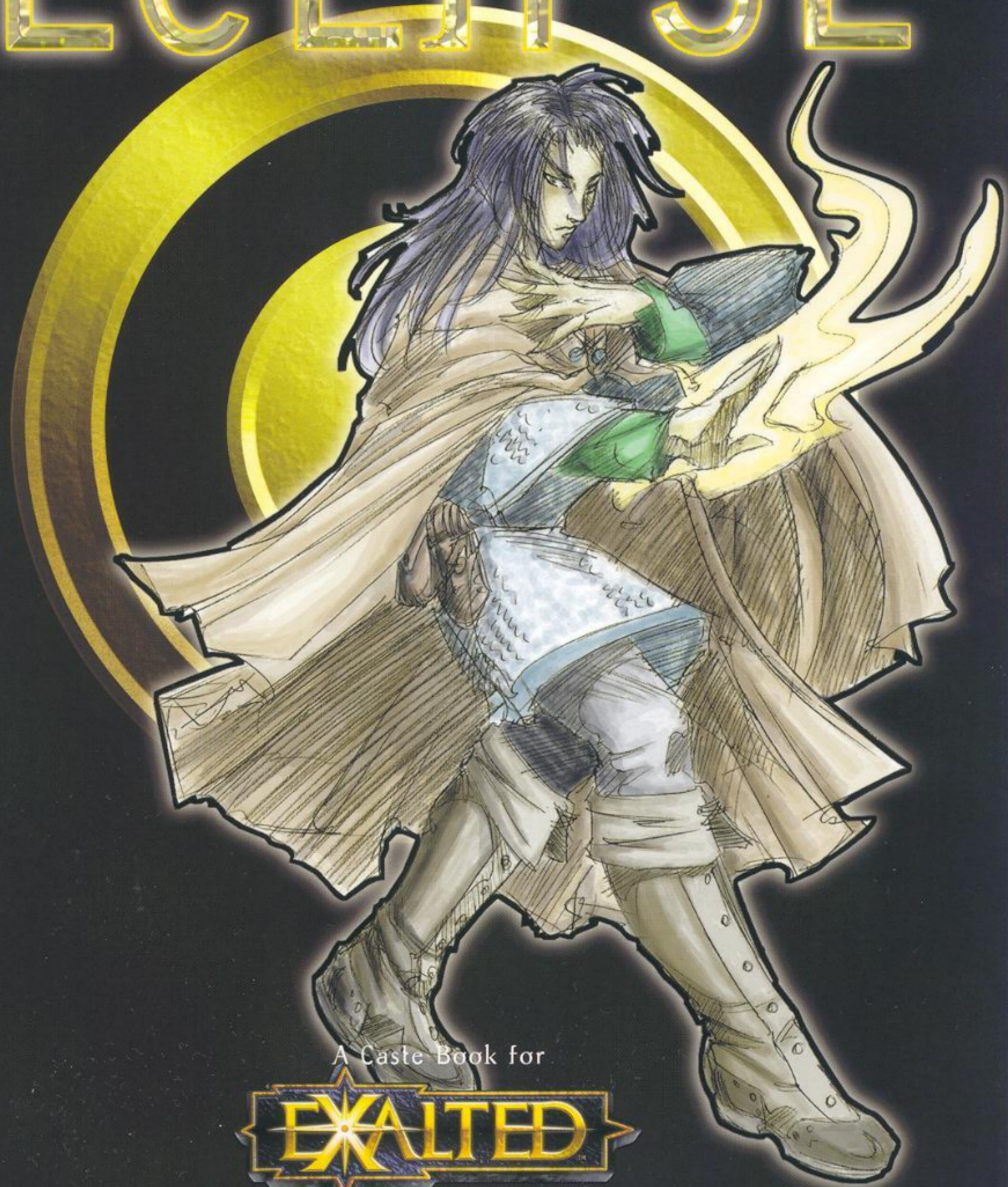


C A S T E B O O K
ECLIPSE™



A Caste Book for

EXALTED



C A S T E B O O KTM
ECLIPSE

By STEVE KENSON AND W. VAN METER

A DRAMATIC TALE

BROTHERS CLASH, TRUE LOVE CONQUERS ALL
AND GOOD TRIUMPHS OVER VILLAINY AGAINST A
BACKDROP OF HARD-WON FREEDOM FROM TYRANNY!

THE PLAYERS

The Cattleman

the wealthiest man in this small nation, feuding with his brother the Rancher and also the Logging Boss

The Cattleman's Young Daughter

young and headstrong, she is in love with the Logging Boss's Son, the enemy of her father

The Henchman

the grizzled head of the Cattleman's range riders, villain

The Logging Boss

a wealthy man of this small nation, feuding with the Cattleman

The Logging Boss's Son

torn between loyalty to his father, the Logging Boss, and his love for the Cattleman's Young Daughter, his father's enemy

The Rancher

a wealthy man of this small nation, feuding with his brother the Cattleman

The Rancher's Pretty Young Wife

well-liked by the people of this small nation

The Governor

the leader of this small nation

The Envoy

a diplomat from the Seventh Legion, hero

Also

A wandering ironmonger, a fortuneteller, a carnival girl, the Rancher's men, the Cattleman's men, townfolk, the Envoy's men, an Exalted subversive

* * *

I am Rustson, a ragged wandering ironmonger local enough to these parts to not seem out of place at this meeting but eccentric and poorly socialized enough to avoid being called upon for an opinion on the uprising. I made Rustson's acquaintance a few days from here. He met with my carnival on the road as he traveled his meager seasonal route. He should, by now, be well on his way to Great Forks, where he seeks more lucrative work at my advice. A tale of rebellion will unfold in the hearts of the people of this small nation soon, and as the tale's teller, I have much research to do.

They come to the meeting in small groups, cliques, and take their places in the strangling heat and dust of this hall, a union hall or grange, that is little more than a barn in tawdry makeup. The slack-faced Governor, the stubborn Cattleman, the handsome Logging Boss, the leathery sheep Rancher, these and other backwater archetypes play the role of the political elite in this place, and with just a cursory analysis, I can see who will take part in what acts of my tale.

"Quiet! Quiet! To order, everyone. The Envoy from the Seventh Legion has made clear he leaves in two nights with or without our answer, so we need to get this meeting underway." The Essence flows as the rustic senate brings down its opening gavel, and in my mind's eye, the setting begins to take shape. Charms wash over my perceptions, and colored lines and shapes begin to play out between and over the faces of the assembled, becoming quickly a complex map, a diagram of the interrelations of my players here. It is as if I had known the folk of this town for years. The quick glances between the Cattleman's Young Daughter and the

Logging Boss's Son, easily overlooked on the surface, but to me, tell of a furtive and struggling love. Though they may not know it or admit it, most of the townsfolk are afraid of the Cattleman's coarse, silent Henchman, their avoidance of his eyes and person a subtle admission of the violence they detect under his skin. A stranger might miss the resemblance, but the Cattleman and his younger brother, the Rancher, were quite close once. Everyone present knows the two never agree on even the most straightforward subject, but I know they both care deeply for the happy-eyed woman the Rancher has made his wife and that his success with her is the reason for the brothers' estrangement.

All of them, though, are worried, worried about the world outside their borders and about a man not present. The Envoy who symbolizes for them the choice they must make about their nation's place in this new time of tumult in the world, this age of old sorrows and new hope. There are more, so many more details to these peoples' lives and doings: the slavery to drink that afflicts the Governor, the romances, the abuses, the small tales that are common to every town in every place. Rustson no longer needs to be present, though. I can see what must be done to make these people loose themselves from the slaver Realm, to unify them and to free them from the animal squabbles that hold them back.

* * *

I am the Lady of Fate, an overwrought and admittedly depthless fortuneteller of my own devising, one of the cast of showmen and charlatans advertised on the handbills for my wandering theatrical troupe and carnival. In my dry and withered hands, I hold the unblemished hand of the pretty young daughter of the Cattleman, her wet eyes wide and happy from the courage I lend her with my every assurance. "The Governor will marry you and your beloved, my mirror tells me it is true. He is a good man, the Governor. He understands love."

I see the fear she has in her heart for what her father might do, and she is right to be afraid. Her father, the Cattleman, though the wealthiest and most prominent citizen of this place, is stubborn and vengeful. His vendettas and feuds alone account for most of the stalemate among the powerful here, and most of my efforts are toward remedying his conflicts and forging a consensus. "Soon, your beloved will be your father's own son, and your father will treat the father of his own grandson as his own family, if you see my meaning." I creak to my feet with a wink, smiling under my masks at the girl's shaky enthusiasm, evident as I embrace her as a sister. "I will even contact your Governor so you may go to your love right away. Go."

* * *

I am a round young carnival girl, sliding unnoticed from the rear of the fortuneteller's gloomy tent and up the laughing midway to where the strong drink is sold. The Governor, of course, is already there.

* * *

I am the Governor, unsteadily making my mark on the marriage documents in my parlor while the newly wed children coo at each other rapturously. It pleases me to see their joy. Without my aid, they may have come to less pleasant ends given the feud between their fathers. It was a simple enough thing to feign shock at the glow in the room when I sanctified and witnessed their oath of marriage and then to work upon the two a tale of their true love and how the light was theirs alone. The Unconquered Sun blesses me with a gift for tales, so well-told that the truth of them is never in doubt. I give the couple my leave to depart for a brief honeymoon and leave letters on the desk to be sent to the parents come morning. They will want to know of the happy news.

* * *

I am no one, resting and respiring, breathing in Essence from the world around me and watching the camp of the Seventh Legion's Envoy. He is a good man, this Dragon-Blood diplomat. When the Cattleman sees this, he will be more inclined to ally with Lookshy. I am no one, and I wend my way from town and across the





fields to the villa of the Cattleman, where I arrange some props in the barn and the bunkhouse. Then, on to the home of the Rancher, to whisper to his pretty, sleeping wife the tale of her morning ride and rescue from the hands of the antagonist of my tale.

* * *

I am the Rancher's Pretty Young Wife, out for a morning ride. This is the complex part of my tale, close to the denouement and very precisely timed. A fumbled line or improperly paced entrance or exit could ruin the entire production and result in a general melee. At this time of morning, the Cattleman's number two man, the Henchman, rides his gang along the ill-defined border between the cattle and sheep fields. This borderland is where I plant myself in the path of the Henchman and his cronies, a fist-sized rock in hand.

Powerful insults and taunts come easily with the application of Essence and Charms. I do not imagine it's what might come to mind first when one thinks of Solar charisma, but it works well when one wants to arouse irrational anger in someone. A fist-sized rock to the teeth from shouting distance also helps. Another interesting point, it is harder to pretend to flee but to truly mean to be caught than it is to simply and honestly flee. This is, at least, what I was prepared to think, until I realized that I was being ridden down by a gang of men who spend more time in the saddle than out of it. The truth of the scene is that I can barely evade these men, and before I can feign capture, I am overtaken. A filthy hand drags me from my frothing mount, and I tumble, ground and sky dancing around me in crazy circles. I am far from where I meant to be overtaken, the road to town is around the next hill. Bolting comes naturally. Screaming I have an innate talent for.

I remain the Rancher's Pretty Young Wife, though I add torn clothing and tear streaks to the face when I hear the thunder of approaching horses from the direction of the road. The Envoy, I strenuously hope. His ears must be keen, as I hoped, for him to have heard the commotion from the road. I knew his schedule and route for



this morning, of course, but was worried that my earlier miscalculation might have let him and his men pass me by. I can only believably avoid a beating, or worse, at the hands of these range riders for so long before they become wise, frightened or see the anima I'd eventually be forced to show.

* * *

Few can resist a direct command from me, even a softly spoken and subtle one, and the Rancher's servants are loathe to argue with the lady of the house after her morning's ordeal if she bids them to leave her outside her rooms. It wouldn't do for anyone to note that the Rancher's Pretty Young Wife remains safe in her bed, where she has slept through the sunrise. Thus unfettered by any pressing roles here, I am again no one and pass unnoticed back to the town.

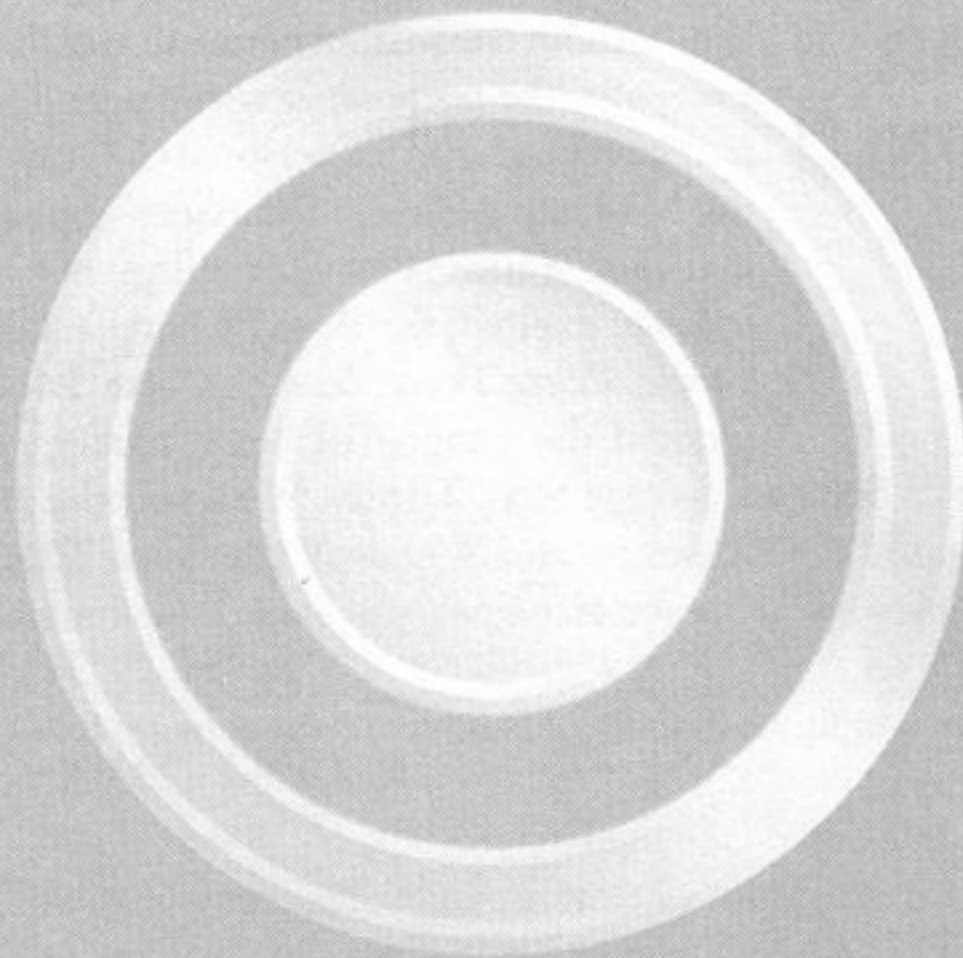
Even now, the two brothers so long estranged and feuding, the Cattleman, smiling around a mouthful of ashes at the news of his son's clandestine marriage, and the Rancher, relieved with the safe return of a Pretty Young Wife he never truly lost, stand side by side. They are united in persecution of the Henchman, the traitor in this town's midst who hurt the woman they both love. It is a beautiful irony. They were driven apart because they loved the same woman, and now, that same love reunites them now that a true enemy has been discovered. Simple, sometimes tragic, but ultimately, a very fulfilling climax to that subplot.

* * *

The Envoy from Lookshy will be the hero, when the curtain falls. At the trial of the villainous former Henchman, the testimony of the Envoy and the Rancher's Pretty Young Wife will be more than enough to damn the villain. More significantly, the Pretty Young Wife overheard quite a bit more from the Henchman during her trial with him. She will recount how he bragged at prodigious length about the nature of his allegiance to the Realm. How he started the range war between the Cattleman and the Rancher. How he exacerbated the feud between the Logging Boss and his brother. These and a dozen other subversive actions, all to keep this small nation in turmoil so the Realm might easily milk it for taxes and resources, and all this testimony will be corroborated by townsfolk who suddenly and conveniently recall having noted strange behavior from the Henchman in the past. Though he does not win the heart of any of the tale's ladies, to my knowledge, the Envoy is seen as a champion and of the people. This nation will side with Lookshy and the Seventh Legion and be one less source of income for the Realm.

* * *

I am the Mirror Flag, bard and diplomat of the Unconquered Sun. I go among men and give them dreams of righteousness. The tale of revolution is my sword, and with it, I will win the war fought in the hearts and minds of men.





CREDITS

Authors: Steve Kenson and W. Van Meter
 Storyteller Game System Design: Mark Rein•Hagen
 Developer: Geoffrey C. Grabowski
 Editor: John Chambers
 Art Direction: Brian Glass
 Artists: Brandon Page, Chris Stevens, UDON (featuring Omar Dogan, Scott Hepburn, Eric Vedder and Joe Vriens) and Melissa Uran
 Cover Art: Melissa Uran, Colored by Matt Milberger
 Cover Design: Brian Glass
 Layout and Typesetting: Brian Glass

AUTHOR'S THANKS

W. Van Meter would like to thank Aeon, Grant Morrison, the Panther Moderns, the letters D, P and B and the number 54.

YET ANOTHER NOTE FROM BRIAN

From a very apologetic Art Director, that'd be me, to the wonderful artist, Melissa Uran. Mel, I'm very sorry I left your name out of the credits on *Creatures of the Wyld*. Please forgive me.



1554 LITTON DR
 STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
 30083
 USA

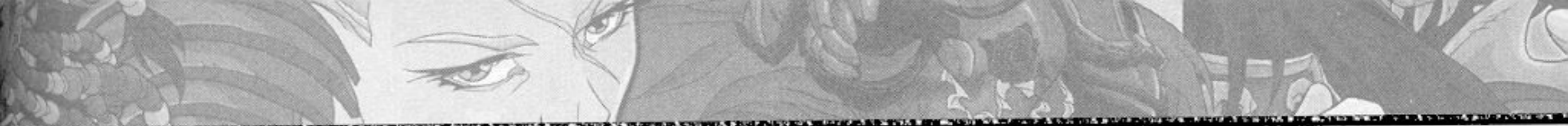
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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



C A S T E B O O K ECLIPSE™

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INTRODUCTION

If you wish to encourage a policy of peaceful coexistence, then be sure to expound on it in terms of lofty ideals, but also hint that it is commensurate with the ruler's personal interests.

—Han Fei Tzu, “The Difficulties of Persuasion”

Caste Book: Eclipse delves into the world of diplomacy, travel and politics in the trenches that is the arena of the Eclipse Caste — a guide to the Exalted who chose words as their weapons. Painted as the Solar Anathema known as the Deceivers in the modern Age due to their purported unassailable social control over the world in the First Age, the new Eclipses can be a puzzle to fit into games in the current Age of Sorrows, where blood and sorcery are often the first and only solution.

The Eclipses are the faces of the Solar Exalted, their points of contact in matters of alliance, subtle dealings and trade. Of all the castes, the Eclipse occupy a unique position in regards to their Caste Abilities: These are not the sort of Abilities that directly define an individual. When the character is Exalted, it is typically the Favored Abilities of a given Exalt that define his strengths and personality. Certainly, all members of this caste are skilled travelers by land and sea, all have a knack for communication and behavior among a variety of cultures, and all have a talent for the grunt work involved in building and maintaining administrative structures. So, they can travel anywhere, get along with anyone and set up an efficient shop when they get there. But to what end? That's where Favored Abilities come in. All Eclipses are consummate organizers, but what exactly they organize depends on the Exalt in question. Within this book, look for

examples of just this principle, and see the variety possible within this caste.

In a perfect world, people find themselves saddled with responsibilities to which they are suited. The world of Exalted is far from perfect. Just as in our world, survival and success depend on how individuals use their skills in the environment they are faced with, rather than on in an ideal situation. This book, then, details members of the Eclipse Caste and the environments they find themselves in, whether they choose them or not, and how their skills and predispositions serve them and their thousand causes.

Also worthy of consideration are the other inhabitants of this land — mortal, Exalt or god — with whom the Eclipse must interact. While this is true of anyone, it is doubly true for these Solar Exalted whose calling is predicated on dealing with others. It is the people they interact with who shape them, and so this book also looks at these others: what they think of the Eclipse and what the Eclipse might have to say about them.

Keep in mind, while some Eclipse Castes may be unstoppable warriors, amoral assassins or unknowable sorcerers, they all excel at organization and at building social structures. They can be a very different sort of character to portray or include in your game, as their focus on networking and diplomacy is quite a bit less archetypal in a fantastic setting than the other castes.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Caste Book: Eclipse provides insight and inspiration for the methods and motives of the Solar diplomats. As such, it includes new Charms, artifacts and Hearthstones of special note for people using the Eclipses in their games and items and Charms mentioned elsewhere in the book. It also contains several views from and of the Crowned Suns, showing how they fit, or don't fit, into the world of Exalted.

Chapter One: Our Souls Through Our Eyes gives you the history and Exaltations of five very different Eclipse Caste Exalted. In their own words, they give a picture of their mortal lives and the circumstances that elevated them to divine service and set the tone of their careers as Exalts.

Chapter Two: Obligations of the Caste provides a range of opinions on what the Eclipse Castes hope to accomplish and how they see their place in the world. The anecdotes in this chapter serve both to illustrate the world of Exalted and to show how members of the Eclipse Caste hope to either fit in within it or to change it more to their liking.

Chapter Three: The World Awaiting Us gives the opinions of the five Eclipse Caste Exalted on mortals, other Exalted and the wide range of supernatural beings that inhabit the Age of Sorrows. The Eclipse Caste, of all the Solar Exalted, have the most contact with other beings and have a great deal to say on the subject.

Chapter Four: Voices Not Our Own provides a sample of the wide variety of opinions that mortals and various powerful beings have about the newly reborn members of the Eclipse Caste. Some seek to use them, many serve them, others see them as allies, and many fear the doings of the Eclipse Castes, but all acknowledge that they are a force to be reckoned with. Storytellers and players can also use these anecdotes as a basis for possible opponents or for allies for their characters.

Chapter Five: Dreams of the First Age gives both information about the dreams and memories of the First Age that occasionally come to all Solar Exalted and examples of the sort of memories that members of the Eclipse Caste have about this lost era. This chapter also provides further information about life in the Old Realm and the actions of the so-called Anathema in their final days.

Chapter Six: Magic of the Eclipse provides many new Charms for use by Eclipse Caste and other Exalts devoted to the ways of diplomacy and administration. Among these various Charms are a few exceptionally powerful ones that require permanent Essence scores of 4 or 5. Additional Hearthstones, artifacts and specialized mundane items are also included in this chapter.

Appendix I: Signature Characters contains five character templates, one for each of the narrators as a starting character.

Appendix II: Other Notable Eclipse Caste presents five members of the Eclipse Caste who have become respected — or feared — in the world of Exalted.

SOURCE MATERIAL

Of all the types of Solar Exalted, the Eclipse Castes have the fewest clear cut antecedents in popular fiction, media or classical tales. While there are no shortages of smooth-talkers or diplomats, they are generally not the focus of the story. As all good diplomats and negotiators know, they do not stand out in history, but stand, instead, behind it, and it is more often their creation than their stage. It's usually worth looking for media that inspires you about the methods and ideology of the Eclipse in question and not the archetype they often embody. Here are a few options for places to look for inspiring examples. While not all of these books or television shows are heroic fantasy, all portray characters and activities that can educate or inspire you as to the nature of Eclipse Caste Exalted.

TELEVISION

Television does not rot your brain. Your parents were telling the truth. Even so, *Law & Order* is a great show to watch for Eclipse ideas. Remove the modern crime-drama parts, and you're left with characters who succeed by knowing the law and how to use it and by knowing who they need to talk to in the government to get what they want. The lawyers and cops on this show navigate several bureaucratic bodies like sharks or illuminati, and that's what Eclipse Caste Exalts can do.

20TH-CENTURY FICTION

Examples of modern adventure literature with characters similar to the members of the Eclipse Caste or plots that can inspire include:

Jhereg, *Yendi*, *Taltos*, *Teckla*, *Athrya*, *Phoenix*, *Orca*, *Dragon* and *Issola*, all by Steven Brust are a high-action fantasy series about Vlad Taltos, a master assassin in the vast and highly magical city of Adrilankha. His interactions with his fellows in the vast criminal organization that is House Jhereg and the various jobs he takes form a wonderfully epic series of stories of murder, betrayal and high adventure.

George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* and its sequels are thickly packed with political chicanery, intrigues, alliances made and broken, betrayals and every other sort of power game. They are all very good books and full of ideas for Byzantine power structures for Eclipse Caste Exalted to fight, fix or abuse for personal gain.

Though he is recommended elsewhere in Exalted, Sean Stewart's books offer a great look at how the little gods of Exalted think and behave. Since the Eclipse Castes are the ones who get sent off to deal with spirits, it's worth mentioning these again. Look especially for *Galveston* and *The Night Watch*.

NONFICTION

Treason By The Book by Jonathan D. Spence. This is a book about pro-Ming treason in China during the Manchu rule. It's not particularly relevant to Exalted, but it provides an excellent look inside a functioning pre-modern bureaucracy and how things are done. It may surprise you.







CHAPTER ONE
**OUR SOULS
 THROUGH
 OUR EYES**



During an eclipse, Luna veils the face of the Unconquered Sun and a crown of shining light surrounds her. The perfect order and balance of Heaven shines down upon Creation, demonstrating the harmony of all things. The Eclipse Castes of the Solar Exalted are like the eclipse they are named for. They make the glory and the order of Creation visible for all to see, and they understand and help to put things into perfect balance. From organizing the efforts of their fellow Solars to guiding the machinery of government, the Crowned Suns worked behind the scenes of the Old Realm. They kept its bureaus running smoothly and free of corruption and incompetence. They traveled far and wide, forging treaties and agreements that expanded the Realm's influence and protected it from rivals: demons, spirits and Fair Folk. They laid the foundations of peace and prosperity so the Realm could grow and flourish.

The Great Curse slowly poisoned the minds, hearts and souls of the Quicksilver Falcons, and it was eventually reflected in their works. The bureaucracy of the Old Realm became increasingly arcane and labyrinthine, impossible for others to navigate. The Eclipses' agreements were not based on fairness, but on false promises intended to lure others into servitude and permit the Realm to crush all that stood in its way. The Quills of Heaven spread lies and deception while ferreting out and punishing those who dared to defy the social and politi-

cal order. Their empathy gave way to arrogance and self-assurance so great that they were unprepared when their most loyal allies turned against them. When the Dragon-Blooded rebelled and rose up against the Solar Exalted, the Eclipse Castes fled to the distant corners of Creation to rally the alliances they had forged, only to discover that many were all too happy to abandon them to their fate, even at the cost of curses.

In the Second Age, the Crowned Suns have been reborn and restored to their ancient purpose. Once more, they travel far and wide throughout the Threshold, knitting together peoples and nations, forging alliances, settling disputes and seeking to bring order from chaos. The Dragon-Blooded have co-opted the social machinery of the Realm, which is now merely a grim parody of what it once was. With the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress, it has practically ceased to function. The Harmonious Voices have their work cut out for them.

The Eclipse Caste is Exalted from mortals of all backgrounds and stations, although most have some understanding of the intricate threads that bind people together — and sometimes tear them apart. They are often merchants, bureaucrats, censors, functionaries, courtiers and others to whom social contact is their lifeblood. Quicksilver Falcons also arise from the ranks of travelers and wanderers, those who feel the urge to discover what lies beyond the next rise or the shore of the



vast sea — or even the misty edges of Creation, where it gives way to the chaos of the Wyld. Sailors, equestrians, shamans, explorers and itinerant wanderers are drawn to the path of the Eclipse Caste. Drawn to discover the world anew and to bridge the gaps between nations and peoples and heroes.

These are the tales of some of the Crowned Suns, the Harmonious Voices of the Solar Exalted — and of the Unconquered Sun.

SWAN

Everything was perfectly arranged on the dark lacquer tray: the tiny cups of translucent porcelain, with sweeping waves painted around their lips; the steaming pot of water, with its quilted holder to keep it hot; the mixing bowl holding the aromatic powdered tea. It was a moment of perfection, frozen in time.

I lifted the pot with deliberate care, pouring a small measure of water into the tea, inhaling deeply of its fragrance as it filled the air around me. I stirred the tea with swift strokes of the whisk, blending it evenly, letting the rhythm of the motions carry me. As I placed the whisk back on the tray at the proper angle and gently set the bowl down beside it, the door flew open, and a dark-clad man came at me with a blood-curdling shout, a staff of lacquered wood in his hands.

I rolled backward as the staff came crashing down against the floor where I'd sat instants ago. I came to my feet in Coiling Serpent Stance, raising up on the balls of my feet, firmly rooted but ready to strike or retreat. The man recovered from his clumsy blow and came at me again. This time, I was ready for him. He swung his staff low, and I leapt up and over it, feeling the rush of air pass beneath me. As I dropped down, I seized his wrist with one hand and dropped into Striking Serpent Stance. Slipping my other hand under his shoulder, I shifted my weight, using the momentum of his strike to send him tumbling onto the floor.

He recovered quickly, but I brought my foot down and snapped his staff in two. He came at me again, still holding the shorter piece like a club. This time, I met the attack with a Cobra Strike that took my attacker off his feet and sent him sprawling onto the floor. The other piece of the staff followed with a clatter. The pressure point I'd hit would leave him unable to move for a few minutes, but caused no lasting damage.

I bowed to my opponent, then turned and bowed to the man sitting silently by the far wall, where he'd been throughout the encounter. He nodded in return.

"You handled that interruption well, Swan," he said. "Now, please continue with your demonstration of the tea ceremony."

"Yes, teacher," I replied, sinking back down in front of the tray. I was pleased to note that I had managed to

avoid disturbing any part of the tea set. As my erstwhile opponent moaned on the floor behind me, I took a deep breath, picked up the tea bowl and went on. Such is the training of a junior diplomat in the Coral Archipelago. It was not enough to be able to perform the rites and ceremonies flawlessly. A diplomat also had to be able to defend himself, and a junior diplomat had to be capable of defending his superiors and dignitaries in his charge, all without forgetting the essentials of proper decorum. Master Garnet Shoal insisted on nothing less than perfection.

So did my father. As one of his younger sons, I was expected to bring my family honor through my service to the ministry. It was an opportunity afforded only to those of the right bloodline and breeding and a privilege extended only to the few able to meet the demands of the rigorous training. Although there was greater glory to be won by serving in the military as my father had done, I was well aware of the trust and responsibility placed in the diplomatic corps and, therefore, in me. Of course, I was less concerned with family honor and more with doing well in my studies because service as a diplomat meant opportunities to travel and to see the world. Even as a boy, I longed to leave the islands of the archipelago behind, sail out across the sea to the east and visit all the lands of Creation. My training was the key to that freedom, so I devoted all my energy and attention to it.

I still recall my father's stern pride when I graduated to the role of junior diplomat and was given my first posting. Although he remained as stiff-necked and dignified as ever, I could see the joy radiating from his eyes and the smile that tugged at the corners of his mouth. My mother wept the first time I bid farewell to my family before leaving for the docks that would take me on the first of many voyages. I realized my dream of sailing off to distant lands, although the grand adventures I expected were quickly replaced by trade negotiations, administrative duties, receptions and state dinners and all the many duties of a junior diplomat. Still, I was away from home, out in the wide world, and I had no idea then just how far I would go.

EXALTATION

After only a few short years of service as a junior diplomat, I was entrusted to handle certain matters on my own. I loved these assignments, even when they were dull and dry, simply because they allowed me time to myself, traveling from place to place. I would often be on my own for weeks or even months, with only the land and sky for company. It allowed me time to experience the beauty of Creation and made me appreciate the pleasures of civilization all the more when I returned to them.

I was on my way through the North on a minor trading mission when it happened. Winter was quickly coming; the first snow had begun to fall as I walked

through the rolling hills and the thick woods of evergreen and cedar, dusting the ground and the trees with white powder. I was eager to reach my destination, discharge my duties and return, lest bad weather force me to spend weeks or even all winter there. I had not achieved my station to while away my time stuck in some Northern backwater. So, I pressed onward into the early hours of the evening, despite the risks of doing so. I should have made a camp as the sun was setting and waited things out until morning, but I decided to follow the road for as long as I could still see it.

At first, I took the glimmer of light that I saw on the road to be a trick of the sun, which had all but faded to the west, but as I watched, it became clear that it was no fading sunbeam. In fact, it grew brighter and stronger, and I could see that it was moving quickly toward me. It was a horse unlike any I had ever seen, its hide golden like the sun, its mane and tail the purest white, its body lit from within by a glow that turned the twilight into daytime around it. Sitting astride that fantastic steed, crouched low over its shining head, was a slim figure swathed in dark robes, face veiled, but surrounded like the horse with a corona of light. But this one did not shine like the noonday sun. It glowed with all the colors of the sunset I had seen: rose, lapis and gold shimmering in the growing darkness.


Behind the golden steed came a thundering collection of hooves, horses bearing a half dozen warriors, armed and armored for battle. Even at a distance, I could see the ornate style of their armor and the gleam of different colors of jade from the weapons they carried. These were no ordinary soldiers, they were Dragon-Blooded, scions of the Realm, or perhaps outcastes of the North, though they didn't have the ragged bearing of outcastes. No, these were battle-hardened and proud Dynasts, of the sort I had sometimes seen and grown to detest in Coral. They were arrogant and cruel, so assured of their places as Princes of the Earth, and these Dragon-Blooded were howling for blood as they chased this burning figure across the land.

I was sure that they would all thunder past me, but one of the Dynasts lowered his spear as if in a charge. Fire blossomed around its head, then a bolt of flames lanced out and struck the dark rider's golden horse. It screamed in pain, echoed by a cry of surprise from the rider, thrown by the force of the blast. The wounded horse stumbled and fell, then suddenly vanished like mist, faint motes of light dancing in the air for a moment, then winking out.

I was already running toward the scene, and I reached the rider just as a long braid of white hair tumbled from a loosened scarf and eyes as pale blue as the winter sky looked up into mine. Her skin gleamed like bronze in the dying light, and a fresh cut across her face still oozed blood, which stained the scarf crimson. When our eyes



For the first time.



met, I felt warmth spread through my body and limbs, despite the chilling air. I felt light, filled with a boundless energy and a terrible sense of purpose. The Dragon-Blooded would not take this woman. Not now, not again. As she rose on shaky legs, I stepped between her and the onrushing hunters.

A slim, cold hand firmly pushed me aside as strange words spilled from the woman's lips, her voice rising to a crescendo of power as the air hummed with power and the presence of something else. The light flared brightly around her, and there was a sound like shattering glass. A swarm of black, buzzing shapes whipped past me like a whirlwind, a storm of obsidian knives that lashed out at the oncoming Dragon-Blooded. They barely had time to rein in their mounts before the spell struck. The horses screamed and died, cut to ribbons, the Dragon-Blooded threw up their arms and shields to protect themselves, cast to the ground by the deaths of their steeds. I stood transfixed in awe as the mysterious woman slumped heavily against me.

There was a moment where the only sound was a gentle tinkling of falling glass, then came a crunching and clatter as the hunters lurched up from the ground. They were all bloody and torn, though I couldn't tell how much of the blood was theirs and how much belonged to the horses that lay dead on the ground. Their proud armor was scarred and gashed, and at least two of the riders did not rise at all. The rest shouted battle cries and charged toward us.

I stepped forward to meet their charge, movements coming unbidden to me. I dropped into a wary stance that Creation had not been seen for a thousand years and felt power flow through me and around me. My hands wove patterns through the air, leaving faintly glowing tracers of Essence in their passing. The sinuous patterns and movements distracted the Dynasts as they struck. I batted aside a spear with the flat of one hand, twisting to avoid a sword thrust at the same moment. I grabbed the sword-wielder's outstretched arm and gave it a sharp twist. There was a satisfying snap, and she dropped her sword, crying out in pain.

A knife skidded across my ribs, but my skin was as hard as scales, and it left nothing more than a scratch in its wake. I spun and threw the swordswoman into one of her compatriots, sending them down in a heap. Then I turned as another blade arced in toward my head. The flats of my palms slapped down on either side of the blade, trapping it between my hands, and I hit my shocked attacker with a snap-kick in the groin. He went down with a whoosh of air and a strangled cry.

Even now, I can't say how long the battle lasted. It was a whirl of twisting and turning, dodging, blocking and striking. I was like a serpent, fast and deadly. Attacks and defenses came to me that I'd never even seen before,

much less practiced. I splintered a teak spear shaft and struck its wielder with a knife hand to the throat, and suddenly, it was over.

The Dynasts lay scattered about me, many of their weapons lying broken or discarded. Some moaned softly and stirred, while many others lay still in puddles of their own blood or as broken as their toys. I bled from numerous small cuts, but as I stood there, I never before felt so alive. That was when I became aware of the shimmering glow around me, like the sun silhouetted by a shadow. That was when I first knew who and what I was.

I turned to find the woman that I aided sprawled alongside the road. I went to her and found that her flesh had lost its bronze tone, becoming as pale and fine as milk. In the distance, I could already hear the sounds of more riders approaching, and I knew that the Dragon-Blooded rarely hunted alone. Slipping my arms underneath her, I lifted her gently. Normally, I would never have left the road, but I knew for certain that we couldn't stay there. So, I turned and carried her into the deepening darkness of the forest.

RUNE

Like everyone, I learned at a very young age not to leave the road to Whitewall. I was born in the city but traveled sometimes with my father, who was a merchant. He'd met my mother in his travels and brought her to live with him in the city, although they sometimes journeyed together to visit her family in the south, on the shores of the White Sea. When we traveled, my mother and father always warned me, "Do not leave the road, Rune, not ever, or the monsters will take you away and eat you."

We lived in a house safe inside the city walls, my parents, my little sister Aria and I. We visited my grandparents for Aria's second birthday. It was the first time they'd ever seen her, so it was a joyous occasion. We stayed for almost a week while my father conducted some business, but then, we needed to begin the long trip back home. Soon, winter would set in, and the snow would make travel even more difficult and dangerous. My father rarely traveled in winter, looking after business in the city during the long, cold months.

We were not far from Whitewall on the last day of our trip home. Although the light was fading and a late autumn fog swirled over and around the road, my father insisted on pressing on, hoping that we could reach the city gates before they closed at sunset. None of us were eager for another night of camping on the road, hearing the distant songs of the Fair Folk or the strange, tortured cries of ghosts.

Then, one of the wheels on our small wagon cracked and splintered. My father cursed as the wagon lurched. He hauled the horse to a stop so he could hop down and examine the damage. Then, he cursed again when he saw

it. Mama climbed down from the wagon to help him as he tried to patch the damage, at least enough to get us back to the city.

I should have been watching my sister rather than peering over the side of the wagon at my parents or listening to the strange music that seemed to drift out of the mist and hover in the air. As it was, I only noticed when Aria giggled and the sound seemed to come from far away. I looked up to see her toddling form shadowed in the fog, out at the edge of the road.

"Mama! Papa!" I yelled, standing up in the wagon. My mother looked where I was pointing, and an expression of terror spread across her face.

"Aria!" she screamed, rushing toward my sister as she vanished into the fog.

"Flora!" my father said, grabbing her wrist. "Wait!"

But my mother did not listen. She pulled away from him and ran after my sister, calling her name, then vanished into the fog with her, until we could only hear her voice, further and further away, calling, pleading for Aria to come to her.

"Mama!" I yelled, starting after my mother. My only thought was to find her, to bring her and my sister back safely, but my father seized my arm, pulled me to him and held me tight.

"No, Rune!" he said. "Stay here, stay here." His grip nearly crushed the breath out of me as I struggled and kicked feebly.

"No! Mama! Mama!"

Then, there came a scream, the likes of which I had never heard, which haunts my dreams to this day. It echoed through the darkening fog, then died away to nothing. I cried out and tried to escape my father's iron grip, but he held me even tighter, as his body shook with sobs. He walked and held me as I cried and fought, I don't know how long, until I was exhausted and fell asleep in his arms. I later learned that he had walked the rest of the way to the city holding me like that and huddled against the closed gates all night, leaving horse and wagon to their fate. When I awoke in the morning, he told me that my mother and sister were gone.

My father was never the same after that night. It was as if the dead had taken him along with his wife and daughter. He became more and more like a ghost himself with each passing month. He clung to me like a drowning man clings to a piece of flotsam, as if I could keep his head above the water, but all it did was slowly begin to drag me down.

To say that my father became overprotective of me would be an understatement. He rarely allowed me to leave his sight. I was allowed to travel with him again when I was older because he needed someone's assistance in maintaining his business and thought I should learn the trade. Still, I wasn't permitted to wander.

Violating my father's rules only earned me a beating and further restrictions on my freedom.

Even as my father faded, his business flourished. He devoted all of his time to it, trying to lose himself in accounts and trade goods, ledgers and the clink of jade. We never lacked for material comforts, but the fine townhouse where we lived seemed so big and empty with just the two of us there. My father was certainly a most eligible man, and a number of ladies called on him in the first years after my mother was lost, but they became fewer and fewer as my father turned them away, until they stopped coming altogether.

As I grew older, I took on more and more of the responsibility for my father's business. This pleased him, although it was the only real thing between us in those years. I didn't care much for the dealings of trade, although my father said I had a knack for it, but I wanted to please him and support him however I could.

I also enjoyed the opportunities and privileges my father's wealth afforded me in the city. I attended parties and social gatherings, made friends and maintained all the social contacts my father couldn't be bothered with. Still, I had no truly close friends, only acquaintances and those who saw an advantage in befriending the son of an influential merchant. As I became a young man, I began drawing suitors, and I found their attentions flattering, but the weight of my duties and my father's suspicions kept me from them. I suspected that no one would meet his approval and that I would have nothing to look forward to except fumbling assignations in strange bedchambers during a party or other occasion when I could slip away. The dead had taken my mother and sister, but in many ways, my father and I were becoming just as dead as they surely were.

I returned home late one night and discovered that my father had hung himself from one of the rafters in his upstairs office. Perhaps he knew that he couldn't protect me from what was to come, but more likely, he felt that he had discharged his duty to me and was free to finally join my mother and sister in death.

EXALTATION

I met Lios alongside the road from Whitewall the spring after my father's death. When the snow had begun to melt and the sky was clear enough, I took to the road alone to tend to the business my father had left me. After all the years of struggling with my father's rules, I was finally free. I was a young man with a prosperous business and better prospects than many in the city. But I still felt trapped by my responsibilities and a life I hadn't chosen.

I was so absorbed in my own thoughts that I didn't notice him at first, but as he approached the road, the jingling sound of the bells trimming the harness of the reindeer he rode caught my attention. I looked up and





caught my breath. I had been introduced to, even courted by, some of the comeliest in Whitewall, but Lios was by far the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. His skin was pale and flawless, and he sat tall and majestic in the saddle. Golden hair flowed down his back and small horns decorated his brow above eyes the color of the winter sky. He was dressed in finery trimmed in ermine and omen dog fur, his tunic shot through with silvery threads.

"Hello there," he said to me with a smile that made snow by the side of the road melt. "That's a terribly long face you're wearing for such a fine spring day as this one."

I didn't know how to answer. I was at once fascinated and frightened. I clung to what my parents had told me. No Fair Folk could harm you as long as you stayed on the road. I forced myself to look away and clucked to the horse to keep going. I could hear the clatter of the reindeer's hooves as the road, walking beside my wagon at a steady pace.

"No greeting?" he said, and the hurt tone in his voice made my face flush with shame. "That's not very polite. I'm called Lios, and you are...?"

I kept silent I don't know how long, and Lios continued to ride beside me at a steady pace, saying nothing more. Perhaps I became used to his presence, or maybe I just felt the need to talk with someone rather than spend the entire trip alone with my thoughts.

"Rune," I finally said. "My name is Rune."

He rode with me for days, making pleasant conversation, asking about me, but mostly just riding alongside in silence. When I reached the outskirts of my destination, he bid me farewell. When I made my way back toward Whitewall, he was there again to accompany me, departing when we came in sight of the city walls. He was nothing of what I expected from one of the Winter Folk, and I found myself wondering if I would see him again.

I did. He was there again in the summer and in the fall when I set out from the city and when I returned. He never threatened, only approached with a cheerful greeting and a desire to hear everything about my life since our last meeting. Despite myself, I found I was warming to him, becoming used to his presence. I found him a fine traveling companion and easy to talk to about all that had happened in my life. I found no need for mortal relationships, not when my beautiful and charming Winter Prince awaited me.

Of course, I underestimated both the cunning and the patience of the Fair Folk. I believed that Lios truly cared about me, but then a farmer can also be said to care for his beasts, even as he fattens them for slaughter. The truth is that I fell in love with Lios, and that blinded me to any danger, to anything other than the sound of his voice, the memory of his face, his presence, his touch.

The first winter was difficult, feeling trapped inside the city, unable to leave its walls to see him, knowing he

could not enter with me. I became moody and withdrawn and snubbed all efforts to console me. I wanted nothing that the city had to offer me. My real desire lay outside its uncaring walls. The winter winds sometimes carried the strains of sweet music from beyond the walls, and I dreamed that it was playing for me.

Lios awaited me in the spring, and my heart soared with joy to see him again. The pleasure of our travels washed away the melancholy of the long winter months and poured my heart out to him. But inevitably, the days grew shorter, the nights colder, and it was time again for my fair paramour to say goodbye. I almost could not bear it when we parted on the road before I reached the city. I wanted to call after him, to offer to go with him, but I did not.

One dark night in the depths of winter, I could stand it no longer. I went to the wall and called to Lios, and he came. I invited him into my home and my heart, neither considering, nor caring about the consequences. We would be together, that was all that mattered. But it wasn't my happiness that Lios wanted. It was my sorrow and fear that were like meat and drink for him, my despair that first drew him to me, like a moth to a flame. He needed to fan that flame, to enjoy what he had so painstakingly prepared, and he did.

I was fortunate that my absence was noticed and a Dragon-Blooded hunter in the employ of the Syndics saw the signs that one of the Fair Folk wandered free inside the walls. Her jade daiklave, crackling with lightning, drove Lios from Whitewall, back into the driving snow outside the city, and left me to face the judgment of the Syndics for my crime.

There was no defense, of course. I didn't even try to offer one. I had broken the city's most cardinal law, consorted with the monsters outside the walls and allowed one of them inside. The decision was swift and certain: I was to be exiled from Whitewall, to face whatever fate awaited me in the world outside. The nearest safe haven was hundreds of miles away, and I was alone and on foot in the midst of a winter that piled snowdrifts up against the unyielding white walls of the city.

Lios was waiting for me, of course, and he wasn't alone. He sat astride his reindeer mount surrounded by feral Fair Folk with aspects like wolves that circled and snarled just off the road. He smiled at me as if a minor errand had parted us rather than a sword blade, but I could see the poisonous edge to that smile now, the part of him that took such pleasure in my pain. The full sprouting antlers were like a crown on his head as he looked down on me.

"Come with me, Rune," he said, extending his hand. I ignored it and began walking, and Lios laughed.

"No greeting for me? That's not very polite, but I'm sure you'll change your mind soon enough. It's a very long walk and a very cold one, and I have plenty of time."



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So, I trudged along the road, bent against the driving snow, while Lios and his pack ran alongside. I did my best to ignore the Fair Folk's jibes and taunts, the voice that I had once wanted to hear more than any sound, the beautiful face that was the source of all my pain. I could feel the cold settling into my limbs even through the furs. It was likely that I wouldn't even make it a whole day before I froze to death. I wondered if my ghost would join with my sister's and my mother's, to snatch unwary children that wandered off the road and devour them.

I heard Lios laugh, a sound like silvery bells, and I felt heat ignite in my heart and rush through my limbs, the warmth of anger. I would die in the cold, but I would be damned to Malfeas before I allowed the Fair Folk to enjoy it. Without a second thought, I screamed and launched myself at Lios, knocking him from his mount and tumbling us both to the snow-covered ground.

It was the opportunity he and his pack had waited for, of course. His hobgoblins dragged me from him, kicking and screaming, and Lios stood, one hand brushing a trace of blood from his lip, bright scarlet against his white flesh. He licked it from the back of his hand and smiled.

"Hold him," he told the wolf-kin, as he drew a silvery blade from his side and advanced on me.

Suddenly, the warmth I felt became a tremendous heat, washing over me, filling me, like basking in the summer sun. It chased the cold from my body and overflowed, shedding a shimmering golden light all around me. The Fair Folk released me and recoiled from

the light, and even Lios was taken aback by it. I stood, feeling strength and confidence like I had never known as strange thoughts and recollections flitted through my head. I knew somehow, with complete certainty, that the Fair Folk would not, could not, attack me. I was inviolate, beyond their reach, so long as I observed the rules of hospitality. Lios lowered his blade as I felt my Caste Mark shine from my forehead for the first time.

As the snow swirled around us, I knew that I still could not survive the long journey from Whitewall. An idea formed, and I smiled confidently at Lios.

"I have an offer for you," I said.

RHIANNA

It had been raining for days, but on the day we arrived, the day the Spring Market was due to open, the sun broke out from behind the clouds and chased them away like a stern father with a gaggle of naughty children. The air was scrubbed clean by the rain and filled with all the scents of the marketplace: roasts and cakes, freshly cut hay and hyssop and, most of all, horses, since they were the reason that we gathered.

I was helping my father as I had since I was a child. I'd been coming with him to the Spring Market for as long as I could remember, but this year, there was something different about it, a kind of anticipation in the air. I noticed the difference immediately after we arrived, and I spotted some figures moving among the traders and other Marukani, resplendent in their fine armor and cloaks, Dynasts — or at least outcasts from Lookshy or elsewhere. But these had the look of the Realm about them. My father quietly told me not to stare



as one of the Dragon-Blooded looked in our direction. I glanced away just as my eyes met his.

We were making our way to the designated spot to set up camp when I saw something even more impressive than a pair of Dragon-Blooded warriors. Actually, the first thing I saw was the small crowd of people gathered around one of the paddocks. They were cheering and yelling encouragement to someone. Then their shouts just as quickly died away and turned into gasps of disappointment or sympathy. I rushed over to see what was going on.

Pushing through the crowd, I saw a man being dragged from the trampled, muddy ground inside the fence and laid eyes on the most beautiful stallion I had ever seen. He stood, tall and proud, like a king among commoners. He snorted and pawed the ground, his breath steaming in the cool morning air. He was black as night from his head to his hooves, including his lustrous tail and mane and his eyes, like polished obsidian. Fine muscles rippled under his glossy black coat. I caught my breath at the sight of him. He was magnificent.

"They say he's God-Blooded," said a voice close to me. I turned to see one of the Dragon-Blooded I'd spotted earlier, standing close by. He didn't look that much older than I was. His skin was a pale green, while his hair was a deep chestnut, worn long but pulled back in a braid and caught back from his face with a fine gold band set with a green stone. It matched the color of his eyes, which were like emeralds or summer leaves. He wore a breastplate engraved with twining vines, and his rolled-up sleeves showed a tattoo of thorny vines spiraling down his right arm to the wrist.

"Offspring of a mare and some spirit, I'd wager," he continued, "caught out on the southern plains. I hear that Radek expects he'll fetch a fine price, but not if he can't be broken to the bridle. He's already thrown three of Radek's best riders. Kicked the last one in the chest to boot." He shook his head sadly. "He won't be broken, one like that, mark my words. It's a shame. Perhaps Radek can put him out to stud and get some fine foals from him, but he won't break a beast like that."

"I'm Veris," he said to me with a disarming smile. He smelled like a fresh pine forest after a summer rain. "V'neef Veris."

"I am Rhianna, my lord," I said, finally recalling my manners and bowing properly to him.

"And what do you think of that fine creature, Rhianna?" Veris asked me.

"I think you are right," I replied, turning my attention back to the stallion, who hadn't moved during my exchange with Veris. It was as if he was watching us. "He won't be easily broken, if at all. He's a free spirit, longing to run free across the grasslands, swift as the wind, fierce as the storm..."

"Rhianna!" My father's voice jolted me back to the moment, and I spun my head toward it, blushing fiercely when I realized where I was and who I was talking to. Veris was looking at me rather strangely, but before he could say anything, I backed away a couple of steps.

"My father," I said by way of explanation. "I have to go." I reluctantly turned away from the paddock, giving it a backward glance as I slipped away. The stallion stood, still and silent, and watched me go, and so did V'neef Veris.

I busied myself with helping to unload the wagon and to set our camp in order. The horses needed a rubdown, fresh feed and water, and I talked and sang to them gently as I worked. Still, my thoughts kept turning back to Radek's camp, back to the magnificent stallion and to the handsome and dashing Dragon-Blooded officer. I wondered about what Veris said. If Radek knew what he had and how he would deal with it.

EXALTATION

It turned out that he didn't know either. Radek's best trainers tried to break the proud black stallion, but all of them failed, and some of them paid in pain for their efforts. One man received a kick to the head. He survived, but it was doubtful that he would ever be quite right again. I risked my father's anger by spending so much of my time at the paddock, watching the riders and, more importantly, watching the horse as they tried to tame him.

I was there when Radek's temper finally peaked as his latest trainer was dragged from the muddy ground, the horse snorting defiantly, almost as if he was laughing.

"That's enough," he spat in disgust. "No beast is worth this."

"What will you do with him?" I asked.

Radek shook his head sadly. "I'm going to have to have him put down. He's useless to me as he is, and his offspring would probably be just as bad-tempered, if I could get him to mate without hurting any of my fillies."

"No! You can't!" I said. The raised eyebrow I got in return said that not many people said "can't" to a man like Radek. The sly smile that followed said that he intended to show me why.

"All right then, Rhianna," he said. "If you are so fond of this beast, then perhaps you can gentle him where others have failed."

"Me?" I said, and there was a patter of laughter from the folk gathered around the paddock.

"Why not?" Radek continued. "Unless, of course, you're afraid to. I can certainly understand. I mean, a girl your size is certainly no match for such a spirited creature as this one."

My face flushed hot as the crowd burst out into laughter. I realized that Radek wasn't serious. He was

simply playing with me. Taunting me like some foolish child. He laughed right along with everyone else. I think he expected me to laugh, too, but I didn't.

I swung my legs over the fence and dropped down inside the paddock, then strode directly toward the black where he stood, silently watching my exchange with Radek. Everyone started laughing even harder when they realized that I seriously meant to try. Radek nearly doubled over, clutching his ample stomach.

"Use your feminine charms to sway him, Rhianna!" he called after me. "Perhaps he can't resist a pretty face!"

I ignored Radek and the laughter of the crowd. There was nothing but the horse that stood and looked at me like he was waiting for something. I approached him gently, cautiously, and spoke softly to him.

"This is as much for you as it is for me," I said. "I can help you, if you let me. I don't want to see you hurt." He snorted a bit, but I couldn't tell if he understood or simply wanted to warn me off. I ran a hand over his strong neck and shoulders, and he shuddered under my touch, ready to bolt.

"Easy, easy," I said, patting him gently. I took hold of the reins and put one hand on the saddle horn. The laughter had died away behind me. Everyone was watching, waiting to see what would happen. I glanced over at the fence and saw Veris standing there, his green skin standing out against the crowd, his armor gleaming in

the sunlight. He had that strange look on his face again, and I turned away before I lost my courage for fear of looking like a fool in front of him.

I had been riding since before I learned to walk, so I swung up into the saddle with a single, easy motion, before the stallion was even aware that I was doing it. There was a moment of total stillness, where I sat high atop the horse, feeling his tremendous, barely restrained power beneath me. Then, there was an explosion of motion, like the strike of a thunderbolt, and I was holding on for dear life.

The stallion spun. He bucked. He kicked and began running around the paddock, fighting to throw me off. I clung to the reins, to the saddle, to a handful of black mane. I squeezed my legs around him and fought to hold on. More than that, I tried to feel his movements and flow with them, like my father taught me, to ride out the storm of his fury and let him tire himself out trying to throw me.

The sun burned warm and bright upon us as we struggled together, and I let his movement flow over and through me. My legs flew into the air once, but I held on tightly and dropped back down into the saddle. There was nothing but the need to hold on, hold on just a little longer.

Suddenly, it was over. The stallion stopped fighting me and stood still beneath me, breath coming in great huffs. I stroked his neck with one hand, and he nickered.





"Storm," I whispered. "Your name is Storm, isn't it?" He tossed his great head in reply.

That was when I noticed that the crowd had fallen completely silent, staring at us with open mouths and wide eyes, even sly Radek, even Veris, who stood with a look of complete shock. I looked at my own hand and saw a shimmer of light, bright and filmy against Storm's dark hair. It surrounded me, and I felt the light welling up in my heart, burning from my brow. I saw my father push his way between the awe-stuck people beside the fence.

"Rhianna!" he called, then he stopped and stared at the sight of me, crowned and clothed in light, astride the great black horse. Something passed across his face, a mix of wonder and horror, and the pride I felt at my accomplishment evaporated upon seeing it. It was the same look everyone wore as some began to slowly back away from the fence.

Then, Veris shouted for his men and reached for the sword he wore at his hip, yelling that I was one of the Anathema. I lifted the reins, and with a nip of my heels, Storm bolted forward, running for the fence. People screamed and scattered as we charged toward them. Storm cleared the fence and the heads of the startled onlookers with a single, graceful bound and hit the ground outside at a full gallop. As I rode away, I could hear Veris' shouting behind me. Now, I knew why the Dragon-Blooded were at the festival and that I had to get away as quickly as possible. The only trouble was, I didn't know where I could go.

At first, I just rode as hard and fast as I could. It didn't take long for Veris and his compatriots to retrieve their horses and set off in pursuit of me, and they were good riders. I glanced over my shoulder to see a cloud of dust in the distance moving closer and dug my heels into Storm's flanks. I gave the stallion the freedom to run like he had longed to all that time in the paddock, and he flew like the wind, but I knew that it was only a matter of time before even Storm became tired. I just had to hope that we could outrun the hunters before that happened.

So, I headed westward, away from the festival and away from the Dragon-Blooded as swiftly as Storm could carry me. A part of me wanted to weep from the joy of riding such a fine horse, but the rest of me was far more concerned with what had happened, what would happen if the Dynasts caught up with us. The golden glow still surrounded me, shining against Storm's hide. I prayed to Hiparkes, asking the Lord of Horses to speed my mount, his child, hoping he would reveal what had happened to me, what I had become.

How long we rode, I can't say, but as the sun sank low, turning the western sky the color of blood, I saw the shadows deepen and stretch out toward us, almost like hungry fingers reaching for us. I realized that it wasn't just a trick of the light. We were very near to the city of Thorns. It was the edge of the shadowland that defined

the domain of the Deathlord Mask of S)bdÂrs. I also realized that the shadowland was vast. We could try to go around it, but there was nothing to be found for miles outside of it, and Storm was already growing exhausted.

I looked back and saw the Dragon-Blooded slowly closing the gap between us. I could make out Veris' green-tinged skin, his deep green cloak flying out behind him. I looked ahead into the deepening shadows and the towers of Thorns rising up in the distance. There was nothing else to do. I spurred Storm forward, and we rode into the darkening shadowland.

MIRROR FLAG

I have always been an artist, to the chagrin of my father. Even as a girl, my thoughts were of song and tale and not of jade and commerce as he would have it. For every lesson in cold numbers, my heart demanded a lesson in dance. For every stiff savant to tutor me in speech and manners, an instructor for the sanxian. I saw my days at Father's side, learning the ways of the predator Guild he championed, as a chore through which I earned a day at the amphitheater.

I had no love for the world of profit. My child's eyes saw only a heartless game with an empty prize. Wealth, it seemed, was not an end but a means by which to gather yet more of itself, success merely a pressure to succeed again. It made my father a stone, and I hated him and his Guild for it, for shutting their eyes so tightly to the beauty and joy my girl's eyes saw everywhere. They hired guards where they needed minstrels and played games with smaller men's lives as you or I would play a flute.

I know now that I killed my father when I left Port Calin to study in Nexus. It was a constant battle with him to honor my heart's wish to attend the acting academy as well as his damned school of philosophy. He had his peers visit me, their pressures ranging from polite guilt to financial threat. He bribed me with fine apartments and appointments, as if these things could compare to the joy I felt in my arts. It sickened me that a man could even think such a thing, and my life seemed a constant war. I fled from Nexus, and he died from work as sure as a man dies from drink.

Nexus had been all I thought I wanted from life. It was alive with energy, vibrant and cosmopolitan in a way that even the Realm was not. The arts were respected there, and I had peers for the first time. Never before had people seemed so real to me as those friends, and we drank deeply of life for years. Though it pained me to leave them, I do not regret it. Freedom from the shackles of my past meant far more to me than even the rich community of the arts. Using the money from the sale of my household, I was able to purchase a partnership in a traveling show run by a leathery old carny called Barker Red and be on my way from the city.

Barker Red's show was a carnival: acrobats, geeks, animals and the like. It was hardly a haven for the arts, but I parlayed my responsibility over the books and money into a position of some authority. Before long, the show fea-

tured singers and rude plays more prominently, and then, my own dramatic performances and monologues. By the year's end, Barker Red's Roadshow had gone from a shabby circus to an eagerly anticipated festival, attracting even members of the upper classes of the East with its storytellers, musicians and performers.

Barker was all too happy to give me the reins of the show, our success allowing him to worry only about his own showmanship. I never expected to learn lessons from him, but his working man's experience as a performer was as valuable to me as my years of academia. His skill with oration was staggering, honed by years of constant use. More important, he knew the mind and heart of a crowd. He showed me that the people are half the show. A flawlessly told tale that ignores the rhythm of the audience may as well have been told to a stone.

The color and mischief of carnival people grows on you, especially when you have placed yourself at the center of a family of them, and I found myself with a respect for what I would have once called rude forms of entertainment. There is artistry in all forms of performance. Only a fool would say that the joy a child gets from a juggler is worth less than the tears of a rich madam at hearing a tragic song. It's ironic that I overcame the prejudice many feel for these folk, only to discover that my companions really were thieves.

EXALTATION

My performance was the only thing that could win my freedom — and that of my companions. The same companions who stood huddled on the darkened midway, gaping at the stuttering, prismatic banners of light around me. A voice said to me, "I Exalt you, player, to bridge men and nations with your art. Step forward, and tell your tale, and you will have your freedom." Summoning what grace I could, I stepped forward to face the god who would hear our tale and judge us by it....

Great Forks, the House of Festivals, there is no better place to enjoy success as a performer. Its people are educated, and while some may call them soft, they simply understand the importance of the intangibles of life more so than their neighbors. We had been putting on our show in the area, spiraling through the outlying towns and enjoying larger and larger crowds as word spread of us. We ended the season's tour in Great Forks proper, intending to winter in one of the many well-appointed fairgrounds maintained by the city inside its walls. If we continued to draw large crowds and incomes as we had been, I planned to propose to Barker that we settle semi-permanently there. I knew he would be hard to convince, as he always was when it came to settling down, even for a while. The success we might enjoy with a complex of our own to winter in and a staging area for the traveling season, though, could make it very lucrative.

Our first run of shows enjoyed the success I had hoped, and after I finished with the ledgers, I decided to entertain in my apartments on the fairgrounds. I am fond of parties, and it has been said that I am quite skilled at hosting them. This soiree, though small, was no exception. Several local socialites were there, mingling with some of our players. Entertainment, conversation and recreation were plentiful.

I cannot say how I knew something was amiss. It was a sense of tension outside and little more. I can't say how or why, but reflex took over. With the few moments I had, I smoothly dismissed everyone and managed to make my rooms presentable, expecting someone to enter via the door. Instead, several men appeared from thin air, startling me into a table, which toppled into the fire. Great Forks is home to a great many spirits who walk among mortals as citizens, serving in its army and civil forces. It was those beings who appeared that night and caused my panic. A pair of them came forth and seized me. In my shock over the fire and their sudden appearance, I lost what civility I had, and another stepped forward, uncertain how to restrain me. I cannot say what I meant to do, strike him or flee, but I stopped when he shifted his spear from hand to hand and commanded the fire begone.

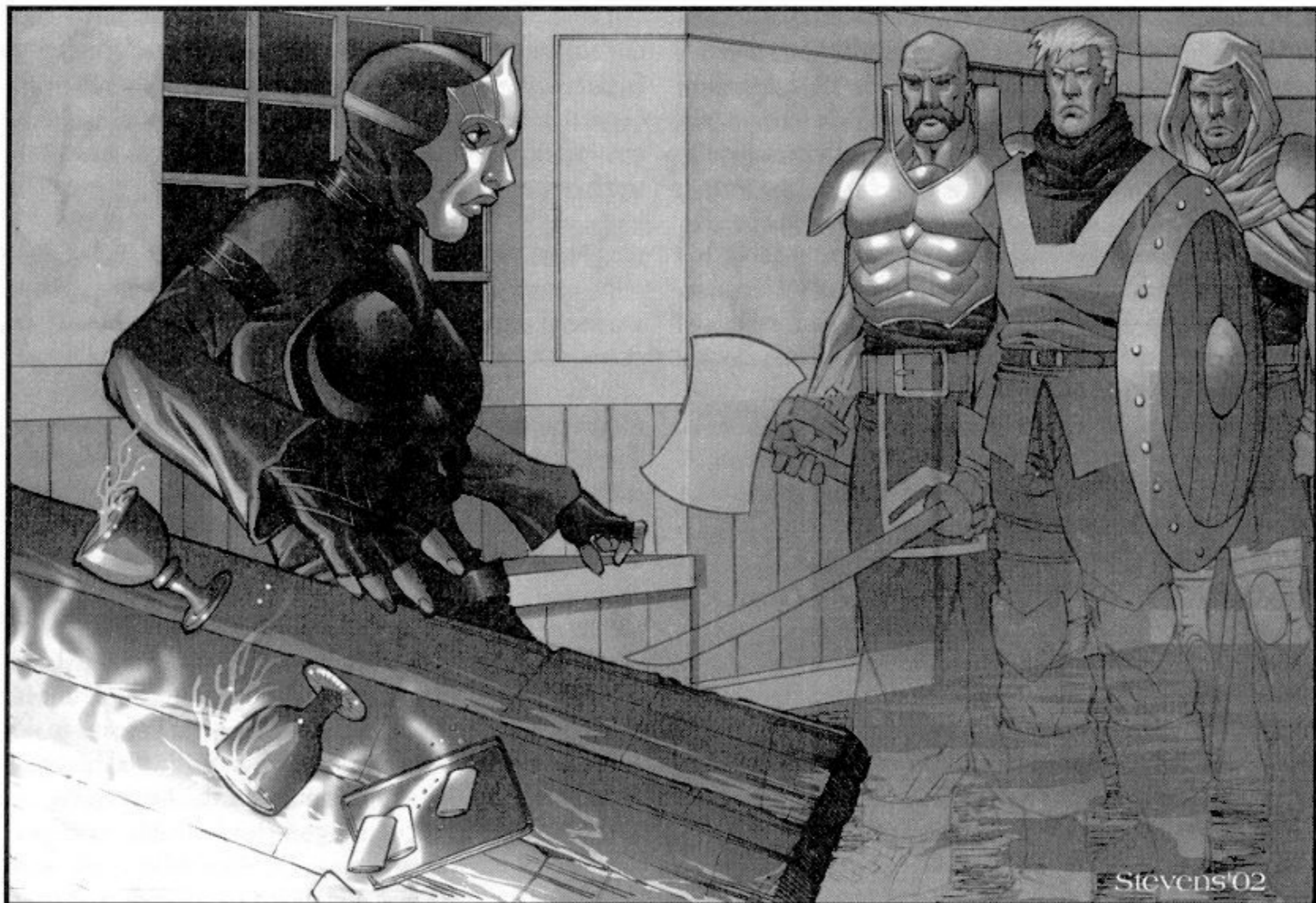
Massed into a central courtyard outside were performer and laborer of the troupe alike. My people were dressed as for sleep and wide-eyed in confusion. Armed men and gods alike gathered us together, wordlessly gesturing for some among us to turn over concealed weapons though they seemed to have given only the most cursory of visual inspections. The fire spirit, their leader, leaned close to one of his men and spoke. The man nodded and looked up at us, "Which of you is the owner? Step forward." When I stepped up with Barker, both he, the man and spirit frowned. The spirit again leaned close to his man, and again, the man spoke, watching Barker Red, "You and yours stand accused as thieves. In both the tributary towns and here in the city proper, claimants have brought forth complaints against you. Cooperate, and you will—"

If he spoke more, I was not aware of it. My perception of the scene was suddenly no longer that of a mundane participant. It was as if I could sense the energy of the situation, the truth and falsehood, the direction of control and the true intent in posture and word. Like reading the stage direction for a play in progress, I could see the hidden motives of my own companions. Upon it all was the unseen hand of a party not present, driving the actions of the spirits and men detaining us, and the glow of lent authority that led into the city's heart where our true judge lay.

"Wait." The spirit, the leader of these men, was shocked when I stepped forward to address him directly. I continued, riding the warm wave of surety that welled up within me. "There is an explanation for all of this, if



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I might but speak with your master.” My own people were muttering in confusion, and the spirit was about to speak harshly when I began to glow. Everyone, protagonist and antagonist alike stepped back, hushed.

“I will hear your tale and judge you by it.” These words came from a man behind us, walking with purposeful strides into the scene. He was tall and long of limb, dressed in the rugged yet worn clothing of a traveler, only his whiskered chin showing from beneath the brim of his broad wanderer’s hat. I was aware of the city’s men bowing to acknowledge this, one of the spirit three who ruled Great Forks, and that I was bowing as well. “Lord Talespinner....”

ADMIRAL SAND

The world does a funny thing as you get older, it gets larger and smaller at the same time. Young people, they think they know what’s going on around them, but they really don’t have any idea how the things they do affect their environment. Older people, they know. There’s a dance to society, things that happen in a grain field change things in the local town. Things there change things in the prefectural seat, and so on. Knowing this, seeing how big the world is, older people have a better eye for what’s right under their nose. The little joys and defeats of family and life, the details of life as individual, they’re easier to appreciate when you can see the huge dance of the world. That’s what I mean about

growing and shrinking at the same time, simple details take on new significance when seen against the complex backdrop of the world at large.

More years ago than I’ll admit, I was on the impetuous side of the coin. You’d be hard pressed to find a young man who could match my reckless, arrogant youth. Don’t misunderstand, I wasn’t totally foolish. I was as educated and clever as a boy could be, seeing himself as a rogue and hero. The truly foolhardy don’t last long running the trade routes and blistering dunes of the Sun’s Sea, but I managed to retire from active command of a trading argosy a very successful old man and still feel pretty good about it. That last is the rare bit. Trade is one of the things that keeps the world together, and it can be a fine and noble career, but it usually isn’t. I don’t kid myself on that count. Most traders are men whose decision between selling your skin and doing something noble would be based on which made him more money. Not me. I knew I was contributing something. Sure, I was racing the sands in my dunerunner ship, making myself wealthy, and there were women and fights to be sure. But, just as often, I was keeping people in touch, giving opportunity to hundreds or thousands of other folks.

In retirement and old age, I got to contribute a little more and a little differently. Success, when cultivated, has a way of spreading to others. Here in Oasis, I settled down and built myself a villa, to run my endeavors from a comfortable chair and let the young men do the

traveling. Years later, Oasis and the other small villages nearby had become a very wealthy little informal confederacy. Sure, we still passed along our jade to the Lap and points north, but where once there had been just my dunerunner the *Desert Eagle* and some Guild contracts, there was now a thriving trade community that serviced routes from Gem to Chiaroscuro. I was proud of it all, feeling that I had, in many ways, birthed the boom and helped to guide it. In my pride, I can be blamed for what almost happened. Hubris is easy to fall into after a life as lucky as mine, and I very nearly fell asleep at the tiller.

EXALTATION

I'd heard occasional reports all season of this or that trouble, enough that I was dimly aware that it was tough going all around. The Dune People were as active as they'd been in my lifetime, raiding by night from the Far South, and news from the Isle wasn't encouraging. A weak Regent was making for all sorts of trouble down the line, and the Perfect of Paragon was using it as an excuse to escalate tensions with Gem.

I did little, it pains me to admit. Men came to me seeking advice or outright intervention in local politics, and I gave them pithy maxims and went back to my leisure. Whatever squabbles the dons were having would play out, I thought, and they would rally to address the problems of the season. Plea after plea came to me to step in and impose some order. I could not tell you now what I was thinking at the time, but I could not be bothered to seriously consider that these men of power, many of whom'd had their first jobs with me, were really doing such a bad job of things. I waved my hand and dismissed the things I heard as the complaints that every government must sustain. These men would learn from their mistakes if they were making them at all, and who was I to meddle? If some old man had told me what to do as a youth, I'd not have appreciated it.

I cannot say precisely when I came to awareness of the situation. One day was suddenly just not like the rest, my recollections of the previous months were sharper, truer. Connections between observations made and ignored fell into patterns, prices at market, tense looks on faces at social events, the tone of conversations half-heard among people on the street and the comings and goings of riders and dunerunners. I walked from my villa wordlessly, this jarring clarity moving me of its own volition to the central exchange of Oasis, the mercantile center of a mercantile community. Still more observations swam into my perception. When had my village turned so shabby, with the houses ill-kept and the fountains dry? Why were ragged men begging instead of working?

The central hall of the exchange was closed to the public. I cannot remember if I passed sentries or locked

doors before finding myself looking into the atrium from the great doorway. The eyes of the dons and their men were all on me, the last echoes of their bickering dying in the rafters of the room. How I must have looked, I can only guess at, their faces moving slowly from annoyed patronizing respect at the disturbance of a foolish old dandy to something more like concerned fear. It pleases me to think they saw the Unconquered Sun behind my eyes then, but I'll never know.

I must have demanded answers and roared because I was deluged with frantic explanations, gloating litanies of accomplishment and hostile volleys of blame back and forth among them. The sound they made, it seemed to me like beasts crying out in frenzy in a slowly growing cacophonous volume, and in it, I heard only ignorance, greed, murder, betrayal of responsibility and disrespect for the sanctity of community. In their faces, I could see the devils under their skin, jackals and capering apes, things that live only to cram themselves full with no regard for the greater good. My perceptions were warped into a horrific and bent gestalt of painful input, and in the moment that it peaked, the voice began to speak in my head. For what seemed like an eternal instant, that presence laid bare for me the heart of the world and truth of things as they were. As they sat frozen in that demented tableaux around me, I communed. In neat columns and rows, I was shown the bottom line.

"These men are not the bridges between the people, they are widening fissures that keep people apart. In you, I will have a bridge such as the world needs now. You are Exalted, Sand. The experience of age, the vigor of youth and the clarity of righteousness combine in you now. Undo the acts of men such as these, and bridge the people of Creation in my name." I do not know if those were the words, or if there were ever words spoken. It may be that some other, greater communication took place, and I can only know it as words. Surely, there was much more imparted to me at that moment, many truths.

The room, not a small one, was awash in daylight, daylight that spilled from my body and from the banner of the Unconquered Sun's temple and all-seeing eye that filled the air around me. I was armed and armored, after the long moment ended, my own glass and steel sword in one hand and a curved blade of sunlight in the other. Every third man was dead before me in a row where I had cut them down as they tried to flee through me to the door. Most of them were dons, a few were men at arms. From the stunned remainder, I extracted an Oath. They would follow me and the confederacy that was now truly mine, keeping its secrets and furthering its goals, bringing the light of the Unconquered Sun back to the lands of the sand sea of his name. An old man's tired dream of rest was gone, replaced by a burden of great responsibility.







CHAPTER TWO OBLIGATIONS OF THE CASTE



Though the Crowned Suns may not shine as brightly as their Solar brothers and sisters, they are a vital part of the Unconquered Sun's Chosen and play an important role in bringing together their fellow Solars, along with all the disparate Exalted, the nations of the world and even factions such as the Fair Folk and the Deathlords.

Once, the Eclipses were the force that bound the Old Realm together. They traveled across Creation, forging the pacts and alliances that kept the Realm safe and made it strong. They spread the word of the Solar Deliberative and carried its wishes to the four corners of the world. As emissaries of the Realm and Princes of the Earth, they were welcome in every camp, every Manse, every stronghold, and their words reached the ears of the mighty and the humble alike. Their efforts wove the fabric of society and kept it from fraying.

But the Curse of the enemies of the gods grew in the hearts of the Solar Exalted, and the Crowned Suns turned from their duties as righteous censors and officials of the Realm. Duty was replaced with self-interest, and honest negotiation with back-room deals and secret pacts sworn in the dead of night. The powers of the Eclipse Caste were used not only to enforce oaths and contracts rightly sworn, but as forms of trickery and treachery that forced others into slavery and bound them in service to the Realm — or simply to the Exalt who sealed the pact. After the Dragon-Blooded rose up to

slaughter their Solar leaders, the Eclipse Caste became known as the Deceivers, the most foul and devious of Anathema. Stories are still told about how they can trap men in webs of lies and chain their souls in eternal servitude.

The reborn Solar Winds find that the Age they recall is but a dim memory, the old order swept away by the rebellion of the Dragon-Blooded and centuries of their Dynasty ruling over Creation. The intricate tapestry woven by the Eclipse Castes and their Exalted brothers and sisters in the First Age lies in tatters. It is up to the Quills of Heaven to gather all the scattered and broken threads and weave them into something new and strong again. It remains to be seen whether or not things are damaged beyond repair and what new pattern will emerge from the work of the Harmonious Voices. Will it be a restoration of the glory and harmony of the First Age or the creation of something entirely new? Not even the Eclipse Caste itself can say for certain.

THE GOALS OF THE ECLIPSE CASTE

The purpose of the Eclipse Caste is the creation and maintenance of the intricate tapestry of relationships that allows society to both function and prosper. Although it sounds deceptively simple, the work of the Eclipse Caste is perhaps the most complex and subtle of all the Solar Exalted and the most important to the long-



term success of the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun. Other Solars may win great victories on the battlefield or from the podium, transform Creation through their wills and strike with surgical precision against the enemies of righteousness. But it is the Quills of Heaven that write these deeds into history and ensure that the work of their brothers and sisters will not be undone. The Eclipse Castes provide structure, order and permanency and the means to maintain them.

To do this, the Eclipse Caste Solars must first gather allies. Although they may choose to do their work alone, the Harmonious Voices earned that sobriquet by working best in groups, whether that group is a Circle of Solar Exalted or the bureaucracy of a city or nation. The Quicksilver Falcons have a natural tendency to make friends and find potential allies even in the most inhospitable places. The Eclipses are capable of getting others to see their point of view, given time, and can gently guide them into becoming allies, the threads that make up the fabric of society, the raw materials that artists such as the Crowned Suns use in their craft.

Once they have the support of their allies and clear communication, the Eclipse Caste can do what it does best: negotiate and arrange deals. In the First Age, the caste aspired to deal making as an art form, mastering the ability to reach agreements that were mutually beneficial to all sides or at the very least mutually acceptable. In the present, not all of the reborn Solar Winds are so scrupulous — or can afford to be, given the state of the world. They must make what deals they can in hopes of doing better in the future.

Through diplomacy, negotiation and barter, the Eclipse Castes begin to weave the threads they have gathered into a pattern. They create a network of ties between different people, businesses, towns, cities and even nations. A finely crafted contract allows two (or more) businesses to prosper where they each would have failed before. A treaty of non-aggression and mutual protection makes a region safe for its people and ensures stronger ties between nations. A newly formed administration allocates resources fairly and efficiently, to the benefit of all people. An agreement keeps the Deathlords or the Fair Folk away from a vulnerable settlement and saves the souls of its inhabitants.

In order to create new structures, it is often necessary for the Solar Winds to sweep away the old, either to restore what has become corrupt or to create a clean slate where they can write anew. Certainly, the Eclipse Caste Solars see much in the modern Age in need of their attention. They were the censors of the Realm in the First Age, and it was their duty to ensure that the bureaus, committees, councils and even the Solar Deliberative itself were efficient, fair and honest. To the eyes and ears of the Harmonious Voices, Creation is filled

with discord that must be corrected, and the caste possesses the power to bring any bureaucracy to a grinding halt, to topple unjust rulers and to ignite the fires of rebellion and change.

Some of the Eclipse Caste can foresee the day when they will restore the social machinery of the First Age, allowing for a return to its achievements in prosperity, justice, invention and artistry. But only the most naïve of the Crowned Suns believes that this is anything less than the work of multiple mortal lifetimes. The Old Realm was not built in a day, nor can it be restored in one. For that matter, there are those among the Eclipse Caste who think that the time of the First Age is long gone and that the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun should set their sights on other goals. Will their god smile upon any of their efforts? No one knows, although many claim that they do.

SWAN

Snow began to fall as I carried the woman away from the fallen bodies of the Dragon-Blooded, and I gave a silent word of thanks to whatever spirit brought it, hoping that it might help to cover any tracks I left behind. I hoped that the hunters would not be as foolish as I was and would not leave the relative safety of the road to pursue us into the depths of the forest.

I moved quickly, my body and limbs filled with tremendous vigor, despite having just fought several scions of the Realm. The shimmering glow still surrounded me, mixing with the pale rose, blue and violet that radiated from the woman I carried, lighting our way in the darkness but also calling out to any who might follow. The whole scene seemed intensely familiar to me: carrying the limp body of a fallen comrade (for I felt an intense sense of kinship with this woman) through the wilderness in the dead of night, with pursuers close behind us, drawing closer, howling for our blood.

I thought I could almost hear the sound of hunting trumpets through the woods, but I wasn't sure whether it was real or just an image from those dim memories. I quickened my pace, although I wasn't entirely certain where I was going. Away from danger, I suppose. That was my only thought at the time, to get away from there and to gain time to think and to plan.

We had gone some distance, my strides covering more ground than I would have imagined, when I had to pause and catch my breath. I gently set my lovely burden down on a bed of moss that grew around the boles of the great trees that loomed up all around us. The glow that surrounded us both was beginning to dim, and I wondered what I would do if it went out altogether. I might be able to make a torch from a pitch-laden branch or the like.

Almost as if I'd spoken aloud, a small light, like the flame of a torch or lantern, sprang up in the darkness beyond the tree trunks. Only, instead of a warm glow, it shed a cool, greenish light. It hovered there, swaying slightly from side to side. Then, another appeared a short distance away, then, another, and another. Soon, there were dozens of them, lights hovering and darting like giant fireflies, casting a pale green glow over everything.

One of the lights detached from the group and approached me. As it got closer, I could see that it was a small spirit. It looked almost like an infant, with its small body and bulbous head, but its skin was as white as a mushroom, tinged with green, and its eyes were black pools that regarded me curiously as it tilted its head this way and that. It swooped to one side and then the other, as if to see if I was real from both the front and the back. I saw the blur of tiny wings at its back, only half the length of its stubby arms.

Not wishing to give offense to the spirits of the forest, I bowed deeply before it.

"Honored greetings, most noble spirit of the forest," I said. There was sound from the trees like a rush of wind rustling through the leaves, even though the air around me was utterly still.

"Honored greetings to you, Prince of the Earth," the spirit replied in a reedy voice. "You are welcome in our domain."

Words came unbidden to my lips. "I thank you for your hospitality. I ask only for rest and refreshment for my companion and I as your guests. We will take nothing from your forest that is not offered to us, nor leave anything behind that is not wanted here."

There was a moment of silence that seemed to stretch on forever as the forest spirits watched me with their dark eyes. Then, there was a distant crashing noise that echoed through the trees. The glowing spirits scattered like dry leaves, including the one hovering before me.

"Wait..." I began, but they were gone before I could get the words out. I went over to my companion's side to see how she was. Her breathing was slow and regular. I slid my arms underneath her and



forest



lifted her up again. Whatever the sound had been, I didn't want to wait around to meet it.

Suddenly, a green, glowing form zipped out of the darkness to hover in front of me again. I couldn't tell if it was the same spirit or another one that looked just like it, but it spoke to me in its piping voice.

"Come, we will lead you to the Forest Lord."

Being in no position to refuse, I said, "Lead on, brother spirit."

I imagine it was quite a surprise for my Twilight sister, awakening in a dark woodland glade, covered with a blanket of leaves against the cold of the night, with glowing shapes moving off in the darkness. No less a surprise than the sharp, cold blade I found suddenly pressed against my throat when I leaned over her to see if she was awake.

"Welcome back," I said as gently as I could. "There's no need for that. You're safe."

"Who are you?" she said, her ice-blue eyes narrowing.

"My name is Swan. I helped save you from..."

"The Wyld Hunt," she concluded. "On the road. I remember now." She lowered the knife and looked at me as if for the first time and her eyes widened a bit. "You were Chosen as well," she said. It wasn't a question.

I nodded, resisting the urge to rub a hand across my neck. "Yes. It came upon me when I saw you, when I saw the Dynasts attack you. What is your name?" I asked.

"Arianna," she replied curtly. "The Hunt, what happened to them?"

"Some I left back on the road," I said.

"You must handle yourself pretty well then," she said, turning up the corner of her lips in the ghost of a smile that did pleasant things for her color and disposition. I shrugged modestly and inclined my head.

"I get by."

"You said you left some back on the road, what about the others?"

"They pursued us," I said. "But it turned out that they were not as welcome here. The loyal servants of the Forest Lord made that abundantly clear to them, I'd say."

I turned my head toward the shadows among the trees, and Arianna followed my gaze. I heard her gasp slightly as a vast bulk moved out from the darkness, illuminated by the glowing spirits flitting around it and by the soft light shed by our animas. It was like a boar, if such things were made from creaking wood, with thorny spines and a coat of bristling needles. The strong scents of pine, fresh earth and fresh blood wafted from the Forest Lord.

"The trees feed well tonight," he rumbled. "You are welcome here, Children of the Unconquered Sun. It has been a long time since any of your kind have visited us here. You will acquaint your sister with the terms of the oath you offered us?" he said to me.

"I will, noble lord," I replied, dipping my head.

"Oath?" Arianna hissed at me under her breath.

"I'll explain soon," I whispered. "Nothing to worry about."

"Oh, glad to hear it," she replied tartly.

If the Forest Lord caught our exchange, he chose to ignore it. "You are welcome to abide here, but when the sun rises, you must return to the lands of men."

"We thank you for your hospitality," I said, and Arianna also rose to give a slight bow. The Forest Lord seemed satisfied with this and ponderously withdrew from the clearing, back into the dark depths of his woods, leaving the two of us alone, except for the nearby lights of the smaller spirits. There was a long moment of silence before either of us spoke again.

"Well," Arianna said with a note of finality. "It seems that I owe you my thanks for saving my life." I was an admission that cost her, clearly, but also one that she felt was necessary. I was more intrigued by her with every moment.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'm sure I can find a way for you to repay me." Her eyes were cold, until she saw that I did not intend to lie with her. After that hard moment, she smiled as well, as is often the case in such matters. Since then, we have gone beyond having any debts between us. We left the domain of the Forest Lord in the morning, to return to the world we'd left behind. Now that we both knew there were others like us, it was simply a matter of finding them.

MAKING ALLIES

Although the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun are forces unto themselves, they are not and never have been intended to work alone. The Solar Exalted banded together in Circles in the First Age and have begun to do so again. Although the Zenith Caste provides the Solars with their guiding light and strong spiritual and moral center, it is the Eclipse Caste that often facilitates the creation of Circles and alliances among the Solars and between them and other potential allies.

And the Solar Exalted are in need of allies, to be sure. Hunted by the Dragon-Blooded of the Realm, often feared and shunned as Anathema by the common folk, the Chosen need safe havens and support if they are to survive and fulfil their destiny. The Harmonious Voices help to provide these things, with their gifts for making friends and arranging deals. A Circle with an Eclipse member often has a better chance of making it than one that relies on force to deal with its problems.

RUNE

In the spring, when the snow receded from the city walls and the first green shoots began to emerge from the awakening earth, I approached the gates of Whitewall, riding on the back of a reindeer with tack and harness of white leather and silver. Members of the guardians came forth to meet me, and one woman stepped forward, raising a hand in challenge.

"Ho, stranger," she said. "Who are you, and what is your business in the city of Whitewall?"

"I am an emissary of the Winter Folk, come to speak with the Syndics."

"Then you must await their indulgence," the guardian replied sternly, her eyes wary. "For by the terms of the pact, none of your kind are permitted within the walls."

"No Fair Folk perhaps, but as I said, I am merely a humble emissary." I drew back the hood of my cloak to allow them to see my face. "I am Rune, and I am a citizen of Whitewall. I am also the appointed emissary and ambassador of the Winter Folk. By the laws of the Syndics and the terms of the pact, I wish to enter the city."

Word went quickly from the gates and, a short while later, a messenger came to the guardians that watched me. They reluctantly stood aside, hands still resting near their weapons, regarding me with suspicion, as the woman spoke to me again.

"The Syndics grant you entrance to the city, noble emissary," she said, her voice clearly strained with the need for civility. "They say that suitable quarters are being prepared to receive you."

"My thanks," I replied, "but that is not necessary." Then, I rode past the stone-faced guardians and back into the city that was my home. Through the familiar streets, past the curious faces pressed against windows and leaning from doorframes and shops, I made my way to the center of Whitewall, to a place long spoken of in my childhood.

The mighty bronze doors, inlaid with orichalcum, opened at my slightest touch. I felt the arcane defenses withdraw from my presence, and I stepped into the antechamber of pale marble and carved ivory, lit by the springtime sunlight streaming through the high windows. This was my embassy, my sanctum, within the city walls. For a thousand years, it had waited patiently for one of the Chosen to return to it. Now, I was truly home.

As I expected, I didn't have much time to acquaint myself with the Manse before there was a knocking at the door. I opened it to find the guardian who had greeted me at the gate standing there with two others. They seemed a bit startled when the bronze door opened, but the woman stood her ground, hand resting on the hilt of her sword.

"We are to escort you to an audience," she said.

"Very well," I replied. I pulled up the hood of my cloak and stepped out the door, letting it swing closed behind me. It shut with an audible click, and I knew that it would remain fast against any that approached until I returned.

"Lead on," I said to my escort. The woman nodded to the two men with her, and they turned and headed down the street. The woman paused, pointing two fingers at me.

"I just want you to know this," she said. "The Syndics may have decided to allow you back into the city, they may even allow you to stay, but I will be watching you. If it turns out that you have betrayed us to the Fair Folk again, or if you ever put this city or its people at risk, I will kill you. Do you understand?"

I held her gaze for a long moment, reading the intent in her eyes and in her heart. Then, I nodded.

"I understand."

"Good," she said. She did not speak to me again.

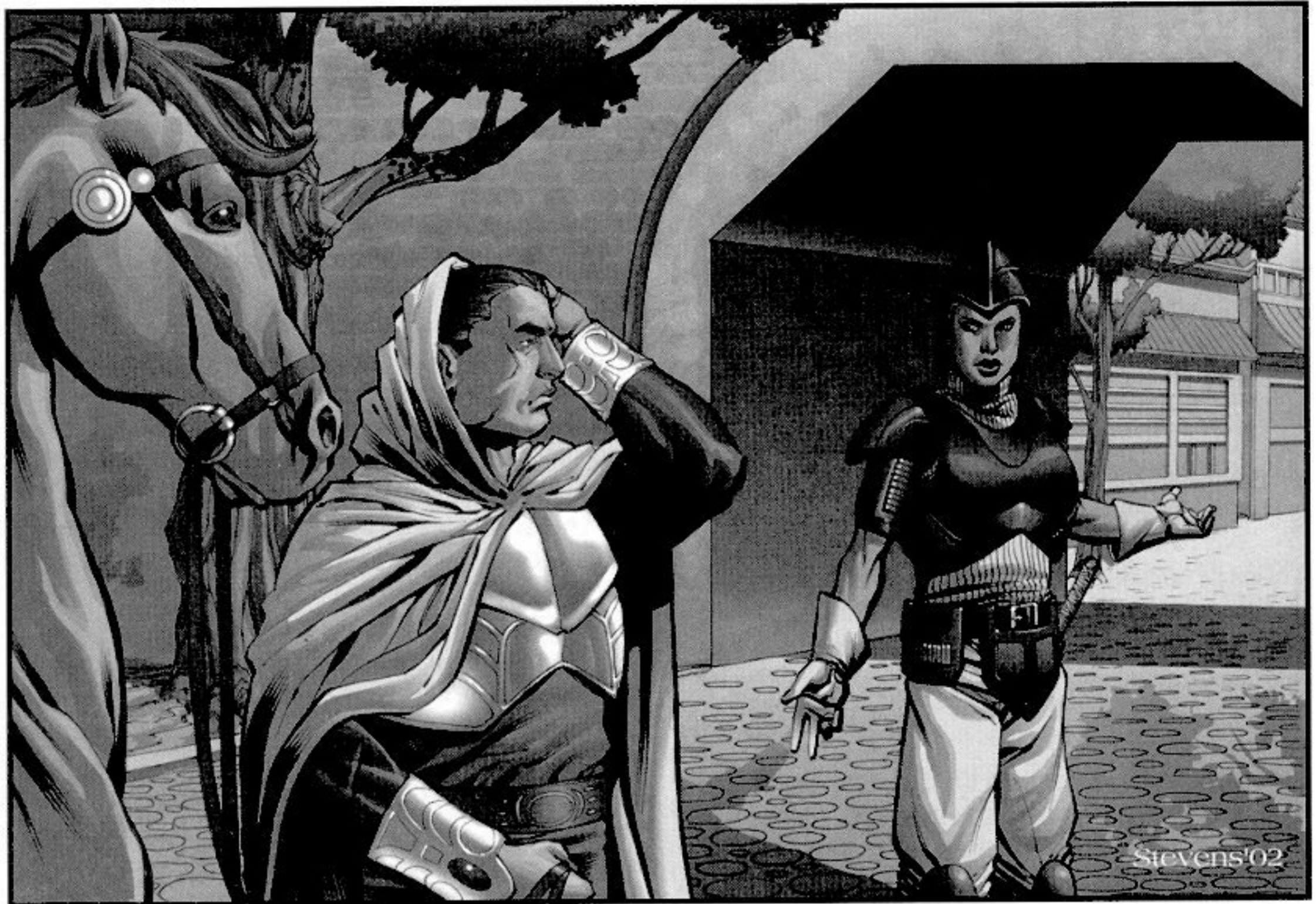
The palace of the Syndics stood in the center of Whitewall, not far from the Manse I claimed, so it was only a short walk through the close and winding streets. People stared as we passed, a few pointed and whispered to each other, and parents hovered protectively over their children, no doubt certain that I would snatch them away and devour them right before their eyes. Their fear helped protect me for the moment, but it could just as easily destroy me, if I wasn't careful. I needed to overcome that fear, if I was going to be successful.

The tall double doors of the Syndics' palace stood open as we approached. The guardians standing watch at the doors nodded to my escort as we entered, and we were greeted by a woman wearing a fine robe of blue with designs along its hem worked in silver and white thread.

"Welcome, Rune," she said to me. "Please come with me. The Syndics are expecting you." The guardians withdrew, and she led me past the Angyalka. I remembered when the demon's music sounded sad and poignant, but now, it sounded light and airy, as the seconds of my listening were no loss to the span of an Exalt. We walked through the maze of corridors in the palace to a chamber that must be near its heart. The domed ceiling above was made of a web of metal struts, supporting panels of glass or crystal, delicately etched with snowflakes, leaves, vines and stars. The sunlight slanting through the panels cast shadowy patterns of the same on the white marble floor. Tall, fluted pillars supported the dome, resplendent with scrollwork, and a raised dais stood beneath the dome, with three thrones of ivory atop it. Seated in those thrones were the immortal Syndics.

They were spirits of vast age, older even than the city itself. Their appearance was identical, spun glass and crystal over silver bones, robed in white gossamer, tall, fine and delicate. They were beautiful to behold but also





cold and sharp like a fine blade. They almost seemed like statues as they sat silently and regarded me. I approached the foot of the dais and dropped to one knee, bowing low, waiting for them to acknowledge me.

"Welcome, son of Whitewall," one of them said. "Welcome, emissary of the Winter Folk," said another. "Welcome, Chosen of the Unconquered Sun, Prince of the Earth," said the third, and I raised my eyes to them at that. "Welcome, to the Hall of the Syndics," they said in unison. Their voices were sweet and sang in the vastness of the chamber, like the ringing of a crystal goblet.

"I am honored by your greeting, noble Syndics," I replied, bowing once more.

"It has been an Age..." one of the spirits said.

"... since we saw one of the Solar Exalted," another concluded.

"Why have you returned to Whitewall?" The third asked.

I rose to my feet. "Out of duty, noble ones."

"Duty?" the three asked at once, inclining their heads quizzically toward the one in the center.

"My duty to my people, to the Fair Folk and to the Unconquered Sun, who blessed me with his power," I said. "I have come to petition you, noble spirits, for the honor of serving you and Whitewall. I wish to place my gifts at your command, to serve as your voice outside these walls. By the ancient pacts and the grace of the

Unconquered Sun, I may walk where few others can. I can help to keep Whitewall safe and to ensure the harmonious existence of its people, your people. I can carry your wishes to the shadowlands and to the Wyld places, to the barbarians and throughout all Creation. I can help to secure the future of Whitewall."

"We already..."

"... have pacts to secure..."

"... Whitewall's future." The Syndics replied. "It is under our protection," they said in unison.

"That is so," I said. "You have forged pacts with the Fair Folk and with the Deathlords, to keep them at bay, but you are without an emissary that can go into the shadowlands or the Wyld places. And what of the Bull of the North?"

The Syndics exchanged glances between them before facing me again.

"What of him?" one asked.

"You have no pact with him. What is he, barbarian leader, spirit or something more?" I let the glow of my anima flare around me, my Caste Mark shining from my forehead. "Who will go to his camp to speak for you, noble lords? Choose me, and I shall not fail you — or Whitewall."

There was a long moment of silence in the cold chamber as the Syndics looked at me, unmoving. The

glow of my anima cast a golden light that shimmered from their crystalline forms.

"You will... swear... to this?" they said, one after the other.

I mounted the steps of the dais and slowly climbed them until I stood only one step below the enthroned spirits. They remained unmoving. I held out an open hand toward them.

"I swear before the face of Heaven that, if given a commission, I shall serve the good of Whitewall and its people, that I shall be a fit and proper emissary and that I shall uphold the law. In return, I shall ask for the support of the city's noble Syndics, the role of emissary of Whitewall and the opportunity to use my gifts well. Should I betray my oath, may the justice of Heaven be swift and sure."

The middle spirit lifted a thin, cold hand and a finger like ice brushed against mine. The symbols of the oath filled the air around us as my anima flared bright for an instant. The Syndics did not look away, their faces expressionless, unreadable. The bargain was made, the oath sealed.

"It is done... Emissary of Whitewall," said the two Syndics flanking their brother.

"Now, for your first task," said the third.

RHIANNA

To the dead, one of the living entering a shadowland must be like someone with a lantern entering a dark room, even more so with one of the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun. It did not take long after Storm and I rode into the shadowland for the servants of the Deathlord to find us.

I took solace from the fact that the Dragon-Blooded had apparently broken off their pursuit, unwilling to enter a shadowland at night, as any sensible folk should be. It was cold comfort, however, when hungry ghosts mounted on horses that were little more than leathery skin and bleached bone took their place. They looked like the remnant of some Dragon-Blood's household cavalry. We rode on, but we were both exhausted, while the dead do not tire. It wasn't long before they began to close in on us, as the dark outline of Thorns loomed in the distance.

In a narrow gully, we turned to face them. I drew the short blade that I mostly used as a skinning knife, the only weapon that I carried. Storm snorted and pawed at the dry and dusty ground. The dead would not feast on either of us easily.

They approached in complete silence. No hunting cries, no wails, no shrieks of victory. Not even the sound of breathing, only the soft clumping of dead hooves on dead soil, the feel of dead eyes brushing over me. Four

THE ART OF THE DEAL

One of the things that the Quills of Heaven do best is arrange deals, agreements and various sorts of pacts. These ties bind the fabric of society together and give the Eclipse Caste the ability to chart the future through its abilities. Although some can approach the caste's ability to arrange a deal, none can match its unique powers to sanctify the agreements its members make. A pact witnessed and sealed by one of the Eclipse Caste cannot be broken without a terrible curse, and few are willing to take that risk.

Exactly *how* this curse manifests itself is up to Heaven, as interpreted by the Storyteller, but the Crowned Sun can direct it to a certain degree. Members of the Eclipse Caste sometimes seal agreements in formal rituals where those involved swear oaths that clearly state what fate will befall them if they are foresworn, in which case the curse is likely to take that form. For example, if a warrior swears, "If I am foresworn, may my weapons turn against me in my time of need," then the botches that result from the curse are most likely to happen in the heat of battle. A woman who swears upon her beauty may suffer an accident wherein she is terribly scarred. A man who swears upon his prosperity may suffer a sudden reversal of fortune that leaves him destitute. And so forth.

Given these penalties, people do not swear oaths lightly in the presence of a Quicksilver Falcon. Of course, the presence of one of the Eclipse Caste can help ensure that none of the parties at least intend to break their oath (since it's unlikely they would swear it in such a case). Some also do not know that Heaven will enforce their oath until it is too late. Many of the Eclipse Caste see no need to advertise who are they and what they can do. If someone swears an oath that they don't mean, then they probably deserve what's coming to them.

riders fanned out, two toward either side of us, allowing a fifth to ride between them, straight toward us.

He was different from the others, not a gray and withered creature clad in tatters and rags, but tall and proud, sitting straight in the saddle. He was all-over white, from his flowing white hair to his garments of white silk and satin, accoutrements of white leather, armor and weapons of white lacquer and white jade and the finely crafted white mask that covered his face. The mask was of the face of a beautiful young man who looked





half asleep, lost in some pleasant dream, eyes half closed, lips slightly open as if breathing peacefully. I half expected to see those carved lips move, but when the figure spoke, they remained still.

"Welcome," he said in a soft voice, muffled only slightly by the mask. "Welcome to the domain of His Most Resplendent Majesty, the Lord of Thorns, the Master of the Twice-Born, the Wise and Sagacious Mask of Winters. I am the Palest Ivory, a humble servant of the mighty Deathlord, at your service." He pressed one white-gloved hand to his chest and bowed slightly from the saddle. It was hardly the greeting I expected.

I lowered my blade, but only slightly. "I am Rhianna," I replied, doing my best to keep my voice from shaking. "Daughter of the Marukani."

"Rhianna," Palest Ivory repeated, seeming to savor the taste of the word in his mouth. "Daughter of the Marukani, and of the Unconquered Sun, I see. What business brings you here from the lands of the living?"

"My own business," I replied.

"Of course." I fancied that I could see Palest Ivory smile, although the white mask remained still. "Still, I am sure that my lord and master will wish to greet you personally. He has commanded me to bring you to him. Will you come with us?"

The thought of walking into the palace of a Deathlord sent a chill down my spine, but Storm was exhausted, still breathing in heavy snorts, and although Palest Ivory voiced his question as a request, I didn't doubt that he would force the issue. So I sheathed my blade and put on as polite a face as I could.

"I would be honored," I said. "Please lead the way."

The palace of the Deathlord towered over Thorns, and I could see the living and the dead moving through the streets, although, at times, it was difficult to tell one from the other. Palest Ivory lead the way to the gates of the palace and through them to the grand throne chamber of the Mask of Winters himself.

He was tall, taller than any man I'd seen, standing head and shoulders above me. His thin body was draped in black cloth and metal chains that rattled and clinked whenever he moved. His head was hooded, and his face was covered with a gleaming mask of ice, if it was a mask at all. It betrayed no emotion, no hint of what lay behind it, save for the burning, pale eyes that looked out from behind it at me. Those eyes took in everything, never blinking or wavering. I could not stand to look directly at them for long.

So, I bowed my head in what I thought was the proper manner and gave my respects to the Lord of Thorns. He returned my greeting in a deep and sonorous voice.

"You are welcome in my domain, Quicksilver Falcon. I am told that you fled here from the scions of the

Realm." When I nodded, he continued. "Well, you need have no concern. You are safe here, and you may remain as long as you choose as my honored guest."

"I thank you, noble lord," I replied, "but I ask only for enough time to rest myself and my steed before returning to the lands of the living." I feared the Deathlord's response would be anger or rage, that he would have me cast into a dungeon or imprisoned in one of the high towers of his palace. Instead, he merely inclined his head graciously.

"Of course," he said. "I have already commanded that suitable quarters be prepared for you. Use them as long as you wish. I only ask one thing of you before you depart."

"What is that?" I asked.

"That you take some letters I have written to the council of your people, the Marukani, so that I may extend my greetings and goodwill toward them. It has been... difficult to find a suitable messenger."

"Certainly," I replied. Then, I was given leave to rest, so the one called Palest Ivory led me from the chamber to the quarters set aside for me in the palace. They were fit for a prince, and my rest was undisturbed. The Deathlord's servants brought me food and even washed and mended my clothing. Palest Ivory presented me with this bow that I carry before I left, saying that I would need something more suitable to defend myself once I left the shadowland. I took the Deathlord's missives, sealed by his own hand, and promised to bring them here.

That is my tale. I offer myself up to the judgment of the council, but I ask only one thing. If you wish to reply to what the Mask of Winters has to say, then consider which circuit rider you can send into the shadowland to safely deliver such a message. If you will have me, I would be honored to take up that duty. If not, then I know a place where shelter awaits me.

MIRROR FLAG

I foment rebellion. It sounds very simple, just three words to say it. This apparent simplicity is a failing of the language to reflect the true depth of the meaning of the three words. Consider that "I love you" is also only three words, but is a statement enormous in its implications. No matter. The truth is that what I do is not nearly as important as how I do it. Anyone can stir commoners to violence. What I do is art.

It may seem to an outside observer that what I do is performance, entertainment. Another such observer, more shrewd, sees manipulation. The truly perceptive see I am a weaver, pulling together the lines of lives and groups to form a orderly and beautiful pattern. This is what the Quills of Heaven, the Eclipse, do. We are the agents of unity, the sunlight that leads men to each other

LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is the lifeblood of any civilization, and it is central to the duties of the Eclipse Caste. The members of a group or community must communicate if they are to work together. The tributaries or citizens of a nation must communicate with their leaders and their leaders must be able to make their decisions known to the people. Nations must communicate with each other to avoid unnecessary conflict and to maintain cooperation and trade. Without communication, the delicate fabric of society begins to unravel until there is nothing left but chaos.

Therefore, the Eclipse Caste Solar Exalted are gifted in all areas of communication. They can compose messages that are simple, concise and effective. They know who to talk to and when, where and how to talk to them. They can pass messages up and down any chain of command or organizational structure, and they are able to get from place to place quickly to deliver whatever messages they carry. Communication facilitated by the Quills of Heaven is clear, prompt and effective.

Conversely, the Eclipse Castes understand exactly how to interfere with communication as well. They can mire an enemy bureaucracy in confusing and contradictory orders and directives. They can spread propaganda that makes lies out of their foes' claims. A few carefully placed words can turn almost anyone into a social outcast, and the Quicksilver Falcons know all the ways to disrupt an enemy's supply lines and logistics while maintaining their own. Any ruler who underestimates the abilities of the Eclipse Caste may not rule for long.

and under which everyone is one family, and what the family of humanity needs right now is unity in revolt.

Revolution, I want to make clear, is not my calling. It is my palette and inspiration, currently, and the goal of my work. Art is my calling, but art serves the needs of society and the times. Those needs, in the world as it is, are uprising and rebellion. When these needs change, so will my medium and themes. For now, and for as far as I can see ahead, revolution will remain the focus of my craft.

Does it seem that the terms I use and the explanations I offer are vague and contradictory? This is a paradox for many. Does life inspire art, or does art inspire life? What is art? Does someone like myself use

art as an outlet for the passions of the people, or do I use art to make those same passions appear? The truth is, and this is one of the only solid truths I know, that it is both. You cannot understand it unless you immerse yourself in it and feel the cycle, like a heartbeat, the thrum between men and their hearts, ideas and people. Even then, no two people will give you the same definitions or feelings on the subject, yet all of them are true. Even now, I feel like these words fail to do anything but raise more questions. This is the danger of trying to speak in all-encompassing terms on a subject such as this, a task better left for the heart, to feel and not know. I will try to speak only of specifics as they apply to me and my feelings on the subject, where I can be more certain of truths.


Art, in my life, is wielded. It is a weapon and a tool, not an inert thing to be passively admired or a luxury for mere entertainment. Music, acting, dance, storytelling, writing, all types of performance and craft, these things can be used on people and groups as a smith uses a hammer on metal. On a very small scale, this can mean that a man can be inspired to take a desired action or to examine and adopt a certain belief. The large end of the spectrum allows the construction of social movements, widespread inspiration of certain virtues or support against an unwanted regime or doctrine. It is this end of the scale that fascinates me and is the focus of much of my effort, and it is how my artistic innovations ultimately serve to fulfill my role as an Eclipse Caste Exalt. The how of this will become clear near the end of my explanation of my art, though it may not seem so at first. Have faith.

My personal artistic watchwords, my focus within my focus, are involvement and empowerment. To me, these are two sides of one coin and the root of my calling as an Eclipse. Together, these two things form an artistic doctrine predicated on inspiring within people the feeling that the world belongs to them and that what they do is a vital part of Creation. It is a doctrine of participation. People who feel as if their participation will have a measurable effect on their world, amazingly, will do just that — participate.

It seems valid as an idea. I knew it was valid when I first saw it in my mind's eye. Implementing this doctrine, making it tangible, was something I had to think long on. I am lucky for the wisdom and insight of the many teachers I have had, but most lucky to count among them Spinner of Glorious Tales. His divine storytelling techniques demonstrated to me the flexibility of truth required for my doctrine to be made manifest.

I'll take as the basic unit of my art the tale, for purposes of illustrating my methods and doctrine of participation. Put simply, a tale can inspire. If I want to evoke a certain mood or idea in someone, I can tell them a tale about the thing I want to inspire. There are a





number of flourishes or enhancements I can include as part of the tale if I wish it to function better. I could tell a tale not obviously about the subject I wished to inspire and, through my skill in telling, lead the audience to come to the desired conclusion on its own. I might tell a tale that contains the opposite of what I want to inspire and, in the telling of the failings of a negative, inspire the inverse positive. The list is long, endless probably, but there is one simple flourish that is notable in its effectiveness. In this method, the tale is one of the thing you hope to inspire in the audience, but the teller makes the heroes of the tale similar to the audience. The audience will see itself in the role of the hero in your tale and, by the power of that connection, be more inspired. This is the first step toward inclusion of the people in the art, identification.

The step up to acting from tale provides the next component of my technique. In acting, the characters from our tales are now portrayed by players. The tale is more real, all the parts are more than just words. Movement, dress, expression, these things give us a more dynamic and deeper expression of what was just a story before. This richer texture for the tale gives the audience a far greater range of options as to how they connect to the tale and find their inspiration within it. The tale has become a simulation of real events. This is the discipline of art where I found my deepest passion, as a girl. For me, it was like going to another place, transported to the world or time where the events of the drama occurred, and it has colored my feelings about what I do now and the terms I use to describe it.

Identification and simulation, from these two things I synthesize the next artistic theory that forms the foundation of my doctrine, demonstration of possibility. It's not innovative, just a combination of the two previous ideas. Use of players provides simulation, and the plot they act out features characters that are designed to mirror the audience, providing identification. The end result is a performance where the audience sees people like themselves doing great deeds, and their hearts are awakened to the possibility of performing those deeds themselves, to a degree that a simple tale could never have done so.

Without the divine, the next and final iteration of the core ideas of my doctrine would be not impossible, but terribly difficult to implement. My state as an Exalt and the Charms I have because of it effectively compress weeks of planning and effort into a few moments. I can learn to know people as if we'd shared years of friendship with only a handful of interactions. This and more I can do as the Unconquered Sun's bard, and what is a process of planning and writing for a mortal artist is, for me, a constant, an enlightened state in which I am always directing my part of the plot of Creation.

The doctrine of participation's final leap ahead, the core concept that enables success with my method, stems both from a sudden inspiration I had at the time of my Exaltation and from lessons I have learned from my mentor Talespinner: the falsehood of the concept of truth. It seems a paradox, perhaps, but it allowed me to conceive of my doctrine, and that is all that matters. That realization itself is significant, but it is not the final concept of my doctrine. Rather, it permits the final concept.

Demonstration of possibility, as I have said, combines identification on the part of the audience with a simulation of a possible scene using players. From this, by way of the inspiration of the unimportance of truth, I arrived at the root of the doctrine of participation: There is no need to draw a line between actors and audience. The idea of identification exists only to make an audience feel at one with the characters, but there is no need for that abstraction under my doctrine. The audience can be the actors. This is my enlightened inspiration, erase the line between players and audience, between tale and Creation, between teller and tale, and between truth and fiction. No longer is there a need for characters to resonate with the audience, to form a connection. All people are characters in the tale of life under my doctrine. Everyone is the hero of their own tale.

I am the author of these tales. I can sense the flows of energy in all manner of relationships between people, groups, even nations. From this, I can see where changes to the story must be made to steer the story toward a more productive denouement or to slow the pace to build the needed tension. I can control the scenery and the props; engineering these things is relatively simple to me. I can even control the actions of the supporting roles in someone's tale, surely someone in your life did something to inspire a wise course of action on your part once. In many people's lives, that person was actually me. It is beauty, isn't it? I can unify everyone I come in contact with. They can all be part of the company of performers that includes everyone in Creation. This is how my work is true to my caste. This is the unity I foster and the way that I bring people together as heroes.

I trust that the necessity of a fluid definition of truth is apparent. The great masters of storytelling certainly felt no compunction to limit themselves to truth in their craft, and with good reason. When speaking to the hearts of the people, facts are not the language best suited. Emotion, passion, inspiration, these make up the alphabet of the artist with which we can write words of rebellion or unity or whatever we are called upon to write. And truly, we can make the tales we tell come true if we are skilled and passionate enough, for a man who is told that he is a hero will be one. Truth is not fact. It

is what people believe. I work to make people believe they can take back their lives, their world, from tyranny, and if they believe that, it will be the truth.

ADMIRAL SAND

There's a world of difference between knowing something in your heart and being able to transform that knowledge into words that others can understand. I have a pretty solid idea of what I'm doing as an Exalt. I have from the start. That's not a universal among the Sun's Chosen though. The few others I've had contact with don't have the same feeling. It's possible I was Exalted for just that reason, that I would take to it well and see what I needed to do without needing much conscious deliberation on my part. Still, in order to communicate how I see things to other Exalts, I need to be able to justify my actions and motivations in words and not just my thoughts. What is it I bring to the table, so to speak, as a soldier in Unconquered Sun's army?

It's safe to assume that my skills and accomplishments in life before my Exaltation are the reason I was chosen, either because of the accomplishments themselves or because my actions shaped me into the man I am. A large assumption, some might say, but I refuse to believe the Unconquered Sun would invest in people randomly. What did I do in life that was noteworthy to attract this attention, then? A few things come to my mind, but they might require some explanation to see as anything but the biography of a merchant.

I made myself very wealthy, financially. Very wealthy. This is the first thing that those who have known me in my lifetime think of when they think of me, I imagine. More to the point, I made myself wealthy from humble beginnings. I was not born to wealth. My family is not old. I had two assets at the beginning of my career, and I parlayed them into my later success. These things were youth and the ability to accurately weigh the risk of a situation in relation to its possible payoff.

Youth, I've since learned, is not a function of age, but one of outlook. The youth of the young is just the free sample we are all given and all too often let slip away. What youth gives us is hard to encapsulate in a few words. It makes us vigorous, gives us a desire to go out into the world and do things with our lives instead of hiding behind the perceived safety of the status quo. Those who have lost their youth often say of those who have not that they are foolhardy or have a devil-may-care attitude toward life. I don't think this is true at all. I think that those who productively embrace their youth know that the world will go on without them if they don't work to be a part of it. The other gift of youth is a stronger tendency to look for the gold of any situation over the pyrite. Only those who have lost their youth go into an endeavor looking for the downside. In all things,

I stay aware of the possibility of failure but try to focus on the possibility of success.

Having said it aloud now, I can see how my youth was intimately connected to my other asset, the ability to accurately analyze the risk to benefit ratio of any enterprise. From the start, I always looked at both the upside and the downside of things, where most folks see only one or the other. I guess this makes me better able to see the big picture of things, and a bigger picture is often a truer picture. Gambling is my usual example of this. How many successful men eschew gambling, calling it a fool's pastime? It's so common a thing for merchants to say that it's practically a given to most peoples' view of them. In my eyes, though, their automatic dismissal of gambling is really the fool's pastime. They see chance and money together and flinch away, rarely looking closer and seeing the truth. There are forms of gambling I'll never take part in, forms that are truly just chance. These men are right to balk from them. There are other types, though, often card games and bets on competition, where there is more than just blind chance. Some forms of gambling are more skill than chance: Knowing the rules, the odds and the players; all these things can be learned and applied to games to maximize success. To me, all of life is like this, not just gambling. Where some flinch from a risk by habit, I look close and use my mind to find out how the risk is not a risk at all.

The Unconquered Sun is not, in my opinion, looking solely for people with skill. There are Guildsmen with greater skill than I at developing wealth. I feel I was chosen for another, related reason. I strove to succeed, as any merchant would, but I did it without making any man my victim. This is the distinction made between other men and myself, leading to my Exaltation. There was no loser in the game I played, no back that I tread on to reach my success. I feel, as I did before, that success at the expense of others is not success at all. It is parasitism, and a man who measures success in terms of what it gives only him is not a man. He has separated himself from other men in trying to elevate himself above them. I dislike sounding as if I see myself as a paragon. Certainly, my success meant some failure for those who were in competition with me. This is the nature of life no matter if you speak in terms of trade or love or war. However, there is a line between healthy competition and paving the road to success with the bones of your enemies.

I made decisions not only based on what would benefit me, but my family, my business and society. This is just simple wisdom, for a region where trade is a way for the few to strangle riches from the many will soon have no trade at all. My ethical conduct was a long-term investment in future trade for both myself and all the people, building a productive, cyclic system where trade supported the people, who would then support further





healthy trade and so on. The merchants that most folk are familiar with, the Guild, have great skill in commerce but lack this last component. They seek only to further themselves, not all mankind. I suppose they cannot be blamed, truly. I could not change more than a small number of people to my way of thinking as a man. The obstacles are too numerous and great for one man to do much, and so, I think that, as men, they cannot see the change they could make. Men have one life, one short span in which to learn these things and apply them, to work toward the needs of all men and not just their own, and one life is not long enough.

I, however, am no longer a man. I have been elevated to a state where my personal needs are so simply dealt with that they take up only a tiny fraction of my attention. I can — I am bound to — make the well-being of mankind my concern. I am an Exalt, and it is my duty to be a custodian to mankind. I can see the big picture in a way that no man can, and I have the power to take as my responsibility tasks that no man could.

To the Eclipse Caste is left the duty to cross boundaries and to connect people, to make them one. Commerce does both of these things. It is my calling, and so, it is the tool I use to fulfill my duty. The details of trade are many and complex (and often boring), but there are

a few high points I can hit to make clear exactly how vital it is and how powerful a tool it can be to bring order and righteousness to Creation.

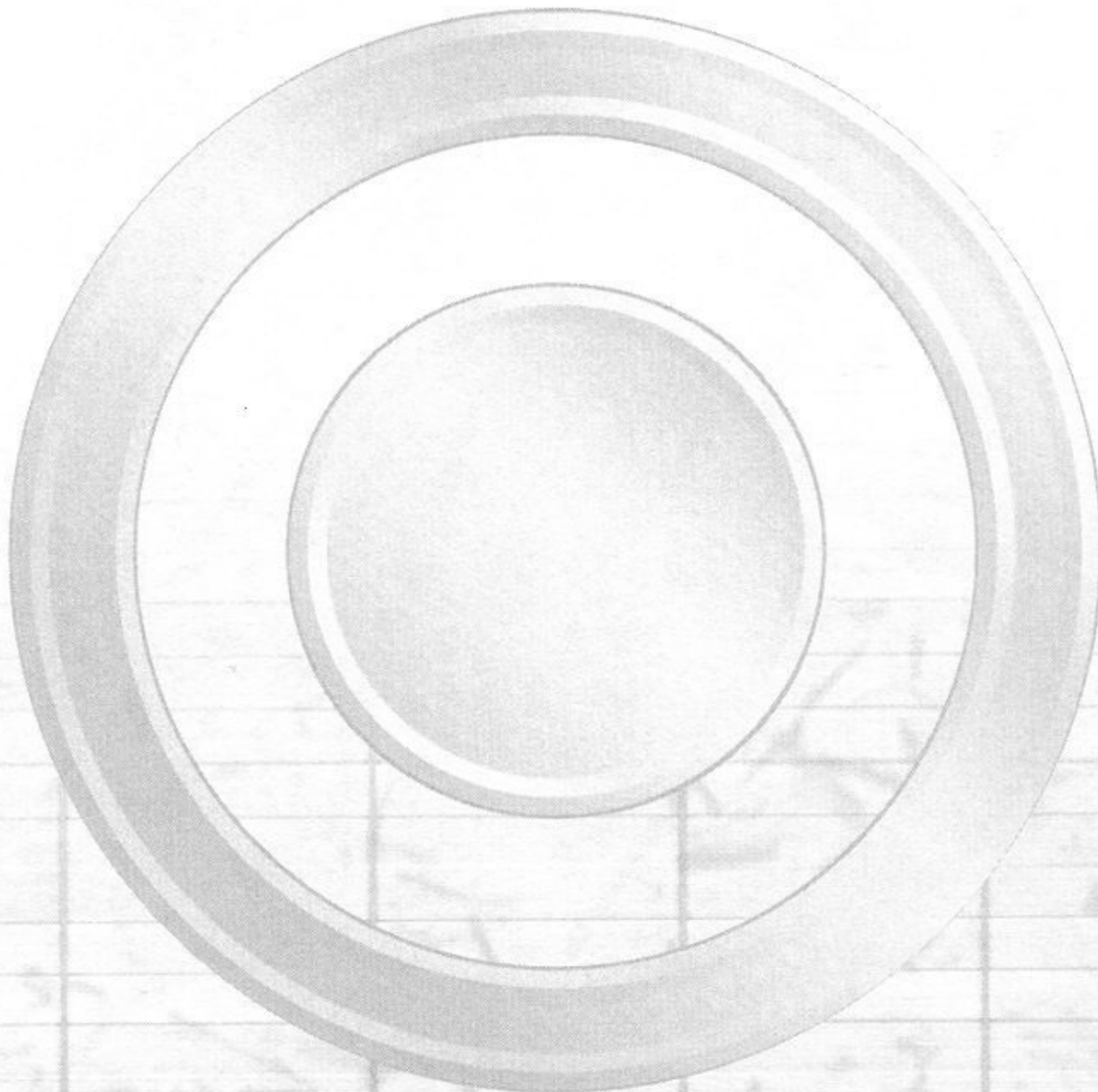
Trade makes wealth not just for the merchant, but for everyone involved. Farmers, craftsmen, laborers and governments all benefit from the flow of resources and employment opportunities from area to area. Merchants are simply the agents of this flow, bringing rare goods to an area and taking surplus from it. When wealth is common, there is growth. Wealth is like the sun: When there is just enough sunlight, crops yield only minimally. When there is ample sunlight, plants grow beyond the norm. In this way, wealth enables men to escape the cycle of fulfilling need and have the luxury of progress upward from baseline survival. In short, wealth lets us be more than beasts. It lets us do things beyond worry over food, shelter and mating.

Trade spreads ideas and information: Dunerunner crews are the main source of timely news and gossip on the Sun's Sea, which is most of the landlocked South. This flow of news and ideas back and forth from different nations does so many different things that I could write a series of books on the subject — and may someday. For now, I hope that some of the significant uses for it are obvious. One thing I've specifically tried to use this facet



of trade for is to bring pressure on Paragon and Gem and slow their inexorable march toward a very messy and costly conflict here in the South. Because of my regular and fast trade routes, I can make sure that news of the doings of both nations is common knowledge all over the region. By keeping those on both sides, and third parties, well informed, I can make a stalemate much more likely. I hope to make more use of this in the near future. I reason that if I popularize the misdeeds of some nations or organizations, those same entities will be cowed into performing less of those misdeeds because of the pressure from the other nations. Its dangerous — but a great boon for the people who would otherwise be victims of warring titans such as Rankar and The Perfect. Never underestimate as well that both of those fellows make a great deal of jade from commerce, commerce in no small way enabled by me. I've taken great steps to make my trade network lucrative for the Perfect, for now, so it's in his better interests to play the game rather than to make war. Soon enough, I will have to work toward a more final solution, though. He is a dangerous man and will not stay sated for long by my alliance.

There is more, so much more. What seems to me in my heart to be a simple duty and method gets larger and more complex when I put it into words. I would not have thought it to be this way. This is why it's my duty, then. My actions illustrate all I've tried to explain far better than my words. I do want to make one thing clear about me and about what you've heard. I am an Eclipse, and I am a tradesman. Do not think that just because I excel at these things, that I think these methods are the only ones. I would be foolish to adhere to only one model for success. I am a leader, and I have a people and a world to make strong, and so, I will not use the methods of diplomacy and trade on those who do not deserve them or who will squander my efforts. These men, as you have heard, Armattan or I kill after offering them the chance to deal civilly with us. It is a simple matter of the bottom line. The more time I waste negotiating with a villain, the less time I have to work with those who will understand and benefit. It is no less a valid path for one of my caste. I simply opt to make the good strong instead of trying to batter myself in converting some despot to righteousness.







CHAPTER THREE THE WORLD AWAITING US



The Eclipse Caste is made up of worldly folk. While some Solar Exalted can afford to ignore certain things about the world, the Harmonious Voices deal with others as part of their duty and calling. This tends to make the Eclipse Caste the most broad-minded and social of all the Solar Exalted. Of course, the Crowned Suns do not all deal with the world in the same way, but they do all deal with it, one way or another.

The members of the Eclipse Caste are gifted diplomats, allowing them to get along at least civilly with almost anyone. The Harmonious Voices are fairly open-minded and willing to negotiate, although they're still subject to their own prejudices and preconceived notions about others. Eclipse Caste Solars can still be stubborn, irrational and even fanatical about certain views. They're just better at concealing such things when the time comes to negotiate or to act properly in public. Most truly are open to understanding the views of others, which is one of the things that makes them such able diplomats.

Like all of the Solar Exalted, the Crowned Suns begin their lives as ordinary mortals, albeit mortals of extraordinary potential. Their early lives and their dealings with others shape their opinions of the world around them. The Eclipse Caste tends to arise from mortals with natural gifts in diplomacy, organization, leadership and empathy for others. The members of the caste are often well traveled or worldly even before taking the Second Breath, having experience as courtiers, diplomats, merchants or messengers. They may

have seen much of the world and its diverse ways. Some, on the other hand, have never left the boundaries of their hometown or village before their Exaltation, which opens new vistas for them to explore.

Quicksilver Falcons that hail from the Threshold have usually experienced firsthand the often-brutal nature of governance and diplomacy there, where "negotiations" are conducted at swordpoint and "agreements" are reached under torture or duress. Eclipses may take it upon themselves to undermine such corrupt regimes or to support those reasonably stable and just governments of the Threshold (or both). Those Eclipse Caste who come from the Realm are often more cosmopolitan and experienced in the ways of courtly intrigue. They can be somewhat at a loss, however, in the savage and far less genteel frontiers of Creation, where these heroes must often go to avoid the attention of the Wyld Hunt.

When creating an Eclipse character, consider his or her early life experiences and how they have shaped the character's views of the various factions and peoples of the world. The views of the narrators of this book are only a sample of the diverse opinions of the Crowned Suns.

SWAN

OTHER SOLAR EXALTED

The Unconquered Sun never meant for us to have to stand alone. That is why the different castes of his Chosen

compliment each other so well. We each have a role to play in the greater scheme of things, and it works best when we carry out our roles as it was intended. Of course, sometimes, we don't always agree on exactly what our intended roles are, which can make for some... lively debates.

I'm fortunate to be part of a Perfect Circle, with a member from each caste. We balance each other quite well, I think. Panther, our Zenith, gives us passion and drive. He is the voice of the Unconquered Sun, the heart of our Circle. He gives us the courage to do what must be done, and he certainly never fails to point out when he thinks we're wrong about something. Dace is Dawn Caste, straight and true as an arrow, striking right to the heart of any problem. He's our finest warrior and tactician, able to turn any situation to his advantage. He confronts danger head-on and triumphs over it. Harmonious Jade, our Night Caste, is our cunning and stealth when she deigns to stand with us. When Dace and Panther's direct approach fails, her subtlety often wins out. Arianna is our Twilight, the intellect of our Circle. Her knowledge and keen insight help us to decide wisely, and she cautions discretion and thoughtfulness to temper our passions.

And I am the voice of our Circle. I speak for my brothers and sisters before mortal rulers, spirits, Deathlords and Fair Folk. I explain our needs to others, and I tell them what we have to offer in return. I arrange the things that let us focus on our goals, and I find us ways to reach the places where we need to go.

Although I was trained to be self-sufficient and believe that everyone should be capable of looking after themselves, I find that when I stand with my brothers and sisters at my back, there is no task we cannot accomplish together. As a Circle, we are more than just individuals. We are part of a greater whole. So has it been, so may it always be.

THE REALM AND THE DRAGON-BLOODED

I was raised and taught to distrust and dislike the Realm and the Dynasty that rules it. Since leaving home, I have learned a great deal more about both, and my distrust has only grown, but along with it has come a measure of respect, and perhaps even understanding, for the Dragon-Blooded and their Realm.

The key to understanding the Dragon-Blooded is entitlement versus service. Some of the noblest people I know are servants. Not necessarily menial workers (although there have been some), but people who dedicate themselves to caring for something other than their own advancement. It might be service to a nation, to an ideal, to a people or service to a god, but it is the ability to set aside selfishness and give of yourself to something greater. Now, there certainly are those who believe that they serve a cause but really only serve their own delusions or needs. I've dealt with more than my share of fanatics, enough to know that they're everywhere. There is a fine line between dedication and fanaticism.

The Dragon-Blooded — all of the Exalted — were once dutiful servants of Heaven. Even the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun, placed above all others, were still servants of his glory and the will of the gods. It was when the Exalted abandoned the ways of service that the First Age came to a terrible end. The Solar Exalted turned from their duties to glorify themselves. The Dragon-Blooded rebelled and seized power for themselves, and the Lunars and Sidereals abandoned Creation to its fate.

The Realm and the Dragon-Blooded no longer serve. They *are* served instead. The Terrestrial Exalted are raised to believe that they are entitled to the role of Princes of the Earth and masters of the Realm. Tributaries are taxed to support the Realm and not for the common good. The Thousand Scales is riddled with corruption and bureaucrats who look after only themselves and their own careers. Even the Immaculate Order, which has some element of service in its tenets, supports the "birthright" of the Dragon-Blooded.

Their selfishness is the Dynasts' weakness. The true servant understands sacrifice in the name of something greater. To the entitled, there is nothing greater than they are. The true servants of the gods will do what is necessary to right the balance of Creation. What are the Dragon-Blooded willing to sacrifice to hold up their tottering empire?

THE THRESHOLD

As a boy, I always dreamed of traveling and seeing distant lands and faraway places. Since my Exaltation, I have visited the distant corners of Creation and seen lands and wonders I could scarcely have imagined. I have learned that the world is far wider and many faceted than I once thought. It was once wider still, but even the shadow of Creation's former size and glory is a wonder to behold.

What I learned about the Threshold is that, despite differences in culture and background, people are much the same throughout Creation. They want the same things: safety, comfort, love and companionship. They struggle against the same risks: hunger, disease and the whims of the gods and fate. Despite the machinations of nations and rulers, the people of the Threshold want peace and prosperity. They want order and efficiency, although they're often forced to do without either.

When we Solar Exalted give them what they need, they look favorably upon us. When we're just another threat they have to survive, they look on us with suspicion and fear. We should look to serve the needs of the Threshold. If we do, its peoples will reward our help and service with loyalty and support. This is how the First Realm was built, and it is how we can rebuild it, if we have the patience and the strength to do it.

OTHER EXALTED

I mentioned that the downfall of the Exalted was that they stopped serving others and served only their own needs and desires. It was true of the Solars and the Dragon-Blooded, and



it was also true of the Lunar and the Sidereal Exalted, though from what I've seen, our Exalted cousins have not benefited as much as the Dragon-Blooded have.

The Chosen of Luna live as beasts in the Threshold and the edges of the Wyld. They have all but forgotten their time as civilized beings and given themselves over to their animal drives and needs. They have turned away from the world, lost in their own private suffering. Some have become bitter and twisted, while others have fled so deep into themselves that I do not know if they can be called thinking beings any more. More than any of other Exalted, the Lunars are only a fraction of what they once were.

I know that most of my Circlemates on some level consider the Lunars nothing more than beasts and prefer to deal with them accordingly. I try to remind them that the Chosen of Luna are not monsters or that, if they are, then we Solars had a hand in their making. We owe a debt to the Lunar Exalted, our ancient mates and companions. More importantly, I believe that the Lunars still have a role to play in Creation. Just like the Solar Exalted must come together, we have to unite the scattered Celestial Exalted to restore the balance of Creation.

There was a time when we would have known exactly how to find that balance by consulting with the Sidereal

Exalted, the Chosen of the Maidens, but they are as scattered as our Lunar cousins — and even rarer. We have encountered Sidereals from time to time, or rumors of them, but they are no longer the same seers that advised the Solar Exalted in the First Age. They've become the leaders of cults or hermits living in isolation. Like the Lunars, they have lost their way.

THE DEATHLORDS

The presence of the shadowlands and the Deathlords in the world are proof of how far matters in Creation have shifted out of balance. Even the line between the living and the dead, between the world and the underworld, has become blurred. The Deathlords are dangerous foes because death feeds their power. That's why I counsel my Circle to negotiate with them. Until we have the means to deal with the Deathlords, struggling against them may only make them more powerful. Better to turn that strength to our advantage against enemies we can deal with and bide our time.

That was the plan when we visited the city of Thorns and the Deathlord Mask of Winters. The place is a shadow of the living world, form without substance. The Restless Dead go through the motions of life, but it's like a sort of macabre play, an imitation of life. The Mask of Winters was willing to agree to a mutual treaty with us, as I suspected.

Exalted



I'm sure that the Deathlords see us much as we see them: potentially useful and perhaps the most dangerous of their foes. So, better to ally with us, bide their time and look for weakness. Sooner or later, it will come down to us against them, when there are no other enemies to fight. I think that conflict will decide the future of the world.

What troubles me most about the Deathlords are their Abyssal Exalted. Where did they come from? If the Deathlords created them, does their power rival that of the Celestial Incarna who created the Exalted? I cannot believe that is true, but if it is, well, we were created to overcome the enemies of the gods before, and we can do so again. I would like to know more about the Abyssal Exalted, but they have remained elusive so far.

RUNE

MORTALS

If I learned anything growing up in Whitewall, it's that people need someone to look after them, to keep them from wandering into danger they can't see, to protect them from what lurks out in the night. If it weren't for the protection of the Syndics and their pact, monsters would have overrun Whitewall long ago, turning its people into soulless slaves of the Fair Folk or adding them to the ranks of the hungry ghosts. The world is a dangerous place, and humanity is prey for many cunning hunters.

It's our duty as Exalted to hold back the darkness, each in our own way. Some castes do so with weapons, others with divine fire, and some with the light of knowledge. I keep people safe by going out into the darkness and making the pacts and agreements that will keep it at bay for another night. Exalted do not live entirely in the mortal world or in the world of spirits and creatures that dwell beyond it. We stand on the threshold between the two, keeping watch, because it's our duty and because someone has to do it.

I suppose that sounds self-pitying, but it's simply the truth. As one of the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun, I have power, prestige and wealth. I can do things most men only dream about and walk safely in the realms of demons, spirits and the dead. My lifetime may be measured in millennia. I will see generations pass before me. Yet, there are times when I envy the life of a simple man who works an honest trade, raises a family and lives to enjoy a ripe old age as a respected elder of his community. That isn't destined to be my life, but I want to make sure that more people have the opportunity to make it theirs.

OTHER SOLAR EXALTED

When I was first Exalted, I looked forward to the possibility of meeting others of my kind. I faintly recalled the glory days of the First Age, when the Solar Exalted were like giants, and we worked together to overcome the enemies of the gods and build an empire to glorify them. My first experiences with others of my kind were not what I expected or hoped for.

The first came not long after I returned to Whitewall and laid claim to my Manse. I awoke one night from a sound sleep to the feeling of a presence in my home. I slid out of bed and into a robe, picking up my sword just as I caught a faint sound outside my chamber door. I moved beside the door just as it opened slowly, with barely any sound, and a shadowy form slipped into the room. The edge of my blade was against her neck before she was more than three steps inside.

"How did you get in here?" I asked. I felt her neck muscles tense beneath my blade at the sound of my voice. To her credit, she didn't turn around or do more than flinch slightly. It only took me a moment to recognize her: the guardian who'd greeted me at the city gates when I returned and who'd threatened me before my audience with the Syndics. Macha Pethisdottir was her name.

"If you mean to finish me, be quick about it," she said bluntly.

"I'd prefer it didn't come to that," I said, my blade unwavering. "Now, I'll ask again, how did you get in here?"

"The door was unlocked," she replied.

"Unlocked? That's impossible, unless..." I slowly withdrew my sword, keeping it at the ready, and Macha turned toward me, her pale eyes flashing in the faint light coming in from the hall. It seemed to crown her with a golden halo.

"You're Exalted," I said simply. After a moment, she nodded.

"Yes. Chosen of the Sun."

"Like me."

"Not like you!" she spat. "I don't flaunt who I am, and I don't live in a palace. I do my duty and use my gifts for the benefit of Whitewall, not my own comfort!"

"Then you misunderstand me," I said. "I didn't come to this place for comfort. I came to it because it called me here, because I needed a haven. You should understand that better than most. You obviously found a haven among the guardians, but what sort of haven is there for me?"

"You betrayed Whitewall before," she said.

"Yes, I did. I was alone and foolish and thought that I was in love. I made a mistake, and I paid the price for it. Now, I want to make up for it, to redeem myself. Can you understand that?"

There was a moment where Macha looked at me strangely and I lowered my sword, leaving myself open to her. If she chose to attack me, I had little doubt that I would die then and there. Then, her expression softened a bit.

"Yes. I think that I can understand that."

THE FAIR FOLK

The mistake that most people make where the Fair Folk are concerned is in thinking that they are like us. Although they may wear beautiful guises, the Fair Folk are no more human than a tempest or an inferno. They are elemental forces—chaos given form and substance—and they are not a part of Creation like we are. I made the mistake of thinking otherwise once, but I was lucky. Most who mistake the nature

of the Fair Folk don't live to learn from it, at least not with their minds and souls intact.

It wouldn't be true to say that I understand the Fair Folk. I'm not sure that anyone in Creation truly can. But I did live with them for a time, and I know at least one Fair One quite well, so I have learned some things about them. The first is not to underestimate them because of their appearances. Everything you see and hear of the Fair Folk is illusion and seeming to cover their true natures. Whether they look beautiful or ugly, alluring or terrifying, the Fair Folk are powerful, dangerous and hungry.

What do they hunger for? Many things: love, lust, compassion, courage, fear, hatred, jealousy, rage, delight, sadness and more. They hunger for what is in our hearts and our souls. Our dreams and feelings are a banquet to them, and they need them just as much as we need food, perhaps as much as we need air to breathe. The important thing to know is that for many Fair Folk, the difference between feelings is like the difference between vintages of wine or flavors of food to us. You may prefer one over the other or like many different ones. The same is true with the faerie, and they see no difference between joy and terror, save for how it "tastes" on their tongues. The Fair Folk can bring you to the heights of ecstasy or plunge you into the depths of despair, and they'll do either with equal delight, perhaps even both to add some spice to their fare.

Although my Charms and my status as one of the Eclipse Caste afforded me some protection in the Wyld, I always felt like a beast being fattened for the slaughter. I was always on my guard against treachery and even the hint of danger, and I could only wonder if my wariness and concern were like a pleasant appetizer for my hosts. If so, they showed no signs of it. Life with the Fair Folk was, and is, a constant fencing match, a game of thrust and parry, with the fey always looking for an opening to exploit, always seeking a sign of weakness.

Does that mean that we cannot coexist with the denizens of the Wyld? Not at all. Only that we cannot underestimate them or think that they can know friendship or coexistence as we understand them. Some may, but for how long? We can parley and negotiate with the Fair Folk, and we can learn to treat them with the respect they are due, but keep them at arm's length. You keep a fire in a hearth so that it doesn't burn your house down. You don't take a savage beast and make it a playmate for your children. The same lessons apply to the Fair Folk.

THE ABYSSAL EXALTED

The first task that the Syndics gave me was intended to test my loyalty, I think, as much as my other abilities. They ordered that I escort a tribute to the domain of the Deathlord known as the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears. The "tribute" consisted of three convicted criminals, as required by the terms of the spirits' pact with the Deathlord.

One was a boy scarcely into manhood, arrested for stealing to feed himself and his siblings. Another was a

woman who attacked and wounded a guardian in a dispute. The third raped and murdered a woman, some said under the influence of some spirit. As their punishment, they would be given to the Deathlord, to do with as she pleased. I was keenly aware that I could have been one of them, if I hadn't been exiled. They knew it, too, and I could feel the hatred burning in their stares, mixed with a hopeless resignation to their fate.

The prisoners were chained and forced to walk, since no valuable animals could be risked to transport them. I rode but spent a good part of the time walking my reindeer to allow the prisoners to keep up. Fortunately, the weather was not too cold, so the chances of any of them dying during the trip were small, although it might have been more of a mercy if they had, given what awaited them. Chained as they were, the prisoners didn't try to fight or run, although I slept with one eye open, ready for anything.

A rider met us not far inside the border of the shadowland. She wore black steel armor, beautifully fashioned, that covered her entire body but was molded to make it clear that she was a woman. With her full helm and gauntlets, not an inch of skin was left uncovered. She carried a heavy, doubled-edged daiklave at her side, in a sheath decorated with silver and rubies.

"Are you sent by the Deathlord to guide us?" I asked. Her only response was a slow nod. Then, she wheeled her horse and bade us to follow with a wave of her hand. She did not speak the entire way to the red crystalline palace of her mistress. She just rode silently ahead, occasionally looking back to see that we still followed.

She brought us to the Deathlord, who waited in a long chamber with basalt columns supporting domes of obsidian, jade and quartz, with screens of carved carnelian and curtains of jet beads between them. She sat upon a finely cushioned divan, wearing her whim of the moment, a flowing gown of wine-dark velvet covered with innumerable teardrop jewels, said to be the choicest tears of despair, frozen forever in time. A gauzy veil dripping with more gems covered her face, but what little that could be seen of her delicate features was breathtakingly beautiful.

She barely spared a glance at the prisoners, before commanding her servants to take them away. The boy broke down crying and pleading for mercy as he was dragged from the room, and his sobs pierced my heart. I could see dark lips stretch in a faint smile beneath the Deathlord's veil.

"So, my dear child," she said to the woman who accompanied us. "What do you think of our guest?"

She reached up and removed her helm, a cascade of midnight hair tumbling from beneath it. She was younger than I expected and incredibly beautiful. Her skin was pale and flawless, her lips red as blood. Her lashes were long and dark, lowered almost shyly over eyes like pale green jade. Eyes only a shade lighter than my own, that reminded me so much of my mother or of...

"Aria?" The name escaped my lips in a whisper, and her eyes flashed up to meet mine.





"It is good to see you again... brother," she said softly.

"It can't be," I said, then I felt the light touch of a hand on my shoulder and spun to see the Deathlord standing right behind me. I could feel the cold of her touch, like ice, even through my heavy cloak and my tunic.

"Such a touching reunion," the Lover said. "Rune, have you nothing to say to your sister?"

I turned back toward Aria, who stood silently, eyes filled with hope and expectation. Then, I spun back toward the Deathlord, shaking her icy hand from my shoulder.

"What have you done to her?" I hissed.

"Why, raised and protected her, of course," the Lover replied, like it was the most sensible thing in the world. "What else could I do after her family so cruelly abandoned her?"

"Liar! We never abandoned Aria! You took her from us! You took her and our mother!" Tears filled my eyes, blurring everything except for the Deathlord's mocking smile, behind that concealing veil. I reached for the hilt of my sword.

Suddenly, another blade appeared between us, a heavy blade of black steel cut with graceful runes. For a moment, I caught sight of my reflection in its surface, and my face seemed twisted in a silent scream. I looked to see my sister holding the sword to bar my way, her face set and determined.

"Is this any way for a guest to behave?" the Lover asked me. "I thought you would know better, Rune. Fortunately, your sister does." I looked back at Aria and knew that she would drive that sword through my heart in an instant, if her mistress commanded it.

"Aria, I..." tears filled my eyes and flooded my heart. The words choked in my throat. All the eloquence and etiquette I had seemed meaningless. All I could do was sink to the cold floor and sob, crying for the fate of the sister I had found and now lost again.

I remember being led through the palace and left alone for a time. It was only the thought that I would not give the Deathlord the pleasure of claiming me that gave me the strength I needed not to give in to complete despair. When I recovered, I was told that Aria was "occupied elsewhere" but that I was welcome to return and visit her and that perhaps she would come to see me in Whitewall, if the Syndics permitted. I returned to the city alone but with the knowledge that the Deathlords are the most cunning and dire of foes. I swore then that I would find a way to free Aria from the grip of the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears, even if it meant giving her the release of death.

RHIANNA

MORTALS

All my life, I was raised to be careful. "There are always things out there that are bigger and more powerful than you," my father always said. "That's just one of the truths of life." Just because I'm different now doesn't mean my father's advice is any less true. Spend some time dealing with the powers of Creation, and you'll understand that. The Solar Exalted may

have been a great power once, and we may be again, but for now, there are things bigger and more powerful than we are.

I've thought about the Unconquered Sun's plan in Exalting me (believe me, I've often wondered why I was chosen). I think that it's our mortality that actually makes us what we are. We're not eternal like spirits or the Fair Folk, and we're not born and raised to be Exalted like the Dragon-Blooded. We come from humble beginnings, and we need to remember that, no matter how far we may climb. I don't want to start placing myself on some kind of pedestal high above "common mortals." I'm not a god. I'm a woman. I've been given certain gifts, and I want to use them as well as I can for the good of my people.

Even worse than those who would destroy me simply because of who and what I am are those who would worship me. I have had folk believe that I can travel into the shadowlands to bring their loved ones back from death or that I can carry messages to Heaven and set the Celestial Bureaucracy to work on their problems. I've lost count of the gifts and "tribute" I've been offered in exchange for my blessings or for putting a good word in with the powers of Creation. It's enough sometimes to make me want to ride off somewhere no one knows me, to try and find a corner of the world where no one has heard of the Exalted, but I know that's foolish. All I can do is be patient and try and show people who I am: not a god, not a monster, just me.

THE DRAGON-BLOODED

The Dragon-Blooded would be wise to heed my father's advice. I don't think that most of them realize that there's anything bigger than they are in the world. Bigger than them individually, perhaps, but not greater than their Realm and what it represents. The Dynasts that I've seen are certain that they're protected by the power of their house, their family and their title. Even the Dragon-Bloods from places such as Lookshy have the same attitude, that they're part of something that can take on any threat and win. I admire their courage, if not their wisdom.

The truth is, I have no quarrel with the Dragon-Blooded. They picked one with me. I've never particularly liked Dynasts, but the same holds true for any arrogant nobles who think they know what is best for the River Province. The Alliance has dealt with their kind before, and we will again, if need be. It's the Dragon-Blooded that declared the Solar Exalted Anathema, and I know now that's a lie. Do all of the Dynasts know it? Maybe not, but it doesn't change things. I escaped from the Dragon-Blooded before. If the Wyld Hunt wants me, it'll have to catch me first, and when it does, it'll find out that I've learned a lot more about defending myself since that first time.

SHADOWLANDS

The shadowlands were not at all what I expected. Like everyone, I'd heard the stories about the fall of Thorns, about the Deathlord Mask of Winters and his deathknights, stories of hungry ghosts and nemissaries told to frighten and warn us as children. I expected the shadowlands to be places of

torture and perpetual despair, full of wailing spirits and monsters, but they are more than that.

The shadowlands are the domain of the dead, but only the simplest ghost and shades are mindless monsters. Some of the dead are almost indistinguishable from the living, and Mask of Winters and his deathknights are as articulate as noble lords. Plus, there are those living folk who dwell in the Deathlord's domain. I find the shadowlands a place of strange contrasts: dark and frightening, yet a comforting kind of shelter. They are terrible, but also beautiful, with wonders to rival anything that we know. The Mask of Winters is a conqueror but is also a wise and careful ruler. I think it would be a mistake to dismiss the shadowlands as places inhabited only by monsters.

THE EAST

My Exaltation and my work as a circuit rider and messenger have allowed me the opportunity to travel all over the East, and what I have seen gives me some hope for the future. These lands were the heartland of the Old Realm, and we've never sworn allegiance to the Scarlet Empress or her Dragon-Blooded Dynasty. The East is made up of diverse peoples, cities and nations. If they were united together in a common cause, I believe that even the Realm would have cause to worry. I'm not the only one who thinks so, either. I've encountered others, including a few other Solars, who agree.

The difficulty is coming up with a common cause that can bring the people of the East together. Most can't imagine Lookshy and Nexus actually working together, much less uniting the warring Haltan and Linowan, but I think it can be done. They're already connected more deeply than they know — or are willing to acknowledge.

Easterners are fiercely independent, and I don't think we should give that up, but we don't have to in order to work with one another. We need real alliances and treaties that can prevent wars. We need more than military advisors from the Seventh Legion strengthening our defenses against outsiders such as the Realm. Once those are in place, something new will start to grow almost on its own, and the East can become the center of a new power in the world that can rival or even exceed the modern Realm.

MIRROR FLAG

MORTALS

I loved a man once, a handsome poet of Nexus, the most perceptive and passionate artist I had ever known. I had never given my heart to anyone so fully before, and when his body betrayed him, I felt betrayed as well. His death showed me that the love I had in my heart was not meant for one person. My love is for all of Man, not a man. My Exaltation made this doubly true. The components of humanity may come and go, but the one thing that humanity is, that whole, it is my lover and ward. If I lose sight of the forest for the trees, I fear my grief at every defeat and death would be too much. When I think of my love for the world, though, it still wears his face.

My calling as an Eclipse and the way I choose to perform it, conversely, require that I move extensively among mortals as one of them, a different outlook and set of opinions every time. Perhaps it is the fact that I so often switch wholly from one mortal identity to another that permits me to maintain my highly abstracted love for mortals as a whole, the constant interaction on many levels and in different circumstances allowing me my gestalt passion. An interesting idea, but a distraction from the facts: Though I am apart from the mortal world on one level, on another, I am immersed in it constantly. I can and have played the role of nearly any sort of mortal I can imagine, and hence, I know them on a level I don't think could easily be matched.

SPIRITS

I moved in circles, even before being called by the Unconquered Sun, where contact with spirits was not uncommon. A traveling entertainer is at the crux of two vocations that spirits often deal with, wanderer and performer. As for wanderers, it's fairly common knowledge that they see spirits in their journeys, for good or ill. A spirit who's domain is not in a populated area and who desires contact with the world of men has little choice but to deal with whoever happens by. It's simple necessity. Performers see them because performers attract everyone, it's their business.

I was enamored of them then, as a mortal. I could not see the beauty of humanity from inside it, so I sought it elsewhere. In the little gods, I thought to find wisdom and passion that I could not find from my peers. It was an obsession for some time, and I took to the use of bright morning. In hindsight, it is ironic that I spent so much effort trying to become part of the world of Essence and gods and later was Exalted.

My ideas about spirits were not unfounded. I did ingratiate myself with a few of them and counted some as close friends. It was a source of much inspiration to me as a mortal. They are more archetypal than men, narrower and deeper. As a creator of tales, I saw them as similar to the great characters from fiction: by necessity and function often iconic. What I learned from them went, as all things I learn do, into my art.

Now, I am the Unconquered Sun's bard, and they are my peers and contacts. I am not ashamed of my previous pursuit of their friendship. In many ways, it served as a primer for my current state, but I have learned to see them with eyes less eager. Talespinner of Great Forks, my mentor in many things, has helped me understand better the past role of the Solar Exalted in dealing with the spirit courts, and more significantly, we have begun to see the best ways that relationship might be continued in these new times. My allies among the Maidens' children seem tentative about my close relationship with Talespinner and the spirit courts. For now, I will keep the depth of my relations with the ten thousand gods to myself until I can hear the tale of why the Sidereals feel as I think they do.





THE REALM

The looming antagonist of the bulk of my recent tales, the Dynasty seems lately its own antagonist as well. In its thrashings it unthinkingly tread on its own tributaries, the people who keep the Dynasts rich and fat. Their failure is the spark of my success, so I should not speak too much against them. Every incidence of the cannibal Realm making a victim of one of its tributaries is another chance for me to make those same victims into a self-governing nation of heroes. I would be hard pressed to invent a villain that inspires men to righteousness half as effectively as the Dynasty. There is hardly even a need for me to amplify the evidence against it to rally the people.

Minus my professionally mandated invective, my view of the Dynasts is akin to my view of any large organization. They can't help but be unhealthy, all groups beyond a certain size are certain to become corrupt in time. I'd like to someday have a chance to expose individual Dynasts to my art and doctrines and reawaken in them a sense of their worth and rightness. It is, however, a luxury that I do not currently have. They are the antagonist, and their redemption is a possible tale for a later chapter, but not for now.

THE CULT OF THE ILLUMINATED

The Children of the Maidens contacted me very soon after my Exaltation, with overtures of alliance and patronage. Any artist will tell you never to refuse patronage, and so, I did not. I did note, though, that they sought to educate me on matters with which I already enjoyed some acquaintance. It would have seemed rude to reject their tutelage, though, and so, I also did not do that.

Here, I will admit to a practice that I don't often mention, but which you may have inferred from what I have told you of my ways already: My art has fostered in me a habit of multiplicity. I am accustomed to playing many roles and of tailoring those roles to the needs of the other players, the scene and the coming denouement. The practical result of this in this case is that, when the Cult of the Illuminated wanted me to play the role of the Unconquered Sun's scion in need of mentoring, I played that very role for them. Over that role, I wore the mask of one who thinks she doesn't need their direction, as I also anticipated they would be comfortable with that and expect it from me. I work hard to be accommodating to my peers, which is what these seers are to me. They seem to favor a dynamic where they have agents, those who work for them, where I prefer to work with and not for. Thus far, I have managed to arrange it so that they feel they have it their way, and I feel the same.

THE GUILD

The Guild did more in my life to shape my opinions of the powerful and influential and my views on large organizations than any other source. People will tell you often and at length of the robbery the Guild commits, disguised as trade. The robbery that stands out in my mind is the one it commits against itself. All the joy that could be had from a life of travel

and social contact, the Guild members steal from themselves in favor of an artless existence of counting money and trying to stay vigilant against the perceived con artists that lurk behind every customer's face.

I inherited my father's businesses and assets after his slow death of greed, and I pay my dues to the Guild so that I can call myself a factor, but I don't subscribe to its cold lifestyle or tactics. Trade is merely a convenient activity for me to use to fund my art, as I travel with a huge caravan already. There is just no reason for me not to. From this, I've managed to demonstrate to other Guild factors that a caravan that incorporates entertainment and performances enjoys a much greater degree of business success. It's become quite a fad among Guildsmen who travel in the East and Southeast, and I work to push the idea along when I can. More than once, I have made wealthy men swear an oath to support the people through the arts, as punishment for treading on those same people. It would be poetic if, one day, the Guild that my father championed were to become a symbol for the art that he rejected.

OTHER SOLARS

My true peers, my family of the soul even. Among the few of my brothers and sisters I have met have been some of the most colorful and passionate creatures I could imagine. Like men, we do not always agree on matters of method, but I've found there is a shared understanding of duty and goal. I am lucky in that I understand that I do not need to agree with them or what they do — the tale of Creation needs all types of heroes. I just need to know that they are heroes.

Those who Exalt in service to the Unconquered Sun appear to count among themselves a number of performers like myself, artists and purveyors of inspiration. I like to think that the Unconquered Sun looks for the mark of an artist's soul even among the warriors and priests he makes his children. The loose Circle I find myself a member of certainly doesn't discourage my naïve theory. We all share a love for travel and drama, performers even those who are not such by calling, and have found our way into each others' company. I cannot think it's by chance, and it pleases me to think of us as the Sun's Troupe. It could simply be that I am lucky and have found that which I sought. I have heard of Solars in the North who, tales say, are little more than hammers of the Unconquered Sun's will where times demand more subtle tools — butchers to my circle's surgeons. I hope not. I don't know what might occur if the Unconquered Sun's people came to conflict with one another, but I do not imagine it would be a good end to our tale.

THE FAIR FOLK

It would make sense for someone of my temperament and methods to be fascinated by the Fair Folk, and once, I might have been. I am their antithesis, though. They appear to embody passion and beauty, and in many tales, they are doomed lovers of mortals or the like. What they are is entirely other than what the romances or their appearances indicate. I feel it whenever I'm near them. They are in direct opposition

to my views on almost a spiritual or resonant level. I do not know enough of them to speak at great length or persuasively, but that is what I feel. That is not to say that there isn't much to be learned from their methods or magics — just the opposite. Their ways, turned to support of Creation instead of its rape, could lead scholars of art to truly staggering revelations and techniques. Think of it this way: Is a murderer's sword evil? Of course not. The same blade could be taken and used in defense and support of righteous causes.

SHADOWLANDS

Even a child can tell you that tragedy is half of all good tales and can be a thing of sad beauty, done properly. I don't know if these places of death and the lords of these places are noble or proper, but there is a tragic beauty about them and their lands that I find hard to articulate. It seems obvious that these agents of death are no friend to the world, but no villain thinks himself a villain. Even in tales, they often start with noble intentions and later go astray. I can't help but wonder what, if any, noble intentions once drove these creatures and brought them to where they are now.

ADMIRAL SAND

MORTALS

I'm not quick to draw too thick a line between myself and mankind. I think that's a dangerous mindset to fall into. On the other hand, I am different. There is no denying it. I am more than a man. That said, I never want to lose sight of the man I was or the people around me every day. If I forget what common people are like, how can I be their advocate or custodian? I am lucky in that people surround me day and night. My calling is one of constant contact. The thought of Exalts who don't see men regularly worries me. I fear they might quickly forget what it is we're here for. Our great power does not give us the right to elevate ourselves above the common folk. It gives us the responsibility to be more a part of their lives than we could as mortals, to be more human than human.

From a practical standpoint, I am largely free of the burden of dealing with people from beneath the mantle "Exalt," as I have taken great steps to keep my nature a secret from the public. I am free to deal with men as a man myself. Soon enough, I feel my ruse will have to come to an end. I'd like to make that happen on my terms and my schedule. For now, it is much easier for me to simply operate as a well-known and wealthy man. Only my family, my Circle, my closest agents and a few of my powerful peers know I am more than mortal.

THE GUILD

Ah, commerce, see what you can become. It's a shame about the Guild. There are men there, I think, who really understand what it is that trade can be. Unfortunately, the Guild as an entity has taken its flawed views too far for redemption to be an easy thing. The factors have lost sight of the fact that healthy commerce is a component of a healthy government or society and, instead, made commerce the top of the ladder, with government and society relegated



to the status of obstacle or tool. A very disharmonious arrangement, but with the Realm's monopoly on governance, who can blame men for finding power in other venues? Given the state of the world right now, I predict that the Guild's power will reach a sort of equilibrium after a few decades of turmoil. Its power is a result of its orbit around the spindle of primary power that is the Realm, and with that spindle unsteady and new power bases forming in the Threshold, the Guildsmen are going to face competition from previously unknown quarters. Me, for example.

I'm not so bold as to pursue the equivalent of a frontal assault against the Guild right now, but I can start laying the groundwork for one from within the system. A few decades of honest and healthy business practices will make a mark on the expectations of the people of the South. That may sound like nothing, but ideas have a way of spreading out of control when someone is fanning the flames. The Guild's power, just like any power, stems ultimately from the people, and if the people know there's a better way than what the Guild offers them, they'll not tolerate anything else. I predict this will all be greatly compounded by the fact that I'm going to have to kill several significant Guildsmen over time. Call it a hunch.

THE WYLD

As a young man, more years ago than I will admit to, I once foolishly tried to leave an established route to avoid a sandstorm and perhaps shave a few hours from the circuit. My recollection of events is unclear to this day, my memories jagged. The *Desert Eagle* was hissing through the dunes under a clear night sky, and

then, I was trying to cover my face to avoid looking upon the sea of my former lovers' beckoning, happy eyes the dunerunner now sluiced wetly through. It seemed like just a moment had passed, a lightning flash of excruciating madness, but it must have been much longer than the split second I can recall. Two smiling crewmen had leapt from the deck. Another two took their own lives not long after reaching port.

No matter how wracked the world seems, never doubt that we are an island of stability besieged on a sea of madness. Beyond the world, and in some places under its skin, there are things that no one should ever see, things it hurts to even remember seeing. I am a willful individual and one of the Solar Exalted, and even I place contact with a place of the Wyld in a category all by itself. I can only hope that normalized regular trade will stimulate a sense of order among the people and provide a bulwark against the Wyld's chaos.

SPIRITS

The small gods display all the traits of men, they just display them in letters writ far larger than the cramped hand of mortal life can reliably produce. There are bandits, liars, lovers and customers to be found among them, just as among men. The bandits are more cunning, the liars more devious, the lovers more visceral and the customers more concerned with rarities. Those last, as you might guess, are the spirits I most often come in contact with, not contact I try to dissuade. As spirits are often like the essence of men, trade with them is often similarly elevated. How could I not be intrigued at the



Stevens'02

chance to ply what I consider a sacred trade in the markets of the divine? This is not to say they receive preferential treatment based on their nature. As stated, there are scoundrels aplenty among the spirits. No, I deal with them as I would anyone: respect where it is due, trust where earned, my sword when provoked. The courts need the attention of the Solar Exalted as much as the world of men, and the things I try to teach men are just as valuable taught to spirits.

THE REALM

It's all too easy to point one's finger at the Realm and cry villain, but it's hardly a productive step toward remedying the ill health of the world. This is not to say that the Realm isn't a bloated and corrupt behemoth that is smothering itself and the Threshold, because it is that, but what the Realm is clearly not is a black villain who, when slain, will restore Creation to its previous righteous order. I think that it's more accurate to think of the Realm as a powerful grandmother who refuses to accept that age has weakened her judgment and won't name an heir. She needs to be dealt with in the meantime, and we're better off courting the possible heirs and hoping that they'll be wiser rulers. The alternative is fruitless argument with Grandmother Realm, ending in her sending you to your room with no supper.

Don't misunderstand me, I have slain Dragon-Bloods who stood in the way of my goals, encouraged subversives among men and worked with other Solars who are staunch haters of the Realm. I simply caution against making the Terrestrial Exalted out to be monsters when their faults are better explained by ignorance, decadence and greed. They are little more than men, and their evils are little more than the evils that can be found anywhere. Creation has real monsters in this time of tumult, and calling the Realm such distracts from those true foes.

PARAGON AND GEM

If the resources I spent keeping these two from war were available to me for other uses, no child in the South would eat less than twice a day. Rankar VII, the Despot of Gem, is a canny and amoral plotter, and the Perfect of Paragon's reputation and methods are no secret, but neither man is stupid. They both know that, for now, their interests are better served by dealing with me as an insulating middleman, and I'm sure they both have an idea that I work to arrange things this way to avoid war. It would not shock me to find they both know of my nature as an Exalt, having met them both on more than one occasion recently. I can only try to make it cheaper for the Perfect to buy Gem's resources from me than it would be for him to do it through war. This way, the pressure toward war comes from Paragon's patrons in the Realm. Given time, I hope the Perfect will see that his allies are pushing him into a conflict that, because of my efforts, is not in his nation's best interest. Rankar, on the other hand and regardless of my intent, is going to become more and more reliant on my infrastructure to meet his import and export needs. It's just a matter of geography. Both the Guild

and the Talaarah mercantile house, whether they know it or not, use my network for shipping on the Sun's Sea.

OTHER SOLARS

Sunlight can get in through cracks into the damndest places. This is what my Circle has taught me about what Solar Exalts can do. Even from the first days of my Exaltation, I was very careful and took pains to conceal my nature and actions but thought I must be a rarity among my kind. It's certainly an easy assumption to make about the methods of the Sun's Chosen. You expect them to be bold and hard to ignore and brilliant like their patron. Now, down the line, I know that sometimes a shaft of sunlight manages to find the gaps and reflective surfaces it needs to reach the darkest basement and that that slim beam of sunlight is often all that is needed if you've been stuck in that darkness long enough.

Poetic talk aside, the South is home to many subversive and underground Solar Exalts, both in my Circle and otherwise. In the way of the South, too, those same subversive Chosen are also some of the most uncomplicated and clear-sighted individuals I've known. Many think that those who operate out of sight are manipulators and gamesmen, but I can tell you that, among my Circle, we simply know when to keep our heads down and to make noise only when the outcome is sure. This is not the land or the time for bold actions that draw attention, but for subtle shepherding.

A VIEW OF THE LOCUST CRUSADE FOR USERS OF TIME OF TUMULT

Word has reached my ears, from more than one avenue, that there are weird forces active around Gem and beyond. The rumors bear the wild dissimilarity of embellishment in retelling but are persistent enough to bear consideration. Some versions tell of insect-men, raiders who I would say were beastmen if they weren't said to use complex and unknown equipment and highly coordinated and disciplined tactics. Two things catch my attention primarily about these rumors. One is the reported use of machines like my dunerunners that work with no sails and over many types of terrain. I'm sure the reason for my interest on that count is terribly easy to puzzle out. The second thing, worrisome, is that the raiders appear to be leaving no resources in their wake, like locusts on a rampage. People, trees, minerals, food and finished goods alike are carted off by these industrious little cadres, with special care given to looting any source of the Five Magical Materials they come across. Given that many reports indicate that these raiders make use of or are led by some sort of great machine man, which I presume is an automaton or a man in elaborate armor, the interest in raw Magical Materials is unsurprising. Making contact with these raiders, in my capacity as an Eclipse, is high on my list of priorities. The region cannot afford to have a resource shortfall in Gem.





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CHAPTER FOUR VOICES NOT OUR OWN



The Eclipse Caste, more than any other Caste, deals with the other inhabitants of the Exalted world. The Quicksilver Falcons forge and maintain ties between themselves and potential allies throughout Creation. Since the return of the Solar Exalted, the influence of the Eclipse Caste (and therefore the Solars in general) has spread outward as the Harmonious Voices work their magic on the world. Where the other Solar Exalted inspire fear and awe wherever they go, the Crowned Suns are not always recognized for who and what they are. They are able to work behind the scenes as well as in the public eye, moving between the two with ease.

MORTALS

Although all of the Chosen of the Sun deal with mortals to one degree or another, none understand them quite as well as the Eclipse Caste does. Part of the purpose of the Harmonious Voices is to serve as the bridge between the glory of the Solar Exalted and the mortals they have been set above. So, it is important for the members of the caste not to lose touch with their own mortality and to understand what drives mortals. Some believe that forgetting these things helped bring down the Eclipse Caste at the end of the First Age.

The mortal world is the domain of the Crowned Suns. While the Dawn Caste fights, the Zenith Caste leads, the Twilight Caste teaches and builds and the Night Caste watches, it is up to the Eclipse Caste to maintain the social fabric that supports the work of its brothers and sisters. In the First Age, this made the caste a vital part of the Realm. In the current Age, it makes the Eclipse Caste a valuable resource, a potential threat — or possibly both, depending on one's interests and goals.

The Quills of Heaven are masterful organizers and communicators, able to take almost any rabble and turn them into a smoothly functioning group, capable of handling any task within their skills. An Eclipse minister or advisor is invaluable to a kingdom, business or organization to improve efficiency, maintain complex support structures and to guard against corruption, indolence and incompetence. Anyone with an organization to run envies and desires the abilities of the Eclipse Caste.

Of course, those same abilities can easily be used against an organization as well as for it. The Crowned Suns can incite rebellion with their tracts and speeches, bring bureaucracies to a grinding halt, outbid and undersell their competition, and steal away potential clients and allies with their honeyed words and promises. As much as some would like to harness the

abilities of the Eclipse Exalted to their cause, others fear those same abilities being turned against them. This leaves them with a difficult question. Do they strike and try to eliminate a potential threat before it grows too powerful? If they do, they run the risk of making the Eclipse Caste into the enemy they fear. If they do not, then the Anathema may grow in power and influence until they are too strong to be stopped. The Eclipse Caste is certainly aware of this conflict, and the caste uses it to its advantage in negotiations.

Ironically, mortal society is the place where the Harmonious Voices are the least protected. While ancient pacts allow the Eclipse Caste to walk freely among the most terrible of monsters: the Fair Folk, demons, ghosts and more, among mortals the Quick-silver Falcons must rely on their own abilities. Fortunately, the members of the caste make friends easily, and being the friend and ally of one of the Crowned Suns is rarely dull.

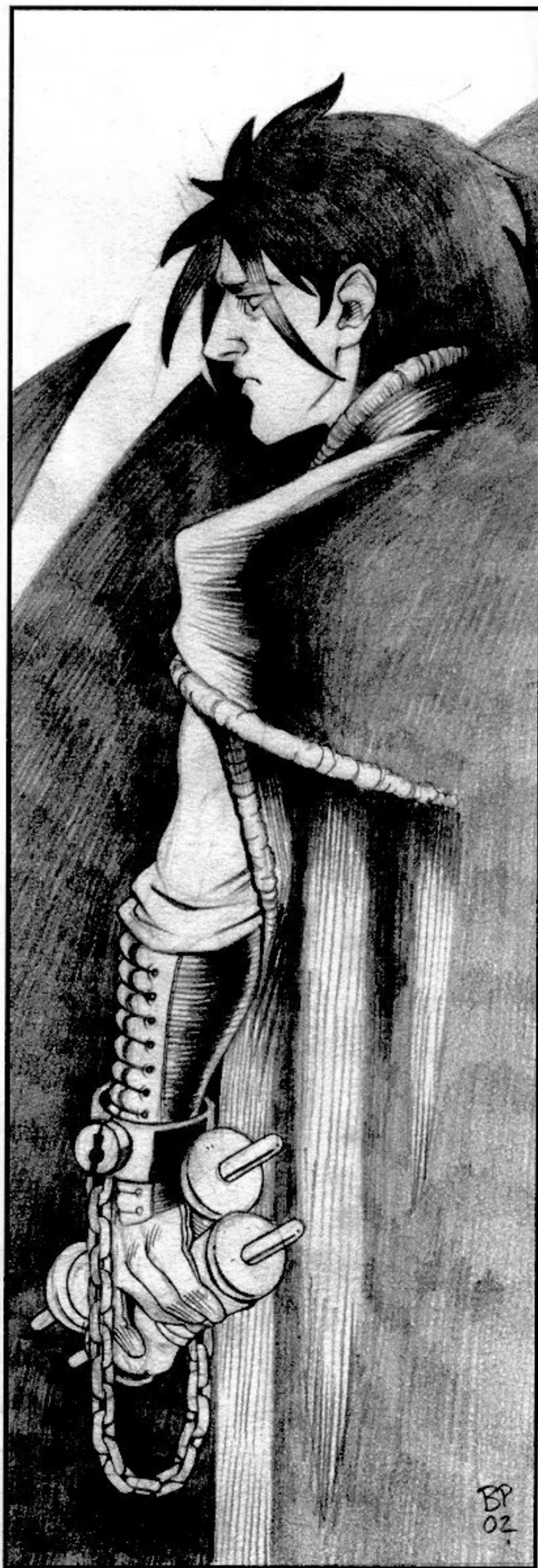
GARNET SHOAL

You ask about Swan, who was my student in years past. Did I know that there was anything extraordinary about him? Yes, although I did not suspect just how extraordinary or that it would lead him to the places that it has. Swan was always an able student, if not always as attentive as he could have been. But then, he is young and was younger still back then. I was careful not to praise him too much because I did not want him to become overconfident in his abilities, but he showed great promise from the very beginning.

There was a time when I was not so proud of my student, shortly after he left the service of Coral for another calling altogether. I wondered what led Swan to turn away from his duties, wondered if he was even alive or if he had died at the hands of bandits, barbarians or some beast in the North. I later heard rumors about him, or someone like him, traveling about and leaving the most fantastic stories in his wake.

When I last saw him, Swan looked just like the young man who learned from me, but there was something different about his manner, the way he carried himself and the look in his eyes. When I saw him at a diplomatic meeting in Wavecrest, it wasn't as master and student, but as fellow diplomats. He spoke with me and told me how he had been chosen by the Unconquered Sun and how that led him to a new calling, to take what I had taught him and to use it to help the world and not just one small island in all of Creation.

I think that he was worried that I would disapprove, prepared to argue his case against me. But the truth is that I have never been more proud of any student I taught. They say that the greatest and sad-



dest moment in a teacher's life is when he realizes that his student has exceeded him. I experienced that moment when I last saw Swan, Quicksilver Falcon and Chosen of the Unconquered Sun.

RADEK THE HORSE BREEDER

I tell you, I have never seen the like of it before! Rhianna mounted up that stallion, and it was like the glory of the sun itself descended upon her. She shone brightly, and in that instant, the beast became as tame under her as the best-trained mare. Then, there was all the shouting and commotion, the horse bolted, and she rode off, with the Dragon-Blooded close on her heels!

She must have left them eating dust, I can tell you that, since they eventually came back empty-handed. I can just imagine how it must have made their blood boil when she escaped, but not nearly so as when the council decided to make Rhianna a circuit rider, granting her the protection of the Alliance. They didn't speak of what happened that day in the official writ or anywhere in public, but I was there. I know what I saw. I can tell you that all the stories you've heard of Rhianna and her steed are true because I was the one who found that magnificent stallion for her! And I'd be only too happy to do the same for you, my good friend.

FORTHRIGHT STONE, MERCHANT OF WHITEWALL

I've known Rune since he was just a boy. His father and I did business, may his soul know peace, and I continued doing business with Rune when he took over his father's trade. He's a clever young man and always dealt with me fairly. I had no complaints. I was shocked when I heard about his arrest, and I went to his trial. He didn't even try to defend himself. I felt sorry for him, gods know that any man would be tempted by one of the Fair Folk, but the law is the law. I'm a bit ashamed to say that I didn't give much thought to him once he was exiled from the city. I just assumed that once he was outside the walls... well, I hoped that his troubles would soon be over, and that was that. I had a business to run and my own family to attend to.

But when he came back! Oh, you should have heard the talk going on in the marketplace and in the taverns at night. Merchants gossip worse than idle homebodies, but the tales they told! I heard that he was a changeling, sent by the Fair Folk to deceive us. Perhaps he was the real Rune, but with his soul eaten by some beast that put on his skin like a coat to walk among us. He was a vengeful ghost, he was an angry

god, he was every fanciful dream or nightmare that you'd ever heard. I confess that I didn't say much to the contrary, but then, I didn't know, did I? None of us did, really.

Then, there was that trade dispute, and suddenly, he was there. He simply showed up at the meeting, alone and unescorted. He sat down at the table with us and said, "I'm sure we can figure this problem out," and may the gods strike me down if he didn't do just that. He worked out a deal, got everyone to agree to it — even old Miller Stone, who can't agree that the sky is blue — and Rune broke open a fine bottle of whiskey so we could all drink to it. He wasn't the lad that I knew and did business with, that's for sure, but he also wasn't some demon clothed in man's flesh, either. He's a good fellow, a loyal citizen of White-wall, and anyone who says otherwise will have to answer to more than just me, I'll tell you that.

BARKER RED

It is only because of it's permission that I do so that I speak to you candidly of the Mirror Flag. Under normal circumstances, my most solemn oath forbids me this openness on the topic of my partner, student and treasure. Student, yes. The Mirror Flag is many things, and powerful, but one of those things is wise. I, the Red Barker of the Ten Thousand Performing Diplomats Company, have learned the ways of the road and show over the course of many hard decades plying my trade and honing my craft. The Mirror Flag, though it's insights are powerful and abilities plentiful, knows that there is no replacement for a carefully accumulated and time-tested store of real experience. Trust, then, is placed in me to apply this great wealth of scars and habits to both the daily operations of this grand procession and as mortar between the golden blocks of the Mirror Flag's divine doings.

This coupling, this dance, illustrates well the Mirror Flag's right and sagacious thinking that the most good is had when mortal and divine efforts are harmoniously implemented, and so, this is our performing family's aim in all our endeavors. Like translators of foreign yet beautiful words, we mortal few serve as intermediaries for Mirror Flag's heavenly actions as Mirror Flag serves Unconquered Sun, so that the light of the sun might fall like a waterfall from him into the channels that we serve as and into the world. In reverse, the astute will see, our unity makes us like a flower whose mortal petals protect a fragile representative of divinity from a world that could harm it in it's youth, until, someday, it will be ripe and bloom fully, and it's protective petals will be it's colorful heralds. For now, this family we have made takes it's messages and joy to the people of the



Threshold with the Mirror Flag as our subtle banner and constant source of inspiration.

JAMNEN WRIGHT, GUILD EXCHEQUER OF PORT CALIN

I remember the day his tearful daughter came to claim her inheritance that it was a sad irony that he had had me officiate over the writing of his will only a few weeks before. I suppose, in hindsight, that he may have been ill and knew his end was near. It is not my place to ask why in these matters. If that is the case, his reputation for great diligence in life was an understatement. Only a very diligent man would go to such lengths to insure his lost child's legacy when his own death was so near.

The girl? Oh, she was her father's child, that much was clear to me even in her grief. I recall that she was very well mannered and well educated in the particulars of both inheritance law and etiquette. The fact that she was able to perform the transaction so well herself without even an advocate present says to me that she has the diligence that served her father so well. Very sharp. I would think that she will go very far following in his footsteps. She is a daughter any Guildsman would wish for, and she will make his memory proud. I do wonder why I had never met her previous to this unfortunate business, however. To be honest, I hadn't known he had a daughter.

ALMORALES, PROREUS OF THE DESERT EAGLE

Veneration of the sun is not as rare in the South as many would have you believe. Ours is a land defined in many ways by the sun — and more yet by those who live their lives in the deep desert. Any dunerunner crewman like myself can tell you that you must take steps to keep the sun on your side as, in the harsh sand, you do not want it against you. We still called the vast dunes the Sun's Sea, even before the Admiral, and I think that says a lot about how we see things.

I guess that the Unconquered Sun must have known this when he choose Admiral Sand to be his agent among the people here because this traditional quiet acceptance for the sun god coupled with the Admiral's gift for words made the sudden appearance of one of the "Anathema" among us hardly a shock. The Unconquered Sun is indeed wise, elevating a man whose friends think him good and will accept his new state as right. Hindsight is clearer than foresight, and looking back now at the time when I first came to know Sand, it seems as if he was always a man of the sun. He was always bright, both in the sense that he was attractive to people and in the sense that he was

wise in seeing things as they were. And while he often seemed, and still does, to be the sort to simply dazzle and play, he is, in truth, the most direct of men I have known. He simply knows that one can be direct without being stolid, never mistake his bursts of rakish humor for foppery. I have worked closely with him since I was a very young man, and his reputation as a canny character even then was well established. His mind is strong enough that, even to this day, his insights seem to be to be oracular, such are the leaps of intellect that he can make. No, he is no aged dandy.

I will admit, yes, that I and other people close to him have done things to portray him as exactly that: an aged dandy. Admiral Sand says that the Unconquered Sun's agents have many enemies and could be hunted. This is in addition to the prejudice that those not of the Far South are known to have for the Solar Exalted. I would not say we misrepresent our employer, but that we don't address incorrect assumptions about him when we encounter them. Certainly, I don't understand the complexities of Sand's schemes, but I do know that they would be much less successful were we dodging bounty hunters from the Realm or questions about the Admiral's wits at his age. Don't tell him I mentioned his age.

In private, he can be very grave. He has always made his people's welfare his business, and that is a great weight for any man to assume. Now, though, I think he has made the welfare of *all* people his business. And so, I do not wonder at his grave moods. Even still, I have never known him to forget a man's name or not to be ready with a joke when hard times come or not to have a gift for his men when their children are born.

Brutal? Sir, Admiral Sand is never brutal. Admiral Sand simply knows when diplomacy requires a sword instead of a smile, and I'll trust that you never refer to him as brutal again.

RAFEE BATEEQ OF THE TALAARAH GUILD

The South loves tales of it's son's success, and Sand's tale is destined to be one the most beloved. They named him Admiral when he got to be too old to do anything but command his convoys from his villa, a villa in a town he raised from the sands for his own leisure. Truly the South's son, to have an ending like that to his tale.

Imagine my, and others', surprise when it turned out to not be the ending of Sand's story after all. I do not wish him ill, far from it. Though he and I vied for the same lady on too many occasions to count, even with him my elder by longer than I feel safe telling

you, I have always come away from my business with him richer in both jade and smiles.

When I heard he had come out from his resort and was once again traveling with his fleets, I assumed it was the last hurrah of an old man. Last year, I was at some banquet or another, and what I saw of him seemed to prove my assumption correct. He was the Sand of old, if a bit more excessive: Wine flowed, women blushed at comments whispered during dances, he was clearly out to enjoy himself and to make sure everyone in earshot did the same. Later in the night, I found myself alone with him on the veranda, and conversation turned, as it does between merchants, to business. It began as a light enough exchange between old men. As the debate drifted toward more serious topics, I saw a steel in him that had not been there earlier that night, an energy in him I had not seen there for decades. He said things to me that night that were so — powerful is the only word I can use — so powerful that I think they changed me and my views on what it is I do. I can still recite from memory some of his phrasings, and some of them were so astute that I occasionally sit up in bed at night and see his meaning, months later.

I fear my old friend must have made some pact with the spirits or worse or turned his wealth toward the acquisition of some magics. I can detect in the doings of his agents no malice, no new greeds or plots. In fact, he has, in recent times, pulled off some masterful maneuvers in the realm of trade, things that, until they were complete, I would have sworn were foolishness. It is a mystery that I plan to keep my eye on and, in the meantime, capitalize on. Sand prefers to work with the Talaarahn over the Guild, and I would be a fool to look too closely at the business that makes me rich.

THE PERFECT

A merchant admiral, when he has a fleet and men, is as much an admiral as any and, thus, is to be handled as something other than a wealthy buffoon. This Admiral, Sand, even more so, as he is one of the Anathema, a Deceiver. I like to see it as a sign of respect that he took relatively little action to conceal this fact from me, an acknowledgment that I would have discovered it regardless of any charade. He has done an admirable job of keeping a low profile otherwise. Certainly, I'm aware of no talk of the fact in my domain or among my allies.

Thus far, I have neglected to mention my knowledge to my peers in the Realm: They do not ask, and so, I do not lie, and so long as this Admiral continues to work for the gain of my people, I have little reason to report him. Again, I like to think that he must know

that I see his game and means for me to see. It is a sign of respect for my nation and person that the Admiral wastes no time with subterfuge.

If the patterns I see in his actions are correct, and they are, this man truly understands the complexity of trade and it's vital role in the orderly management of the people. His competence and apparent willingness to put the needs of order first have caused me to reexamine the facts available to me on the subject of the Anathema. If my evaluation indicates that things are as they are said to be by the Realm, then I would like to confront this admiral myself, for my own knowledge. It will do the Dragon-Blooded well to see that these sorts of matters can be dealt with by order, but not solely by their order.

OTHER SOLAR EXALTED

The Eclipse Caste is associated with the center direction for good reason. Of all the castes of the Solar Exalted, the Harmonious Voices are the best suited for working within a group to ensure that it works smoothly and efficiently. The members of the Eclipse Caste are often the center around which their Circles form and help to strengthen and maintain the ties between their Solar brothers and sisters.

In the First Age, it was common for a Perfect Circle of Exalted to swear oaths of loyalty and faithfulness to each other, oaths witnessed and sanctified by the Circle's Eclipse member. These oaths bound the Circle together, but it was the members' willingness to swear them that was more important. In the modern Age, such rituals have fallen into disuse, with the Solar Exalted creating Circles how and where they can, but the Eclipse Caste still serves much the same function in helping to keep the Circles together.

Generally, the Harmonious Voices are the most easygoing of the Solar Exalted and get along with everyone in equal measure. They recognize the importance and the abilities of all the other castes, which, in turn, recognize the gifts of the Eclipse Caste. The Zenith and Twilight Castes sometimes get too caught up in their lofty or cerebral activities, just as the Dawn and Night Castes can become too involved in physical matters, neglecting the mental and spiritual. In these cases, it is up to the Eclipse Caste to strike a balance.

ARIANNA ON SWAN

Swan believes that it's possible for people of good will to get along in harmony and good faith, with just a little help. It's understandable. He's young and doesn't really understand yet that good will and common sense aren't nearly as common as he believes. He hasn't been anything else besides the favored son, the bright pupil or the star diplomat. He hasn't had the





kind of failures you need to tarnish the bright shine of the world, to blacken your heart just a little and dim your sight to imaginary possibilities.

He's naïve, reckless, charming, cunning and idealistic. He can dance and feast with kings, smoke and drink with barbarian chieftains, drive a hard bargain and deliver an even harder kick. He thinks that he's always right, but he's usually too diplomatic to say so. He always knows the right thing to say, and he's willing to say it. I find him daring and reckless, handsome and feckless, fascinating and infuriating. I love him more than a brother, and if you threaten him, I will have demons feasting on your heart before the sun rises again. Do you understand?

MACHA PETHISDOTTIR ON RUNE

Do I trust him? Not yet. But I'm willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, since he was willing to do the same for me. The truth is that Rune is just a little too smooth for his own good, if you ask me. Only a few people know about me, and I've never told anyone how I Exalted, but Rune doesn't hide anything. He's out there, bold as brass, and he doesn't care who knows what he is or what he's done. That takes guts. So, either Rune is brave, or he's a fool. I haven't exactly figured out which yet. I guess when I do that

I'll know whether or not to trust him. For right now, let's just say that he's a good man to know.

DEMETHEUS ON SAND

He's a puzzle, that old one, but worth the thought to figure the puzzle out. I learned a lesson about people from this fellow, about judgment. See, it's no secret I got no love for people who complicate things, and merchants, in my experience, sure are the first ones most folks will think of when they think of complications. When I met Sand, I thought to myself that this guy was going to have all sorts of plots and plans and knots to throw into my life, and I was none too pleased about. Armattan, about as direct and simple a guy as I've known, says this Sand guy is worth his salt though, so I go along with the relationship. Good thing, too. Turns out, sure, he's a trader and goes out of his way to look like an old sissy, he can juggle details and plans in his head like a spider in it's web, but he's no schemer. He knows the right weapon to use on some people is a sword and not words, and he knows the right words to use on people who deserve them. He can pack a whole argument into three words and a wiggle of his eyebrow, and it works just as well as the windbag way. He's not lost in his words and money like people get, they're to him just like my fists are to me: ways to do to the right thing. Good thing, too.



Otherwise, someone like me would be trying to keep the books. Ain't that a laugh?

MISTRESS EMERALD ON MIRROR FLAG

The Mirror Flag is a strange one, even by the standards of the carnival folk we both keep the company of, but she hides a good soul underneath her many faces. I sought her out, not knowing I would find a Solar Exalt, based on the reputation her persona, the Mirror Flag, was developing as a rebel and fighter for the common people. What I found was a being that, even now, I have trouble believing has been an Exalt for such a short time. Privately, I think that she may have been incomplete as a mortal. Many are. They turn to fighting or to drink or to petty conquest to make up for a lack they feel inside. In her case, I think that whatever the Unconquered Sun gives us to make us as we are made her whole. She was comfortable with her state and able to control her Charms faster and better than I was by far. Some are inclined to divinity, I suppose. She is certainly far from mortal. Her mind especially works in ways no mortal's does.

It is a curious thing: Her mysterious public persona of the Mirror Flag is so well known. Dynasts and slaves alike know of the Mirror Flag. It is the revolutionary phantom, the golden comedy mask that mirrors your face in it's own, and if oppressed people make their pain known, the Mirror Flag will come and teach them to throw off their shackles. Knowing her as I do, however, I know that these things that her mask is famous for are not the things that drive her. She is a performer and an artist, her thoughts always turning to the meaning of her art or ways to enhance her techniques. The whole business of revolt is just another of her characters, I guess. I am certainly guilty of playing roles and allowing others to make false assumptions about me, but what she does is well beyond my simple misdirections. I do hope that I have not, like so many have, been fooled by her performance into thinking that she is my ally when she is not.

OTHER CELESTIAL EXALTED

The Lunar and Sidereal Exalted remember the Crowned Suns well, since they often had dealings with them during the First Age. Younger Lunars and Sidereals know of the Eclipse Caste only as legends, but their elders have taught them about the caste's abilities and deeds, enough that they respect these newborn Princes of the Earth and what they can do.

The Lunar Exalted want no more to do with the Eclipse Caste than they do any of the Solar Exalted. Some still have bitter memories of Eclipse Caste Solars trying to rally the Lunar Exalted to strike back against the Dragon-Blooded and retake the Realm or

of sheltering beloved Crowned Suns until they were hunted down by the Dragon-Blooded or lost to the madness of the Wyld. They have no desire to go through anything like that again. Some younger Lunars, however, have met and talked with the Quicksilver Falcons that dared to venture into their domains and are intrigued with what they have seen and heard. As in the First Age, these Lunars find themselves drawn to the warmth and beauty of the Solars. It remains to be seen if any will act upon their interest.

The Sidereal Exalted consider the Eclipse Caste a grave threat or a valuable resources, depending on the faction. The Bronze faction of the Sidereals see the Solar Winds as a danger to all that it has built since the rebellion that first wiped out the Solar Exalted. The Eclipse Caste could undermine the order of the Realm or unravel the complex fabric of the Immaculate Order. Worse yet, the Quicksilver Falcons could follow those threads back to the Chosen of the Maidens themselves and discover the truth about their involvement in the downfall of the Solar Exalted. The Gold faction of the Sidereals consider the Eclipse Caste among its most useful Solar allies. With the aid of the Harmonious Voices, groups such as the Cult of the Illuminated can spread their influence far and wide, and the Gold faction can shape the destiny of nations to suit its plans. The greatest danger is of the cunning Eclipse Caste discovering too much about their Sidereal patrons and their plans or, worse yet, deciding that they no longer need Sidereal aid to accomplish their goals.

GRANDFATHER FROST

It has been a long time since I saw the glory of any of the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun, a long time indeed. I had heard rumors, whispers on the wind, visions in the ice, but I doubted them or chose not to heed them. So, I was surprised when I first saw the Solar Exalted that came to negotiate with me. It was as if all the years in the North, the countless lifetimes roaming with my pack, dropped away and I stood once more in one of the great palaces of the Realm, my wife at my side, to receive members of the Deliberative. They were so proud, so confident, these Children of the Sun, I could have wept from the memory of it. But I did not. Those memories are less than dust now, and I live a different life.

Still, I honor the oaths that I made then. I permitted the Eclipse and his escort to approach unmolested and to say what they had to say. I expected bluster, even threats, or perhaps pleading and wheedling, but there was neither, only reason and an appeal to my honor. They were so young, the Eclipse especially so, but in them, I could see the lost glory of





what was. "It's a simple matter," he said. "Do you want to create or destroy?" We spoke, and he convinced me to spare the mortals living at the edge of my territory, even to claim that land and protect it against others that would sweep across it. I cannot say what will come of the return of the Solars after all this time, only that it feels good to see them again. It feels good to be a part of something again, after so very long.

FLEET BRILLIANCE ON MIRROR FLAG

This one makes me wonder if it's not possible that the divine spark of one of Jupiter's Chosen got a bit turned around on its way back to the world of matter and ended up as a Solar Exalt. She isn't nearly as effective at the game of secrets as one of that Maiden's children, though I'm sure she thinks herself such, but it is interesting to see a Solar play at it. Certainly, she's skilled. I don't mean to imply otherwise. It's no easy feat to decipher her layer after layer of motivation and misdirection. It's like a game I play with her. She constructs selves within selves meaning to trap my perception and lead me to think a false identity is the true one. It's a simple matter to dig until I see the girl, inside all the rest, that is afraid. That's the one we seek to speak to, the frightened artist. It's a fine game and serves to drive her to improve her skills. I don't trust the frightened artist's accounts of her past, there are obvious holes, but I feel she obscures it from habit and a misplaced urge to conceal her relationship with the spirit courts and not any real motivation to mislead me.

As a subversive, she is a great success. She eagerly learns all she can from the Illuminated Cult and adds her own strange vision of art and performance to make herself a guerrilla like no other. She can identify what it will take to rouse people to action easily and, in a matter of a few weeks, can construct the illusion of that stimulus and have the tools of revolution ready for the now-aroused populace. It's masterful. I can not say otherwise. It is the hope of the Gold faction that, in the coming decades, we can groom her to play the role of chief propagandist of our new order. Who, should they unravel the knots she will tie, will think to look deeper and find us? The Mirror Flag will be our flawless smokescreen.

THE DRAGON-BLOODED

Of all the Solar Exalted, the Eclipse Caste of old dealt the least with the Terrestrial Exalted. The Dragon-Blooded were the soldiers of the Old Realm, while the Eclipse Caste were envoys in far-flung places and distant corners of Creation. The Crowned Suns commanded some personal Terrestrial troops or interacted with Dragon-Blooded ministers and

functionaries, but they did not command the armies of the Realm like the Dawn and Zenith Castes once did.

It is perhaps because of this that the surviving members of the Eclipse Caste were among the last to be hunted down and eliminated by the rebellious Dragon-Blooded. Some Quicksilver Falcons were far from home when the coup began, and others fled into hiding with trusted allies when news of the slaughter reached them. The Terrestrial Exalted were forced to root out the remaining Solars, and they often paid dearly in terms of lives and resources to do so. Even among the Dragon-Blooded today, the Deceivers are some of the most feared Anathema, not because of their prowess in battle, but because of their tenacity and their ability to seem harmless, until it is too late.

To the Dragon-Blooded rulers of the Realm, the Eclipse Caste is both scorned and terrifying. On the one hand, the Dynasts are warriors born and scoff at the threat posed by traveling diplomats and courtiers, especially when compared to the martial prowess of the Dawn Caste. On the other hand, social connections are the lifeblood of any Dragon-Blooded house or noble, and the Crowned Suns are quite capable of poisoning that well and making even a powerful Dynast into a social outcast. There's also the ever-present risk of being tricked into an agreement, enforced by the power of an Eclipse. Needless to say, the scions of the Great Houses tread more carefully than ever.

GLORIOUS BRAND, OUTCASTE MONSTER HUNTER

I keep thinking, what if I hadn't saved him? Of course, I didn't know then what he would become. There was no hint of it. I've heard others say that they always knew he was special, that he would achieve great things, but I don't remember any of them stepping forward at his trial to defend him. It's only now that he's favored by the Syndics that they say things like that. I just keep thinking that if only I had been a little later, he would be nothing but a drooling husk, and I wonder if that would have been better or worse? Back then, I thought he would have been better off mindless and soulless than exiled, but I guess you never know how these things are going to turn out.

Rune is certainly not what I pictured the Deceivers to be like. He's charming and almost boyish. He doesn't seem like a cold and calculating monster, scheming to enslave your soul. Of course, the priests would say that's exactly how a Deceiver would be; seemingly harmless, until your soul belongs to him and you don't even recall giving it away. But then, I never placed much stock in what the Immaculates had to say. I'm more concerned about earning a living, and

I've been hunting monsters in Whitewall for a long time. I've gotten to know their tricks, and I don't think that Rune is like them. If he is, then he's a lot more cunning than I ever imagined.

Either way, I don't have any interest in his politics. He's good for Whitewall, and he pays well, and that's good enough for me. If the Wyld Hunt does decide to come for him some day, they aren't going to be able to afford my blade. I hunt monsters, not men.

V'NEEF VERIS ON RHIANNA

The Anathema operating openly in the Scavenger Lands! I never thought I would live to see the Realm sink so low. While the Great Houses fight amongst themselves, the Anathema are free to do as they wish in places like the River Provinces, and I have heard stories of them appearing all over Creation. It is a sign that the Realm must have a new, strong leader to direct our forces, to send the Wyld Hunt to sweep away these monsters that incite the common folk to rebellion, that spread the worship of their false and blasphemous gods.

But the most dangerous of all are those Anathema who conceal their true nature beneath a veil of normalcy and even servitude. Like the demon that offers its service willingly, the people who accept the aid of the Anathema are dooming themselves. We pursued one of the creatures from the Marukan Alliance, but she escaped into the shadowland of the Deathlord, Mask of Winters. Then she returns to the Alliance, offering her "gifts" to aid them, and the fools accept! They'll understand the mistake they've made when their pet Anathema turns against them, betrays them to the Deathlord or worse and chains their souls in servitude.

The Realm may not have the power it needs in the River Province now, but it is only a matter of time. The throne will be filled, and on that day, the Anathema will learn fear and the true power of the Princes of the Earth. If Rhianna thinks that she is safe from me, then she is sadly mistaken. With or without the Empress' command, I will carry out my duty. I will keep the world safe from the Anathema and their kind, so long as there is breath in my body. I swear it!

ABYSSAL EXALTED AND THE DEATHLORDS

The Eclipse Caste is permitted to walk freely in the shadowlands according to ancient pacts. To the surprise of many, this suits the Deathlords just fine, and they are usually happy to have the Crowned Suns as their honored guests. Despite the enmity between the Deathlords (and their Abyssal Exalted) and the

Chosen of the Unconquered Sun, the Deathlords recognize the value of diplomacy as both a tool and a weapon. The Eclipse Caste is an integral part of that diplomacy, giving the Deathlords the opportunity to negotiate with the Solar Exalted rather than always having to fight them directly.

Likewise, the Harmonious Voices allow the Solar Exalted the chance to negotiate with the Deathlords on their own territory without having to fight their way through armies of the Restless Dead. Many Solars recognize that, while the Deathlords may not be suitable long-term allies, they may also not be the most important enemy to deal with at the moment, given the threat of the Dragon-Blooded and the encroachment of the Fair Folk and the Wyld into Creation. Thus, in many places across Creation, the Deathlords and the Solars have struck an uneasy peace, broken by the occasional outright conflict and largely maintained by the efforts of the Eclipse Caste.

MOURNFUL ARIA ON RUNE

Oh, brother, where was your joy at seeing me again? We are not that different, you and I. You think that you need to save me from who and what I am, and I must show you how to embrace death as I have embraced it, to find the kind of freedom that I know.


When I first heard that you awaited me, I dreamed that it would be easy. You would run to embrace me, and in so doing, embrace the freedom of death. You would return with me to the shadowland, to the palace of my mistress, and you would swear to serve her as I have. We would be together again, forever. But I see now that was a childish fantasy. You don't understand the world like I do. You haven't had the benefit of the Lover's teachings. You've lived in a world of pain and loneliness and despair. Now, you cling to the hope that the people of Whitewall will accept you, raise you up as their hero. You're wrong. They will destroy you one day, or they would, if allowed the chance.

I won't let that happen, Rune. You thought that I was lost, but you are actually the one who is lost, lost in a world of hopes and dreams about fighting the inevitable, of changing what cannot be changed. The only truth in Creation is death, my brother. It comes to us all in time. It is the only constant, the only certainty. Do not fight against it, embrace it, and you will understand. I only hope that my mistress will let me show you the way, as she has shown me.

THE LOVER CLAD IN THE RAIMENT OF TEARS

Patience, my child, your time will come, but the way will not be easy. The light and promises of the





Unconquered Sun have blinded your brother to the truth. He believes that he is a champion of life and light and does not understand that life must always give way to death and light to darkness. The service of the Unconquered Sun is a transitory thing, like all things in life. I know this truth well, and your brother will learn the same lesson, in time.

Remember that you have time on your side, even if your work should take an Age to complete. No matter where your brother may turn, sooner or later, he must meet death, like all things that live. The Chosen of the Unconquered Sun live long indeed, but the seed of death is inside them. You need only encourage it to grow and blossom.

Until the time is right, cultivate him as you would a garden. Let the corpses of memories and the decay of what he once believed to be true become the fertile soil. Become close to him, and show him the glory of what you have become so that he might better understand. Encourage him to visit my domain, and make him accustomed to our ways. It is in his nature to learn and respect the ways of others, so use this to your advantage. Offer him knowledge, and teach him as I have taught you, and we will become a part of him because such lessons can never be unlearned.

PALEST IVORY TO HIS MASTER, THE DEATHLORD MASK OF WINTERS

"The messenger Rhianna has departed once more, oh Resplendent and Awesome Lord, bound for the lands of the living, carrying your tidings to her people and to others beyond.

"I have spoken with her, as you commanded, and she does not understand that she does your bidding through her work. She believes, as her people do, that her service helps to stay your mighty hand, to check the growth of the shadowland. She does not know that you choose to wait and prepare for the proper time, rather than expanding your domain, that you choose to cultivate ties with the mortal cities and nations surrounding your kingdom out of strength, rather than weakness."

"Well done, my loyal servant. Even now, there are those mortals who wonder in fear at my plans and cast jealous eyes at the places that seem to hold my favor."

"Yes, Lord. Rhianna spoke of concerns that you are gathering allies in the River Province, concerns that could lead to war if nervous leaders choose to attack your would-be allies and so deprive you of their strength."

"They do not understand that they serve me however they may act. If they attack, then they

destroy or weaken the lands closest to my domain, eliminating potential threats and leaving them easy prey for my armies, strengthened by the dead left in the wake of the fighting. If they choose to negotiate, in hopes of currying my favor, then they tie their own hands when the time comes when they must act against me. If they do nothing, then my domain may grow undisturbed, protected by the lands of my 'allies,' becoming more deeply entrenched, until there will be no dislodging us.

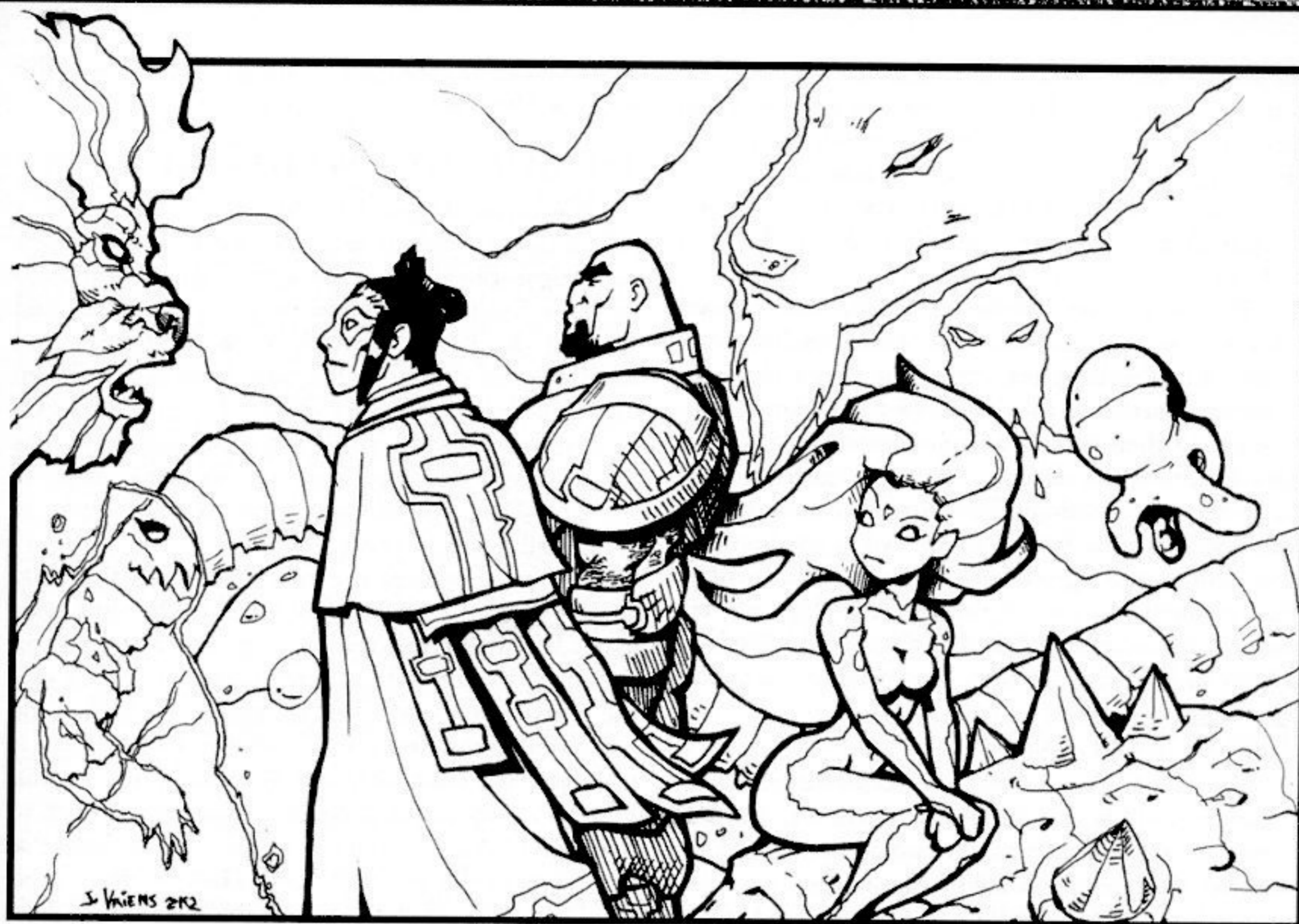
"You have done well, my faithful one, as have the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun such as Swan's Circle and our little Rhianna. Now, do you see the wisdom in sparing her and offering her shelter? Take and break an enemy's weapon, and you have only deprived your enemy. Take and use that weapon as your own, and you not only deprive your foe, but strengthen yourself. So it shall be with these Solar Exalted."

FALLING TEARS POET, RECOGNIZING THE MIRROR FLAG FROM AFAR

Transcendent liar. She told me of her own beauty so skillfully that I thought her beautiful. Knowing that pain would make my work great, she hurt me. She cultivated between us the tortuous love that all great poets cite as the inspiration for their work. Even as I wasted, as the sickness took my life, she played her part. Now, from the other side of life, I see that my muse was a herald, preparing me for my fate. Sometimes now, I smell her sweat in the news of a lynching or hear her laughter in the chants of the herders as they storm the gates of the taxman's house. I wonder if I am jealous that so many people are my lover's lovers now, chasing her into rebirth as I did.

THE FAIR FOLK

The Fair Folk have something of a love-hate relationship with the Eclipse Caste, a reflection of the relationship they have with all Creation. By ancient pact, the members of the Eclipse Caste may walk among the Fair Folk and the Wyld places of the world freely and cannot be attacked without just cause. Of course, the Fair Folk are masters of duplicity and skilled at coming up with excuses for attacking and destroying the Exalted when they choose, but even they cannot fool the judgment of Heaven. If their justification is not sound, they will pay the price for their indiscretions, and they know it. Thus, the Fair Folk are cautious when dealing with the Crowned Suns or anyone under their protection.



LIONS OF THE WINTER FOLK

Rune, like others of his caste, it seems, has a gift for turning disappointment into opportunity. Not just his own disappointment, either. I remember the fury I felt when that Dragon-Blooded bitch drove me from Whitewall. How I wished then that I'd taken the chance to finish Rune off rather than savor what he'd given me before hunting in that teeming city, but his survival gave me a new opportunity.

When he was exiled and his dreams were seasoned with betrayal, bitterness and despair, I rejoiced. Then, he was snatched from my grasp again, Exalted by the Unconquered Sun, protected by the ancient pacts. I thought that I would have to be content with watching him slowly freeze and die, but he offered me another opportunity.

While he abided with us throughout the winter, Rune was no longer the naïve young man I had found along the road. He rapidly matured into a worthy adversary. Everything about him became an intoxicating challenge. I taught him swordsmanship, and he bore the lessons (and the cuts that came with them), until he was good enough to hold his own and even best me on occasion. We fenced with words over meals. We duelled with glances and caresses in the night. I offered him challenges, and he met them. Oh, thank Chaos that I didn't snuff out his flame when I

could! He has become more beautiful and complex than I could have imagined, gone from a mere morsel to a feast! I could play this game for a mortal lifetime before I grow tired of it.

I begin to understand the virtue that mortals call patience. With each day that passes, Rune ripens like the most tempting fruit, and I must wait for just the right moment to pick it. One day, he will think that he is rid of me, he will believe that he has won, that he is beyond my reach. That is the day when he will be mine: body, mind and soul. Mine to play with forever — or until I tire.

SPIRITS

Like the Fair Folk, spirits have something of a love-hate relationship with the Eclipse Caste. On the one hand, the Solar Winds were entrusted with the task of keeping unruly spirits in line in the Old Realm. They sealed pacts and agreements that bound the denizens of the spirit world and limited their power, many of them still in force to this day. A lifetime agreement is one thing to a mortal's mayfly existence and quite another to an immortal spirit. The little gods often grew to fear and hate the coming of the Crowned Suns and their powers.

Spirits also remember that the Eclipse Caste once treated them with the respect and propriety that is



their due. Although they were stern and hard negotiators, the Quicksilver Falcons were also respectful and aware of the importance of the spirit world, not like the Dragon-Blooded with their Immaculate Order. The rules of the Solar Exalted, laid down by the Eclipse Caste, were firm, sometimes harsh, but just and fair.

This means that spirits are usually cautious and respectful when they know they are dealing with members of the Eclipse Caste. They honor their ancient agreements to the letter, and the Harmonious Voices and their companions are inviolate so long as they maintain the decorum of proper guests. If the Exalt strays from that, the spirit can and will do whatever it wants. Spirits are shrewd negotiators and don't enter into agreements easily, especially when they're talking to one of the Quills of Heaven, but they can be bargained with, and they're more likely to talk to an Eclipse Solar than they would most others.

THE FOREST LORD

Yes, the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun have come to us here. I offered them shelter, and the Crowned Sun promised that he would honor me with sacrifices and that he would come if ever my forest needed his aid. He sealed his oath and upheld it, not like those who think to bargain with me and cheat me of my rightful due. They repay by feeding the forest and keeping it strong, like the others that pursued the Chosen here. They brought steel and fire into my domain, entering without permission. They paid for their arrogance with their lives.

So, what have you to offer in exchange for the bounty of the forest? Do you offer your oath, given freely and upheld with honor, or is your body and your blood all that you can offer? Consider carefully, and answer well.

STORM, SON OF HIPARKES

I, who thought never to carry another on my back, now serve willingly because I have found one worthy of me. She is like the sun that parts the clouds after a storm has passed. She is the gentle light of the dawn that awakens the world. Others looked on me with lust and greed in their hearts. They tried to dominate me, to break me to their will. She came to me out of admiration to help me. Although I rejected her, she did not waver. Although I struggled, she held on. In that moment, her light opened my eyes, and I saw the destiny my father intended for me. Since that day, I have helped to save her, and she has protected me more times than we can count. Rhianna is more than just a rider or a mistress. She is a friend and companion, and I will be the same to her until my

father comes to claim my soul and I run through the fields of Heaven.

THE SYNDICS OF WHITEWALL

We court danger in allowing the Quicksilver Falcon called Rune to serve us. We remember when the Dragon-Blooded rose up against their Solar leaders, how Exalted blood ran deep in the streets and fields of the Realm. Terrible were the battles, and awful was the slaughter. The new lords of the Realm still consider the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun their enemies, and they will not look kindly upon our sheltering this one, much less naming him emissary of our city. They will be angry, and they may strike at Whitewall in their anger.

But we remember the First Age, when the Solar Exalted ruled the Realm. The world is changing once more. It is written in the Heavens and whispered on the wind. The Scarlet Empress' throne lies empty, and the Great Houses will war amongst themselves. The protection of the Realm is not what it once was, nor is its anger. We must safeguard Whitewall, and in this, Rune is a most useful ally. He is bound by his oath to the good of our city and our people, and he serves as our voice in the places beyond where mortals, even the Dragon-Blooded, cannot go. Whitewall prospers, and if the Great Houses should settle their dispute, our oath to him does not include protecting him from the wrath of the Terrestrial Exalted. He serves Whitewall, and he serves us, and we will decide when his service and his usefulness are at an end.

TORCH BANISHES NIGHT, SPIRIT GUARDSMAN OF GREAT FORKS

Never have I seen someone dazzle so many so well with such overt lies. It's almost as if it's the beauty of the telling is the key and not the lie itself. With Lord Talespinner, I feel this is understandable, as well-told tales are his domain, but I cannot say with surety why anyone else ever fell to her words. I certainly didn't, though it does not seem to have mattered. Though the evidence said she was masterminding a criminal band in the guise of a carnival, Lord Talespinner saw fit to pardon her and to execute her partner, the old barker in the red robe. My bitterness over the lies clouds my words, I know. She did Exalt as one of the Unconquered Sun's ambassadors in the midst of legal proceedings. I suppose prosecution would have been too thorny an issue, regardless of the fact that the girl burned all the evidence during arrest and lied about it later. I can only trust that Lord Talespinner's tutelage has had an effect on the girl.

SHALRINA, DAIMYO OF FACES

The Mirror Flag's face was designed by me, so I have a certain bias in her — or rather, it's favor. It is not often that anyone, let alone a Solar Exalt, comes to me knowing my nature and skill and asks for a unique and artistic mask. I now know of the Mirror Flag's fluid identity and understanding of the symbol of the mask and suppose it's only natural that we two found each other. It's a great boon for me, I'll not deny that. Mirror Flag's attributes are such that I find myself sharing a level of commonality that I have not felt for a great long while.

Mirror Flag comes highly recommended from my peers, is skilled in the ways of gods and is always willing to cooperate or trade favors. It goes a long way toward soothing my worry at the return of Unconquered Sun's Exalted that the Mirror Flag knows so well her place in dealings with me. Speaking strictly as an artisan and dealer, it also pleases me that she is discriminating in her taste in masks and a voracious collector.

TALESPINNER OF GREAT FORKS

A anecdote, a caution for those who have a narrow view. Once, there was a spirit of Great Forks, a guardsman called Torch Banishes Night. This spirit, a spirit of the uses of fire, was a very diligent enforcer of laws and investigator of crimes and, most times, a very good judge of the worth of people. During one investigation, however, he was foiled by a mortal conniver and bright morning addict, a performer who, because of her use of the drug, was able to detect Torch Banishes Night and his fellow spirit-guardsmen as they closed their investigatory net around her in their incorporeal true forms.

A very wise being might have seen that this girl, though an addict and a criminal, was clever well beyond the norm for mortals. A being who had spent his entire existence telling tales and learning all that one learns from that art might have even suspected that the girl was even more devious and had, in fact, engineered her entire persona and doings for a chance

to impress a powerful lord, possibly even the scholar of tales.

Torch Banishes Night saw only a criminal. His zeal was admirable, but his scope was limited by the bounds of his profession. He could not see that the criminal he felt so clever to see under the face of the performer was nothing more than a second mask, while the true face of the seeker, the girl, was underneath.

It occurs to me that you might have to had been there for my anecdote to make as much sense as I hoped it would. It does come off as a bit contrived and possibly obtuse. I'm confident that a little revision will tidy it up well and make the moral clear. In the meantime, I'll sum up by saying that some secrets are revealed to you, even secrets you may think you discovered on your own.

SWAN DRAGON ON SAND

When is sand not sand? When it's a man. When it's an ocean, or the dunes are door. The land of sand is the land of Sand, who shrinks his land into his hand to make it easier to land. This is the hand of the man called Sand on the land. What is the sound of one hand clapping itself on the back? Like back in the day. When the Sun's sons had the run of the land, men like Sand ran with demands and plans to protect man, but behind their fans, the plans were shams and were undone. These new ones of the Sun, on the lam from the stars and young dragons rumbling, have humbling lives and dodge knives, but Sand survives and arrives on a plan, not grand, not fun, no grand stands: the Sun against the law of the land. No, he knows to stay low and to land small blows against the ghost throne, ghosts and mad hosts, and to take as his post the command that makes strong the most, the people, the order, the bliss of the righteous that exist in bits, and if they miss the sins of pride that the last them fell into and take the low slow road to right and pick their fights and give me a warm place to sleep at night and maybe a little white wine if it's not too much trouble, we may just come out of this Age with a smile.

He gives me alms when I ask, so I name him good. He remembers my face, so he is not yet bent.





JOE VRIENS

CHAPTER FIVE

DREAMS OF THE FIRST AGE



The Unconquered Sun Exalted a particular number of souls at the dawn of the First Age, and even though the flesh they once wore is long since dust, that deathless power endures, and faint memories cling to it. The power of the Solars has lived before, often many times, although their lives since the Usurpation and the creation of the Wyld Hunt have usually been brief. It is only recently that the Solars have returned in greater numbers and recalled some of the glories they once knew.

These memories are fragmentary and dreamlike, usually triggered by the sight or experience of something familiar to a past life. Seeing a First Age ruin or artifact might bring the memory of it welling up in the Exalt's mind. A recollection might be anything from a strange sense of familiarity to *déjà vu* or a flashback to an earlier life and time. Generally, the greater the Exalted's permanent Essence score, the more complete and detailed these memories become. Exaltation is often accompanied by visions or recollections of memories, as are the meditations and exercises that increase an Exalt's Essence. Some Exalted believe that reclaiming these memories of the First Age is an important part of increasing their Essence and their control over it.

The Eclipse Caste has many opportunities to spark memories of the past through their meetings

with various inhuman beings. Many of the spirits, demons and other creatures the Harmonious Voices treat with were actually present during the First Age and recall it well. They are also sensitive to Essence and the nature of souls, so they may recognize a familiar spirit dwelling within new flesh upon meeting an Exalt for the "first" time. Such meetings often trigger recollections for the Exalted as well. Of course, the Exalted should beware. It is not unknown for a conniving spirit or faerie to try and create false "memories" that suggest the Exalted and the creature were once close friends or even intimates. Even if it's true, a lot can change in the passage of an Age, and neither the Exalted nor the denizens of the spirit world are the beings they once were.

The Storyteller can use these dreams and visions of past lives to provide the players with tantalizing hints and clues about the nature of things and beings their characters encounter during the story. Meeting to negotiate with a spirit that is threatening a village is one thing. Suddenly realizing that spirit was a lover (or a blood enemy) in a former life can complicate matters.

THE FETE

The domed room is large enough to fit an entire village inside, held up by towering pillars so thick



that it would take at least 10 people holding hands to encircle one. The pillars are carved with complex designs filled in with gold. The dome arcing high overhead is lapis lazuli, spangled with silvery flecks like stars. In the air beneath the dome float dozens of glowing orbs that shed a soft light over the assemblage below.

And what a gathering it is! The Princes of the Earth are resplendent in all their finery. The robes and cloaks are woven from silk, brightly dyed and cleverly embroidered and cut. Jewelry of orichalcum and brilliant gems adorns throats, wrists, waists, arms and legs. Among the rich colors and the golden gleam of the Solars are the furs, dark colors and silver of the Lunars. Moonsilver bangles reshape themselves to their owners' whims and Lunar Exalted mix the exotic features of beasts and birds with their costumes and jewels.

Here and there are the Sidereal Exalted, in the colors of their Maidens, talking philosophy and discussing ancient lore with Twilight scholars. There are the Dragon-Blooded, some in their ceremonial armor, most in dress uniforms or fine clothing, with delicately carved ornaments of jade.

Beautiful music is playing from somewhere, and many people are dancing complex and beautiful dances. Winged folk loop and soar through the air beneath the dome to the laughter and applause of those watching below. The scents of sweet perfumes and incense swirl through the air, mixing with the enticing aromas of exotic food and drink. People cluster together on balconies overlooking the room and spill out onto terraces that offer a view of a gleaming city. We have fought long and hard, struggled and sacrificed, but we are victorious, and tonight, we celebrate and honor our achievements.

I whirl in the steps of a dance, sip an exotic nectar I've never tasted before, and just as I hope that this night will never end, I awaken.

THE PACT

The fortress is spun from crystal and glass in a rainbow of colors that catch the sun and throw shards of brilliant light in all direction. It looks like such a delicate thing, but I know that it has withstood a fearsome assault. Appearances are deceiving here, but for now, it is of no threat to anyone.

I lead the entourage, carrying an ivory tube tucked beneath my arm. The Terrestrials follow behind, in perfect order and discipline, alert for danger, although I do not expect any. We are here today on a mission of peace, not war. The war is over, and now is the time for healing and rebuilding.

They greet us at the entrance to the fortress, tall and thin, impossibly beautiful, wearing only filmy

cloth that shimmers with the same colors as the crystal all around us. Our steps ring like music on the stairs, our voices cause the walls around us to sing and reverberate as we exchange greetings. We're taken through the vast central hall of the place, where light paints moving pictures on the walls and floor, up a spiraling stairway past strange, caged beasts and greenhouses of flowers with gems for petals that give off a perfume like nothing in Creation.

At the top of the tallest tower, we look out upon the forest of crystal that grows below. The structure of the fortress is so fine and clear it's as if we stand on air with nothing to support us. The Unconquered Sun still shines above, and I offer up a silent prayer of thanks to him, feeling the gentle caress of his warmth on my face. Then, I turn back to the glass table and open the ivory tube, spreading the treaty out before our hosts. They know its terms and are prepared to accept them. Their seals upon it are works of art, like the brushstrokes of a master.

I hold out a hand, palm up, and three other slim hands are placed upon it. The light shines brightly around us and the writing on the document seems to rise into the air to dance, like motes of dust in the sunlight. The pact is sealed.

THE AMBASSADORS

The sun is setting over the city, casting its towers and domes into shadow, painting the sky in vivid shadows of rose, orange and violet. A wind rises from the sea, cool and heavy with the smell of salt, as I shade my eyes and look toward the setting sun and the shadow that moves across it.

Their chariot moves slowly, majestically, toward the platform as the wind whips my cloak out behind me. The approach is silent. My pulse quickens as I watch. I've been looking forward to this meeting for some time. The pentagonal craft comes up alongside the platform, hovering high above the streets below. A gate lowers from its side, forming a bridge across the narrow gap, and its passengers disembark.

Their scales gleam in the fading rays of the sun, tails lashing slowly from side to side. A forked tongue flicks out, tasting the air. They wear ceremonial armor but carry no weapons apart from the claws on their hands and their splayed feet. They pause at the edge of the platform, and I walk slowly out to greet them. When I am almost within arm's reach, I stop and give a low bow, which is returned to me in kind. Then, I raise my arms to Heaven in respect to the Unconquered Sun that we both honor. Clawed hands are pressed to their hearts, then raised to the sky.

THE STORM

The ship rolls and pitches, tossed on the towering waves like a child's toy. We slid sideways as a powerful wave nearly capsizes us, water flooding across the deck. The wind shrieks and howls, driving rain so heavy that I can barely see. Even though it is day, the sky is black as night, lit only by flashes of lightning that fork yellow and blue.

The engines struggle against the power of the waves, their whine drowned out by the wind and the storm. I help the crew up on deck. We can only try to ride out the storm's fury, and I focus all my Essence and will into my ship, strengthening her hull, keeping her upright, trying to hold the pounding force of the waves at bay. I glow like a beacon in the darkness, spilling light across the deck. My men are lashed to the ship by tethers, but my feet remain firmly rooted. My ship is a part of me. No gale, no wave, can separate me from her.

I call to the helmsman to hold our course, then a towering wall of water rises up in front of us, so high it seems to blot out the sky. A shriek resounds on the wind as I cry to my crew to hold on and the wave breaks over us. For a moment, the sky and the storm are gone, the world smothered in surging water. I feel the ship straining, but she will not break as long as I do not. Then, we surface again, the water's pull unable to hold us.

I hear the cry once more, and I know that it's not the sound of the wind. I raise my hand, and my anima flares, as bright as the sun. In its light, I can see vast black tentacles rising up out of the raging sea all around us. The angry spirit will not be thwarted of its prey so easily. Each arm is like a tree trunk, with hide like leather, covered with cruel barbs that can tear a ship apart, much less a man that falls into its clutches.

I draw a golden rod from my belt, tipped with a glowing stone. I level it at the nearest tentacle, and a beam of light lances out from it. It cuts through the tentacle like a razor. Black blood fountains into the air, which is filled with a burning smell and the shrieks of the monster. Thunder cracks, and I catch lightning in my hand as it's hurled down upon me. The bolt only fuels my anger and my will, and the light stabs out from my scepter, severing another of the beast's arms and sending it crashing into the churning water.

It rises up from the depths, amber eyes twice my height, bloated body big enough to swallow my ship whole. A purple gem glows at its forehead, with sparks and lightning playing about it. Its vast maw opens with a deafening shriek.

I roar back my defiance, holding my scepter clasped in both hands, high above my head. My anima flares in the impression of mighty wings around me, and

suddenly, the clouds above part, a brilliant shaft of sunlight striking down. Surrounded and sustained by its light, I level the golden rod — its tip obscured by a sphere of pure, white light — at the creature. A searing beam bursts forth and strikes the glowing jewel on its head. Spears of purple light shoot out in all directions, then the gem explodes. Its detonation is echoed by the spirit's scream. A wave pushes my ship sideways, but I see the creature sink and disappear below the surface.

ROUTES

...far above the ground, I can see the Blessed Isle and the Threshold spread out to the horizon in every direction, though the Threshold is familiar only along the coast, and every land is connected to the next by shimmering sigils: swirls and matrices of multicolored, pulsing lines. I want to examine these runes, and so, I focus on one more closely... there is a vertiginous moment of horror as my perspective changes radically, and a hand, apparently mine, reaches out to trace one of the sigils on what is now a very detailed map built into the wall. "This character of the Order Conferring Trade Pattern is only at half integrity." My eyes drop to the outermost border of the Threshold, calculating the effect this drop in trade power will have on the Wyld barriers.

The room, I know without looking that it is immense and filled with maps and underlings, falls silent at my words, awaiting direction. "Decrease the road tax on the southern spur of this character to tier nine, and have the textile and spice routes moved to the northern spur... fast land ships, use Zephyr Fleet. Also, ready my ship and crew, I'll be dealing with the raiders personally." I turned on my heel to prepare for the trip, hoping this would be enough to turn the character from yellow back to a proper green. "The Pattern must stay strong, people. Let's move."

ALLIES

...a menagerie of terrible, beautiful beings: insect men made of cold blue light, living islands that speak in a chorus of low voices from galleries of great stone faces, a congress of man-sized turtles paddling in circular formation through the hot blood of earth inside a volcano... these and countless more, all bound to order and alliance by my word alone, by my presence as they make their oaths... before me now, one of the many beings I treat with as an envoy of the Deliberative, but one I am glad to see. I know this one well. She is more beautiful than most and less outwardly terrible, though, from long experience, I know that she is as terrible in her way as any of the gods. Her madness betrayed outwardly by the wet glint in her





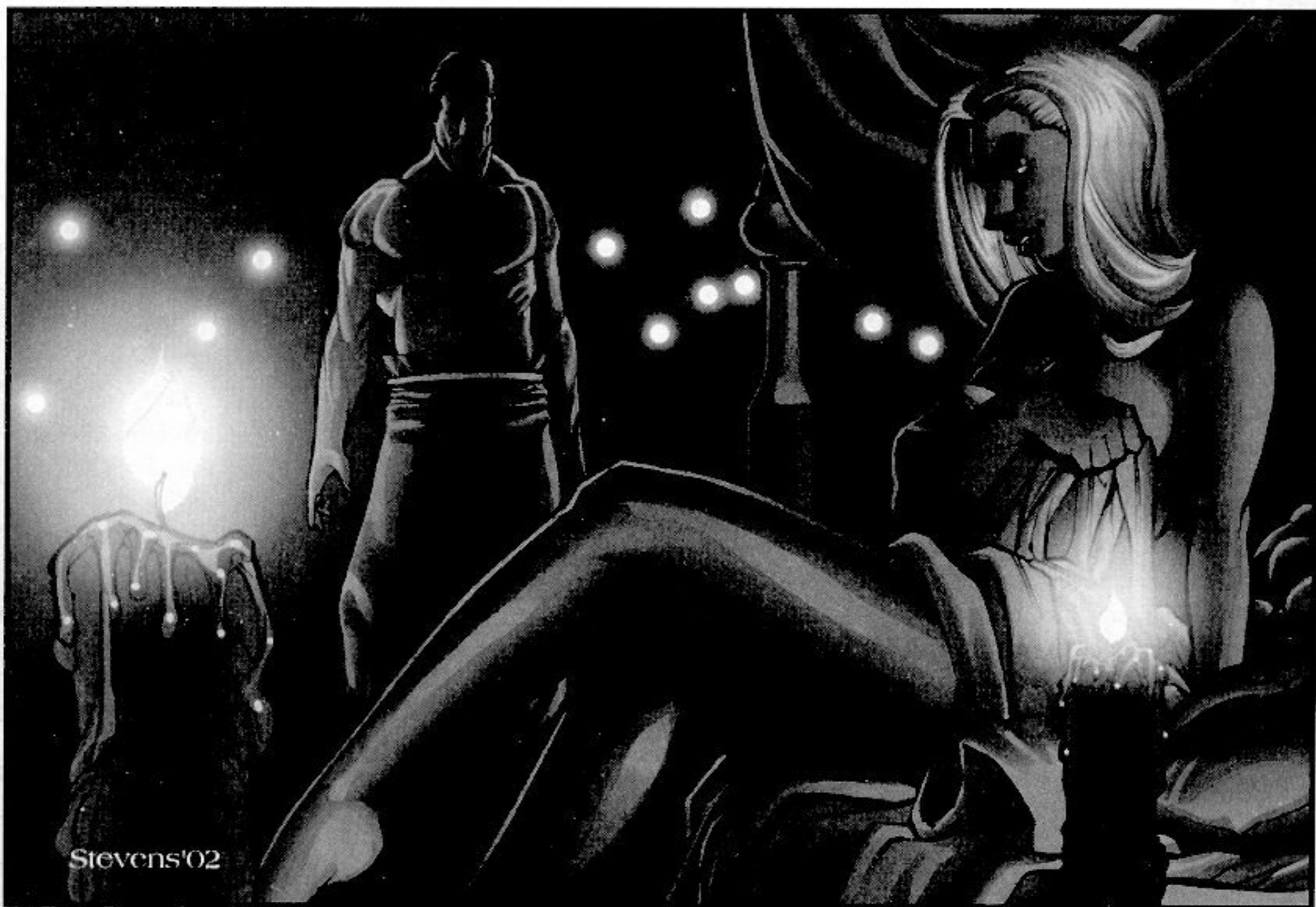
eyes, she lounges on the corner of a great bed and smiles, glad of my presence as I am glad of hers. She lifts her great horn to her lips to drink, the Lady of Bliss is ever drunk, and the blanket she wears carelessly as a garment reveals a stretch of tan leg here, a breast or midriff there. This game brings a smile to my tired face, but not the instant peace of forgetting that it once did from her, my lover. I am too tired now, not the young Exalt I was... She seduced me, as she does all beings she meets, centuries ago. She gave me respite from my constant travel and words, centuries of words in a constant, empty stream. I hated my skill with them, my duty to speak constantly to every manner of hostile god and demon... to counter my melancholy, she gave me weeks of bliss, her sphere. Every manner of pleasure, we enjoyed together in each others' arms: drink, herbs and powders, the pleasure of dozens of slaves... youth, now, and brutality... too much drink... the cold white ecstasy of sharing senses with the slave who services me as my Lady of Bliss breaks the slave's neck... Still, I am tired. The games must be so grand as to take a year to plan, or else, I grow as tired of them as I do my duty... Sitting up from her bed, her mad, inviting eyes now only cause a tired anger in me. It is only seclusion I want from her now. Away from the world, here in her humid domain, no one will dare to intrude on our games. I strike her

hard across the face, and she laughs, sprawled on the floor in her spilled drink and spilled blood... and again... and again... and I forget for a time.

LISTEN

The room, the center, the spells I make, the Essence, the items of power I wear, these things bring me the stolen words and whispers of a thousand people. Though it is as if I stand in the midst of countless conversations, I hear and understand each with flawless clarity and can recall the details of each with ease. More significantly, I can synthesize from these snatches of talk, a merchant in Noble, a legionnaire in a winehouse nine streets away, a matrix of moods, a pattern of the people of a nation.

The operatives of my agency stand arrayed around the room, silent, awaiting my instructions, the nation's responses to the nation's collective wishes. I may tell my Terrestrial agents to have patrols stepped up in a region where lingering unsolved crimes are hurting faith and, thus, productivity. I may tell them to begin gathering evidence on a tax collector who the people feel lives too well. They do not question when I say these things. They know my magics and the ties I have with the Essence of the people, the web that ties all citizens together. Even when I tell them to silence a subversive, they walk from the room with purpose as



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with any other task I give them, to disseminate parts of the task to their agents and those agents to their own and so on.

I do not justify my crime, in the dream. I do not think to myself some circuitous rationalization when I send my operatives into the world to hurt markets for certain items or to bolster others. I know I simply abuse my office for the gain of my private business affairs and those of my allies. That is good. At least I knew what I was.

FLIGHT FROM HOME

...no time for tears, though I know they need to come soon. All my concentration and Essence goes to manning a tri-hull scout ship, alone, toward open ocean it was never meant to see without support. Grief is a luxury for those who aren't in danger of death themselves, but I will grieve. Dawnrazor, the Prince, Kal... my friends, peers and everyone else, all slain or disappeared — or running, as I am. Only my own duplicity saved me from accompanying them to their ends. My absence, to see to my own selfish plans away from my peoples' eyes, spared me the bite of treachery for a time. I can feel that guilt will be crushing when I allow myself to feel it's weight, but for now, I pour my soul into my stolen ship and scud eastward. Meherrin, he could have fled or been killed with the rest, kept a lodge far from civilization, a private retreat in the wilderness.

Night, I fly blind across the surging foam. Scout ships of my land's own navy swarm through the darkness, heavy with Terrestrial warriors and sorcerers. When I lag or grow tired, the night is split with spells and brilliant light as they unleash their energies at every wavetop or shape that might be my battered ship. Land, the comfort I raced toward for days, is now to one side, now the other... a thousand storms from a thousand spells, and my Essence is all but exhausted. Hands burned, eyes blind from strain — too late I see the rocks. There is a moment of calm as sea and sky trade places once, twice and, then, the cool embrace of the sea. The calm under the waves betrays nothing of the mania above, so calm... so still...

FLIGHT FROM PAIN

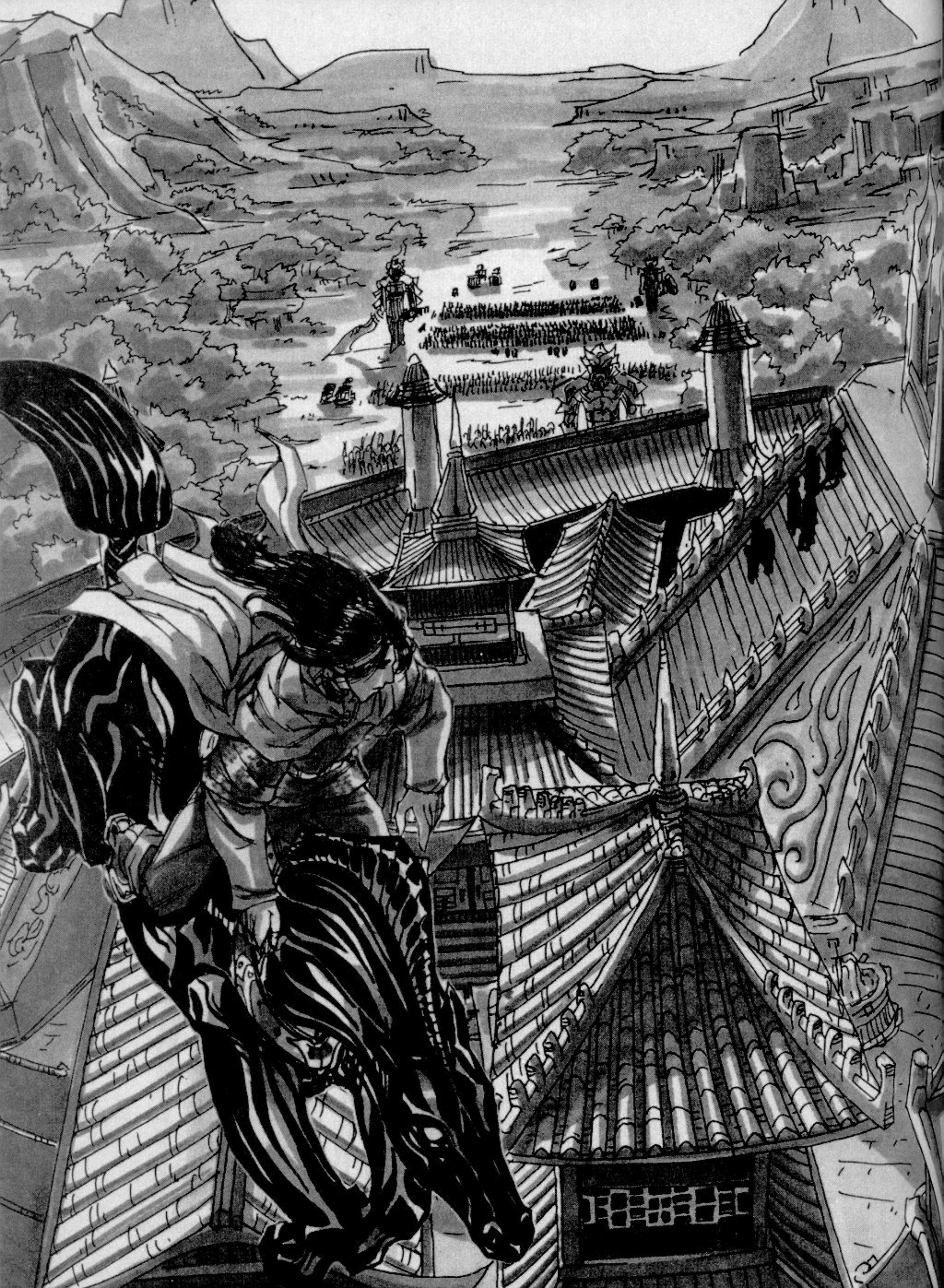
...calm, still and dark in the study of my Dragon-Blooded major-domo, Kes. The streets of the city are quiet tonight, easy for me to see to my personal

business while everyone's attention is on the great feast. I adjust the mask that hides my imprint on things I handle and go to work on the piles of paper in Kes's study. I sort through the official records and replace them with altered versions, carefully burn the originals and take the ashes to scatter so they cannot be sorcerously reconstructed. There is a wailing sound, like many voices crying out, and an ill light from the center of the city, but I do not seem to notice in my dream. I glide to the side door. Kes knows many of the details of my criminal abuse of my position, and it profits him as well as me, but I do not wish to awaken his servants or family and delay my arrival at the feast any further. Kes is framed in the flickering white light from outside as he slips through his side door, just as I move to leave through it. I can see in his eyes that something is wrong. He mumbles that he thought I was at the feast already, sweating. He smells of Essence and fire as he steps, afraid, back out the door and inhales to yell to someone. In one motion, I am closing the door on his hand and am away, flying through the streets and moving to avoid the arrows of the Terrestrials who pursue me. Panic. The Deliberative Palace vomits smoke and light. Solars lay dead in the atrium of the Palace and in the streets where they fled. Panic is joined by rage.

FLIGHT FROM LIFE

...the Dragon-Bloods on the ships are still combing the sea around the wreckage of my scout craft when I explode from the waves on the rocky shore. It is dawn now, and I hope I have some of the strength of the Children of the Dawn, now dead, as my Essence screams into my powerbow again and again, screaming white arcs lancing in a perfect straight line into the midst of the traitors seeking my body. For my dead lovers, an arrow explodes through all three hulls of the nearest ship, turning it over twice in the air before it lands. For my fallen peers, an arrow turns the torso of a Terrestrial into a red spray as he casts a spell, the implosion bow and mast behind him vanishing into a cone of splinters and blue-green released Essence. For my dead competitors, for my slain friends, for my ruined dreams, for my unfinished crimes... the implosion bows drive me back toward the beach and, finally, onto my knees in the surf, and still, I fire, again and again, mundane arrows now that my Essence is gone, and the dream ends.





CHAPTER SIX

MAGIC OF THE ECLIPSE



The magic of the Eclipse Caste is subtle but broad and deep. The Crowned Suns have the potential to learn and master not only Solar Charms, but also the techniques and secrets of other Exalted and even of spirits, demons or Fair Folk. Because of this, any two members of the Eclipse Caste may differ greatly in Charms and Abilities. They rely on this flexibility in carrying out their duties.

This chapter details some Charms and artifacts associated primarily with the Eclipse Caste. Characters may learn of or discover these Charms by meeting with other Exalted or through their own incomplete recollections of the First Age. Characters may also invent or create these magics on their own.

CHARMS

BUREAUCRACY

BUREAUCRATIC CONCEALMENT TECHNIQUE

Cost: 4 motes
Duration: Special
Type: Simple
Minimum Bureaucracy: 4
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Indolent Official Charm

Using this Charm, a character can effectively cause a single item to disappear into the depths of a bureaucracy and remain hidden from all efforts to find it until the Exalted ceases committing Essence to the Charm or chooses to retrieve the item herself. The item may be virtually anything that can be moved through human effort: a letter, an artifact, a piece of jewelry — even a statue or the like. It is shuffled from place to place, stored and forgotten, and it draws no attention to itself. Investigation attempts to find the concealed item have their difficulty increased by the Exalted's Essence.

FORGETFUL BUREAU CHARM

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: Instant
Type: Simple
Minimum Bureaucracy: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Indolent Official Charm
 Forgetful Bureau Charm allows an Exalted character to erase all evidence of one item or individual from a particular bureaucracy. Records are lost or destroyed, officials misremember facts, and so forth. The effects take some time to make themselves felt. A small local bureaucracy is affected within a day. Larger organizations may take weeks, or even months,

before the process is complete. So far as the bureaucracy is concerned, the item or individual in question does not exist. Those with direct contact with the subject still recall it normally, but official records and other documentation do not support their recollections. New records can come into being after this Charm is used, but previous records on the subject are permanently lost.

This Charm allows the Chosen to create difficulties for others by eliminating all official record of them or for the Exalted to protect their own secrets, such as removing evidence of a Circle's activities or of the location of a particular Demesne or Manse.

ENDURANCE

TIRELESS TRAVELER'S STAMINA

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Endurance: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

The character using this Charm infuses his body with Essence, allowing him to travel for an entire day without becoming fatigued or needing rest, provided that he maintains a reasonably steady pace (the character cannot run, that requires the Tireless Runner's Stride Charm from *Caste Book: Zenith*, p. 72). A character using this Charm could walk or ride at a steady pace for an entire day without becoming fatigued, footsore or saddlesore. The character must still eat and drink and is subject to the effects of the environment (like extreme heat or cold), and the Charm does not prevent an Exalt's mount from tiring. Still, characters using this Charm can cover considerable distance in a fairly short time and arrive at their destination as fresh as when they left.

(This Charm can be used as an alternate prerequisite to the Tireless Runner's Stride Charm from *Caste Book: Zenith*.)

LINGUISTICS

SWIFT SAGE'S EYE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 1

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

A character using this technique can read and comprehend written works at superhuman speed. The character can read approximately two pages of written

text (or its equivalent) per second, so she can read a book as quickly as she can turn the individual pages or a scroll as quickly as she can unroll it. The character must be able to read the language in the first place in order to use this Charm, and comprehension is the same as if the character read the text at normal speed.

PERFECT RECOLLECTION DISCIPLINE

Cost: 1 mote per work

Duration: Special

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Swift Sage's Eye

A character using this Charm can completely memorize a written work or illustration in the time it takes to read or study it. The character can also memorize spoken words. A work can generally be no longer than a medium-sized book, a few hours of conversation or a single fairly complex illustration, such as a map. Longer works require correspondingly greater amounts of Essence.

The character's memory of the work is flawless: He can recite it from beginning to end, copy it down entirely from memory and even use his recollection in conjunction with Charms such as Whirling Brush Method and Flawless Brush Discipline to produce copies of the work. He can navigate from a memorized map as if he had it in front of him at all times. Although the Chosen can use this Charm to memorize a lexicon of a foreign language (thereby memorizing its vocabulary and grammar), his use of that language is somewhat halting and crude, since he still needs to "look up" and translate meanings in his head.

The work remains memorized for as long as the Chosen commits Essence to it. When the Essence is no longer committed, the character's memory of the work fades to what it would normally be if the character had simply read, viewed or listened to the work.

EXCELLENT EMISSARY'S TONGUE

Cost: 3 motes per language

Duration: Special

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 3

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, the Solar Exalted may acquire the ability to speak and understand a language merely by hearing it spoken. The Charm requires at least an hour of exposure to the language. So long as the Essence is committed, the Chosen is completely fluent in that language, without a trace of accent, but cannot read or write in it. A character can master a

total number of languages equal to her dots in Linguistics by using this Charm. Once the Essence is no longer committed, the knowledge of the language fades immediately.

FLAWLESS FORGERY TECHNIQUE

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Flawless Brush Discipline

With a masterful eye and hand for copying, the character can produce a flawless forgery of any written work or illustration, provided he has a sample to work from — at least one written sentence or a single illustration. The forgery need not be a duplicate of the sample, but it perfectly replicates the original's style, such that anyone familiar with that style would instantly recognize it. The character works at his normal writing or drawing speed but produces work in the chosen style. A character using Sagacious Reading of Intent who is familiar with the original style can determine that the forgery is not genuine, but otherwise, it is completely flawless and undetectable.

SUBTLE SPEECH METHOD

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Letter-Within-A-Letter Technique, Poetic Expression Style

The character can speak in a roundabout fashion, stressing particular words, inflections and allusions to convey ideas and concepts that may have nothing to do with what the character is saying. Only the intended recipients (who must be familiar to the Exalted using this Charm and must speak the same language) understand the true meaning behind the character's words. Everyone else hears only what the character says on the surface. Thus, an Exalted using this Charm could explain the details of an assassination plot to someone while appearing to discuss the weather, for example. Someone using Judge's Ear Technique can tell that there is something behind what the character is saying but not necessarily what it is.

MASTERFUL TRAINING MANUAL

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Special

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 5

Minimum Lore: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Poetic Expression Style, Twisted Words Technique

The ability to effectively convey information is an important part of teaching. This Charm aids the Exalted in passing on their wisdom. A character writes a treatise or manual with any Attribute or any Ability, Charm or spell known to the Exalt as its subject. Creating the text requires time equal to that needed to train for the author's rating in the chosen Trait (*Exalted*, p. 271). For example, a character with Socialize 5 writing a manual on proper etiquette and social behavior would take four weeks. If a Charisma 5 character wrote a manual on making friends and influencing people, it would take four months. Charms such as Whirling Brush Method cannot reduce this time, since writing the manual requires careful and deliberate thought.

Once the text is prepared, others reading it may spend experience to acquire that Trait, using only the text as their tutor. The reader must be capable of learning the Trait described by the text and can only acquire or improve the Trait to the rating of the text's author. So, a manual that describes Martial Arts 3 is useless for a character with a Martial Arts rating of 3 or better, since he has already exceeded the manual's knowledge.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of the various manuals and treatises penned by the Solar Exalted of the First Age were lost or destroyed, although some are said to be preserved in ancient Manses or perhaps in the libraries of certain Dynasts or Sidereals.

MARTIAL ARTS

MANTIS-STYLE MARTIAL ARTS

Based on observations of the praying mantis, the Mantis Style focuses on blocks, punches and, most importantly, holds and joint-locks. While an effective offensive style, the primary aims of the Mantis Style are to allow the user to block attacks and disarm or disable a foe without killing him. The Eclipse Caste finds it much easier to negotiate with a living opponent than a dead one, and having someone in a painful joint lock can be a most effective bargaining position.

The Mantis Style can be combined freely with all martial arts weapons, but it is most commonly used





either unarmed, with a pair of war fans or with a seven-section staff.

LEAPING MANTIS TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Martial Arts: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

The character springs into action with the speed of a mantis leaping at its prey. Add the Exalted's Martial Arts score in yards to the maximum distance the character can leap and to the character's Initiative score, provided that he leaps up or toward his opponent (making this Charm of limited use in an enclosed space). This Charm can only be used once per turn and must be activated before initiative is rolled.

IRON-ARM BLOCK

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Martial Arts: 3

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Leaping Mantis Technique

The character imitates the defensive stance of the mantis. The Exalt can add his Martial Arts score to a single parry attempt, either unarmed or with a martial arts weapon, and the character can parry attacks that do lethal damage while unarmed.

MANTIS FORM

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Martial Arts: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Iron-Arm Block

The character adopts the stance of a mantis, ready to strike or block in an instant. The character adds his Martial Arts score to his Initiative and to his bashing and lethal soak. He may parry lethal attacks without a stunt. So long as he wields a martial arts weapon using his Martial Arts score or fights barehanded, he may abort to a *cascading parry*, which may be used to block multiple attacks. The dice pool of a cascading parry is reduced by 1 per successive parry attempt, as per a full dodge. The character's unarmed Martial Arts attacks also do lethal damage. Characters cannot use more than one Martial Arts Form-type Charm at a time. Activating another Form Charm immediately negates the effects of the first. This Charm is incompatible with the use of armor

GRASPING CLAW METHOD

Cost: 3 motes
Duration: Instant
Type: Simple
Minimum Martial Arts: 4
Minimum Essence: 5
Prerequisite Charms: Mantis Form

The character can snatch weapons away from opponents in combat. The character using this Charm adds his Martial Arts score to an attempt to disarm an opponent in hand-to-hand combat.

GRASPING MANTIS DEFENSE

Cost: 5 motes
Duration: Instant
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Martial Arts: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Grasping Claw Method

When the character is successfully attacked, he may activate this Charm and immediately attempt to parry the attack with his Dexterity + Martial Arts pool. If the parry is successful, the character's opponent is placed in a hold using the character's net successes as the extra successes on the hold attempt.

JOINT-LOCKING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes
Duration: One turn or one hold
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Martial Arts: 4
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Mantis Form

The character can place an opponent in a hold that is difficult to break. If the character places someone in a hold and activates this Charm, the difficulty to break the hold is increased by the character's permanent Essence (so the player has a number of automatic successes on the Dexterity + Martial Arts roll to maintain the hold equal to his character's Essence).

JOINT-BREAKING ATTACK

Cost: 4 motes
Duration: Instant
Type: Simple
Minimum Martial Arts: 5
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Joint-Locking Technique

Make a martial arts attack roll as normal, including rolling damage. However, the attack does no actual damage. Rather, for every health level the attack would have inflicted, the target's player is at a -1 penalty to all rolls for the remainder of the scene.

FLYING MANTIS KICK

Cost: 2 motes
Duration: Instant
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Martial Arts: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Mantis Form

The Exalt leaps into the air and strikes out with a devastating kick. The character's extra attack successes are doubled for the purposes of determining damage of an unarmed kick attack.

CRUSHING CLAW TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes per turn
Duration: Varies
Type: Simple
Minimum Martial Arts: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Mantis Form

When the character executes a clinch attack, the attack does Strength + Martial Arts + 2 lethal damage rather than the usual Strength + 2 bashing damage.

UNFOLDING RETRIBUTION STANCE

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: Instant
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Martial Arts: 5
Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Grasping Mantis Defense, Joint-Breaking Attack, Flying Mantis Kick, Crushing Claw Technique

During the turn this Charm is active, the character can launch an immediate Martial Arts counterattack against anyone who attacks him using his full Dexterity + Martial Arts dice pool. The counterattack comes after the opponent's attack roll but before the damage effects are applied. The Unfolding Retribution Stance in no way mitigates the attack's effects. A character cannot use the Unfolding Retribution Stance in response to Solar Counterattack or any other counterattack Charm.

PRESENCE**ROSE-LIPPED SEDUCTION STYLE**

Cost: 1 mote
Duration: Instant
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Presence: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Harmonious Presence Meditation



Infused with Essence, the Exalt becomes incredibly attractive to a particular person that she wishes to seduce. The Chosen's Presence Ability is doubled for the purpose of seducing her chosen target. These are Charm bonus dice and count against dice pool maximums.

RIDE

SOARING SPIRIT STEED

Cost: 15 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Ride: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Phantom Steed

This Charm summons a horse of pure Essence, much like Phantom Steed, except the Chosen's mount is also capable of flying through the air at its normal rate of movement, allowing its rider to traverse obstacles with ease.

FEATHERY GALLOP EXERCISE

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Ride: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Spirit-Steadying Assurances

The Exalted infuses Essence into her mount, lightening its steps and distributing its weight. The mount leaves no tracks, even in snow or soft sand, and can run across any surface — even mud, quicksand or water — at its normal speed without sinking. Note that the mount's hooves do still touch the surface, so a mount cannot run across dangerous liquids such as molten lava or acid without harm. The Chosen must spend Essence for each turn the mount passes over the surface, or it will sink, meaning this Charm is only useful for crossing short distances.

BRIDGE OF CLOUDS TECHNIQUE

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Ride: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Feathery Gallop Exercise

When the Chosen uses this Charm, her mount can run on the empty air between two solid surfaces as if there were a solid, invisible bridge there. This lets the Exalt bridge gaps such as canyons and chasms, allowing horse and rider to cross. The mount moves at its normal speed, and the Exalted must spend Essence

each turn of the crossing, or gravity takes hold once again, usually with regrettable results.

WIND-RACING ESSENCE INFUSION

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Ride: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Steed-Sustaining Method, Flawless Partnership Meditation

This Charm infuses the Exalted's mount with Essence, granting it extraordinary speed. The mount can run at a maximum speed of $(\text{[it's Stamina} + \text{the Exalt's Essence]} \times 10)$ miles per hour. The mount still tires at the normal rate (unless also under the effects of a Charm such as Flashing Thunderbolt Steed), it simply moves at a greater rate of speed during that time.

SAIL

GOLDEN ESSENCE SAILS

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Salty Dog Method

The character using this Charm weaves sails out of pure Essence for a ship that has no sails (or badly damaged ones). The new sails are of a shimmering golden cloth, as light as silk but stronger than canvas. They appear on the ship's masts and furl or unfurl at their creator's command. They may bear an emblem of the Chosen's anima, if she wishes it. Golden Essence Sails have a soak value of (the Exalt's permanent Essence score + 2) for resisting attacks against the ship's rigging or sails, and they do not accumulate damage (they ignore any attack insufficient to damage them, just like the ship itself does). See *Savage Seas*, pages 92-93, for more information.

PHANTOM CREW CHARM

Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Golden Essence Sails

With this Charm, the Chosen calls into being phantom sailors able to crew any ship the character is aboard. The phantom crew speaks only when necessary and obeys all of its summoner's orders. The

phantom sailors will sail the ship anywhere and perform any shipboard duties, although they will not fight and should be treated as extras with relevant Abilities equal to the Exalted's Essence. The character can summon a crew sufficient for a ship of up to (Essence x 40) feet in length.

GLORIOUS SOLAR SHIP

Cost: 15 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Sail: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Phantom Crew Charm

The Exalted conjures an entire vessel from pure Essence, capable of bearing him and a number of passengers and crew. The ship has a maximum length of (the character's Essence rating x 20) feet and appears ready to sail, with all of the necessary equipment on board. The Glorious Solar Ship has no crew; it is up to the Chosen to provide one, either mortal or otherwise. Other Sail Charms can be applied normally to the Glorious Solar Ship.

SOCIALIZE

WELCOME GUEST METHOD

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Mastery of Small Manners

A character using this Charm becomes more socially attractive: People find her words charming, her appearance and manner intriguing and her overall presence pleasant and enjoyable. The Chosen's player gains automatic successes equal to his character's permanent Essence on Socialize rolls to make new acquaintances, gain introductions and so forth.

FLAWLESS DISCRETION STYLE

Cost: 8 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Mastery of Small Manners

While this Charm is in use, any effort to spy on the Exalt has its difficulty increased by the character's permanent Essence score. Background noise is always just loud enough to cover the character's conversations, inopportune interruptions prevent others from listening in or looking over the character's shoulder,

and searchers never find anything incriminating in the character's quarters or possessions. The Charm does not guard against open inquiries or observation: The character can still be interrogated or openly watched; it only makes it difficult to monitor the Chosen covertly.

GRACEFUL COURTIER ATTITUDE

Cost: 2 motes per point of reduction

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Mastery of Small Manners

By attuning with the flow of Essence, the Chosen becomes virtually unflappable. No matter how difficult or unusual the social situation, she navigates it with enviable ease and grace. Every 2 motes of Essence spent allow the Exalt's player to ignore one point of difficulty on all Socialize rolls imposed by conditions such as a foreign environment, interpersonal tensions, bad weather and bad food, even insult or injury. The difficulty of any Socialize roll cannot be reduced below 1, and this Charm only overcomes penalties that increase the difficulty, it does not make normally difficult feats of Socialize easier (such as convincing a hated enemy to be cooperative). The Exalt using this Charm appears graceful and dignified under even the worst circumstances.

GRACEFUL DEFLECTION TECHNIQUE

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Socialize: 3

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Wise-Eyed Courtier Technique, Master of Small Manners

The Chosen's mastery of social graces can remove him from danger in more ways than one. Through a combination of reading an opponent's body language and the use of witty or engaging banter, the character may add a number of dice equal to his Socialize Ability to a single dodge attempt in combat. The character's opponent must be capable of hearing and understanding the Exalt's words, so this Charm is ineffective against opponents who are deaf, do not speak the same language or are largely mindless (such as zombies or beasts).



DISTRACTING BANTER METHOD

Cost: 8 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Graceful Deflection Technique

The Exalted engages in an almost nonstop stream of witty banter with her opponents, intended to distract them and keep them off balance. So long as the character keeps up the dialog, opponents attacking her subtract a number of dice from their pools equal to the Exalt's Essence. This Charm only works on opponents capable of hearing and understanding the character's words and whose Essence is lower than the character's. The Charm ends if the Chosen stops talking for more than a turn.

MASTERFUL DISSIMULATION METHOD

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Socialize: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Motive-Discerning Technique

This Charm allows the Exalt to conceal his true feelings and motivations; a character using this Charm can speak pleasantly to a hated enemy without any hint of his true feelings showing through. Add the Chosen's permanent Essence score to the difficulty of rolls to pick up on the Exalt's true feelings and motivations. Charms that automatically do so (such as Motive-Discerning Technique) require a successful reflexive opposed Perception + Socialize roll against the Exalt's Wits + Socialize to succeed while this Charm is in effect.

READING THE HEART

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Motive-Discerning Technique

With a masterful understanding of human (and inhuman) nature, the Exalt using this Charm can learn a subject's Nature simply by engaging him in a brief conversation. This provides the Chosen with information about the subject's motivations on a broad scale, rather than relating to a specific situation (such as that gained from Motive-Discerning Technique). While the Exalted gains a rough idea of what motivates the subject, she does

not necessarily know how the subject will react in any given situation.

EXALTED ACCOLADES

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Understanding the Court

Using this Charm, an Exalt can draw attention to someone else's achievements and good qualities, improving her reputation and standing within a particular social circle. The subject's virtues are emphasized and talked about, while others tend to turn a blind eye to the subject's faults. The Exalted must touch the subject to use this Charm and must offer some praise for the subject in a public setting. For a full day afterward, the subject's player gains a bonus on all Social rolls equal to the Exalted's Essence score. This Charm has no effect on characters with a higher Essence than the Exalt activating the Charm.

HEARTHSTONES AND ARTIFACTS

HEARTHSTONES

JEWEL OF THE GRACEFUL COURTIER

(MANSE ••)

This oval, opalescent jewel seems to shift color with the light and background it is exposed to. The jewel's wearer blends easily into any social situation as if using the Mastery of Small Manners Charm (see *Exalted*, p. 211). The bearer's player is incapable of botching Socialize rolls, and the bearer will never make an unintentional faux pas. Like the Charm, the jewel's protection only covers the most basic manners and interactions. Deep or involved social interaction does not benefit from its protection.

MERCHANT'S JEWEL (MANSE ••)

The bearer of this smoky stone with gold flecks gains a bonus equal to her Conviction for all her player's rolls to buy or sell merchandise. However, if the character ever gives the Hearthstone away or trades it for less than a fair price (in the Storyteller's judgment), she falls under a curse. Her player will automatically botch her next roll involved with buying or selling anything, with the character ending up either paying outrageous amounts for shoddy merchandise or practically giving away goods for nothing.

GEM OF WISE DISCERNMENT (MANSE •••)

A flattened, clear hexagonal-cut gemstone with a clear “window” through its largest facets. When the gem’s owner looks through this window, all things are revealed for what they truly are. Guises and illusions are stripped away, revealing what lies behind them. This works on physical disguises as well as magical ones. The gem does not reveal a character’s true Nature or detect lies or other forms of deception, only changes in appearance. A character using this stone automatically penetrates the Fair Folk’s glamour and beguilement. In addition, he automatically detects the Tells of any Lunar Exalted he encounters, even if he is not suspicious of the Lunar. This Hearthstone explicitly does not allow characters to see the invisible.

JEWEL OF WHISPERS (MANSE •••)

This dark, cabochon-cut stone allows its owner to hear all sounds near the jewel as if she were actually present at that spot, regardless of the distance between the owner and the jewel. If the owner wishes, she can speak and make her voice appear to come from the jewel. The Hearthstone is magically linked to the owner’s Essence and can be recalled to her over any distance. The owner merely wills it, and the jewel vanishes from where it is and reappears in its setting. While the stone is used to sense remotely, no other Hearthstone can be placed in the setting used to hold the gem.

STONE OF TEMPERANCE (MANSE •••)

A oval-shaped, translucent watery-blue stone, the stone of temperance adds 3 dice to all of its bearer’s player’s Temperance rolls (allowing the character’s Temperance dice pool to exceed five dice). This includes activation of the Virtue using Willpower (see *Exalted*, p. 129). However, the bearer’s player *must* make a Temperance roll whenever the bearer is confronted with a situation and wishes to act contrary to the Virtue, and the stone’s bonus dice count toward this roll as well. Thus, the bearer of the stone of temperance is incredibly resistant to temptation, bribery or corruption and capable of great acts of deliberation, but he is also virtually incapable of bias, deception, betrayal or impulsive action. In short, he makes the perfect censor or diplomat.

There are said to be Hearthstones aligned with the other Virtues in much the same way as the stone of temperance.

OATHSTONE (MANSE •+)

This stone is round and usually a deep blood-red. An oathstone’s true powers are not revealed until it is given away rather than kept. When the stone is given as a gift or as payment to seal a bargain, it can bind an oath or agreement between the giver and the receiver. This works just like the Eclipse Caste ability (see *Exalted*, p. 127) at no cost of Essence to either party (the Essence is supplied by the Manse that created the Hearthstone). If either party violates the oath, his or her player will horribly botch a number of important rolls equal to the oathstone’s rating (usually one, but some oathstones have higher ratings). Additionally, either party knows instantly if the agreement is broken, and the giver of the oathstone is automatically aware of the holder’s general whereabouts. The rightful holder of an oathstone may use it to regain Essence normally, even without being attuned to the stone’s Manse.

ARTIFACTS**LOTUS BLOSSOM CUP (ARTIFACT •)**

This beautiful goblet is carved from translucent white jade in the shape of an unfolding lotus blossom atop a thick stem for the cup’s foot. Any liquid poured into the cup is immediately and completely purified of any toxins or other harmful agents. Even strong acid or pure venom would become nothing more than clean water. Thus, any liquid in the lotus blossom cup is automatically safe to drink. Such cups are often used by those who fear assassination through poison or in diplomatic situations to assuage any fears that poison or drugs will be used.

PLAYER’S MASK (ARTIFACT •)

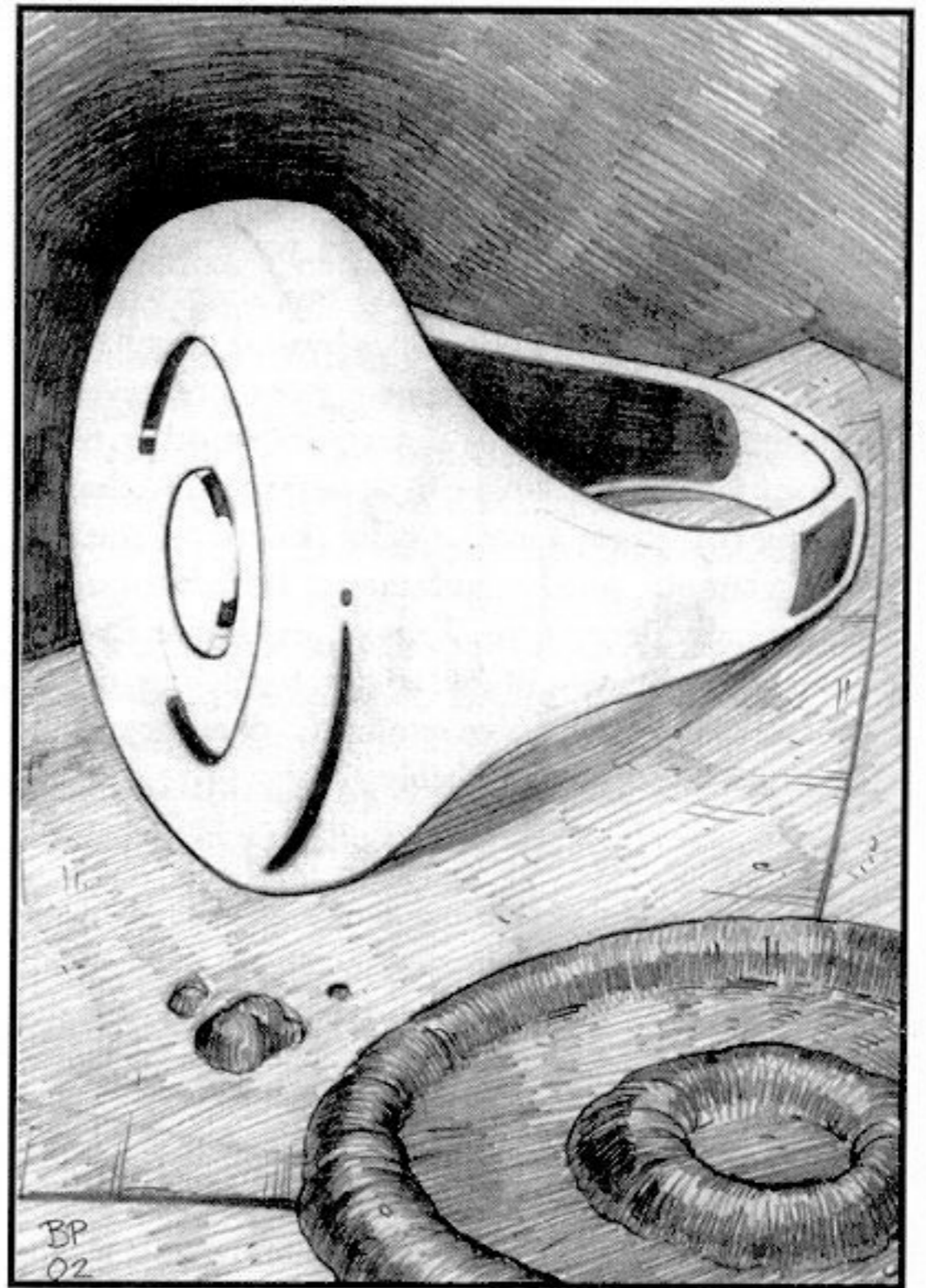
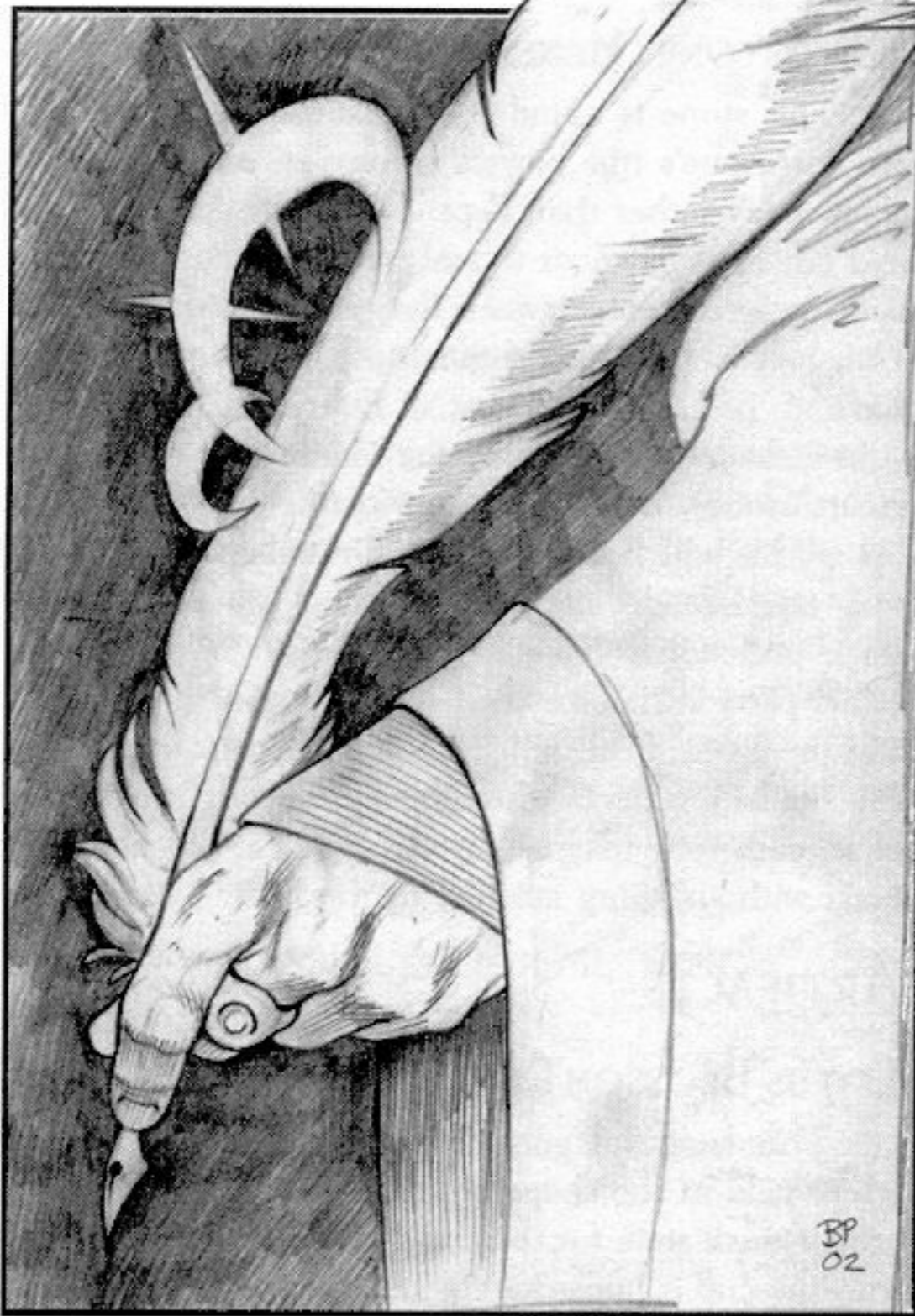
Often ornate, these theatrical masks were used by Exalted actors in certain highly stylized styles of amphitheater performance in the First Age. When attuned and worn, a player’s mask can switch between a comedy or tragedy mask at will. Some are also able to become an expressionless face and to vanish and reappear as the wearer wishes. The real power of these masks is in concealing the identity of the wearer, so that an audience sees only the role and not the actor.

The character must commit 1 mote to activate the player’s mask. The mask adds two to the difficulty of rolls to discern the identity or motives of the wearer.

SILVER QUILL (ARTIFACT •)

These items are writing implements of silver in the form of feathered quills so finely crafted that the “plumage” of the feather has the consistency of a stiff-bristled brush. A silver quill can write without any





need for ink, in any color its writer wishes, and its nub never wears down. Its markings are waterproof like fine ink and dry instantly. The quill can write on any surface that a normal writing quill can. There are some known silver quills (Artifact ••) that are also capable of writing on their own at the direction of their owner, copying down the words of the owner or another designated person or persons with great speed and accuracy.

SOLAR SEAL (ARTIFACT •)

This seal is crafted from orichalcum, either as a small stamp or a signet ring. It bears the mark of the Eclipse Caste, but it can transform to display any seal its owner is rightly entitled to. When used to seal a document, a Solar seal ensures its security. If the sealed document is opened by anyone other than the sender or the intended recipient, its pages become completely blank and can only be restored by the touch of the seal to the pages once more. Solar seals were used in the First Age to protect the contents of important documents and some are still in use.

SEVEN-JEWELED PEACOCK FANS

(ARTIFACT ••)

These fine folding war-fans have leaves of orichalcum inlaid with gem-work in seven brilliant colors and engraved with fine tracteries. The fans must be wielded together as a pair. They have the same statistics as wind-fire wheels and require the same Abilities to wield them. Their construction grants them +1 to Speed, Accuracy and Defense. Characters must commit 2 motes of Essence to attune the fans to themselves.

SILKEN ARMOR (ARTIFACT •••)

This unusual cloth was made by First Age artisans and used to make robes, tunics and other articles of clothing, usually richly colored and decorated, suitable for formal occasions of all sorts. Although the fabric has the weight and texture of silk, it is as strong as steel when struck, making even a light tunic, robe or cloak of the stuff effective armor. Silken armor grants its wearer an additional 5 lethal and 3 bashing soak. It is the clothing of choice for those who need



protection but cannot be seen wearing obvious armor. This armor costs 6 motes to attune, provides no magical materials bonuses, stacks with other forms of armor, and cannot be detected as magical without the use of All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight, Measure the Wind or some other magic-sensing ability.

FOLDING SHIP (ARTIFACT ●●●●)

This fantastic creation of the First Age is a blue-water merchant (see *Savage Seas*, pp. 56-57) with double masts and sails of the finest and strongest silk. It is capable of sailing on its own at the command of its owner, without need for a crew, merely someone at the helm to direct it. But that is not its best known

ability. At a command from its owner (who must commit 4 motes of Essence to the artifact to attune it), the ship collapses in on itself, folding in a clatter of cunningly designed panels until it becomes a box of finely carved wood, about a foot long and six inches tall and wide. Upon another command from its owner, the box once again unfolds back into a ship. A folding ship that spends a full day or night in box-form repairs all damage it has suffered. Although still limited by needing a body of water to sail upon, a folding ship is an extremely useful vessel, and the ships were often found in the possession of Eclipse Caste diplomats of the First Age.

IRON HORSE (ARTIFACT ●●●●)

This creature is a wonder of First Age magic and engineering. It is a massive horse made of iron plates, fully articulated and capable of movement. The iron horse has the Abilities of a war horse (see *Exalted*, p. 316), except that it has 8 lethal and 10 bashing soak and does 3L damage with a bite and 10L damage with a kick from its sharp iron hooves.

The iron horse requires no Essence to attune, merely an Intelligence + Ride roll (difficulty 3). In fact, the horse has a gemstone set into its forehead that stores up to 5 motes of Essence that its owner may draw upon while touching the horse. This Essence is used and recovered like Personal Essence and only recovers once all of the owner's Personal Essence is restored.

The iron horse is remarkably intelligent (about the same as a child of eight or nine years) and capable of understanding and obeying verbal commands from its owner. It is capable of traveling tirelessly, without need for rest or refreshment, and it requires no food, water or even air (allowing it to gallop along the bottom of the sea, for example). The iron horse is very heavy (weighing nearly a ton), so some structures (such as light bridges) may not support its weight without the use a Charm (such as Feathery Gallop Exercise). Exalted riders can use Ride Charms on the iron horse normally (although some are not necessary, given the horse's tireless nature).





APPENDIX I

SIGNATURE CHARACTERS

The Crowned Suns are the emissaries of the Solar Exalted and perhaps the most diverse of all the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun. Although they often held roles as ambassadors, bureaucrats, merchants, diplomats and so forth before their Exaltation, the members of the Eclipse Caste come from all walks of life in all parts of Creation, and the duties of their caste often take them far from whatever land they call home. Although they all pursue their duties as Harmonious Voices, the ways of the caste are diverse.

This appendix provides game statistics for five of those Harmonious Voices, the narrators of this book. They are presented as starting characters of the Eclipse Caste, suitable for use as characters or as inspiration for players creating their own Eclipse characters. Storytellers can also use these characters as ready-made allies or antagonists for their chronicles, either unaltered as novice Exalted or with the addition of further Abilities, Charms and Combos to use them as experienced characters.

SWAN

Quote: *The Unconquered Sun never meant for us to have to stand alone.*

Prelude: You were born to a military family in the Coral Archipelago. You decided to become a diplomat because you longed to leave Coral and see the rest of the world. You studied etiquette and diplomacy, martial arts and tactics, administration and languages. Although the training was long and difficult, you learned your lessons well, becoming a junior diplomat and earning the trust of your superiors. Your position allowed you the opportunity to travel that you wanted, on diplomatic and trade missions for Coral to other nations in the Threshold.

It was on one of those missions that your life went in an unexpected new direction. You saw a woman being pursued by Dragon-Blooded warriors and came to her aid. When you did, you were filled with a newfound strength and skill that allowed you to overcome the Dragon-Blooded and carry the wounded woman to safety. Her name was Arianna, a member of the Twilight Caste, and she became your friend, companion and sometime lover. Together, you sought out other Solar Exalted to create your Circle.

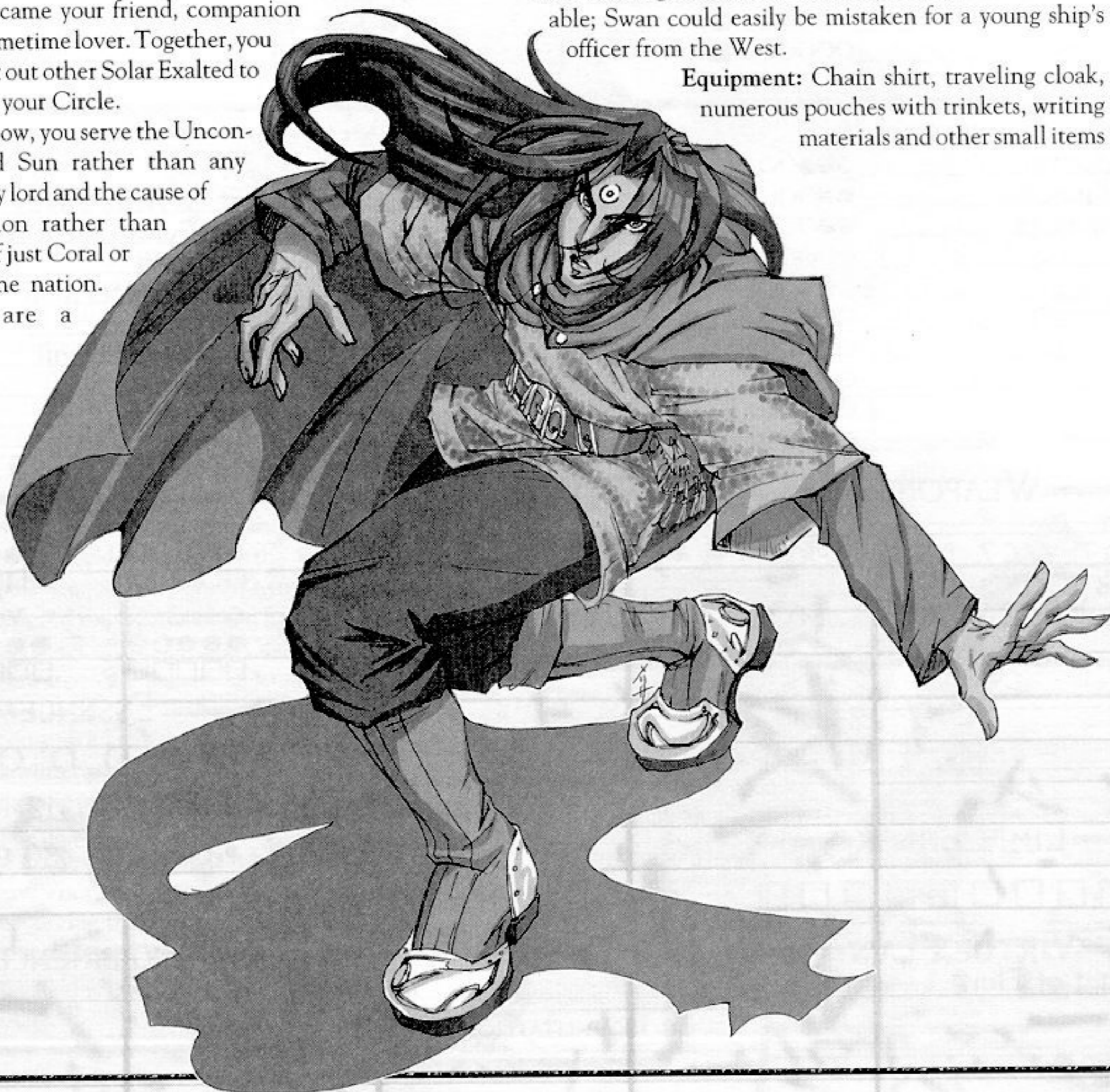
Now, you serve the Unconquered Sun rather than any earthly lord and the cause of Creation rather than that of just Coral or any one nation. You are a

freelance administrator and negotiator, cultivating allies and associates for your Circle.

Roleplaying Hints: You're young and headstrong, versed in the ways of the world without yet being truly worldly. You were raised and trained to be a man of action, not just words, and you often advocate action to your brothers and sisters in your Circle. You're not naïve. In fact, you can be somewhat jaded about the motivations and ambitions of others, but you trust in the ability of negotiation to resolve many disputes without the need for violence. When violence is necessary, you're willing — and capable — of doing what has to be done.

Image: Swan is a handsome young man in his early 20s, with fine-boned, delicate features. He's tall and lithe and moves with an easy grace, particularly his long, thin-fingered hands, whether he's performing Snake-Style martial arts or a ritual greeting. Swan's hair is long, straight and the deep violet color of the sea at sunset, matching the color of his eyes. He typically wears a light chain shirt for protection under a triple-layered cloak, with canvas pants and knee-high boots. His clothing is simple and serviceable; Swan could easily be mistaken for a young ship's officer from the West.

Equipment: Chain shirt, traveling cloak, numerous pouches with trinkets, writing materials and other small items





NAME: Swan
 PLAYER: _____
 CASTE: Eclipse

CONCEPT: Young Diplomat
 NATURE: Visionary
 ANIMA: _____

ATTRIBUTES

STRENGTH _____ ●●●○○○ CHARISMA _____ ●●●○○○ PERCEPTION _____ ●●○○○○
 DEXTERITY _____ ●●●○○○ MANIPULATION _____ ●●○○○○ INTELLIGENCE _____ ●●○○○○
 STAMINA _____ ●●●○○○ APPEARANCE _____ ●●●○○○ WITS _____ ●●●○○○

ABILITIES

DAWN		ZENITH		TWILIGHT	
<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHERY _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> ENDURANCE _____	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> CRAFT _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> BRAWL _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> PERFORMANCE _____	●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> INVESTIGATION _____	●●○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MARTIAL ARTS _____	●●●○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRESENCE _____	●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> LORE _____	●○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> MELEE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> RESISTANCE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> MEDICINE _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> THROWN _____	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> SURVIVAL _____	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCULT _____	○○○○○
NIGHT		ECLIPSE		SPECIALTIES	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ATHLETICS _____	●●○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUREAUCRACY _____	●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AWARENESS _____	●●○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LINGUISTICS _____	●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DODGE _____	●●●○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RIDE _____	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> LARCENY _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SAIL _____	●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> STEALTH _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIALIZE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		CHARMS	
<u>Contacts</u> _____	●●●○○	Name	Cost
<u>Influence</u> _____	●●○○○	<u>Striking Cobra</u> _____	_____
<u>Resources</u> _____	●●○○○	<u>Technique</u> _____	3
_____	○○○○○	<u>Serpentine Evasion</u> _____	3
_____	○○○○○	<u>Snake Form</u> _____	5
_____	○○○○○	<u>Ox-Body Technique</u> _____	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Respect Commanding</u> _____	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Attitude</u> _____	5
_____	○○○○○	<u>Graceful Crane Stance</u> _____	3
_____	○○○○○	_____	_____
_____	○○○○○	_____	_____

WEAPONS

Fist
 SPD 7 ACC 7 DMG 3B PRY 7
Kick
 SPD 4 ACC 6 DMG 5B PRY 6

ANIMA

LIMIT BREAK

□□□□□□□□□□

VIRTUE FLAW

Heart of Flint

WILLPOWER

●●●●●●○○○○○
 □□□□□□□□□□

HEALTH

SOAK
 B 4 L 4 A 3

-0	□■ ■ ■ ■ ■
-1	□□ ■ ■ ■ ■
-2	□□ ■ ■ ■ ■
	□□ ■ ■ ■ ■
-4	□
INCAPACITATED	□

VIRTUES

COMPASSION	TEMPERANCE
●●●○○	●●○○○
□□□□□	□□□□□
CONVICTION	VALOR
●●●○○	●●○○○
□□□□□	□□□□□

ESSENCE

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
 PERSONAL 12 | _____
 PERIPHERAL 30 | _____
 COMMITTED _____

EXPERIENCE

RUNE

Quote: *It's our duty as Exalted to hold back the darkness, each in our own way.*

Prelude: You learned the dangers of leaving the road to Whitewall at a young age when your little sister, Aria, wandered off into the mist. Your mother followed her, and they didn't return. You did your best to help your grief-stricken father maintain his business and threw yourself into the social life of Whitewall. After your father's death, you took control of the family business while still a young man.

Traveling from Whitewall, you met one of the Winter Folk — the Fair Folk of the North — named Lios. Although you ignored him at first, he traveled with you, and you began to look forward to his company. In time, he became your friend, your confidant and your lover. Your life in Whitewall mattered less and less, while you looked forward to your time outside its walls in Lios' company.

Eventually, you gave in to temptation and allowed Lios within the city's walls. That was when you discovered his true intentions. Good luck and the jade sword of a Dragon-Blooded monster hunter saved your soul, but you were found guilty of conspiring with monsters and exiled from your home.

Outside the walls, you found Lios waiting for you. He and his troupe had only to wait for you to freeze or starve on the long journey from Whitewall in the dead of winter. Enraged by his betrayal and taunts, you decided not to give the Fair Folk the satisfaction. When they dragged you from Lios, you Exalted. As one of the Eclipse Caste, you were inviolate according to ancient pacts with the Winter Folk.

You negotiated shelter with them for the winter and returned to Whitewall in the spring as an ambassador and emissary. You reclaimed an ancient Solar Manse in the city and made it your embassy. Your ability to walk unharmed among the spirits, the dead and the Fair Folk make you useful to the city's ruling Syndics and to many of power and influence in Whitewall, although it remains to be seen

if your influence can protect you from the power of the Realm. You've also discovered that your sister is not truly dead, but not truly alive, either. She has become one of the Abyssal Exalted, servants of the Deathlords, and you hope to one day reclaim her.

Roleplaying Hints: You are confident and sure of yourself and your abilities. You believe that you can talk your way out of most situations, but you're willing to use force if the situation calls for it. You prefer to remain neutral in most matters, acting as a go-between and an impartial negotiator. It's when your own interests become involved that you lose your objectivity and act with passionate devotion. You believe that your Exaltation gives you a duty to help others in need and to try and build something worthwhile and lasting.

Image: Rune is a handsome young man, with a tall, thin build. He has long black hair usually worn in a ponytail to keep it out of his face. His eyes are deep blue, and his complexion is usually somewhat pale. He dresses in sturdy Northern clothing: typically, a wool tunic and pants, knee-high black boots and a long, hooded cloak. He favors the colors blue and white in his clothing.

Equipment: Slashing sword, throwing knives, breastplate, Hearthstone bracers, gem of grace Hearthstone (+3 on Charisma and Manipulation rolls)





NAME: Rune
 PLAYER: _____
 CASTE: Eclipse

CONCEPT: Emissary
 NATURE: Caregiver
 ANIMA: _____

ATTRIBUTES

STRENGTH _____ ●●●●○ CHARISMA _____ ●●●●○ PERCEPTION _____ ●●●●○
 DEXTERITY _____ ●●●●○ MANIPULATION _____ ●●●●○ INTELLIGENCE _____ ●●●●○
 STAMINA _____ ●●●●○ APPEARANCE _____ ●●●●○ WITS _____ ●●●●○

ABILITIES

DAWN		ZENITH		TWILIGHT	
<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHERY _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> ENDURANCE _____	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> CRAFT _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> BRAWL _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PERFORMANCE _____	●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> INVESTIGATION _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> MARTIAL ARTS _____	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> PRESENCE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> LORE _____	●○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MELEE _____	●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> RESISTANCE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> MEDICINE _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> THROWN _____	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> SURVIVAL _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCULT _____	●●○○○
NIGHT		ECLIPSE		SPECIALTIES	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ATHLETICS _____	●●○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUREAUCRACY _____	●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> Lore (First Age) _____	●○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AWARENESS _____	●○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LINGUISTICS _____	●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> Occult (Fair Folk) _____	●○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DODGE _____	●●●○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RIDE _____	●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> LARCENY _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SAIL _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> STEALTH _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIALIZE _____	●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		CHARMS	
<u>Artifact</u> _____	●●○○○	Name	Cost
<u>Backing (Syndics)</u> _____	●●●○○	<u>Golden Essence Block</u> _____	1/2 Dice
<u>Manse</u> _____	●●●○○	<u>Ox-Body Technique</u> _____	_____
<u>Resources</u> _____	●●○○○	<u>Integrity-Protecting</u> _____	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Prana</u> _____	5, 1w
_____	○○○○○	<u>Deft Official's Way</u> _____	6
_____	○○○○○	<u>Sagacious Reading of</u> _____	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Intent</u> _____	6
_____	○○○○○	_____	_____
_____	○○○○○	_____	_____

WEAPONS

Slashing Sword
 SPD 9 ACC 7 DMG 5L PRY 7
Thrown Knives
 ACC 5 DMG 5L RATE 3 RNG 15

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

VIRTUES

COMPASSION	TEMPERANCE
●●●○○	●●○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
CONVICTION	VALOR
●●○○○	●●○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

ANIMA

HEALTH

SOAK
 B 5 L 5 A 4
 -1 MOBILITY PENALTY

ESSENCE

● ● ● ○ ○ ○
 PERSONAL 12 | _____
 PERIPHERAL 28 | _____
 COMMITTED 4

LIMIT BREAK

VIRTUE FLAW

Heart of Tears

-0	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
-1	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
-2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
-4	<input type="checkbox"/>
INCAPACITATED	<input type="checkbox"/>

EXPERIENCE

RHIANNA

Quote: *We come from humble beginnings, and we need to remember that, no matter how far we may climb.*

Prelude: You were born and raised in the Marukan Alliance in the East. Like most Marukani, you've been around horses all your life, and you learned to ride almost before you could walk. The fondest memories of your childhood are of accompanying your father to the Spring Market, the month-long festival where the Marukani honor their ancestors, trade and evaluate the new foals and yearlings.

It was at a fateful Spring Market where you first saw a magnificent black stallion, said to be God-Blooded, the offspring of some spirit and a mortal horse. Certainly, he was majestic and proud. He threw all the riders that tried to break him until his owner decided that he was just too much trouble. But you weren't willing to let such a fantastic beast slip away and took the opportunity to gentle him yourself. Against all odds, you succeeded — and Exalted in the process.

Fleeing the fearful stares of your people, you also rode from the Wyld Hunt, which sought your life. You found shelter in the shadowland ruled by the Deathlord Mask of Winters. As one of the Quicksilver Falcons, ancient pacts gave you passage through the shadowlands, and the Deathlord offered you his hospitality — and an opportunity. You returned to the Alliance with greetings from the Mask of Winters for the council of elders, and they saw fit to make you a circuit rider in the Alliance, one of the elite riders who carry important messages for the council. Your gifts make you suited for the most dangerous of missions, and you accept them gladly, since there is nowhere you would rather be than riding under the open sky, with your horse, Storm, as your constant companion.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a balance of opposites: wild and free but also duty-minded and responsible. You are often charged with important messages and tasks, and you see them through, no matter what. You hate to be tied down, and inactivity frustrates you to no end. Your horse Storm is more than just a mount to you. He is your best friend and boon companion. You would gladly give your life for him, as he would for you.

Image: Rhianna is a slight, slim young woman. Her skin is deeply tanned from a lifetime spent outdoors in the sun and wind. Her eyes are dark brown with epicanthic folds and her hair is long, straight and black, usually worn in a long, thin braid down her back. She usually wears canvas riding clothes and a buff jacket for protection.

Equipment: Rations and rugged traveling clothes. A buff jacket, slashing sword and a self bow with a dozen broadhead arrows. She is rarely far from her companion and steed, a black stallion named Storm.





NAME: Rhianna
 PLAYER: _____
 CASTE: Eclipse

CONCEPT: Horse Messenger
 NATURE: Explorer
 ANIMA: _____

ATTRIBUTES

STRENGTH _____ ●●○○○ CHARISMA _____ ●●●○○ PERCEPTION _____ ●●●○○
 DEXTERITY _____ ●●●○○ MANIPULATION _____ ●●●○○ INTELLIGENCE _____ ●●○○○
 STAMINA _____ ●●●○○ APPEARANCE _____ ●●●○○ WITS _____ ●●●○○

ABILITIES

DAWN		ZENITH		TWILIGHT	
<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHERY _____ ●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> ENDURANCE _____ ●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> CRAFT _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> BRAWL _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> PERFORMANCE _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> INVESTIGATION _____ ○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> MARTIAL ARTS _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> PRESENCE _____ ●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> LORE _____ ●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> MELEE _____ ●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> RESISTANCE _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> MEDICINE _____ ●●○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> THROWN _____ ○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SURVIVAL _____ ●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCULT _____ ○○○○○			
NIGHT		ECLIPSE		SPECIALTIES	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ATHLETICS _____ ●●●○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUREAUCRACY _____ ●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____ ○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AWARENESS _____ ●●○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LINGUISTICS _____ ●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____ ○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DODGE _____ ●●●○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RIDE _____ ●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> LARCENY _____ ○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SAIL _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____ ○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> STEALTH _____ ○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIALIZE _____ ●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> STEALTH _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____ ○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____ ○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS
Backing (Marukani Post) ●●○○○
Contacts ●○○○○
Familiar (Storm) ●●●○○
Resources ●○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○

CHARMS

Name	Cost	Name	Cost
<u>Wise Arrow</u>	<u>1/die</u>	<u>Master Horseman's Eye</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Trance of Unhesitating Speed</u>	<u>varies</u>	<u>Spirit-Steadying Assurances</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Ox-Body Technique</u>		<u>Feathery Gallop Exercise</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Tireless Traveler's Stamina</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>Mastery of Small Manners</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit</u>	<u>5</u>		
<u>Reed in the Wind</u>	<u>1/2 dice</u>		

WEAPONS

Short Sword
 SPD 7 ACC 7 DMG 4L PRY 7
Self Bow
 ACC 7 DMG 4L RATE 2 RNG 150

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

VIRTUES

COMPASSION ●●○○○ □□□□	TEMPERANCE ●●○○○ □□□□
CONVICTION ●●●○○ □□□□	VALOR ●●●○○ □□□□

ANIMA

HEALTH

SOAK
 B 7 L 4 A 3
 -1 MOBILITY PENALTY

ESSENCE

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
 PERSONAL 12 | _____
 PERIPHERAL 30 | _____
 COMMITTED _____

LIMIT BREAK

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

VIRTUE FLAW

Foolhardy Contempt

-0	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
-1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
-2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
-4					<input type="checkbox"/>
INCAPACITATED					<input type="checkbox"/>

EXPERIENCE

MIRROR FLAG

Quote: *The tale of revolution is my sword, and with it, I will win the war fought in the hearts and minds of men.*

Prelude: Your past has been retold so many times and in so many ways that even you aren't sure about some of it. Once, you were a performer for and administrator of a successful traveling show. Your well timed Exaltation allowed you to dazzle the spirit rulers of Great Forks and turn imprisonment into patronage and, from that, the backing of the Cult of the Illuminated. Now, you travel the Threshold under a variety of stolen identities and concealed within a huge mercantile and entertainment convoy, subtly constructing alliances and rebellion against the Realm and the Dragon-Blooded.

Roleplaying Hints: Art has taught you that truth, like art, is in the eye of the beholder. You truly believe that what you do is no lie, but that your tales are a tool by which you might elevate men and free them from shackles they don't know they wear. The ends are all that matter to you, the rightness of your actions is something you don't examine, but instead, take for granted. At least, that's what you tell yourself. Truthfully, you avoid self-examination, fearing you might realize you are a directionless liar who lets the Cult of the Illuminated decide her fate to avoid having an opinion of her own. Inside, you know that you are a pawn, but you are both lazy and afraid of what might happen if you tried to stop.

Image: Mirror Flag, when she appears as herself, is not even herself. Her face is a golden mirrored thespian's mask, her body hidden beneath sleek black clothing, armor and cowl. Every posture is a pose, every motion dramatic, every word weighty.

Equipment: Mirrored orichalcum player's mask made by Shalrina of Nexus, black armor and cowl, (equivalent to an exceptional reinforced buff jacket), jugglers knives and batons, faked evidence, forged documents, sanxian, an assortment of euphoric and hallucinogenic drugs





NAME: Mirror Flag
 PLAYER: _____
 CASTE: Eclipse

CONCEPT: Revolutionary Actor
 NATURE: Hedonist
 ANIMA: _____

ATTRIBUTES

STRENGTH _____ ●●○○○ CHARISMA _____ ●●○○○ PERCEPTION _____ ●●○○○
 DEXTERITY _____ ●●○○○ MANIPULATION _____ ●●○○○ INTELLIGENCE _____ ●●○○○
 STAMINA _____ ●●○○○ APPEARANCE _____ ●●○○○ WITS _____ ●●○○○

ABILITIES

DAWN		ZENITH		TWILIGHT	
<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHERY _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> ENDURANCE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> CRAFT _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> BRAWL _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PERFORMANCE _____	●●●●○	<input type="checkbox"/> INVESTIGATION _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> MARTIAL ARTS _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRESENCE _____	●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> LORE _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> MELEE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> RESISTANCE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> MEDICINE _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> THROWN _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> SURVIVAL _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCULT _____	●●○○○
NIGHT		ECLIPSE		SPECIALTIES	
<input type="checkbox"/> ATHLETICS _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUREAUCRACY _____	●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Occult (Spirits)</u> _____	●●○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> AWARENESS _____	●●○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LINGUISTICS _____	●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DODGE _____	●●●○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RIDE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LARCENY _____	●●●●○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SAIL _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> STEALTH _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIALIZE _____	●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		CHARMS	
<u>Artifact</u> _____	●○○○○	Name	Cost
<u>Backing (Sidereals)</u> _____	●●●○○	<u>Reed in the Wind</u> _____	<u>1/2 dice</u>
<u>Followers</u> _____	●●○○○	<u>Respect-Commanding</u> _____	_____
<u>Mentor</u> _____	●●○○○	<u>Attitude</u> _____	5
<u>Resources</u> _____	●●●○○	<u>Harmonious Presence</u> _____	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Meditation</u> _____	6
_____	○○○○○	<u>Reed in the Wind</u> _____	<u>1/2 dice</u>
_____	○○○○○	<u>Seasoned Criminal</u> _____	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Method</u> _____	10
_____	○○○○○	_____	_____

WEAPONS

Excellent Throwing Knives
 ACC 1 DMG 3L RATE 3 RNG 15
Excellent Throwing Baton
 ACC 1 DMG 5B RATE 2 RNG 10

ANIMA

LIMIT BREAK

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

VIRTUE FLAW

Heart of Tears

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
 □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

HEALTH

SOAK
 B 8 L 6 A 5
 -1 MOBILITY PENALTY

-0	□ ■ ■ ■ ■
-1	□ □ ■ ■ ■
-2	□ □ ■ ■ ■
	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
-4	□
INCAPACITATED	□

VIRTUES

COMPASSION	TEMPERANCE
● ● ● ○ ○	● ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □	□ □ □ □ □
CONVICTION	VALOR
● ● ● ○ ○	● ● ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □	□ □ □ □ □

ESSENCE

● ● ● ○ ○ ○
 PERSONAL 15 | _____
 PERIPHERAL 36 | _____
 COMMITTED 1

EXPERIENCE

ADMIRAL SAND

Quote: *One last time, I ask you to consider my request. Your surplus is great, and these people will die without it. No? Very well, I'm sorry we could not come to an agreement. Still, the people must have bread. Draw your blade.*

Prelude: Once, you played a game of commerce and diplomacy: fast travel, fast deals and fast women. You have seen what greed and inaction can do and were even guilty of it yourself before the Unconquered Sun gave you a last chance. Where once you had only a handful of years left to you and declining faculties, you now have the vigor of an Exalt to drive your wisdom.

Roleplaying Hints: You feel very strongly about the responsibility of those with power to use it for the common good and have little patience for those who disagree. You looked forward to spending your golden years in leisure, but if you don't claim responsibility for the world now, the selfish will. You will play games of compromise with the best of them, but the instant the game overshadows the goal, you will resort to direct and sometimes violent means to serve the cause. Yours is a flawless clarity.



Image: Young Sand melted the hearts of women with a raised eyebrow and flawless charm. Little has changed after many decades. Traces of his swashbuckling youth remain, now tempered by decades of harsh reality. His angular features are now striking, almost severe, darkened and lined from years on the Sun's Sea. His once black hair, still worn in a long braid with a ribbon, is now a dignified silver with pure white at his temples. Sand favors military-style fashion in golds and tans, always with a cape and riding boots.

Equipment: Chiaroscuran glass slashing sword and reinforced breastplate set, a skin of fine wine, a fleet of dunerunners (including his own *Desert Eagle*), villas, townhouses and warehouse space from Gem to Chiaroscuro. Admiral Sand has riches the likes of which men can hardly imagine and access to all common goods and services.





NAME: Admiral Sand
 PLAYER: _____
 CASTE: Eclipse

CONCEPT: Merchant
 NATURE: Leader
 ANIMA: _____

ATTRIBUTES

STRENGTH _____ ●●●○○○ CHARISMA _____ ●●●●●● PERCEPTION _____ ●●●○○○
 DEXTERITY _____ ●●●○○○ MANIPULATION _____ ●●○○○○ INTELLIGENCE _____ ●●○○○○
 STAMINA _____ ●●○○○○ APPEARANCE _____ ●●●●○○ WITS _____ ●●○○○○

ABILITIES

DAWN		ZENITH		TWILIGHT	
<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHERY _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> ENDURANCE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> CRAFT _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> BRAWL _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PERFORMANCE _____	●●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> INVESTIGATION _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> MARTIAL ARTS _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRESENCE _____	●●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> LORE _____	●○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MELEE _____	●●●○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RESISTANCE _____	●●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> MEDICINE _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> THROWN _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> SURVIVAL _____	●○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCULT _____	○○○○○
NIGHT		ECLIPSE		SPECIALTIES	
<input type="checkbox"/> ATHLETICS _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUREAUCRACY _____	●●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AWARENESS _____	●●●○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LINGUISTICS _____	●○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> DODGE _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RIDE _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> LARCENY _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SAIL _____	●●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input type="checkbox"/> STEALTH _____	○○○○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIALIZE _____	●●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		CHARMS	
<u>Followers</u> _____	●●●○○○	Name	Cost
<u>Influence</u> _____	●●●○○○	<u>Retrieve the Fallen</u> _____	_____
<u>Resources</u> _____	●●●●●●	<u>Weapon</u> _____	1
_____	○○○○○	<u>Call the Blade</u> _____	3
_____	○○○○○	<u>Glorious Solar Sabre</u> _____	5m, 1w
_____	○○○○○	<u>Dual Slaying Stance</u> _____	1
_____	○○○○○	<u>Whirlwind Armor-</u>	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Donning Prana</u> _____	2/turn
_____	○○○○○	<u>Salty Dog Method</u> _____	3
_____	○○○○○	_____	_____
_____	○○○○○	_____	_____

WEAPONS

Glorious Solar Sabre
 SPD 8 ACC 7 DMG 6L PRY 7
Excellent Slashing Sword
 SPD 8 ACC 8 DMG 6L PRY 8

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

VIRTUES

COMPASSION	TEMPERANCE
● ● ● ○ ○ ○	● ● ● ○ ○ ○
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
CONVICTION	VALOR
● ● ● ○ ○ ○	● ● ● ○ ○ ○
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

ANIMA

HEALTH

SOAK
 B 10 L 9 A 8
 -1 MOBILITY PENALTY

ESSENCE

● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
 PERSONAL 14 | _____
 PERIPHERAL 35 | _____
 COMMITTED _____

LIMIT BREAK

VIRTUE FLAW

Heart of Flint

-0	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
-1	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
-2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
-4	<input type="checkbox"/>
INCAPACITATED	<input type="checkbox"/>

EXPERIENCE

APPENDIX II OTHER NOTABLE ECLIPSE CASTE

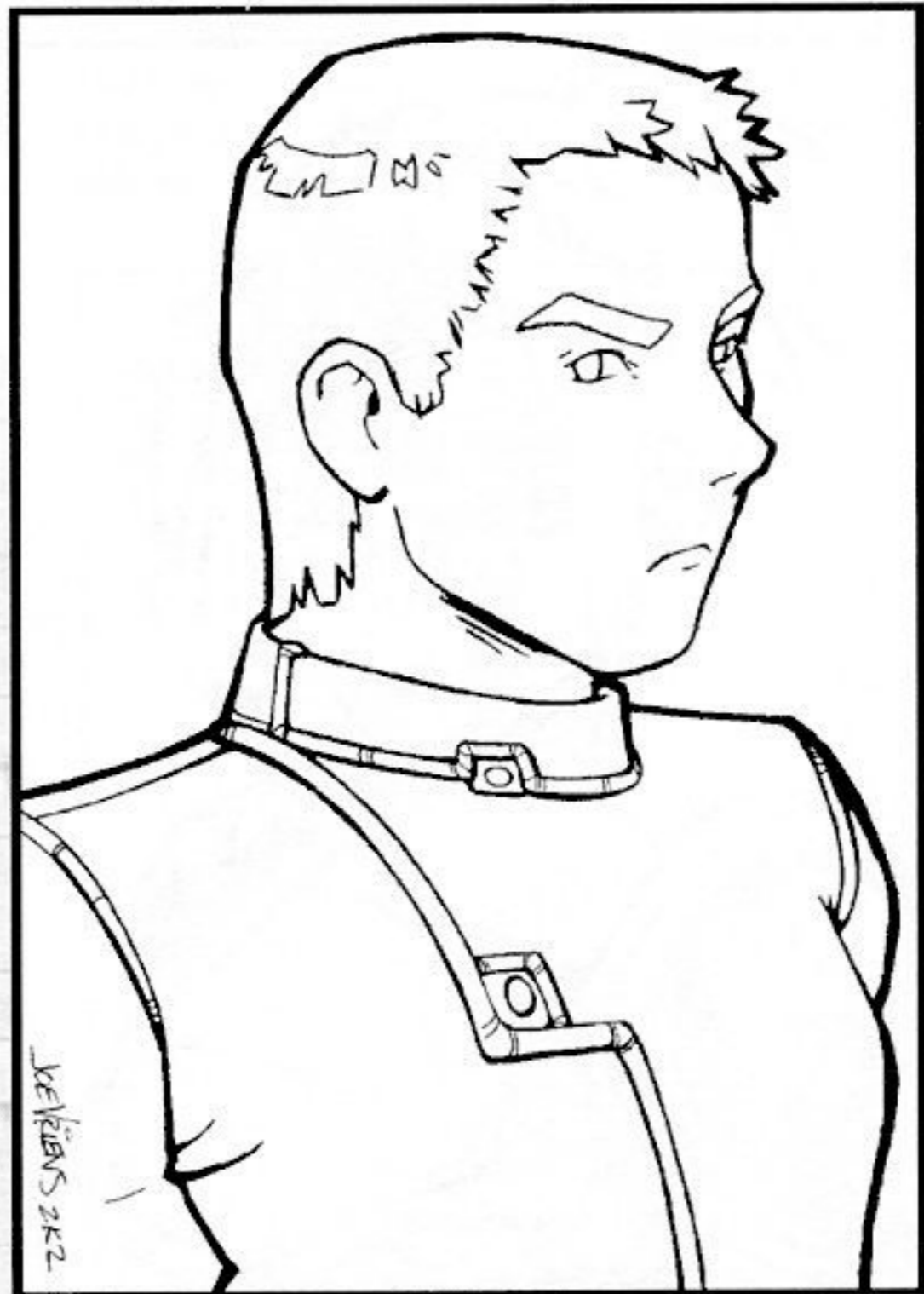


LYR UNNAN

An infant on a small island in the West was offered as a sacrifice to appease the spirits of the sea. The spirits took the child and brought him to their court beneath the waves. Rather than being devoured, the child was adopted by a Storm Mother named Lanara. She named the child Lyr Unnan, “wave, son of the sea,” in the tongue of the water spirits.

Lyr spent his childhood growing up in an undersea spirit court, but he always knew that he was different, that his origins lay in the realm of air and light above the waves. As he grew older, he became more and more curious about where he came from and about seeing others like him. His “mother” Lanara discouraged this desire, but she could not quench it. Finally, she offered Lyr a choice: He could return to the world of men, but if he did, there was no turning back. He could never return to the world under the waves. Lyr chose to go, and Lanara was enraged. An undersea storm engulfs Lyr and buffeted him mercilessly until he lost consciousness.

Lyr woke on the shore of an island, washed up there by the Storm Mother’s anger in a fearsome squall the night before. Alone, penniless and unarmed, it was not long before Lyr was found and captured by pirates, who sold him to the Guild as a slave. Bound in chains, he leaned over the rail of their ship in tears, begging to





return home, but if the Storm Mother and the other spirits of the sea heard him, they remained silent. Lyr had made his choice.

A handsome young man, he was bought as a pleasure slave and spent nearly three years serving the needs of his master and mistress. Lyr was Exalted when he discovered a plot against his mistress, who he'd come to care for, and assisted in foiling it. He was granted his freedom but forced to flee from those who would hunt him. He now serves as a freelance navigator, negotiator and merchant onboard various ships in the West, never staying in one place for too long.

SCARLET WHISPER

Is any ruler in the whole of Creation more secure than the noble and all-wise Perfect of Paragon? Certainly, the citizens of that great city believe so, but even the Perfect is aware of the power of the Solar Exalted and the threat that they may pose to his rule. But the Perfect is wise and sees all, and he knows well the potential of the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun as well, potential that can be harnessed for the greater good of Paragon.

The woman known only as Scarlet Whisper is a citizen of Paragon and has been since birth. Like all citizens, she sworn her oath of allegiance and obedience to the Perfect and received his mark as a sign of the compact. A bright and inquisitive girl, she became a fine writer, creating poems, plays and stories that caught the

attention of the people. But she shunned the spotlight, and so, her work remained anonymous, the author's identity unknown to anyone except the Perfect, who sees and knows all.

Through her passion for her work, Scarlet Whisper was Exalted, and in that moment, her oath to the Perfect was broken. She was remade as one of the Crowned Suns, her poetic gifts and her insights into the nature of people expanded and heightened. Two other Exalted found her, guided by a vision from the Unconquered Sun. The Zenith Armattan and his companion the Nightbringer Laughing Rain tried to convince Scarlet Whisper to leave Paragon, the only home she'd ever known, and come with them into the world. Meanwhile, the Perfect sensed the severing of his bond with the woman, and his loyal servants sought her out.

In the end, Scarlet Whisper chose the home and the ruler that were all she knew. She renewed her oath of allegiance to the Perfect, and he elevated her to a status befitting her gifts. As Paragon's Minister of the Arts, Scarlet Whisper's work is now widely known and celebrated. She cultivates new artists from among the people and attends social gatherings and events, making her the most desired guest in the city other than the Perfect himself.

Behind the scenes, Scarlet Whisper is the most feared and powerful woman in Paragon. Her poems, plays and tracts help ensure loyalty and have even brought immigrants to swear loyalty to the Perfect. Her mastery of the city's social scene has intimately acquainted her with its key players, and her oversight keeps Paragon's administration free from both corruption and outside interference. Many say that she already shares the Perfect's bed and that it may only be a matter of time before a formal engagement is announced.

SUMMER SHADOW

The role of shaman is an important one for the tribe but also a heavy burden. It is the shaman's duty to deal with the spirits, appeasing the mighty, driving off the weak and mischievous or malevolent, protecting the tribe against their Charms and the magic of the shamans of other tribes.

Summer Shadow's destiny as a shaman was foretold when she was born during an eclipse in the heat of the summer months. Even as a child, she could sense when spirits were near, and the tribe's shaman took her as his apprentice, raising her apart from her family and teaching her what she would need to know to succeed him. She learned about the lore of herbs, flowers and roots. She studied a hundred secret names and learned seven sacred songs. She practiced the rituals to honor the little gods until she could perform them flawlessly.





As she grew into womanhood, it became clear that Summer Shadow had surpassed her teacher, and he felt pangs of jealousy. In the end, he tried to place a curse upon her and failed. The tribesmen found pieces of him scattered throughout the forest. Summer Shadow quelled the angry spirit that he raised and became the tribe's shaman. She has served well in that role for more than a decade now.

Almost a year ago, Summer Shadow's tribe clashed with a tribe of beastmen that came from the depths of the Eastern forest. In that first clash, Summer Shadow Exalted, and she defeated the leader of the beastmen, binding him to an oath never to attack her village again. Unfortunately, the true leader of the beastmen tribe is a Lunar Exalted that lives in the depths of the forest. He killed his lieutenant when he learned of his failure but not before he heard about the appearance of one of the Crowned Suns near his domain. Since then, Summer Shadow has struggled to protect her home against the Lunar Howling Talon and his brood. Although she has gained aid from some local spirits, it hasn't been enough, so the Quicksilver Falcon has sent some lesser forest spirits searching for others who might aid her and her home. This is just as Howling Talon wishes, since the more Solars gathered in the village before his final raid, the more satisfying his victory will be. For now, he bides his time and gathers his forces, preparing to strike the killing blow.

CROW THE BOY

Child gangs are hardly a rarity, especially in Nexus. Child gangs with wise administration and a solid long-term business plan are unheard of, with the exception of Crow the Boy's gang, the Sweeps. The Sweeps were once a band of legitimate, if dishonest, orphans who kept themselves fed through chimney cleaning and what petty theft that roof access made easy. An honest trade kept them from being a target for other gangs, and their generally altruistic aim of providing a place for the very young of the street kept them from being an enemy of the citizenry.

Crow the Boy, who is not actually a boy at all, took the dress and name when her departure from adolescence into young womanhood turned her from a lanky child into a strikingly beautiful girl. So striking that it caused worry among her gang family for her safety on the streets. The wise and intense girl has a very strong sense of humor, often bizarre, so the nickname remains though the ruse has long been over.

Crow rose rapidly from the lower ranks to the inner circle of the gang as older members left for real cartels, split to form their own gangs or were killed in the divisive warfare that followed the breakdown of the outfit. Friends since childhood split, fought and split further, and for many years, dozens of youth gangs and cartels, all former or current Sweeps, battled across the rooftops and through the crawlspaces and undercity of Nexus. Crow's leaders were killed and replaced with heartbreaking frequency, and every one she pushed to find a diplomatic solution, to little avail. The other gangs took offers of diplomacy as a feint or a trick, having all learned the same tricks side





by side as boys among the Sweeps. Desperation led Crow to secretly attempt to reconcile with the enemy gangs, a botched job that resulted in her capture and a tense standoff culminating in her Exaltation.

Crow the Boy had the luck and presence of mind to cow the schism leaders into swearing an oath to her, the obvious new boss, on the spot. Since, she has systematically tracked down every remaining faction of the Sweeps, through a variety of means, and oathsworn them back into her new version of the organization. The gang, if it can be called that any longer, swells with the influx of orphan children who are its primary concern, Crow has gone as far as to accept children into her family from poor families who can't care for their kids as well as the Sweeps. Revenues from the very legitimate protection and policing rackets, as well as from the mundane work of cleaning and vermin control that the children's size suits them for, goes first to clothe, house, feed and educate the gang's orphan wards. Crow the Boy has parlayed her position of power and reputation as honorable into a long list of favors owed her, favors she trades for resources to further the Sweeps' reach over Nexus — and, hopefully, over the East.

Crow the Boy is very studious and is committed to the well-being of her family, if wildly eccentric. She is well known to talk and sing to herself and to invent words of nonsense as she reads or works. She is also deeply curious about her nature as an Exalt and has traded many favors for books of lore dealing with gods and magic to bolster her sorcerous inquiries into Exaltation. The Boy is a compact and wiry girl with cropped black hair, beautiful under the sooty raccoonish face that develops from the wearing of the Sweeps' trademark workman's goggles. She dresses, as her gang does, in cast-off clothing and the climbing harness required for life above and below the buildings of the city.

ROSE SUN AND MOON

Rose was never a wild girl. She was well liked in her tiny village and never shirked her duties around the farm or spoke out of turn — or much at all for that matter. Her only worrisome trait was that she seldom spoke — in fact, preferring her own company to that of the other children. She would often spend hours at a stretch mutely watching the other villagers, the cattle or the sky, humming or smiling to herself. She could speak, when called on to do so, and had a gift for numbers and common sense. She was just peaceful and, her parents thought, simple.

In Rose's 15th year, the surrounding villages were plagued by raids from savage tribes. Plainsmen raiders who stole through the villages and evaded posses sent to track them. Rose's own village, soon after, was beset by lions, a great pride led by a singularly large male who could often be seen to simply stare into the village at



night, it's green gold eyes unmoving. When Rose began to speak in her sleep of the lion she had not seen, her parents and village grew understandably worried, fearing the Fair Folk were working some glamour over the serene and pretty child.

When one morning brought a band of the plainsmen to the outskirts of the village, led by a golden-maned and fierce youth who stood ahead of the mob, the few able men of the place readied their spears and bows and went to meet them. The savage youth described a girl, Rose, and demanded that she be brought to him, saying he knew that this was her village. Rose's father and the other men moved to the attack, thinking the barbarians meant to demand Rose as tribute from the villagers. As both sides postured and readied for a melee, cries from the women rang out, and all sides turned to see Rose walking calmly toward the youth, a brilliant light pouring from her head and the air around her in a gold and pink display like the flower of her namesake, and into his arms.

Rose Sun and Moon and her mate, Thorn Moon and Sun, now lead an unsteady hybrid culture of ranchers and plains riders, bonded by the powerful and true love the two Exalts have shared through all their many incarnations as Solar and Lunar. Her Exaltation and the rediscovery of Thorn has awakened in Rose some part of her missing throughout her childhood, and now, she is a vibrant and charming girl. Her ready laugh and wise words have allied the small cluster of villages in the remote region and won the respect and love of the nomadic people of her husband.

C A S T E B O O K ECLIPSE™

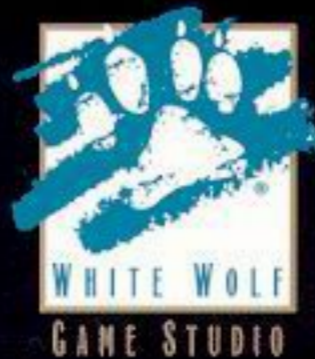
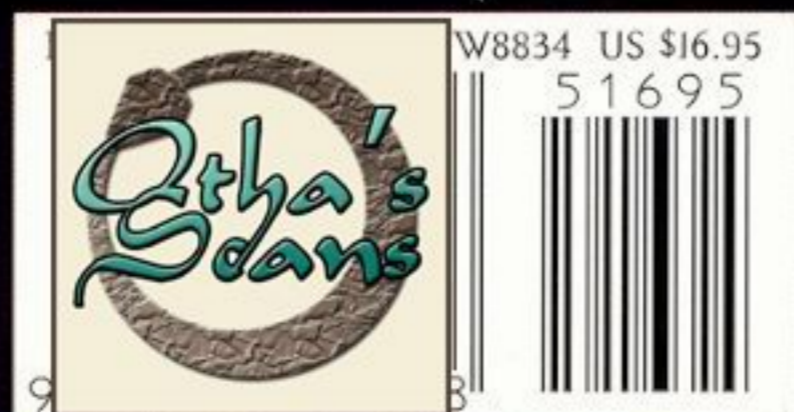


The Ambassadors of the Unconquered Sun

Travelers, diplomats and spies, the Eclipse Castes of the Solar Exalted are the emissaries of the Solar Tribe. Yet, these far-ranging wayfarers are more than just negotiators and merchants. With its understanding of human nature and its skills at the bargaining table, the Eclipse Caste serves as the key advisor to the more militant castes.

The Envoys of Righteousness

Caste Book: Eclipse is the fifth Caste Book for Exalted — books detailing the differing castes of the Solar Exalted. Within its pages are all the secrets of the Eclipse Castes, from the perfect and unbreakable oath they can administer to their fragmentary memories of the First Age to the mastery of the social process that they wield. This book also contains the new magical powers, rules and artifacts that Eclipse Caste characters will need to carry out their diplomatic missions.



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