a hermit in the forest regrets the string of events that led to his banishment, beginning with the accidental slaying of a child. At the song's climax, a group of hunters approaches; he intentionally provokes them into killing him so his misery will end.

The Tribunal. Each voice type takes the part of an elder debating whether or not to banish a young couple accused of shamanism. Finally it becomes clear that one of the elders is herself a shaman who has falsely accused them; she commits suicide as they are vindicated.

Bevudi O and Guntav. This humorous song is about two fast friends who vie for the love of the same young woman. Each woos her extravagantly, piling one outrageous boast upon another. Eventually the woman chooses a third fellow, who has been out accomplishing things while these two have been bragging.

Feasts and Festivals

Madlanders don't follow a regular schedule of public celebrations. Because they don't practice religion, they lack the calendar of observances common to most cultures. Likewise, their disregard for history prevents them from commemorating important events of the past. Instead, their festivals are held on an ad hoc basis, when there is some immediate good fortune to celebrate.

Typical causes for celebration would be a surplus of food or a triumph over a danger to the community. Less frequently, a village might choose to honor a valued citizen at the time of his wedding or the birth of his child. Food surplus parties are only held in times of great abundance; there's no point in eating up the whole reason for the celebration. The size of the festival depends on the magnitude of the event; a village with a particularly large surplus will invite neighboring communities. Feasts held to mark the vanquishing of enemies will involve all of the communities who were threatened by them. Wedding or birth parties are usually confined to a single village.

If many communities are involved in a feast, the pride of the host village is at stake. Its best cooks and brewers will be under pressure to outdo themselves. Village sportsmen train hard to uphold local honor. *Vedodit* trainers spruce up their beetles' paint jobs. Top *pi ewe* players spend days engrossed in strategy.

Feasts and festivals are devoted to sports, games, and the copious consumption of food and drink. Contests of skills are also popular, as famed practitioners of every art from archery to pottery to brewing compete for glory. Storytellers and musicians gather together to swap repertoires and show off their talent. There are sometimes even practical joke contests that award prizes for the most intricate prank.

Festivals attended by several communities provide great opportunities to make new acquaintances. Many marriageable young folk meet their future mates at these affairs. Elders also meet to discuss matters of interest to the entire area.

GMs will find that festivals function for players much as they do for Madlanders; the lighter challenges of a vole-racing championship or practical joke competition will be welcome relief from life-or-death monster encounters. For GMs, they provide opportunities to introduce or develop subtler plot lines, where the stakes are emotional instead of physical.

could build a better whale-spike, someone would have done it." This is one area in which a clever PC could leave his mark on Madlander life forever; many fishers lie awake at night thinking how frustrating the spike problem is.

Ships are beached and covered with treated hide tarps when fishing season is not in progress. During the season, they are anchored off-shore. Most Madlander village sites were originally chosen for natural docking features. Some have convenient rocky outcrops or spits from which to board anchored ships - as does Kawa Tok (see map, p. 115). Others are sited on deep shelves that drop right off from the shore.

Costume

Summer outfits are designed to be cool; men wear only breechcloths, sandals, and hats. Women have lengthened breechcloths which extend down to the top of the knee. They also add a cutoff sleeveless tunic that covers shoulders and chest. Tunics and breechcloths are made of softened deer hide, a supple fabric that feels good against the skin. Sandals are made of deer hide, too, subjected to a tanning process that makes it quite tough and hard. Several layers of deer leather, cemented with fish glue, are used in each sole.

The centerpiece of the Madlander hat is a cap of hardened deer hide. While still soft, the hide is cut and shaped. Then it's tanned and dipped repeatedly in fish glue. (Hardened hide pieces are equivalent to light leather armor.) The summer hat then has a very wide oval brim sewn to it to protect the eyes from sunlight. The brim is as much as three and a half times as wide as the cap itself; it's made of a stiff felt-like fabric made by subjecting untanned hides to a glue treatment.

Winter outfits for both men and women begin with modified hats; instead of the wide brim, they have flaps of rabbit fur that come down to cover both ears and the back of the head. Sometimes a rim of fur is attached to the cap at the front for decoration.

Tunics and lower garments of soft deerskin are lined on the inside with the furs of various animals - fur scraps are not thrown away, but sewn into linings. Deerskin is cut to fit, waxed and glued to make tough, moisture-resistant boots. Waterproof mittens are made from otter skin. Rabbit fur trim is added to the collar, the ends of sleeves and pants legs, and the bottom of the tunic. For women, the leggings go only from the top of the knee to the bottom of the boot; the area from waist to knee is covered by a deerskin skirt with a lining of thick bear fur.

Winter travelers add a heavy bear-hide cloak with rabbit fur trim. Women's cloaks come down to the back of the knee; men's, to the waist. Each come with laces so the wearer can seal himself inside his cloak if he sits with his knees up against his chest. As armor, this outfit is equivalent to regular winter clothing.

Men add a third outfit for fishing. Designed for maximum water resistance, this is basically a suit of deer-leather armor with a hard glue-and-wax coating to retard mist and rain. At joints and breaks in the armor, the fisherman wears a wrapping of waxed birch bark. Boots and short rain cape are made from treated bear hide. The fishing hat is a version of the basic cap that extends along back and sides. This outfit may also be worn on land during heavy rainstorms. Consider it light leather armor when determining PD and DR.

Music

Madlander instruments are manufactured by women and played by men.

The lead instrument in Madlander music is the *zawadat*, a long wooden flute carved from pine. It is the *zawadat* that carries the melody of Madlander instrumental music; its player dictates the tune, speed and structure of a piece, with the other instruments functioning as accompaniment to it.

Accompanying the *zawadat* player(s) will typically be four to eight percussionists and one or two men on *vawabo gazawat*. Madlanders produce many different sizes of drum, all with heads made from deer hide. The larger drums are bowl-shaped, like our kettledrums. Small drums are struck with the hand, while the bowl drums are hit with wooden sticks wrapped in moleskin. Drum bodies may be of pine or fired clay; each material yields a different sound. (Pine-bodied drums make a sharp noise, clay a deep one.)

The *vawabo gazawat* is a primitive stringed instrument, with a pair of gut strings resonating against a three-foot wooden bowl on a stick. It's played with a bow also strung with gut. It provides a steady bass line that anchors and subtly comments on the contributions of other players.

Strictly instrumental playing is highly improvisational, although it is always based on time-honored patterns and structures. Vocal music is more set in form. Both men and women sing in chorus to drum and *vawabo gazawat* accompaniment; sometimes a *zawadat* will join in, but in a strictly secondary role. Vocal harmonies are extraordinarily complex, with four types of voice recognized for each gender.

Where stories tend to tell of adventures and remarkable feats, songs specialize in everyday feelings of emotional entanglement.



Games and Sports

Like members of most low-tech cultures, Madlanders have more leisure time to dispose of than moderns. Skillful athletes and gamers are highly respected; any type of match is likely to attract a knot of rapt spectators.



Sportsmanship

As part of their fierce devotion to sports and games, Madlanders refuse to tolerate poor sportsmanship. Villages are small, and the pool of players limited. No one wants to get shut out for cheating or being a poor loser, since there's only one game in town. These recreations are a refuge from conflict, not a substitute for it, so it's easy for Madlanders to genuinely believe that good conduct is more important than winning. Cheating is alien to the tension-deflating purpose of Madlander sports and games: anyone caught at it would immediately be suspected of being possessed or shamanic.

The exception to this principle is *Trouble Fish*, in which sneaky or underhanded tactics are admired; the game is a test of cleverness as much as anything else. Any tricky ploys, short of washing off a fish, are encouraged in a spirit of ruthless fun. *Trouble Fish* has a slightly different social function than other sports: here villagers can sublimate antisocial feelings or harmlessly avenge a slight by whacking the object of their irritation with some mucilage-covered seafood. "You fished me" is a common phrase, spoken with grudging admiration to someone who's put one over on the speaker.

There is a line between ruthless and reckless, of course - one *Zo Do Wabda* tale has him yelling, "The skinless are coming," and fishing his friends as they run for their weapons. Then, naturally, the real skinless show up...

Gambling Without Money

Wagering on the outcome of a beetle fight or foot race transforms a competition between a few people into a communal event: if everyone has a stake in its outcome, all are participating. Madlanders love to gamble; often spectators have more fun than athletes.

However, with no currency and a system of communal ownership, there's nothing to gamble. Madlanders solve this by making a completely worthless item - the *ve iwwu e*, the same inedible fish used in Trouble Fish - the unit of exchange.

In fact, Madlanders don't bet real *ve iwwu e*, but hypothetical ones; nobody wants to keep a bunch of stinky, foul-tasting fish around just to bet with. Someone with a good memory is assigned to keep track of each person's supply of imaginary *ve iwwu e*. Children are given a hundred of these nonexistent fish when they first show an interest in wagering. Many villagers will have negative numbers of them. The point is simply to keep track of who the village's shrewdest wagerers are at any given moment. Although the only benefit of a large stockpile of *ve iwwu e* is the esteem of one's fellows, the competition for the most fictional fish is intense.

This can confuse outsiders. One Savarginian scholar, who visited various Madlander villages several times before the locals were finally forced to kill him, became convinced that *ve iwwu e* were a genuine form of currency. He imported an entire galleon full of them expecting to make a killing. He was astounded at the mockery when he tried to use his fish to buy *wavobaks* and to corner the tuber market.



Beetle wrestling. The pugnacious *vedodit*, or Madlander fighting beetle, is central to a sport indulged in by all ages. The *vedodit* is a bulbous black insect an inch in diameter; in the wild, males fight each other with their enlarged forelegs and mandibles to contest the right to mate with females. Madlanders capture and train the beetles to fight on cue. The bugs rarely harm each other in these contests: only rarely will a leg or mandible be ripped off. Usually they just flip each other onto their backs; in the wild the contest continues until one tires. In a wrestling match, the win goes to the trainer of the first beetle to tip its opponent over four times. Matches take place in wooden boxes of regulation size, covered in a fine netting to prevent the combatants from simply flying off. Beetle-wrestling enthusiasts devote great time and energy to the care of their beetles. The insects are named, and their carapaces painted in clan colors.

Foot races. The traditional Madlander foot race is almost as much an obstacle course as a track event. Each village has a traditional route along its rocky outcrops that every child learns as a youngster. Races are often challenges between individuals. Men compete against other men, and women against women; children race amongst themselves by age group rather than gender.

Pi Ewe. This is a betting game played with a set of 73 clay tiles which are painted on one side with a variety of colored designs. From three to six players draw tiles from the deck and attempt to arrange them into traditional patterns that score points. There are thousands of accepted patterns which players must know; each has its place in a point hierarchy. Every round, players add to or subtract from the pot according to the value of their patterns.

Trouble Fish. The *ve iwwu e* is a small, inedible nuisance fish. During the spring, Madlanders dispose of these in large free-for-all games of Trouble Fish, in which each player is given a clay quiver containing three *ve iwwu e* smeared in glue. The object of the game is to hit other players with the gooey fish - which then sticks to them - without being hit oneself. Players hit with the fish are out of the game; their unused fish are captured by the person who tagged them out. The last unfished player in the game wins. Players aren't allowed to leave the village boundaries; they can't physically touch one another with anything other than the *ve iwwu e*. Otherwise, anything goes. The fish can only be removed after soaking for several minutes in sea water; any wet players are disqualified, the assumption being that they've been hit by a fish already. If at any point all the remaining players are out of ammo, a time-out is called and each is given another three sticky fish to continue the game with. Players may be of any age or gender; speed is crucial, but sneakiness can be just as effective.

Vole bag. A loosely-stuffed bag, covered in vole skin and about the size of a cantaloupe, is the ball for this team sport. Any number can play, so long as the teams are equal; one team goes hatless to identify themselves. Players form a large circle, hats and hatless alternating. A referee stands in the middle. The object is to bump the vole bag at a member of the opposite team in such a way that he won't be able to hit it back up into the air. If the bag hits the ground, the closest player to it is out of the game. Players who touch the bag immediately after another team member are also out. Thus, it's important to get the bag close to the target member of the other team; otherwise you risk getting one of your own players out. The referee settles any questions as to who was closest to the bag when it hit the ground. The team with the last player left wins.

Madlanders also play a simple strategic board game called *tobpe*, and *tippet*, a betting game with dice made of animal bones. They construct elaborate wooden tracks for vole racing. Wrestling is another popular physical sport.

CHARACTERS

4

Madlander characters differ from the PC types common to standard fantasy settings. The effective Madlander hero is a generalist, adept at a particular set of skills that have made the difference between survival and catastrophe for generations. Although each individual has his strengths and weaknesses, an adventurer's comrades will have roughly the same skills, armor and equipment as he does. While it's permissible to play a mysterious outlander or someone with colorful shamanic or sorcerous powers, this in itself imposes a hefty set of constraints. The challenge in building a Madlander PC is to make him unique from the inside, distinguished by his motivations and beliefs, instead of the external qualities marked on his character sheet.



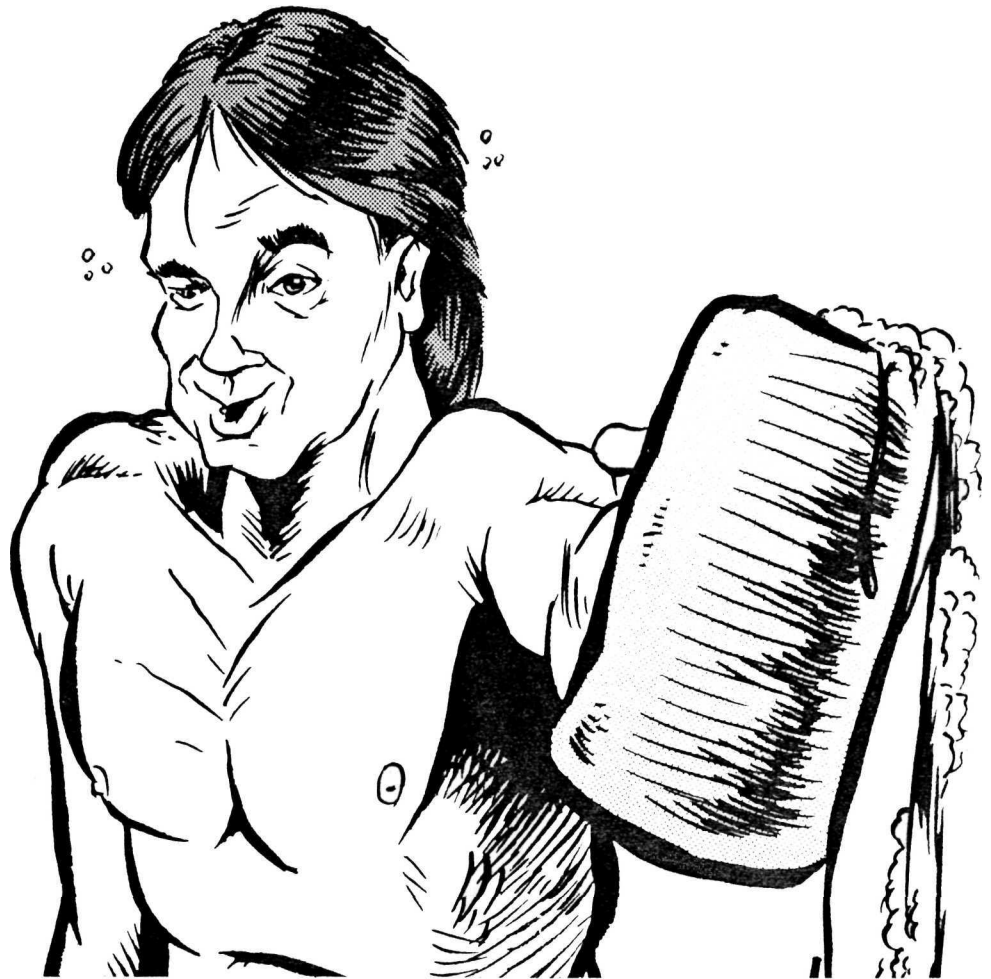
The People

Physically, Madlanders are a smallish, stocky people. Average height is 5'5" for men and 5'3" for women. They have thick, sturdy skeletons. The average individual is muscular and physically fit; over- or under-weight types have a lower chance of survival. They're also subject to cultural prejudice.

Skin color ranges from olive to light brown. Hair is usually black, occasionally brown. Straight hair is the norm; some folks have large natural waves. Eye color is usually brown, with a smattering of greens and hazels. Blond hair and blue eyes do turn up, although both...are extremely rare. Children with either may be suspected of being soulless changelings (see p. 91) and may be killed; this might explain why these features don't often surface from the gene pool. Tightly curled hair is similarly feared. Men do not grow facial hair, though some very old men develop wispy white mustaches and chin whiskers. Body hair is sparse in men of all ages.

Madlanders tend toward blunt, flattened facial features. Cheekbones are generally high and wide. Under the eyes is a layer of fatty tissue that gives the Madlander a perpetual squint; this is a natural protection from the bright sun of summer and its reflection from the winter snows. Otherwise the Madlander face is often on the gaunt side, with skin tight over bone and facial muscle. Lips are small and thin. Again, babies with sharper than normal features may be taken for changelings and killed at birth.

Wrinkles and creases begin to appear on the faces of Madlander men around age 20; women, whose tasks don't expose them to the elements as much, start to wrinkle around 35. Scars are another common feature of Madlander faces and bodies; again, this is true of men more than women. Scars are considered attractive on a man; they show experience.



Creating Distinctive PCs

Instead of a party consisting of a wizard, a warrior, a priest and an assassin, a group of Madlander PCs might be differentiated as the storyteller, the hunter, the fisher, and the agile one. More importantly, an interesting *Mad Lands* campaign depends on creating unique personalities for each player character. Skills and attributes become less important: the crucial choices are of vivid character traits. Eventually that same Madlander party might better be described as the thinker, the forgetful one, the troubled one, and the happy-go-lucky guy.

GMs embarking on a *Mad Lands* campaign can help players find these subtle ways of differentiating their characters. Ask players to submit, along with each new character sheet, a biographical sketch a page or two in length. This shouldn't be used to set the PCs' personalities in stone . . . often the most interesting bits of characterization evolve during play. The idea is simply to invite each player to think about his hero's personality before the game, to lay the groundwork for the three-dimensional portrayal that should emerge as the campaign progresses.

GMs can foster the sense of a pre-existing group interrelated in complex ways. A Madlander party will have an extensive background - its members are people from the same village who have known each other all their lives. The PCs will already have a rich well of shared experience before the first story begins. They will know everything about their fellows except their deepest secrets. Each party member will know the advantages, disadvantages, and skills of his friends as well as his own. Accordingly, just after - or better yet, *during* - character creation, players should pass their character sheets around. They can then relate their PCs' respective traits to one another, inventing anecdotes from the past to explain them. Quirks can cement relationships among the party members. For example, if one PC suffers from Overconfidence, another player might give his

PC "Teases Dax to keep his head from swelling" as a quirk. To add more fuel to the fire, a third player might select "Hates the way Dupazvo Vo always teases Dax," and so on. The great adventure teams of fiction and drama are built around interactions like these. Perhaps a group will even hit on an internal dynamic as appealing as the Kirk-Spock-McCoy triangle.

Similarly, Game Masters should suggest that players connect their characters to their village's NPCs, either through quirks or in their biographies. Establishing pre-existing relationships - as family, friends, lovers, tutors, rivals or whatever - gives the PC a vivid past existence, and aids the GM in generating new plot threads.

Point Costs

Use the suggested *GURPS* point costs for beginning PCs - 100 points plus a maximum of 40 points of disadvantages. The protagonists of a *Mad Lands* game ought to be average men and women forced by harsh circumstances to become heroes. Many of the creatures and sorcerous villains that they will face will be more powerful than they. The odds are stacked against a Madlander from birth. But triumphing over impossible odds is what heroism is all about.

Appearance

Players wishing to create characters who are attractive to the opposite sex should consult p. 20 for a discussion of Madlander standards of physical beauty.

Wealth

The communal economy of the Mad Lands isn't compatible with the assumptions about the nature of Wealth (p. B16) in the *GURPS Basic Set*. There is no currency. The concept of *wedo* (see p. 15) makes the idea of starting wealth irrelevant. Therefore, it isn't possible to spend points on a higher wealth level than average, or get points by choosing a below-average wealth level. Someone who hoards items needed by the village has an Odious Personal Habit; one who hoards weird and useless trash like gold coins or exotic silks has an unusual quirk.

Status

Madlander society isn't organized as a power hierarchy; its concept of status is much less involved than in a setting centered around an aristocracy or military rank. But status is important - it motivates many Madlanders to confront the horrors of the wilderness to bring back meat for the village, or to risk the uncertainties of the sea for the chance of an impressive catch. A person who feeds the village or saves it from supernatural threats ... or who brews up a tasty batch of *zoxibek* ... wins the respect and admiration of his fellows.

"Respect" is a better term for this concept than "status." Madlander culture dictates that everyone, even the tiniest baby, is worthy of respect. Anyone who has survived long enough to take a single breath in this hostile place has done something right. Those who have repeatedly done great deeds to ensure the village's survival deserve greater respect and deference than an inexperienced young hunter just come of age.

Respected villagers are influential in political affairs - their opinions will be solicited first, and given more credence than those of people who haven't accomplished as much. They'll be looked up to as role models by youngsters.

But unlike status in, say, a feudal society, which is based on heredity, a respect level based on one's actions is subject to change. If a once-mighty hunter is now

Height and Weight

Average heights and weights for Madlander characters, based on ST, are as follows:

ST	Height	Weight	ST	Height	Weight
3	4'8"	125 lbs.	10	5'5"	150 lbs.
4	4'9"	130 lbs.	11	5'6"	155 lbs.
5	5'	130 lbs.	12	5'7"	160 lbs.
6	5'1"	135 lbs.	13	5'8"	165 lbs.
7	5'2"	135 lbs.	14	5'9"	170 lbs.
8	5'3"	140 lbs.	15	5'10"	175 lbs.
9	5'4"	145 lbs.	16	5'11"	180 lbs.

For each inch over 5' 11", add 10 lbs. to average height. These tables assume a Madlander male character; for women, subtract 2" from height and 15 lbs. from weight. For foreign characters, use the charts on p. 15 of *GURPS Basic Set*, but subtract 3" in average height.

Clans

The clans of Madlander settlements are named after various sought-after fish species. All Madlander villages include the following clans:

- Bawa Ek Kava (tuna)
- Be Ve Dawak (cod)
- Bodbo (crayfish)
- Dev Za (ocean salmon)
- Gakag (sea bass)
- Goga Ek Goga (haddock)
- Kopod (herring)
- Kada (extra-pungent relative of herring)
- Nozip (small, tasty squid type)
- Tapokpa (flatfish)
- Wikato (bulbous-headed herring)

Villages with twelve clans add:
Ditatex (large-mouthed salmon variant)

Along the south coast, the thirteenth clan will be:

Up Vitug (bottom-feeding tuna with eye-stalks)

On the shores of Itapi At, the thirteenth clan is instead:

Wipid (killer whale)

Clan membership as such has little impact on the personalities of its members; much more important is the influence of the clan elder on his charges. Players should ask for information on the village's elders before deciding which clan they want their characters to belong to.

When visitors appear from another village, the clan to which they belong has the first responsibility for hospitality.

Reputation

Since Status in Madlander society is based on deeds rather than heredity, it overlaps with the territory covered by Reputation in the *GURPS Basic Set*. Also, the idea of having a "rep" implies that people who do not know the individual in question at least know of them. In a Madlander village, everyone knows everyone else. In *Mad Lands*, Reputation refers to a character's image in other villages. Most people with reputations will be known only throughout a small region, like the peninsula Kawa Tok (see p. 114) is situated on. To get a reputation throughout the Mad Lands, a character would have to defeat an incredibly powerful spectral menace or sink to unimaginable levels of evil.

For reputations that cover all the villages within a week's walking distance, use the listed values. For a month's walking distance, double the listed value. A reputation throughout the Mad Lands quadruples the value.

Characters can also have reputations that cover their area of expertise. A PC might have a reputation as the best brewer of *zoxibek* in the area. He'd get a positive reaction modifier in situations in which brewing expertise is relevant, but not otherwise. Such limited Reputations cost half to 1/3 of the full value. Exact values can be decided by the GM, based on his determination of just how often a limited reputation is likely to come into play.

Changing Status Levels

Since Status here is based on deeds, not birth, it stands to reason that status can change over time. The point costs listed refer to starting a new PC at a given status level. During play the GM should always monitor the actions of PCs as they affect their fellow villagers, and adjust their status ratings (and the reaction modifiers that go with them) accordingly. If PCs begin disrupting the village as they act out their mental disadvantage, or somehow take on the taint of sorcery or shamanism, their status will go down regardless of the points initially spent on it. On the other hand, humble youngsters who repeatedly save the village will gain in general esteem.

In this case, the *Mad Lands* GM should feel free to alter status ratings *without requiring payment of points*. In other words, if the party does something extremely heroic, the GM should reward them with an extra status level by immediately *giving* them the points to cover the cost. This works both ways: GMs should drop respect ratings for characters whose actions threaten the village. After the game starts, characters shouldn't be able to increase their status by simply paying points for it. They will have to earn it through appropriately impressive deeds.

increasingly drowning his sorrows in *zoxibek* and failing to bring home the game, respect for him decreases. A young woman regarded as silly and useless will suddenly gain respect if her healing skills save a person thought to be mortally wounded.

For game purposes, the following paragraphs describe sharply differentiated degrees of respect. The reality is more complex and subtle - Madlanders themselves wouldn't recognize this system; they wouldn't refer to the names given these categories, for example. They'd also see gradations of respect within categories: the drunkard and the village idiot might both be *Under a Clofia* in game terms, but one would likely be respected more than the other.

Under A Cloud. This is the lowest possible respect level, accorded to those who are seen as a probable risk to the village's survival. They haven't yet done anything warranting death or banishment, but are expected to eventually. This covers suspected shamans or sorcerers, people who seem to be under a supernatural curse or doom of some sort, and those who are unable to check a dangerous personality flaw. They'll be excluded from important village decisions. (It's possible to be considered dangerous for some reason and still fall into a higher respect category; such ambivalent types will have done great deeds that redeem the dark sides of their personalities.) All reactions are at -1. This is a disadvantage worth -5 points.

Village Folk. This is the basic status level of an everyday villager. They contribute the expected labor to their tasks, and do them acceptably. They're considered good, trustworthy people, having performed no exploits of great distinction, but without significant blots on their characters. This is also the status level of young folk who have yet to come of age, or have yet to distinguish themselves after doing so. There is no reaction modifier or point value.

Promising Sort. One who has recently gained the notice of the village for an outstanding personality, displays of talent, or minor deeds of distinction. Costs 5 points; +1 to all reactions.

Valued Person. These are people who have routinely distinguished themselves for great skill at what they do, over a period of time. Their opinions are greatly influential in their area of expertise. Costs 10 points; +2 to all reactions.

Hero. One whose exceptional deeds or abilities have saved lives of villagers, directly or indirectly, on more than one occasion. They are accorded great deference, and their words in a village meeting are heeded whether they speak on a matter they are expert in or not. Costs 15 points; +3 to all reactions.

Village Leader. A status level typically held only by clan heads. They lead village meetings and arbitrate disputes. Note that the position of clan head is not elected or appointed - it goes to the eldest member of the clan upon the death of the previous head. Sometimes the acknowledged holder of the position is less than qualified for it, and is known for foolish decisions and bad judgment. There is no impeachment process for ineffective clan leadership, but such individuals will be quietly accorded lower status - as a hero or even just a valued person. (The reaction penalties from various disadvantages are reducing his bonus for elder status.) If a clan contains a bona fide hero and a weak clan head, the hero might well take on the duties of the clan head in all but name. At any rate, if a player wishes to run a character who is actually clan chief, the cost is 20 points; +4 to all reactions.

Advantages, Disadvantages and Skills

Most advantages, disadvantages and skills that apply to the *Mad Lands* setting already appear in the *GURPS Basic Set*. Many advantages and disadvantages should be handled slightly differently based on the unique qualities of Madlander culture, and many skills will be unavailable due to the setting's tech level.

Advantages

Clerical Investment

Any sane Madlander shuns rather than worships the gods, so this doesn't exist as an advantage in this setting. See the disadvantage, *Shamanic Initiation*, p. 51

Legal Enforcement Powers *see p. B21*

There are no professional law enforcers in Madlander society. When clan elders decide that action must be taken against a miscreant, he's asked to submit himself to a tribunal at an appointed time. Accused individuals rarely refuse to attend - this is a sign of bad faith and greatly increases the chances of being considered guilty. In those infrequent cases when the accused refuses to attend a tribunal, elders select an appropriate number of able-bodied individuals to subdue him. Similarly, if the accused is found to require punishment, elders will then select a group to enforce their decision. Any villager might be called on in this capacity; this ad hoc "deputization" is not permanent and can't be purchased.

Literacy *see p. B21*

The Madlander language has no written component. All Madlanders are therefore illiterate. The standard cost applies to the ability to read other languages; skill in at least one other language must be purchased for this advantage to be of any use. Players must explain in their character biography how their PCs came to acquire this exceptional talent. Literacy is equated in the Madlander mind with sorcery in particular, and dangerous foreign ideas in general. A Madlander who knows another Madlander can read reacts to him at -1. The negative reaction is cumulative with other factors that lead to a suspicion of sorcery.

Luck *see p. B21*

Because of the collateral weirdness induced by the proximity of its strange gods, luck in the Mad Lands is a double-edged sword. For every fortuitous event, there follows an awful chance occurrence of similar magnitude. Often positive luck carries its own horrible consequences with it. For example, there is a Zo Do Wabda tale called "Zo Do Wabda's Lucky Day" in which he has a premonition of great good fortune. He visits the woods to gather mushrooms for Vidigi. He encounters an insane foreigner who throws a huge knife at him. He happens to be on a cliff ledge, and cannot dodge! Frozen in fear, he realizes only an incredible stroke of luck can save him. Then the ledge suddenly collapses, dropping him out of the path of the knife. He avoids a possibly-fatal knife wound but ends up with a severely broken leg, sharp bone protruding from his shattered shin. He also loses all of his mushrooms. This is luck, Madlander style.

To adjudicate this, GMs should use the regular luck rules as found on p. B21. The player, as usual, gets to pick the best of three rolls for whatever action he wants his PC to be lucky at. However, the GM should then add a twist to the results. Ideally, as in the above example, the character's objective should be achieved, but through the intervention of a chance event that also has negative repercussions. Such repercussions should be roughly of the same magnitude as the advantage gained by the exercise of luck. If the GM draws a blank on this, he should allow the lucky success, and then soon after follow it with a nasty bit of bad luck that counters the earlier good fortune.

Some individuals may be notorious for luck that rebounds in a particular consistent way. The NPC Pogox (see p. 122), for example, is notorious for unbelievable luck that always benefits him while destroying his companions. GMs should be careful when

players wish to specify the nature of their bad luck, to ensure that they get the full degree of nastiness to counter their good fortune.

These comments on luck apply on the land only; on the sea, regular Luck rules apply. Thus, Luck is more desirable for a fisher than a hunter.

Since luck in the Mad Lands automatically balances itself out at least half the time, the cost of the advantage is reduced. Luck costs 7 points, Extraordinary Luck, 15.

Magical Aptitude (Magery)

In the Mad Lands, this is a disadvantage. See p. 50.



Magical Resistance *see p. B21*

In an environment dripping with foul magic, Magical Resistance is extraordinarily useful. It could easily become the most popular advantage in a *Mad Lands* campaign. If the high incidence of Magical Resistance begins to gnaw at suspension of disbelief, a GM can propose the theory that natural selection favors the magically resistant Madlander.

In this setting, resistance to magic is an unconscious mental discipline, the ability to refuse to be affected through sheer force of will. Since Madlanders see magic as dividing into two distinct categories (see p. 94), resistance to sorcery and shamanism require slightly different mental attitudes, and are separate disciplines. Players must buy Shamanic Resistance and Sorcerous Resistance separately; their characters may therefore be more susceptible to one form than the other.

This division also serves to make Magical Resistance less of a bargain.

Characters visiting from outside must re-allocate their points between the two types of resistance; Madlanders traveling elsewhere can combine the points for a higher overall resistance.

Mathematical Ability *see p. B22*

Madlanders do not use sophisticated mathematics, which makes this skill less than useful in this setting. It isn't forbidden, though.

Military Rank

There is no military in the Mad Lands. This advantage is unavailable.

Patrons *see p. B24*

As the Mad Lands have a non-hierarchical, tribal society, there are no large organizations available to act as patrons for PCs. Neither is there the sort of factional competition that would lead powerful individuals to seek followers. The communal property

ethic makes the question of patron-supplied equipment irrelevant. This limits the use of the Patron advantage, but does not rule it out completely.

Characters could have close relatives of high status - heroes or clan leaders - who might lend special advice or support. Patrons who live in the same village as the PC would be available almost all of the time, tripling the point cost (see p. B24).

If a player for some reason decides to play a shaman or sorcerer, he might decide that his tutor in magic is still alive and can be contacted from time to time for help. Add 10 points to the cost of a shamanic or sorcerous patron.

Unusual Background *see p. B23*

It's unlikely that individuals with unusual backgrounds would be adopted by a Madlander village. Outsiders are dangerous. Players shouldn't be prevented from doing unusual things when designing characters, but the extra burden of obstacles they're taking on by deviating from the norm should be explained to them. If players propose a character whose skills can only be explained with resort to an unusual background, charge the appropriate number of points. However, this must be coupled with the Social Stigma: Outlaw, outsider or barbarian disadvantage

(see p. 50). GMs should ask players to modify characters whose presence would dispel the mood of the setting.

Rarely, seals, Viwti E, Ittevtati Otap or even Va Ekappi O might be informally adopted into a community after a long probation period. During this period, the outsider would be expected to fulfill the obligations of other villagers, without the rights. Eventually the elders will either agree to make him a member of the community ("This person is obviously human and useful, too bad he was born in the wrong place"), or ask him to leave. Any violation of Madlander norms would lead to a rejection of the candidate. Once accepted, he can expect *almost* the same degree of tolerance that any other member of the community would have.

Born-and-bred Madlanders can also have Unusual Background; typically they'll have spent time in other lands, learning things unknown to other villagers. Reaction modifiers will depend on the place they visited, and why they were there. For example, a sojourn in Patvik would be less suspicious than a decade spent in the land of the *Gaget*. A prisoner escaped from the Metal Cities would get better reactions than a voluntary visitor to Savarginia.

New Advantage

Unfazeable *20 points*

Characters with this advantage have adjusted their mental attitudes in order to come to terms with the terrors of the Mad Lands. They're unsurprised by the appearance and actions of monsters, magic or gods. Accordingly, they're exempt from Fright Checks, and disregard all reaction modifiers, positive or negative. This advantage is incompatible with all phobias.

It must be roleplayed fully - if not, the GM can declare that it has been lost. There are two ways to roleplay this advantage; both render the character unable to relate closely to his fellow villagers.

Fatalistic. A lifetime of listening to grim Zo Do Wabda tales

and seeing friends cut down by horrific menaces has led the character to withdraw into a shell of bleak acceptance. Doom is to be expected; the appearance of a fleshless or heightless is greeted not with a shriek, but with a yawn and a flat request to "Kill me and get it over with." Ironically, this lack of care for his own fate makes the character clear-headed enough to help himself survive.

Unaware. The character is a just a little thick, and doesn't comprehend the full horror of the situation. He may have a low IQ, or he may just live in his own little world. For an example of the latter, see *Pogox*, p. 122.

Disadvantages

Addiction *see p. B30*

Except for alcohol (see p. B30) the only addictive substances in the Mad Lands are those used by the soulless. For the average Madlander, these would be extraordinarily difficult to acquire. So, although there is no money in this setting, soulless drugs would have the same point cost (-20) as drugs whose daily dosage exceeds \$100.

Soulless drugs affect humans much more severely than their intended users. All are highly or totally addictive to humans. Soulless may use them in traps; victims who survive the trap may crave further doses of the drug. Unless otherwise specified, all last for two hours per dose; characters with ST below 10 will be affected for twice this time and those with ST over 15 for one hour only.

Soulless drugs, like everything soulless, have impossible names (see Chapter 7). Madlanders who find a source of these drugs would call them by a cut-down version of the name. Some drugs popular with the soulless include:

Ydzhnmoza: An intoxicant liquid which, when ingested, spirals the human nervous system into a well of blissful immobility. Side effects for long-term use include hair loss (the rate of which the GM can adjudicate) and 1 point of IQ loss for each six months

of continuous use. This is an incapacitating, totally addictive drug.

Tzhr. Used by its soulless makers as a spellcasting aid, this bitter powder is often rolled into maple candy to ease ingestion. While it lasts, a dose of tzhr will temporarily increase IQ by 1d points. In humans, it also saps the user of an equal number of ST points, and does so for twice the period of the IQ gain. It's also hallucinogenic; soulless spellcasters train in the techniques of mental discipline required to either disregard the visions or incorporate them into one's sorcery. Those without the skill will find themselves unable to work, fight or concentrate on spellcasting as their minds careen through the unfamiliar grottoes of the unconscious. Tzhr is highly addictive.

Logetzhicalluzh: This greasy balm is rubbed on the soles of the feet to provide a stimulant effect. Logetzhicalluzh heightens sensation in human users to a degree that produces ecstasy during even the most modest use of the sense of touch. Users will find themselves overcome with pleasure merely by running their hands along a piece of bark or fur. The effect of more intense sensual interactions will be left to the imagination. When under the influence of this drug, the user must make a Will roll to do anything other than run about feeling things and blissing out. Long-term users must roll against HT every six months; each

failure reduces HT by 1 point. Logetzhicalluzh is highly addictive.

Neredzhsibl: A treated mushroom that contains a depressant which sends the user into a dreamless sleep for a period of (20-ST) hours. This is quite popular with the soulless, who often wish to escape from their eternal lives of ennui. For humans it provides a period of deeply refreshing rest, during which healing rates are doubled. It is totally addictive.

One of the four types of soulless magic, gem injection sorcery, is totally addictive. This side effect makes the practice of this style of magic a -30-point disadvantage.

As in the case of alcoholism (see below), tribal elders seek to force withdrawal of any villagers known to be addicted to a drug. After this process is over, the ex-addict might well have to explain his exact relationship to the soulless at a tribunal.



Alcoholism

see p. B30

Madlander elders are always on the alert to make sure that no one debilitates himself with an addiction to *zoxibek*. Alcoholism can quickly make one a liability to the rest of the tribe, and the elders will act quickly to treat and counsel people who start to overindulge. Those who do become alcoholics will be the subject of a campaign that continues until they agree to stop drinking. As a consequence, it is rare to find an active alcoholic of long standing in a Madlander village; most victims of this disadvantage will be in the recovery stage.

Code of Honor

see p. B31

Most Madlanders hold dear a basic set of cultural obligations. Madlanders are expected to always come to the aid of their people, their *viMage*, their clan, their family and their friends - in that order - when danger threatens. Those taking the Madlander Code of Honor are expected to risk their own lives to save others, provided they have a reasonable chance of success. The Code of Honor does not require suicidal or reckless action. This could also be seen as a Sense of Duty to the Madlander people. Note that a character cannot get points for both the Code of Honor and Sense of Duty in this case.

Because most Madlanders can be expected to have this disad-

vantage, players can take it for their PCs and not count it against the -40 disadvantage limit. It is worth -10 points.

Dwarfism

see p. B28

This is worth -20 points in the Mad Lands because of the poor reactions that a dwarf will get from other Madlanders. Those who suffer from dwarfism will resemble the heightless, a particularly vicious monster. In confusing situations, dwarfs may be mistaken for them, with disastrous consequences. Even when other Madlanders know someone is a dwarf and not a heightless, they'll be unable to forget their primal dread of the very short, and will react to them at -1 despite the best of intentions.

Epilepsy

see p. B28

Madlanders believe that a seizure may indicate that one is being contacted by a god. Unlike most primitives, Madlanders will of course react negatively to anyone having a supernatural episode, provoking a -1 reaction.

Actually, this is no superstition. Epilepsy does make one vulnerable to receiving divine messages. The player of a character undergoing a seizure must roll 3 dice against IQ to *avoid* making contact. Magically resistant characters add their bonus to IQ for this purpose. Characters with Magical Aptitude subtract one die per level of Magery. (Anyone with three levels of magery automatically communes with a god whenever they suffer a seizure.)

The nature of the message is up to the GM. It may be a vision, a verbal message inside the epileptic's head, or even a peculiar taste, smell, or feeling. Given the strangeness of Madlander deities, the message will certainly be obscure - it may have a clear meaning or be completely indecipherable. Likewise, the GM can select an appropriate god given the circumstances, or just pick one at random. Ideally, the GM will make choices that further the current storyline: if an intelligible message from a particular divinity would move the plot along, this is an opportunity to supply one. If such a message would only complicate an already advancing story, the message should be vague and inscrutable, or clear and obviously irrelevant to the current problem.

Fat

see p. B28

Madlanders are even more prejudiced against the obese than most societies: heaviness implies that one is greedy and eats more than one's share. Reaction rolls are -3 for weights 1.5 times normal and -4 for weights which are twice normal (-20 points).

Gluttony

see p. B33

This is worth -10 points due to -1 on all reaction rolls from fellow Madlanders; gluttony is equated with greed, which is the culture's primary taboo.

Greed

see p. B33

This is a -30-point disadvantage in the Mad Lands - greed is the culture's primary taboo. Characters known to be greedy will be shunned; for game purposes treat this as a -4 to reaction rolls. Also, characters who persist in greed and hoard goods are apt to transform into monsters. Whenever a character indulges in a greedy act, his player must roll 9d against a total of IQ, ST and HT. If he fails, the character will slowly (over a period of 1d months) turn into a monster of the GM's choice. The sort of monster should reflect the situation or something else significant about the character. For example, someone whose greed leads him to stockpile food might turn into a bloodless, a type of horror known to be perpetually hungry. Note that in the Mad Lands the "riches" mentioned in the description of this disadvantage on p. B33 may refer to valuable things other than cash.

Intolerance

see p. B34

All Madlanders are to some degree intolerant of those who are different from themselves. Given the dangers of the unknown in this forbidding land, this sentiment is not entirely misplaced. However, Madlanders rarely come into contact with foreigners, and do not have a class structure, so this is not likely to come into play often. GMs should carefully examine the way players set up characters with this disadvantage; this common cultural trait may well not be worth any points at all.

Kleptomania

see p. B34

A society without property is a society without theft. Players may still portray characters who compulsively pick up things they like, but this will be regarded as a quirk by fellow villagers: "Oh, old Pok has taken the *zawadats* up to the *wavobak* again. What a funny fellow." It is more serious to take something you don't need from another village, but even this is unlikely to be construed as theft, merely as an awkward situation or misunderstanding. It is worth -1 point in the Mad Lands.

Magical Aptitude (Magery)

see p. B21

A certain small percentage of Madlanders, like other humans, are born with an innate propensity for sorcery. In most cultures, this is reckoned an advantage; here it is a bad thing. One who follows up this aptitude and becomes a sorcerer is doomed to a cursed life full of occult malice.

Even those who don't seek out sorcerous abilities will find that unearthly things tend to happen to them. Gods, shamans, sorcerers and supernatural creatures are unconsciously drawn to victims with magical aptitude. If any of these encounter a hostile party including a person with Magery, they'll attack that person first. If more than one magically-apt individual is available for attack, the entity in question will select the one with the highest level of Magery.

The GM can either run this on an ad hoc basis, directing any supernatural things that pop up in the course of an adventure toward latent mages, or they can treat it as a generalized Enemy disadvantage. In this case, the GM should roll vs. the character's (IQ + Magery) before each session. If the roll is equal to or under this amount, some magical nastiness will befall during that session. This needn't be an earth-shattering threat every time; sometimes it can simply be a small reminder of the unpleasant consequences of being in tune with thaumaturgic forces.

In addition, normal Madlanders sense that there is something subtly wrong or sinister about potential mages; they react to them at -1 for each level of Magery. This in most instances will not be a precise feeling that someone is inherently magical, just a vague suspicion or inexplicable dislike. (Reactions to a *known* shaman or sorcerer are at -15.)

Along with all of this dread, characters having this disadvantage also get all of the abilities described on p. B21.

The normally positive point cost of Magery is *negative* in the Mad Lands setting!

Odious Personal Habits

see p. B26

Madlanders live in close quarters with one another. Life in a *wavobak* prevents any sort of concept of privacy. Consequently a polite Madlander goes to great lengths to avoid offending his neighbors, who sleep, eat and live just feet away from him. GMs should take this into account when assigning point values and reaction modifiers to the particular Odious Personal Habit a player proposes for his character. Many OPHs would have higher values and modifiers in the Mad Lands than in other settings.

Poverty

see p. B26

This disadvantage does not apply in the Mad Lands. Relative to some other cultures, all Madlanders are poor. Relative to each other, none of them are.

Primitive

see p. B26

Again, within the Madlander context, this disadvantage is not relevant. Foreigners might look down on Madlanders as being primitive, but all of the various Madlander villages are equal to one another in tech level. There are no other cultures living in the area that seem primitive to the Madlanders.

Social Stigmas

varies; see p. B27

Madlander culture is communal and has no class structure. Therefore, the Second-Class Citizen disadvantage is not available. Likewise, although Madlanders make distinctions between men and women in terms of what sorts of labor are expected from each, they do not view one sex as inferior to the other. So there is no gender discrimination to derive social stigma points from. If a non-Madlander has been adopted into a Madlander village, they will have to take the -15 "Outsider, outlaw or barbarian" disadvantage. The -3 on reaction rolls will never be in the form of outright hatred on the part of one's adopted villagers; Madlanders are too polite and emotionally guarded for this. Villagers reacting poorly to an outsider in their midst will leave them out of important social events, be reluctant to let him marry their daughter, gently ignore him when he speaks up in village meetings, and so forth. An outsider might be tolerated, but he will never be regarded as fully a part of the village unless actually adopted. When pressed, in fact, his Madlander neighbors will admit that they do not consider him fully human. A subtle form of bigotry, perhaps, but one no less emotionally debilitating in the long run. This disadvantage will usually go hand in hand with the *Unusual Background* advantage (see p. 48).

Youth

see p. B29

As in many survival-oriented cultures, there is little time for an extended period of adolescence in the Mad Lands. One comes of age when one reaches puberty. Due to nutritional differences, however, this generally comes a little later than in our modern culture. So, although the age of adulthood varies, for purposes of calculating the value of this disadvantage it should be considered to be 15.

New Disadvantages

Cursed

10 or more points

A character with this disadvantage has somehow attracted negative supernatural energy which consistently causes misfortune of a specific nature. Most curses can be described in a single simple sentence: "Everyone Ke Ke Gi loves will die young and violently." "Every pot Vonaka Ge At spins will break within a month." "Any children born to Butke will have humps and speak backwards."

Curses come in two parts - a misfortune and a trigger. The misfortune can be an irritant, as in Vonaka Ge At's breaking pots, or catastrophic, as in Ke Ke Gi's doomed loved ones. The trigger is an action of the cursed character that brings on an episode of misfortune - Ke Ke Gi feeling affection for another, Vonaka Ge At making a pot, Butke conceiving a child.

The curse victim may know how he received it. A shaman, sorcerer and monster may have spoken the curse in the victim's

presence. On the other hand, the character might have a curse and not know why (see *Ke Ke Gi*, p. 119). In these cases, there might be a reason for the curse; discovering it might make a good plot hook. Equally likely, the curse is simply the unintended result of uncontrolled god-magic (see p. 54).

The point value for curses must be decided by the GM, based on the degree of misfortune they bring and the likelihood of frequent triggering. A curse activated on the first of each month or every time the victim sneezes would be worth more than one triggered each time he wears an enamel helmet from Savarginia while strangling a gopher.

Ignorance

-5/skill

Madlanders expect their fellows to have at least some ability in a number of survival skills by the time they reach adulthood. Those who do not have such abilities will be looked down upon as slackers or fools. For each expected skill (see below) which a character has spent *no* points on, he must take one level of this disadvantage, worth -5 points per level. For each level of this disadvantage someone has, he will receive -1 on reaction rolls from other Madlanders.

Skills

Expected Skills

Certain skills are necessary to contribute to the survival of the village. Madlander society divides responsibility for particular sorts of labor along gender lines. If a Madlander doesn't have *some* level of ability in each skill expected of him, he will be looked down upon by his fellows. This is considered a disadvantage (see *Ignorant*, above).

The skills expected of males are Area Knowledge, Bow, Carpentry, Fishing, Naturalist, Navigation, Running, Seamanship, Shipbuilding, Spear, Stealth, Survival (Woodlands), and Tracking.

Skills expected of females are Agronomy, Artist (nonrepresentational), Botany, Cooking, Diagnosis, First Aid, Leatherworking, Meteorology (weather sense), Pottery, and Woodworking.

Gender-Determined Skills

Some skills, which are not required, are practiced by males only. These skills are: Boating, Musical Instrument (*vawabogazawat*), Musical Instrument (*zawadat*), Musical Instrument (drum).

Those who have skills typically practiced by the other gender may be looked on as mildly eccentric, but this depends on the skill. While men might not usually have First Aid skills, a male with the ability to patch up his comrades while out in the bush would be admired as a clever sort. A man with a smidgen of Cooking ability would be gratefully received out on the trail but thought of as weird if he tried to out-cook the women back in the village. A woman with good Area Knowledge would not be condemned . . . but some might question the time she's wasted acquiring useless information, which might have been used getting better at something directly useful.

Hunting and Fishing Skills

Players wishing to run hunter characters should consult p. 31 for a list of skills valued on hunting expeditions. Valued skills for fishers are discussed on p. 34.

Shamanic Initiation

-10 points

The character in question has already gone through the unspeakable rites and ceremonies that allow one to petition the gods for shamanic powers. Or, at the player's discretion, the character may have willingly or unwillingly encountered a god directly and been granted powers. This is a disadvantage because the use of shamanic powers is taboo to the Madlanders, and one who openly uses them will be *at best* banished from normal society! Reactions to a proven shaman are at -15; all able-bodied individuals in the area will attempt to hunt him down and kill him.

Normal villagers will unconsciously sense something sinister about an initiated shaman even if he never behaves in a way that would openly reveal his secret. Unrevealed shamans get a -2 on reaction rolls from normal Madlanders, in addition to any penalty due to Magery.

As with physical disadvantages (see p. B27), characters do not get points for this disadvantage if it's acquired during play. Reduce the character's point value instead.

Literature

In this setting, the skill Literature refers to knowledge of the oral traditions of the Mad Lands. Along with Bard, it's essential to any aspiring storyteller. Since knowledge of Madlander monsters and magicians is found within the oral tradition, it also serves the function of Occultism (see p. B61).

Unavailable Skills

The following skills are not available to characters with a normal Madlander upbringing: Accounting, Administration, Alchemy, Animal Handling, Anthropology, Archaeology, Armoury (specializations other than hand weapons or bow and arrow), Astrology, Astronomy, Battlesuit, Beam Weapons, Bicycling, Biochemistry, Biology, Black Powder Weapons, Calligraphy, Chemistry, Computer Operation, Computer Programming, Criminology, Crossbow, Dancing, Demolition, Driving, Ecology, Economics, Electronics, Electronics Operation, Engineer, Falconry, Fencing, Flail, Force Shield, Force Sword, Forensics, Forgery, Genetics, Geology, Gunner, Guns, Heraldry, History, Hypnotism, Jeweler, Judo, Karate, Linguistics, Literacy, Lockpicking, Mathematics, Mechanic, Merchant, Metallurgy, Motorcycle, Nuclear Physics, Parachuting, Photography, Physics, Physiology, Pickpocket, Piloting, Powerboat, Psionics, Psychology, Research, Riding, Scuba, Shadowing, Speed-load, Streetwise, Surgery, Teamster, Telegraphy, Theology, Underwater Demolition, Vacc Suit, Veterinary, Writing, Zoology.

Many of these are proscribed because they assume a higher tech level or more complex intellectual system than the Madlanders have. Examples of this category include Physics, Lockpicking, and Speed-loading.

Others are culturally inappropriate. For instance, Madlanders have little experience of crime and so have developed no criminology discipline. Madlanders have no domesticated animals larger than racing voles, and therefore no animal handling or veterinary skills. Dancing is taboo, as it's considered too close to ritual and a possible way of summoning the gods. Hypnotism would likely be confused with shamanism or sorcery and bring serious consequences down on someone who practiced it.

New Skills

Harpoon (Physical/Hard)

The Madlander harpoon, used for small-scale whaling, is a large iron spear with a line attached to it. Damage is thrust +5, minimum strength 11, weight 6 pounds. Otherwise, treat as a thrown spear.

Defaults to Spear Throwing -2

Vedodit Training (Mental/Hard)

This is the highly specialized ability to train insects for wrestling contests. A successful trainer can, on a skill roll, spot a "natural" fighter in a nest of beetles, and can train him to win. To determine the winner of a match, pit the two trainers together in a Contest of skill. GMs may wish to factor in variables to add excitement.

Defaults to IQ-6

Vole Training (Mental/Average)

This is the ability to spot likely voles and train them for racing. As with *vedodit* fights, vole races can be resolved as skill contests between trainers, with GM-added variables.

Defaults to IQ-4



Jobs

The Madlander economy is not sufficiently complex to allow for the concept of separate professions. Most people are expected to contribute to the same economic enterprises: hunting and fishing for men, agriculture and craft work for women. Some individ-

uals may be famed for special skills - being the best healer or cook in the village -but these are not jobs. Even specialized skills such as Blacksmith involve no "income." As a result, the job table typical of most *GURPS* worldbooks is not relevant here.

Equipment

The communal possession ethic of Madlander villages, and the absence of a currency system, mean that players can equip their characters with reasonable possessions without worrying about paying cash for them.

The GM must carefully enforce what "reasonable" is. In terms of the sorts of equipment that will be available, Madlanders have a limited metal-working ability and are most skilled at producing wood, pottery and leather products.

In terms of how much equipment an individual can have, remember that a Madlander will typically take with him only items that would be directly useful to the job at hand. This will eliminate the "pack full of every conceivable bit of junk known to mankind" syndrome of many PC equipment lists. If equipment is lost or damaged on a mission, the individual responsible is ex-

pected to repair or replace it himself, or, if his skills are insufficient to the task, to get a close relative to do so.

The most common weapons produced in Madlander villages are axes, bows and arrows, daggers, knives, hatchets and spears. Throwing axes, maces, clubs, broad and smallswords, and staves may also be manufactured in a typical village. Other weapons, such as blowpipes, crossbows, flails, other sword types, bolas, and so forth will be very rare, only available as trade goods. Users of these weapons will have to be self-taught.

Madlanders produce tools as well as weapons, including saws, files and specialized knives and scrapers for butchery.

Madlanders do not wear metal armor or use shields. Winter clothing is PD 0, DR 1. Rain gear is PD 1, DR 1.

Hunting Gear

Bandages and bone needles	1/4lb.
Blanket, bearskin	10 lbs.
Fish glue in clay container	1 lb.
Flint	1/4lb.
Gut cord (5 yards, supports 80 lbs.)	1/2lb.
Hatchet	2 lbs.
Lodestone	1/4lb.
Pack, small (40 lb. capacity)	4 lbs.
Pack, large (60 lb. capacity)	10lbs.
Tent (4 man), deerskin	35 lbs.
Torch	1 lb.
Trail food (dried fish and <i>katti</i>)	1/21b.
Walking stick, 3-5 ft.	1 lb.

Water, 1 quart, in skin container	2 lbs.
Whetstone	1 lb.
<i>Zoxibek</i> , 1 pint, in skin	1/2lb.

Fishing Gear

Gut Cord, 1 yard	negligible
Large knife	1 lb.
Small knife	1/2lb.
Small hammer	1/2lb.
Bandages and bone needles	1/4lb.
Boat repair kit	5 lbs.
Combat weapons of crew	variable
Fish glue in clay container	4 lbs.
Fish oil lamps, clay, with oil	46 lbs.
Flint	1/4lb.

Lodestone	1/4lb.
Harpoons, 2	20 lbs.
Hatchets, 10	20 lbs.
Net	200 lbs.
Net repair kit	15 lbs.
Oars, 12	10 lbs.
Pickled <i>kakew</i> , 1 barrel	75 lbs.
Sail	50 lbs.
Sail repair kit	20 lbs.
Spare plank	50 lbs.
Spare rudder cord	1 lb.
Venison jerky, 1 barrel	50 lbs.
Water, 6 gallons, in barrel	75 lbs.
Whetstone	1 lb.
<i>Zoxibek</i> , 6 gallons, in barrel	75 lbs.

THE GODS

5

The presence of the gods in the Mad Lands is reflected in everything from its landscape to the way magic works to the behavior of its people. The nature of the gods themselves, though, remains cloaked in mystery. Information about them is fragmentary; what is known seems contradictory. Knowledge from direct experience is rare: those who meet the gods face-to-face usually end up mad or dead. Any given story about them may be literally true, partially distorted or completely without foundation.



Meeting the Gods

GMs are advised to consider the consequences before bringing a direct encounter with a god into the plot line.

Meetings with deities should be exceedingly rare. The average Madlander will go through his entire life without meeting a god. While PCs, as central characters in a story, are by definition extraordinary individuals, it stretches credibility to have them continually running into gods while everyone else in the village knows them only as a distant threat.

The gods are the root cause of all Madlander weirdness, so it's tempting to have the PCs collide with them as soon as possible. But GMs can build the gods into their campaigns slowly and subtly, by showing the players glimpses of them before bringing one to center stage. Like any horror, the gods are scarier when mysterious: let the PCs stumble across traces of their existence, or glimpse their outlines in dreams. Indirect agents of the gods, such as shamans or monsters, present more than enough threat to keep a series of stories going indefinitely without their involvement.

When the ideal moment comes for the direct introduction of a god into the story, the GM should remember that any such encounter will change the campaign *forever*. Any character who meets a god will be altered in some way, whether physically or mentally. Players should always be given plenty of opportunity to avoid such encounters, since their lovingly constructed characters will be permanently transformed. A meeting with a god is not a brief episode to be played and then dropped, but one with an aftermath that the GM should continue to explore as the revolving point of one storyline after another. Divine encounters should be saved as a narrative ace up one's sleeve; wait till the game hits a rut before shaking things up with a Zuutak attack or a game of *tippet* with Belt Agwo.

The descriptions of the gods are designed to give the GM wide latitude in deciding exactly what form such changes will take, though they'll generally be for the worse. Unless the story absolutely demands otherwise, they should be difficult challenges that the PC can overcome, rather than utterly crippling catastrophes. If the GM needs to establish the shocking power of the gods by destroying someone, he has NPCs for that.

The material in this chapter corresponds to common knowledge; this is what the average Madlander knows about the gods. GMs should allow players full access to it.

Storytellers might be able to supply further detail about particular gods, but the more tales they know the more contradictions they'll run into. Shamans, who deal with deities either directly or through other shamans, will have first-hand information, but they'll have to be coerced into sharing their secrets. They're likely to be deceptive if they talk at all. Even an honest witness describing a direct encounter could only supply a piece of the puzzle. Those who probe the mysteries of the gods find that gathering evidence about them just compounds the confusion.

Bax Powu Kag (the Moose)

Bax Powu Kag is an odd sort of moose, with stubby legs, gray fur and (usually) no antlers. His face is long, his saucer-sized, staring eyes deep and mournful. He's fatter than a normal moose, lacks its characteristic goatee and doesn't seem to like swamps very much. Bax Powu Kag is more often found out in scrub plains than in the bog. In most stories he's about the size of a *wavobak*, though in a few he's smaller than even a normal moose, closer to the size of a young boar.

He's one of the less active gods; even storytellers profess to understand little about his purposes. He shows little interest in humankind, and is supposedly the hardest god for shamans to summon. In the small number of tales he's featured in, encounters with humans are invariably accidental, with people stumbling upon him in the woods. Often the heroes end up in serious trouble without Bax Powu Kag so much as noticing them. When encountered, Bax Powu Kag is usually minding his own business, grazing on bits of vegetation most real animals would find inedible.

Bax Powu Kag is known to exude an oppressive emotional aura, seizing all who come near him in a heavy web of despair. Contactees lose, temporarily or permanently, all of their mental defenses against the harsh realities of the Mad Lands. They start to feel sorry for themselves, lose hope for the future and become obsessed with the negative side of everything. Some who run into him remain rooted to the spot until they starve to death, convinced of the futility of any effort. Others attempt suicide. Victims of his aura can develop odd compulsions, relentlessly repeating meaningless activities: they might spend hours trying to swat imaginary insects. GMs should determine the exact nature and duration of reactions to the presence of Bax Powu Kag based on the length of exposure, the needs of the storyline and degree of success at IQ rolls.

In a couple of stories, Bax Powu Kag speaks. He turns out to be much like those infected with his presence: gloomy, pessimistic and apathetic. In one story, Zo Do Wabda tries to gain shamanic powers from him by cheering him up; everything he does simply makes Bax Powu Kag more unhappy. Finally, he achieves his goal quite by accident - he throws away a broken arrow that the Moose finds fascinating. In exchange, he is given a remarkable power - the ability to make everyone around him pathetic and mournful. The effect cannot be turned off, so Zo Do Wabda eventually ends up living in self-enforced exile alone in the forest, lest he infect others with despair. Eventually he stumbles across Bax Powu Kag again, and they spend the rest of their days together in mutual self-pity.

There are stories of shamans with despair-inducing auras, so it is presumably possible for them to get power from the Moose.

Bett Agwo (the Hare)

When judging behavior, Madlanders don't accept good intentions as a justification for harmful acts. Results count, motivations don't. The reason for this attitude is the Hare god, Bett Agwo. He has never been known to attack people.

He doesn't look on humans as toys or playthings. He seems to be the sanest of the gods, displaying a consistent personality. It's even possible to carry on a conversation with him. Bett Agwo is the only Mad Lands god who appears to be fully conscious of his divine status, or of the way gods elsewhere are expected to behave toward their people. If the stories are to be believed, he cares about humankind, and tries to help them as a benevolent god would. This just makes him more dangerous.

Bett Agwo's attempts at helping are notorious for backfiring on their recipients. He's a sort of reverse trickster: even though he means well, those who deal with him always get the opposite of their desires. Bett Agwo doesn't seem to be in full control of his awesome powers, and his divine gifts become curses through unintended side effects, overly literal interpretation of the request for aid or an overload of mystical energy. Someone calling upon Bett Agwo to free him from approaching monsters, for example, might shoot up hundreds of feet into the air, with no way of breaking his fall. A request for the power of flight might result in hideous bat wings which would mark their owner as a freak to be hunted down and killed. In granting the power of long-distance sight, Bett Agwo might accidentally



Summoning the Gods

It's possible that at some point in a *Mad Lands* campaign, a player will decide to make his character go deviant and try to contact a god. GMs shouldn't discourage this, but should heighten the drama of the story by putting obstacles in the would-be shaman's path.

The gods of the Mad Lands are nothing if not perverse; attracting them only seems easy when you don't want them around. Those who actually want to meet the gods have a hard time getting their attention. State of mind seems to be the key: one's desire to meet a god cancels the supernatural resonance of simple taboo breaking, like dancing or singing a deity's name. Would-be summoners must find more potent means.

The easiest way to find out how to contact a god is to find someone who has already done it: a shaman. But shamans are careful not to announce themselves. If one manages to locate an admitted shaman, he is likely to place conditions on the seeker in accordance with his own agenda. Chances are he'll know how to reach only a particular god or two, not necessarily the one the PC seeks (see *Shamanic Initiation*, p. 51).

Some might instead try to devise their own ways of attracting the god in question. They'll have to do some research, quizzing local storytellers for information on the god's motivations and behavior - while being careful not to reveal the nefarious reasons behind the questions. Then the summoner will have to decide just what might appeal to his divine target. Bett Agwo is known to be the easiest god to contact - simple concentration on his name might be enough - but he's also the least able to deliver worthwhile boons. A summoning of Zuatok or Zewa Zab would likely involve large quantities of tubers. Gakox Pezep might require a blood sacrifice. The means of beckoning more obscurely motivated gods, like Dopod Abwep or Bax Powu Kag, would be more difficult to determine, and are left to the creativity of GM and players.

If the summoner does get a god to manifest, his challenges are just beginning; no ritual will give him power over his target, or even any guarantee that the god will be favorably disposed to him. He may simply get eaten or turned into a crayfish for his trouble. He'll have to do the persuading job of his life in order to get his wishes granted.

Even if he succeeds, his gains will not be without cost. The god will probably impose conditions that more than balance the benefits. And many of the Mad Lands' gods have more power than they can control; they may honestly intend to grant his desires but end up giving him more than he's bargained for, with unpleasant results.

GMing God Behavior

Because the gods are so little understood, their actions seem capricious and inconsistent: the only conclusion men can reach about them is that they are utterly insane. Perhaps the gods follow their own logic, one unfathomable to mortals; this makes no practical difference to those who must avoid their attention if they want to remain in one piece, physically or mentally. The fundamental characteristic of the gods is *mystery*.

In order to decide what gods do, the GM must make decisions about their motivations. The important thing is to keep them enigmatic to the players, who will presumably read this. That's why the information presented here is left deliberately vague, more a series of hints than a comprehensive profile. The gods of each *Mad Lands* campaign should be slightly different, so that players are always kept guessing. Even within a single campaign of long standing, the GM should periodically alter the ground rules of the gods to maintain a chaos factor. GMs are urged to go through these descriptions and decide which details are merely false beliefs; they should add secret details of their own. They might even decide that a given god is purely imaginary, or perhaps existed once in the past but has gone away. Maybe some of the gods have active agendas, and seek contact with humans to advance a particular plan. Or maybe they're simply blundering through existence like omnipotent wild animals.

God behavior need not conform to conventional notions of time and space. When encountering a PC for the first time, the god might greet him as an old friend - or enemy. The next time, he might not be remembered at all. Gods can appear in several different places at the same time; they might do so without effort, or become confused as they try to split their consciousness between situations. Two gods might decide to switch bodies for a lark; the normally sedate Bax Powu Kag might cause great havoc in Kikavo Dat's form. Even weirder combinations might result: imagine the horror when Belt Agwo appears wearing Zuutak's borrowed head!

Just as Madlanders are helpless against their whims, the gods themselves might be subject to great unknown forces. GMs might decide that each god is possessed by a random personality trait on a given month of the year, for example. The GM might want to work out the origin of the gods and the precise factors governing their existence, or just play it by ear according to the story demands of each individual encounter. As long as the characters and their players remain puzzled, and the actions of the gods remain generally hazardous to humanity, anything goes.

cause the supplicant to lose the ability to see normally. The Hare can grant any sort of supernatural ability, but it will always come out horribly twisted. Because of this, he's the most feared of the gods; while being devoured by Gakox Pezep is a horrible fate, it is also a predictable one. Belt Agwo, on the other hand, is capable of literally *anything*.

It might seem tempting, once saddled with one of his terrible gifts, to seek him out again and ask him to rectify his mistake. There is a Zo Do Wabda tale that warns against trying this: every time Bert Agwo removes a nasty side effect, he accidentally creates a much worse one.

To make matters worse, Belt Agwo is easy to summon, even unintentionally. Any prolonged concentration on his name will cause him to appear. He may also come on his own initiative, without being called. This is thought to be a hazard for people who want too much out of life; eventually any strong unfulfilled desire will attract his well-meaning but disastrous attention. Madlanders refrain from even discussing his existence; storytellers talk about him only to caution listeners against desire.

Unlike his fellows, Bett Agwo never appears as a giant; he always manifests as a normal-sized hare. His fur may be white, yellow, or brown; he always appears with a small dark brown patch at his throat. (Hunters are always careful to check for this marking when hunting hares; those that sport them are left alone.) Bett Agwo rarely appears physically. He usually comes in dreams or other altered states - hallucinations brought on by sickness, exhaustion or intoxication, for example. Storytellers imitate him with a low, quavery voice, using long sentences loaded down with big words and qualifiers. They portray him as rather dotty, often becoming distracted or confused in the middle of a conversation; sometimes he'll forget details such as to whom he's speaking and what they want from him.

Bubzavav (the Bear)

Bubzavav behaves very much like a normal bear who just happens to be sentient and have all of the abilities of a god. He's portrayed in the stories as a single-minded being, always in the pursuit of tasty food. As omnivorous as any bear, Bubzavav's list of favorite foods is long: honey, deer, mushrooms, grass, tubers, fish ... If it's edible, Bubzavav will seek it out and gulp it down.

Some tales portray Bubzavav as a bit of a bumbler; often he gets himself into trouble in his never-ending quest for delectables. In one story, he ventures into an old collapsed Zewa Zab runnel because he sees bees flying in and out of it. Being a roly-poly creature, he gets stuck, inches away from the beehive full of tantalizing honey. Zuutak comes along and tries to push him through the hole, but succeeds only in lodging Bubzavav in more securely. Zuutak smells some tubers in a faraway village and promptly vanishes. Bett Agwo appears and offers his help, which Bubzavav is not foolish enough to accept. Miffed, Bett Agwo vanishes too. Finally Zo Do Wabda comes along and suggests to Bubzavav that he use his godly power to shrink himself down a bit so he can wriggle out. Bubzavav does so, and sincerely thanks Zo Do Wabda for the advice. Now famished, he apologizes profusely to Zo Do Wabda for the necessity of eating him.

This tale underlines the fact that Bubzavav is as unpredictable as any bear; he may benignly ignore a party of hunters or hungrily maul them to death. In stories where he speaks, he can be downright cheerful and polite. This doesn't stop him from dining on a friend when his stomach begins to rumble, though. In another popular tale he devours Bax Powu Kag, but disgorges him after several days of indigestion provoked by the Moose's constant complaining.

Like many Madlander gods, Bubzavav often appears in gigantic form. Sometimes he gets as small as an adult male grizzly. His fur is a very light brown, almost yellow, which distinguishes him from a normal grizzly at this size.

Bubzavav is thought to grant shamanic powers to supplicants who don't seem tasty enough to eat. His servants can turn into bears, but otherwise all of their supernatural talents seem to relate in some way to food.

Dopod Abwep (the Child)

Dopod Abwep is the sole humanoid in a pantheon of animal gods. Although he's never less than twelve feet tall, his body is proportioned like that of a seven- or eight-year-old boy. He moves in the gawky, loose-limbed way of a young boy who's just had his first big growth spurt. The Child literally leaks divine power, his entire body glowing and giving off a constant halo of light. This glow is so blinding that distinct features of face or body are impossible to discern.

His personality is also obscured in mystery. When encountered in stories, he rarely seems to be doing anything in particular. He's usually just killing time in a childlike manner: skipping stones into a lake, making sand piles or simply staring off into space. He never speaks, but human characters who meet him sometimes sense his feelings or desires intuitively.

Dopod Abwep gives off an aura of sadness. This emotional state is contagious, and someone who sights Dopod Abwep may feel hints of it for months or years afterwards. It's not the oppressive self-pity of Bax Powu Kag, but a more wistful feeling of melancholy. While the Moose wants to be left in solitude to enjoy his misery, Dopod Abwep seems consumed by loneliness and a need for contact.

It is precisely this need that makes him so dangerous. Dopod Abwep will try to touch someone who encounters him, but the surface of his physical form is so hot he immediately melts any human flesh he touches. He may be happy to give a summoner shamanic powers, but the shaman will gradually find his humanity draining away from him afterwards: he'll slowly lose all of his social and communication skills, then his power of speech, and finally his entire physical being. Dopod Abwep's shamans over a period of a few years turn into weightless (see p. 74).

In the meantime, they have magical powers over light and heat and can reverse the aging process. They may also find that Dopod Abwep will not leave them alone after initial contact; he may appear at any time seeking their company, and has a knack for doing so at the most inconvenient moments. He does have a childish temper, and can throw enormously destructive tantrums if rejected by someone he has adopted as a friend. Prolonged physical proximity to Dopod Abwep seems to accelerate the transformation into a weightless.

Gakox Pezep (the Cougar)

Gakox Pezep is regarded as the most aggressive and dangerous god of all. He's infamous for rampages in which he mauls or devours every man or animal in his range of sight. Unlike normal big cats, he moves by hopping across the terrain, sometimes covering miles at a time. Sometimes he leaps so high, and manifests at such gigantic size, that he creates huge craters when he lands. When Madlanders hear distant thunder on a cloudless day, they quake with terror, knowing that Gakox Pezep is on the prowl.

He's renowned for his unpredictable dual nature; when on the hunt, he's a mindless, snarling beast, capable of nothing but destruction. At other times, he appears aff a normal-sized cougar who walks upright like a man. In this incarnation, he not only speaks but boasts a gregarious personality, engaging those he meets in polite chitchat. In this mode he has a raucous sense of humor, telling stories and playing silly practical jokes on those who lie in his path. He'll stop passersby and urge them to spend the afternoon, offering them food and asking them to swap puns and riddles with him. This is a disturbing prospect - the food he offers is usually raw meat, still dripping with blood. Sometimes it's even



Unholy Places

If PCs run into gods frequently, they'll end up as quivering heaps of unpurchased disadvantages in record time. It's better to introduce gods into the storyline indirectly, by having adventurers run into their traces instead of the deities themselves. If players and GM are fully into the spirit of the setting, characters will be as frightened merely running into a place that bears the spoor of a god as they would be encountering an entire demon host in another fantasy game.

Any area altered by godly action is considered to be haunted. A variety of lingering effects are possible.

Apparitions. A party entering a haunted area might think they're encountering a god, when all they're really seeing is an impression, mystically stamped on the land. The trauma will be the same. Or a group might experience other mentally damaging hallucinations. Perhaps they see an image of themselves from the future or past, or a horrible visual prophecy (not necessarily valid) of their own violent deaths. GMs can make such visions thematically appropriate to the story at hand, or can use them to advance the plot by providing important clues.

Emotional Residue. Haunted areas can be impregnated with a god's contagious psychic aura. An area grazed by Bax Powu Kag would carry his despair effect. Hunters entering a haunt of Bubzavav might become hungry to the point of contemplating cannibalism. A stretch of Zewa Zab tunnel might compel all who enter to compulsively maintain it against erosion.

Ghosts and Undead. Those slain by a god might be rooted to the place of their demise, and try to murder the living so they'll have company. Or they might try to warn others away, harming them only unintentionally.

Mutant Animals. Unholy places are prime habitat for mutant animals (see p. 78).

Not all landscape features marked by the gods will be haunted in this manner. Only places touched both recently and at length will carry their residue. Sites gradually return to a natural state, but humans can never be entirely certain which places are safe. Even long-deserted spots will still be eerie.

Manifestations of the Gods

Sometimes when the gods appear, they're as real and solid as a stone or a boat; when they manifest themselves physically they match the descriptions given in this chapter. On other occasions, witnesses seem only to be encountering an image of the god, a portion of his essence from wherever the gods reside. In these cases, their appearances can vary widely.

Only portions of the gods may be visible: Vuvuti's eyes alone might blink out from a treetop perch; Kikavo Dat's disembodied feet might thunder across the interior. A god could be disembodied entirely, only his booming voice and a feeling of pervading dread revealing his presence. They might appear as insubstantial phantoms, or have transparent hides, revealing a glowing network of pulsing internal organs. They may appear in two dimensions only, as flat depictions on an invisible screen. Or they could manifest in more dimensions than the human eye can understand, driving watchers mad with impossible geometry.

A god might appear only in the mind of an onlooker, perhaps with other nearby people unable to perceive the god at all. Or he might cobble together a physical form with the materials at hand: imagine a Zuutak made entirely of dead pine needles, or a mammoth Bubzavav of granite and quartzite. When the gods abandon these temporary forms, they might crumble back to their original state, or leave behind a statue that will alarm generations to come.

The gods don't always seem to be in control of their vast powers; they might be encountered while struggling with some disfiguring outside force. They might materialize inside out, or keep fading in and out during a visitation. They might appear only in black-and-white, as if something is interfering with their attempt to reveal themselves. Or they could be frantically trying to control a transformation into some entirely unexpected form.



human or seal meat. The Cougar may become hurt or even enraged if his gift is not refused with the utmost diplomacy.

One does not want to enrage him: Gakox Pezep can shift from friendly beastman to monstrous carnivore without warning. This is likely to happen if he loses his temper, smells fresh blood or sees a blatant display of fear on the part of his "guests." Conversely, other stories depict him tearing apart a village and then suddenly popping into his cuddly form and wondering what all the fuss is about.

If the lore is accurate, shamans summon Gakox Pezep at great risk; if he's contacted while in his carnivore aspect, he simply eats the summoner, with no communication possible. A summoner lucky enough to reach him in his saner form may be granted illusion or deception abilities, or the ability to travel in great bounds. Although he doesn't seem to consciously demand anything from them, Gakox Pezep's shamans apparently become subject to uncontrollable personality shifts just like their god's.

Kikavo Vo (Big Leaper)

While most of the Madlander gods are frightening versions of more-or-less familiar animals, Kikavo Vo and her son Kikavo Dat seem to be weird hybrids of many creatures. Descriptions of them in village lore are precise: they have the

heads of deer (without antlers) mounted on long thick necks. Their chests and torsos are like those of big potbellied grizzly bears. Their postures are upright, like a man's. Mounted on their shoulders are tiny arms like those of a small child. On the end of each arm are the sharp claws of a wolverine. Their powerful legs are designed like a toad's, but their huge feet resemble those of no known beast, long and flat like planks from a ship deck. With these fearsome appendages they bound across the landscape, leaping miles at a time, smashing anything they touch down on. They anchor these leaps with a thick tail, resembling a shortened squid's tentacle, protruding from their hindquarters. Their freakish bodies are covered from head to toe in thick brown fur like a moose's.

In one tale, a shaman explains Kikavo Vo's chaotic appearance by recounting the following myth. The gods were born when a number of animals stumbled across a sun that had fallen to earth; as each dived into the sun, they were transformed into gods, and part of the sun was eaten up. After the boar, the bear, the hare, the mountain lion, the gopher and the child dived in, there was little divine matter left, and still many animals waiting for their share of it. Many of them leapt into it at once, and they all got mixed together into one god with the traits of many different creatures. However, the story indicates that the shaman, as one might expect, is an unreliable narrator. For example, his tale fails to explain where Kikavo Dat came from, or to account for the features not found on any animal. At any rate, few care to speculate about such awful matters as the origins of the gods.

Kikavo Vo is notable as the only Madlander goddess. Though bad-tempered, she sometimes displays compassion. Some stories recount instances in which she happens across mortals in trouble and attempts to help them. Unfortunately, like the Hare, she inevitably miscalculates the amount of help needed, making her aid a curse instead of a blessing. In one tale she comes across a lost hunter who has fallen off a cliff and broken his legs; she "heals" him by completely removing the bones that seem to be giving him so much trouble, and hops off into the bush, satisfied at a job well done. In another story she passes a village and sees that several of its *wavobaks* are on fire; she stamps the fires out but utterly destroys the buildings in the process.

Kikavo Vo is only actively hostile when she thinks her child, Kikavo Dat, is being threatened. The fact that he is invulnerable to mortal harm doesn't stop her from flying into a deadly protective rage when he seems to be in even the slightest danger.

Those encountering Kikavo Vo in other circumstances report being overpowered by sweet emotion; a paralyzing wave of bliss sweeps over them and drives them to their knees. They may be left in this state long after her departure, leaving them helpless against predators - they'll swoon with joy as a wolf pack tears them to shreds. Those who avoid this fate will be forever after haunted by their brief moment of total ecstasy; some will expend every waking moment trying to find her again for another "fix." If they do, they may end up as her shamans. Shamans devoted to Kikavo Vo, like the goddess herself, may try to help regular Madlanders - with the same disastrous results.

Kikavo Dat (Little Leaper)

Kikavo Dat is a smaller version of his mother, Kikavo Vo. Even if he's made himself 40 feet tall, he's distinguishable from her by the proportions of a baby animal: his head, feet, and tail are large compared to his body, and his eyes are big and bright.

Kikavo Dat behaves like a rambunctious, exuberant child - with the power to remold reality to suit his whims. Full of energy, he's in constant motion, leaping about without regard to the destruction caused every time he lands. He's a restless god with a short attention span, always in search of diversion. Humans are play-

Intersctions Between Gods

Given the volatile and often savage behavior of individual gods, it would seem reasonable to expect that encounters between them would be doubly destructive. Strangely, this is not the case. In all the lore of Madlander storytellers, there isn't a single tale of gods fighting one another. Even when one of them is eaten or shapechanged by another, it appears to be "something gods do" rather than an actual battle. Gods are most likely to act in recognizably human ways when gathered in a group.

Many tales about meetings between the gods follow a standard format. Zo Do Wabda, sometimes with other hunters, is traveling through the woods when he comes upon two or more of the gods together. Zo Do Wabda is frozen in amazement by whatever he sees, and then watches with fascination. Here, the storyteller will describe some unlikely godly behavior, often a parody of normal Madlander life. Eventually, Zo Do Wabda tries to participate himself (and is quickly slain for his temerity) or recovers his senses enough to realize that he should flee (in which case the gods accidentally and unknowingly destroy him).

When spotted together, the gods might be playing games of *tippet* or *pi ewe*, racing voles or cheering on fighting beetles. In one story, Zo Do Wabda is slain by a divine game of Trouble Fish, smashed by a glue-covered killer whale! The gods may be having a picnic together; they might simply be chatting. Several stories show Gakox Pezep playing weird pranks on his fellow deities. In other tales, Bett Agwo has attempted to do a magical favor for one of them, and now the rest are struggling to reverse its alarming effects.

In a couple of stories, Zo Do Wabda tries to take advantage of the apparent good mood of the assembled gods and approaches them to ask a favor. In one tale, he actually upbraids them for the appalling conditions of Madlander life, and demands that they do a better job of godhood. These stories always end the same way...



Realms of the Gods

Clearly, the gods spend only a small fraction of their time in the Mad Lands. Otherwise, Zuutak would long since have eaten every tuber and tree, and Gakox Pezep, every man and animal. Zewa Zab's tunneling and the Kikavos' leaping would have reduced the entire place to rubble, and so on.

If they're not always here, it follows that they're usually somewhere else. Of all of the subjects dealt with in the canon of Madlander tales, the realm of the gods is the source of the most confusion and contradiction. No two stories set the home of the gods in the same place.

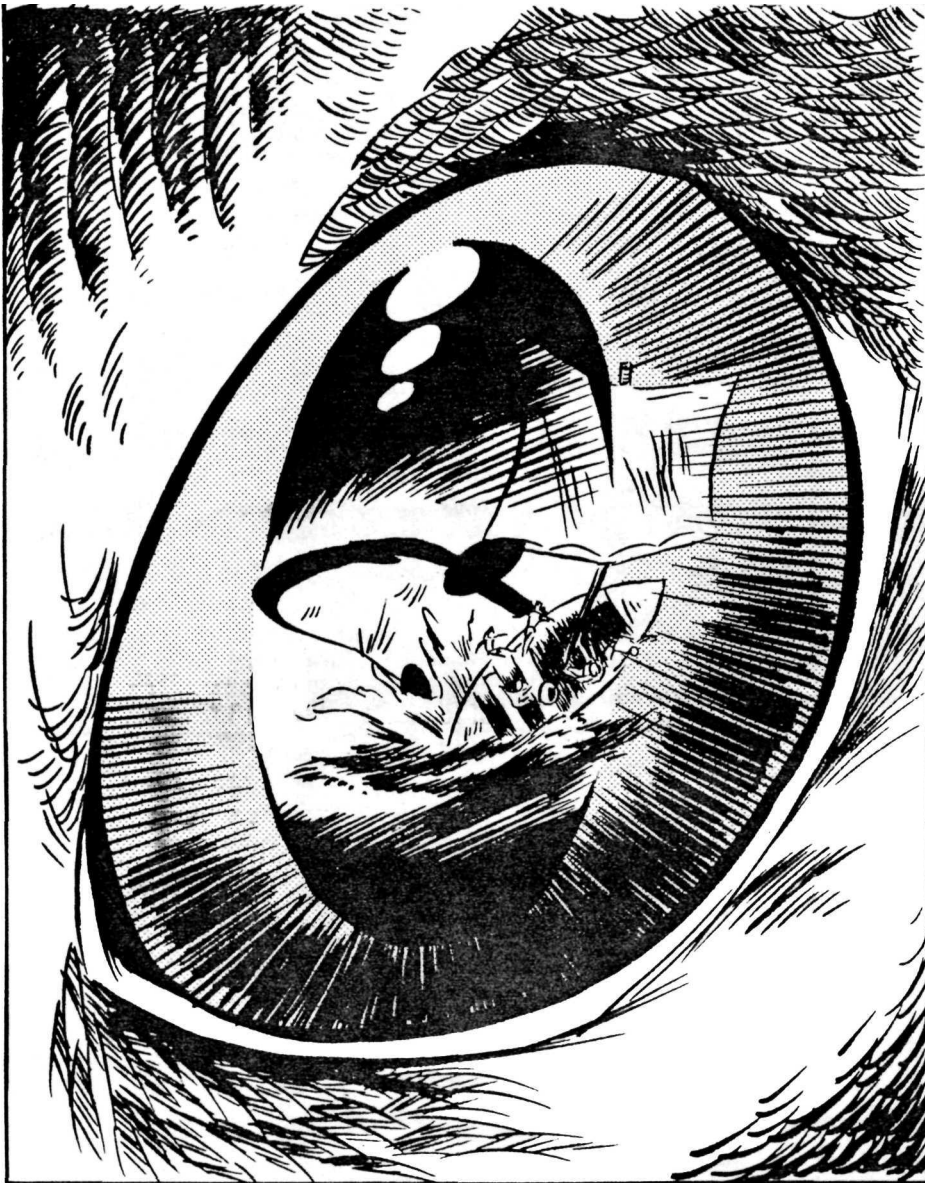
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things to him - in the way that ants and flies are toys for seven-year-old boys. Kikavo Dat will seize a person and strip him of his humanity in various ways just for fun, much as a child might tear a wing off a moth to see if it'll fly in circles. Kikavo Dat's gleeful experiments are responsible for many of the former Madlanders now stalking the forest as crazed bloodless, footless, headless, and so on.

Humans encountering him are reportedly affected by the aura of childish emotion he radiates. They may find themselves infected with his hyperactivity, compelled to twitch, jump and leap about to release a sudden excess of energy. Sometimes this effect ends when Kikavo Dat leaves; it's just as likely to last for days, months or until death. Another symptom of Kikavo Dat encounters is a mental regression to childhood, which again may be permanent or temporary.

Kikavo Dat can be reasoned with, at least to the extent that one can reason with a self-centered, all-powerful youngster. Several tales describe clever types who manage to survive a run-in with him by keeping him entertained until he gets bored and hops away.

In the tales, shamans of Kikavo Dat seem never to display the same abilities twice. They all seem to have been permanently regressed to childhood; one or two stories tell of actual children to whom he's granted shamanic powers.



Vuvuti (the Owl)

As in many cultures, the owl is regarded by Madlanders as representing knowledge and wisdom. However, since the Owl in question, Vuvuti, is a god, the knowledge is forbidden and the wisdom terrifying.

Vuvuti appears as a horned owl the size of a man. Accounts emphasize his deep and penetrating eyes, the size of barrel lids. People who encounter him find themselves irresistibly drawn to stare into them. There they see visions whose content is invariably disturbing. They might see a prophetic image of doom, or suddenly grasp a truth so shocking it threatens their sanity. The visions might be Vuvuti's attempt at communication, since he is never known to speak. Or they could, unasked, convey a tempting secret, such as the ritual required to gain a shamanic power.

Since these visual images are his only method of communication, Vuvuti's character remains somewhat unclear in Madlander lore. He does seem to be a cynical and mocking god, though, as many of the images he creates display a jeering contempt for mankind.

Owls are predators, and Vuvuti is sometimes known to prey on humans. Now and then he'll swoop down over a village and snatch a tender child in

his talons. When asked for information or shamanic powers, he'll nip off a small portion of the supplicant as payment for the answer. He usually prefers to peck out an eye, but has also been known to take fingers, toes or other bits of flesh. This is painful, and imposes a limit on the number of requests one can make of Vuvuti. From a shaman's point of view, the advantage of dealing with the Owl is that he considers his little snack payment in full, asking nothing further in exchange. Compared to other gods, who make their shamans follow orders, or even subtly infect them with their own personalities, this is considered a good deal. Powers associated with Owl shamans include various prophecy, knowledge and detection spells, along with the ability to shapechange to owl form.



Zewa Zab (the Gopher)

Although the gopher god Zewa Zab is rarely encountered in the flesh, his mark is everywhere in the Mad Lands. He seems to spend all of his tune on the material plane using his monstrous buck teeth to tunnel through bedrock. Over countless centuries he has created an extensive network of tunnels throughout the land. Some are freshly dug; most have long since filled with debris or collapsed. Collapsed tunnels sometimes become river beds (see p. 50).

Realms of the Gods (Continued)

One tale says they live in the clouds, hopping from one to another like squirrels in the trees. It claims that their movements are responsible for thunderstorms and blizzards. But this theory ignores the fact that many storms come in from the sea, which is anathema to the gods.

Another account places them in a chaotic underground land accessible through Zewa Zab's tunnels. The tale is about Zo Do Wabda being taken home as a toy by Kikavo Dat and becoming lost; it portrays the god realm as a cold, lightless place whose dimensions shift every day. This sounds suspiciously like the cities of the soulless (see p. 82), and may be a case of the Kikavo Dat story becoming intertwined with another about a kidnapping by soulless.

Other theories locate the realm in a land far to the north of the Whiteness, or even in a kingdom inside a tiny pebble lying somewhere in the Mad Lands' interior. Then there's the story that claims a different lair for each of the gods: Vuvuti lives behind the moon, Dopod Abwep in the sun, Zewa Zab in his tunnels, Bubzavav in a cave in the Togethian mountains, the Kikavos on an island far to the south and Zuutak at the bottom of a peat bog. Bax Powu Kag lives in the clouds above Togeth, and Bett Agwo in a hidden meadow that is splendidly sunny even in the depths of winter. Interestingly, the story omits mention of Gakox Pezep.

Another story, in which a shaman begs Zo Do Wabda to switch places with him, includes extensive metaphysical speculation from the mouth of the shaman character. He concludes that when the gods aren't in the Mad Lands, they don't exist at all: they only come into being when people, down in their deepest thoughts, want them to. While the shaman pontificates, Zo Do Wabda is able to sneak up behind him and club him to death, giving the story a happy ending but cutting off the theory in mid-sentence. This reflects the general Madlander attitude toward philosophical speculation, too!

GMs can choose a specific answer for the question of the god realm: either one of these, or another that has yet to occur to Madlander tale-tellers. The reality of the gods is not linear, several opposite answers might be equally true.

Gods and Boundaries

The gods of the Mad Lands have power only over a limited area. Visitors from the Whiteness and Northern Tribelands tell the Madlander people that the gods they fear so much are not even known abroad. The force that ties the land to its gods, and vice versa, is not understood. As with many questions of this nature, Madlanders have no particular interest in exploring it.

Knowledge of the boundaries that the gods are subject to is, however, most useful. Most important is the fact that they have no dominion over the sea; their power ends at the coastline. A god cannot pursue someone into the sea; a fleeing victim is safe if he makes it to the water. The god's magics don't work on anyone in or on the ocean; this applies to shamanic abilities too. Monsters created by the actions of the gods are also barred from the sea: this includes both the once-human menaces described in Chapter 6, and animals mutated by the malign effect of haunted places. (The soulless - see Chapter 7 - and their sorcerous powers are not hindered by the sea, since their relationship to the gods is indirect if it exists at all.) Offshore islands are also free of monsters and shamanic monsters.

This effect is not due to a godly aversion to water, throwing sea water at a god or monster on the land accomplishes nothing. Rather, the coastline acts as a border beyond which the gods, for whatever reason, can't venture. Other borders confine the mad deities, too, although these are harder to take advantage of.

To the north, the border is with the Whiteness. Most months of the year, however, the intelligent snow of the area comes right up to the Madlander border, and it will act to repel any foreign intruders. Those crossing this line will be exchanging one supernatural threat for another. During the couple of months when the snow is melted, the Viwti E vigorously patrol their borders to prevent incursions; without their snow they're jumpy and insecure, and may or may not allow Madlanders entry to escape pursuers.

To the west, a minor mountain range forms the border with Togeth. The barrier to the gods is marked by the highest points of the range; the gods can't pass to the west of this line. The Togethian border is less reliable than the others; monsters can cross it, although they seem to prefer not to. And one story tells of Zo Do Wabda being chased, slowly but relentlessly, across the entire land by Bax Powu Kag and finally making it across the Togethian mountains - only to find that the Moose wasn't subject to the barrier.

Madlanders consider his tunnels best left alone - the newer ones will definitely be haunted, and maybe the older ones, too. Since they don't investigate it, Madlanders know little about Zewa Zab's tunnel network. The tunnels might conform to some sort of pattern - doubtless a bizarre one - or be entirely random; no one has made a systematic survey.

Zewa Zab looks like a normal gopher enlarged to gigantic proportions; he's usually about 15 feet long. Stories portray him as extremely single-minded; he'd rather continue digging than torment humans who come across him. He might bite a few limbs off people who get in his way, but is otherwise nonaggressive. Now and then he'll tunnel up into the center of a village around harvest time and gobble up all the tubers; he does this less frequently than Zuutak (see below). According to the storytellers, he talks very quickly and at great length, with tunnelling pretty much his exclusive subject.

His shamans are more feared than he is; they have a wide range of earth magics at their disposal. They usually hide out in Zewa Zab's tunnels, which they carefully maintain.

Zuutak (the Pig)

Zuutak is so universally feared that his very name breaks the rules: it is the only word in the Madlander language that requires a double vowel when transcribed to the Roman alphabet. This denotes the way that the "u" sound is always drawn out to mimic a scream of alarm.

Zuutak's name is synonymous with cries of alarm because he is the god most likely to materialize in the middle of a village. Zuutak's forms vary, but he's always some sort of pig. His most notorious trait is his bottomless hunger for fresh and tasty vegetation. The greatest fear of Madlanders as the tuber harvest approaches is that Zuutak might attack the village's crop, rooting through the soil with his snout and gobbling up the entire year's supply in a few horrific minutes. The only defense is flight; Zuutak is not normally carnivorous and will only eat people who get in his way or try to fight him off. Those who take refuge in their *wavobaks* are usually spared. There are, however, some accounts in which Zuutak destroys a village's longhouses - killing a few people along the way - while trying to get at tuber preserves. Zuutak probably only attacks one or two villages a year, but fearful rumors always multiply his depredations.

Zuutak will also reportedly devour large stands of trees or even peat bogs. Since these feedings occur in uninhabited areas, they are rarely seen directly; hunters sometimes stumble into the devastated landscape he leaves in his wake. Places wrecked by Zuutak are fertile ground for hauntings and other supernatural events; hunters and normal animals steer clear of them.

Though he most often appears as a giant hog the size of a *wavobak*, his physical size can vary radically. Sometimes he's merely the size of a grizzly bear; other times he's so huge that the tread of his hoof can crumble a hill into the sea. On the other hand, he sometimes appears as a normal-sized or even tiny pig; in this form he may seem harmless, but all of his destructive power remains intact. Usually his hide is a bright pink, a coloration not found in the boars of the Mad Lands; when he appears at a normal size, this is the tip-off to his identity. It's not a foolproof one, since he sometimes wears the coarse gray hide of a native pig. A hunter can never be absolutely certain that the boar he's stalking is a common one and not the god in disguise.

Apart from his appetite, Zuutak's personality and motivations remain obscure. There are few accounts in which he involves himself in human affairs. However, there are tales about shamans who do his bidding in exchange for certain powers; they seem to spend their time planning ways to steal food from villagers.

MONSTERS AND BEASTS 6

Any individual Madlander is unlikely to meet a god in his lifetime. The gods' spawn, the monsters of the Mad Lands, are far more commonly encountered. It's a rare hunting season that doesn't include at least one fight with monsters. This relative familiarity doesn't make them any less frightening: any single Madlander monster is more than a match for even the most experienced woodsman. The physical threat they pose is only a fraction of the terror they inspire: most of it is psychological. First, they're viscerally revolting, with extremely gruesome appearances. More important, they induce horror because of what they represent.



Using Monsters

As characters progress through many fantasy games, they accumulate a steadily longer list of creature types they can slaughter without breaking a sweat. In the Mad Lands, things are different. Although some monsters are scarier than others, there are no pushover opponents PCs can enjoy easy victories against. There is no Mad Lands monster that doesn't pose a real threat to any human, no matter how experienced.

Monsters here should be treated as they are in horror games. Every tangle with them is a brush with death. Madlander characters, including PCs, should be frightened of them. Those who survive monster encounters might suffer psychological damage if they fail Fright Checks. Monsters are never regarded casually.

GMs should be careful when bringing monsters into the story line. If a little bit of gratuitous combat seems required to pick up the pace, use outlaws, animals (rabid or mutated) or foreigners instead.

When the GM finally decides to bring a monster to center stage, he should carefully build up to it. Have the PCs spend some time investigating its trail of carnage before introducing the obscene horror itself. Bring on NPCs who are appropriately terrified at the prospect of meeting it; show victims who have suffered at its hands. Think of small chilling details to engage the players' imaginations. This will make the actual encounter, when it finally comes, seem more significant and scary.

Don't be afraid to build powerful monsters. Players will have been given sufficient warning that these aren't typical fantasy bad guys; if they proceed without caution, show them no mercy. On the other hand, there should always be a means of escape so properly careful PCs won't be annihilated along with the foolish. There is no dishonor in outright flight from a monster one can't hope to defeat.

Clever players will work out strategies to even the odds. Help them by providing opportunities for guerrilla tactics or sneak attacks. Place exploitable flaws in monster plans or hidden advantages in the local terrain. Don't spoon-feed these Achilles' heels to the players; make them work to find them. Good players will often surprise a GM by coming up with equally strong strategies he hadn't anticipated.



Monstrous Origins

Madlander monsters don't breed. They aren't species unto themselves. Each monster is a former human, altered by supernatural forces. A Madlander who comes face-to-face with a monster is not just worrying about being killed; he's thinking, "This could happen to *me*." Death is something a Madlander accepts rather than fears. The real dread is of being turned into a monster, of being doomed to an endless existence beyond death as a grotesque mockery of one's true self.

Monstrousness in the Mad Lands is defined by *absence*: something essential to humans has been magically torn from every one of these creatures. Along with the obvious - skinless no longer have skins, boneless now lack bones - they've lost all sense of basic morality. In Madlander thought, the need of one human to band together with another for mutual survival isn't learned, it's inbred. The impulse toward compassion and cooperation comes from an actual substance in human blood. The blood of monsters is thought to boil at the moment of transformation, turning this human essence into poisonous bile. Foreigners, because they lack this essence, don't qualify as exactly human. But monsters are downright evil, because they're fueled by a corrupt version of it. The bile drives them to seek out others and harm them. Monsters are no more capable of self-sacrifice or compassion than a chipmunk is of flying. (A non-mutated chipmunk, that is.)

This belief fails to explain a few things. The mechanism that drives the bloodless to evil remains puzzling. How foreigners, lacking the essence of humanity to corrupt, can become monsters is also unexplained - and many foreigners, not knowing how to protect themselves here, meet this fate. And some intelligent monsters group together for mutual benefit, which, according to theory, they should be incapable of. Various rationalizations have been proposed to deal with these gaps.

The easiest way to become a monster is to be attacked by a god. Since anyone who dies without being given a proper funeral becomes some sort of undead menace, victims "eaten" or "devoured" by a deity don't just die. Some time after being consumed, they're excreted as monsters. The details depend on the manner of the attack: if the victim's face is bitten, he'll end up as a faceless, if a leg is torn off he'll become a footless, and so on. Certain monsters can perpetuate their own numbers by attacking human beings and transforming them.

Madlanders don't regard mutated animals (see p. 78) as monsters: they lack the blood poison that makes monsters evil. They're just another impersonal hazard to be coped with, like hostile weather.

The gods seem to have a tolerant attitude toward their benighted spawn; even Gakox Pezep in his most violent aspect won't go out of his way to destroy them. On the other hand, a few tales describe intelligent monsters provoking a god enough to warrant an attack. They end up being turned into *different* monsters. And, of course, Bubzavav eats everything, including monsters!

Monsters

The following information represents common Madlander knowledge of the most important monsters. It's more likely to be accurate than the material on the gods, since encounters with monsters are more frequent. However, nothing supernatural in the Mad Lands follows hard and fast rules: in monstrous matters, there is an exception to everything. GMs should feel free to create individual creatures who break the pattern for their types. They're also encouraged to come up with creatures of their own, remembering that each is a magically remolded human with something absent. What might the heartless be like? The eyeless? Mindless?

Along with descriptions of appearance, personality, behavior, social organization (if any), powers and means of origin, this section discusses possible psychological effects a person who encounters the monster might suffer. PCs scoring more than 21 on the Fright Check table (p. B94) during a monster encounter may, at the GM's discretion, experience these either instead of, or in addition to, the specified result.

Stats have deliberately been left vague to underline the need to carefully personalize each and every evil creature.

Bloodless

The bloodless are greatly feared by Madlanders because, although their appearance can be distinctly hideous, they're also capable of looking like normal humans. Bloodless live after the loss of all blood. They suffer perpetual pain throughout their chests and limbs which they can only alleviate by drinking the blood of a human victim.

In its hungry state, a bloodless looks like an unbelievably emaciated human. Its drained white skin is stretched tight across its bones, making it look like a corpse that has undergone natural mummification but continues to walk about. Their eyes seem unnaturally large, goggling out of their drum-tight faces. Their hair, now translucent, hangs down limply from the head. If touched, it is as brittle as dead grass, and can easily be broken off with the hand. Some bloodless will have lost their noses due to the drying out of connective tissue.

If a bloodless drinks enough blood, its tissues and hair will temporarily rehydrate, making it look absolutely human. (Bloodless who have lost their noses will need to immediately bandage themselves, or all of the precious bodily fluid will shoot out of them in a single frightful nosebleed.) Bloodless will, if possible, always wear human garb, which they carefully maintain so they'll look as normal as possible when trying to infiltrate a village or accost a party of trusting hunters.

The unrelenting agony of the bloodless state makes these creatures completely single-minded. All they think about is satisfying their hunger. If they do manage to drink enough blood to dampen it, they set about using their newly healthy looks to capture prisoners for future draining. No matter how long it thirsts, a bloodless will not die; it just lumbers along in excruciating pain. Bloodless seem incapable of ending their suffering by committing suicide; their overwhelming need to feed probably prevents them from even thinking of it.

To completely relieve the pain, a bloodless must consume the blood of a human equal to or greater than its original body weight. Once it does so it remains fully satiated for a few months - no one has been able to study them well enough to be more specific about the time involved. A bloodless who consumes less than this - who, say, drains a few pints from a victim who escapes before bleeding to death - staves off the hunger for a few days at most. Blood from animals or other monster types has no effect on the hunger.

Victims retain their intelligence after being turned into bloodless, but the longer they go without blood, the more their minds deteriorate. A successful bloodless who goes for only short periods between feedings is still capable of higher reasoning and abstract thought; all of this intellectual capacity is devoted to lining up its next meal. Individuals who have gone hungry for long periods will operate solely on the instinctive level, left with only the drive for blood. Even in the emaciated state, bloodless can speak, in a loathsome rasping voice like the stirring of dead leaves. The more brain-dead ones may have little to say beyond "Blood! Blood! *Blood!*" A blood feeding will not restore lost intelligence.

Bloodless may be solitary hunters, or may group together into small bands who cooperate in the search for prey. Bands will be led autocratically by a single individual. The leader will likely be the one with the most intelligence left, to whom the others defer because of his grasp of strategy. Others may rule through superior physical force or greater shamanic power. Leaders must ensure a steady blood supply for their followers, not only because they'll be deserted otherwise, but because even loyal disciples will become useless if their brains are allowed to dry up. Mindless bloodless aren't smart enough to stay in a group or follow orders; they'll drift away to continue existence as lone predators.

People become bloodless through three mechanisms: divine contact, contagion or social deviance. The most common origin is divine contact, in which the victim loses his blood by getting too close to a god. The touch of Dopod Abwep is known to evaporate human blood. Sometimes Gakox Pezep or Bubzavav will drink a victim's blood as the first step in eating them. Rarer are instances in which Bert Agwo accidentally dematerializes the blood of someone seeking a magical boon from him.

Contagion occurs when a victim whose blood is drained by a bloodless dies and is not given a proper funeral. One would think that this would be a far commoner origin than divine contact, since monsters are encountered more often than gods. But the bloodless themselves try to keep their population as low as possible, since they're all competing for access to the same blood supply. Whenever possible they'll return a drained corpse to the nearest settlement so the villagers will perform the proper rites. Bloodless population control goes beyond the prevention of contagion cases; bloodless have been known to attack and kill one another in battles over territory. Turf wars give an advantage to bloodless in bands; only very powerful ones can control prime areas near villages by themselves. Mindless bloodless are the usual victims when the bloodless decide to cull their own population.

Finally, people can turn into bloodless if they display evil personality traits over a long period of time. In general, only males are susceptible to this: if they're greedy, or consistent cowards and slackers who eat the food of the village without ever risking their own lives to help acquire it, they may slowly mutate into bloodless. At first, they'll experience heightened appetites, and may be mistaken for gluttons. As time goes on, they'll need more and more food to silence their rumbling stomachs and maintain their body weights. Then one day they'll find themselves tingling with desire when they see someone cut themselves. This process usually ends with the victim going crazy at the sight of blood, killing the bleeding person as he completes his transformation to monster. Sometimes village elders will spot the symptoms before they reach this stage, and will try to counsel the afflicted to display more courage and self-sacrifice. Behavior change prior to full transformation can gradually reverse the process.

Bloodless created by divine contact have a full range of the shamanic powers associated with the particular god in question. Others have only the spellcasting powers they had before transformation, if any. In their hungry state, bloodless are incredibly tough in combat. They're completely invulnerable to crushing or impaling damage. In fact, they can't be really killed, only dismembered. In order to destroy a bloodless, one must systematically deliver enough cutting damage to its head and limbs to sever them. The pieces of the bloodless will "live" on; the monster's consciousness will be intact, still suffering its terrible hunger through eternity. Only a bloodless with true strategic genius would be capable of harming anyone after being hacked into pieces. Despite this, Madlanders usually burn or toss dismembered bloodless into the sea, just to be safe. Carrying the chartering, writhing pieces of a troop of bloodless to the coast would be a disturbing experience, requiring periodic Fright Checks.

The bloodless is most vulnerable after it has fed, when it takes on human form. Then it is susceptible to the same sorts of damage as any mortal.

Bloodless drain their victims in various ways. Many of them have a new or adapted appendage to do the job: fangs, lamprey-mouthed tentacles hidden somewhere on the body and hollow fingernails that serve as feeding tubes have all been reported. Some can drain by osmosis, simply by laying hands on a victim. Others have no special feeding apparatus, and attack with normal weapons. When they feed, they open a wound in the victim and lap up the blood like a vampire bat.

Psychological Damage

People who tangle with bloodless and survive may still suffer traumatic effects. They might experience unquenchable thirst or hunger. Equally likely, they will be nauseated by some or most types of food or drink and show symptoms of anorexia. They could combine the two complexes and suffer bulimia. If struck by hunger and thirst, they may irrationally believe that they are turning into bloodless themselves. Or their trauma might relate to some other part of the encounter.

Creating Bloodless

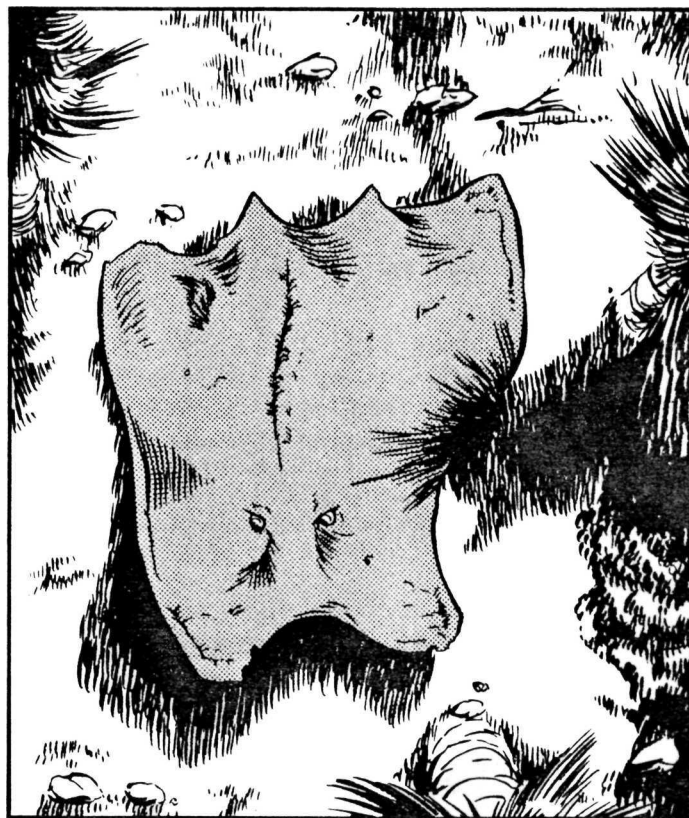
To create a bloodless, start by building him as he was before the transformation. In emaciated form, it will have double ST, and 1.5 times DX and HT. Its hide will be PD 2, DR 2. (In satiated form the bloodless will revert to the original stats and lose the armor ratings.) Drop any skills and advantages that can't be used in securing prey. If it was created by divine contact, take those points and put them in Magical Aptitude and shamanic powers appropriate to the god. Whatever its origin, it may have a specialized feeding organ - points can also be devoted to its attack. For a more powerful bloodless, add experience points for its existence after the transformation. For ones that have gone hungry, drop IQ as required.

Boneless

ST: 1d+19	Move/Dodge: 15/air	Size: 1 hex
DX: 3d+6	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: as for human minus 5 lbs.
IQ: 3	Damage: after successful grapple, 2d smothering and 1d acid digestion per turn	
HT: 10/45*	Reach: C	

*The high hit point number reflects how hard a boneless is to seriously injure, since it's mostly flesh. It can move its internal organs about at will and uses this ability to protect itself when someone is thrusting at it. Critical hits are assumed to have punctured an organ; multiply the damage by 3.

The boneless are great flopping sheets of skin that fly the Mad Lands' interior in search of prey. They move through the air as a manta ray swims through the ocean. Their hides match the complexion of Madlander skin. A pair of human-looking eyes is mounted front and center on its top surface. Anyone foolish enough to closely examine a boneless will discover vestigial remnants of its original human form scattered randomly about its hide - an ear, a few teeth, some hair, a nipple. Along its underside they'll find hundreds of enlarged pores about a fifth of an inch in diameter. In living specimens each pore will be sealed with a layer of yellow mucus.



Boneless are strictly carnivorous. They'll prey on any large animal - moose, deer, bear, cougar, monster - but prefer human meat if they can get it. They attack by wrapping themselves around a victim and slowly smothering him to death. It's a horrible way to go: the boneless begins to digest its prey before it's even dead. As soon as the boneless is wrapped around its victim, its pores begin to secrete concentrated digestive acid. This melts the victim's flesh, allowing the boneless to absorb the resulting fluid back through the pores.

Although the acid retains its potency after the boneless dies, Madlanders don't bother to harvest it. Because it's a dangerous product to obtain, they avoid becoming dependent on its use.

Boneless are instinctive, not intelligent. When hungry, they search for prey. They are usually solitary hunters. When full, they find a sheltered spot - in a tree, tunnel, or cave - and sleep for weeks at a time, rolled up or curled into a ball. On rare occasions a few might be sighted together, for no clear reason - they don't breed and seem incapable of communication. In fact, they sometimes attack one another. A fight between two boneless is a remarkable sight, as each tries to envelop the other in a death squeeze. Often both die, tangled in a partly-digested mass.

A handful of tales feature intelligent, talking boneless, sometimes in organized gangs. These stories are understood to be fanciful, or perhaps evocative of a past time when some boneless

could think. No one alive today reports encountering smart boneless.

People become boneless by being crushed so severely by a god that the corpse spreads out like a pancake and the bones are ground to powder. Gakox Pezep and the Kikavos are the chief creators of boneless, though other gods like Zuutak and Bax powu Kag are capable of similar squashings if they manifest big enough.

Victims killed by boneless don't come back as boneless themselves - the digestive process destroys a corpse more thoroughly than a funeral. If a victim returns at all, it'll be as a ghost. It seems unlikely that one can become boneless through bad behavior, although one story does tell of an entire village of people who turn boneless when they fail to stand up to a tyrannical elder. Since Madlander society doesn't produce many tyrants, it's hard to say whether this is fable or valid warning.

Few boneless have special powers beyond their smothering attack and acidic digestion. The odd exception might have a shamanic power from the god that created it, but will be unable to use it in any intelligent way. A shamanic boneless might involuntarily create peculiar, meaningless illusions or emit random bursts of healing energy.

Psychological Damage

Survivors of boneless attacks may have recurring nightmares in which they're being smothered or burned by acid. They might develop phobias against blankets or bathing.

Faceless

From the neck down, the faceless look like perfectly normal naked humans. From the neck up, they're a different story. Their heads are hairless and totally featureless. Where one would expect ears, eyes, nose, mouth and wrinkles there is nothing but a layer of soft, puffy tissue.

The faceless apparently don't need food or drink. They seem to be aimless creatures who do little but wander about forlornly in the wilderness. Whether they're intelligent or not is a matter for conjecture, since, lacking mouths, they're incapable of speech. Judging from body language, and the closed-off whimpering noises that resonate deep within their throats, the faceless are sad and tormented things. They'd be objects of pity if they weren't dangerous.

Humans must be careful not to get too close to faceless, who seem to have some sort of psychic sense that allows them to perceive their environment despite the lack of sight, hearing and so forth. When a faceless senses the presence of a human nearby, it will imprint itself upon that person and begin to follow them. It's not clear how large a faceless' range of psychic detection is. Hunters use arrow range as a rule of thumb.

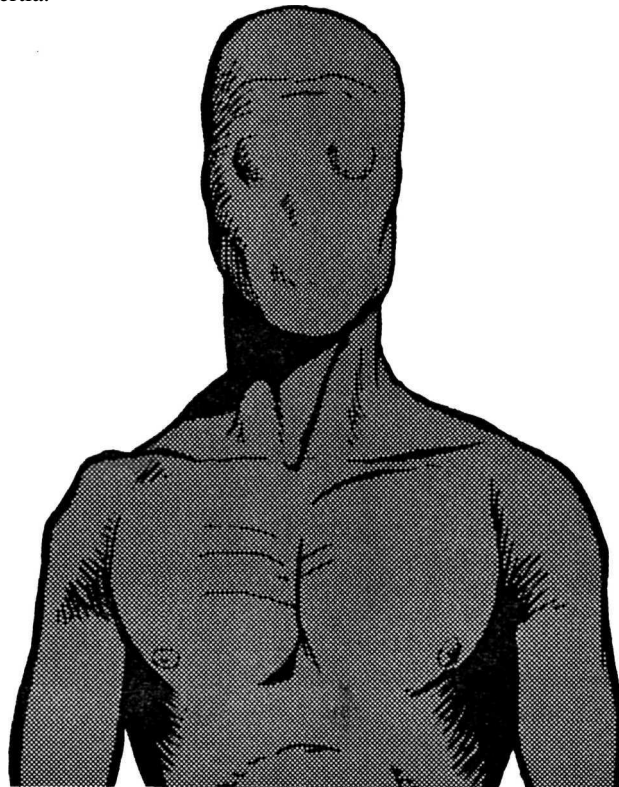
A faceless doesn't seem to be trying to harm the person it is following. If it catches up with its quarry, it attempts to wrap its arms around the victim; it whimpers and holds on for dear life. A clinging faceless passively but stoutly resists any attempt to dislodge it, gently or otherwise.

No one wants to be locked in a permanent embrace with a disturbing monster, and being near a faceless is not safe, even if it means no harm. Faceless are walking harbingers of doom, carrying bad luck like a disease. Those in proximity to one are at any moment likely to experience disaster: examples might include lightning strikes, attacks from animals or other monsters, earthquakes, fires, crop blight, food spoilage and the sudden damage to items ranging from pots to *wavobaks*. Anyone suffering emotional trauma from previous monster encounters will have their symptoms multiplied fivefold. Chronic diseases recur. Old

wounds will open up again. If something bad happens, the person nearest to the faceless ends up on the receiving end. Characters near a faceless suffer penalties to all die rolls, increasing in severity the closer the thing comes. Exact penalties depend on the individual faceless, and are left to the GM's discretion.

The logical thing to do is to avoid faceless altogether, and destroy them if they try to follow. But they're hard to kill. First of all, the bad luck they project will affect people trying to attack them: weapons fall apart, footings give way, even successful blows hit weakly. Secondly, faceless are relentless once they decide to follow someone. Even hacking them apart doesn't stop them. If a faceless' legs are chopped off, it'll pull itself forward with its arms. If its arms are removed, it'll edge along on its stomach muscles like a caterpillar. If decapitated, its head will roll towards the one it seeks. If the skull is cracked open, the exposed brain will crawl out and creep on ahead. Other severed parts may also continue the pursuit: one victim may be pursued simultaneously by a faceless' head, both arms, torso, legs and ambulatory entrails. Each part carries the same degree of bad fortune as the whole.

Though usually encountered singly, faceless are sometimes found in small groups. It's difficult to say how they act without observers around, since their behavior changes so radically when they detect human presence. From what is known, they seem to have no capacity for social interaction. Most reckon that groups exist only when a number of people are transformed to faceless at the same time; as monsters, they remain in the same area out of inertia.



Faceless are created only through divine contact. Dopod Abwep will sometimes approach people and embrace them, drawing their faces to his chest and burning them off. Like the resulting monsters, he means no harm, apparently acting this way out of loneliness. Spending too much time near Bax Powu Kag can cause facelessness. Potential shamans asking Bett Agwo for chameleonic or camouflage abilities may find themselves turned faceless by mistake. Gakox Pezep and Bubzavav create them when they gnaw on victims from the top down; Zewa Zab also

gets the occasional accidental mouthful of human head while burrowing. Kikavo Dat has been known to flatten out a face or two while treating people like dolls.

Psychological Damage

Victims stalked by faceless may suffer psychological aftereffects even after the thing is finally burned or crushed completely into pulp. They may feel they're being constantly watched or followed. They might develop an irrational fear of losing their own facial features. Or they could suffer hallucinations in which approaching people's faces vanish; more than one person has been slain by accident when taken for faceless by a hysterical victim.

Creating Faceless

Stats are those of a normal human with no armor or weapons. Faceless will keep going, regardless of damage suffered, until there is nothing left of them capable of any sort of movement. (At this point a cautious party usually burns the pieces or throws them into the sea.) Hit points function only as a guide to just how much of the body is crawling about at any given moment. GMs can make these determinations with the help of hit locations, weapon types, and other situational modifiers.

Fleshless

The fleshless, stripped of all skin and muscle, are ambulatory skeletons, complete with organs hanging down from their rib cages and gluey strings of exposed nerves dangling from each bone. They still have eyes in their eye sockets and tongues in their mouths. They no longer have noses or ears but still seem to be able to hear and smell.

Fleshless retain their human intelligence and struggle to convince themselves - and others - that they're not monsters at all, the obvious visual evidence notwithstanding. They're constantly struggling to suppress a powerful urge to destroy all human life they meet. Every fleshless displays a different personality: they're obsessed with retaining the traits they had as humans. They end up as nauseating caricatures of their former selves, crazily exaggerating what they remember as their defining virtues. The fleshless are acting, posing as the humans they used to be.

Any fleshless' greatest dream is to be accepted into a human community. Nothing is less likely. A fleshless in the presence of a human seems manic and nervous, anxious to pass for normal. Their adoption of human behavior just makes their hideous forms more obscene by contrast. When a fleshless senses that it is loathed or feared, it gives in to its murderous impulses and it lashes out in full fury. Madlanders who encounter them try to humor them until they can escape or gain the upper hand for the inevitable fight. The result is an absurd and deadly dance, as the fleshless desperately try to convince the Madlanders of their humanity, and the humans fight their revulsion, trying to convince the fleshless they're convinced - with the situation ready to explode at any second.

Fleshless behave as much like regular folks as they can. They set up communities with clans and elders. They build primitive lean-tos and call them *wavobaks*. They go on hunting expeditions, even though they no longer require sustenance. (They don't fish, since they can't leave the shore for the sea - see sidebar, p. 62.) They form pairs in imitation of marriage. If infant or juvenile fleshless happen along, the members of a fleshless village hotly compete for the chance to adopt them and seem more like a real family. They play games, tell stories, and even play their own nerve-shattering version of music on cobbled-together *zawadaK*.

But in the end their monstrous natures always come through. Their communities are unstable: vicious fighting frequently erupts between clans, and elderships go to the most ruthless. Fleshless marriages seldom last more than a few months before one mate tries to annihilate the other. Children try to kill their parents, and vice versa. Few villages last longer than a year or so; after some big crisis each member will sulk off into the wilderness, in search of "more human" fleshless to start a new community with.

Gakox Pezep and Bubzavav create fleshless whenever they eat most of a human victim. A sustained embrace from Dopod Abwep has the same result. Kikavo Dat and Bett Agwo produce a few, through sadistic playfulness and divine incompetence, respectively.

Victims killed by fleshless may become fleshless themselves if their corpses are sufficiently mutilated. Fleshless usually try to avoid propagating this way: they want to regain their humanity, not take away that of others. But when in a homicidal frenzy, their self-control vanishes. Often they end up shrieking something like, "You think you're better than me? Well, you see how it feels to live like this!" and stripping the flesh from their screaming victims. Some fleshless will intentionally abduct children and turn them so that their communities will seem more "real." According to their twisted logic, the children will be able to recapture their birthrights when their new "parents" do.

Divinely-created fleshless will have all the particular god's shamanic powers. Those spawned by contagion will have them only if they were shamans in their former lives. Because they're sustained by supernatural power instead of biology, it's very difficult to mortally wound a fleshless. It requires major damage to destroy them. They're invulnerable to impaling weapons, and suffer damage from cutting weapons only in the case of a critical hit.

Psychological Damage

Survivors of fleshless encounters may begin to doubt their own humanity, convinced that they're merely posing as their true selves. Or they might suspect that other villagers are impostors. They may change their eating habits to bring on rapid weight gains or losses.

Creating Fleshless

To build a fleshless, start with a normal human character. Double ST, add 50 percent to DX, and multiply hit points by 3. For divinely-spawned fleshless, add magical aptitude and 1dx10 points of shamanic powers.

Footless

ST: 1d+12	Spees/Dodge: 10	Size: 3 hexes
DX: 1d+10	PD/DR: 1/1	Weight: 300 lbs.
IQ: 3d	Damage: 3d stamp, 1d-2 bite	
HT: 1d+12/2d+28	Reach: C	

In a crowded field of contenders, the footless are the weirdest-looking monsters of the Mad Lands. (They're also oddly named, since all they *have* is a foot; with sardonic humor the Madlanders call the beast after its one remaining feature.) Their bodies look like huge humanoid legs severed below the knee. Each stamps about on one enormous foot, up to eight feet long and three feet wide. Mounted in front, about three-quarters of the way up the leg, is a single eye enlarged to the size of a plate. Below this are two slits for nostrils and a small oval mouth lined with 16 triangular, razor-sharp teeth. The mouth seems to exist only as a weapon: if eviscerated, a footless proves to have no internal or-

gans or digestive system. Sprouting from the end of the leg is a long flowing mane of hair; like Madlander hair, it'll be black or gray. Footless smell very bad, especially in damp weather.

Footless are unpredictable; they may attack humans on sight or ignore them completely. It's thought that they're intelligent but completely mad. They don't seem to be driven by animal needs: they're asexual creatures who don't require food or drink. If taken by surprise, they'll either be trying to while away the time, or they'll be virtually catatonic, locked in their own private lunacies.

Footless can talk - in fact, they rarely shut up. They mutter unendingly to themselves in voices so soft they can only be heard from close range. Even when caught sleeping, they'll still be babbling away. Legend has it that anyone who gets close enough to a footless will hear one absolutely vital piece of information. This single gem of knowledge will be hidden in a mountain of apparently senseless gibbering. Those foolhardy enough to sidle up to a footless report babble on a nearly infinite number of topics. They may be ranting to themselves about boating safety, the mystic significance of the *kavi a*, the smell of their mothers' breath or how it feels to be wounded by a spear as opposed to a sword. Sometimes they have uncanny knowledge: they may expound correctly on heraldry in Savarginia, reveal the current whereabouts of each of the gods or repeat a man's thoughts back to him. The footless must have some sort of long-range psychic sense that allows them access to such information; presumably they have no control over this faculty.

Footless may be encountered singly or in groups. They seem to take comfort in one another's presence, though they don't interact or communicate in any explicable way. It's not clear whether each is part of a permanent group, or if they're wanderers who bond temporarily with other footless.

Only gods create footless. Kikavo Dat is thought to be the main manufacturer of footless; it's a design he uses repeatedly when reshaping captured humans to his whims. Victims who lose legs in attacks by other gods may also become footless. Would-be shamans who ask Belt Agwo for mobility powers, or freedom from the needs of the body, may also suffer this fate.

Footless do not have snamanic powers. Oddly, for creatures created by gods, some of them can cast sorcerous spells. No doubt they've picked them up by accident while using their psychic

ability to trawl for knowledge. A footless could have any sorcerous powers imaginable, no matter how inappropriate. Chances are it wouldn't be sane enough to use them to maximum effect, but even in ignorance they could pose a threat.

Psychological Damage

The thumping sound that announces the approach of a footless signals terror in the Madlander heart: by sound alone, it's easy to mistake them for Gakox Pezep and the Kikavos. Sufferers of footless trauma might become convinced that they've been given unwanted snamanic powers from these deities. They may be unable to rid their nostrils of the footless' sharp, damp stench. Many become obsessed by the words they heard the footless utter, forever pondering the vital meaning hidden in them. Extreme cases may take to babbling themselves, muttering aloud each evermore-disturbed thought.

Ghosts and Undead

Madlanders who die and are not given a proper funeral are likely to rise again in undead form, their bodies animated by the evil magical aura of the Mad Lands. When the residents of a village know that one of their number has fallen in this way, they go on alert, expecting him to return to the village as a monster. Those who do not return are assumed to be out in the bush, waiting.

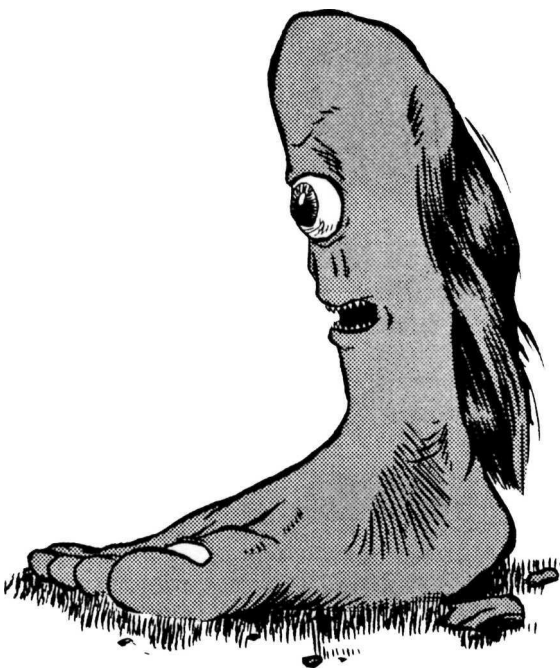
Fortunately, only Madlanders seem to return as ghosts or undead; monsters and foreigners remain dead when slain. It's not clear whether a foreigner adopted as a Madlander might return; since adoptions are very uncommon, storytellers don't have enough information to speculate. Seals do come back from the dead, but this seems to happen even less frequently than human hauntings. The circumstances that provoke a seal haunting are probably different from those for Madlanders; the seals themselves are resolutely tight-lipped about such matters.

Undead

Even expected undead attacks are hard to prepare for, each has a unique personality, set of motivations and range of supernatural abilities. Typically, all of a man's positive traits will be reversed in his undead counterpart. If known for his wisdom, he'll be completely irrational as an undead. Self-sacrifice becomes greed, creative impulses turn into destructiveness and heroism into murder. Meanwhile, his character flaws will be magnified tenfold: a former glutton tries to devour everything in sight; a blowhard rends the air with constant ear-shattering shrieks. Desires repressed in life are pursued without restraint. The subject of an old unrequited crush might be targeted for abduction and a fate worse than death. A friendly rivalry held in life could lead to a deadly vendetta.

Undead are not restricted to the standard sorts of supernatural abilities available through shamanism or sorcery. Each has a unique set of powers. These may relate in twisted fashion to the undead's former personality. A drunkard might exude an aura that intoxicates everyone within range. A great whaler could appear with a deadly magic harpoon. A former storyteller might gain hypnotic powers of persuasion, or even the ability to reorder reality to fit its own perverse storyline. Alternately, an undead's new powers might be tailored specifically to the weaknesses of the former friends it now wants to destroy. Or it might simply gain the first five or six powers it needs to begin its reign of terror.

Undead, still recognizable as specific friends and loved ones, carry a special charge of horror. Some may rise intact, with no traces of the wounds that killed them. Others display them proudly. If slain by decapitation, the undead might carry its head



under its arm; if burnt to death, its blackened body continues to smell of charred meat. Some undead remain forever as they were at the moment of death; others will be frozen in a particular stage of decomposition.

Some undead have peculiar vulnerabilities or invulnerabilities. Almost all can be destroyed by fire; all will vanish if thrown into the sea.



Ghosts

Some people return from death even if their bodies are completely destroyed; even a thorough funeral is no protection. They return as ghosts, with no physical bodies. This is extremely rare: most Madlanders die peacefully, passing permanently into oblivion. Ghosts arise only in certain specific circumstances: if the deceased is killed unexpectedly, has major unfinished business to attend to or is excessively remembered by those he leaves behind. Even in these cases, a ghostly return is merely possible, not inevitable. Victims of sudden death return as ghosts because they don't realize they've died. Those obsessed with reaching a particular goal come back to fulfill it. Other ghosts may be recalled from oblivion by deep emotions directed to them by the living. If a child is given the same name as a recently dead person, his ghost can return to possess the child. No doubt other rare circumstances provoke the odd haunting as well.

Ghosts can't touch or be touched, and can only do harm indirectly, through their supernatural powers. They may look like their former selves, with or without the wounds that killed them. Or they could appear as balls of light, puffs of smoke or other monsters or animal. They can alter their appearances at will. However, they can't make themselves either completely invisible or completely opaque, so they'll be at least partially translucent in any form they take.

Ghosts behave much like undead. They can have any supernatural power imaginable, which will probably relate in some way to their former personalities or means of death. Ghosts are tough to get rid of, since they have no physical form to destroy.

However each is subject to its own strict haunting limitations. Most are only able to manifest within a particular time frame: only on their birthdays, for example, or on the day of their death each year. Others may be restricted to appearing during particular weather conditions, or only on certain occasions, like harvest time or village feasts. Still others appear year-round but are tied either to one location - like the site of their death - or set of conditions. They may appear only when someone thinks of them, or uses an old weapon they had *wedo* over for many years. These limitations make good puzzles for PCs to solve.

Creating Ghosts and Undead

Each ghost or undead should be custom-built by the GM. For ghosts, take a human character and remove all points from physical attributes and skills, sinking them into tailor-made supernatural powers. For undead, add powers worth 50 percent of current build points.

Headless

Headless have had their heads pushed down into their rib cages by a god. Gradually the creature's facial features will grow back through the pectoral muscles, so that it will have eyes, nose, and mouth sticking out from its chest. They otherwise resemble normal humans.

Headless are mindless engines of destruction. People, animals, other monsters, trees swaying in the breeze, waterfalls: everything that moves is a target. Headless will even go after gods if they see them, though they face certain obliteration. They'll use whatever weapons they were carrying as humans; if they lose these, they'll pick up boulders or use heavy tree branches as cudgels. A headless attack is never subtle: they just charge their victims head on, relying on pure brute force.

The only thing a headless won't try to destroy is another headless. By instinct, they gather together in herds. These groups can reach several dozen in number, enough to destroy a village and its inhabitants in a few hours. These mobs have the social structure of a herd of cattle - if that. Headless do not communicate with one another, and don't need to, since they all share the same narrow range of behavior.



The Kikavos and Gakox Pezep are responsible for most of the head-stomping that creates these things. Other gods might spawn them too. Headless do not spread through contagion or spontaneous transformation.

Headless don't have spellcasting powers; shamans and sorcerers who have their heads pushed in lose their magical powers with the rest of their consciousness. They are tough opponents, capable of sustaining a great deal of damage before expiring. Their hides harden into a natural armor. They do not age.

Psychological Damage

Survivors of headless attacks may fear crowds, or be afraid to make sudden movements. Some become possessed by the delusion that their chests are sprouting facial features. Others will develop an obsession with maintaining their individuality, exaggerating any nonconformist traits they might have.

Creating Headless

Take a normal human, quadruple ST and hit points, halve DX, and reduce IQ to 3. Remove all skills and advantages that require intelligence. Their hides are PD 1, DR 2.

Heightless

As Madlander monsters go, heightless aren't so awful in appearance: they simply look like ordinary humans shrunk down in size. They're usually about three feet tall, though some are as short as twelve inches. Close inspection will reveal loose-fitting, sagging or wrinkly skin, which is disconcerting but nowhere near as awful as the appearance of a fleshless or skinless. An even closer look, though, will reveal the thing that makes the heightless so greatly feared: the glint of pure evil intelligence in their eyes. Each wears a cap of soft hide, stained a color that ranges from rusty brown to crimson. The color depends on how recently the heightless has killed: they ritually soak their caps in the blood of their victims.

Heightless don't stalk humans out of blind instinct, or jealousy, to alleviate boredom or hunger, they do it for fun. Heightless are the only monsters who become smarter when they abandon their humanity. They use this cunning in the pursuit of their greatest pleasure: murder. To them killing is as much an art form as storytelling or music. They pursue their own arcane aesthetic ends in stalking their victims. The more ingenious their plan is, the more they enjoy it. They also try to make the mental and physical cruelty of their crimes as extreme as possible. The heightless will set up challenges for himself: he may choose for a victim a community's most respected elder, or a great hero, or someone who never leaves the village boundaries. He may select his quarry systematically, attempting to wipe out an entire family - or even clan - one member at a time. He might even saunter into the middle of a village meeting and cheerfully announce a list of people he's chosen to kill, in order, with method of death specified.

Heightless are solitary by habit. They're too obsessed and egotistical to share their art with others. If one does encounter another by chance, they might converse for a while, trading boasts about their respective homicidal triumphs. But then each will go his own way after a friendly tip of their bloodstained caps.

Heightless are sometimes the result of one god or another squashing an innocent Madlander to midget size. Unusually, however, most of them have turned into monsters spontaneously. Any Madlander who commits coldblooded murder is in danger of shrinking down into a heightless. Individuals who murder and get away with it find themselves mentally at odds with the rest of society: they have broken the greatest of taboos and survived.

Even if the original murder was a strongly motivated special case, the killer will often find himself fighting the impulse to strike again. After all, the act he has committed has already put him beyond the pale. Eventually he will give in to the impulse. From the Madlander point of view, he will be slowly going mad from guilt. The murderer will think he is throwing off all of the absurd rules of a society incapable of recognizing his greatness. At the same time, physical shrinkage starts to set in. During the beginning stage of the transformation, the killer won't yet have the full powers of a heightless, and will have to flee, or be captured and destroyed.

Heightless don't propagate by contagion; unless one happens to select as victim another murderer who has yet to make the change, the victim won't rise again as another heightless.



Those few who were rendered heightless by gods will have shamanic powers accordingly. Most heightless look down on those who use magic in pursuit of their killings; they're seen as gauche defilers of the art form, unable to rely on their wits alone. The thing that makes heightless terrifying is their *conditional* immortality. So long as they succeed in killing at least two victims a year, a heightless can itself be slain in one way only. This lone vulnerability is different for each heightless. It might be susceptible only to fire, acid, drowning or being dropped from a height. The killing method might be something harmless to anyone else: a heightless might drop dead if a beetle crosses its left boot, if hit by a songbird egg, or at the sound of a particular piece of music. A heightless may or may not be aware of his vulnerability. It will be immune to damage from any other source: a heightless laughs off arrows, sword blows or punches as if hit by dandelion fluff. It can be confused, blinded, or grappled, though. The usual strategy to deal with one is to entangle it in a net or other trap and then imprison it far away from any settlements. Madlanders will even venture into Zewa Zab tunnels in order to seal in a bound and captive heightless. If they're lucky, the fiend will expire from a lack of victims before it can work its way out of confinement.

Throwing a captured heightless into the ocean works only if its vulnerability is to drowning; it will lose any shamanic powers while it's past the boundaries of the Mad Lands, but maintains its immortality. It's not clear whether a heightless would eventually lose this if it stayed past the boundaries for a long period - they don't seem to cross them willingly.

Psychological Damage

A community which loses people to a heightless will be possessed by feelings of anger and helplessness. They'll see danger in every corner, haunted by the fact that anyone could be seconds away from falling into an elaborate death trap. If the heightless is still actually stalking villagers, this is self-preserving, not crazy. But these fears can linger even after a heightless has been slain.

Creating Heightless

To build a heightless, start with a normal human character. Add 50% to IQ and quadruple the existing points devoted to each mental skill. Double points in each physical skill. If the character has any advantages that come in levels, double the levels.

Skinless

The skinless live on as monsters after having their skin stripped off by divine contact. Their exposed muscle tissue glistens red in the sunlight; on some specimens, moist bags of yellow fat hang from it. Behind them, the skinless leave a trail of their own blood, which forever drips from open capillaries. Larger veins and arteries thread around their bodies like pulsing ropes.

Skinless retain their intelligence after transformation. Unlike most other monsters, they also continue to require food and shelter. They view humans as natural enemies, competitors for a limited supply of game and prime living places. Skinless try to kill any human hunters they run across. They also stage raids on villages to get food and supplies. Attacks against humans are motivated by emotion as well as economics. The skinless condition is one of constant low-level pain; although they become used to this, it does make them perpetually bitter and irritable. Ripping the life out of a smugly skin-covered human is one of the few true pleasures in skinless existence.

Skinless tend to develop singular obsessions, like greed, envy, megalomania, alcoholism, compulsive lying, uncontrollable tempers or a taste for human flesh. Others are seized by quirkier obsessions: rock collecting, endless tuneless whistling, alliterative or rhyming speech, or a need to constantly tell unfunny, brain-damaged jokes. Not all skinless will be consumed by their lunacies: many will be able to control them except in particular rare instances.

Although skinless often form groups for their mutual benefit, they follow no set social structure. Each group has its own distinct set-up, determined by its leader. Skinless are attracted to charismatic leaders, charisma being defined as intelligence, ruthlessness and personal power. Some leaders have been known to set up a complex set of laws for their subjects to follow; others rule by the whim of the moment. Most individual leaders keep only a small, manageable number of followers. But every so often a more ambitious type tries to form a vast skinless empire, with a hierarchy of lesser leaders under his command. Bands of skinless may be nomadic, or may defend one particular stronghold. They may erect primitive buildings, or rely on natural features like caves and tunnels.

The usual gang of divine suspects is behind the creation of skinless: Gakox Pezep and Bubzavav create them by eating the skin off their victims. Dopod Abwep does the same with a caress.

In fact, it is thought that getting too close to the physical manifestation of *any* Madlander deity can burn off all skin.

The skinless themselves can convert humans to their kind. To do this, they must capture their prey alive and subject him to a lengthy ritual of preparation. At its height, the victim is skinned alive as drumming and chanting reaches an ecstatic climax. He then goes into shock; if he survives (makes a successful HT roll) he recovers as a skinless. The ritual requires the participation of over a dozen skinless, so it can only be done by larger groups.



This ritual can be slightly altered to an even more sinister end. Again, the victim is skinned alive, but is kept continually conscious by shamanic means. Though technically remaining human, the subject is likely to go irrevocably mad from the pain in short order. Meanwhile, the skinless have his skin, which has been painstakingly removed in a single piece: it can be worn as magical disguise, allowing the skinless to pose as its former owner. As long as the skinless is reasonably close to the victim's height and weight, the only clue to the imposture is a very slight sagging of skin around the neck. (Some tales suggest that the headpiece is separate and can be removed at will, which accounts for the wrinkling.) Matching victim to impostor is usually not difficult; remember that Madlanders have a far narrower range of heights and weights than modems do. Skinless use these disguises to infiltrate villages, often to set them up for raids. The skin remains useful as long as the victim is kept alive back at the skinless enclave; if the victim is put out of his misery, the disguise immediately melts into a pool of slime. Theoretically the victim can be kept alive forever, gibbering in nonstop agony. If they wish to, skinless can discard the skin at any point and perform the necessary ritual to turn the victim into a skinless himself. This is usually done only to victims who have been "skin donors" only for a short period of time; long-term donors will likely be too mad to be of any use.

Madlander misfits can also turn skinless. Self-centered whiners and complainers, self-pitying sorts unable to roll with

life's punches and prickly types who are quick to take offense are all at risk. Anyone who exaggerates these traits to the point of making life unbearable for the rest of the community might one day wake up without an epidermis.

Skinless are physically powerful - enough to slay a man with a single barehanded blow - and can take a great deal of damage before keeling over. Most have shamanic powers: skinless have learned the secrets of shamanic initiation, and those who have gained powers from the gods can teach them to others. They're less active in winter: freezing temperatures make their blood flow sluggishly, and doubles the pain they usually feel. They try to spend their winters in shelters kept hot by roaring fires, where they can avoid this effect. Madlanders planning to attack skinless will wait until winter if possible.

Psychological Damage

People who meet the skinless might afterwards suffer psychosomatic aches and pains or unrelievable itches. They might become convinced that other villagers are skinless in disguise, either fixating on and harassing one individual, or deciding that the entire village has turned. Equally possible is a delusion in which the victim feels his own skin is loosening and is about to slither off and abandon him.

Creating Skinless

Triple ST and hit points of a normal human. Add a new mental disadvantage or two, possibly creating new and outlandish ones. Remove all inappropriate skills and advantages, and put the points into magical aptitude and shamanic powers. For skinless who have been monsters for a long time, double or triple that number. When outdoors in freezing temperatures, a skinless' normal ST and hit points are reduced by one third, and DX by half.

Soundless

ST: 3	Speed: 10 (torso 5)	Size: 1 hex
DX: 12	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 5 lbs. (head)
IQ: 4	Damage: bite 1d-3	10-15 lbs. (limbs)
HT: 1d+8	+ poison	50-200 lbs. (torso)

Soundless are excellent trackers, performing at IQ+3d.

The soundless are so named because they can creep through any terrain in absolute silence - they never snap a twig or roll a pebble, even in full flight. These small creatures rely on stealth to surprise much larger prey; if confronted they use speed to dodge or flee. Soundless hunt together in small colonies, usually with five members; a sixth member will be hiding nearby. Each colony was originally a single human being dismembered in an encounter with a god. Now all the parts - head, torso, and four limbs - are separate ambulatory monsters. Each part sprouts four long and spindly but powerful legs, like those of a fox. The torso and limbs grow sensory organs: they appear on the soles of the feet, the palms of the hands, and, on the torso, at the neck. The eyes are small, dark and beady. The nostrils are mere slits; the ears, small round membranes like those of a frog. Their mouths are lined with tiny needle-sharp teeth, hollow and full of poison. Each develops its own digestive and circulatory system. They grow a layer of downy gray fur of a shade that makes them very hard to see in the dark.

Soundless act on instinct. Exclusively carnivorous, they're expert trackers willing to follow their quarry over great distances, for weeks at a time, until an ideal moment to attack. If possible, they'll move in while their prey sleeps. The torso member of the colony, which is slower and a larger target, will hang back from the initial attack. Instead, it will be searching the local terrain for

a suitable hidey-hole. After making the kill, the others tear apart the corpse and drag the pieces to this lair. The members of each colony have a psychic link to one another: they follow the torso's mental trail to find the temporary nest. There they gorge themselves on their kill. After eating, the soundless will be torpid and hideously bloated with food. They remain in this state of conscious quasi-hibernation for four to six weeks, and then abandon the lair and hit the trail in search of another victim.

If one of them is threatened, the rest of the colony comes to its defense. The group won't flee if it means leaving a member behind. If one is captured, the rest stalk its captors until a chance to free it arrives. All soundless behavior can be traced to the twin drives for food and protection of the rest of the colony.

Their psychic link is almost a group mind. Colonies seem to act as one entity. When attacked by a group of soundless, many hunters instinctively go after the walking head, thinking it will be the "brains" of the colony. In reality, no colony member is more dispensable than others.



Victims torn to pieces by any god are prone to return as groups of soundless. Gakox Pezep, Kikavo Dat and Bubzavav, as usual, are the most likely to do this. Some victims literally fall to pieces when they see a particularly disturbing image in Vuvuti's eyes.

If any members of a colony are killed, the survivors set about replacing them. This means finding a human target. If a particular human was responsible for the deaths of their brothers, they'll track him tirelessly. If not, they'll look for the nearest and easiest person to attack. They stalk and kill the victim as normal, but will not eat the part or parts corresponding to slain colony members. Soundless have two separate poison sacs. One poison type they use to paralyze their prey. The other, used in this situation, magically transforms a severed body part into a new soundless. The other soundless guard the body part for the several days it takes to transform; only then do they eat the unused portions of the body, giving the newborn first crack at it.

People who selfishly withdraw from their communities and refuse to share their wisdom and skills may, if their withdrawal leads to some sufficiently awful disaster, find themselves growing gray fur. If they do not mend their ways, they'll one day fall into a seizure and split apart into pieces, which will immediately sprout legs and scamper off into the wilderness.

Soundless have no supernatural abilities apart from their automatic success at all Stealth attempts, and the poison that converts body parts into soundless. Their other poison is a paralytic agent that reduces a victim's DX by 1d-2 per turn. When DX reaches 0,

the victim is completely immobilized and ready to be shredded. Those poisoned by a soundless who manage to avoid being devoured recover from the paralytic effect slowly, regaining 1 point of DX every 4d hours. GMs should roll after each regained point to determine the interval until the next one.

Psychological Damage

People who encounter soundless may be unable to shake the feeling that they're being tracked, especially during periods of silence. They may suffer psychosomatic paralysis in times of stress. Or they could develop the delusion that their body parts - or those of others - are becoming separate entities.

Weightless

In the right light - with bright sunshine beaming directly onto them - the weightless look like any normal Madlander. Not even the smallest detail will give them away, from walk to wrinkle. But on a gray day or in the moonlight, the weightless will be revealed for what they are - phantoms with the form but not the substance of reality. A weightless can neither touch or be touched; someone putting his hand into the space where a weightless stands won't feel a thing. Weightless can make the full range of sounds of a normal human; they can also give off a variety of smells. But they can trigger only two senses at one time: a weightless loses its visibility if it makes simultaneous noises and smells, for example.

Some weightless have gone insane, but most of them, tragically, retain their mental faculties. And although this defies common sense, not all weightless are evil. Many have wholly unchanged personalities. This just makes an unending phantasmal existence all the more unbearable: their communities shun them as supernatural creatures, so they live a half-life of eternal exile. Some become embittered and seek revenge; others refuse to abandon their sense of morality. A weightless may be an aimless wanderer, or might have some goal to further. Most of them try to fool Madlanders into interacting with them as if human; even a ruse that lasts only for a few moments is drenched in bittersweet pleasure, a brief reminder of their human past.

Most new weightless seek out others of their kind and try to set up communities. But without the ability to build longhouses or boats, and lacking the need for the economic activities that bind a village together, the whole thing quickly becomes a hollow charade. Life among other phantoms just reminds a weightless of his own loss, which is usually the first thing he wants to forget.

Weightless come into being when a god attacks someone with

such force that nothing remains of the corpse. Since they have no way to affect others directly, they can't reproduce by contagion; the typical weightless wouldn't wish his fate on others anyway. Many weightless eventually end their miserable existences by seeking out the one thing that can destroy them: a god.

It is possible to become weightless spontaneously. This usually afflicts Madlanders with a philosophical bent. If one contemplates the nature of reality too deeply, one might conclude that the Mad Lands are unreal, or is at any rate only part of one of many possible realities. Anyone who follows this train of thought too far might, just as they hit upon a particularly apt metaphor or elegant bit of logic, abruptly lose all physical substance. Their existence from then on is a cruel rejoinder to their arguments, as the thinker forevermore becomes an unreal thing in an inescapable reality.

Weightless are incapable of any kind of direct effect on the physical world; unlike ghosts, they don't have shamanic powers. If a weightless wants to make something happen, he has to persuade or trick a human, seal or monster to do it for him. Weightless may gather extremely useful information in their insubstantial roamings, which they may exchange for services. Then again, they might get a man to slave for them and reward him with lies and fantasies. Some will assign tasks that turn out to be traps and look gleefully on as their victims walk into disaster. The problem from the Madlander point of view is that you can't rely on weightless to be consistently good or evil, so it's impossible to tell whether any particular one is trustworthy or not.

No human can destroy or even harm a weightless, but they can be disposed of by social skills. Many will go away as soon as they're seen for what they are; others can be tricked or angered into leaving.

Psychological Damage

Many who encounter weightless suffer no ill effects at all. Others may have a psychosomatic loss of feeling in one or more places; extreme cases will lose the sense of touch completely. The aromas that weightless release may linger in the nostrils for months or years, blocking out more subtle real smells.

Creating Weightless

To build a weightless, remove ST, DX and HT and all physical skills that go with them. Those who have suffered the condition for a long time will have transferred all of these points into knowledge or other intellectual skills.

MAD LANDS BESTIARY

Although it's the monsters of the Mad Lands who stalk the nightmares of its people, the average man is far more likely to be injured by a wild animal than by a boneless or fleshless. Hunting

is essential to the Madlander way of life, and carries risks as well as benefits. Most gaming sessions should include an animal encounter of some sort.

Wildlife

Many animals found in the Mad Lands resemble those of temperate forests on Earth. Bears and mountain lions are the reigning predators. Wolf packs also occupy a spot near the top of the food chain. Smaller predators include lynx, foxes, wolverines, martens and weasels.

Large herbivores include elk, moose and several varieties of deer. Rabbits, hares, skunks, porcupines and a wide selection of rodents, from marmots to squirrels to voles, fill out the roster of

smaller plant-eaters. Otters are found in streams along the eastern coast that connect to the sea. Seals are plentiful along the coast, but in the Mad Lands they're a special case, not regarded as animals. They're discussed on pp. 75-76.

The region's birds of prey are owls, hawks, and two species of eagle. They rely mainly on small mammals for food, as relatively few other birds find the Mad Lands hospitable the entire year round. Starlings, grackles, and ravens are among this small num-

ber of species. They are joined in the warm months by dozens of types of songbirds, who fly in from nearby Togeth for the smorgasbord of spring bugs - see below.

During the warm months the Mad Lands writhe with insect life. Mosquitoes - which fortunately are not disease-bearing - are everywhere in the south; blackflies are even thicker in the north. Caterpillars are all over the leafy trees in the springtime; those that don't get devoured by Togethian songbirds become brown or gray moths, some larger than a man's hand, that swarm over campfires in late summer and early fall. During the summer the bush resounds with the mating serenades of lustful crickets.

Reptiles are represented by small box turtles and a large number of snakes, including a highly poisonous lake snake and several types of rock-dwelling rattler. Amphibians are not found here.

Animals, especially predators, are likely to behave more violently than their counterparts in our world. Creatures like wolves and bears that only occasionally attack humans on Earth do so regularly in this setting. This is partly attributable to the need to compete with monsters like boneless and soundless; environmental pressure has selected tough, mean specimens. Also, the lingering aura of insanity given off by the gods is contributes to pointless, even self-destructive, violence in some creatures.

Madlander animals deviate slightly in appearance and behavior from similar species of our world. Not every animal of the Mad Lands is listed here; use the examples below as inspiration when adding weird modifications to others. Some are within the realm of biological possibility; others turn familiar creatures into fantasy beasts. Ideas about animals that we consider to be folk beliefs can turn out to be true in the Mad Lands. Maybe there *is* a snake that travels along by taking its tail in its mouth and rolling along like a wheel. Game Masters can pick a handful of old wives' tales and make them true, make up some similarly weird animal behaviors of their own, and, just to keep players on their toes, can decide that some commonly-held Madlander beliefs about animal behavior are actually mistaken.

The following descriptions focus on the ways in which Mad Lands species deviate from the norm, although full information on their attacks is supplied. For more on their real-life behavior, consult the *GURPS Bestiary*.

Avukett (Deer)

ST: 5	Move/Dodge: 9/7	Size: 2
DX: 15	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 70-150 lbs.
IQ: 4	Damage: 1d imp	Habitats: F, M, J, P
HT: 13/6-8	Reach: C	

The Mad Lands's most common variety of deer is a sleek, fast animal. Like many herbivores here, they compete in a deadly environment through increased fertility, producing 30% more young than comparable Earth species. Primarily tan in color, each generation of avukett has a different, odd marking on its right flank in dark brown hair. Currently the marking on all of the Mad Lands's newborn avukett is a swirly pattern that vaguely suggests a human ear being gnawed on by two long rows of flattened teeth. The previous generation's marking looked distinctly like a bowl full of berries. Storytellers say that these markings are omens, each with a decipherable meaning.

A Utuk (Wolf)

ST: 8-10	Move/Dodge: 9/7	Size: 1
DX: 14	PD/DR: 1/1	Weight: 70-170 lbs.
IQ: 6	Damage: 1d-2 cut	Habitats: F, M, A, P
HT: 11-13	Reach: C	

Wolves in the Mad Lands are clever beasts, particularly in attack strategy. Some tales even depict a utuk who speak Madlander and display great skill at debate and rote memorization. Few living hunters report encounters with such wolves, so perhaps these are mere fables. Like other Madlander predators, a utuk are aggressive and will attack likely human targets without hesitation.

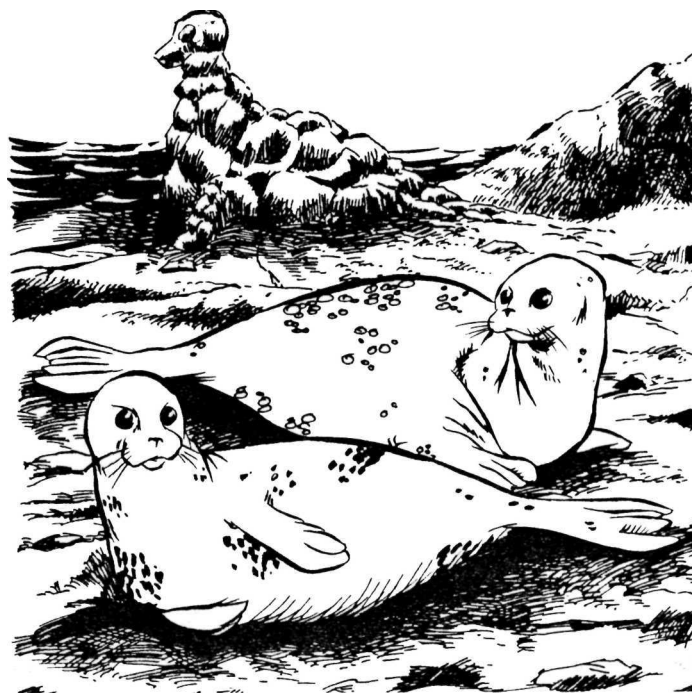
Given the chance, wolf packs will abduct young human children and then raise them as cubs. One large pack that patrols the shores of Itapi At is known to be led by a feral woman, who speaks only in growls and shows no mercy to humankind.

Bowog Ux (Wolverine)

ST: 10-12	Move/Dodge: 8/6	Size: 1
DX: 12	PD/DR: 3/4	Weight: 30-65 lbs.
IQ: 5	Damage: 1d-2 cut	Habitats: F, M, P
HT: 10-12	Reach: C	

The Madlander wolverine has a sadistic streak: it's known for launching sneak attacks on a human parties, savagely biting the most tempting target and quickly darting away into the bush. There is no obvious benefit to the animal in this behavior; it's reckoned that the ancestor of the bowog ux population was driven mad in a *toppe* game with Bax Powu Kag.

In addition to a diet of game and carrion, the bowog ux dines on iron ore; this makes its fur tough and metallic, adding to its armor protection. Prospecting parties sometimes try to follow wolverines - a difficult task - hoping they'll lead them to new ore sources.



Dakip En (Seal)

ST: 12-17	Move/Dodge: 12/8	Size: 2-3
DX: 12	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 800-1,000 lbs.
IQ: 2d+6	Damage: 1d cut	Habitats: SW
HT: 13-18	Reach: C	

Madlanders don't regard seals as monsters; then again, they're not exactly animals either.

Seals are a common inhabitant of the Mad Lands's rocky coastline and nearby ocean waters. Some of them are as intelli-

gent as humans. These dakip en are capable of speech, higher reasoning, and even art. They are so advanced in these faculties that Madlanders regard the intentional killing of one as murder. In other words, they think of dakip en as closer to human than foreigners are.

However, seals are tricksters, and one must always be suspicious of their motives in any dealings with them. They're known for a raucous sense of humor, and love nothing more than ensnaring a human in a one-sided bargain or humiliating joke. When negotiating with seals, one must be rigorous in defining terms, because they are expert at building agreements packed with loopholes and punitive terms. They can, however, always be trusted to honor their own commitments to the letter.

Physically, the dakip en closely resemble the leopard seals of



our Antarctic region. They're long, sleek animals, streamlined for swimming. Adult males reach a length of 10 feet and a weight of 800 pounds. Females are larger, up to 12 feet long and weighing half a ton. Their faces are elongated, with an impressive array of sharp teeth.

The first important goal in seal life is food. Madlander seals are carnivores, feeding on fish and gulls. They'll eat whale blubber if they find a dead one, but do not attack live killer whales. The orcas are their main enemies; they often try to convince humans to go after them. The second most important thing is a good place to bask after a good meal. This sometimes means defending themselves against outlaws or monsters. Dakip en can deliver a powerful bite. They also try to get humans to help build fortifications for their favorite basking places.

They're also able to hold their own because many of them practice sorcery based on the Epic style of the soulless (see p. 99). How they learned this remains a mystery - one legend says there is a great ocean shelf underwater on which the books of Epic sorcery are carved. Dakip en are known to speak Madlander, Soulless, and the language of the Whiteness. If this story is true, at least some of them are also literate in Soulless.

Seals are well aware of the Madlander abhorrence of sorcery, and avoid using it in their presence. Some tales also claim that one can get shamanic powers from dakip en, but the seals themselves stoutly deny this, and take offense if pressed on the matter.

Dakip en are solitary. Males will dally briefly with females during mating season, and young will stick with their mothers for about two years, but seals form no permanent social attachments. Groups may share a good basking area, but no seal is subordinate to another. The only obligations one seal bears any other are those he himself agrees to by covenant. Seals are just as sneaky and tough when negotiating among themselves as they are with humans. When disputes arise, seals do not resort to a third party for a resolution: they simply continue to argue until one disputant

gives up. These disputes can go on for weeks or months, usually ending when one party is overcome by hunger and splashes off in search of food. The seal with the most blubber is often the winner in such debates.

Seal culture values self-reliance, a hard bargain and a sense of humor. Males tend to be more adventurous and gregarious than females. They also tend to get into more trouble, as do young seals of either gender. If dakip en have a religion, they scrupulously avoid mentioning it in the presence of Madlanders. It is also not clear whether they speak a language of their own in addition to their three adopted ones.

Dakip en love storytelling as much as humans; practical jokes, more so. They often try to enter human contests in both. They sing a distinct repertoire of songs, which sound tortuous to the Madlander ear. Basking sites are often marked by sculptures, usually of seals, which they build by nosing rocks up into a pile.

Several unintelligent seal species inhabit local waters - Madlanders call them *bugpit*. They're all smaller than the ones discussed here. Smart seals contemptuously deride their animal cousins, having dozens of derogatory nicknames for them. According to one of their myths, the other seals were, at the beginning of time, given the opportunity to become intelligent too. But they all turned it down, fearing the risks of sentience. Self-aware creatures can be unhappy as well as happy; it is safer, the other seals decided, not to be aware at all. Nothing appalls a dakip en more than unused intelligence.

Dekbetid (Feathered Skunk)

ST: 3-4	Move/Dodge: 3/5	Size: <1
DX: 14	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 1-6 lbs.
IQ: 14	Damage: 1d-4 crush#	Habitats: F, P, D
HT: 12/3-5	Reach: R, C	

The Mad Lands' skunk is covered with feathers. There are four varieties, each with a different dazzling display of metallic colors; the most common alternates bands of turquoise and scarlet. These feathers would be sought after for ornamentation, but it's next to impossible to get them in odor-free condition.

As with our furry skunk, the dekbetid is loathed for its powerful scent spray. When provoked, it unleashes a fluid spray with a 60° arc of fire accurate within four hexes - any one target within range can be automatically sprayed. If it makes its DX roll, the victim is sprayed in the eyes: he's blinded and in pain for 5 minutes. Regardless, he'll stink for at least two weeks even if doused in an acidic tuber bath within 20 minutes - four if not. Reactions to dekbetid victims will be at -3 during this period, and Stealth attempts automatically fail at ranges less than ten yards.

Obtobev (Moose)

ST: 40-50	Move/Dodge: 12/6	Size: 3
DX: 13	PD/DR: 1/2	Weight: 3/4-1 ton
IQ: 4	Damage: 1d+2 cr#	Habitats: F, S, P, M
HT: 15/16-20	Reach: C	

The Mad Lands's moose species differs little physically from the North American variety. According to legend, someone who is injured by a moose after attacking it unarmed will become a better person, shedding bad character traits. Brave PCs might use this as a game-world mechanism for buying off mental disadvantages. Few Madlanders test the legend - after all, it reeks of magic, so any effect might backfire. And moose are dangerous, doing 1d+2 crushing damage with their antlers or 1d+1 trampling with their hooves. The ultimate veracity of this folk belief is left to the GM to determine.

Oded Za (Wood Bear)

ST: 22-28 **Move/Dodge:** 8/6 **Size:** 2#
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 400-1,000 lbs
IQ: 6 **Damage:** 1d+2 cr# **Habitats:** F, M
HT: 14/18-22 **Reach:** C, 1

The oded za is the size of Earth's grizzly bear. Its fur is auburn in color; males have a thick mane of white fur around the neck and similar cuffs around wrists and ankles. Oded za are high-strung animals; used to being attacked by monsters, they'll often charge individual humans - or even small groups in the case of especially large, confident males - on sight. Their range extends throughout the Mad Lands's forests. They prefer to hibernate in secluded places in the wood, sheltered by fallen and rotting trees.

Any bear occupies one hex only when standing to fight. Both types of Madlander bears can bear hug opponents, grappling and then biting.

Oded Zu (Marsh Bear)

ST: 27-33 **Move/Dodge:** 7/6 **Size:** 3#
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 800-1,500 lbs.
IQ: 6 **Damage:** 2d-2 cr# **Habitats:** F, M
HT: 15/20-24 **Reach:** C, 1

Oded zu are larger than the more common oded za; they're covered in long thick strands of hair. They're dark brown to black in coloration, with greenish highlights. Their preferred habitat is the bog; primary prey is the moose. They also dine heavily on swamp vegetation: bulrushes, water lilies and duckweed. Their snouts are wider and flatter than Earth bears; they have extra-large back molars and scalable nostrils. Large lungs allow long stays underwater. When food is scarce, they'll compete with wood bears in their habitat. Marsh bears are less immediately aggressive than wood bears, but they are territorial: they'll generally attack only humans foolish enough to come within 50 yards of them. Tunnels and caves are their favored hibernation sites.

See above for information on size and bear hug attack.

Tovekbe (Porcupine)

ST: 2-5 **Move/Dodge:** 2/5 **Size:** <1
DX: 10 **PD/DR:** 3/2 **Weight:** 10-35 lbs.
IQ: 3 **Damage:** * **Habitats:** F
HT: 13/3-5 **Reach:** R, C

The Mad Lands's porcupines can fire their quills into opponents in any hex adjacent to theirs. They may fire up to a dozen at a time, at a single target. Quills do no damage going in, but each bunch does 1 HT damage when pulled out, plus an extra 1 HT per hour left in the skin. (If the tovekbe makes a critical hit, the GM may rule that a quill has struck an eye or punctured an artery and determine damage accordingly.) The average porcupine will have 1dx40 missile quills available at any given time; missile quills regrow in 2 weeks.

As with regular porcupines, those entering its hex must roll DX to avoid taking a bunch of quills from a tail-strike; porcupine handlers roll DX at -2, or take a bunch automatically if they're rough with the beast. Those who take quills in the hand can't use the hand until they're removed, and may suffer permanent impairment at the GM's discretion.

Tovekbe are sometimes heard whistling popular Madlander songs, usually slightly off-key.

Wigtibidat (Squirrel)

ST: 1-2 **Move/Dodge:** 14/7 **Size:** <1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 4-10 lbs.
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d-5 cut **Habitats:** F
HT: 14/2-4 **Reach:** C

The wigtibidat is a gray squirrel with a flash of red on the tip of its tail. One in six squirrels can change their appearance when threatened, so that their faces look vaguely human. This sometimes serves to startle a hunter long enough for the squirrel to dart away. These specimens are killed, if possible, simply because they're disturbing. They aren't eaten or used to make anything, for the same reason.

Wipid (Killer Whale)

ST: 40-70 **Move/Dodge:** 15/7 **Size:** 19-28
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 0/1 **Weight:** 1-2 1/2 tons
IQ: 8* **Damage:** 2d+2 cut **Habitats:** SW
HT: 15/20-30 **Reach:** C

Killer whales are a major threat to fishermen. Enraged pods of these giant predatory dolphins have been known to charge fleets, seeking to overturn boats. A wipid can also leap over a ship to bite off a crewman's arm or head.

Physically, wipid are identical to Earth's killer whales. Seals maintain that they're fully intelligent, but evil. Madlanders see no evidence for this - if wipid can communicate with them, they choose not to. Since nothing a seal says can be taken at face value, Madlanders define wipid as animals rather than foreigners.



Uwat (Pigdog)

ST: 8-10 **Move/Dodge:** 9/7 **Size:** 1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 70-170 lbs.
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d-2 cut **Habitats:** F, M, A, P
HT: 18-22 **Reach:** C

One Madlander animal not found on Earth is the *uwat* or "pigdog". These dangerous scavengers seem to belong to the canine family, but they have taken over the ecological niche of the wild boar, and share its behavior patterns. About the size of a Doberman Pinscher, these beasts have tusks and short coarse hair. Coloration is usually russet red, but gray and even bluish specimens are not unknown.

They travel in packs of up to 30 and will sometimes attack a village *en masse*. They love tubers of all sorts, and stage these raids when food is scarce. They're also occasionally driven mad by insect bites and take their fury out on the nearest group of moving targets. A charging pigdog can seriously injure a person, and they've certainly been known to cause great suffering by

destroying tuber crops. They're more of a serious nuisance than a direct threat to human life.

The Togethians have apparently succeeded in partially domesticating these things, which the Madlanders simply point to as further evidence of the barbarity of the Togethian character.



Zu Wat Ux (Mountain Lion)

ST: 8-22 **Move/Dodge:** 10/7 **Size:** 2
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 80-250 lbs.
IQ: 5 **Damage:** 1d cut **Habitats:** M, F, D, P, S, J
HT: 15/13-19 **Reach:** C

Like most Madlander predators, the local version of the mountain lion has learned to be more aggressive than its Earth counterpart - it attacks solitary individuals or weak parties without warning. It's mostly found along the mountainous western border.

According to legend, zu wat ux have an affinity for ghosts. Sometimes ghosts possess the bodies of mountain lions, displacing their minds. In other tales, the zu wat ux and ghost form a

sinister partnership, the ghost helping the lion find fresh meat in exchange for services.

Zubov (Giant Squid)

ST: 7-20# **Move/Dodge:** 10/6# **Size:** 30-1,000
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 3/2 **Weight:** 15-20 tons
IQ: 3 **Damage:** 1 cut **Habitats:** SW
HT: 15/20-200 **Reach:** C-70

Giant squids sometimes rise from the depths to dine on a few fishermen. Reaching 300 feet in length, these ten-tentacled beasts can keep an entire crew at bay or sink their boats. Zubov come in a variety of bright, fiery colors - mottled yellow and orange are the most common.

Listed strength is for *each* tentacle, two of which are much larger than the others. A zubov can grapple with two tentacles and defend normally; tentacles can Dodge only if the zubov's body is lying on the water's surface, allowing it to see. The turn after grappling a victim, the zubov can try to pull him towards its beak to be bitten. Crushing damage from tentacles is determined through a Quick Contest between the tentacle's ST and the victim's HT. If the tentacle wins, the victim suffers damage equal to the difference. If the victim wins, he suffers no damage. Zubov can also drown grappled victims.

Tentacles are disabled after suffering 20% of the squid's total hit points. They can be amputated only through cutting damage; impaling damage is not doubled against them. Damage to tentacles don't count against overall hit points; a fisherman must typically jump into the water to get access to the head and vitals.

Zubov are not hunted intentionally, but survivors of an attack will feast on the amputated tentacles.

Mutant Animals

Animals who live for too long in a haunted place (see p. 57) become unique monsters. Anything is possible: flying weasels, carnivorous rabbits with saber teeth, cyclopean wolves with poisonous breath or intelligent hornet colonies with hypnotic powers. Although the Mad Lands's rivers and lakes are full of fish, these are not usually harvested, since all these bodies of water are considered to be haunted by their godly creators. Freshwater fish can provoke insanity or disease if eaten. Rivers are populated with monstrous fish: giant electric eels, char that act like piranhas and muskellunge that feed like sharks.

Each mutated animal should be a unique encounter. In rare cases a whole group of animals - like a herd of deer or nest of ants - may all suffer the same mutation. These divine deformities usually die with their original recipients; mutant animals only rarely pass their new features on to offspring.

Here are some sample mutant animals.

Desire Snake

ST: 6 **Move/Dodge:** 4/6 **Size:** <1
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 12 lbs.
IQ: 3 **Damage:** 2d **Reach:** C
HT: 15/10

This is an otherwise normal rattlesnake which has gained a shamanic power it uses unconsciously; its reptile mind doesn't allow it to learn how to use it to its own ends.

Any human within 6 hexes will trigger the power. The victim hears his own voice emanating from the snake's position. As he draws closer, he'll start to make out what it's saying to him: it's

listing his own most secret desires, over and over. If the victim investigates, the snake, maddened by divine power, will strike aggressively.

Raccoonalisk

ST: 5 **Move/Dodge:** 6/7 **Size:** <1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 45 lbs.
IQ: 6 **Damage:** 1d-4 cut **Reach:** C
HT: 14/8

This very large male raccoon specimen has wandered far from the site of its original divine contamination. One night it bounds boldly into a south coast village. Though still as playful and mischievous as a young cub, it has its mind on the tasty fish laid out on the drying racks. Villagers who try to drive it off discover it's more than just a pest: when enraged, its eyes emit a beam of shamanic energy that does 1d+3 melting damage per round to a single target. Whatever the beam strikes becomes sloppy goo - including flesh. The target must be in its direct line of sight, no more than six hexes away. It can use the beam during as many as six consecutive turns, but must spend six turns recharging after using all of his shots. Any turn spent with the beam inactive recharges a shot.

Any time it's not actually being attacked or distracted, the raccoon turns its attention back to the fish. It may take the villagers a fair time to discover this unique menace's pattern of weakness; during this time it can do much damage and possibly take some lives. If it's simply left alone, it'll steal a single large fish and leave ... but it will be back every night for more.

THE SOULLESS 7

The final group of "monsters" native to the Madlands is the soulless. Unlike the others, they are a genuine race, with their own language and highly developed culture. Too highly developed, in fact. Cursed with immortality, the soulless are trapped in cultural stasis, having exhausted every means of diversion centuries ago. This has made them decadent and cruel. To the Madlanders, they're unpredictable, frighteningly powerful menaces. From their own standpoint, they're victims of a cosmic practical joke.



Encountering the Soulless

Madlander Knowledge of the Soulless

The soulless look almost human. Their eyes are yellow, have no pupils, and slant even more dramatically than those of the Viwti E. Their features are sharper than a human's: high thin cheekbones, slim triangular heads, long straight noses. Even their ears are slightly pointed, both tops and earlobes. Their males and females are both around the same size, usually a head or two taller and 20 pounds lighter than an adult Madlander man. They can change the color of their skins, from earth brown to human flesh tone to the gray of granite.

Soulless have neither human blood nor life-spark in them. This makes them incapable of compassion, love or other positive emotions. This lack makes them undying, immortal unless killed by natural means. And because they are so old, they have more years of practice at fighting than Madlanders can even imagine, so they might as well be impossible to kill.

All of the positive emotions they've lost have been replaced by bad ones: they practice perversions and enjoy cruelty. Some tales say that their main feeling is boredom, and explain that they do all sorts of horrible things in an attempt to reawaken the emotions they gave up with their souls.

Like foreigners, the soulless speak a language Madlanders don't understand, and have a way of turning their speech into symbols that can be looked at later and somehow understood. This allows them to perform acts of sorcery, a form of magic that doesn't get its power from the gods, but is evil and dangerous nonetheless. Anyone who knows writing is probably an evil sorcerer, and should be put in front of a tribunal immediately.

Soulless women can't have babies. Instead, they use their sorcery to turn unborn Madlander babies into soulless. This is why elders must look carefully at every baby before deciding it is human; if they make a mistake, an inhuman child will grow up in a human village, waiting for the day when a troop of soulless will descend on it to collect him, usually killing many humans in the process.

The soulless live in gigantic villages hidden somewhere in the interior of the Mad Lands. These are invisible and hard to find, which is a good thing. Any sort of natural-looking circle - of plants, mushrooms, or rocks - encountered in the bush may be a magical entrance to one of their villages. No sane person goes near them.

An adequate description of the soulless' ancient culture requires more space than that devoted to all the other monsters put together. The higher page count shouldn't be taken as an indication that the soulless ought to appear more frequently than other monsters. To the contrary: soulless are the most dangerous opponents of all, and should be introduced into campaigns with caution.

Players should have access only to the sidebar on this page. Madlanders know no more about the soulless than any other monster. Accurate details on their culture and homeland are scarce. Few return alive from visits to a soulless city, so little information has filtered into the storytellers' canon. GMs should make sure that any material they present as local lore is vague and full of distortions and outright fantasy.

These stories always portray the worst side of human-soulless interaction; characters who run into soulless should expect to die. GMs can, however, bring the soulless into a storyline without killing off all the PCs. The soulless aren't a part of the Mad Lands in the way that the gods and other monsters are. They have an existence independent of a role as a menace to humanity; Madlanders are of only peripheral interest to them. Although they place no particular value on human life, and might even kill a hunting party for sport if the mood strikes them, they don't automatically attack humans on sight. If they encounter a party in the woods, they may ignore them, or even interact with them peacefully if that will further their own agendas.

Bringing human player characters to the soulless homeland will mean a major shift in tone and setting for the campaign. Even if they return safely to their villages, PCs will have learned things that might set them permanently apart from their friends and families. GMs are advised to wait until a campaign has developed to the point of stagnation before making substantial use of the material in this chapter. When they do decide to do so, they should build the plot line slowly, starting with small hints planted in other episodes, so players have the sense their characters are heading toward something that will change them forever. Try to make the confrontation of Madlander and soulless cultures part of an epic storyline. Its climax could even wrap up the entire campaign, changing it into something not recognizable as a *Mad Lands* game, or concluding it altogether. If the players are still having fun exploring regular Madlander existence, don't rush them into the world of the soulless.

Defining the Soulless: Undying or Unliving?

From the Madlander point of view, the soulless are just another of their region's monsters, defined by their lack of a vital bit of humanity: in this case, their souls. The soulless see things quite differently. As far as they're concerned, the Mad Lands is a foreign place that their realm just happens to exit into. And they *know* they have souls, because when they're killed, they reincarnate!

They don't associate themselves with other Madlander monsters. The others are created - directly or otherwise - by the local gods. The genesis of the soulless is a different matter.

Either 145 or 227 centuries ago - soulless scholars are divided on the correct date - the soulless were a mortal tribe called the *jyiuehyynkzd*, differing only in a few minor anatomical details from present-day humans. This was long before any Madlander deities arrived in the area, which at the time was dominated by a race of malevolent jade trapezoids. Oxlcxowsyjys, the young princess of one jyzuehyynkzd tribe, managed to steal the secrets of the trapezoids' sorcery, and spent decades mastering them. Finally she managed to make contact with a powerful being from another dimension.

The exact nature of this being is a matter of conjecture. Although most original participants in these events - including Oxlcxowsyjys herself - survive, soulless have trouble remembering events more than a hundred centuries in the past. Historical records on this and other early soulless events were at some point deliberately damaged and distorted. Though for all intents and purposes it seems to have been a god of some sort, it is taboo in soulless society to refer to it as such.

Oxlcxowsyjys made a pact with the being. It agreed, for a price, to grant her people immortality. After doing so, she used a principle of magic she had deduced from the trapezoid texts to either trap the being forever or destroy it entirely. Over the next several centuries the jyzuehyynkzd, able to amass superior combat and magic skills as they grew older without dying, slaughtered the trapezoids. Calling themselves "the people who are not felled by age," they began to build a civilization of unparalleled splendor. (Translation of this term has been omitted, as the soulless name for themselves is comprised of 8,906 syllables, the longest in their lexicon. See *Language and Nomenclature*, p. 89.)

It wasn't until much later that the soulless discovered the price they had paid. It only took a few thousand years for them to exhaust every avenue of civilized endeavor - over a period of time they came to dead ends in art, poetry, sport, rhetoric, music, politics, philosophy and the aesthetics of magic. Personal rela-



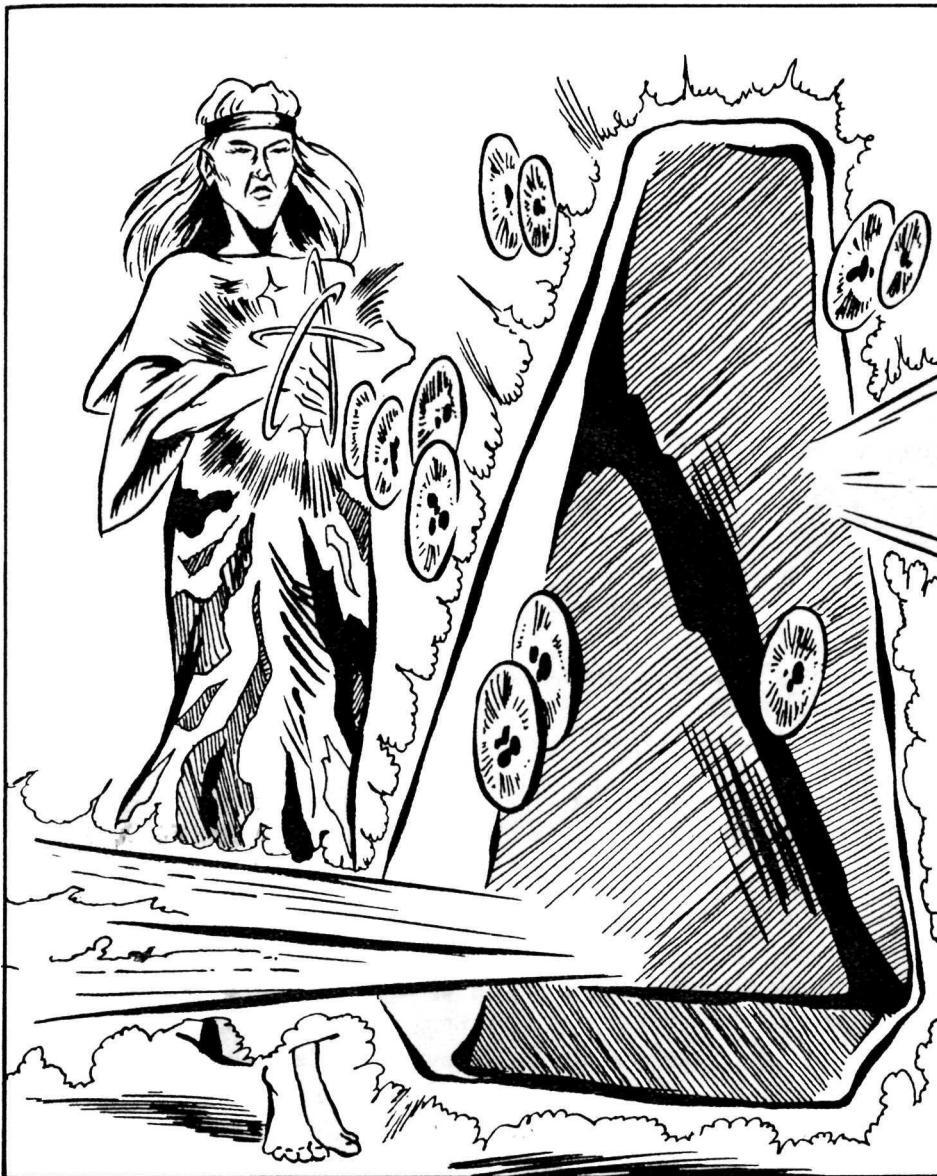
Cultural Values

Economically self-sufficient and emotionally alienated, it's hard to see at first glance how the soulless can sustain any kind of society. The reason the soulless themselves give is "force of habit." A common truism maintains that the culture is so stagnant it doesn't even have the energy to collapse. Soulless strongly deny that any deep bond connects them as a people. At best, any statements of unity are expressed negatively: the only thing they have in common is being unlike all others.

Though they refuse to admit it, soulless do seem to take solace in each other's company. They share not just a heritage but a common despair. Soulless may bemoan the sorry state of their society, but they do so together. The continued existence of the Metal Cities proves that misery loves company.

Soulless admire independence, power and skill. They respect winners. Losing is contemptible; good grace in defeat is irrelevant. The ideal soulless is sexy, cynical, witty and ruthless. Stupidity is laughable; compassion, incomprehensible. The worst offense to society is to be unattractive or boring.

Consequently, there are few cultural constraints on behavior. Morality is an alien concept; when confronted by a being from a culture with a moral system, soulless respond with bafflement. Questions of right and wrong just don't occur to them. They act in pursuit of pleasure, not virtue. Soulless see no reason to avoid harming others in this pursuit; those who do harm will be admired, not scorned. The victimized are by definition weak, and deserve no pity.



Soulless Philosophy

The last field to stagnate in soulless culture was philosophy, which spent several centuries trying to come up with ways of dealing with the stagnation of all the others. Even for several centuries after the competing schools of thought had set themselves in stone, philosophy provided relief from boredom: war bands espousing each school sprang up, plunging the entire realm of the soulless into an entertaining five-way civil war. When this, too, became inevitably boring, philosophical discourse finally ceased development. The schools of soulless philosophy are:

Abanfonism. The soulless are bored because they think excessively and expect too much from life. Happiness can be attained if only everyone abandons all rational thought, and retreats to a barbarous and savage society ruled along strict authoritarian lines. Unfortunately, the abandonists themselves must remain strictly rational until that glorious day comes so they can successfully debate their opponents.

Deceptivism. The soulless aren't really immortal at all - because they don't exist. The entire realm of the soulless, along with the Mad Lands and all surrounding lands, is nothing but the fever dream of a duck that has eaten rotten corn. The burden of immortality should be borne cheerfully, because it isn't real. The universe is nonsensical, so no behavior can be either right or wrong.

Incarcerationism. The impersonal universe has conspired to cage the soulless people in a trap - immortality - that seems inescapable. Logic dictates that there must be a way out of this trap. If only enough thought is given to it, a solution can be found.

Prehistoricism. The pre-immortality jyzuehyynkzd had an ideal culture, and although their present curse cannot be reversed, the soulless can achieve a measure of happiness and well-being by returning to it. The problem is figuring out what this idealized culture is actually like, since memories don't go back that far and the historical record is fragmentary and contradictory.

Regenerationism. A Utopia from which all boredom is banished is still in the future. All that is necessary is the adoption of a rigorous system of moral and ethical behavior, all of it based on the principle that no one should bore anyone else.

The soulless abhor any kind of religion or worship; instead, each individual subscribes to one of these philosophies. Some follow them fervently; most, bored by these issues, just pay lip service. Fights sometimes break out between adherents of different schools, but the most vicious conflicts occur over small points of doctrine within each group.

tionships soured. The soulless were becoming bored with life. But they could not take leave of it. Existence continued to grind on for them as the centuries went on.

Soulless are willing to do *anything* for even momentary relief from their perpetual boredom.

A Sorcerous Economy

The soulless are such powerful sorcerers that the economic needs which drive any normal society don't apply to them. Each of them can attend to any material need by conjuring the item out of the air. Chances are that every item a soulless uses in a day, from the bed he wakes up in to the food he eats to the clothing he wears, will have been magically manufactured by its user.

Almost all soulless have mastered every known craft skill at some point in their lives, in order to combat their boredom. This makes them self-sufficient as far as most services are concerned, too. Even seemingly unique items, like works of art, can be replicated by craft or magic without an exchange of money or goods. Consequently, the soulless need no currency system.

Self-sufficiency results in a loosely knit society of extreme individualists. Virtually all soulless live alone, forming no permanent bonds with others. Groups remain together only as long as they benefit each member. Social units like families or professional guilds remain weak associations, when they exist at all.

One notable exception to the economic self-sufficiency of soulless sorcerers is the case of those who use the gem injection school of magic (see p. 100). Due to an ironic quirk of this style, its practitioners can't themselves manufacture the gems needed to work it. However, any soulless who uses any of the three other schools can easily whip up a pile of any given gemstone. The problem gem-injectors have is convincing them to do so. Since there's no currency system, the injectors can't just buy what they need. The favors other soulless demand in exchange for a potful of gems are usually onerous in the extreme. Some injectors will venture out into the human world to prospect or trade for gems; others resort to thievery, burglarizing the homes of other soulless for any jewelry they may have conjured up for decorative purposes.

The Metal Cities

The soulless live in three cities: Kzowozymyzzkz, Fyzkwyzkzozpoza and Xymzdykyhjyzklz. The term "cities" refers more to the grandeur of their construction than their populations, which average no more than 5,000. Collectively called the Metal Cities, they exist in their own magical spaces tied to, but distinct from, the land of the Madlands. Here the laws of the wider world are superseded by magical logic: distance and spatial relationships are ever-changing, malleable by individual desire. Soulless cities are impossible to map, because the relative distance between any two points within them is never consistent.

Each soulless has a home of his own in one of the three cities. Most buildings are eye-poppingly ostentatious. Outer facades are mostly of precious metal: silver, gold, or platinum. Often every inch of these surfaces is decorated with statuary, filigrees and inset gemstones. (These are usually protected by magical traps meant to harass and humiliate thieving gem injectors.) The interiors - which usually have a much vaster volume than would seem possible given the size of the exterior - will be equally lush. Since they can conjure up any material or fixture, soulless interior decoration is limited only by their imaginations - which are no longer what they used to be. Some manors have interior layouts which remain set and could be mapped out. Other homes are arranged as mutably as the city.

Soulless cities have only one street - one that leads anywhere the traveler wants to go. Every exit of every building leads to the Street. Upon hitting it, a soulless simply visualizes the buildings he wishes to get to. These then appear,



Portals to the Soulless Realm

Each of the three soulless cities is tied to a particular spot in the interior of the Mad Lands. All have a small number of portals that lead from the forest to the Street. Madlanders do not know the exact location of any of these portals, and don't really want to know; there's always someone foolish enough to use them. Sometimes foreigners come to the Mad Lands openly looking for portals; this admission is justification for killing them.

Madlander tales do contain accounts of Zo Do Wabda accidentally stumbling into soulless cities. In these tales, the entrances seem to be part of the natural landscape, only revealing themselves on close inspection. One story describes a portal as a circle of boulders arranged in a clearing; another, as a circle of mushrooms. In another, Zo Do Wabda leans up against a gigantic boulder right where someone has etched a circle in charcoal. He falls through the boulder into the midst of a soulless street fight.

This is how the entrances appear to Madlanders; soulless perceive them quite differently, in keeping for their taste for splendor. Instead of a circle of boulders, they'll see a golden gateway encircled by decorative emeralds the size of pigdogs. Rather than mushrooms, they'll see a dome of light hanging in the air, smelling of rose petals. The charcoal circle in the boulder appears as a platinum door inscribed with magically animated torture scenes.

Residents of the metal cities have to use these portals not only to get to the Mad Lands, but to go from one city to another. Transport magic doesn't work for direct travel between cities. Theorists of sorcery have a complicated explanation for this, speculating that direct magical travel from city to city might create an energy connection between them that could eventually cause the three cities to collapse into one. This might in turn create a catastrophic fault line in reality, or a critical mass of magical energy, or various other disasters. Some soulless would love to destroy all of reality in order to end their existence. They work actively towards this scenario.

But in the meantime, soulless must make a long physical trek through the Madlander wilderness, which many of them find extremely tedious. Encounters with soulless in the interior are most likely to be with individuals or parties traveling to another city. They'll be cranky and bored, and may be in the mood to amuse themselves by torturing a few humans, or worse.

arranged along the Street in the desired order. Soulless using the Street at the same time can see one another and interact, but each will see their own personalized sequence of buildings along its length.

Soulless cities have few public buildings - these solitary beings conduct most transactions in private homes, and have no need for markets or stores. Most public buildings are theaters or arenas for sports and entertainment events; there are a mere handful of official buildings.

The Street determines the distance it places between points according to the needs - conscious or otherwise - of the traveler. If he's in a hurry, the place he's going will be right next to his home. If he desires a leisurely stroll, or needs time to psych himself up for a difficult confrontation, the Street makes itself much longer. Its appearance also depends on the frame of mind of the traveler. The Street is arrays paved with sheets of silver inlaid with delicate patterns in gold. But if the traveler is in a pleasant frame of mind, the Street will be wide and flooded with golden light. Frightened individuals will walk a narrow lane lined with tall, dark buildings, cloaked in fog and reeking with dampness. The angry will stalk down a Street lined with decorative hooks and spikes as an imminent thunderstorm fulminates in the sky. Even the inlaid designs vary with individual mood: the contented will see large, even geometric shapes; the disturbed, a swirling melange of menacing, half-revealed figures.

Political Games

Activists use the following tactics on one another

Public Opinion. Any group worth its salt issues a steady barrage of communiques, broadsheets, pamphlets and other propaganda. Most organizations inscribe giant slogans on the facades of their buildings and then assign members to impose them on the Street, so the average soulless can't avoid noticing the group's presence. They'll also have public orators to stand in pulpits in the Street and harangue passers-by. Motivation to step up such campaigns grows with public indifference.

Sabotage. Vandalism, from posting one's own slogans on an enemy building to destroying their headquarters entirely, is a perennial occupation of soulless politicians. Physical assaults can be unexpected and hard to defend against, but sorcery yields the most spectacular results.

Espionage. Infiltration of rival organizations is always important. First of all, it's the best way of getting information on opponents' plans. Secondly, double agents can act within the enemy group to change those plans in accordance with their real loyalties.

Alliance. Nothing upsets a faction more than to hear that its rivals are joining together to gang up on it. Soulless politics is a crazy quilt of ever-shifting alliances, sometimes between groups that on the surface would seem totally incompatible. In fact, most alliances end when the joined groups use their new proximity to deliver suddenly unexpected attacks on each other.

Outright Combat. This final option is usually a last resort, not because it's dangerous - soulless are all so phenomenally skillful at fighting that it's very hard for them to hurt each other - but because the political mind hates the lack of subtlety. But on occasion tempers will flare to the point that an impromptu melee will break out. Like any fight between soulless, these tend to go on inconclusively, sometimes for days, until one side tires of the action and gives in ... or just wanders away.



It's possible to impose a building on the Street, to force all travelers to pass it or at least see it in the distance. Typically this is done when a new structure has been built, to announce it to the rest of the city as a potential destination. Showoffy types with newly designed facades might do the same. To perform such an imposition, at least one soulless must be actually inside the building in question, concentrating fully on the task.

Madlanders, and other humans without sorcery skills, are unable to navigate through soulless cities. They'll see the Street as the nearest soulless sees it. This creates an image, as different soulless come and go, of a chaotic place that completely changes every time a man blinks. If they duck into a building, the humans will see it as its last inhabitant left it. Soulless don't let unaccompanied humans roam about in their realm; our helpless heroes will quickly be scooped up and taken prisoner.

Non-soulless with sorcerous abilities may be able to use them in an improvised, hit-or-miss form of navigation. They will also see the Street as the nearest soulless does until they try to focus their own wills on it. Sorcerers can use any type of spell as transport magic in a Metal City; the spell must relate in some way to their intended destination. The usual effect of the spell is aborted; the Street converts it to a transport spell instead. This technique limits one to already familiar places: someone wanting to travel to a specific parlor with a fireplace could get there by casting a fire spell while concentrating on the destination, for example. An information spell might get one to a library, and so on. There is a high margin of error in these attempts, and folks using this means of travel might find themselves in unexpected places. When the technique goes wrong, the unwanted destination will still relate somehow to the spell type used. Shamanic powers can't be used in this way.

Politics

A society of absurdly powerful individualists has little need for government. The disorder and discontent of soulless life would be made even worse by any attempt to impose authority on it.

However, the fact that the soulless have no real government doesn't mean they don't love politics. The ephemeral nature of the stakes just makes soulless politics even more passionate and convoluted than they otherwise might be. The lack of a governmental system means only that there are no rules: political strategy is a free-for-all of manipulation, infighting and betrayal.

Each city at any one time will have around a dozen self-proclaimed rulers competing with one another for control of the populace, each with a coterie of followers. About 30 percent of the soulless dedicate themselves to the endless political struggle; the rest are bored to tears by it. The uninterested majority will never allow any leader to dictate anything to them, so this control the others seek is purely imaginary. Because it doesn't exist, various groups can claim to have it simultaneously.

Political interest groups independent of the competing "rulers" also spring up. These may be devoted to one of the philosophical schools or to some other cause. They may wish to abolish sorcery, institute a taxation system or force every citizen to breed animals for bear baiting. Only rarely is the actual content of the objective more important than the fanaticism required to pursue it. These political societies play the various organizations off one another, offering to do harm to one "government" in exchange for concessions from another. The loyalty of a political society is always short-term: otherwise the society would be in danger of being absorbed by the leader's organization.

Some groups, both leadership structures and political societies, are completely underground, their very existence being secret to any but their own members.

These secret groups usually operate by infiltrating the public groups, attempting to destroy them from within. Secret groups are even more unstable than the others, since any degree of success tends to expose them.

Social Organization

There is no single social unit that all soulless belong to. Unlike the Madlanders, whose first allegiance is to a village, or the Togethians, who value an extended family structure, the soulless place the needs of the individual over the needs of the group.



Soulless might find some vestigial value in family ties, if only because it's more interesting to torment those one has a close relationship to. But most soulless have forgotten who their relatives are, and early family records are corrupt at best. The soulless have a fleeting experience they call *pytrakzhyjzh*, in which one gets the shivery feeling of a deep shared bond with another. But the sufferer has no way of knowing whether the other is their parent, son, sister or one-time lover or blood enemy. Feelings of *pytrakzhyjzh* usually strike at moments of intense emotion, whether violent or passionate. Either way, they can be awkward.

On the other hand, those fortunate enough to have an accurate record of their family tree often feel constricted by blood relationships, and shun all contact with relatives.

Dispute Resolution

Most cultures have mechanisms in place to mediate disputes between their members; this prevents conflicts from spreading and destabilizing the entire community. The soulless, on the other hand, live for disputes. Whenever possible, they seek to make them worse so they'll drag on and provide extended entertainment for participants and spectators alike.

The soulless maintain a complicated court system to exacerbate disputes. Even a simple suit often explodes into a centuries-long maze of claims, counterclaims and third-party interventions. This is mainly due to the fact that the courts have no power to enforce their judgments. The vast majority of soulless are so good at sorcery and combat that they can't be made to do anything they don't care to. Losing litigants simply reject the court's ruling, forcing the winner to initiate new proceedings, charging his opponent with violating the judgment. This new trial can be counted on to go back into the original case and possibly overturn the ruling. This in turn provokes a third case, and so on. Often secondary disputes arise, and jurors end up suing one another, lawyers lay charges against judges, and so on, *ad infinitum*. There are cases which have been in litigation for such a long period that the participants don't remember the original facts of the case and must rely on records - which can be doctored by any clever sorcerer. This isn't a significant impediment; facts have little bearing on the soulless justice system anyway.

Most soulless are fully versed in the voluminous and ambivalent legal code of the Metal Cities, and can act as lawyers, judges or other court officials. Before a case is tried, both disputants must come to an agreement on who is to preside over the case, and on the make-up of the 27-member jury. Many cases get bogged down completely at this point, and never reach trial. Sometimes secondary lawsuits arising from court selection reach trial before the main case.

Soulless lawyers are not paid, since money means nothing here. Instead, they practice law as a perverse recreation. Lawyers enter the process as mediators in the judge selection, and will often stick with a case long after the two original litigants have abandoned it out of boredom.

Interactions with the Gods

In their millennia of often deprived existence, the soulless have consistently maintained a single taboo, against the practice of religion. Submission to the will of a more powerful being of any sort is considered the ultimate obscenity. Occasionally magicians may contact powerful otherworldly beings to further some plan or other, but they haughtily maintain the upper hand in any such transaction. The ideal relationship between soulless and such entities is that between the creature that granted the jyzuehy-yinkzd immortality and Oxlcyxowsyjys, the magician who disposed of it forever.

While using magic to roam through dimensions, soulless may encounter all sorts of self-styled deities. But the closest to home are the crazy gods of the Mad Lands. These are hard for the soulless to deal with. Most deities are intelligent enough to strike a bargain with - though often not quite enough to avoid being trapped by wily soulless negotiating tactics. The Madlander gods, on the other hand, are completely irrational, and even those capable of comprehending a pact aren't sane enough to honor it. As powerful as soulless sorcerers are, they still pose no threat to Madlander gods, who can obliterate an entire platoon of them by sneezing. Any sensible soulless will flee unashamedly from any possible confrontation with one. One might think that the soulless might seek them out in order to be destroyed. But, like any other form of unnatural death, being slain by a god doesn't grant freedom from the curse of immortality: the victim just returns as a changeling (see p. 91).

The gods have never been known to enter the Metal Cities. The soulless contend that they haven't the power to do so; more likely, Zuutak and company just aren't interested. Soulless are always wary of the risk of godly attention when they venture outside. Even if they don't encounter the gods directly, they'll sense their presence every time they use sorcery. Spells cast on the soil of the Mad Lands are less predictable than in the Metal Cities; they're more likely to have unpleasant or just plain weird side-effects (see pp. 107-108).



Ceremonies

Ceremonies in most cultures originate as ritual, as a means to get the attention of the gods and secure their favors. Here the usual reasons don't apply; the soulless are proud to say they kneel to no deity. Still, the soulless have a great appetite for all things ceremonial. They literally have more processions and festivals than there are days of the year. Sometimes as many as three major celebrations will compete with one another for pre-eminence in one day. These scheduling conflicts may degenerate into physical ones, with massive brawls between rival celebrants adding to the sense of occasion. Soulless commemorate any occasion with a ceremony.

Many of their great holidays celebrate abstract concepts; others mark historical anniversaries, or kick off a season of cultural events. Some no longer make any apparent sense; these may have started out as religious observances during the Jyzuehyinkzd Period which were secularized before current memory. (Visitors to the Metal Cities take note: soulless take great offense at any such theorizing.) A few of the most widely-observed ceremonies:

Days of the Code. A festival in which celebrants practice a different vow each day for eight days. On day one, they promise not to seek escape from any bad situation. Then all spend a day without entering their own homes. Next, they swear off all divination magic. On the fourth day, everyone must dress up as a queen or empress; on the fifth, one must dance from point to point instead of walking. The next day, all participants spend the entire day trying to seduce the person least likely to give in to their charms. On the seventh day, each soulless summons an extradimensional entity of his choice to run rampant through the city. Finally, everyone must spend a day in self-hypnosis forcing themselves to forget everything that happened during one of the other days of the observance. By tradition, this would be the day the individual considers the most eventful.

Eve of Hot Tongues. Twice a year, radical deceptivists run wild on the Street, using firebombs to try to ignite everyone they pass. Any pain inflicted is intended to teach adherents of other schools to abandon the false reality of physical sensation. The actual effect is the opposite, and the Eve usually ends with burn victims rallying and lashing out against every known deceptivist. Dates for this event vary each time to provide an element of surprise.

Festival of Deception. A biennial event accompanied by great revelry. The central event takes place in a stadium. The preliminary ceremony is standard each time: a soulless chosen by lot performs a traditional series of illusions, making a knife appear as a living heart, a metal statue seem to come to life, a songbird become an eagle and a severed hand, a spider. This is followed by a competition of illusionists, each contestant trying to outdo the others with unheard-of magical spectacles. Winners are decided by audience applause, as judged by a panel of 27. Passions run high between rival spellcasters, and attempts to rig the jury have become commonplace.

Night of the Metal Masks. An annual event observed by all but the most antisocial. Celebrants don exquisitely crafted metal masks and hit the Street. The masked soulless then proceed to inflict the crudest and most humiliating attacks, physical or magical, on any others who catch their eye. A large committee of sorcerers sits above the fray, charged with blocking any spells designed to reveal the identity of participants. At an appointed hour, all must unmask; tormentors discover the identities of their victims and vice versa. Custom forbids the taking of vengeance for humiliations inflicted during this festival. Like all soulless customs, this lacks an enforcement mechanism.

GMs running adventures in the Metal Cities should invent at least one ceremony for each day the PCs spend there, using these as a model. But not all ceremonies need be as disruptive as the ones listed here; many are sedate affairs involving little more than a bit of parading and dressing up.



Literature

Soulless literature is dominated by a few major figures. The writers who first came to prominence during the early Flourishing period remained active for thousands of years, preventing less talented figures in their shadows from developing. Most soulless literary greats were very active over the centuries, and created huge bodies of work. During the Flourishing these writers explored every imaginable style and genre until finally running out of new ideas during the Stagnation. Since then, readers have gone back to more obscure writers working during the Flourishing in search of the new and interesting. But the soulless will have read all of these by now, too. Most soulless have read all of their literature so many times that they've committed every word of it to memory.

The towering figures of soulless literature are:

Yrdisvibyl. Yrdisvibyl is famous for a single work, the multi-volume narrative poem simply known as *The Epic*. It is a sweeping tale winding together the lives of dozens of characters at the beginning of the Flourishing. *The Epic* is the basis for a particular school of sorcery but is revered by all as the centerpiece of their literature. See also p. 99.

Hyzhlyzhlyzh is the soulless' leading dramatist, responsible for 5,133 plays ranging from early heroic melodramas to experimental visual pieces to a series of late, bitter satires. *Hyzhlyzhlyzh* remained active longer than any other writer, her satires date from early in the Decadence. Since then she's been a recluse, writing tortuous books of criticism tearing apart her own plays. Few agree with her current assessment, and little attention is given to these new books.

Kazhlaalzyxm's reputation rests on several volumes of extremely short stories, none more than 84 words in length. Their brevity and precision is still breathtaking today. *Kazhlaalzyxm* produced these in a few short years and then vanished without a trace. Some believe she was someone writing under an assumed name.

Dlzhpokwiwkzh wrote thousands of lengthy prose narratives, inventing and then exhausting every known genre. His books are regarded as more entertaining and less profound than the works of the other authors mentioned here. He lost his abilities during the Stagnation, but periodically announces the publication of a new manuscript. It inevitably turns out to be a virtual word-for-word remake of an earlier book with perhaps a few names changed. It seems he's forgotten his own work.

Knowledge and History

Soulless culture values learning and the keeping of accurate records. Every day a soulless forgets a little more of his own past. In the Metal Cities, scholarship is a frantic rear-guard action designed to protect as much information as possible before it vanishes. Somewhere in the mists of the past is hidden the key to reversing the curse of immortality. Or so the soulless must hope. The historian to find it would be hailed as a great hero by his people, who are anxious to bid farewell to existence.

Unfortunately, for every conscientious scholar honestly trying to answer the mysteries of existence, there are six with some kind of axe to grind. Falsification runs rampant through the existing sources: it's especially easy to commit using magic. Even honest scholars end up distorting the record as a result of reproduction methods. Books in the Metal Cities, like any other item, are manufactured magically. A sorcerer just concentrates on the book he wants a copy of and causes it to appear from nothing. The problem is that the magician's desires can infect the book he is conjuring - he gets the book he wants rather than the book as it currently exists. So often the copy will be different from the original in subtle ways that reflect the copyist's biases.

As a result, there isn't a single aspect of the unremembered period that isn't subject to dispute. Many historians have long since given up trying to find the truth by sifting through the evidence: now they simply make things up, hoping to one day come upon the real facts by accident.

Inventing Soulless Words

Assuming they're interested in doing so, GMs can create words or names in Soulless simply by inventing a long, unwieldy word full of hard consonants in difficult combinations. They can then throw in a few unlikely doubled letters and lots of "zh"s, using "y" as a vowel at least 50% of the time. As with Madlander words, the idea is to create the *appearance* of a foreign language that follows a recognizable pattern rather than to fool linguists.

GMs with access to a word processor can easily generate Soulless words which will be realistically odd. Begin by blindly and quickly hitting 15 to 20 letter keys. The result will be, something like: Slwoesdkjsjwlsjk. Then edit the word to make it look more Soulless. First, replace all "s"s with "zh"s: Zhlwoezhdkzhjzhlzhyk. Add "y"s between consonants to make it at least marginally pronounceable, but don't be afraid to leave in a few tongue-twisters: Zhlwoezhydkzhjzhyzhyk. This leaves too many syllables to actually use, so just delete a few repetitive or uninteresting ones: Zhlwoezhydkzhhyk. In this case, the process naturally creates an unusual-looking doubled letter. Otherwise, the odd double should be added.

Pronunciation

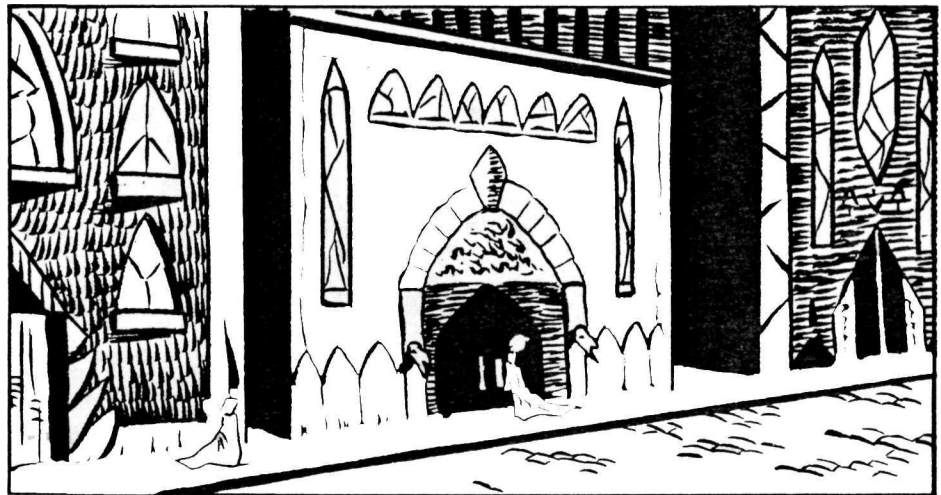
Soulless words look like a hellish cross-breed between Welsh and Polish; they're *supposed* to be hard to pronounce. Chances are that players and GMs alike will avoid using them if at all possible. This is entirely appropriate for the setting: Madlanders won't be able to pronounce Soulless words and names properly. The typical Madlander will associate Soulless with sorcery, and refuse to speak even a word of it. Instead he might create a Madlander equivalent of the first few syllables of a Soulless name. He'd be even more likely to come up with his own insulting nickname for a soulless, in Madlander, like "snake pants," "swamp eyes" or "fish glue."

Some GMs and players *like* exotic names, though. They'll just have to muddle through pronunciation of names by breaking them down into syllables and practicing. GMs planning a scenario in which many Soulless names will pop up can make it easier for themselves by preparing a "cheat sheet" with all the names broken down into syllables: Zh-l-wo-ez-hyd-kyz-hyl. It's still tough, especially with consonants that seem to cry out for more vowels; these can be buzzed or slurred over in speech. Eventually even the most stubborn-looking word will roll off the tongue, if not exactly trippingly.

One area of general agreement is the breakdown of soulless history into eras. Deciding on exact dates to define them, and their significance to the current problem, is a different matter. They are as follows:

Prehistory. This era is also known as the Jyzuehyynkzd Period. It's the period before the soulless lost their mortality, when they were a tribal people oppressed by magical trapezoid beings. There are no widely-accepted records of this era, though there are a few interesting pot fragments which are probably forged. Every possible speculation has been made about this period; it's an especially hot topic with the prehistoricists (see p. 82) who seek a return to this period but fail to agree on even the most basic questions about it.

The Flourishing. This is the period immediately after the Jyzuehyynkzd gained immortality, when they still thought of it as a great blessing. Here all of the great accomplishments of soulless culture were made, in every area from engineering, to refinements in sorcery, to the arts. Although no one can remember back this far, it stands to reason that this was a very long period in soulless history. Different groups of scholars have proposed dates for the beginning of the Flourishing that vary by as much as 8,200 years. Historians with high estimates tend to pack most of those extra centuries into this period. (The date debate has no middle ground: one group places Oxlcxowsyjys' deal with the being at 14,500 years ago, another at 22,700. The argument centers around whether a single line in *The Epic*, the masterwork of soulless literature, is exposition or allegory.)



The Stagnation. A briefer period, probably only a thousand years or so, during which the soulless gradually realized that they had exhausted every area of endeavor, and could only repeat themselves endlessly. A few still have very dim memories of this time, which have become so vague they're indistinguishable from dreams.

The Decadence. The era in which the soulless consciously decided to destroy everything they had achieved and plunge into a period of darkness and depravity. This was done to try to duplicate the interesting variety of life during the Flourishing by pursuing chaos and negativity with the same passion they once devoted to order and achievement. Scholars agree that the Decadence lasted only one-fourth as long as the Flourishing. Most soulless' first clearly-remembered episodes date from the tail end of the Decadence.

The Reaction. A 2,000-year period during which revulsion set in against the excesses of the Decadence. Slowly a consensus built to try to recapture the positive values of the Flourishing. This period ended when the soulless discovered that they were now spiritually incapable of recapturing its purity, and that it was boring anyway. Definite, uninterrupted memories for all soulless begin here.

The Swings. This discovery led to another swing into decadence, which in turn provoked a counter-reaction, and so on. This period contained seven miniature versions of the Decadence and six pale imitations of the Flourishing. The Swings are reckoned to have lasted 1,238 years.

The Philosophy Wars. The one discipline to remain vital after the Stagnation was philosophy, which continually updated itself to try to come to grips with the changing circumstances. The beginning of this period is dated from the day that the abandonist savant Llykzhkyjzhm announced in a famous speech that all of the philosophical schools had now also reached the end of their development. He ended the speech dramatically, with a massive armed assault on an invited audience of regenerationists and incarcerationists. This launched a fivefold civil war that the rest of society joined enthusiastically. The period ended 1,411 years later, when the last committed band of prehistoricists laid down their arms, overcome by the tedium of it all.

The End of History. History is thought to have ended at this point 5,589 years ago. Since then life in the Metal Cities has crawled along with no discernible cultural development. Elements of the Flourishing and the Decadence exist side by side in predictable fashion. The only thing left for the soulless is death, which refuses to come.

Language and Nomenclature

The soulless language went through several permutations during the Flourishing, so that the one used today bears little resemblance to that spoken by the jyzuehyynkzd. Immortality had a marked effect on speech: with plenty of time to kill, words and sentences lengthened, and sentence structures turned into verbal thickets. The vocabulary became laden with qualifiers, with millions of new words joining the lexicon to precisely separate the smallest gradations of meaning. Even the type of syllable changed, as the soulless had ample time to practice the most tongue-twisting of sounds. The soulless words in this book are in fact shortened to make human use comparatively easy. The average soulless word has 29 syllables; names are about half again as long. Here we present just enough of each word and name to retain its convoluted flavor. Oft-used small words like conjunctions and prepositions are usually a mere dozen or so syllables.

The result is a language in which the communication of even the simplest idea can take ten or fifteen minutes. This is fine for the soulless, who have all the time in the world. Humans find it an incredibly frustrating language to learn and speak. One can devote a lifetime to it and still not master its nuances.

Clothing

Within the realm of the soulless, clothing is for display purposes only. Even in at the coldest point of the Madlander winter, the Metal Cities are magically maintained at a comfortable temperature. Soulless have no social need to cover up for modesty, either. Most do favor clothes of some sort, though, because the wide variety of possible outfits is yet another diversion from the ennui of immortality.

A soulless may keep an extensive wardrobe, or conjure up a brand new set of clothing as he dresses each morning. Some care little for such matters, and are known for having worn essentially the same garb for centuries. Others try not to appear in public looking the same way twice, though over thousands of years repetition is sadly inevitable.

Generalizations about soulless clothing styles are impossible; their extreme individualism is nowhere as obvious as in their dress. Flashy or outlandish clothing is more common than plain. Materials range from animal furs, to basic fabrics, to gemstone or precious metal magically woven into cloth. Bright colors and wild patterns are also prevalent. Soulless have idiosyncratic ideas about which colors



Fashion

The current wide variation in soulless clothing styles is a relatively new phenomenon, dating from the Swings. Before this a unified sense of style prevailed. Fashions did change over centuries, but at any given time most of the population would be wearing broadly similar garb.

Paintings from the time preserve the evolving parade of styles. Scholars cross-reference these with descriptions in *The Epic* to construct a chronology for the histories of both fashion and art. The earliest clothing was that of the tribal jyzuehyynkzd: loose tunics and kilts made from the treated hides of large native reptiles. This material was soon replaced by various conjured fabrics. Clothing became tighter, leggings appeared. Then layers began to appear: vests, jackets, shirts, elaborate undergarments. Different cuts of these, combined with a staggering range of possible fabric colors and patterns, provided sufficient variety for thousands of years of fashion.

During the Stagnation, style makers ran out of new combinations; they then began to recycle old ones. By the time of the Swings, each style had been reused for many more years than it had lasted in the first place. At this point clothing design died as a specialist vocation. More and more soulless became bored with fashion and simply adopted whatever look struck their fancy in the morning.

This continues to the present day, but occasional trends still bubble up from time to time. With no need to manufacture or distribute clothing, fashion proceeds at blinding speed. Someone who comes up with an arresting outfit might spot a few copycats wearing it the very day after its first appearance on the Street. It may or may not catch on; if it does, hundreds will be wearing it the day after that. The following day almost the entire population of the city might appear in the outfit. On the fourth day, it will seem to vanish, worn only by a few hapless sorts who are always one step behind the times. Then it will be gone without a trace, having become immediately *passee*.

Changeling Raids

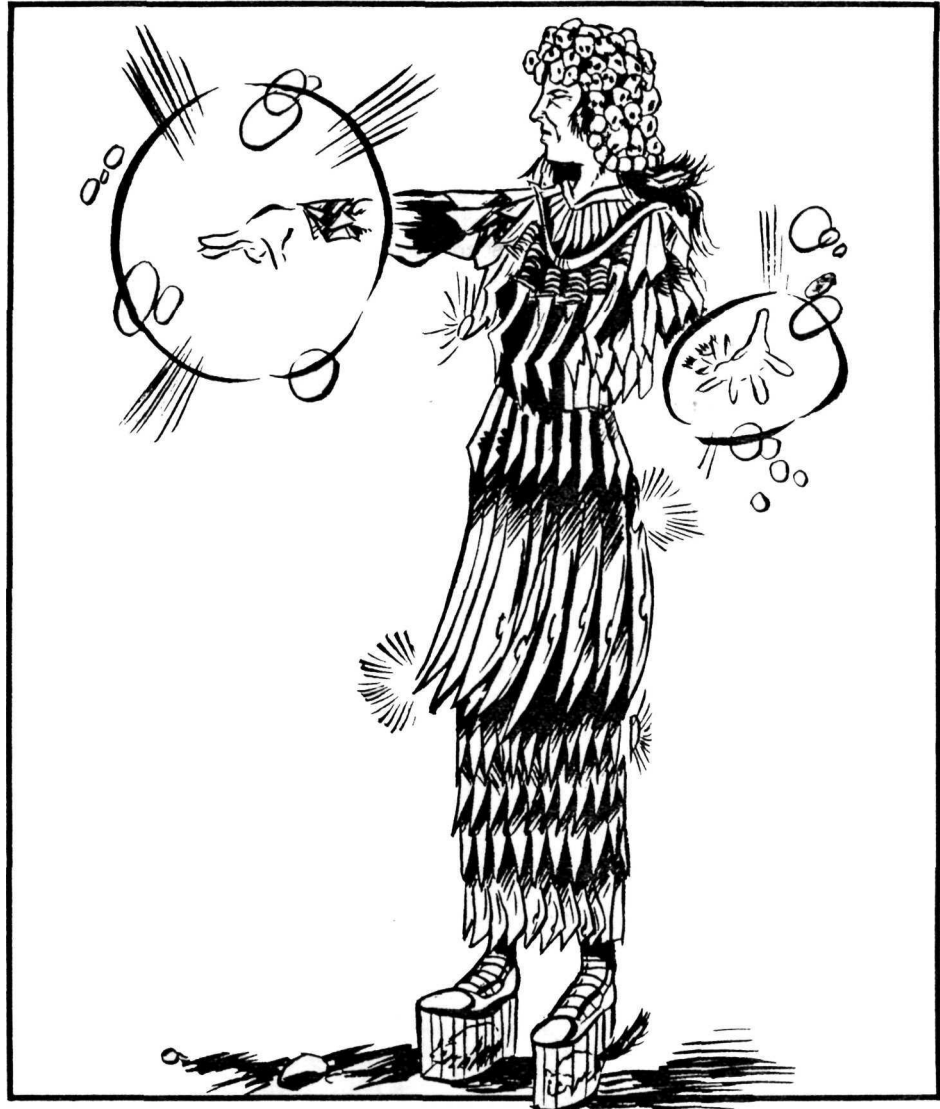
When a soulless is slain, it's likely that someone will be interested in finding his new incarnation. There's little point in looking until after the ninth month, at least. After this time passes, some of the deceased's friends, lovers, political allies or artistic collaborators may get together to discuss plans for his retrieval. Sometimes these interested parties won't be able to get along, and will spend their time squabbling instead of making rescue plans.

The usual way of finding someone's new incarnation is to conjure up a magical device that alerts the sorcerer when it appears. The rescue party then organizes itself and makes the trek to the village in question. The rescue raid may, depending on the temperaments of the participants, be smooth and stealthy, or sudden and violent. The raiders will have no qualms about taking Madlander lives in the process. In fact, sometimes they'll take the opportunity to seize captives while in the neighborhood.

Madlanders fear such attacks, and will be prepared for them if they have a sharp-featured rebellious child in their midst. The usual strategy is to grab the changeling as a hostage, threatening to kill him if the raiders attack anyone else. This only works when none of the rescue party has a vindictive streak. After all, once they have their quarry safe in hand, there is nothing but their word to stop the raiders from lashing out at the uppity humans. A better tactic has yet to be found; a group of soulless is too powerful a threat to fight head on.

The enemies of a dead soulless may have as much interest as his friends in grabbing his new form. Without skills and magic, a changeling is acutely vulnerable to whatever tortures and humiliations a foe might choose to inflict on him. At the time, the newborn won't understand why he's being victimized. But eventually someone will awaken him, and he'll remember the recent torments as clearly as his old life and skills. Abusing someone's changeling is considered the cruelest, most elegant form of revenge.

This means that there may be numerous competing groups planning to stage a raid over one changeling. Sometimes they stalemate one another and force the newborn to trek home alone. Other times they'll burst into the Madlander village simultaneously, touching off an epic brawl that sends the poor humans scrambling for cover.



go well together: to an outsider's eye, many of the print designs they favor seem to clash outrageously. Accessories also provide rich opportunities for personal expression: hats in particular are *de rigueur*. Hats for both males and females are usually large and of precarious construction. Soulless style is essentially unisex; no pieces or styles are restricted to a single gender.

The best way to convey a feeling for the array of styles is to describe a few random passersby on the Street. One might see a woman with a four-foot hat in the shape of a whale, studded with diamonds and sequins. She wears a velvet top embroidered with gold threads in a pattern that continually shifts depending on the mood of the onlooker. From the waist down she's clad in flowing pantaloons with horizontal stripes in orange, purple, and yellow. Each stripe smells of a different fruit: tangerine, grape, and lemon. Her boots are made from magically transformed live pigdogs; with each step they howl in agony.

Walking with her is a man wearing a leather headband. Attached to the headband with ultra-thin platinum chains are a half a dozen toucans, who flap about and occasionally fight with each other. Every time one of them pecks out another's eye, the soulless magically heals it. His torso is bare, but the skin is pierced dozens of times with rings of obsidian. He wears a kilt of panther skin that periodically bursts into purple flame. He has enormous platform shoes, one of them in black leather, the other of sandstone.

Slightly behind her is a woman covered completely in a white linen jumpsuit, which includes a mask with ruby-lensed eyeholes. Following her is another wear-

ing Togethian-style armor made of ice, and then a man dressed from the waist down in crimson silk, and from the waist up in writhing eels.

When venturing outside, the soulless go for more functional gear in case they run into a god and need to be unencumbered for flight. This usually means simple tunics and pants that change color with the terrain.

Theater and Spectacle

The soulless love theater - the more elaborate the better. Sometimes when a scene calls for the violent death of a character, a human captive is substituted for the actor at the crucial moment, and is actually murdered on stage. A few cranky purists contend that this is less satisfying than a faked death by a skillful actor - captives often break character in unseemly fashion when their big scenes come. But attendance invariably goes up when a so-called "Final Performance" is announced. On occasion one of these doomed actors puts on such an affecting performance that the audience cries out for a reprieve. This is not mercy: they want to save him for a more sensational demise at a later date.

Birth and Death

The pact with the unknown entity that turned the jyzuehyynkzd into the soulless forever removed them from the cycle of life that rules other creatures. New soulless are never born; existing ones can't truly die.

Natural causes of death that afflict other species don't affect the soulless at all: they're immune to aging and disease, and don't need to sleep or eat to survive. However, though it requires absurd luck given their combat and magical skills, they can be hurt. They recover over time from any nonfatal injury at the same natural healing rate as humans. Most have access to healing magic and can recuperate instantly.

If, in defiance of all probability, a soulless receives a mortal wound, he will die. Not, however, permanently. The body becomes a lifeless husk, and decomposes like any other dead creature - that is, if it isn't hijacked by other soulless for some nefarious purpose. The soulless' consciousness survives, and floats out of the city to the world of the mortals. The next time a Madlander couple conceives a child, the soulless' consciousness rockets downwards into the woman's womb. The fetus develops not as a human child, but as a soulless. When born, it has the mind of an infant, with no memories of its past or true nature. Physically, traces of that nature may be evident, and chances are that the attending elder will spot them and kill the newborn. Then the soulless' consciousness returns to limbo, waiting for another conception.

Initially, the child believes himself to be human. But gradually his fiercely individualistic nature asserts itself, and he'll begin to reject his supposed parents and community without knowing why. The villagers' attempts to socialize the misfit in their midst will only sharpen his rebelliousness.

If the dead soulless' friends are looking for him, they'll eventually stage a changeling raid on the village (see sidebar, p. 90). If not, the child will eventually run away from his community, much to its secret relief. Instinctively, he'll head toward a particular site in the interior, without understanding its significance. With limited skills, he may be killed *en route*, in which case he returns to limbo until he can be born to another Madlander couple. If he makes it, he'll find himself in front of an entrance to the Metal Cities. He'll see it in all of its weird glory, as a soulless would, and find himself irresistibly drawn through the portal.

Once inside, he'll be at the mercy of the first soulless to stumble across him - he won't know where he is, or how to navigate the Street. Even though he'll at least be in his teens by now, soulless will regard him as a "newborn," a greatly treasured commodity. Political groups in particular love to find newborns, seeing

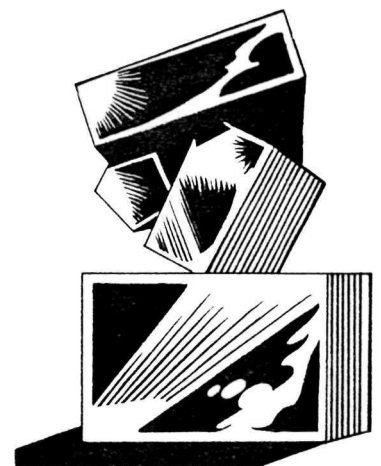
Duelling and Sparring

Since, with incredibly effective magical weapons and centuries of combat experience, the soulless have a very difficult time harming one another in a fight, one would think that violence between them would be abandoned as futile. But if the soulless gave up everything in their lives that was futile, they'd have nothing left

Anger - or boredom - still provokes many spontaneous brawls. These may take place anywhere - on the Street, at a performance hall, or even in a private parlor. These fights last a long time - usually days - because neither combatant requires sleep or food. Failure of a fighter's magic armor or defensive skill is statistically very unlikely at any given moment, but if the melee continues indefinitely, the unlikely will eventually happen. By tradition, even a spontaneous fight ends in first blood; fighters have to summon up an enormous quantity of hatred to keep going after one of them scores a wound. More often, both contenders get bored and agree to a stalemate long before any injuries are suffered.

More formal duels are also used to settle disputes; though, like the legal system, these in practice just lead to another level of contention. The two disputants assemble a jury of 27 - as usual, a process itself fraught with conflict - who act as adjudicators of a sparring match. This duel may be fought with any sort of weapon and consists of 27 three-minute rounds. The system for adjudicating duels is elaborated in 12 volumes of rules which attempt to anticipate every possible move and assign point values or demerits for each. In reality, most jurors ignore these and award scores on subjective aesthetic grounds. But the rules provide a fruitful source of argument after the jurors' decisions are collated.

Decisions often end up in the court system, with the loser suing the winner, the jurors or both. On the other hand, litigants often abandon lawsuits in order to settle things with rapiers. The duelling court and the law court operate in complementary fashion. Some disputes bounce back and forth between the two venues for centuries.



Roleplaying Soulless

Here are a few general principles to keep in mind when portraying soulless interacting with PCs.

Distance. At best, soulless respect humans as we do chimpanzees. They're amusing, possibly worth studying, but will never be true equals. (In fact, they think they have more in common with seals, who can at least appreciate the mystical import of *The Epic*.) Even the kindest soulless will always treat humans as a lower order of being. They see no reason to conceal their attitude of manifest superiority. It's inconceivable that human wishes and aspirations would be relevant to anything.

Capriciousness. Unless one understands how they're driven by the crush of boredom, soulless seem subject to sudden mood swings. A party of wounded humans might encounter a seemingly-friendly soulless who volunteers to heal all of their wounds. As they're expressing gratitude to him, he's just as likely to attack them. These actions are not inconsistent to a soulless: wounding a human is just as interesting a way to kill time as healing him. They undertake most tasks simply for diversion, feeling deeply about nothing. To Madlanders, this unpredictability is insane; to soulless, it is the only way not to go mad.

Tone Scale. Soulless see time differently than humans; a long period to a Madlander is the blink of an eye to them. This is reflected even in the smallest aspects of behavior: for example, in speech. Soulless seem to take forever to get to a point, deploying a platoon of qualifiers and tangents for each spoken sentence. Even their pauses are appallingly long to a human listener. Have fun with their thicket-like speech patterns; players should be struggling to follow a soulless character's dialogue.

Deviant Soulless

Material on any culture is by necessity a pack of generalizations. In the case of the soulless, these are unusually reliable: millennia of stagnation have ironically molded these vehement individualists into very similar personalities. But any culture has its nonconformists: it is possible that benevolent and sensitive soulless exist somewhere. If they do, they probably live in self-imposed exile, far from the Metal Cities. Who, for example, taught the seals Epic Sorcery?

If GMs do decide to introduce a "good" soulless character, it's recommended that they keep him far from the main events of the campaign. He'd be so powerful that frequent onstage appearances would reduce the PCs to supporting roles. A friendly soulless would cost too many points to buy as a patron.

them as blank slates who can be trained and indoctrinated to the cause. Without thousands of years of combat experience, the newborn will be quite vulnerable, completely subject to the whims of his discoverer. In all likelihood, someone will eventually use sorcery to "awaken" the newborn, restoring all memories - including skills - from his past existence. This is the usual response of someone who's attacked by an obvious newborn, the expectation being that the awakened will, in outrage, turn on the soulless who ordered the attack.

Death, then, is a mere inconvenience, not a permanent end.

Weapons and Armor

All soulless weapons and armor are magical: they're all conjured from thin air. They may have weird appearances or special powers. They're also phenomenally effective. Magic weapons and armor were the very first things the soulless developed as they refined the techniques of sorcery. Even before contacting the being that made them immortal, the jyzuehyynkzd princess Oxlcyxowsyjys used trapezoid magic to build them. Throughout the Flourishing, many sorcerers continued to pursue the ultimate weapon; others kept pace with the ultimate protective gear. Now everyone carries weaponry that almost never fails to hit, and armor that almost never fails to protect from those hits. Effectively, a soulless misses only on a roll of 18 - but when he strikes at a fellow soulless, his attack is effective only on a natural 3. With quick magical healing and the like, a battle can take days.

During the exotic days of the Decadence, many new exotic weapon designs were introduced, like multi-bladed swords, polearms with puppet-like animal heads full of nasty teeth, and throwing weapons shaped like spiders. GMs should feel free to deploy the strangest weapons they can think of. But the novelty of such pieces wore off long ago: most soulless now fall back on old standbys like swords, knives, and axes.

Magic weapons may be made of any substance, the flashier the better: bone, glass, stone, precious metal or combinations thereof. They're often decorated to the hilt, as it were; some buck the trends by carrying completely unadorned equipment. Armor may likewise be made of exotic and unlikely material, but is more often left invisible in order to show off more interesting clothing underneath. Soulless armor is form-fitting, flexible and light, and doesn't impede movement at all.

Character Creation

Unlike the soulless themselves, most GMs aren't cursed with an excess of time on their hands. Here's a quick way to build a soulless character. Build *attributes* on a total of 200 points. Add *advantages*, mostly sorcerously-gained, worth another 200 points. Up to a further 150 points(!) can be taken in disadvantages and used to buy further advantages.

As to skills: It isn't necessary to complete an extensive skill list for each character. All soulless will be trained to an incredible degree in every skill in the *GURPS Basic Set* except for high-tech skills, which are culturally inappropriate. If an exact skill level must be generated randomly, add 2d to the skill's controlling attribute.

Next, determine which Sorcery skills the character has. Typically, practitioners of the *singing* and *gem injection* sorceries will be trained to a level of IQ+3d in each of the skills of their schools. *Sacrificial* sorcerers have this degree of skill only with the animal types they can maintain a breeding stock of; this places a practical limit at around a dozen or so. They use other animal types at IQ default only. *Epic* sorcerers will usually be trained to maximum in 2d+20 lines; these must be chosen and listed on the character sheet. They'll have another 3d lines at IQ default. See the following chapter for details on these skills.

SHAMANISM AND SORCERY 8

In the Mad Lands and surrounding areas, magic is poorly understood even by its most experienced practitioners. A skilled student of magic might be able to reliably predict what effect a given spell will have. *How* it works is a tougher question.



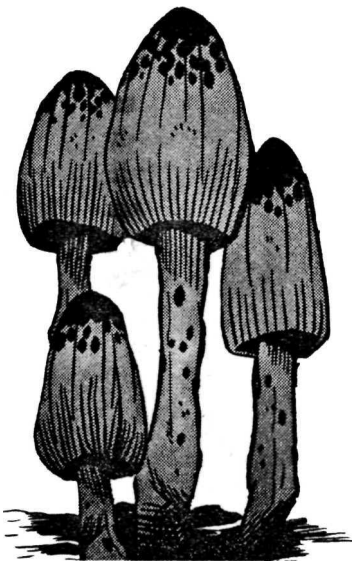
Mysterious Magic

Magic in the Mad Lands is intended to be weird and atmospheric. Many fantasy settings treat magic as just another readily understandable natural force, as consistent as the laws of gravity or genetics. Here it's intended to seem strange, real but not mundane. This strangeness should be always be apparent to its practitioners as well as its victims. In this setting, magic is not a science but an art.

The *GURPS Magic* book presents highly specific spells with rigidly defined limitations. The Mad Lands setting requires a different approach. This uses broad areas of magical skill instead of particular spells. A character might for example, have a skill level of 15 in quartz magic, which he must apply creatively to the situation at hand. Let's say he's being pursued by a furious mob anxious to put him to a tribunal. To use his magic, he must specify the effect he desires, and then make a success roll. He knows quartz magic relates to the moon, sex, and invisibility. This gives him a range of choices. He might try to blind his pursuers with moonlight or overcome them with distracting lust; he might simply go invisible. The skill roll determines whether it works or not, and the GM then decides to *what degree* it works.

The idea is to make magic seem more like that found in fantasy books, comics and movies, where it usually seems flexible and surprising. Magic is in effect a literary conceit, a metaphor that comes to life and enters the action. GMs should accordingly determine the exact effects of successful magic use - fatigue or other costs, range, duration, visual manifestation, unforeseen side effects - on literary grounds.

This gives the GM more power, and much more responsibility over the development of the storyline. Those uncomfortable with this lack of structure can, of course, adapt *GURPS Magic* to their needs.



All over the known world, various cultures practice different types of magic. Each has its own explanation of mystical principles; these frequently contradict one another. But these seemingly opposed methods all function. Some spellcasters - for example, the shamans of the Mad Lands - give little thought to such questions. Others, like the wonder workers of Savarginia, delight in metaphysical speculation. Some of these have concluded that contradiction is the very essence of magic. It is the art of the impossible.



Magic in the Mad Lands: Unnatural Laws

The two different modes of magic native to the Mad Lands are shamanism and sorcery. These are incompatible with one another. Each is acquired through a different route; the mindsets required to practice them are mutually exclusive.

Shamanic powers are granted, directly or otherwise, by the Mad Lands's gods. So it's not surprising that shamanism is a chaotic and unrestrained style of magic. Shamans gain their magics through direct experience and practice them through intuition. They believe that they're in mental contact with their patron deity each time they attempt to use their powers. This isn't quite true - but the shaman must *believe it to be true* in order to trigger the magical energy. It's just this sort of

paradox that all magic depends on: if it makes straightforward sense, it isn't magic and won't work.

Sorcery, on the other hand, is a cerebral technique, which can be acquired through study, memorization and experiment. Practiced mainly by the soulless - plus some seals and a very few human renegades - it requires years of mental exercise to master. Soulless sorcery breaks down further into four distinct techniques, described on pp. 98-107. Each serves the same purpose: to intensely focus the mind, allowing it to shape the invisible forces to the caster's purpose. Though the techniques seem methodical, the results are often mysterious.

Shamanism

Though they sometimes grant powers to those who ask for them, the gods more often than not seem to spread shamanism like a contagious disease. Anyone who encounters a god is a potential victim. The shock of seeing a deity can open a mystic channel which allows the directing of magical force in a particular way. Once opened, it can't be closed: the person's perceptions are forever altered, and he is, like it or not, a shaman.

Shamans themselves give little thought to the principles behind their weird abilities; as far as they're concerned, they've been given supernatural powers by a god and that's all there is to it. Other Madlanders are even less curious. GMs, however, may be interested in the following details.

The Mad Lands are a high-mana area, with many pockets of very high mana. But the magical energy of the Mad Lands is different from that of the Metal Cities of the soulless, or foreign lands. It's contaminated somehow: wild and subject to extreme fluctuations. Sorcery performed in the Mad Lands is much likelier to have bizarre side effects than elsewhere. Soulless theorists haven't decided whether the weirdness of the Mad Lands's magic gave rise to the gods, or whether their frequent use of the energy made it as crazy as they. The gods appeared in the Mad Lands during the soulless' lifetime, but before current memory; they don't spend much time on such issues, as the whole topic of gods makes them edgy.

It is this irregular, god-infected magic that shamans manipulate to create their effects. Not that they themselves have any idea that this is how things work. As far as they're concerned, they're merely the eyes, ears, and hands of their god on earth. They think they're in communion with him every time they work magic. When attempting a casting, the shaman simply frames in his mind a request to his patron deity. He thinks it's instantly reaching the god in question. If the request pleases the deity, the magic happens. The shaman knows that the god is insane - as he himself probably is - so he accepts a certain degree of randomness of effect in the granting of his request. If something doesn't work, he'll think his god is displeased with him.

Consequently, shamans who wish to maintain their power spend most of their time trying to carry out the will of their patron god(s). The gods are, however, notoriously indirect about communicating with their "servants." Shamans must seek divine orders by looking for omens - in the weather, the stars, patterns of falling leaves, animal behavior or anything else that makes an impression on their deranged minds.

Actually the gods aren't in frequent contact with their shamans; chances are they've completely forgotten about them. They probably weren't even aware of having opened the shaman's mind in the first place. But in order for the channel to remain open, the user must believe he's in one-way communication with a god. If he begins to suspect the truth - that the gods don't care what he does with his powers - he loses them. The most effective way to disarm a shaman is to convince him of the true nature of his magic - a very difficult thing to do, especially since few understand that nature!

Attitudes Toward Shamanism

By now it will be obvious that Madlander attitudes toward shamanism are completely negative. Proven shamans are never given the benefit of the doubt. Anyone who suggests that good shamans might exist, or even that otherwise evil shamans might on occasion act virtuously, will be hooted down derisively by his fellow villagers.

But how do shamans become evil? Obviously the ones who seek out other shamans and voluntarily undergo initiation have already gone bad for whatever reason. But many, the so-called "god-touched" shamans, receive their supernatural powers involuntarily, as a by-product of a run-in with a god. The common belief is that the power itself immediately drives its recipient dangerously mad. The experience is somewhat different from the inside.

Someone who suddenly finds himself in possession of a shamanic power will be seized by terror and despair. A lifetime's cultural conditioning will not disappear just because he can suddenly fly or turn into a pig. The new shaman will still believe that shamans are malign and crazy; this will now include himself. He'll burn with self-hatred and shame.

Chances are he'll try to conceal his condition at first. He'll vow to suppress his powers completely, and act as if he didn't have them. Or he may assuage his conscience by using them for the good of the community - and only when there's no chance of his being caught. Shamans rarely remain closeted for long. Often, ridden with guilt, they give themselves away. They may talk in their sleep, or fire off a spell accidentally. They often become obsessed with the whole idea of shamanism, vocally condemning it at every opportunity. A wise elder might become suspicious when a clan member abruptly becomes a fanatical shaman hunter for no apparent reason. It often takes a dramatic moment for the shaman to reveal himself, like a dispute with another villager. A flight into the woods often follows a spell cast in anger.

Once cast out of the village, most try to find others of their kind. For one thing, they'll want to acquire additional powers just to survive. Also, they'll want to replace their lost communities. But such arrangements rarely last. Shamans direct their self-hatred at others of their kind, and find each other's company hard to bear. The life of a shaman is a lonely one. Madlanders believe that their evil natures lead to this solitude, but perhaps it's the other way around.



God-Touched Shamans

Distinctions can be drawn between shamans who gain their powers after a divine encounter and initiated ones. Initiated, voluntary shamans actively repudiate everything Madlanders hold dear, but god-touched shamans will likely have been virtuous souls who were minding their own business when a god came along and changed them forever. Accordingly, they're likely to be crazier but less evil than their initiated counterparts. They'll feel more of the self-loathing described in the previous sidebar, it may drive them slowly mad if the divine encounter didn't do it instantly. Residual effects may cause them to take on the god's character traits.

God-touched shamans are more obvious; they're likely to bear physical scars of their encounters. Their wounds or mutilations might spontaneously heal in a nasty way that relates to their powers. Someone whose arm is torn off by Zuatok and gets shapechange powers in return might find a horribly distended pig leg regrowing in the socket. An eye devoured by Vuvuti might grow back as an owl's eye, in which answers to the shaman's knowledge spells appear.

These shamans will usually be restricted to a single power, unless they become initiates as well. Characters who become god-touched during play receive their power at IQ level. Those who seek out gods for powers must pay character points for them; involuntary recipients get them free.

Most gods can bestow a number of different powers. These are miniature versions or adaptations of their own divine abilities. In direct encounter cases, the victim usually receives only a single ability. Shamans with more than one power will in all likelihood have learned most, if not all of them, from other shamans. People who remain intact after two direct encounters are exceedingly rare.

Specific powers vary in usefulness. Some make the shaman a force to be reckoned with all on their own. Others require great creativity to pose a threat to anyone - the gods, chaotic to the core, are not play-balanced.

All shamanic powers are Mental/Very Hard skills, with whatever fatigue cost the GM finds appropriate this may vary from moment to moment! The god(s) granting them are listed below. To determine the level at which a god grants a skill, roll 3 dice - unless the GM, for some dramatic reason, wants the skill to be particularly high or low. If the character is learning the spell from another shaman, this roll cannot exceed the teacher's current skill level.

Burning Light (Dopod Abwep). Allows the shaman to conjure a version of Dopod Abwep's deadly aura. Sometimes the caster will want illumination only, but the two parts of the power are inseparable - if Dopod Abwep's light is evoked, something must also burn. Experienced shamans ask for it in a number of useful forms - among other uses, it can be shaped, cast like a missile or used as a ward to appear if a boundary is breached.

Bounce (Gakox Pezep, Kikavo Vo). Allows the shaman to leap high into the air and land far away without suffering damage (unless the spell fails, of course). The shaman can also use this as an attack which sends victims shooting skyward; when they fall, they don't bounce.

Cause Bad Luck. (Bax Powu Kag) The shaman selects a target for misfortune, human or otherwise. He can attempt to specify the nature of the bad luck, or just leave it up to magic's whim. The results of the latter are often more serious. Creates interesting, if not always convenient, side effects.

Confusion (Gakox Pezep). Primarily used to cloud an opponent's mind. More creative uses involve casting it on inanimate objects or abstract ideas.

Destroy Undead (Kikavo Vo). At first glance, this is one of the few unequivocally good shamanic powers. But it frequently disposes of undead creatures in disconcerting or harmful ways: they may explode, sending stiletto-sharp bone shards flying throughout a village. Sometimes it fails to destroy them completely, merely breaking the undead down into dozens of tiny monsters, for example.

Detect Food (Bubzavav, Zuatok). A very specialized, self-explanatory knowledge spell, dear to the hearts of its divine sponsors. Frequent use can substantially increase a shaman's need for food, as he mysteriously begins to burn calories at a startling rate. A possible explanation for this is found in one tale, in which a shaman with this power discovers that Bubzavav is magically stealing the food right out of his stomach.

Dream Walk (Vuvuti). Allows the subject to enter the world of dreams. All dreams in the Mad Lands are connected to one another, and shamans with this power can travel between them. They can spy on the nightmares of sleeping enemies, or appear in the dreams of allies to convey messages. It's possible to reshape the dream world to one's will; this comes in handy if one ends up in combat with a hostile dream walker.

Earth (Zewa Zab). The gopher god grants one boon, but it's a broad one: power over the element of earth. The burrowing of tunnels, remaking of the landscape and the forging of metals are among its most obvious possible uses.

Flight (Vuvuti). This is a self-explanatory transport spell. The shaman has the choice of wingless or winged travel. It can be cast on others.

Gloom (Bax Powu Kag). This allows the shaman to project a field of depressing emotion like that of the Moose.

Healing (Kikavo Vo). If only shamans weren't evil and insane, this ability could make them very popular. In practice, it mainly gets used by the shaman himself and his sinister allies, if he has any. If the spell goes awry, the patient may find himself growing extra limbs or organs.

Illusion (Gakox Pezep). Another broad and useful ability. Illusions, no matter how fervently believed in, can never harm a victim directly. But they can lead people into danger, or torment them emotionally. Shamans who use this power extensively sometimes lose the ability to distinguish illusion from reality.

Knowledge (Vuvuti). This skill allows the shaman to know the answer to any question he poses, whether about past, present or future. Vuvuti often brings unwanted truths; one must be especially cautious when dealing with the future. It's also important not to use this ability to pose an unanswerable question; those who do so experience a brief moment of absolute terror before their heads explode.

Loneliness (Dopod Abwep). This is another harmful emotion, castable on others.

Madness (Bubzavav). This spell can be used to induce a state of insanity in a human victim, sometimes of the shaman's choice. Like *Confusion*, it has more dramatic uses in the hands of a creative magic user.

Opposites (Gakox Pezep). The dual-natured Cougar grants this broad power, which, when cast, turns its subject into its opposite. Shamans can attempt to suggest what this might be, but the result is often a surprise. Cast on a thunderstorm, it might result in a clear sky or a snow storm. A human victim might become evil or undead - or it might just change a chauvinistic fisher into a committed hunter. Users of this ability may eventually become schizoid.

Possession (Vuvuti). This allows the shaman to take over the body of another living creature. His own body must be safely protected as he does so. There's always a danger of bringing alien traits back to one's own body, or leaving dangerous thoughts and memories behind in the victim.

Raise Dead (Kikavo Vo). This is another spell that might make shamans popular - but those who return from the dead usually come back insane or with shamanic powers of their own, possibly as undead or monsters.

Read Mind (Vuvuti). This permits eavesdropping on the thoughts of others, humans or otherwise. Careless shamans sometimes get blasted into catatonia by accidentally reading the mind of a god in disguise.

Send Nightmares (Vuvuti). Shamans can use this ability to cast nasty thoughts, images and scenes into the dreams of sleeping victims. If the caster is detected by a hostile shaman with the Dream Walk ability, he can be dragged into the world of dreams with no independent means of escape.

Are There "Good" Shamans?

The average Madlander finds the idea of a benign shaman impossible to swallow. Hundreds of stories warn against shamans who pose as do-gooders; in the tales they're invariably coaxing Zo Do Wabda to his doom.

However, in a fantasy game, nothing is truly impossible. GMs will have to decide for themselves whether good shamans exist. If they do, each will have had to resist powerful psychological pressures in order to remain sane and functional. They'll also need to have been exceedingly clever to use their powers to help their communities without being discovered. Even these towers of strength will be continually lured toward madness and evil.

The most likely source of good shamans will be the PC group itself; a player whose character ends up god-touched probably won't want to turn him into a villain immediately. Respect the character's free will, but present him with all of the pressures and temptations of his new status. This situation is a rich source of conflict and story ideas. He might seek out other good shamans, but find himself duped by evil ones, to give just one example.





The Shamanic Network

What motivates initiates is obvious: the desire for magical power. The shamans doing the initiating, on the other hand, do so because it's the only way to build up a network of allies in a hostile society. Once initiated, the shaman is the equal of his teacher, the master has no concrete leverage over his student to force him to do his will. After all, he can't threaten the initiate with exposure without revealing himself too. Shamans only cooperate for mutual benefit. The benefits may be intangible ones, based on personal relationships: even an evil shaman occasionally wants to have a friendly chat with someone.

A shaman can create a network of contacts by initiating a number of people from different villages. They might in turn introduce him to others they've initiated, or unrelated shamans they've run across. A network might be a complex web of initiation relationships, especially with mutual exchanges of power between independent shamans. Students may even stay in touch with masters after they've died and returned as ghosts or undead.

Such groups are inherently unstable, since their members are all insane and evil. They're also subject to exposure; convicted shamans at a tribunal are usually pressured to reveal the identities of other shamans in exchange for leniency.

If good shamans exist in a campaign, they might also form networks. These would be somewhat more stable.

Shamans can sense others of their kind with a successful IQ+Magery roll. Strange shamans approach each other with care.

Shapechange (Bubzavav, Vuvuti, Zuutak). With this power, shamans can shape themselves into the animal form of the god that granted it. Bubzavav allows change to a bear; Vuvuti, to an owl; Zuutak, to a pig. Partial transformations are also possible, giving the shaman bear claws or a pig's snout.

Shrink (Zuutak). This allows the shaman to shrink in size. The easiest size to reach and maintain is that of a piglet - a foot and a half long, eight inches high. Experienced users of the ability get as small as a fighting beetle.

Thistle Control (Bax Powu Kag). The Moose grants this oddly-specialized ability. Shamans can use it to locate, heal, destroy or talk to thistles. They can render them ambulatory, command them to attack others, or form them into useful shapes. They can even share their limited perceptions from far away. This would be especially useful if the Mad Lands had more thistles - it's a rare plant here - or if they had anything interesting to say.

Time Transform (Vuvuti). This allows the shaman to change anything from its current state to the form of his choice. The limitation is that the new form must be related to the old one through the agency of time. The shaman can change a man to a baby or an elder. He can instantly rot a *wavobak*, or turn it into a tree. He can turn coal to diamonds, and vice versa. He can't work completely incongruous transformations, like turning a man into a worm or a pigdog into a crossbow. Soulless are immune to this power; evidently the power of their ancient immortality pact cancels it out.

These are not the only possible shamanic powers. Kikavo Dat and Bert Agwo, in particular, are known for bestowing unique abilities. Bett Agwo, always an agreeable sort, will try to bestow any power he's asked to. Sadly, his desire to please always exceeds his capacity to deliver, and the power gets inevitably garbled in the transmission. It will always come with side effects unpleasant enough to cancel out its usefulness. For example, someone who asks for flame breath will get it - but his face, mouth and lungs remain vulnerable to fire. A wounded man who asks Bett Agwo to dull his pain will likely find himself unable to feel anything ever again. Time and again potential shamans who think themselves clever approach Bett Agwo, certain that they can load their requests with enough qualifiers to ensure a catch-free power. None have succeeded.

Unique powers bestowed by Kikavo Dat may work better, but he doesn't seem to grant them on purpose. Those who encounter him may or may not later discover that they've become shamans. And these powers are often very strange indeed, in keeping with Kikavo Dat's childish persona. Stories mention Kikavo Dat shamans who can turn victims' faces into wooden masks, change the genders of people or animals, and make pigdogs dance. GMs can think of appropriately weird powers by picking random words out of books and using free association to decide what magic Kikavo Dat has granted.

Sorcery

In this setting, sorcery is defined as magic that can be learned and performed without the intercession of gods. The soulless have developed the techniques of sorcery by dividing it into four separate methods, or schools. Over the millennia, the soulless have become so adept at sorcery that they can use it to produce virtually any effect imaginable. Those seals and humans who practice it use forms developed by the soulless, though of course with far less skill.

No soulless uses more than one of the four schools of sorcery, though some have changed from one school to another. Apparently the different forms involve very different mind-sets, requiring extensive re-training!

One must be literate in the soulless language to learn sorcery; Magical Aptitude is also a prerequisite. All sorcery skills are Mental/Average for soulless, Mental/Hard for seals and Savarginians, and Mental/Very Hard for other humans.

Epic Sorcery

The massive narrative poem *The Epic*, by the poet Yrrdisvibyl, is not merely the central work in soulless literature - it's the key to one of their four schools of magic. The soulless consider *The Epic* so profound a work of art that prolonged meditation on its individual lines can provide the mental discipline and intense concentration required to bend magical energy to one's will.

The Epic, in its current form, appears in 14 volumes. No soulless, including those in the roughly 75% of the population who use it only as literature, would be caught without a copy of it in his manor. It's so revered that it's the only book still manufactured mechanically, rather than by sorcerous duplication, in order to avoid corruption. This has now evolved more into a custom of respect than actual scholarly concern, since most devotees of *The Epic* have now committed the entire poem to memory.

Each volume contains 239 pages, each containing a single verse of 15 lines. One can trace the evolution of the soulless tongue through the work: the linguistic change between early and later volumes is analogous to that between *Beowulf* and *The Waste Land*. Despite this, Yrrdisvibyl's stylistic ground rules remain rigid: each verse breaks down into five sub-groupings of 3 lines; each sub-grouping ends in a rhyme. Each line conforms to a consistent pattern of stresses.

The narrative of *The Epic* deals with the intertwining lives of a large number of characters who live, love and hate in the early days of the Flourishing. Prominent among them are Dyjyfl, an idealistic warrior, his cynical lover Vyblh, her wrathful father Zhfyd, and his charming enemy Kydlyv. (The short character names show how early a form of written Soulless the first volumes are.) Characters fall in and out of love, betray friends and form alliances with enemies. Every character has at least one pitched battle with all of the others; Dyjyfl is attacked by everyone else, particularly Vyblh, on numerous occasions. In the process, soulless civilization is forged.

The first use of *The Epic* as a magic aid was also early in the Flourishing; as the fourth volume appeared, someone realized that some of the lines of the first could be used as a focus. Several soulless claim credit for the discovery. At any rate, the number of lines that could be used for sorcerous effect grew rapidly as more soulless explored the book's potential. Epic sorcery, elegant and cerebral, became a widely popular method.

To learn Epic sorcery, the student simply contemplates the hidden occult meaning of *The Epic*, reading and rereading it. It may take months of thought before the moment of insight suddenly strikes, and the student suddenly realizes that he *now fully understands* a particular line. This process is different for each individual: teachers can suggest methods of inquiry, but can't simply explain lines. It takes $100x(1d+1)$ hours of independent study to pick up a new line of Epic sorcery; $75x(1d+1)$ with a teacher's help.

The student can't choose which line he will suddenly understand. The GM can either decide this randomly, or choose a line that reflects in some way on the character or the theme of the story. Starting characters with *Epic* sorcery powers should be given randomly chosen lines.

To invent lines from *The Epic*, GMs should find a book of poetry in an old-fashioned style. If the playing group contains any English majors, the works of well-known poets should be avoided. Used book stores or rummage sales are great sources for the moldy work of forgotten poets. Take lines from these poems, adapting them as necessary. Substitute names of *Epic* characters for any proper names that appear; change details to match soulless culture. *The Epic* is a work of such breadth that any line could conceivably come from it. Don't worry about getting the right style or number of syllables: the process of translation from Soulless to English can explain any discrepancies.



New Shamanic Characters

A player may wish to start with a shamanic character. GMs may want to encourage such a player to at least begin the campaign with a normal Madlander, to get a sense of the culture before he begins to violate its basic principles. Once acclimated, he can always retire his first PC and introduce the outlaw. To be fair, make clear to the player the heavy load of obstacles he's taking on. Then follow through, and confront the PC with the full complement of societal and supernatural pressures. He'll have asked for it.

Have him decide whether his character is initiated or god-touched, and provide a full background to explain how it happened. Starting play as either type of shaman requires the Unusual Background advantage. Appropriately sneaky GMs will decide that he's not in possession of the whole truth, and prepare for surprise revelations in future sessions.

The player may want to build a more experienced good shaman into the character conception as a Patron, whether the GM has decided to allow them or not. GMs should feel free to permit this - after all, the patron may not be what he seems. Or he might go insane as the game progresses, again providing a juicy plot line.

Literacy as Sorcery

The soulless, particularly those of the Epic Sorcery school, are fond of a poetic metaphor equating literacy with sorcery. This is found, perhaps originally, in the very first line of *The Epic*:

Reader, you are magicker, bringing form to letters on this page.

This is one line that no sorcerers have learned to use. Legend has it that the one who does figure out its mystical meaning will become omnipotent. Mostly, however, this is just a favorite poetic image.

For the Madlanders, it is literally true. It is known that in order to learn sorcery, one must be able to read. Therefore, anyone who knows how to read might be capable of sorcery. The ability to read in any language is a grave offense, even if no other evidence of sorcerous abilities exists.

Yrrdisvibyl the Poet

Yrrdisvibyl is, of course, still alive; he is supposedly still at work on the 15th volume of *The Epic*. Part 14 ends on a cliffhanger, with Kydlv having cast at Vyblh a spell which will supposedly circumvent the pact and destroy her forever. However, Yrrdisvibyl has been reported at work on Volume 15 for as long as anyone can remember.

He's been forced to adopt a reclusive existence, maintaining secret residences in each of the three Metal Cities. If he goes out in public, he must do so in disguise; he hasn't been spotted for centuries. He receives only a few trusted friends as guests - it is presumably from them that rumors of his current doings come. According to these friends, Yrrdisvibyl is still a lively and witty companion, sinking into depression or rage only when someone makes the mistake of mentioning his writing. Supposedly he's had a rough draft of Volume 15 for a long time, but continues to revise it over and over again, refusing to publish until it meets his standards of perfection.

Yrrdisvibyl has retreated from public life not only because of frustrations over the state of his manuscript. As author of *The Epic*, he found himself hounded by practitioners of Epic sorcery demanding insights into particular lines. His complete disgust with Epic sorcery is well-known: he considers it a vulgar perversion of the purely aesthetic aims of his verse. He himself practices singing sorcery. Nothing he could do discouraged the relentless questioners, so he went into hiding.

It's up to the sorcerer to come up with magical effects for the lines he mystically understands. His player must specify the desired effect, and how that effect relates to the line his character is using. If the skill roll is a success, the GM as usual decides exactly what happens. This allows an infinite range of possible effects. Here are some examples of possible lines and their magical uses.

I will make the bud a fairflower. This line could not only be used for plant magic, but could foster the growth of the target, make it more attractive, or accelerate its aging process.

The human mind must have some vital fault. Any sort of human psychological or brain disorder could be caused or healed with a line like this.

Mild is the mirk and monotonous music of memory. This could be used to induce trances, or distract opponents with illusions from their own memories.

She is so strange she must be fair. This could allow any sort of transformation, as long as the subject ends up both weirder and more attractive.

Survey this shield, all bossy bright. Useful for protection and light effects.

With just one vial, one vial of drug. Could be used to conjure up a desired drug, or induce intoxication effects in others.

These suggestions are by no means exhaustive; GMs can rely on the endless invention of players to turn any string of images into the basis of a creative and versatile style of magic. NPC users needn't demand this much detail; soulless sorcerers can be assumed to have a line available for any purpose.

There is *nofatigue cost* for Epic sorcery, or any other kind, in the Metal Cities. For sorcery outside the Cities, the GM should set a cost, usually 1 to 3 points, based on the effect he permits that particular spell to have.

Gem Injection Sorcery

Gem injection sorcerers focus their minds to the working of magic through physical sensation - specifically, the effect of powdered gemstones injected into the bloodstream. They mix the powder with a *logetzhicalluzh* derivative and inject it using metal syringes. These syringes are usually elaborately decorated devices, the gem injector's most prized possession. Gem injectors claim to be able to feel the difference between each type of gem powder, and often seem to experience mood changes that correspond to the mystic nature of each.

While the other schools of soulless sorcery are cerebral, gem injection is body magic, triggered by sensation rather than thought. Accordingly, mastery of each gem type is a Physical/Hard skill. This will be relevant if a human character becomes a gem injector; as usual, soulless are considered to have so much experience with each type that they fail only on a critical failure.

Specific gems and the areas of power they rule are as follows:

Amethyst. This gem gives clarity of mind to the user, and can be used to influence the minds of others. It confers clairvoyance and healing powers. Those who inject it can see faraway events in their daydreams. Their healing powers can be directed not only to other living creatures, but to inanimate objects as well - they can repair anything from a ruptured aorta to a crumbling archway. Users can combine aspects and heal subjects from a long distance away.

Aquamarine. Aquamarine controls the element of water - except for the sea, which is controlled by pearls. This still permits a wide field of control, from the waters in rivers and streams to those in the bodies of living things.

Beryl. This is used in contacting, summoning and binding spirits or other magical entities, and for contact and travel between dimensions.

Diamond. The hardest gemstone is associated with durability, determination, strength, and earth. Control of the earth element includes a wide range of abilities, from finding and excavating buried items to calling up earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. The aspect of durability is useful in hardening and strengthening items.



Acquiring Gems

Gem injection magic can be used to conjure up gems, but not in an economical way. In a pinch, an injector can shoot up a dose of diamond and use its earth aspect to create a quantity of the gemstone of his choice. The catch is that a principle of magical conservation comes into play, so that the volume of gems created by magic can't exceed the volume injected to trigger the effect. This means that injectors must go to great lengths to find gems elsewhere. As noted on p. 82, they are the one example of continuing need in an economy of otherwise unlimited abundance.

Other sorcerers can easily conjure up gems, but usually expect something in return for them, even if the price they exact is only emotional. Injectors are expected to grovel and confirm their contemptibly needy status if they want gems. Some are willing to prostrate themselves; others resort to theft or foreign trade schemes. Gem injectors are more likely than other sorcerers to be willing to tutor humans in magic - in exchange for gems. Any type of gem will do: injectors can turn one type into another under the influence of diamond.

Addictive Sorcery

Gem injection magic is the last form of potent addiction in soulless life. Users become hooked on the intense physical sensation that it provokes. If they go for more than a week or so without working magic, they start to feel listless and drained. After a month of abstinence, they become so weak they can't stand for more than a few minutes. A few weeks later, they begin to "kick" the addiction and are attacked by waves of agony and bodily spasms that resemble major epileptic seizures. These nearly unbearable sensations will persist for several weeks, after which the user is freed of the physical addiction.

The relapse rate of former gem injectors is almost 100 percent. Most subjects will still be psychologically dependent. To be unable to work magic in soulless society is to become a helpless victim. This means that an addict functions much better than an ex-addict. Accordingly, injectors who kick rarely intend to do so permanently. Most go partly through withdrawal just for the experience of the pain, and the ecstatic pleasure of injecting again afterwards.

It can be used to harden even tiny particles of dust into any desired item, which will seem to have been conjured out of thin air. The determination aspect can strengthen the resolve of the caster or others.

Emerald. The deep green gem controls love, passion, reproduction, and even resurrection. It can inspire love, or any other extreme emotion. Its reproduction powers can cause any subject - animal, vegetable or mineral - to make copies of itself. With resurrection, it can bring things back from the dead; if cast in the Mad Lands, they'll come back as undead.

Garnet. This red stone controls the spheres of luck and pleasure. Casters usually ensure the luck remains with them or their allies, but pleasure can be used aggressively. For example, an opponent in a duel is likely to be extremely distracted when a magical wave of ecstasy washes over him.

Jade. This opaque green stone confers power over plants and males or masculine forces. It also grants healing abilities.

Jet. This gem is used as a revealer of information. It can find lost objects, research answers to questions, or give away the innermost thoughts of a passerby. Like any soulless information magic, it can't retrieve information from the past if no one remembers it any more: it can only discover things that are already known to some living creature somewhere.

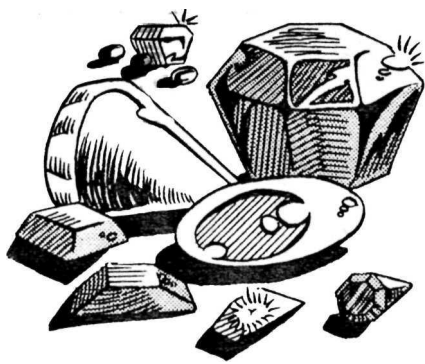
Attitudes Toward Sorcery

Characters who become acquainted with sorcery will have to be just as discreet as shamans. Madlanders see little practical difference between shamanism and sorcery: both are dangerous and evil. They understand that sorcery doesn't come from the gods. However, the fact that it originates with the region's deadliest monsters is no consolation. A sorcerer will always turn on his community eventually. Sorcery is thought to suck out the soul of its user, robbing him of a little piece of his essential humanity every time he uses it, until he eventually becomes soulless himself.

Soulless, on the other hand, view the practice of sorcery as the dividing line between themselves and the lower species. It is the basis of civilization. Those without sorcerous powers are no more than animals. This attitude explains the soulless respect for seals; they're regarded as another fully intelligent race.

Soulless divide humans into two separate species, those who use sorcery and those who don't. Madlanders, along with inhabitants of the Whiteness and Northern Tribelands, are animals who have learned to mimic the forms of more intelligent creatures. The Savarginians belong in the same category as the soulless, even though their short lifespans prevent them from achieving the level of power taken for granted in the Metal Cities.

If sorcery is the hallmark of civilization, shamanism is a sign of irredeemable degradation. Madlander shamans find no sanctuary in the Metal Cities; the soulless hate the whole idea of gods. Though they won't admit it, they fear them, too. Out of sheer revulsion, soulless kill shamans whenever possible, though their powers sometimes make them tough opponents. Togethians, with their peculiar, god-granted sorcery, are a sort of missing link, halfway between animal and civilized being.



Lapis Lazuli. The element of air is controlled by this stone. It also permits any effects related to the concept of rulership.

Pearl. The pearl's aspects are purity, women, and the sea. Sea powers are versatile, giving the sorcerer control over such things as tidal waves and whirlpools. Control over the feminine extends from charm spells cast on individual women, to contraception and birth magic. The purity aspect allows the caster to transform anything that is made from several elements into just one of those elements. It also gives him power over anything that is naturally 100 percent pure - he has no control over items rendered pure by his own magic or that of other sorcerers.

Quartz. This semiprecious stone, common in the Mad Lands, relates to the moon, sexuality, and deception. It can provoke insanity, foster illusions or render subjects invisible. A range of light effects are possible, as long as they involve a pale, soft light. The sexuality powers of quartz are as cold as the light of the moon, lacking the passion associated with emeralds.

Ruby. The ruby controls justice, fire, violence, destruction and blood. This allows any sort of attack magic the caster can think of, though jets or balls of fire tend to work best. Due to the justice aspect, these only work on targets who somehow deserve it. Conveniently, just about everyone in soulless society deserves a bit of damage. Control over the element of fire can also be used peacefully, to create fireworks displays or breathe normally in the midst of an inferno.

Sapphire. Any effect which can be seen as protective in some way can be created by a sorcerer with sapphire in his blood.

Sardonyx. This gem is used in a wide range of communication magics.

Topaz. The topaz relates to nobility and splendor, the sun, light and beasts. It permits illusions that improve the appearance of the spell's object. Sun and light powers grant anything from gentle illumination to burning attack spells. Control over beasts is useful, too - note that under soulless definitions, Madlanders and other humans who don't use sorcery count as beasts.

Turquoise. This gem covers corruption, putrefaction, necromancy, and darkness. It is useful for creating undead monsters, destroying pure things, inducing rot in the living, and obscuring subjects in the veil of night.

Gem injectors can reliably inject only one gem type at a time. Successful use of Chemistry skill while preparing the injection allows the user to precisely time the dosage, so it wears off exactly when desired. If doses of different gems are combined, it's still possible to work magic, but the effects will be unpredictable: the control areas of the gems will interact in strange ways.

Practitioners of this school have an antagonistic relationship to those who use other styles. Because they can't synthesize gems themselves (see p. 101) they have to beg or steal them from their rivals. This creates a dependency they come to resent bitterly. They view other sorcerers as gutless dilettantes, afraid to feel the essence of magic course through their veins. Members of other schools view gem injectors with distaste: they're shabby and pathetic creatures, enslaved to their magic instead of being masters of it.

Sacrificial Sorcery

This school of sorcery is the one most directly related to the type stolen by the jyzuehyynkzhd from their trapezoid oppressors. Its effects are powered by the magical energy released by the death throes of a living creature. They're focused by the mind of the caster as he sacrifices the victim, usually an animal. The effects available relate to the particular animal slaughtered. The sorcerer is able to cast magic relating to that creature for as long as he likes; when he sacrifices another creature, he loses all powers from the first. Sorcerers of this school tend to sacrifice often: prolonged use of one victim can lead to personality shifts in the user, as

character traits of the animal begin to assert themselves. Just what constitutes prolonged use is left up to the GM, so he can deploy these effects when it's dramatically interesting. As a rule of thumb, they'll come more quickly if the caster has created several mighty spells than if he's just done a few subtle things over a number of days.

It's possible to combine effects from two animals, as long as they're slain at the same moment. This can present logistical difficulties, but the combined effects are often worth the trouble. Another hitch is that all spells cast after a multiple slaughter must relate to all of the animals involved. For example, a caster who's simultaneously killed a bear and a deer must relate at least one magical trait of each animal to every spell he subsequently casts.

Each type of sacrifice is treated as a separate skill. Animals used in sacrificial sorcery, and the areas of effect they trigger, are as follows:

Bat. Sacrificers of bats gain darkness, flight, and location powers. Prolonged use can turn the caster into a nocturnal creature who only ventures out at night and loathes bright light.

Bear. A versatile sacrifice, the bear grants powers relating to strength, healing, growth, and sleep. During the Mad Lands winter, prolonged users are prone to lethargy and may find it hard to stay awake. In the summer months, they may be overcome by curiosity or gluttony, or prone to sudden violence. Users in the Mad Lands proper may attract the unwelcome attention of Bubzavav.

Caterpillar. The sacrificial killing of a caterpillar gives the caster control over the magical principle of transformation. Those who stick with it too long become obsessive gluttons.

Cougar. The cougar confers mastery over mammals. This command power excludes intelligent creatures who use sorcery, but includes Madlanders and members of other human cultures who don't. Abusers tend to become homicidal maniacs; magicians who use the power on Mad Lands soil may attract the cruel version of Gakox Pezep, and thereby die.

Cricket. A single cricket can grant wide communication powers that melt barriers of distance and even dimension. He can also cause prolonged users to become completely preoccupied with mating.

Deer. The deer grants plant magic and speed powers. Overuse can make one timid and skittish.

Extra-Dimensional Creatures. Creatures from other worlds yield meta-magical powers - that is, power to alter other spells - when slaughtered. They could infect the user with any personality traits; they'd probably be very strange ones.

Firefly. Light powers come from the firefly. Continuous use can turn the sorcerer into a fashion victim, obsessed with the flashiest possible clothing.

Fish. Any type of fish grants power over the element of water. Specific types might also confer more specialized abilities; this is an area the soulless haven't explored, for some reason. Abusers begin to lose IQ after too long in the fishy mindset.

Fox. Killers of a fox can work stealth and camouflage magic. Continuous use tends to turn the magician into a habitual liar; after a while, he'll be unable to tell the truth even if he wants to.

Gopher. This humble rodent grants earth powers - including the ability to conjure up metals and gems. Users are very careful about using it in the Mad Lands, since it can attract Zewa Zab. Those who use it for too long start to think of nothing except tunnel construction.

Hawk. Much-prized, the hawk grants power over air, flight and detection powers, and command powers over all birds. Victims of personality leakage become aloof and superior, and feel uncomfortable when less than three stories off the ground.



Sorcerous Training

The current state of training in sorcery - or any other discipline for that matter - is exceedingly poor in the Metal Cities. After all, most soulless have known everything there is to know about sorcery for thousands of years. They are not in the habit of teaching others their mystic secrets, so there are no functioning educational institutions or set learning techniques.

A human who somehow convinces a soulless to teach him the principles of his style of magic has reached only the first obstacle in a trying process. Even the most tolerant tutor will show little patience for a student's difficulties. Soulless sorcerers are so experienced that their effects now come almost instinctively; they'll have trouble explaining technique to a novice. Telling a haughty soulless that he's a poor teacher will only compound the problem. (It's probably easier to learn from seals, but they only know Epic sorcery - and, given their love of mischief, they'll be guaranteed to exact deeply humiliating prices for their lessons.)

Astute learners may decide that texts on sorcery will be more useful than a temperamental, all-powerful teacher. These books will be hard to find, since they haven't been needed for ages. At best, they'll be lost on the dustiest shelves of libraries. More likely, they'll be propping up furniture or buried in garbage piles.

If characters attempt to learn sorcery during the course of play, GMs should make the finding of useful tutoring or appropriate magical texts the object of the plot line. PCs who start with sorcerous abilities should collaborate with the GM on a background to explain how they got them.

The soulless firmly believe that their great skill at sorcery is due to racial superiority. They're wrong - any intelligent creature would be as good as they, given thousands of years of experience. But this belief is unshakeable, and is another reason why humans find it hard to get tutoring from them. Humans who do learn sorcery are treated as great prodigies, who have somehow managed to overcome their in-born inferiority. Madlanders who learn sorcery are considered even more remarkable - by soulless standards, they've gone from animal to intelligent being in one giant leap.

Sacrificing Other Creatures

The creatures mentioned as useful in sacrificial sorcery are simply those that are currently used on a frequent basis. Although other creatures might be equally useful, this list has evolved into a matter of convention. It did so over thousands of years. The fauna of this region was quite different during the trapezoid era: most niches in the ecosystem were originally occupied by reptiles of various shapes and sizes. As these animals were replaced by nature, they were similarly replaced on the list.

Adding new creatures to the list is far from impossible. All the magician has to do is find out what the animal's fundamental mystic characteristics are, so he'll know what powers he can derive from its sacrifice. In order to do so, he must simultaneously sacrifice the new creature, an owl (for its knowledge power) and a meta-magical creature: an extra-dimensional entity, Madlander monster, or sorcery-using human or seal. At the end of the process, he'll know what magical properties the new animal has. He'll have to subsequently slaughter another specimen to get those properties.

The reason this isn't done more frequently is that most useful powers are already covered by the creatures on the list. A sorcerer wanting sonar powers could gain them through the bat's location powers, without having to bother to find out if killing a porpoise would do the same thing for him. However, there probably are still useful abilities the list doesn't mention. GMs should find it fairly easy to decide what sorts of powers that new creatures might grant, using the ones on the list as examples.

Care and Feeding of Material Components

Like gem injectors, sacrificers find it uneconomical to magically conjure up animals to use in their magic. In order to, say, conjure up a rattlesnake, the sacrificer would have to kill a bat to locate one and a songbird to fly it to his manor in the soulless realm. And in the case of rarer animals, they run the risk of depleting the stocks if they just keep plucking them out of the Madlander wilderness.

However, unlike gems, animals are a renewable resource. Sacrificers maintain breeding stocks of their most commonly-used creatures in their manors. Few bother to maintain every needed species. Instead, they'll raise more than they need of a few types and trade with other sacrificers for species they don't breed themselves.

Human. As animals who bear the greatest similarity to the soulless, human sacrifice triggers power over the mind, from emotion control to telepathy. Note that this refers only to humans like the Madlanders, who don't use sorcery and are therefore considered to belong to the animal kingdom. Sorcery-using peoples, like Savarginians or Togethians, confer instead meta-magical powers, just as an extra-dimensional creature would. Sacrificers are especially careful not to use human magic for long periods, since the resulting personality shifts dredge up abominable feelings like compassion, altruism and love.

Killer Whale. The killer whale gives mastery over sea creatures. Overusers must resist the desire to flee to the ocean and live there forever.

Maggot. Necromancers sacrifice the maggot for power over the dead. Those who don't time things properly will find themselves wanting to devour all of their subjects.

Monster. All Mad Lands monsters confer the same meta-magical powers as extra-dimensional creatures. Abusers are infected with the instincts of the monster in question. This personality leakage is likely to occur faster with Mad Lands monsters than any other creature type.

Owl. Though the owl's knowledge powers are highly valued, sacrificers make sure they don't cast such spells outside the Metal Cities, since Vuvuti is known to investigate if they're used in the Mad Lands. Abusers of owl magic find their



concentration shattered as their minds are bombarded with useless facts, one every second or so.

Otter. Those wishing to conjure an item, from the simplest tool to a magical weapon, rely on the otter. Excessive playfulness can occur after prolonged use.

Porcupine. The porcupine's magical associations are armor, defense, and protection. Abusers of porcupine powers become surly and defensive, and develop an insatiable need for salt.

Rattlesnake. Poison and warning spells come from the rattlesnake. It causes violent territoriality in abusers.

Seal. Like humans, seals can be used to trigger mind powers; those with Epic sorcery powers confer meta-magical powers as well. They can also be used to trigger any effect of deception. Prolonged use leads to nasty things like a sense of humor or an ability to find joy in life. Victims of this effect often find themselves abandoning prior nefarious plans to play practical jokes on humorless colleagues.

Songbird. Any variety of songbird will yield flight and sound abilities when sacrificed. Intense parental instincts arise in those who use them too long; such feelings are torment to the soulless, who are sterile.

Soulless. The sacrifice of a soulless gives his killer every magical power the victim has ever used, available all at one time. These powers tend to be of great force - earth-shattering effects are easy, but subtle ones requiring great control are difficult. Prolonged use results in a swap of consciousness: the victim's mind takes over the magician's body, and the magician's mind ends up hovering over the Mad Lands awaiting rebirth as a changeling. (This could have bizarre repercussions in the unlikely event that the magician is a human.)

Spider. The spider grants mastery of insects, as well as trapping and ensnaring magic. Overusers have trouble dealing with the impulse to kill anyone who enters their home.

Squirrel. Sacrificial chefs often use the squirrel, who controls food magic. Abusers can think of nothing but the preparation, storage and consumption of food.

Vole. The humble vole permits the sorcerer to shrink himself or others: the power extends to inanimate objects too. If the vole's persona takes over, the caster will want to run away and hide from any threatening situation.

Wolf. Magicians sacrifice wolves in order to gain tracking, hunting and attack spells. Those who use them for too long develop a perverse need for community, and will feel uncomfortable away from crowds of other soulless. They'll defer to those who seem more dominant than they, and try to order around anyone they see as less powerful.

Singing Sorcery

Because of its derivation from the original jyzuehyynkzd magic of the pre-trapezoid period (see p. 81), adherents of singing sorcery claim that it's the purest and most authentic type of magic. This is open to dispute, but it's certainly the most austere cerebral of the four schools. As the name would suggest, singing sorcery is triggered by musical vocalization. Its users get their best effects when they concentrate fully on the purity of the tones they are producing; they must be careful not to allow their emotions to infect their singing. All the sounds of sung sorcery are high ones. Practitioners strive for a piercing clarity of tone, avoiding any hint of vibrato.

Singing sorcery was the most consciously designed of the four schools; its range of effects are accessed simply, by combining only three factors. These are keys, melodies and lyrics. Each key and melody is a separate skill - the difficulty is not in the singing, but in turning it to magical ends.

Sorcerous Rivalries

Members of each of the four schools believe themselves superior to all of the others. For many soulless, the style of sorcery they practice is inextricably bound with their personalities and outlooks. They won't remember the precise circumstances that moved them to select the form they now use: it's impossible for them to say whether particular traits drove them to their choice, or if the style has changed them over the years. At any rate, it is possible to stereotype members of each group. These stereotypes form the basis of typical prejudices toward sorcerers of other traditions.

Epic sorcerers feel that their magic is best because, through *The Epic*, it brings them in touch with the essence of the soulless as a nation. They snort derisively at the claims of the singing sorcerers to have the most authentic magic; the Epickers chuckle that their devotion to jyzuehyynkzd tradition proves how out of touch they are with who the soulless are now. Epickers see their magic as a lofty and elevated pursuit: the bloody sacrificial and addictive gem injection styles are revoltingly physical.

To the gem injectors, Epic sorcerers are effete dabblers, afraid to feel the ecstatic touch of magical power directly. The singers are highhanded and snotty, pursuing their boring style out of prudery. The sacrificers are sadists, getting sick thrills from killing defenseless creatures. All of them are contemptible for their lack of generosity - it would be so easy for them to just cook up some gems and hand them over.

Sacrificial sorcerers see themselves as the only courageous magicians, still willing to wade into the primal forces of blood and death that drove the magic of the trapezoids. The others are all fleeing from the essential stinking truths of the universe. Epic sorcerers are blind, refusing to admit that their treasured stirring narrative is as much about violence as anything the sacrificers do. Singers are fools, trading the power of the trapezoids for the weak mumbo-jumbo of the pathetic jyzuehyynkzd. Gem injectors are sadly misguided, directing their violence inward by stabbing themselves with needles when they should be drawing others' blood.

Singing sorcerers see Epickers as upstart children, pretending mere verses of entertainment are as meaningful as the ancient experience of the jyzuehyynkzd. Sacrificers are pitiful, having identified so much with their old oppressors that they seek to become them. And gem injectors are just plain scum, making something that should be grand and pure into a dirty practice involving bodily fluids.

Magical Vocal Groups

Because of the separation of keys and melodies, certain involved magical effects can't be accessed by a single singing sorcerer. For example, he may wish to enslave a magical entity from another dimension. To find the right beast, he needs both the "Song of Dimensions" and the "Song of Men" - it's controlled by this song because it uses magic - to be sung in the key of Divination. No singer, no matter how skilled, can sing two melodies simultaneously. He must find another singing sorcerer who will agree to sing a duet. Both sing one of the required melodies at once, in the same key.

Singing sorcerers may also team up to sing the same melody in different keys. In this example, the first sorcerer could transport the creature to his dimension with the "Song of Men" in the key of Moving. But this would give it an instant in which to attack him as soon as it appeared. The second sorcerer can solve this problem by singing the "Song of Men" in the key of Binding, to mentally enslave it the moment it arrives.

What's difficult about this technique is not the magic, but securing the cooperation of another soulless. If the second sorcerer here had some secret grudge against the first, he might command the extradimensional being to eat him. These arrangements take extensive negotiation and are quick to break down into combat or litigation.

Magical vocal groups can also have three or more participants, for even more complex results. The chance of success is the average of all involved skill ratings.

The Critical Academy

Most teachers and scholars of *The Epic* as it relates to sorcery are members of an organization called the Critical Academy. Its headquarters move from city to city every five years. It was founded as a clearing house for insights and hints into the magic behind Yrdisvibyl's text. However, since there are no new students to teach, the Academy has stagnated into yet another nest of intrigue and factional struggles. Its great hall is routinely rocked by vicious debates centering around such weighty matters as the arcane meaning of every third comma or whether one can gain mystic power over one's uncle through lines including the word "release."

If a character finds himself trying to learn Epic sorcery, the Academy is the place to go to find a teacher. If he does so, his problem will be fending off offers from its scholars; they're all anxious to have a young mind to foist their particular theories on. Academy members have been known to kidnap students from one another, in order to "rescue" them from the pernicious effects of a colleague's theories.

Soulless singing recognizes 9 keys. Each is named after the magical action it evokes. These are, from highest to lowest

Divination, which covers information magic of all kinds;

Conjuring, which refers to materializing things out of thin air;

Healing, which restores people, creatures and things to a former state of strength and integrity;

Binding, which traps, controls or enslaves the subject to the magician's will;

Illusion, which alters the perceptions of the subject so that it senses something that doesn't exist;

Transforming, which changes one thing into another;

Warding, which protects the subject from a specified threat;

Cursing, which brings harm or woe on the subject;

Moving, which transports the subject from one place to another.

These keys modify 12 traditional melodies, which are separate skills. Each melody corresponds to a subject at which the action of the spell, as determined by the key, is directed. Each is named after its subject, making them self-explanatory. They are, in alphabetical order: *Air*, *Beasts*, *Darkness*, *the Dead*, *Dimensions*, *Earth*, *Fire*, *Light*, *Magic*, *Men*, *Plants* and *Water*. Each melody is commonly referred to as a song, as in "Song of the Dead," "Song of Light" and so on. The "Song of Men" targets beings who practice sorcery, regardless of their form; it was used against the trapezoids, for example. Any living creature that doesn't use sorcery, including Madlanders, is instead affected by the "Song of Beasts." Mad Lands monsters are covered by the "Song of the Dead."



In order to activate a given spell effect, the sorcerer chooses the melody that most closely corresponds to his desired target. He picks the key that matches what he wants to do to it. He specifies exactly how he wants the force of the key to act on the target by composing an extemporaneous lyric and adding it to key and melody. As ever, most soulless fail only on a critical failure. Others using this style of magic succeed if they roll their average rating in key and melody. Degree of success is determined by the GM according to his dramatic needs, and the differential between the number needed and number rolled.

For example, a magician who wanted to make a pile of emeralds would sing a lyric about emeralds to the tune of the "Song of Earth" in the key of Conjuring. If he then wanted to protect those emeralds from marauding gem injectors, he would sing the "Song of Earth" again, this time with new lyrics, and in the key of Warding.

Soulless sorcerers will typically be fully familiar with all melodies and keys. Others might know only a few. This is where the magician's creativity comes in. Let's say, as in the first example above, he wants some emeralds but doesn't have the needed experience with the key of Conjuring. However, if he knows the key of Transformation, he can use it to change a pile of ordinary rocks into the desired gems. On the other hand, if he doesn't know the "Song of Earth," his options are limited. Perhaps, if he already knows someone who has some emeralds, he can sing a "Song of Men" in the key of Binding to charm the owner into surrendering them.

Casters usually start out by learning more melodies than keys, as keys are more flexible. For example, a singing sorcerer can handle an assault from a mob of maddened skinless with virtually any of the keys, so long as he has the "Song of the Dead." He could use the key of Conjuring to materialize boulders over their heads, or the key of Healing to turn them back into normal Madlanders. He could charm them with the key of Binding, mislead them with the key of Illusion, or use the key of Transforming to turn them into anything from newts to nail-clippers. He could wound them with the key of Cursing or teleport them far away with the key of Moving. The only key he couldn't use on them would be Warding, since he wouldn't want to protect them; he could whip up a mystic barrier around himself if he knew the "Song of Men," though.

This simple and very powerful magic system is presented under the assumption that it will be used exclusively by NPCs. GMs who are concerned that PCs might attempt to learn it - thereby unbalancing the campaign - may treat each song and key as a separate 25-point advantage. They can be acquired during play if the PC is able to overcome the appropriate game world obstacles (see *Sorcerous Training*, p. 103). Normal costs for Mental/Very Hard skills apply as well.

Other Magics

The information in this chapter is presented under the assumption that it will primarily be used by GMs to run spellcasting NPCs. The atmosphere of weirdness associated with magic in the Mad Lands will be much easier to maintain if it isn't center stage in every episode.

Other types of magic exist in the world outside the Mad Lands; these will be encountered even more infrequently. This section provides a brief overview of each, leaving details to the GM's creative powers.

Ghostly Powers

There remains one type of indigenous magic that doesn't fall into the two main categories: that used by ghosts and the undead. Some ghosts and undead, those slain directly by a god, acquire the shamanic powers of their killers. But most will have unique powers (see p. 70) activated by a process different from either shamanism or sorcery.

A ghost is a soul which has been bound to the magical background energy of the Mad Lands, providing energy to permit its continued existence. The ghost or undead can also manipulate it to bring about particular magical effects.

The souls of the dying can also be bound to this world by the excessive mourning of others. In this process, the heightened emotions of the mourners provide the trigger to bind the soul to the magical energy field.

Foreign Magics

Magical energy in the world of the Mad Lands is tied to specific places, where it operates differently; political or geographical boundaries are often supernatural ones as well. Anyone who attempts to practice magic away from home is in for a surprise, as they're powering their spells with an unfamiliar fuel.

Savarginian Sorcery in the Mad Lands

Foreign magics will be heavily distorted and unreliable when cast in the Mad Lands. Madlander magical energy is tainted and dark. It twists foreign spells to make them more disturbing, and to rebound nasty side-effects on the caster.

Savarginians will have a certain amount of experience with changes in magic in foreign lands, as their magics work differently even from city to city. But in Savarginia, such changes are limited to special effects. Here the ultimate results of a spell will change, too. No spell has a purely good result in the Mad Lands. Healings will work, but in a painful or gruesome manner. Divination spells will yield dangerously distorted or mentally destabilizing information. Magic that purifies food could also make it addictive, and so on.

Savarginians have a hard time adjusting to these subtle corruptions. Their mastery of magic is a big part of their view of themselves as the most civilized people in the known world. When this sense of mastery is undermined, so is their self-esteem. In extreme cases, casting spells in the Mad Lands might cost a Savarginian his sanity.

Standard GURPS Magic in the Mad Lands

None of the lands in the area use the magic system described in *GURPS Magic*, but cultures of the GM's invention might. Any standard *GURPS* spell cast in the Mad Lands will twist so that its result is negative in some way. GMs should determine the degree of this effect based on the dramatic requirements of the story. *Beast-Soother*, for example, might just give the animal a sickly, glassy-eyed look. Or it might put the poor creature into a coma. *Animate Plant* would summon, not a cooperative spirit, but a malign ghost who might use its new plant body to attack the caster. A mage using *Alter Visage* could get the face he wanted - except for one small, horrifying feature, like insectoid mandibles protruding from his tongue. *Analyze Magic* would provide only vague feelings about something affected by shamanism or soulless sorcery: if the magic analyzed is powerful enough, it might affect the mage psychologically.

For energy use purposes, the Mad Lands are considered High Mana, with pockets of Very High Mana. The entire area is weirdly-aspected, and the Very High locales are weirdest of all, each different in its own unfathomable way.

The Metal Cities are Very High Mana.

All the neighboring areas are High Mana. Savarginia has a number of Very-High-Mana areas. Most are aspected appropriately for the theme of the nearest city.

Tribal Magic in the Mad Lands

Both Sap Cid and Northern Tribe Landers will be essentially without magic while in the Mad Lands. They'll have the same attitude toward shamanism and sorcery that native Madlanders have - they're deadly dangers to be avoided at all costs.

History of Sorcery

Before the invasion of the trapezoids, the jyzuehyynloild seem to have practiced a primitive form of magic triggered by ritual chanting. Most soulless scholars go to great lengths to deny that this involved appeals to gods or higher powers of any sort. They may be protesting too much - surviving descriptions of chant magic contain strong parallels with shamanism.

In any case, it obviously proved ineffective when the trapezoids came. The powerful magic of the trapezoids was based on animal sacrifice - the jyzuehyynkzd being counted as animals. This was the magic that Oxlcxowsyjys stole. She was able to put it to more creative use than the trapezoids themselves, who were bound by custom to a set list of spell effects.

After the trapezoids had been disposed of and the Flourishing began, traditionalists studied the principles underlying sacrificial sorcery. Once they figured out the fundamentals of sorcery, they wedded them to their indigenous style, chant magic, to come up with singing sorcery.

Much to their surprise, their discovery didn't cause the immediate abandonment of sacrificial sorcery - many practitioners preferred its visceral power to the bloodlessly austere singing style. Then others took the principles they'd discovered and applied them to brand-new triggering mechanisms. The first of these was gem injection sorcery, which for a long time was regarded as a perversion engaged in only by a few malcontents. It was not until the early days of the Decadence that the number of gem magicians equaled those of the other schools.

In the meantime, Epic sorcery was accidentally discovered. It began disastrously, at a poetry reading. One reader became so passionately involved in his section of *The Epic* that he caused a rain of acid-spitting purple bats. Several observers went home with the idea of a literary trigger for magical effects. When they later pooled their efforts, the final form of soulless sorcery was born.

There is some evidence that other styles were also developed, but clearly none of them became widely popular. Specific details of these have been lost, as have the principles elucidated by the founders of singing sorcery. Thus, no new forms of sorcery are likely to be developed soon.

Savarginian Magic

Savarginia is a land bursting with magical energy; virtually everyone there is a sorcerer of some sort. Although Savarginians share a common language and - to some extent - a common culture, they aren't united politically or magically. Magic works slightly differently in each of the several dozen city-states: a magician casting a spell in another city can expect the right general result, but may be surprised by the way that result comes about. Each city-state is organized around an idea, often an impossible one - there is a City of Webs, a City of Children, even a City of the Dead. A city's sorcery therefore relates in some manner to its central idea.

For example, a sorcerer from Maywhan, City of Traders, would cast a divination spell by flipping coins. Cetewalians, from the City of Silence, would expect a purely visual answer to any question, while a caster from Rreyneamon, City of Dragons, would expect a lizard to creep up and hiss the answer to him.

Bizarre city-states appear and disappear in Savarginia; GMs are encouraged to come up with their own to supplement the hints given here.

Togethian Magic

Togethians have always prayed for magical powers from their distant and inscrutable god, Togeth. Togeth isn't a terribly flexible dispenser of supernatural abilities, however: he chooses which powers to grant his supplicants, regardless of their own wishes.

Togethian spells are either very basic (no-prerequisite spells from the *Basic Set*) or very complex ("Cast Fireball At Municipal Guard On Council Day," for instance, or "Transform Pink Toad To 40% Silver Alloy.") Many of them are quite useful in their own peculiar way! GMs may design any Togethian spells they like. None have prerequisites other than the favor of the god. Most work only in Togeth and neighboring countries. For some reason, though, all Togethian spells (even the basic ones) work about twice as well in the Mad Lands, in an unpredictable way. GMs can choose randomly between double power, half energy cost, double speed or range, or wider application. The last is a mixed blessing when dealing with a weird spell; the user never knows when "Pelt Charging Savages With Mackerel" will become "Turn Everyone Nearby To Mackerel."

Northern Tribelands and Whiteness Magics

The people of the Whiteness bring no magic with them when they visit the Mad Lands. There is magic in the Whiteness; it's performed not by humans, but by supernatural snow beings (see p. 9). The snow beings don't venture beyond their borders.

Northern Tribelanders each have a guardian spirit, which may sometimes perform very subtle, unflashy acts of magic. Spirit magic is often indistinguishable from coincidence. When they send Tribelanders to the Mad Lands, spirits usually cut off communication from them, out of fear or respect for the Mad Lands's gods. Even this barely noticeable form of magic is unlikely to appear in a campaign.

Other Magics

GMs who elect to put the Mad Lands in another world will have to work out their own compatibilities for foreign magics. The examples given here will serve as guidelines. The general principles behind them are:

Purely benevolent magic doesn't work quite as planned. Magic that would alter the fundamental facts of the Mad Lands backfires horribly. Negative magic may be boosted to uncontrollable levels of power. Powers granted by outside gods don't work at all, or work unpredictably.

CAMPAIGNS

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Many of the things that make this setting distinctive also pose challenges for the GM running a *Mad Lands* campaign. Its close-knit, communal society leaves no room for the "wild individualist" stereotype. This solves some familiar campaign problems - PCs will be unlikely to kill one another, for example. But it also means that extra attention must be paid to relatively subtle aspects of characterization. The Mad Lands background presents a comparatively small group of thematically-linked enemies rather than an inexhaustible supply of nifty monsters. After the initial novelty of the game setting wears off, the GM won't have a deep bag of tricks to keep his players diverted. He should work to make the players relate to, root for and care about all of the PCs, as they would the cast of their fictional series. And the Mad Lands campaign will live or die on the strength of its characters.

Encouraging Characterization

In any genre, in any medium, story should arise from character. GMs can translate this principle into a roleplaying campaign by choosing plots that highlight character traits of the PCs.

Since the Mad Lands are full of dangers, a few enemy character sheets and a vague notion of a plot direction can be enough to get a multi-session epic rolling. Adventure stories are about heroes getting into trouble and then back out again; most PC groups are particularly adept at the former.

The Mad Lands on Yrth

GMs may wish to set their *Mad Lands* campaign in the world of Yrth as described in *GURPS Fantasy*. This requires few changes to the main setting of the campaign, since the Mad Lands is an isolated place with a xenophobic culture. Only one of the Mad Lands's neighbors, Togeth, will need to be substantially altered - see the sidebar on p. 111.

Drop Savarginia from the setting. Ytaria replaces it as the civilized land mass to the south. The Mad Lands and its neighbors form a separate polar continent. The climactic wonders worked by the god Togeth explain its pockets of moderate temperature.

Continued on next page ...





The Mad Lands on Yrth (Continued)

Megalan influence on the Mad Lands is minimal. Of its major cities, only Myrgan would make a logical port for sea travel there, and Myrgan is itself a distant outpost. Megalan expansionism wouldn't seize on the Mad Lands as a likely prize, as there remain closer, more attractive places to conquer on Ytarria itself. Jesuits and other Christian missionary organizations might send delegations to the Mad Lands in order to convert them. The Madlanders will in turn do their best to martyr each and every one of them.

Raiders from the Nomad Territories would replace Savarginian pirates as a source of naval conflict. Slavers working on behalf of the dwarves of Zarak would pose a similar threat.

Traders from Sahud would show little interest in the Mad Lands - the Madlanders wouldn't be much of a market for their silks and other manufactured goods. Since Sahudese magic use is circumspect for reasons of taste, traders might avoid accusations of vile sorcery. They'd escape the Mad Lands with their lives but no profit. The Sahudese would quickly come to see the Madlanders as boring barbarians, best left alone.

Benign nonhumans are unknown in the Mad Lands; any such visitors from Ytarria would immediately be identified as monsters and slaughtered accordingly. Dwarves and gnomes would be treated as heightless. Other types, such as orcs, goblins and reptile men, would be attacked first and classified later. Elves might be mistaken for soulless; Madlanders would likely flee from them until they display unexplainable signs of weakness. Then they'd be assaulted.

The basic relationship between the Mad Lands and the outside world remains unchanged.

Thinking of an adventure story as a series of obstacles to be overcome makes GMing easier. This technique can be broken down into steps:

Discover the character's immediate goal. He may wish to find a boat, impress an attractive storyteller, be relieved of pain from a poisoning or find the skinless lair where his buddies are being held captive.

Put an obstacle in his path. Define a task he must undertake to reach his immediate goal - put bloodless in the boat, a jealous rival at the storyteller's side, an overattentive Hare god in the poison victim's dreams or a misleading set of tracks in front of the rescue team.

Determine the results of success or failure. The player decides what his PC tries to do; if his strategy is sound and his skill rolls lucky, he succeeds. If not, he fails. Either way, the situation has changed and the plot has therefore progressed. The boat-seeker has either driven off the bloodless or been forced into retreat. The lover has perhaps impressed his sweetheart but gained the spite of a troublesome fellow hunter. The dreamer has either offended Bett Agwo or gained a double-edged remedy. The rescuer has found the hideout of dangerous monsters, or been led astray into the depths of the forest. In each case, the new plot development causes the player to formulate a new immediate goal.

Repeat until a suitable conclusion is reached. With the new goal comes a new obstacle, and so on. Ideally these obstacles will build in importance until an exciting climax occurs.

Plot Outlines

The following plot sketches pose more questions than they answer. They provide enough impetus for the PCs to come up with goals, which the GM can then turn into obstacles, thereby generating a plot created as much by players as the GM. Some assume that the campaign is using the NPCs of Kawa Tok; GMs using villages of their own should change them appropriately.

Nectar of the Gods

Village festivals make good introductory scenarios: they allow PCs to get to know each other, and other village characters, in a social context before the adventure plot gets rolling. Madlander celebrations often center around contests. In this case, Kawa Tok is holding a contest for the best *zoxibek*, inviting brewers from all over the peninsula to compete. The next morning the judges - the village elders - are all acting strangely. They mentally regress in age, until they're babbling and cooing like babes. This throws the village system into chaos - chronologically, the elders are still entitled to their authority. But they're incapable of wielding it. The adventurers should realize that the village is being destabilized in preparation for an attack.

In fact, one of the brewers in the contest was a ringer, a skinless wearing a stolen human skin. He laced his *zoxibek* with the shamanically-acquired milk of Kikavo Vo, which has infantilized the elders. The adventurers must track the skinless to their lair and neutralize the milk before the attack on the village. The GM should set up a way for them to do so using deductive reasoning and stealth; the skinless are too powerful to take on directly. The skinless disperse when they find out their spiked *zoxibek* trick has failed.

The Adoptee

A party of *Viwti E* arrive from The Whiteness to ask the village to hand over a former *Viwti E* the Madlanders have adopted as one of their own. The village knows him as Detkeg, a hard-working hunter and fisherman who overcame their initial suspicion to become a valued member of the community. To the *Viwti E*, he is Der Keh, a hated outlaw they have been hunting for years. Der Keh, they

explain, committed the worst crime known to their people: he tried to destroy his tribe's *Tam Busk*, its main snow spirit. After its people suffered years of hardship, the Tarn Busk recovered to the point where it could use its magic to locate the criminal who nearly killed it. Now they have come to ask for Der Keh so they can take him back for trial and punishment - the Sap Cid code of law demands his death after slow, painful torture.

The village must decide whether to hand Detkeg over. On one hand, he broke the worst law of his birth community: isn't it possible that he might one day betray his adopted one? The party of *Viwti E* is obviously a formidable one: they promise not to rest until they have captured their enemy. If they decide to defend him, the Madlanders will probably have to sacrifice some of their own lives.

On the other hand, Detkeg is officially a Madlander now. He has done nothing but good for the village. And the offense he's accused of - trying to destroy a supernatural creature - sounds more like heroism than villainy to Madlander ears. And how do the villagers even know that these *Viwti E* are telling the truth? Detkeg denies everything: maybe *they're* the outlaws.

This storyline would work best if the players were already familiar with Detkeg before the arrival of his former countrymen. The GM can introduce him as a member of the village at the outset of the campaign. Or he can take the long view and start with his appearance in the village, his winning of its trust, and eventual adoption as a full-fledged Madlander. Then he can bring in the *Viwti E* party at a later date. This will seem much more credible than saying "By the way, all along there's been a former *Viwti E* in the village, and you've all known him for years."

Ideally, the PCs will have their own specific relationship with Detkeg before the appearance of the snow nomad posse. They might be indebted to him: if the GM needs to have someone save a PC's life, he can make it Detkeg. Conversely, he could set up an incident in which the heroes begin to suspect Detkeg, despite his good reputation with the rest of the village.

It might be interesting to pit the party against general village opinion. If the PCs see Detkeg as a hero, have the elders lean towards surrendering him. If he's an enemy, show the village as ready to fight to the death to protect him. This establishes a conflict that forces the PCs to act on their own, either to rescue or kidnap Detkeg. If a further twist is needed, he can turn out to be the opposite of their judgment of him.

Fish Food

The crusty fisherman Vat Kep Kig is known for his cantankerous hatred of seals. During a fishing trip, he gets into an argument with a couple of the finny pranksters, who want to trade information on fish location for protection against a pod of killer whales. Vat Kep Kig berserks, charging the seals with a harpoon. They dodge, and he ends up in the sea. He drowns.

The next year, the village finds fish stocks fatally low. Finally they spot the reason - an undead, aquatic Vat Kep Kig, accompanied by an honor guard of vicious-looking seals, is driving the schools away from the boats. As a revenant, Vat Kep Kig has become his opposite. Instead of hating seals, he's allied himself with them. And rather than keeping his home village supplied with fish, he's starving it.

Since *dfee's* become fully aquatic, he'll be an impossible target to destroy from the boats. The fishers are approached by seals seeking help - he's hypnotized their brothers with newfound supernatural powers. They volunteer to use Epic Sorcery to allow a party of humans to breathe underwater, if they'll help track down and kill Vat Kep Kig. One condition: they can do anything they want to the undead, but the charmed seals must be freed from his thrall without serious harm.

The party will have to overcome its suspicion both of seals and sorcery if they want to eliminate this threat to the village food supply. GMs should be able to

Togeth on Yrth

If Savarginia is replaced by Ytania, the other tribal cultures neighboring the Mad Lands, the Ittevtati Otap and *Viwti E*, will be affected only marginally. But Togeth - with a young, outward-looking culture and an economy dependent on trade for growth - will look very different indeed. Togeth looks to Savarginia not only as a primary market, but as a benchmark of civilization. As Ancient Rome looked to Greece for cultural values it then adapted to its own needs, Togeth looks to Savarginia.

Togeth might evolve in three dramatically different ways, depending on which Ytarrian kingdom it forges economic links to.

Geographically, the closest civilized kingdom is Sahud. A Togeth adopting Sahudese cultural values would have an even more pronounced class hierarchy and an introspective philosophy. Madlanders would cease to be trophy opponents for rich young hotheads - instead, they'd be seen as unworthy barbarians of little interest. The Togethians would adopt the quiet, tasteful magic of Sahud. Downplaying their magic use for their own aesthetic reasons, the few Sahudese-influenced Togethians who venture to the Mad Lands might not be attacked as cruel sorcerers. Instead of foul *Gaget*, they'd be regarded as *wigtibidat*, funny eccentrics who would need to be killed only in extreme circumstances.

Togeth's monotheistic culture would adapt well to medieval Megalan Christianity, though with its own idiosyncratic modes of belief. Its social structure remains intact; young aristocrats seeking glory by engaging in battle with "heathens" would still make occasional forays into the Mad Lands. More idealistic sorts would send religious missions eastwards to attempt to convert the Madlanders to Srideenic Christianity. The Madlanders would fear and hate them even more than their callow warriors. In short, Togethians will still be *gaget*.

Relations between Togeth and the Mad Lands will be extremely hostile if Togeth links with Zarak. They'll become more effective sorcerers, learning powerful earth and fire magic from the dwarves. They'll take enthusiastically to slaveholding, staging frequent raids into the Mad Lands and the Northern Tribeslands to abduct able-bodied men and women in their child-bearing years. Eventually the Madlanders will figure out who's influencing them, paling at the thought of an entire nation of heightless! They'll then reclassify the Togethians, viewing them as monsters instead of foreigners. Since no one with an operating brain would willingly ally with heightless kings, they'll call them Mindless.

Timelines: Yrth vs. the Mad Lands

The most obvious contradiction between the history of the Mad Lands and that of Yrth is the span of human history. *GURPS Fantasy* posits a world inhabited only by elves, dwarves and ores until a mere thousand years ago. On the other hand, the lifespans of the soulless encompass hundreds of centuries; their history implies interaction with humans much further into the past than that. The soulless themselves were human millennia ago; even the Madlanders appear to have been around for more than a thousand years. Nonhumans unknown in Yrth, like the trapezoids who terrorized the soulless before they became immortal, lurk in the historical distance.

One way to reconcile the timelines is to decide that the Banestonn brought the Mad Lands and its neighbors to Yrth, lock, stock and land mass. This conflicts with the behavior of the Banestorm as otherwise known; usually it kidnaps only people. But there's no reason why Dark Elven magic gone catastrophically awry can't behave inconsistently.

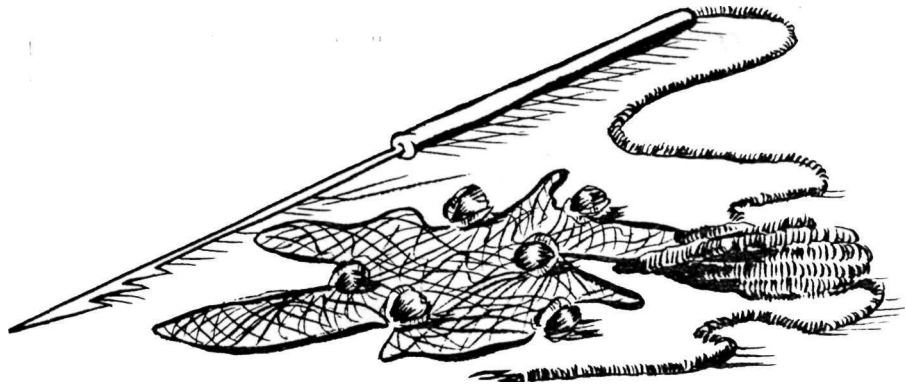
GMs should decide when the Mad Lands's surrounding land mass appeared on Yrth. The Banestorm appears to be decreasing in virulence over the centuries; it's likely that if it took a whole subcontinent, it did so when it was first created. The Mad Lands will have been a part of Yrth for all of the latter's relevant history. In this timeline, the soulless might have had a brief renaissance, as they head out to explore their brand new world. It's hard to imagine these outrageously powerful beings leaving Yrth as is, however. Maybe the soulless were simply too bored to notice a sudden substitution of distant continents.

If GMs want to combine Yrth and the Mad Lands without altering the past history of either setting, they can instead rule that the Banestorm deposits this new catch on Yrth in its present, the year 1990. This provides plenty of opportunity for the kinds of massive social upheavals that breed interesting scenarios. Major earthquakes or tidal waves might rock Ytarria's northern shores as the Mad Lands splashes down. Together will be culturally tost without Savarginian guidance; the Ytarian kingdom that secures access to its rich agricultural output could tip the balance of power.

However, for a game series set primarily in the Mad Lands itself, these decisions might be unwelcome distractions. GMs might simply want to connect the Mad Lands to Yrth with a nice, neat extra-dimensional gate, leaving both essentially intact.

come up with a wide range of underwater obstacles, from giant octopi to a treacherous shipwreck hideaway for Vat Kep Kig and his ensorcelled seals.

Once they've dealt decisively with Vat Kep Kig, the party may realize that there are disturbing questions still unanswered. Undead are usually created by god-magic, which doesn't work on the sea. Evidently he wasn't resurrected spontaneously by free-floating shamanic energy, but through a conscious act of sorcery. Who would have done this, and why? Is it a renegade seal with Epic Sorcery abilities? A vacationing soulless having some sick fun? Why was that one seal mumbling about magic-using *wipid* before the others shut him up? Like any good mystery, the tale of Vat Kep Kig could lead to even larger and darker puzzles.



The Name

A traveler from another village stops in Kawa Tok to rest his feet and swap a few tales with Ki Ze. The children huddle around them, anxious to hear some new stories from an unfamiliar source. Perhaps a PC or two joins them. The traveler is introduced to the children. When he hears the name of the youngest, he is disturbed. He takes the PCs aside and explains. The name duplicates that of a recent death in his village - a real troublemaker who had surprised everyone *by failing* to return as a ghost. Is the dead man's evil spirit occupying the innocent form of this young child, to Kawa Tok's future woe? How do the PCs determine this, and what do they do if the traveler's fears are justified?

Alternately, this plot can be flipped, with the PCs taking the role of the traveler. They travel far into the interior in search of iron ore. On their way home, they stop for hospitality at a village on the shores of Itapi At. When introduced to the village's children, they discover that a young one has the same name as a hated foe - an outlaw shaman it took them many sessions of play to finally send to his doom. Is he back? Do the adventurers try to convince the village elders, or risk taking matters into their own hands?

Rescue Mission

A hunting party comes back from the interior to report a close call with a nest of bloodless. Fortunately, they got away without being spotted.

This tale catches the imagination of Bokadwex, who has recently been going on about the need to build morale in Kawa Tok. He begins to agitate for a major expedition against the bloodless lair, proclaiming the need for a galvanizing victory to "make this village great again." Some young men fall under his sway; many elders and others argue fiercely against him. Allow the PCs to argue on whatever side of the debate appeals to them; it's even possible that the controversy will split the party.

Finally a raid is scheduled; maybe some PCs go and others stay. If some go, the raid occurs onstage. On or off, it's a disaster. There are more bloodless than anticipated; they capture most of their attackers. The cautious PCs who refused to volunteer must then devise a careful guerrilla strike to free the captives - who'll be kept barely alive as blood cows - and escape.

Ghost Ship

A ship is found abandoned in mid-ocean, snagged in a trap of dense seaweed. There is no sign of the crew - no evidence of violence or sudden hardship. In fact, there are half-eaten meals and other odd evidence that the ship's sailors were simply carrying out normal duties moments before something happened to them. Do the fishermen tow the boat back to their village? If it's their own type of ship, they may feel obligated to find the village it sailed from - *wedo* doesn't permit one village to take the property of another! Perhaps the port village is also abandoned, its people mysteriously vanished. Or maybe the crew was simply washed overboard, or snatched by an especially clever squid.

On the other hand, the vessel might be foreign. The village could use another sturdy vessel - as scrap if nothing else. However, maybe even brief contact with it will taint the village with its unknown curse ...

Transcending the Background

The Madlander culture values heroism, but it also prizes conformity. Should the PCs become so powerful and talented that they're head and shoulders above the crowd, their relationships with their fellow villagers may become paradoxically strained.

This will happen most quickly if one or more PC gains magical powers - or powers that seem magical to the villagers. Even if a Madlander wanted to use his mighty powers to serve his people ... even if he was able and willing to drive the monsters into the ocean and challenge the gods themselves ... his people would see him as a worse danger than the foes he destroyed.

If the players are unhappy with this, and want to develop extra-powerful characters, the GM should start by roleplaying the conflict with the rest of their village! Some roleplayers will enjoy this; others will hate it. Eventually, they'll have to make a choice:

Become outcast. A powerful enough PC group could survive in the interior, fighting evil and helping all the villages and then melting into the wilderness. But they'd be considered dangerous, erratic shamans by the people they were trying to help. Or they could give up trying to help the ungrateful Madlanders, and treat them as adversaries - see below.

Journey. A PC group that is tough enough to handle the Mad Lands will be able to deal with any other background of a similar Tech Level, if they can get over their hatred of magic. If an interest in magic was what estranged them from their people to start with, so much the better.

Try to work within the system. If their political skills match their other prowess, and if the players enjoy that kind of roleplaying, they might gain the acceptance of the elders, or even become elders themselves. In a long-term campaign, this could become an attempt to change the whole Madlander culture!

Rejecting the Background

Finally, it's possible that the players will *really* object to roleplaying in a conformist, communal, anti-magical society. Too bad ... but they can still have fun. If the characters dislike their society, then the society itself becomes the antagonist in the campaign!

An alienated PC group with a few shamans could go renegade and try to conquer their village. Or destroy it. In the Mad Lands, such people are likely to awaken one morning to find they've become skinless. But that wouldn't have to end the campaign, either! In fact, it could help it along ...

The GM won't need to suggest these ideas. Players who would enjoy that sort of campaign will work toward it on their own ... and will be delighted to find the GM ready to accommodate them.

Crossover Campaigns

A long-running *Mad Lands* campaign might benefit from cross-pollination with other *GURPS* material. Likewise, portions of this book could be of use to GMs running games in other genres.

Cyberpunk

The soulless tinker with extra-dimensional magic all the time; perhaps they've rigged a virtual reality network as a one-way gate to their realm, in order to get intriguing new slaves to play with. To pass the time, a soulless might assemble a criminal empire on a future Earth, peddling *ydzhmmoza* or *logetzhicalluzh* as the newest designer drugs.

A jacked-up cyber-warrior would be seen as a new kind of monster in the Mad Lands; obviously it's had bits of its humanity stolen and replaced with obscene magic limbs and organs.

Horror

The fleshless or skinless would be just as dangerous and frightening in our contemporary world as they are in the Mad Lands. Supernatural investigators grown jaded by werewolves and vampires might be unnerved by a soundless rooting in a dumpster outside a Seven-Eleven, or a faceless in an underground parking garage. If, in tracking them to their source, the ghost hunters end up in the Mad Lands, they'll have many opportunities to make Fright Checks.

Special Ops

The Mad Lands's cruel environment would provide tough obstacles to a contemporary commando team swept up by an inter-dimensional trade wind. Madlander villagers - who would interpret M-16s and grenades as sorcerous appliances - wouldn't have much of a chance against heavily-armed guerrillas. But the ammo will run out eventually, those bloodless lurking in the tunnels will be scarcely fazed by gunfire, and Private Jarhead doesn't know that he shouldn't try to catch that rabbit ... What begins as a walkover would slowly turn into *The Lost Patrol*.

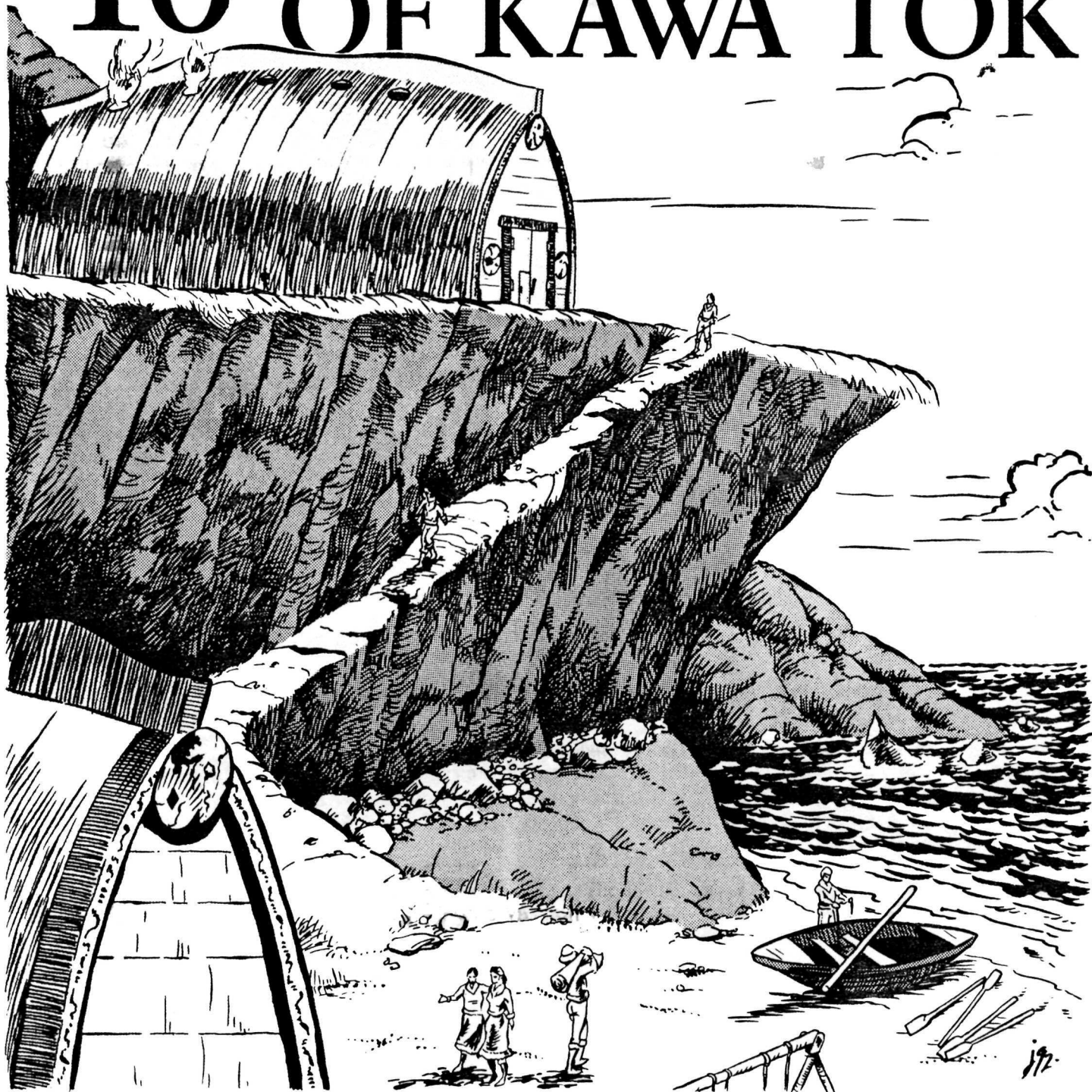
Supers

If a campaign's resident super-team has grown complacent, a soulless with full sorcerous ability would be hard to beat. Like the quasi-gods who occupy the highest power echelons in comic book universes, a soulless would need to be persuaded or tricked into abandoning its nefarious plans instead of being defeated physically.

A trip to the Metal Cities would make for a wonder-inducing episode; unlike everyday Madlanders, supers at least have a hope of survival there.

A super castaway in the Mad Lands would be regarded as a sorcerer by the locals; trying to gain their confidence would pose a challenge.

10 THE VILLAGE OF KAWA TOK



A successful *Mad Lands* campaign will focus more on the adventure party's community than most fantasy games. The GM's biggest challenge will be to make the village come to life, to make it something precious the heroes care about protecting. This means not just evoking the rhythms, sounds and smells of daily life, but portraying its people as a richly varied group of individuals. Ideally, the players as

well as the characters will care about the well-being and safety of the community. The rewards for heroism in the *Mad Lands* are emotional rather than monetary; this requires a bit of extra attention from the GM.

This chapter presents a sample village, which the GM can either adopt wholesale or use as a model on which to base his own community.

Kawa Tok

Kawa Tok is a typical Madlander village, located on one of two tips of a large peninsula near the middle of the southern coast. Its eleven clan houses are nestled in naturally occurring shelves on the rocky outcrop. Kawa Tok has six tuber fields, four of them close together on a plateau on top of the outcrop. The other two are isolated closer to sea level.

Kawa Tok shares the peninsula with four other villages (see map, p. 126). To the south, on the peninsula's second tip, is Bova Awopga. To the west is Okpikvit. To the north of Kawa Tok is a shunned site, once the village of Ganak. Ganak was destroyed by a swarm of headless a few years back, and it is now assumed to be haunted. North of Ganak is the village of Devabo; the fourth village, Bu Pax, is north of Okpikvit. The villages are connected by a winding network of hunting trails that run through the bush which covers the uninhabited center of the peninsula. There is one huge crater, shunned by everyone, on the west side of the interior.

Clan Elders

The central figures of any village are its clan elders. They'll be the most prominent participants in any public function, from village meeting to tribunal. The decisions they take together will affect the fate of the whole community. Most villagers will, in particular, have a close relationship with the elder of their own clan. Some may quietly seek the mentorship of another, more compatible clan head. Others seek role models outside the eldership, bonding with a celebrated hunter or healer.

Elders don't give orders; the presence of strong leadership figures shouldn't impair the players' freedom to make choices for their characters. Not all elders are as wise as they're assumed to be. Some may give bad advice or act rashly. Or they might hold Madlander cultural prejudices that don't apply to a given situation.

The clan affiliation of each character is given after his name. Game values for each character are listed in short form. Only their most prominent or revealing skills are detailed. GMs should feel free to juggle the numbers to add skills that become necessary during an adventure.

Awoxig (Tapokpa clan)

58 years old, 155 lbs.

ST 12 (20 points)

DX 11 (10 points)

Dodge: 5

IQ 10 (0 points)

HT 13 (30 points)

Parry: 6 (spear)

Speed: 5.75

Move: 5

Advantages

Village Leader (20 points)



Disadvantages

Age (-24 points)

Code of Honor (-10 points)

Quirks

Always active (-1 point)

Completely different in presence of wife (-1 point)

Loud voice (-1 point)

Loves food and drink (-1 point)

Loves foot races (-1 point)

Skills

Area Knowledge-12 (4 points); Bow-9 (1 point); Carpentry-10 (1 point); Fishing-10 (1 point); Leadership-12 (6 points); Naturalist-8 (1 point); Navigation-8 (1 point); Running-15 (16 points); Seamanship-10

Kawa Tok

CLAN HOUSES

- 1 Kada
- 2 Bawa Ek Kava
- 3 Bodbo
- 4 Gakag
- 5 Kopod
- 6 Nozip
- 7 Tapokpa
- 8 Wikato
- 9 Goga Ek Goga
- 10 DevZa
- 11 Be VeDawak



(1 point); Spear-14 (16 points); Stealth-10 (1 point); Survival (Woodlands)-12 (6 points); Tracking-9 (1 point)

Awoxig's long shock of white hair is the only thing that betrays his advanced years. His blunt facial features are untrammelled by wrinkles or lines. Muscular and active at the age of 58, Awoxig can still keep up with the most energetic of the village's younger bucks.

Awoxig believes above all in living life to its fullest. He's an enthusiastic eater and drinker. Always out front during hunting and fishing expeditions, he's not content unless he's doing more than his share of the work. Whenever anyone calls for a foot race, Awoxig invariably counts himself among the competitors.

His gung-ho attitude towards life is unrelentingly cheerful; he'd never think to upbraid anyone for doing less than he does. If he has a fault as a leader, it lies in his positive outlook and need to be always in motion: often he's too busy to notice the problems of others. His eye is less than watchful, and other elders worry that members of his clan might stray into trouble without more active guidance. He's not at his best when called on to counsel someone wrestling with inner demons - an unreflective man, Awoxig is likely to offer little more than a friendly chuck on the jaw and an admonition to "get on with it and not worry so much." He's also fond of prescribing activity as a solution to any problem under the sun. That said, he is an effective and smart leader when dealing with physical threats to the community. His straightforward approach and grinning charm have yielded him a loyal following among some of the village's younger men, particularly hunters who fancy themselves courageous men of action.

Awoxig's romantic appetites are just as big as his others; he's now married to his third wife, Ze Aka. She's less than a third his age. His life with her hints at another side to him. Awoxig was the leader of the party that discovered the headless destruction of Ganak a few years back. He found Ze Aka cowering in the wreckage, its sole survivor. He carried her out of the wreckage and all the way back to Kawa Tok. Soon afterwards he announced their betrothal.

Ze Aka is still extremely withdrawn; although she participates in village labor she exchanges no more than a few words with anyone but Awoxig. He is extremely quiet and gentle around her, a real contrast to his usual boisterous behavior. His eyes mist over whenever he speaks of her; no doubt he would fly into a dangerous rage if she were threatened.

Baxabob (Bawa Ek Kava clan)

59 years old, 5'5", 110 lbs., bald, thin.

ST 10 (0 points) **IQ** 14 (45 points) **Speed:** 5
DX 10 (0 points) **HT** 10 (0 points) **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5 **Parry:** 6 (spear)

Advantages

Village Leader (20 points)

Disadvantages

Age (-27 points)
Code of Honor (-10 points)

Quirks

Carries himself like a much older man (-1 point)
Bored by sports and games (-1 point)
Forgets to eat and drink (-1 point)
Hates meaningless argument (-1 point)
Needs solitude to think (-1 point)

Skills

Area Knowledge-14 (1 point); Bow-8 (1 point); Camouflage-14 (1 point); Carpentry-14 (1 point); Detect Lies-15 (6 points); Diplomacy-14 (4 points); Fishing-14 (1 point); Interrogation-16 (6 points); Leadership-18 (10 points); Naturalist-15 (6 points); Navigation-12 (1 point); Running-8 (1 point); Seamanship-14 (1 point); Shipbuilding-12 (1 point); Spear-12 (8 points); Stealth-9 (1 point); Survival (Woodlands)-13 (1 point); Tracking-13 (1 point)

Baxabob is has a long face, with a thinner nose than usual in a Madlander, and dark, deep-set eyes. He moves slowly, as a much older man would, but with an understated grace.

Baxabob is a reserved fellow who radiates a powerful sense of personal dignity. He is well-respected in the village for his cautious and restrained approach to problems. When faced with a dilemma, he likes to go off and quietly weigh all possible factors in solitude. He'll then come back to the group with a carefully constructed plan. He doesn't discuss important issues in public until he's made up his mind; once he has, it's generally unshakeable, unless someone can present new facts that he didn't take into account in his original deliberations. He's not the elder to go to when a snap decision is needed, but often comes up with the wisest choices in the long run.

Baxabob is a watchful and protective clan head who unobtrusively keeps an eye on all of his charges to make sure none are harboring secret problems. He is quick to counsel anyone who seems to be going astray. When giving advice, he persuades through systematic logic, patiently arguing his case for hours if need be. When he finds himself in a dispute, he's polite and nonconfrontational.

He's a bit of an ascetic who pays little attention to his own comfort. His wife must constantly remind him to eat; he doesn't bother with alcohol and takes no interest in games or sports. When others are having fun, he will be quietly watching for signs of danger to the village, external or internal.

Baxabob is married to the village healer, Wuta (see p. 124). Not that a stranger would notice; they almost never display physical affection for one another in public. Their long marriage is actually rock-solid; both are strong, centered people so secure in their love that they don't even think to affirm it.

Bokadwex (Gakag clan)

70 years old, 5'9", 135 lbs, craggy but dimpled facial features, jet-black hair.

ST 9 (-10 points) **IQ** 7 (-20 points) **Speed:** 4.5
DX 8 (-15 points) **HT** 10 (0 points) **Move:** 4
Dodge: 4 **Parry:** 6 (spear)

Advantages

Charisma +6 (30 points)
Village Leader (20 points)

Disadvantages

Absent-Mindedness (-15 points)
Age (-60 points)

Quirks

Defers to his wife (-1 point)
Favors violent solutions (-1 point)
Proud of his hair (-1 point)
Tells self-deprecating jokes (-1 point)
Very gregarious (-1 point)

Skills

Area Knowledge-7 (1 point); Bow-6 (1 point); Carpentry-12 (10 points); Fishing-12 (10 points); Leadership-17 (22 points); Musical Instrument (*Zawadat*)-12 (14 points); Naturalist-5 (1 point); Navigation-5 (1 point); Running-8 (1 point); Seamanship-12 (10 points); Shipbuilding-5 (1 point); Spear-12 (24 points); Stealth-7 (1 point); Survival (Woodlands)-6 (1 point); Tracking-6 (1 point)

Bokadwex is the eldest of the elders, having reached the impossible age of 70. His most obvious physical feature is his hair, which has somehow remained jet black all these years. He's inordinately proud of this fact, and will drag his still-youthful hair into any conversation, relevance aside. (A common village joke holds that he secretly dyes it black, but no one has ever caught him at it.) It's still obvious that Bokadwex once cut a dashing figure; even if his frame has since shrunken a bit it's easy to imagine his former broad shoulders and imposing height.



Bokadwex is a very affable sort, although he has lately become a bit of a dodderer. He projects warmth, and has the skill of making anyone he talks to feel both important and relaxed. As a result of this, Bokadwex still retains the respect and affection of most villagers - even though he's not in fact a wise leader.

He can always be counted on to overreact to any threat. Bokadwex is notorious for recommending large-scale violent responses to village enemies, even when a more cautious and indirect approach would be safer. His oratorical skills rise to their height when extolling the virtue and bravery of young warriors he is sending off to an uncertain fate. In the past, he's organized several raids against nests of monsters. Other elders, like Baxabob, argued in each case that the monsters might never attack Kawa Tok, so there was no need to look for trouble. But the raiders, spurred on by Bokadwex's charisma, went anyway, and some did not return.

It seems that Bokadwex is getting more and more help in making the daily decisions of clan life from his wife Kaveta. Kaveta is a formidable woman, with a will of pure steel and an absolute protectiveness towards her husband. She's also still in full command of her mental faculties, which were probably greater than Bokadwex's to begin with. He'll often refer clan members to her when they come to him for counsel. Her advice to others is usually pithy and brutally honest. She's usually correct in her judgments, but her bluntness often leads people to disregard her. The very same advice will get excellent results when delivered by her personable husband.

Supported by Kaveta, Bokadwex can be extremely stubborn and difficult to dissuade from a given course of action. His leadership skills obscure his lack of wisdom; this is something his followers usually learn only by experience.

Buzavo Bako (Kada clan)

66 years old, 5'3", creased face, unruly hair.

ST 10 (0 points)

IQ 13 (30 points)

Speed: 5

DX 10 (0 points)

HT 10 (0 points)

Move: 5

Dodge: 5

Advantages

Village Leader (20 points)



Disadvantages

Age (-48 points)

Code of Honor (-10 points)

Quirks

Cautious decision-maker (-1 point)

Loud laugh (-1 point)

Lusty (-1 point)

Practical joker (-1 point)

Subtle negotiator (-1 point)

Skills

Agronomy-15 (6 points); Artist-14 (6 points); Botany-11 (1 point); Cooking-13 (1 point); Detect Lies-11 (1 point); Diagnosis-11 (1 point); First Aid-13 (1 point); Leadership-14 (4 points); Leatherworking-15 (4 points); Meteorology-12 (1 point); Pottery-12 (1 point); Psychology-15 (8 points); Woodworking-9 (1 point)

Buzavo Bako is a short, heavyset woman. Her long hair has crinkled into an unruly mess; the few remaining dark streaks are mostly on the left side, giving her face an asymmetrical look. Her round, open face is crisscrossed by a thicket of deep creases and wrinkles.

Most prominent among these are her laugh lines; Buzavo Bako is notorious in the village for her raucous sense of humor. One of Kawa Tok's most characteristic sounds is her deep, throaty laugh echoing off the rocky outcrops. Earthy subjects are her favorite topics for jest; she particularly delights in ribbing young men and women just beginning to learn the secrets of love and romance. Being teased by Buzavo Bako is a rite of passage here. Although a widow, she still maintains an active sex life with several partners.

Beneath her humor is a wisdom based on experience, and a deep reverence for life. Buzavo Bako is no fool; her character judgments are usually dead-on, and her solutions to problems astute. In the best Madlander tradition, she often uses humor to achieve her ends. She may play elaborate practical jokes on younger clan members - these typically contain relevant moral or behavioral lessons.

Her joking also helps to build consensus among the elders. On issues of policy, she can be counted on to side with the more cautious clan heads, like Baxabob and Kuda Ke. However, she'll do so in a subtle way, cajoling stubborn types like Bokadwex and Dako Okked in a friendly manner instead of arguing with them.

Buzavo Bako is best at matters of family and relationship, and on economics, like the state of the village food supply. Her experience doesn't extend to supernatural or other external menaces, and she'll defer to others on such issues.

Dako Okked (Bodbo clan)

61 years old, 3'5", 70 lbs, looks like wrinkly, puffy-faced child.

ST 10 (0 points)

IQ 10 (0 points)

Speed: 5

DX 10 (0 points)

HT 10 (0 points)

Move: 4

Dodge: 4

Parry: 6 (knife)

Advantages

Village Leader (20 points)

Disadvantages

Age (-33 points)

Dwarfism (-15 points)

Ignorance - Spear (-5 points)

Ugly (-10 points)

Quirks

Always on alert (-1 point)

Argumentative (-1 point)

Easily baited by accusations of cowardice (-1 point)

Suspicious of outsiders (-1 point)

Touchy about height (-1 point)

Skills

Area Knowledge-10 (1 point); Bow-8 (1 point); Carpentry-10 (1 point); Fishing-12 (4 points); Knife-13 (8 points); Naturalist-8 (1 point); Navigation-10 (4 points); Running-8 (1 point); Seamanship-10 (1 point); Shipbuilding-9 (2 points); Stealth-12 (8 points); Survival (Woodlands)-9 (1 point); Tracking-10 (2 points)

It's a wonder Dako Okked survived past childhood, let alone reached the elderhood of his clan. He's a dwarf, little more than three feet tall. Aged, he looks like a wrinkled child. To modern eyes, he wouldn't be considered especially ugly; in Madlander society, which abhors difference, his appearance is a major handicap. It's whispered in the village that the clan elder who inspected him at birth was hung over after a feast the preceding evening; normally such a malformed child would have been killed. Whether this rumor is true or not, Dako Okked was declared human and brofght up as such. His round features certainly don't make him look like a changeling, but he was still raised in an atmosphere of unvoiced suspicion.

As a result, Dako Okked is a profoundly suspicious man whose decisions are rooted in paranoia. His eyes are always nervously darting about, as if he expects a bloodless to charge up from behind him at any moment. He assumes the worst of outsiders, and always argues against any move to risk the village or use its resources to help them. His personal manner is obnoxious: he can bluster on for hours at any slight, which he is quick to perceive even where none is intended. When disagreeing with someone, he usually waddles right up to his adversary and shouts in his face, with considerable lung power. Any mention of his size sets him off immediately; he's also very touchy when aspersions are cast on his bravery. In fact, as a young man he was often recklessly courageous, throwing himself into one dangerous situation after another out of an obsessive need to prove himself.

Although Dako Okked is far from agreeable, some members of the Bodbo clan have quietly concluded that the bluster is all an act, and that he is secretly less of a fool than he appears. He is said to "argue like a seal" - he often wins disputes simply by wearing opponents down. On minor matters, other elders will give in to him just to get him to shut up. His decisions are often sound, if uncharitable. He has a strong grasp of strategic matters. When giving personal advice, Dako Okked is usually correct under his overbearing manner.

Kikex Povigig (Dev Za clan)

55 years old, 5'8", 145 lbs., square-jawed, black skin.

ST 12 (20 points) **IQ** 10 (0 points) **Speed:** 6.25

DX 12 (20 points) **HT** 13 (30 points) **Move:** 6

Dodge: 6 **Parry:** 7 (spear)

Advantages

Village Leader (20 points)

Disadvantages

Hideous Appearance (-20 points)

Sense of Duty (-10 points)

Quirks

Consumed by self-pity (-1 point)

Expects to die soon (-1 point)

Rarely speaks (-1 point)

Seeks solitude (-1 point)

Shirks clan duties (-1 point)

Skills

Area Knowledge-12 (4 points); Bow-14 (16 points); Carpentry-10 (1 point); Fishing-10 (1 point); Leadership-11 (4 points); Naturalist-10 (4 points); Navigation-8 (1 point); Running-11 (1 point); Seamanship-10 (1 point); Shipbuilding-8 (1 point); Spear-15 (16 points); Stealth-14 (8 points); Strategy-10 (4 points); Survival (Woodlands)-10 (2 points); Tactics-10 (4 points); Tracking-11 (4 points)

Until recently, Kikex Povigig was a model elder. In good shape for a man in his mid-fifties, he still leads the odd hunting mission. An articulate man with a deep, rich voice, he was no adventure-seeking bravo, but a dedicated leader with a strong sense of responsibility. He was well-known for his theory that all of the advice in the world meant nothing if the adviser was not himself an example of duty and valor.

Kikex Povigig's self-confidence was recently shattered during a small hunting expedition undertaken with two younger members of his clan. They encountered a soulless, and fell victim to her foul sorcery: their skins were turned pitch black. Laughing, the soulless released them and went on her way. Kikex Povigig and his charges returned to Kawa Tok, certain that their new skin color was a sign of impending, inevitable doom.

Indeed, their fellow villagers have shunned them, unable to overcome their fear of sorcery. Everyone is certain that something spectacularly awful is going to happen to Kikex Povigig and his blackened kinfolk, and soon.

He is now a changed man. His former assertiveness is gone, and he spends little time with anyone other than his fellow magic victims. He rarely speaks above a mumble, and spends long periods in solitude out in the forest. The other villagers can't tell whether he's trying to come up with some way to reverse his fate, or if he's simply offering himself up to the many dangers of the bush.

Kikex Povigig has been neglecting his duties as clan head. Most small decisions are made by his younger brother, Tok Nekik. Tok Nekik is not a confident man, as he's spent all of his life in the shadow of his ultra-competent brother. His advice is tentative, and he relies heavily on Baxabob for guidance. Since there's no mechanism to make him acting clan head until his brother is finally devoured by destiny, Tok Nekik can't attend meetings of elders or make final decisions with certainty. Kikex Povigig's attendance at clan head conferences has become erratic, and he almost never speaks when he is present.

Consequently, the Dev Za is a demoralized clan without a clear leader, afraid that Kikex Povigig's doom will bring them down too.

Kuda Ke (Kopod clan)

53 years old, 5'3", 110 lbs., delicate, penetrating eyes.

ST 8 (-15 points) **IQ** 13 (30 points) **Speed:** 4.75

DX 10 (0 points) **HT** 9 (-10 points) **Move:** 4

Dodge: 4

Advantages

Village Leader (20 points)

Disadvantages

Age (-9 points)

Code of Honor (-10 points)

Honesty (-10 points)

Quirks

Avoids touching others (-1 point)

Cautious decision-maker (-1 point)

Celibate (-1 point)

Overcoming lifelong shyness (-1 point)

Talks extremely quietly (-1 point)

Skills

Agronomy-12 (1 point); Artist-11 (1 point); Botany-13 (4 points); Cooking-15 (4 points); Diagnosis-11 (1 point); First Aid-13 (1 point); Leadership-17 (10 points); Leatherworking-13 (1 point); Meteorology-13 (2 points); Pottery-12 (1 point); Psychology-15 (8 points); Singing-12 (8 points); Woodworking-10 (2 points)

Kuda Ke's features are as close to the Madlander average as possible, although her dark, penetrating eyes do stand out. She's a slim woman with long, delicate fingers.

The youngest of six sisters, all of whom predeceased her, Kuda Ke was at first unaccustomed to the central role demanded of her when she became an elder. She'd always been used to putting the wishes of others



above her own, and shrank from the attentions of others. The previous elder, her sister Akba Udi, was a flamboyant leader, loud and demanding. This made Kuda Ke quite a contrast from her sister when she became clan head: her quiet style made some of her clan members fear that she wouldn't be able to pull her weight at village meetings.

Earlier concerns have given way to respect. She continues to be quiet: in fact, she speaks at such a low volume that everyone else at a meeting must strain to hear her. This forces others to pay extra attention to her words. Some, like the noisy Dako Okked, have accused her of doing this intentionally. But, since she's never been known to raise her voice, it seems more likely that this is her natural manner of speaking.

In making decisions, Kuda Ke can be trusted to take the welfare of the entire village into account. Although firm in her opinions, she won't stick stubbornly to a position out of mere pride. Her approach is generally cautious, although she is more willing than some to lend a hand to outsiders, or give them the benefit of the doubt. She's an observant woman, with the ability to dispassionately analyze the situation at hand.

She has broken with Madlander tradition by remaining unmarried and childless. When she was young, she resolutely discouraged all suitors; if she's ever had a romantic dalliance with anyone, it's remained a secret. Despite her lack of direct experience, her watchful eye has made her a good adviser on personal matters.

Pa Pa Zatod (Goga Ek Goga clan)

59 years old, 5'8", 135 lbs, blunt features, broad shoulders.
ST 7 (-20 points) **IQ** 10 (0 points) **Speed:** 5.5
DX 12 (20 points) **HT** 10 (0 points) **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5

Advantages

Charisma +2 (10 points)
Unusual Background (10 points)
Village Leader (20 points)

Disadvantages

Age (-27 points)
Code of Honor (-10 points)

Quirks

Energetic (-1 point)
Haunted by experience with pirates (-1 point)
Looking for husband #10 (-1 point)
Passionate (-1 point)
Short attention span (-1 point)

Skills

Agronomy-11 (4 points); Artist-11 (6 points); Bard-15 (12 points); Botany-8 (1 point); Cooking-11 (2 points); Diagnosis-8 (1 point); First Aid-10 (1 point); Leatherworking-10 (1 point); Meteorology-9 (1 point); Pottery-9 (1 point); Savarginian-10 (2 points); Singing-12 (4 points); Woodworking-12 (2 points)

Pa Pa Zatod is an unusually tall woman with a bold, confident walk. She spent her pre-teen years as a captive of Savarginian pirates before being recaptured by an ocean expedition led by her father and brothers. As a result, even though she is a Madlander, she speaks the language with an exotic Savarginian accent.

She is thought of as being somewhat flighty - she may begin a discussion as a passionate advocate of one position and end it by arguing just as intensely on the other side. She brings an emotional fervor to any task she turns her attention to, whether it be decorating the side of a clan house or counseling a young person who is straying into danger. But her attention span is short - she dashes from one thing to another with no noticeable transition period.

Some villagers say her emotional wildness comes from her time on the pirate ship - a subject she refuses to discuss. It's not difficult to imagine the terrible things that would have happened to a little girl on such a vessel. Pa Pa Zatod still bums with hatred towards Savarginians. Whenever elder meetings must deal with a situation involving them, Pa

Pa Zatod invariably demands that they all be killed on sight. When Kawa Tok must deal with Savarginians, Pa Pa Zatod is the chief negotiator, since she's the only villager to speak their language. She may well distort what they have to say in order to get them killed! She also spares little trust for other foreigners.

Because of her persuasiveness and intensity, she inspires considerable loyalty from her clan - although men tend to respect her more than

Ke Ke Gi (Nozip clan)

55 years old, 5'2", 100 lbs., attractive figure, long silky hair.
ST 7 (-20 points) **IQ** 11 (10 points) **Speed:** 5.25
DX 10 (0 points) **HT** 11 (10 points) **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5

Advantages

Village Leader (20 points)

Disadvantages

Age (-15 points)
Cursed (-20 points)
Code of Honor (-10 points)

Quirks

Deferential to other elders (-1 point)
Emotionally distant (-1 point)
Feels responsible for Kikex Povigig's condition (-1 point)
Mournful (-1 point)
Seeks solitude (-1 point)

Skills

Agronomy-12 (4 points); Artist-10 (4 points); Botany-10 (4 points); Cooking-11 (2 points); Diagnosis-11 (6 points); First Aid-14 (8 points); Leatherworking-10 (1 point); Meteorology-9 (1 point); Pottery-10 (2 points); Woodworking-9 (1 point)

Ke Ke Gi was once an astonishingly beautiful woman - even in her mid-fifties she is still quite striking. The only lines on her face surround her eyes; a look into the eyes themselves, however, reveals an emptiness, the slightly glazed look of someone who has seen too much. She carries herself as if pressed down by a great weight.

Ke Ke Gi's life has been dogged by tragedy: everyone she has ever loved has died violently while young. Her father was killed by a whale during a fishing expedition at the same moment her mother was dying in childbirth. A young, childless couple of her clan took a special interest in raising her one morning they were found to have disappeared from the *wavobak*, with only a few bloodstains to suggest what had happened. Beginning to suspect a curse, the other members of Nozip equally shared the responsibilities of raising her so that none of them would get too close to her emotionally. This didn't stop her older brother from mysteriously drowning just before reaching manhood, though. As she herself approached adulthood, her overwhelming aura of sadness attracted several suitors who became romantically attached to the idea of rescuing her from her curse. They were the cream of Kawa Tok's young manhood, convinced, as most adolescents are, of their own indestructibility. One was carried off by a gigantic flame-breathing hawk with compound eyes. Another was impaled in a hunting accident. A third choked to death on a piece of venison. The other young men abruptly lost interest in Ke Ke Gi, except for one rather stubborn fellow named Wakkabewoke who married her and lived long enough to sire a child. But not long enough to see him bom - Wakkabewoke simply dropped dead one day while working on a boat.

Ke Ke Gi decided to avoid the affections of others in order to protect them. This included her newborn son, Tib Gat Dwik. She let others raise him, and did her best to mistreat him. But she couldn't help loving him from afar. On his 21st birthday, he was standing on the shore when a tentacle reached out from the sea, grabbed him, and pulled him under forever.

It was much later that Ke Ke Gi became clan elder. She does her best to help her people without becoming personally attached to them. She is not a natural leader, she's spent her whole life distancing herself from others and is not much of a judge of character. In elder conferences, she will quietly support what seems to be the majority view.

Wapu Vovike (Wikato clan)

69 years old, 5'5", 135 lbs., looks very elderly.
ST 7 (-20 points) **IQ** 15 (60 points) **Speed:** 3.75
DX 8 (-15 points) **HT** 7 (-20 points) **Move:** 3
Dodge: 3 **Parry:** 5 (knife)

Advantages

Village Leader (20 points)
4k

Disadvantages

Age (-27 points)
Code of Honor (-10 points)
One Arm (-20 points)

Quirks

Clears his throat with disconcerting regularity (-1 point)
Intimidates by making direct eye contact while speaking (-1 point)
Lacks empathy for others (-1 point)
Overuses the phrase "I'm profoundly disappointed" (-1 point)
Uncompromising (-1 point)

Skills

Area Knowledge-15 (1 point); Bard-19 (10 points); Bow-6 (1 point); Carpentry-15 (1 point); Detect Lies-13 (1 point); Fishing-15 (1 point); Interrogation-15 (1 point); Knife-11 (8 points); Leadership-17 (6 points); Naturalist-13 (1 point); Navigation-13 (1 point); Running-5 (1 point); Seamanship-15 (1 point); Shipbuilding-13 (1 point); Spear-6 (1 point); Stealth-6 (1 point); Survival (Woodlands)-14 (1 point); Teaching-14 (1 point); Tracking-14 (1 point)

Wapu Vovike, though a year younger than Bokadwex, looks much older. His head is surrounded by a huge mass of frizzy white hair that juts out in all directions like a halo. His face has drained of color, with only a few flecks of red in his lips and cheeks to contrast with his paleness. His eyes are rheumy and reddened. His movements are tentative and palsied: he suffers from the early stages of what we'd recognize as Parkinson's Disease.

Wapu Vovike is a great orator; even though his voice has started to crack distressingly, he can still rally the people behind him. He also carries himself with an air of irreproachable moral authority. He bears an obvious reminder of an episode that proved his unshakeable courage - he's missing his right arm.

Several decades ago, Wapu Vovike was waylaid by a pair of skinless and tortured. They wanted him to reveal the location of a young woman they had evil designs on. Wapu Vovike knew her hiding place but refused to reveal it. The skinless, over a period of several days, slowly sliced off the arm, making sure he was awake for every excruciating cut. They started on his left leg just before he was rescued: he still bears scars from the lacerations he received. No one doubts that he would have let them take all of his limbs rather than give away the woman. Wapu Vovike is a walking exemplar of personal courage.

This doesn't make him the most approachable of elders. Though he's indispensable in rallying morale during times of dire crisis, he's not so easy to get along with on an everyday basis. He expects everyone else to be as strong as he is and has little compassion for human failings. He admonishes rather than counsels. Instead of advising someone with a problem how to work his way through it, Wapu Vovike will invariably say, "You have profoundly disappointed me. Do better."

In matters of policy, Wapu Vovike may value courage and honor above the actual survival of individual villagers. He's an absolutist who would rather see his people die as heroes than live as cowards. Unlike Bokadwex, he won't go after trouble. But when trouble comes, he would rather lose than retreat. If a conflict can be avoided, he will side with

cautious types like Baxabob and Kuda Ke. But once conflict has begun, he'll be even more of a firebrand than Bokadwex or Dako Okked.

Wed Pepp (Be Ve Dawak clan)

60 years old, 5'2", 130 lbs., graying hair, shifty eyes.
ST 10 (0 points) **IQ** 10 (0 points) **Speed:** 5
DX 10 (0 points) **HT** 10 (0 points) **Move:** 4
Dodge: 5 **Parry:** 6 (spear)

Advantages

Village Leader (20 points)

Disadvantages

Age (-30 points)
Cowardice (-10 points)
Honesty (-10 points)

Quirks

Chronic vacillator (-1 point)
Generous (-1 point)
Good listener (-1 point)
Incorrigibly content (-1 point)
Nervous tic appears in public situations (-1 point)



Skills

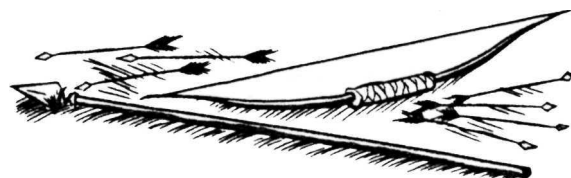
Area Knowledge-10 (1 point); Boating-11 (4 points); Bow-9 (1 point); Carpentry-13 (6 points); Fishing-13 (6 points); Musical Instrument (*Vavabo Gazawat*)-9 (2 points); Naturalist-9 (1 point); Navigation-10 (4 points); Running-9 (1 point); Seamanship-13 (6 points); Shipbuilding-11 (6 points); Spear-12 (8 points); Stealth-9 (1 point); Survival (Woodlands)-9 (1 point); Tracking-9 (1 point)

Wed Pepp, a short, slight fellow, walks with a bit of a stoop, as if trying to avoid being noticed. When nervous or agitated, his shoulders begin to spasm in an uncontrollable tic.

Wed Pepp is an extremely kindly and friendly fellow. He'll offer a companion the last bit of food on his plate or the tunic off his back. He's filled with concern for others, and will listen patiently for hours to the trivial dilemmas of the village's worst complainers. Some consider him an effective counselor, because he'll take the time to listen to them for as long as they want to talk. If Wed Pepp ever does solve anyone's problems, it's because he's given them the chance to talk through the options and reach the appropriate solution by themselves. He himself never voices a complaint, even when imposed on terribly. He can be found with a moony, contented smile on his face even during the worst hours of a crisis. He seems congenitally incapable of being unhappy. This means, though, that he's always perfectly satisfied by conditions as they are, and never strives to make things better for his clan or village.

Wed Pepp is proof that the Madlander clan head system doesn't always yield effective leaders. The Be Ve Dawak clan loves Wed Pepp, but as an amiable dunderhead who doesn't interfere in their affairs. It's the most unruly of Kawa Tok's clans, made up of folks used to getting their own way without being told what to do. The Be Ve Dawak *wavobdk* is always louder than the others; their hunting and fishing parties are the least disciplined. Disputes between clan members often go unresolved, and turn into longstanding grudges, because Wed Pepp vacillates whenever called upon to make a ruling. He hates to upset anyone, so he'll just drag on his deliberations forever in the hopes that the problem will go away on its own. Usually this just makes both parties angrier.

Wed Pepp freezes with terror when called on for an opinion at a clan meeting. When momentum seems to be building towards a consensus, Wed Pepp will quickly jump on the bandwagon. Otherwise, his presence at clan meetings has become a mere formality.



Village Notables

Not all of the village's important NPCs are elders. PCs will be more likely to interact with villagers who are well-known for their mastery of certain skills, or who have contributed in other ways ... or who themselves need help.

Badew E (Tapokpa clan)

18 years old, 5'4", 125 lbs., blonde hair, very attractive.

ST 9 (-10 points) **IQ** 13 (30 points) **Speed:** 4
DX 9 (-10 points) **HT** 9 (-10 points) **Move:** 4.5
Dodge: 4

Advantages

Beautiful (15 points)
Charisma +2 (10 points)
Valued Person (10 points)



Disadvantages

Honesty (-10 points)
Low Pain Threshold (-10)

Quirks

Graciously ignores her rivals (-1 point)
Self-conscious about her hair color (-1 point)
Snaps her fingers arrhythmically when cooking (-1 point)
Uses standard turndown for would-be lovers (-1 point)
Unshakably devoted to Wetvo Ok (-1 point)

Skills

Agronomy-12 (1 point); Artist-11 (1 point); Botany-11 (1 point);
Cooking-19 (12 points); Diagnosis-12 (2 points); First Aid-13 (1 point);
Leatherworking-13 (1 point); Meteorology-12 (1 point); Pottery-13 (2
points); Singing-10 (2 points); Woodworking-8 (1 point)

Badew E is Kawa Tok's favorite cook, a young woman who has the special knack that distinguishes a culinary genius. She can take the same mix of main ingredients and spices as another cook and produce a dish that tastes twice as good, just by getting cooking times and quantities

exactly right. Other women always ask her for her secrets, but she shrugs and claims that it's all instinctive. She never uses quite the same method twice.

She's has another, less positive distinction: she's that rarest of creatures, a Madlander with naturally blonde hair. Despite this terrible blemish, the vast majority of the village's red-blooded young men have crushes on her - she has not just beauty but great personal warmth as well. Unfortunately for them, Badew E is still very much enamored of her husband, Wetvo Ok. Wetvo Ok is ten years older than she is and has a big splotchy birthmark all over the left side of his face and neck. His apparent lack of appeal is all the more frustrating to the fellows who want to dally with Badew E. She's forced to turn down these men so often that she's come up with a standard response that begins, "Really, (fill in name of rejectee), we should just be friends..." This couldn't be more deflating if it were calculated.

Kawa Tok's younger women - those trying to attract the attentions of the same men who are infatuated with Badew E - feel an unseemly jealousy for her. They snipe at her behind her back, and sometimes go so far as to sabotage her meals. On the other hand, the village's older women are her staunchest defenders, admiring both her devotion to Wetvo Ok, and the good grace with which she ignores her detractors.

Ki Zi (Nozip clan)

21 years old, 5'4", 120 lbs., round face, great smile.

ST 8 (-15 points) **IQ** 14 (45 points) **Speed:** 4.5
DX 10 (0 points) **HT** 8 (-15 points) **Move:** 4
Dodge: 4

Advantages

Attractive (5 points)
Valued Person (10 points)

Disadvantages

Honesty (-10 points)
Code of Honor (-10 points)

Quirks

Always looking for new tales (-1 point)
Cool with suitors (-1 point)
Never forgets a detail (-1 point)
Puts positive spin on stories (-1 point)
Tries hard to seem confident at all times (-1 point)

Skills

Agronomy-13 (1 point); Artist-12 (1 point); Bard-16 (6 points); Botany-12 (1 point); Cooking-14 (1 point); Diagnosis-12 (1 point); First Aid-14 (1 point); Leatherworking-14 (1 point); Literature-16 (8 points); Meteorology-13 (1 point); Pottery-13 (1 point); Woodworking-9 (1 point)

While most of the village's eligible bachelors are unofficially seeking the favors of Badew E, they're at the same time officially after the hand in marriage of Ki Zi. She's cute, if not stunningly beautiful, and already an important member of the community. Ki Zi, though barely into her second decade, is already recognized as Kawa Tok's foremost storyteller. She spellbinds young and old, men and women alike with her intensely emotional style of storytelling. She builds up a feeling of reality with vivid details added to the original stories, and entrances the villagers with her husky, quavery voice. She tends to put a positive spin on her tales, and even the grimmest legend will come out as somehow uplifting in her telling of it.

Her memory for stories is deep, and she voraciously gathers new tales from visitors to the village. This makes her a valuable source of information on monsters, ghosts, foreigners and other mysterious dangers of the wilderness. No warrior heads out to tackle a known menace without talking to her.

These conferences give them an opportunity to apply for her affections. Although passionate when discussing myths and stories, she becomes cool when it becomes clear that the subtext is romance. Her air of self-possession is just a front to cover shyness, or so her friends claim.

Bibavov (Kada clan)

46 years old, 5'6", 160 lbs., gnarled and weather-beaten.

ST 10 (0 points) **IQ** 12 (20 points) **Speed:** 6
DX 12 (20 points) **HT** 12 (20 points) **Move:** 6
Dodge: 6 **Parry:** 7 (spear)

Advantages

Valued Person (10 points)

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (-10 points)
Ugly (-10 points)

Quirks

Flustered by Buzavo Bako (-1 point)
Like to humiliate hunters (-1 point)
On the lookout for excessive mourners (-1 point)
Taciturn (-1 point)
Uses cranky questions as teaching tool (-1 point)

Skills

Area Knowledge-12 (1 point); Boating-14 (8 points); Bow-11 (1 point); Carpentry-12 (1 point); Fishing-17 (10 points); Harpoon-13 (8 points); Naturalist-10 (1 point); Navigation-15 (8 points); Running-10 (1 point); Seamanship-17 (10 points); Shipbuilding-17 (14 points); Spear-11 (1 point); Stealth-11 (1 point); Survival (Woodlands)-11 (1 point); Tracking-11 (1 point)

Bibavov is generally recognized as the best fisher and sailor in Kawa Tok. He's built like a *wavobak*, broad-shouldered and bowlegged. Each of his hands seems to be one giant callus, and his wide, flat features have taken on the hue of rotting driftwood. He's a gruff man who never wastes a word. He's taught a couple of generations of young men how to handle themselves at sea - his main technique is to present himself as a tough, forbidding figure and make them work to earn his respect. (He would never admit that this is a conscious strategy.) He makes young fellows figure things out on their own. He greets earnest questions with blunt responses like "You think that's smart, do you?" or "You want to die out there, I suppose?"

Bibavov is notorious for having no sense of humor; this makes him a major target not only for the japey of hunters, but of Buzavo Bako as well. Bibavov can hold his own against the hunters, assigning them the most humiliating jobs at sea. But Buzavo Bako flusters him utterly. He's decided that her practical jokes are a perverse form of courtship (he's wrong); this embarrasses him to the core. He avoids her whenever possible.

Over six years ago Bibavov's wife died; although he presented his usual tough exterior to the village, he grieved deeply inside. This allowed her to return as a ghost, which only he could see. It's been several years since her last appearance, and he's sure she's gone for good. If he sees anyone else in the throes of excessive mourning, he's promised himself he'll try to talk them out of it before they have to go through the same agony.

O Biki (Bawa Ek Kava clan)

25 years old, 5'6", 135 lbs., drools, nearly catatonic.

ST 13 (30 points) **IQ** 6 (-30 points) **Speed:** 6.25
DX 13 (30 points) **HT** 13 (30 points) **Move:** 6
Dodge: 6

Advantages

None

Disadvantages

Absent-Mindedness (-15 points)
Combat Paralysis (-15 points)
Compulsive Behavior (-15 points)
Cowardice (-10 points)
Delusions (-15 points)
Ignorance - all required skills (-65 points)
Paranoia (-10 points)
Phobias: Darkness (-30 points); Death and undead (-30 points); Loud noises (-20 points); Magic (-30 points); Monsters (-30 points); Oceans (-20 points); Zoophobia (-30 points)

Quirks

Speaks in weird images (-1 point)
Speaks only when spoken to (-1 point)
Stares at walls (-1 point)
Tormented by nightmares (-1 point)
Voracious appetite (-1 point)

Skills

No longer applicable

O Biki was once a fierce young hunter given to solitary trips into the interior. One day another group of young men were out hunting porcupine, not far from the village perimeter. They heard a weird half-sung babbling coming from a point farther into the bush. They carefully advanced on its source, and discovered O Biki. He was hanging upside-down from a tree, his feet bound in odd-textured leather thongs. (On closer inspection, they realized to their horror that they were made from human skin.) O Biki was unmarked, but smeared from head to toe with a violet-colored gooeey paste that smelled of saliva. He was muttering to himself, under his breath. His rescuers reported what they remembered of his words to Ki Zi. She says she has yet to figure out their meaning, except that they concerned blossoms, thumping, muscles and a hunting party that vanished a decade ago.

Villagers wishing to hear more of O Biki's senseless gibbering can head to the Bawa Ek Kava clan house, where he spends most of his days. Most of the time he merely stares at a fixed point on the wall, drooling a bit but saying nothing. If asked a question, he will begin to shriek, talking in images with no clear meaning. A sample O Biki rant would be: "The hands! The terrible hands of the blackbirds are coming! They cast their shadows, their hideous shadows, the feathery shadows across our brows, and where they go it is like drinking the waters where the chipmunks have seven eyes and the eels sing like *zawadai!*"

Sometimes these visions come unbidden; he'll bolt up in the middle of the night and howl them out, in the grips of a bad dream. They may be mere nonsense, or might contain some kind of twisted psychic insight.

O Biki is held up by parents as an object lesson to their children: "Be careful where you go and what you see, or you'll end up crazy like O Biki."

Pogox (Kopod clan)

32 years old, 5'9", 140 lbs., lanky, beaklike nose.

ST 13 (30 points) **IQ** 10 (0 points) **Speed:** 6.5
DX 16 (80 points) **HT** 13 (30 points) **Move:** 6
Dodge: 6 **Parry:** 8 (spear or sword)

Advantages

Charisma +2 (10 points)
Combat Reflexes (15 points)
Hero (15 points)
Phenomenal Luck (60 points)
Unfazeable (20 points)

Disadvantages

Absent-Mindedness (-15 points)
Code of Honor (-10 points)
Honesty (-10 points)
Phenomena] Luck (-60 points)

Quirks

- Absurdly brave (-1 point)
- Damnably cheerful (-1 point)
- Back slapper (-1 point)
- Gallant to women (-1 point)
- Gives terrible combat advice (-1 point)

Skills

Acrobatics-15 (2 points); Area Knowledge-11 (2 points); Boating-16 (2 points); Bow-16 (4 points); Broadsword-16 (2 points); Carpentry-10 (1 point); Escape-15 (2 points); Fast-Draw Sword-17 (2 points); First Aid-11 (2 points); Fishing-10 (1 point); Jumping-17 (2 points); Knife-17 (2 points); Knife Throwing-17 (2 points); Leadership-10 (4 points); Naturalist-8 (1 point); Navigation-8 (1 point); Running-15 (16 points); Seamanship-10 (1 point); Shipbuilding-8 (1 point); Spear-17 (4 points); Stealth-16 (2 points); Survival (Woodlands)-9 (1 point); Throwing-15 (2 points); Tracking-13 (8 points)



Pogox is Kawa Tok's greatest hero and champion - and, at the same time, the worst possible role model for young men. Pogox strides across the rocks and trails of the Mad Lands in a loose-limbed, jaunty way, ready to greet any horror with a friendly hello. His face is distinguished by a prominent nose, a grin a mile wide and an impressive battery of dimples. Kawa Tok's women envy his silky, flowing mane of dark brown hair.

Pogox's list of exploits over the years has grown too long to enumerate. If his stories are to be believed - and Pogox has never been caught in a lie - he's met and slain every known type of monster in the Mad Lands, and then some. He's a whirlwind in battle, with the strength of a bear, the speed of a cougar and the eyes of a hawk. But more important, he's blessed with astounding luck, which has allowed him to triumph in the most difficult of situations.

This luck is what makes Pogox as dangerous to his friends as his enemies. As everyone knows, luck is double-edged in the Mad Lands, and fate always balances the scales. In Pogox's case, the bad luck always rebounds on his companions. Once a Savarginian sorcerer, in the midst of casting a spell at a trapped Pogox, was crushed by a tree that just happened to fall over on her at precisely the right moment. But another hunter, who was watching in terror from a seemingly safe hiding spot nearby, was turned into a pile of cranberries by the ricocheting magical energy. In another notorious instance, Pogox and several other Gakag

hunters found themselves in furious combat with a heightless who was completely resistant to even their most powerful blows. In the direst moment, a stray feather drifted up Pogox's nose, and he sneezed messily on the monster. This turned out to be the only substance that could harm it, and the heightless exploded - decapitating two other party members in the process.

Older Kawa Tokites have long ago learned to steer clear of Pogox and let him do his thing, destroying perils to the village in his own improbable way. They do their best to keep inexperienced young men out of his hunting parties. But his allure to naive adolescents is sometimes inescapable. He radiates charm and camaraderie, treating every Madlander man he meets as his best friend in the world. Pogox loves to take young fellows under his wing, always ready with words of encouragement, a round of friendly fake sparring and a hearty back slap.

Pogox is not stupid. But his perceptions are dangerously skewed by his wildly inappropriate optimism. He's never quite made the connection between his own fabulous luck and the long parade of young men he's sent to their deaths. He's always been able to dismiss these disasters with a shrug; in a way, his inability to mourn makes him the ultimate Madlander.

Some men have died in Pogox-related incidents without even being with him; they've fallen victim to his colossally bad advice. Pogox is only too happy to tell others how to develop his unique approach to risk. He teaches that worrying is the root of all danger. The key to success is to head out into the wilderness with nothing but a positive attitude and maybe a weapon or two. Any attempt to prepare for trouble is not just fruitless, it's harmful: it shows a lack of confidence. The truly assured hunter will happily seek out danger - if he maintains the right perspective, the solution to whatever crisis he walks into will fall into place spontaneously. This works for Pogox, of course, due to his phenomenal luck. Whenever someone gets himself killed following the Pogox method, Pogox patiently explains it away: obviously the victim harbored doubts somewhere in his heart.

Pogox is married to Pikte Dukko, a woman so quiet she's practically invisible. They have two young children, both girls. Pikte Dukko rarely even speaks of her husband when he is off adventuring. He's clearly still head over heels in love with her; though he treats other women with great gallantry, his fidelity to her is absolute.

Although stats for Pogox are provided above, GMs are urged to abandon them when necessary to maintain his double-sided luck. When the chips are down, have something really crazy happen to save his bacon - and crisp that of his companions. Hanging around Pogox should be perilous: he's a *deus ex machina* who can crash the very people he's saving. GMs whose sense of gaming propriety is violated by this approach should modify or discard this character.

Vode Vove (Nozip clan)

34 years old, 5'10", 160 lbs., squarish head, wavy hair.

ST 9 (-10 points) **IQ** 13 (30 points) **Speed:** 4

DX 9 (-10 points) **HT** 9 (-10 points) **Move:** 4

Dodge: 4 **Parry:** 5 (spear)

Advantages

None

Disadvantages

- Bad Temper (-10 points)
- Ignorance - Carpentry (-5 points); Shipbuilding (-5 points)
- Odious Personal Habit - Slacker (-10 points)
- Under a Cloud (-5 points)

Quirks

- Avoids Pogox (-1 point)
- Fixes others in a knowing gaze (-1 point)
- Loner (-1 point)
- Mutters disparaging comments (-1 point)
- Smirks when nervous (-1 point)

Skills

Area Knowledge-14 (2 points); Bow-7 (1 point); Camouflage-14 (2 points); Detect Lies-12 (2 points); Fishing-13 (1 point); Knife-10 (4 points); Musical Instrument (*Vawabo Gazawat*)-2 (2 points); Naturalist-11 (1 point); Navigation-11 (1 point); Running-8 (2 points); Seaman-ship-13 (1 point); Spear-10 (4 points); Stealth-9 (2 points); Survival (Woodlands)-12 (1 point); Tracking-12 (1 point)

Vode Vove is a tall, block-faced man with dark eyes and wavy hair. In those dark eyes, other Kawa Tokites are increasingly beginning to see something sinister.

Vode Vove is a loner, taken to disappearing for long periods of time without explanation. If he's acquired any social graces, he doesn't use them. He avoids the company of others, and is downright surly to those who interrupt his lonely ruminations. He's well known for his hostile mutterings. Often he'll insult other villagers as they pass by, rumbling an unflattering comment just loud enough to be heard.

It is widely assumed that Vode Vove is a shaman. Those who cross him have weird things happen to them. Kaveta loudly confronted him after he made a sarcastic remark about Bokadwex; the next day all of the cooking pots she was using spontaneously burst over the fire. In another argument, a young fisher named Vokaka Ge At all but openly accused him of being a god worshiper, the next morning he awoke with a broken leg - without a bruise or scratch.

The person who irritates him the most is Pogox, who steadfastly refuses to believe any Kawa Tokite could be a shaman. Trying to win Vode Vove back into the village fold with an onslaught of friendliness, he subjects him to a campaign of gregariousness, whacking him on the back, bear-hugging him and telling him jokes. It's clear to everyone else that this makes Vode Vove's skin crawl. Nothing bad seems to happen to Pogox, but this might just be his weird luck canceling out Vode Vove's magic. As yet, there is no proof of his supposed shamanic status. Kuda Ke keeps as close an eye on him as possible, given his elusiveness. Others also watch him, hoping they will soon find the evidence needed to call a tribunal against him.

Whether Vode Vove is a genuine shaman or just a misunderstood malcontent is up to the GM. No shamanic powers are included in the above stats, in order to maintain the element of surprise. For a spellcasting Vode Vove, add 25 points worth of appropriate advantages and skills.



Wuta (Bawa Ek Kara clan)

53 years old, 5'3", 110 lbs., prematurely aged, walks with a stoop.

ST 8 (-15 points) **IQ** 14 (45 points) **Speed:** 5
DX 11 (10 points) **HT** 9 (-10 points) **Move:** 4
Dodge: 5

Advantages

Valued Person (10 points)

Disadvantages

Age (-9 points)
Code of Honor (-10 points)
Honesty (-10 points)
Unattractive (-5 points)

Quirks

Almost never speaks (-1 point)
Aloof (-1 point)
Rarely smiles (-1 point)
Stays close to Baxabob (-1 point)
Tippet fanatic (-1 point)

Skills

Agronomy-13 (1 point); Artist-12 (1 point); Botany-15 (4 points); Cooking-14 (1 point); Diagnosis-16 (8 points); First Aid-17 (6 points); Gambling-17 (8 points); Leatherworking-14 (1 point); Meteorology-13 (1 point); Physician-17 (10 points); Pottery-13 (1 point); Surgery-17 (20 points); Teaching-15 (4 points); Woodworking-10 (1 point)

Wuta, in her mid-fifties, looks like a much older woman. Her long, unkempt hair is a shocking white. Her skin is raw and reddened; dark rings hang under her eyes. She walks with a pronounced stoop, as if literally weighed down by troubles. The happiest expression she seems to manage is the slightest of weary smiles.

Wuta, who is married to clan elder Baxabob, is the village's foremost healer. In the sort of cruel irony common to the Mad Lands, Wuta suffers from a chronic condition she can't cure. Due to a throat ailment, any attempt to speak subjects her to severe pain. She tries as much as possible to avoid speech; the most she can manage is a sentence every few hours.

All Kawa Tokites depend on her skills, but, because she doesn't speak, few feel they really know her. Baxabob seems to be able to read her moods and desires without her having to voice them. To others, she is more of a sad and ghostly presence than a close friend.

Wuta is a fanatical *tippet* player: she truly comes alive in the middle of a close match. She gambles with hand signals, and is a tough opponent. Otherwise, she spends her time at Baxabob's side, or in the solitary perfection of her various herbal remedies.

Other members of Bawa Ek Kava wonder what will happen if she ascends to the eldership: it's unheard-of for the oldest living member of a clan to step aside for another. But it's also unheard-of to have an elder who can barely speak.

Disadvantages

Cowardice (-10 points)
Ignorance - Area Knowledge (-5 points)
No Sense of Smell (-5 points)
Overweight (-5 points)

Quirks

Blames everything on his perspiration (-1 point)
Dependent on wife's support (-1 point)
Hates Pogox and Kikex Povigig (-1 point)
Only truly happy when playing *pi ewe* (-1 point)
Reacts badly to teasing (-1 point)

Hunters and Fishers

Although the PCs will need to interact with the village's most prominent members at times, they will probably spend more of their time in the company of average Kawa Tokites - as additional party members on adventures or folks to socialize with. Here are a few typical village men.

Akik Takivodd (Gakag clan)

37 years old, 5'2" 160 lbs., round and sweaty.

ST 13 (30 points) **IQ** 8 (-15 points) **Speed:** 4
DX 8 (-15 points) **HT** 8 (-15 points) **Move:** 3
Dodge: 3 **Parry:** 4 (spear)

Advantages

Danger Sense (15 points)
Rapid Healing (10 points)



Skills

Bow-9 (8 points); Camouflage-12 (8 points); Carpentry-8 (1 point); Fishing-8 (1 point); Gambling-8 (2 points); Naturalist-10 (8 points); Navigation-6 (1 point); Running-6 (1 point); Seamanship-8 (1 point); Shipbuilding-6 (1 point); Spear-9 (4 points); Stealth-11 (16 points); Survival (Woodlands)-11 (8 points); Tracking-11 (8 points)

Akik Takivodd is a short, round man. His dark hair is usually plastered in ringlets to his forehead by perspiration: he's Kawa Tok's most prodigious sweater. Even on a chilly day, rivulets of sweat will be forming at the top of his scalp and running down his face. Akik Takivodd's eyes protrude slightly, giving him a fishy look. As a hunter - but not a particularly good one - he's a prime target for the ribbing of fishers. These jests usually revolve around threats to hook him and reel him in, since he's said to resemble a cod. Akik Takivodd does not take these jokes well, though the best response he can usually muster is inarticulate spluttering.

Akik Takivodd feels that he is always under attack for failing to measure up. To tell the truth, he isn't Kawa Tok's most celebrated hunter - stalwarts like Kikex Povigig and Pogox have long suspected him of being a coward. They're right, but he tries to conceal this as best he can. He tends to blame his problems on his perspiration ("If only the sweat hadn't been in my eyes, I would have been fighting that bear with the rest of you"), no matter how inappropriate an excuse it is.

Village Women

While they will need to keep a stock of pre-built hunters and fishers on hand as back-up during hunting and fishing expeditions, GMs should not forget to also breathe life into the village's ordinary women, whose craft and horticulture labors keep Kawa Tok alive.

Agexa (Bod bo clan)

19 years old, 5'3", 120 lbs., strong mouth, riveting eyes.
ST 7 (-20 points) **IQ** 12 (20 points) **Speed:** 5.5
DX 12 (20 points) **HT** 10 (0 points) **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5

Advantages

Attractive (5 points)
 Strong Will +2 (8 points)

Akik Takivodd is married to Ka Edivak, who has become shrewish and sharp-tongued in defense of her husband. She knows in her heart of hearts that many of the things that are whispered about him are true, but she won't admit it to herself or others.

Bapex Bowev (Bodbo clan)

29 years old, 5'6", 135 lbs., long face, hair always askew.
ST 10 (0 points) **IQ** 12 (20 points) **Speed:** 5
DX 12 (20 points) **HT** 8 (-15 points) **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5 **Parry:** 6 (spear)

Advantages

Voice (10 points)

Disadvantages

Combat Paralysis (-15 points)
 Code of Honor (-10 points)
 Honesty (-10 points)
 Lecherousness (-15 points)

Quirks

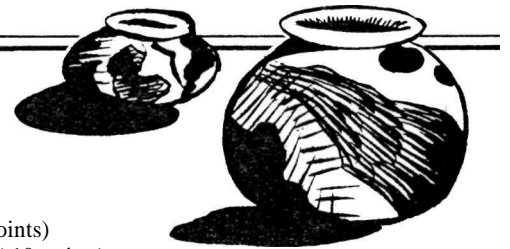
Admires Wegwi Ebo, the shipbuilder (-1 point)
 Likes to make hunters seasick (-1 point)
 Loves fishing trips (-1 point)
 Takes teasing well (-1 point)
 Wants to talk to some seals (-1 point)

Skills

Area Knowledge-12 (1 point); Bow-10 (1 point); Carpentry-12 (1 point); Rshing-14 (4 points); Harpoon-12 (4 points); Naturalist-10 (1 point); Navigation-14 (8 points); Running-6 (1 point); Seamanship-14 (4 points); Sex Appeal-15 (8 points); Shipbuilding-10 (1 point); Spear-13 (4 points); Stealth-11 (1 point); Survival (Woodlands)-11 (1 point); Tracking-11 (1 point)

Bapex Bowev is a delicate-featured man who does remarkably well for himself during Sex Season. He's more comfortable at sea than on land. He spends a great deal of time hanging around Wegwi Ebo, the village's best shipbuilder. Actually, though he loves to be on a boat, he couldn't care less about making them - the shipbuilder has a reputation as his generation's greatest lover, and *that's* the skill Bapex Bowev wants to master. Wegwi Ebo hasn't figured this out yet, and is puzzled at Bapex Bowev's inability to advance himself beyond the rudiments of his beloved craft.

Bapex Bowev can scarcely contain his pleasure when he's at sea: he bounds about the deck, to the consternation of the cranky hunters aboard. He delights in exacerbating any seasickness they might be feeling. This means he's relentlessly razzed on hunting trips, but he takes this with good humor.



Disadvantages

Honesty (-10 points)
 Impulsiveness (-10 points)
 Truthfulness (-10 points)

Quirks

Always has to have the last word (-1 point)
 Interferes with Ke Xi's suitors (-1 point)
 Methodical thinker (-1 point)
 Quick to defend Ke Xi (-1 point)
 Sarcastic (-1 point)



Pa Upet (Wikato clan)

22 years old, 5'6", 125 lbs, stocky build, bushy hair.
ST 10 (0 points) **IQ** 14 (45 points) **Speed:** 6.25
DX 13 (30 points) **HT** 12 (20 points) **Move:** 6
Dodge: 6

Advantages

None

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (-10 points)
 Hard of Hearing (-10 points)
 Honesty (-10 points)
 Overconfidence (-10 points)

Quirks

Always active (-1 point)
 Chipper (-1 point)
 Doesn't hear insults (-1 point)
 Likes to play the field (-1 point)
 Loud voice (-1 point)

Skills

Acrobatics-12 (2 points); Agronomy-14 (2 points); Artist-13 (2 points); Bard-14 (2 points); Boating-13 (2 points); Botany-12 (1 point); Camouflage-15 (2 points); Cooking-15 (2 points); Diagnosis-13 (2 points); First Aid-14 (1 point); Jumping-14 (2 points); Leatherworking-15 (2 points); Lip Reading-14 (2 points); Meteorology-13 (1 point); Packing-13 (2 points); Pottery-14 (2 points); Running-11 (2 points); Sex Appeal-14 (2 points); Singing-14 (4 points); Swimming-14 (2 points); Teaching-14 (2 points); Woodworking-12 (1 point)

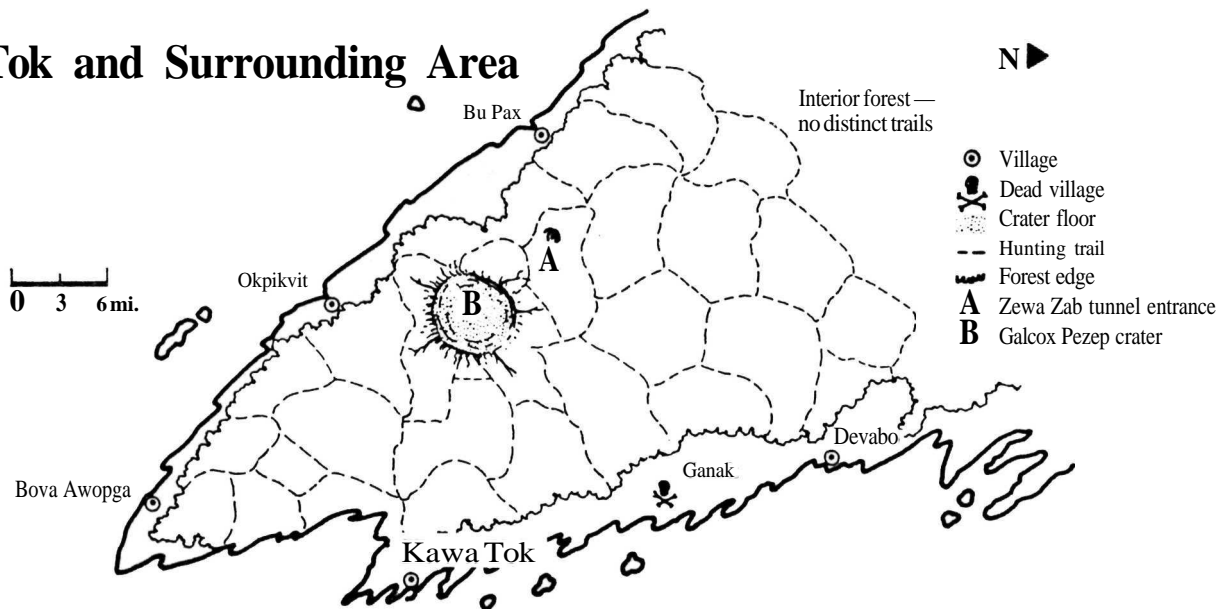
Skills

Agronomy-15 (8 points); Artist-10 (1 point); Botany-15 (10 points); Cooking-15 (6 points); Diagnosis-10 (1 point); First Aid-12 (1 point); Leatherworking-16 (8 points); Meteorology-11 (1 point); Pottery-15 (8 points); Woodworking-14 (8 points)

Agexa is a pretty, headstrong young woman who never hesitates to speak her mind. She's intimidating to the village's less secure young fellows; they find her best friend Ke Zi more appealing. This irritates Agexa, who is much more interested in finding a husband than her friend is. Her pique is never directed towards Ke Zi, though - in fact, Agexa will sharply defend her against even the mildest criticism. Instead, Agexa has become openly contemptuous of Kawa Tok's bachelors, which doesn't exactly help her chances. She spends much of her time sabotaging the efforts of Ke Zi's suitors - no man seems good enough for her friend.

Pa Upet can't stay still. She's always active, bouncing cheerfully about the village - even doing flips, cartwheels and handstands when she feels especially energetic. She has an unflinchingly positive attitude, which can be daunting when coupled with her loud voice. Since she's hard of hearing, conversations with her involve a great deal of shouting. She's able to get along with anyone: she refuses to be offended, and pretends not to hear any comment she doesn't like. Pa Upet is free with her affections, but doesn't seem interested in commitment. Several young men are thoroughly infatuated with her, and she happily juggles affairs with all of them.

Kawa Tok and Surrounding Area



GLOSSARY

Madlander Terms

a ude etde: insulting term for "stupid."
a utuk: wolf.
 abpe: insulting term for a glutton.
avukett: deer.
bakipi: woman.
 bavtopi: village.
bawi: man.
bawa ek kava: tuna; also a clan name.
be ve davvak: cod; also a clan name.
bodbo: crayfish; also a clan name.
bowok ux: wolverine.
bozatu: potato-like tuber.
bugpit: unintelligent seal.
Dakip En: intelligent seal.
davev: (1) minnow. (2) Person not respectful of elders.
Dedipi A: Madlander trickster-hero, a seal.
dekbetid: the feathered skunk of the Mad Lands.
dev za: ocean salmon; also a clan name.
devek: fisherman.
ditatex: large-mouthed salmon; also a clan name.
epetva: tribunal.
etnigap: (1) pine cone. (2) One who can't take a joke.
Gaget: Togethians; literally: "Kill them now!"
gakag: sea bass; also a clan name.
gevo: tough-wooded tree.
goga ek goga: haddock; also a clan name.
Itapi At: large bay in northern Mad Lands.

Ittevtati Otap: people of Northern Tribelands; literally: "the Confusing People."
ivet: elder.
kada: particularly pungent herring variety; also a clan name.
kanpev: amnesia-inducing medicine.
kakew: tuber plant with edible greens.
katti: sweet tuber.
 kavi a: clay oven.
 kavvi: tuber used for cole-slaw.
 kiwwit: insulting term for drunkard.
kopod: herring; also a clan name.
kovdi: hunter.
nive: root which yields a preservative powder.
 nozip: small squid; also a clan name.
nuwidap: sweeter type of *bozatu*.
obtobev: moose.
oded za: wood bear.
oded zu: marsh bear.
oppav: (1) shaman. (2) Insane person.
 patate: child.
Patvik: the Whiteness.
pavge: insulting term meaning "useless."
pi atwi: songbird, or overly talkative person.
pi ev: hot, salty tuber.
pi ewe: wagering game played with colored tiles.
poket: insulting term for lazy person.
tapokpa: flatfish; also a clan name.
te ekke: flavor-absorbing tuber.
tippet: a dice game.
to uwat: severe insult; "whelp of a pigdog."
tobpe: a board game.

totewug: tree yielding an edible nut.
toti: monster, including human renegades. Any formerly-human menace.
tovekbe: (1) porcupine. (2) An irritable person. (3) One who sings poorly.
up vitug: stalk-eyed tuna; also a clan name.
uwat: pigdog.
Va Ekappi O: Savarginians; literally: "Who *are* these people?"
vawabo gazawat: bass-like stringed instrument.
ve iwwu e: inedible fish used in Trouble Fish game, or as imaginary unit of exchange for gambling purposes. Not really a clan name, but a Madlander will josh another by accusing him of belonging to (or planning to marry into) Ve Iwwu E.
vedodit: fighting beetle.
Vidigi: Madlander culture heroine, wife of Zo Do Wabda.
Viwte E: people of the Whiteness; literally: "Frozen-Brains."
vivtak: healing salve.
vowwiti: ghost.
wavapp: insulting term for "liar."
wavobak: longhouse.
wedo: code of temporary possession.
wigtibidat: squirrel, or overly energetic person.
wikato: bulbous-headed herring; also a clan name.
wipid: killer whale; also a clan name.
wippi ak: poison antidote.
zawadat: flute.
Zo Do Wabda: Madlander culture hero, husband of Vidigi.
zoxibek: alcoholic beverage brewed from fermented tubers.
zu wat ux: cougar.
zubov: giant squid.

Tribelands Terms

Exgryen: people of Northern Tribelands. Their term for themselves, meaning "Seekers."

Viwte E Terms

Dal Wiim: the Whiteness.
Sap Cid: people of the Whiteness: the name the Viwte E call themselves.
TarnBusk: chief snow spirit of a tribe.

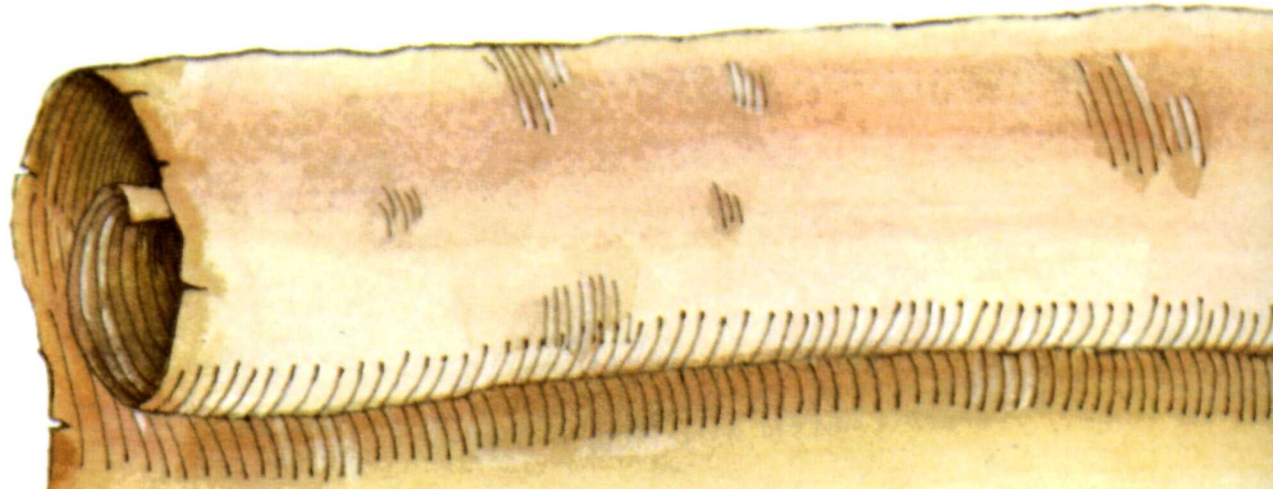
The Madlander Gods

Bax Powu Kag (the Moose)
Belt Agwo (the Hare)
Bubzavav (the Bear)
Dopod Abwep (the Child)
Gakox Pezep (the Cougar)
Kikavo Vo (the Big Leaper)
Kikavo Dat (the Little Leaper)
Vuvuti (the Owl)
Zewa Zab (the Gopher)
Zuutak (the Pig)



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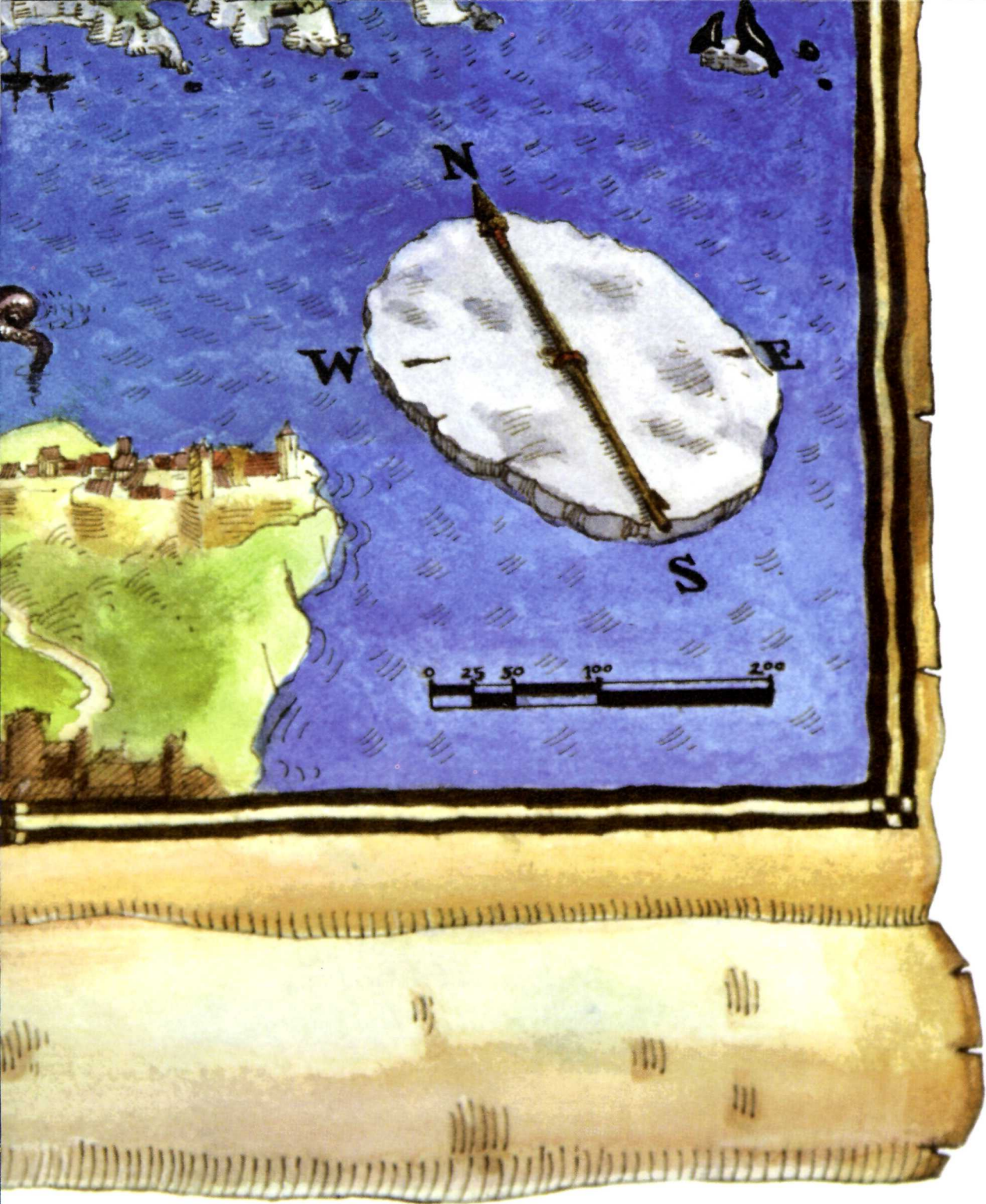
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