

C A S T E B O O K
NIGHT



A Caste Book for



C A S T E B O O K
NIGHTTM

By BRIAN SCHONER AND JOHN SNEAD

NIGHTFALL

The pursuit of the dead is not swift, but it is unceasing. My horse had finally collapsed that morning — a fine animal, but no horse can run forever without rest. Leaving him behind, I had spent the rest of the day running and found a small farm on the horizon as nightfall came. I thought that I had gained enough time to stop and take the rest I needed. If I moved on early enough, I could stay ahead of the Deathlord's forces; if they caught up with me, it would probably not be until after dawn, when I might have a slight advantage.

I thought briefly about knocking on the farmer's door to ask permission to use his barn, but what could I tell him? "Good evening... I am a traveling Anathema, currently trying to escape the wrath of a Deathlord known as Walker in Darkness. Do you mind if I spend the night?" I should be gone before the farmer ever knew I was there, and if Walker's forces came to question him about my presence... no, it would be far better for him if he knew nothing of my visit.

Shrouding myself in shadow and silence, I climbed the ladder up to the barn's loft, letting my arms take up some of the burden my aching legs had carried all day. The creaking boards of the aged structure remained silent for me as I slipped through the loft door and drew the inside ladder up, and the livestock below did not stir as I lay down behind several bundles of hay and fell immediately asleep.

Walker's shadowland was a small one — and still young. He had not yet raided any of the surrounding villages openly and had seemed a good enough neighbor so far. Still, the shadow of death looming on the horizon did not make for restful nights among the villagers, and it was clear that they wanted to know what Walker was up to, though they dared not confront him directly. That was why I had come — or at least part of the reason. The other reason is that I needed to understand the Deathlords, and the only way I could hope to do so was to see one face to face.

I rode south along the banks of the Rolling River until the liquid whispers of the water turned into a muted, brittle hiss and the grass was lush but pale and the sky was black with thunderless storm clouds that never quite gave way to rain. I passed through towns and villages populated by dead folk who stared at me as I passed but would not speak in answer to my questions. But when I let my anima shine with the glory of the Unconquered Sun, they turned their faces away and pointed in the direction I needed to go, and in this way, I came to the keep of Walker in Darkness.

It was a huge, square tower of black basalt, surrounded by three spiked stone walls of increasing height. The gates were of soulsteel, and while the tortured faces within the metal watched me with staring eyes and open mouths, there was no sound as each set of gates opened for me.

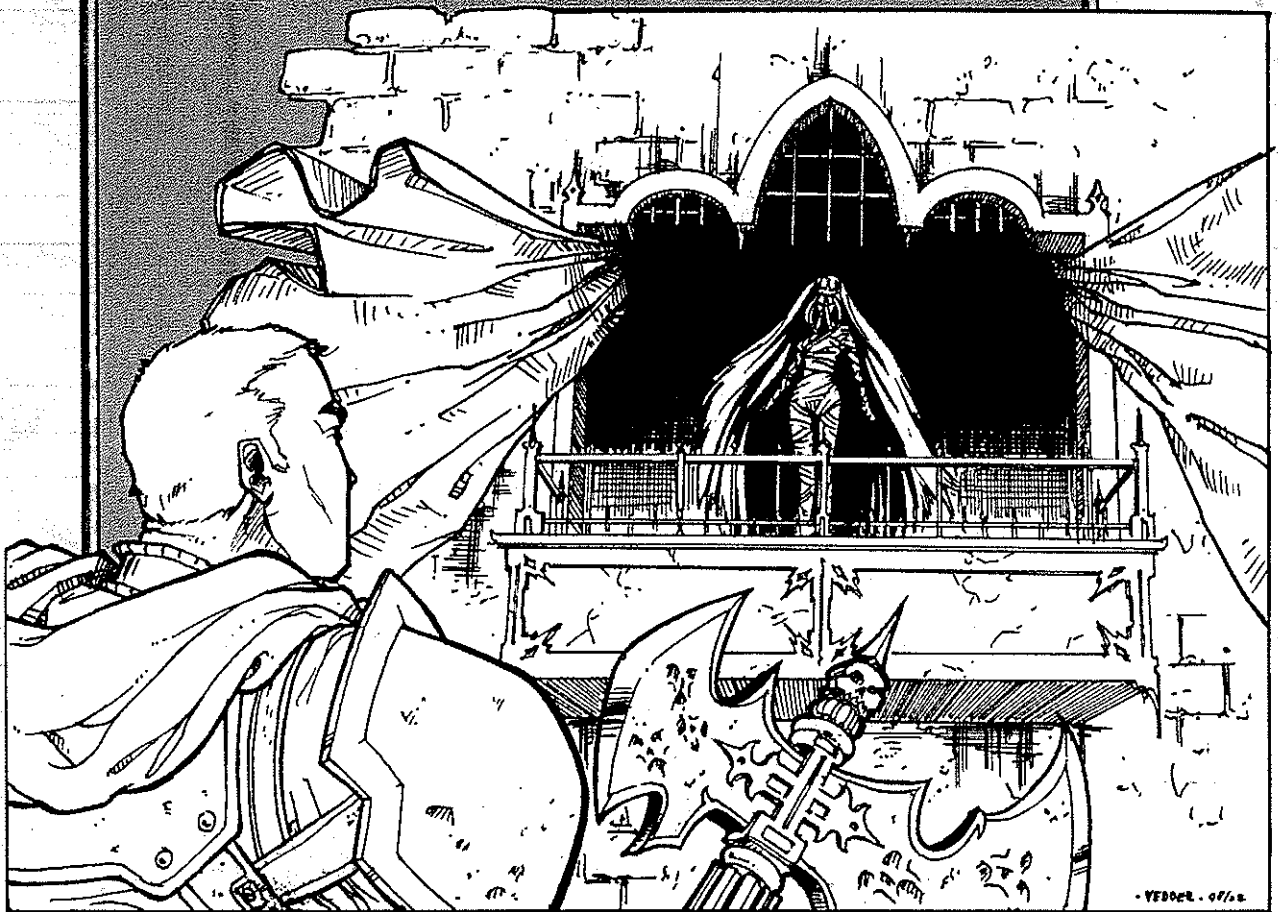
When I finally reached the central courtyard, Walker's agent the Green Lady was waiting for me on a wide balcony lined with thick curtains of black velvet. Her shining emerald eyes peered out from between inch-wide strips of worn black leather that descended from her silver crown and wrapped endlessly around her pale, sinewy body. Only her hair flowed free, a vibrant and shocking red wave that draped behind her like a cape, the only patch of color in that gray place.

Her jaw did not move, and I could not see her lips, but as her eyes bored into mine, I heard the faintest of whispers in my ear. "Why have you come?"

"To learn why you have come," I called up to her. Her eyes narrowed at the sound of my voice, and the ghosts who watched us from the walls flinched as though expecting to see me punished for daring to utter words aloud. "Why has the Underworld come to trouble the lands of the living? What could we possibly possess that will not pass to you in time?"

"Our reasons are not yours to question, Sun-child," the cold whisper said. She was staring at me even more intently than before, and I wondered for a moment if she knew me — or thought she did.

"But I will question them," I said, louder than before. "I wish to understand why the Lords of the Dead have chosen this path."



"To understand us," the Lady's voice hissed, "you must join us." Then, she turned her leather-wrapped head and gestured with one bound hand, and the ghosts began to pour down upon me from the walls like water over a dam.

I shouted a word of warding, which cracked like thunder as a searing circle of light surrounded me, blinding the ghosts. Then, I wheeled my horse around and raced for the gates. The first one I passed through unhindered, but as I galloped through the second, the outermost gate was already closing. I could hear the ghosts gathering themselves behind me, so I lifted the axe from my saddle, gauged the moment and threw it in a flat, sideways spin between the doors.

There came the heavy, groaning clang of soulsteel on soulsteel, but it was not the portals swinging shut: the axe was made of the same dark metal as the doors, and the haft had wedged itself into the narrowing space between them, holding them ajar. I ducked my head and raced through without slowing my pace, gesturing to the axe as my horse's tail cleared the gate. Obediently, it returned to my hand, and I sped away as the doors slammed shut behind me. That would delay Walker's pursuit for no more than a moment, so I rode with all the speed I could muster, galloping through that muted land with only the breathing of my horse to break the endless silence.

I awoke to the nervous whickering of horses. Rolling over silently, I peered between two of the hayloft's floorboards. I could see no movement in the darkness beyond that of the unsettled horses themselves until I let my eyes focus upon the spirit world. Then, three ghostly shapes became visible, moving through the stalls and looking in the corners for their prey. They were pale and wan — and clearly stupid as well; they had not yet thought to look up and were only searching for me in the bottom part of the barn. It was, however, clearly only a matter of time until they found me.

I had underestimated the speed of Walker's forces and had slept too long. Dawn was still an hour or more away, and though these ghosts were doubtless only the advance scouts, the others could not be far behind. Willing the world around me to make no sound, I stood and began moving toward the loft entrance.



One of the ghosts cocked its head at this, its pale tongue flickering from its mouth as though tasting the air — or the Essence I had expended. Slowly, it ascended toward me, confident in its invisibility. As its head rose above the floor of the loft, it saw that my head was turned away from it, though I watched it from the corner of my eye. Its pallid face broke into a stupidly pleased grin. It was still grinning when I swept my axe through its intangible neck, disrupting the spirit entirely; it had no time to be stunned that a material weapon could touch it. But in the hands of the Exalted, no weapon is harmless. The axe's edge still flickered with captive sunlight.

The other two ghosts sensed their fellow's destruction and fled toward the barn doors below me. I dropped straight down onto the first of them, the soulsteel axe blade flashing through its insubstantial body as it squealed hollowly in pain. As it turned to flee, I struck with the axe again, sundering it down the middle. This time, I drew its remaining Essence into myself; I had a feeling I would need it soon enough. The third ghost had escaped me and would surely bring reinforcements soon.

As I inhaled the wailing remnants of the second spirit, I considered the still-agitated horses, trying to select one that looked fast and healthy. With a good horse, I could outrun Walker's forces again, and I could reach Great Forks before night came again. I did not think he would pursue me into that city given what had occurred to the Deathlord Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. But these were farm horses, and old ones at that, suited to little more than pulling a cart. I chose the best of the lot and led her to the door, pulling it open slowly to ensure that my escape remained unseen.

I had not opened the door more than an inch when a mighty blow slammed it back into my face, shaking the entire barn. As I reeled backward, releasing the bridle of the now-panicked horse, another blow shattered the door entirely, and a deathknight stepped through. He wore armor like a fish's scales, black and silver in the pale moonlight that filtered through the door, and carried a great curved blade lightly in one hand. I could not see his face below the skull-like helm he wore, but the desiccated lips around his ivory teeth were set in a confident grin as he advanced through the falling dust. As he set his eyes upon me, he seemed to grow taller as the shadows gathered around him like a cloak. He began to sing while he advanced, an eerie, wailing dirge without words. If I had been mortal, I would have been afraid for my life and my soul; but I am not mortal.

Holding my face with one hand as though still stunned from the barn door's impact, I let the axe dangle at my side as he stepped toward me. As he approached, I could see the tiny face on each scale of his soulsteel armor and hear their faint keening, a dissonant counterpoint to his own death song. He raised his sword, but as he brought it down with a terrible swiftness, I was already moving, tumbling to one side and lashing out at his booted foot with my axe. He easily shifted his stance to avoid my blow and was advancing to strike again before I fully regained my feet. I parried the first attack and dodged the second, ducking as his sword cut easily through one of the beams holding up the hayloft.

"You have broken the silence," he grated, pausing in his song. "The silence will now break you." And he came at me again, crooning his uncanny melody, the glittering silver edge of his sword moved faster than I could see. I backpedaled, knowing that I was no match for him in single combat, knowing that there were probably more like him on their way, knowing that he was backing me into a corner. In desperation, I feinted to the left and rolled past him to the right, trying to shield my body from him with the axe. The haft deflected the worst of his blow, but I still felt the icy-cold sting where he had scored against my ribs, followed by a spreading numbness.

"That's a fine axe," he said. "I believe I shall keep it."

"Survive it first," I said, and threw it at him, the Essence-charged blade blurring into a fiery disk as it spun. The throw took him by surprise, and the axe bit through his armor and into his shoulder. There was no blood as the axe pulled itself free, but smoke leaked from the edges of the wound, and his mouth contorted in pain. He staggered back for a moment, which gave me a chance to clamber up one of the



support beams and pull myself onto the loft, ignoring the cold ache in my ribs. I caught the axe as it returned to my hand and gazed down on him. "Does the warmth of the sun not suit you?"

"Better than the cold of the grave will suit you," he said, as his eyes scanned the edge of the hayloft. He knew he could not climb up without exposing himself to my attacks, and he also knew that I could not safely climb down. "When my brothers and sisters arrive here, you will wish I had slain you cleanly. Some of them have never killed a Sun-touched before, I believe they will want to savor the experience."

"Perhaps I should let you kill me cleanly, then. Come up and do so."

He shook his head, and his dry mouth was grinning again. "No, I have no head for heights." He turned his back to me and walked a few steps away, then turned back to look appraisingly at the loft again. "Come down here, and I will give you swift passage to the kingdom of the dead." He took a few more steps away from me, almost reaching the back of the barn.

"No, I prefer the view from up here," I replied, grinning back at him. "It would appear that we are at an impasse."

"Not really," he said. He ran a few steps toward me and then leapt, a mighty jump that would easily carry him onto the loft. I had divined his plan, however, and was already moving. As he jumped toward me, I jumped up toward the center of the barn, where a small rope and pulley dangled from a rusty iron bracket. I grabbed the rope with one hand and swung around in a tight circle. Even as he landed on the loft and whirled around to face me again, I threw the axe — not at him this time, but at the one intact pillar still holding the loft up.

He had time to begin to growl a surprised question at me before the loft collapsed, dumping him unceremoniously to the stone floor of the barn. The fall would not hurt him, I knew that, but it gave me a moment when he was off his guard and unable to focus on me. Swinging around the pulley once more to gain momentum, I gathered my strength and leapt out through the open loft door, shouting a vulgar farewell and catching the returning axe as I went.

Now came the tricky part, now I needed all the skill and silence the Unconquered Sun could grant me. As I sailed through the loft door, I reached out my empty left hand and caught the sill with my fingertips, arresting my flight and slamming me up against the outside wall of the barn with what should have been a loud thump. Instead, there was only a quiet tap, such as one might hear when a nimble and light-footed man landed neatly on his feet after dropping from the loft window of an aged barn.

I heard the deathknight stir in the wreckage of the loft, then the stamp of his heavy footsteps as he ran toward the splintered door through which he had entered the barn. He raced out through the door, sword at the ready before him, looking around to see which way I had fled. But like the ghosts before him, he was stupid enough not to look up, which made it easy for me to drop silently down behind him and, with all my strength, drive my axe into his back.

The edge of the blade was nearly white with incandescent Essence, and smoke poured from beneath the scales of his armor as I pressed it into his body harder and harder. He opened his mouth, but all that emerged was a sibilant rattle, and then, he fell.

I did not think I had killed him and did not intend to stay here to finish him off. I had seen three more pale riders on a distant hilltop, and if I killed their brother, they would never cease hunting me. Instead, I took his daiklave and his horse — a fierce animal, but obedient enough once I showed it my strength. Far better than the nags in the barn, in any event. I rode away north as the astonished farmer emerged from his house and the sun began to warm the night sky behind me. It looked as though I might reach Great Forks by nightfall, after all.

CREDITS

Authors: Brian Schoner and John Snead
 Additional Material: John Chambers
 Storyteller Game System Design: Mark Rein • Hagen
 Developer: Geoffrey C. Grabowski
 Editor: John Chambers
 Art Direction: Brian Glass
 Artists: UDON with Eric Vedder, Omar Dogan, Joe
 Vriens and Scott Hepburn
 Cover Art: Melissa Uran
 Cover Design: Brian Glass
 Layout and Typesetting: Brian Glass
 Intern: Wendy Misuinas



1554 LITTON DR
 STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
 30083
 USA

© 2002 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire, Vampire the Masquerade, Mage the Ascension and Aberrant are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Exalted, Book of Three Circles, Scavenger Sons, Caste Book Dawn, Caste Book Zenith, Caste Book Twilight, Caste Book Night, Exalted the Dragon-Blooded, the Second Age of Man, Age of Sorrows, Savage Seas, Trinity, Dark Ages

Vampire, Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming and Werewolf the Wild West are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

Check out White Wolf online at

<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf; and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



C A S T E B O O K
NIGHT™

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NIGHTFALL	2
INTRODUCTION	8
CHAPTER ONE: OUR SOULS THROUGH OUR EYES	10
CHAPTER TWO: OBLIGATIONS OF THE CASTE	26
CHAPTER THREE: THE WORLD AWAITING US	36
CHAPTER FOUR: VOICES NOT OUR OWN	50
CHAPTER FIVE: DREAMS OF THE FIRST AGE	60
CHAPTER SIX: MAGIC OF THE NIGHT	66
APPENDIX I: SIGNATURE CHARACTERS	82
APPENDIX II: OTHER NOTABLE NIGHT CASTE	93



INTRODUCTION

*Do not gaze at me because I am dark,
because the sun has gazed on me.
My mother's sons were angry with me;
They made me the keeper of the vineyards,
but my own vineyard I have not kept!*
—Song of Solomon, 1: 6

Caste Book: Night is your guide to better understanding the mysterious and deadly Night Caste Exalted and their place in the Age of Sorrows. Commonly known as the Wretched, the members of the Night Caste are perhaps the most diverse of the Solar Exalted. Working as scouts, spies, assassins, thieves and detectives, they are the silent and unseen mistresses and masters of trickery and deception.

As the living embodiment of the Unconquered Sun's justice, every member of the Night Caste is a unique and powerful individual capable of controlling vast criminal empires, of slaying the most powerful and well-guarded foes or of making off with the greatest treasures. Everyone who becomes a member of the Night Caste has within them the ability to become a superlative spy, assassin, master thief or brilliant detective. Given time, members of the Night Caste can become all of these and truly embody their full purpose as those who walk the most secret paths and uncover evils hidden from the sight of others.

The disappearance of the Scarlet Empress threw the world into chaos — the Solar Exalted return to a world of shifting alliances, devastating betrayals and constant intrigue. They must learn to survive and triumph amidst this deadly confusion. The hidden spies and silent hunters of the Night Caste can easily conceal their true nature, enabling them to evade those who hunt them and then slay their enemies in their beds. This book will provide tales of the heroic exploits of five members of the Night Caste, as well as a host of new Charms, wonders and mundane items that will help the members of the Night Caste become incomparable master thieves and inhumanly deadly knives in the night.

To fully understand the thieves and tricksters of the Night Caste, you will also need to understand both the world they live in and how others see them. Most civilized beings hate or fear all of the Anathema — but for many, the Wretched are the most terrible of all. Anyone who fears subtle terrors and hidden threats has reason to dread the existence of dozens of supremally competent spies, thieves and assassins. Others see the members of the Night Caste as ideal tools for their own conquests. What potential conqueror or usurper could resist the chance to employ an untraceable spy or an unstoppable assassin?

In this book, you will also learn about the relations between the Wretched and the other Solar castes. Although other Solar Exalted often distrust the skulking Night Caste, the members of the other castes also realize that subtlety, careful planning and hidden attacks are the only way to defeat their most well-protected foes. While some distrust the Night Caste Exalted, very few underestimate them.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Caste Book: Night provides new insights into the lives and motives of the Night Caste. It also offers new powers and magical items for use by the members of the Night Caste. **Caste Book: Night** can help you better understand both your character and her place in the wondrous world of Exalted as well as offering information on how others in the world of Exalted are likely to react to your character.

Chapter One: Our Souls Through Our Eyes introduces five unique and diverse members of the Night Caste and lets them describe who they are and how they came to be Exalted. These characters provide examples of some of the diverse individuals who belong to this caste.

Chapter Two: Obligations of the Caste provides a range of opinions on what the Night 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 Night Caste hope to either fit within it or to change it more to their liking.

Chapter Three: The World Awaiting Us gives the opinions of the five Night Caste Exalted on mortals, other Exalted and the wide range of supernatural beings that exist during the Age of Sorrows.

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 Night Caste. Some seek to use them, others see them as allies and many fear the Night Caste, but all acknowledge that it is a force to be reckoned with. Storytellers and players can also use these anecdotes as a basis for possible opponents or 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 Night Caste have about this lost era. This chapter also provides further information about life in the Old Realm.

Chapter Six: Magic of the Night provides many new Charms for use by Night Caste and other Exalts devoted to the ways of stealth and deception. Among these various Charms are a few exceptionally powerful ones that require permanent Essence scores of 4, 5 or even 6. Additional Hearthstones, artifacts and specialized mundane items are also included in this chapter.

Two appendices are also included, featuring summaries of the narrating characters and five additional Night Caste characters. These templates can be used for inspiration for your own characters or as allies or opponents for the players' characters to encounter.

SOURCE MATERIAL

Cleverspies, daring thieves and brilliant detectives have been common characters in adventure fiction for the last several thousand years. Such characters are also popular heroes and villains in all manner of television shows and movies. Here are a few options for places to look for inspiring examples. While not all of these books, movies or television shows are heroic fantasy, all portray characters that think and act like Night Caste Exalted.

MOVIES

Anime offers many possibilities — the fantasy epic *Ninja Scroll* is an excellent place to start. The heroic ninja and the strange beings that oppose them could all fit neatly into the world of Exalted.

The furious and acrobatic action of most Hong Kong action films, whether *wuxia* set in the world of Chinese myth or action films set on the gritty streets of Hong Kong, provide much inspiration for Night Caste Exalted.

Although set in the modern day, both versions of the action comedy *Once a Thief*, directed by John Woo are ideal, with daring thefts and complex double-crosses. Similarly, the astoundingly skilled assassin in John Woo's *The Killer* is another excellent role model in this complex and dark tale of honor and betrayal.

Semi-God and Semi-Devils is an astoundingly high-powered martial arts film where the main characters fly through the air, hurl bolts of glowing force and generally engage in feats of supernatural acrobatics, esoteric magic and inhuman martial prowess that are the equal to that capable of the most powerful members of the Night Caste. Tsui Hark's romp *Peking Opera Blues* features elaborate capers

performed by circus performers, who are themselves persecuted by the corrupt and violent Manchu government.

The West also has a grand tradition of celluloid antiheroes.

The Thief of Baghdad features magical artifacts, powerful spirits and a pair of daring thieves.

Phunkett and MacLeane is a fascinating film about a lower-class thief and his aristocratic partner acting as highwaymen in the 18th century. The blend of wealthy parties and highway robbery is ideal inspiration for members of the Night Caste. Replace the flintlocks with bows and throwing knives, and it's perfect for Exalted.

Similarly, Errol Flynn's *Robin Hood* features a heroic thief and his valiant companions fighting against unjust authorities.

Both versions of *The Thomas Crown Affair* depict a wealthy and sophisticated thief who has a sense of daring and adventure that any Night Caste Exalted would be proud of.

To Catch a Thief, with Cary Grant and Grace Kelly, is a wonderful tale of a master thief coming out of retirement that has many ideassuitable for borrowing, despite its mid 20th-century setting.

Although not as good as the novels by Maxwell Grant, the movie *The Shadow* depicts the exploits of the penultimate mystical hero of the night.

LITERATURE

Any of the multiple translations of *The Arabian Nights* contain many stories of daring thieves, deadly assassins, lethal traps and fabulous treasures.

Judge Dee at Work by Robert Hans Van Gulik is one of Gulik's many translations and adaptations of traditional Chinese detective stories featuring Judge Dee. All of these works provide interesting portraits of an ancient Chinese judge and his band of assistants, many of whom could be models for Night Caste Exalted. These books are an excellent source for ancient tales of crimes and justice.

Although it is set in Victorian England, the Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle can serve as wonderful inspiration for members of the Night Caste. Both Sherlock Holmes and the diabolical Professor Moriarty could be members of this caste.

Examples of modern adventure literature with characters similar to the members of the Night Caste includes the following: *Jhereg*, *Yendi*, *Taltos*, *Teckla*, *Athrya*, *Phoenix*, *Orca*, *Dragon* and *Issola*, all by Steven Brust, are part of 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.

God Stalk, *Dark of the Moon* and the third novel, *Seeker's Mask*, are a superlative series of fantasy novels by P.C. Hodgell. The fantasy world of Rathillien is every bit as strange and wondrous as the world of Exalted, and the main character Jame is a master thief possessed of potent magical powers and a frightening destiny.

The *Fafhrd* and *Gray Mouser* books by Fritz Leiber are all wonderful to read. The *Gray Mouser* is a skilled thief who also dabbles in magic. While less powerful than some, he serves as an excellent model for a member of the Night Caste.

The greatest magical thief in modern fantasy literature must be the Jack of Shadows, from Roger Zelazny's excellent novel *Jack of Shadows*, a being capable of tricking and stealing from the greatest mage-lords of his world.





CHAPTER ONE

OUR SOULS THROUGH OUR EYES



Members of the Night Caste are in many ways the most diverse and universally competent of any of the Solar Exalted. While most people in the Age of Sorrows think of them solely as thieves and assassins, they are also constables, scouts, trackers, courtesans and members of various other professions where secretiveness, keen observation, cleverness and subtlety are more important than brute strength, powerful magic or vast charisma. Regardless of their ostensible occupations, all of the Concealing Shadows are problem solvers who excel at finding unconventional solutions to all manner of difficulties. Whether they are attempting to steal a powerful artifact, to sneak into an enemy camp or to track down and slay a horrific killer, all who belong to the Night Caste have a particular combination of subtle care that distinguishes them from the members of the other four castes. However, not all members of the Night Caste are silent burglars or slow and methodical investigators. Daring martial artists, charismatic crime lords and suave spies also belong among the ranks of the Daggers of Heaven.

HARMONIOUS JADE

My first clear childhood memory is of killing a man. I don't know who he was or what he had done; perhaps he only had the misfortune to be caught by those I once thought of as my family. But I was given a knife, large and

cool in my small, clumsy hands, and told to stick the knife into the man until he stopped moving.

He was bound, of course, bound to a low stone slab somewhere within the mazelike fortress of the Salmalin. The first time I stabbed him — weakly, in the arm — he cried out beneath the silks muffling his mouth and looked at me with pleading, hopeless eyes. I looked back at the robed brothers who had brought me to this place, and they nodded at me to continue. I knew them, and I did not know the man bound, weeping, on the stone, so I continued. But I was small and weak and did not know how to kill a man, so it took a very long time for him to die.

Afterward, Sahan took my hand, with the bloodied knife still in it, and showed me on the cooling body where and how to cut to make the death quicker, or slower, or more painful, or more silent. I studied what he taught me well, for I had already learned that making the same mistake twice was one of the surest ways to obtain a savage beating. The Salmalin were my family, but they were not a forgiving one. The next time I was brought to the room with the stone and told to kill, I asked the brothers how they wanted it done, and the question seemed to please them.

I learned to kill with the knife and the sword and many other weapons, but my favorite was the bow; it seemed natural to me and, yet, somehow magical, how



far and how straight an arrow could be sent and how fast. I also learned how to remain unseen and unheard, how to leap and tumble and dodge and how to see things that were meant to remain unseen. Many of the Salmalin taught me, and on a few precious occasions, a demon servant of the Yozis came to me and showed me things that the Salmalin could not. I learned quickly, and the beatings became rarer and rarer. And when I had learned all these things, I was sent back to Gem, the city where I was born, and told who to kill.

I did not remember Gem. Sahan told me once that my mother died as I was born, and the midwife — “greedy and selfish as all city-folk are,” Sahan said — sold me in the slavemarket for a handful of jade. I thought of that as I passed the slavemarket, walking along as another anonymous face in the swirling crowd; but I did not think of it for long, since I had a job to do. The killing was easy, and my escape from the guards easier still, and I returned to my home in the desert to see what else was required of me.

That was how the years passed. I would be sent to kill someone in Gem or Chiaroscuro or the Lap. When that was done, I would come back to the Salmalin fortress to train until I was needed again. Sometimes, I killed those who opposed the Salmalin, those who did not believe that our masters the Yozis should be brought back to rule the world. Other times, I killed for money, so the Salmalin could work to bring us closer to the day when the Yozis would return. I never really asked why I was killing anyone; it was what I had been raised to do, so I did it, and I did it well.

EXALTATION

In time, I became overconfident, I suppose. I had met very few challenges during my missions, and when one came, I did not recognize it for what it was. My target was a magistrate in Paragon, one who had somehow offended a visitor to that city enough that the visitor would pay for his death.

The magistrate had guards, of course, but they were as overconfident as I, certain that the sullenly obedient citizens of Paragon posed no threat to their master. It was easy enough to reach the top of the wall around the magistrate's villa, with a clear view of the walkway he would use to go from his bedchamber to the gazebo where he would take his breakfast. I had several hours before dawn, so I sat upon the tiled roof to wait, bow and arrow in hand.

I do not know who saw me or how; the first sign I had that anything was wrong was just before dawn, when the guards came boiling out from the small building where they were stationed, their spears already poised to throw at me. Even as the first spearpoint grazed my arm, I was diving back over the wall of the villa and into the city

streets. The guards would be close behind me, but I could be out of sight before they opened the gates of the villa. There were people on the streets who would see me pass, but I had traveled in enough cities to know that the common folk would rather remain silent than risk getting involved in an assassination attempt.

That rule did not hold true in Paragon, however. Even as I darted around the first corner, I heard voices shouting, “That way! I saw her!” The heads of passers-by on my street snapped up as they heard the cries, and several moved to block my path. I pushed past them, for they were traders, not soldiers; but more awaited me with every turn I took, and the magistrate's guards were not far behind. It was as though the entire city was aware of me and wanted me dead. For the first time, I feared that I would die.

That was when I heard the voice. It was not loud, for I could still hear the jingling of the guards' mail and the cries of the watchful citizens of Paragon behind me; but still, the voice filled my head, to where I thought my skull would burst open from the power of it. *My child*, it said. *For too long you have lived in the shadows, hidden away in the darkness. The shadows will still be your friend, but now, they will be the shadows cast by my light. You have a greater purpose than you have yet been told, and such as these cannot keep you from it.*

Then, it felt as though my head really did burst open, for my forehead burned as though my blood was forcing its way out through the skin. My whole body was warm as if from a fever, but rather than feeling sick, I was full of an energy that I had never known. A flickering light of white and purple reflected on the buildings all around me, and all the people in the streets seemed to slow down as I turned to face my pursuers. My fear was gone, replaced by the knowledge that I was something more than these people could ever be.

Even as the first guard stepped around the corner, I drew back and released an arrow, not needing to aim to know that the shot would fly true. As it left the bow, the arrow seemed to transform into a bolt of golden fire, and it punched through the mailed body of the first guard and into the one behind him, killing both. Another fiery arrow killed the next guard to chance the corner, and after that, none followed for a long time. I turned to look at the people of Paragon, those who had blocked my way, knowing in my heart that I could kill them all if I chose. But they backed away, staring at me in awe and fear, and I let them go.

I knew that I could go back and kill the magistrate now, that no guards could stop me, but I knew also that what had happened to me was much more important and that the Salmalin needed to know. Moving as the wind in the now-silent streets, I made my way to the city gates and walked out through them unseen as the

sun rose fully above the horizon. I was sure that the voice I had heard was one of the Yozis singling me out for greatness and that there would be rejoicing and great honor among my return.

When I returned to the fortress, Sahan greeted me and brought me to a small meeting room, then he asked what news I had learned in Paragon. He did not ask if I had succeeded in my mission; I am sure that he could not imagine that I would return without succeeding. I began to tell him what had happened to me. He frowned when I told him that the guards had somehow noticed me, and I am sure he was already considering an appropriate punishment for being detected. But when I told him about the voice and the light and the fiery arrows, the dissatisfied look on his face turned to one of shock, then of fear. Before I could even ask him what was wrong, he had fled the room, slamming the door behind him.

I waited there for a few minutes wondering what I had done, what I had become. Sahan was probably going to the elders to receive guidance about whatever in my story had upset him so. Before too long, I heard the ringing of the great iron bell that signified that a council of the elders was beginning. Whatever Sahan had heard was obviously of greater importance than I could imagine. I cautiously opened the door; finding no one there to stop me, I moved toward the council chambers in order to learn what I had unwittingly begun.

As I approached, I could hear Sahan speaking to the council, his voice loud and urgent. "If she is lying, she cannot be trusted. If she is deceived, then she puts us at risk. But if she is telling the truth — and I believe that she is — she has become our gravest enemy, and she must be destroyed before she realizes the power she possesses."

My mind was reeling with the implications of what Sahan was saying. How could I be an enemy of the Salmalin? What



could I have done? As I edged closer to the entrance to the council chamber, one of the elders said something I could not hear and Sahan replied, "In the western meeting room."

"Then go and delay her while we gather what we need from the armory," the elder said. "Even the Exalted cannot stand against the ancient weapons of our masters. Do not let her know that you know her nature, but do not let her leave the room."

"Perhaps we should wait until she sleeps?" another voice suggested.

"No," the elder said. "Sahan is correct; even the chance that she has become a Sun-child means that we cannot delay. She must be slain immediately."

The iron bell began to ring again, signaling the end of the council, and I slid back into the shadowed hallway, my mind a confused whirlwind. Exalted? Sun-child? Were they saying that I was one of the cursed ones, the servants of the gods who helped imprison the Yozi before the First Age began? I needed time to think... time that I would not have if they came to kill me.

Between the peals of the bell, I heard footsteps coming toward the entrance I waited beside, and indeed, Sahan emerged, looking frightened but determined. He did not see me in the shadows where I stood.

My knife was in my hand, and so, I used it, stabbing in time with the last ring of the bell so that none of the elders would hear Sahan's brief cry of pain. Sahan had taught me how to kill with the knife, so I made his death quick and painless; I owed him that much. I did not know what weapons the elders were taking from the armory and did not want to, so I faded once again into the shadows and walked out of the Salmalin fortress, never to return.

Since then, I have tried to learn more of what I have become, though no two people tell the same story. I have read the laws of the Realm that call us Anathema, Wretched, monsters deserving only of death, and I have wondered how right they were, for no story could survive so long without a grain of truth at its core. But I have also heard other tales of the First Age, of the great wars we fought beside the gods to lock the Yozi into their prison and free the world from their evil. I have read of the just and noble kingdom that we built and that we are those same wise leaders reborn into these troubled years. I have found the tomb of the body I wore in that Age and taken up once again the mighty bow that I bore in that life. I have spoken to all the Exalted of the Unconquered Sun that I could find, those that dared reveal themselves, and heard many tales of what it means to be Exalted. Most of all, I have learned how little I know.

The voice in my head has not spoken to me again.

I still kill for money, for Exalted or not, I must eat, and killing is all I know how to do. But I do not kill as

indiscriminately as I once did; I will not kill for no reason or for a reason I do not agree with. And when I am not killing, I am seeking to learn more about what it means to be Exalted and what the great purpose is that I am meant for. I am silent, I am deadly, and I am Exalted of the sun and of the night; more than that, I do not know, but I will.

HUYLA

We moved here to Nexus from out West — Ma said Pa had left the Lintha Family and would never say more than that. I don't remember Pa much, since he died when I six. Someone knifed him. Ma made us move the night he died, and we were more careful after that, which also meant we were poorer. I looked like my folks and grew up being called frog face — none of the other kids in our tenement wanted to play with me, so I mostly kept to myself. Some say I had a trace of Wyld blood in me, but I know I'm not a twisted freak. It's just that the sea god Ya-Mala used to lay with our women many years ago — that's what my mother told me.

When I got older, no one wanted me at the houses — even the cheapest brothels didn't like my looks. I thought about becoming a gambler or a thief, but I wasn't good enough for the first, and I didn't like the idea of stealing from others. I don't mind making the rich a bit less rich, but wealthy folk can afford well-armed guards. All the thieves I've met scrape by stealing from shopkeepers — that never sat well with me. When Ma got too old to work on the fishing boats, I did odd jobs down at the docks — there wasn't much money in it, but it's steady work. I kept that up until I met Sliver. One day he started asking me questions about a ship that had arrived in a few days back — and since he was paying me, I answered his questions. I kept my eyes open, so I was able to tell him a lot about who had been on and off that ship. I saw him again the next day; he'd gotten beat up when he tried to sneak on board. No one down on the docks paid much attention to me, so I offered to try if he'd pay. Ma was sick, and his clothes were good enough that I figured I could get a bit out of him. I snuck on board late that night. I found a hold full of young captives in chains — when I overheard two of the guards talking, I figured out what was going on. I hate all slavers, but folks who sell people to the Fair Folk are evil beyond even regular slavers. I headed back to Sliver and told him what I'd seen — he said he suspected as much and that he'd been hired to get a particular kid off of that ship. I expected Sliver to just let the local Council enforcer know about the slavers, but he told me that the thugs the Council sent were more concerned with killing the slavers than with getting the captives out safely.

By that time, I wasn't thinking of the money — Sliver could tell me to walk later, but for now, he had a

partner. We went back later that night. There were only three sailors on board — I got one when he went out to take a leak, no one expects someone in the water to grab their leg and pull them in. Sliver got the next one when she went looking for her buddy. The last one had gotten wary — we figured he'd hole up on the ship until the rest of the crew arrived back from the bars. Dragging a half-drunk sailor off a pier is one thing, but I knew I couldn't do much in an open fight, and Sliver was still sort of beat up. He told me to swim out to the other side of the ship and start scraping on the hull with a rock. The sailor must have thought I was trying to drill my way in or something — when Sliver told me to come on board, I found the body right where I had been scratching. Sliver had snuck up behind him and slit his throat. We freed the kids, and then, Sliver notified a Council enforcer. Sliver gave me a third of the Council's reward, and the next day, we watched as the boat was set on fire with the remaining ravagers chained to it. It was all wrapped around with flowers as an offering to the river gods, and everyone came out to watch it and cheer. Nobody likes ravagers, not even in Nexus.

Sliver paid me well, and I asked if he needed a partner. He said yes, so Ma and I ate better than we had before. Sliver was a fixer — anyone who had a problem and a good pile of money came to him. Sometimes, if they didn't have much money, he still took the case, if he thought the client could be useful later. In these cases, he was paid in favors. That deal turned out to be worth our while more than once. The best place to hide out when folk're hunting you is somebody else's house. And this one forger owed us enough favors that Sliver never needed to hire out that sort of work.

We ended up partners, in more ways than one — I don't want to talk about that now. You don't find many who are willing to look past a face like mine. We talked about getting married, but there was always too much to be done, and we figured that if some people knew we were married one of us might seem too tempting a hostage. We had enemies — that's the way it is in Nexus. Whatever you have, there's someone looking to get a piece.

We mostly did small-stuff cases, retrieving stolen goods, roughing up our client's competitors and killing or scaring off the occasional blackmailer. We filled in our time with finding rich kids and beating up crooked merchants. Mostly, we only pissed off small-time thugs and mid-level businessmen, but occasionally, we ran into something big like that ship — otherwise, we did our best to stay out of the Council's way. We sometimes needed to lay low for a while after some cases — that's where having places to hide out came in handy.

About a year back, things changed down at the docks. There was more extortion and organized violence, and people were more scared, but petty crime

Huyla's chief adversary Ophilis Ses is a type of beastman known as a snakeman.

SLAKEMAN

Description: The snakemen are a type of beastmen found in the East and the South. While they have many communities in the depths of the Southeastern jungles, snakemen are also the type of beastmen most commonly found in human cities. Snakemen seem to thrive in urban environments as much as they do in isolated jungle villages. There is a small snakeman ghetto in Great Forks and a moderately sized community in Chanta, and several hundred snakemen slaves toil in Harborhead. A few have even managed to find a home in the complex Varang City-States. Some are accepted in the Haltran Republic, where they can become scholars, doctors or skilled artisans. Elsewhere, most people hate and fear them. Because of their inhuman appearance, snakemen are normally found as beggars or outcasts, although a few have made their way into low-level criminal organizations. Snakemen have scaled skin and a disturbingly smooth and quick way of moving.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 3, Valor 2

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3 (+2 Smell), Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Martial Arts 3, Melee 2, Presence 2, Resistance 1, Socialize 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2 (+2 Track by Smell)

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Fist: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 2B Defense 6

Bite: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 4L Defense 4

Knife: Speed 9 Accuracy 5 Damage 3L Defense 3

Hook Swords: Speed 6 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 5 Soak: 1L/4B

Willpower: 6 Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 1

Other Notes: As one of the least variable types of beastmen, almost all of these creatures have the affliction Fangs and the poxes Snake Scales (1L/1B), Eye Color (golden and slitted, can see in the dark), Hair (none) and Enhanced Smell (+2 dice to smell-based Awareness and Tracking rolls). They are usually extras.

Snakemen can become Exalted, but their lidless eyes and scaled skin makes them innately unattractive. They can never have an Appearance score higher than one. Snakemen are unusually long-lived, living twice as long as a normal human. However, they are very sensitive to cold (increase the difficulty to all Survival rolls in arctic cold and on all Endurance and Resistance rolls to withstand extreme cold by 1).



really dropped off — there was lots of hushed talk that a gang led by someone named Ophilis Ses had bought a big piece of action down here from the Council. That's when we scaled back our work there. Folks who interfered with Ses were asking to die — gang leaders like him know exactly how far they can push the Council edicts.

It cost us money to turn down cases because we'd heard Ses was involved. There's no future in being stupid, but Sliver started worrying that people were using this gang as a way to scare us off, even if they didn't know Ses from the Emissary. Sliver guessed that Jace the fish merchant was being hassled by someone who just claimed she worked for Ses. We followed that thug the next few times she showed up to ask for a payment and saw no indication that she was working for anyone but herself — it turned out we just weren't looking carefully enough.

EXALTATION

We broke both her legs, despite her threats, and then, we went to ground for a bit, just in case we were wrong. It didn't help — Sliver went to discreetly watch Jace's place the next morning and never came back. I got his head in a package that evening, with a note that only said "S."

I grabbed my stuff and headed for the river to get the next boat out. I was being followed, and they weren't even trying to be careful about it — it looked like they were playing a game. I don't remember much about what I did that night. I know I killed one of them who got too close, but there were so many that they kept me from getting to the water. The only way I had left was down — most sewers and tunnels eventually lead to one of the rivers. I'd never been really far down into the underways, but every time I tried to double back and head toward the surface, I could hear someone closing in on me. It didn't look good, especially when I realized where I was.

I'd heard lots of stories about the Tomb of Night — anyone who went in there was never seen again and I'd heard that folks who spent too much time near it got sick. Now, I was only about a dozen yards from it, and I knew for a fact that the nearest path to open water was almost half a mile away. I could hear Ses' people closing in. That was the first time I heard Ses' hissing voice: "Your boyfriend was such a fool. I gave him a chance to work for me, but he just lost his head!" I could tell by his voice that he was a Wyld-tainted monster, and I could tell by his voice that he was laughing at me.

I did my best to remain silent, hoping Ses would look elsewhere — or maybe come close enough that I could take him with me when I died. He seemed to know exactly where I was and sent six of his thugs after me. All of them were bigger and better armed than me — two of them were snakemen, and those freaks don't die easy. I wasn't about to end up another trophy for him — I

figured I'd be seeing Sliver soon no matter what I did, so I made a short dash into the Tomb of Night. I thought I was dead until I opened my eyes and could see what looked like a very old suite of fancy rooms. Everything had a pale gray look, but that was about it. It took me a while to figure out it wasn't the afterlife — stubbing my toe helped. I doubt that happens to the dead.

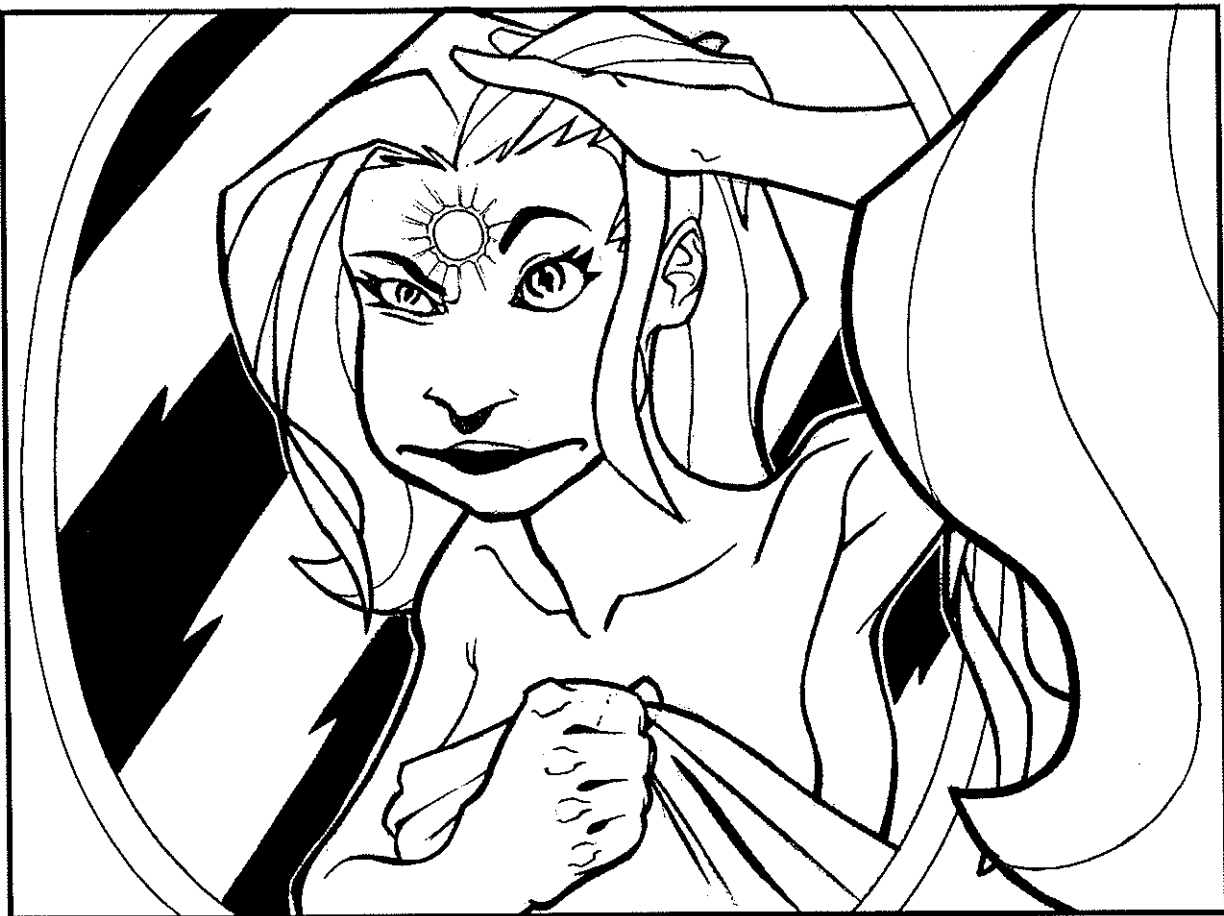
The gray light bothered me — I lit a candle I had in my pack, or at least, I thought I did. I smelled the sharp scent of flint and the smoke, the wick moved and shortened, but I couldn't see any flame. That really made me think I was dead, until I touched the candle — I think you only burn your thumb when you're alive.

Then I realized I was standing in one of the ancient demon tombs. I'd heard the demons were all long dead, but there were stories of them coming back. I stood there for a long while, expecting a demon to come for me any second. I started crying — I still don't know if it was because I thought I was about to die or because I finally figured out I might not. I sat on the floor of a demon's tomb and cried for Sliver. Once I finished, I noticed just how empty the whole place was — it didn't look like anyone had been here in centuries. There weren't any demons here now, but that still didn't explain why I was alive or what I was going to do now.

The place was really fancy — everything smelled old and dusty, but the hanging scrolls weren't even bug-eaten or worn. I didn't know what else to do, so I started pawing through things at random. I found a pair of gold bracers and put them on. One of them had this black stone set in it, and I remember that I liked that. There was an old buff jacket hung up on a hook. It looked less worn than mine and when I picked it up, I noticed it was one of the fancy ones — I could feel the metal plates inside, but it seemed lighter than the regular one I had. One moment, I was standing there looking at it; the next moment, my old jacket was hanging on the hook, and I was wearing the fancy one. Then I saw the bodies — I found over a dozen of them all stacked neatly in a pile behind some water jars. None of the bodies had rotted, they just looked really old, except the clothes on two were in good shape. Seeing them made me more scared than I'd ever been before. Why was I still alive? What did it mean? I sat on the floor, hugged myself and cried until I either passed out or fell asleep.

I guess I had some sort of dream or vision. I was on this golden island — the sand, trees, rocks and everything else were solid, shining gold. A golden robed being, almost too bright to look at was talking to me. I'll never forget what he said, "Huyla, you are now my servant and my aid. Your old mortal life is over, but you have a far greater destiny before you. The foolish mortals now call you Anathema, but you are one of my glorious champions. You are my stalker in the night and the deadly

10/29/20



huntress of all who violate my edicts and bring chaos and destruction to the world. Be calm now in your heart. You have much to do."

I woke up and knew this was true — when I glanced at a mirror on the wall, I could see that the golden circle on my forehead was the only bit of color amidst the endless gray. Sliver was still gone, but I could handle that now. I might be some kind of demon, but that meant I was tough enough to send Ophilis Ses straight to whatever hell freaks like him go to.

ELIAS

I imagine my childhood was not terribly different from that of most other minor nobles. My parents are trader-knights living in the Haslanti capital of Icehome. I received a typical young noble's instruction in flying, swordsmanship, etiquette, manners, dreaming, ice-sailing and bargaining, as well as vast amounts of dreadfully dull history and mathematics. Books are fine for rousing adventure tales, but I've not met many scholars who can write a book that won't leave you sound asleep less than half way through.

I was rather a disappointment to my parents — I simply never had a "head for business." I found bargain-

ing and accounting only slightly more enjoyable than cleaning up after a sick mammoth. The fact that I had a talent for lying and petty theft didn't help matters. As their only child, they had hoped for someone rather more upstanding. However, they both excelled at turning failure into success, and so, when I was 12, they sent me to live with Uncle Shalas. Prior to that time, they had rarely spoken of him, and the one time he visited, mother kept looking at him like he would steal the silver.

It turns out that, while mother had never much cared for her older brother, the Oligarchs liked him a great deal — Shalas was one of their finest spies. The reason we never saw much of him was that he worked for the chief sub rosa ambassador and spent a good bit of his time in Whitewall and the coastal cities. Uncle Shalas felt that I showed a natural aptitude for the work, and after some truly fascinating education in codes, lockpicking and foreign customs, I traveled with him as his aide. Naturally, I turned out to be fairly useful — you'd be surprised how much children can get away with. Claiming to be lost and looking a bit dazed will excuse almost any intrusion into someone's private chambers, as long as you make certain to hide the letter you just purloined. The best part was that almost no one was

willing to torture or execute a noble-born child unless they had absolute proof that he'd been spying.

Of course, once you begin to grow, those tricks don't work anymore, and you need to be a lot more careful if you are going to avoid the well-spiked embrace of "the bed of a thousand questions" or other similarly painful tools. However, when I got my growth and my beard, there were a whole new range of ploys I could use. Seducing chambermaids and serving boys and suggesting how much of a thrill it would be to take your pleasure in the mistress's own bed opens doors in a singularly pleasant and diverting fashion. Also, being taller and stronger meant that I was finally able to receive real combat training, and I liked that.

Life continued on in this vein for another seven years — I went from being my uncle's aide to being his second and the obvious heir to his position. Ostensibly, we traveled the Northland carrying messages, helping arrange protocol for the visiting Haslanti merchant-nobles and generally smoothing interactions between the Haslanti and the various other Northern powers. However, we also examined secret plans, read private correspondences, listened at doorways, traveled undercover and collected a vast amount of information that allowed the Oligarchs to stay one step ahead of their neighbors. The only problem was that all the mystery and adventure that had attracted me as a child had been replaced by a realization that I was performing a singularly deadly job. The worst part was when my uncle and I went into rescue a fellow spy named Kelda. We actually managed to get into the dungeon disguised as warders — unfortunately, by the time we arrived, the Whitewall inquisitors had already started work on her. Both of Kelda's feet had been crushed, and she needed to be able to walk to escape. She hadn't talked and was actually grateful that we were there to kill her quickly. The job never seemed quite as exciting after that, and I started having nightmares — I guess I realized I wasn't immortal. At least, not yet.

EXALTATION

Knowing you'll be tortured and then killed if you're ever caught does wonders for making you careful and effective. We kept the whole business going until one undercover mission down in the coastal states. Those are lands where no sane person who isn't on important business ever goes. I've never seen anyplace so depressing. There are only three types of people there, rural peasants who grow barley and maize, urban slaves who do everything from sweeping the streets to crafting fine clothes and selling jewelry and the few hundred Dragon-Blooded who rule everyone else. Except for a few beggars and thieves, every sodding person living in all of those cities is a slave. Sure, the major ports look

prosperous and well kept, but it was sickening to watch the way everyone jumped when one of those Realm-born Exalts or the bumpkin local pretenders strutted by. They'd have us all living like that if they could manage it — visiting the coastal states most definitely gave me incentive for my work. Unfortunately, even the best plans sometimes go awry.

We had been sent in to copy some letters from the Syndics of Whitewall to the local Dragon-Blood satrap. We went ostensibly to talk about the ivory trade. In the evenings, Uncle Shalas distracted the Exalts with endless tales of mammoth hunting, while I snuck in and read the letters. I thought we had gotten away clean, but just as I finished copying a letter into code, one of the Terrestrials and half a dozen guards burst in. I'd have been willing to chance the guards, but when you see a Dynast glowing like that, with wind whipping around her and the air crackling and glowing, there's no hope. We both decided that figuring out how to kill ourselves in our cell looked better than our odds of a clean death there.

They marched us down into the dungeons and didn't even bother to search us, they just chained us up — they did a good job too, hands and feet both, and no way to reach each other. I knew that we were going to die soon, there was nothing either of us could do about it — we couldn't even offer each other the mercy we'd given Kelda. Then, I got angry — I was only 23, and some damn pompous Exalt was going to kill us both in one of the many horrid and inventive ways they have.

They'd killed so many others, and now, they were going to kill me. I knew I had to escape and warn my wife. Just as I remembered that I didn't have a wife, there was a voice in my head. It was like I both heard it and felt it, and for a minute, I went blind. The voice told me I had been called by the Unconquered Sun. I didn't know what that meant yet, but I knew I had to get out of here. I started struggling against my bonds, and suddenly, my shackles were all lying at my feet. I went over to my uncle, and with just a touch, his bonds also fell off. I got out my knives and sling — it was a damn good thing they hadn't searched us.

When I grabbed the cell door, it fell open, and I started down the hall. There was a guard post just around the corner. When I'd come in, the guard had been playing dice with one of the torturers. If either of them got away, we were still dead, so I moved fast but quietly. There were two other prisoners, neither of them saw me — I hoped the guards would be similarly unobservant. The guard and the torturer were engrossed in their game. I got closer than I had any right to and slit the guard's throat when he walked around the corner to check out the noise made by the button I threw. The torturer was stupid and had his back

turned when I put two throwing knives in him. Not that it would have made a difference, but it kept him quiet. We weren't safe yet, but we now had a chance.

I went back to set the other two prisoners free. Both of them kept backing away from me, especially after I made their chains drop off, but they liked the idea of staying there even less than they liked me. I got the others and my uncle to follow me and went looking for the way out. Going up would just run us into far too many guards and likely a few Exalts, but we needed to move rapidly or someone might come to check on us. I remembered the tunnels and knew that there was something down there that I needed to get. I didn't know where my new memories of a wife or of concealed passages came from, but if these tunnels existed, they seemed like our best chance.

Suddenly, it all made sense. The voice in my head, the weird half-memories, the strange glow I'd been noticing and the way everyone looked terrified, like they were afraid of me, but more afraid to not do what I told them to. I realized I was a demon prince — I'd become one of the Anathema. When my uncle saw me looking at him, I could hear him murmur a short prayer for my soul. I felt panic bubbling up underneath the anger that still filled me, but I'd been trained well enough to know that the time for thinking was when we both were safe.

The window in the door out showed no one around, and I knew the entrance to this tunnel was only a few yards away. Before we left, we took the weapons from the guards' corpses. I was overjoyed to feel the cool weight of a sword in my hand — at least this time I'd be able to go down fighting. I walked over to a section of blank wall and pushed on a series of stones. I felt that portion of the wall shift, then it pivoted and opened onto a damp and ill-smelling passageway. I'd heard rumors that some of the older mansions used by the Exalts had tunnels underneath — this passage looked like no one had used it for centuries.

After we had gone down around 100 yards, I noticed a thin stream of a dark and noisome liquid trickling down the center of the tunnel — combined with the rather warm and fetid odor coming from down below the entire place reminded me uncomfortably of the stories I had heard of the underways of Gethamane. Even if I was a great and terrible demon prince, I still felt ill prepared to confront ancient and nameless beasts from the depths of the earth.

The light around me slowly faded, and after what felt like almost an hour of walking, we came to the end of the passageway. In front of us, I knew there was another door of the type I had opened to get in here. I was eager to escape, but there was something I had to do first. There was another door, hidden from anyone other than one of my kind. I approached it as if in a half-waking





dream — raising my left hand, I placed it against a shallow depression in the rock, and the wall before me vanished. Inside was a small alcove that contained a long-dead body. The bones had an odd golden glow and fell to dust as soon as I touched them. It had been wearing a gilded torc and a chain shirt of finest gold, and by its right hand was a golden sling. The sling appeared to be made from solid metal, until I held it in my hand — then it became as supple as fine leather. Sad, scared and full of unknown rage, I put on the torc and the chain shirt while visions of death and betrayal filled my mind. I came back to myself, whatever that meant now, once I had finished. With the gleaming torc around my neck, my companions seemed even more scared than before. The younger of the other two prisoners half raised his knife at me and then began to weep. Even my uncle looked like he expected me to slay them all. Their mood improved when I opened the hidden door out of the passage.

The doorway opened in the side of a tunnel that had seen far more use. It sloped upward and looked to be the same sort of escape passage some of the larger palaces have back home. Only a fool doesn't leave a way out from a building that can be besieged. Expecting to hear sounds of pursuit at any moment, we hurried onward, our only light coming from the soft violet glow around me. After a short while, I could smell the cold fresh air of winter above us. We reached another great iron door. Fortunately, this one had only a simple latch to prevent anyone from entering from the other side. Going first, I walked out into a trap.

Not only had they discovered our escape, they somehow knew exactly where we were going. The only advantage we had was the fact that the lords of the Realm were disdainful of mere mortals. We faced only the Exalt who had captured us and a trio of the great white mastiffs they used thereabouts to hunt down fugitives. Only two of us had any armor or swords — we would have been easy meat, had it not been for the fact that I was now far more than this young demigod expected. In her disdain for us, she had donned only light armor, relying instead on the potent aura of protection I could see crackling around her body — standing with drawn bow, she seemed certain that she had us in her power.

With little to lose, I drew my new sling and set one the stones I had in my pocket. It had a perfect balance, and I was desperate. I threw one stone at the Dynast's drawn bow and another at the dog about to attack me. The dog collapsed, bleeding heavily, and the bow snapped in half, but not before she fired at me. The arrow glowed with green and glittered with leaves of Essence, but I was able to dodge it almost without effort. She hadn't expected that and suddenly stared at the devil mark on my forehead — I saw her eyes go wide with terror as she began to back away.

While she was still in shock, I dropped another of the dogs — my uncle and the others had taken care of the third one. When I looked against, the younger prisoner was down — the beast had ripped out his throat. The last dog's death moved our young foe to retreat — she turned and ran. I got off two shots at her, and the second one struck her at the base of her spine and took her to her knees. She screamed when I approached — I never imagined I'd hear one of the Terrestrial Exalted call upon the Dragons to protect her — she was terrified of the demon I had become. She was fairly pretty and looked no older than I was — I was going to tie her up and shove her into the passage we had just vacated. Unfortunately, when I got close, she pulled a dagger. My next blow killed her, and I left her where she fell. So much for the "Princess of Creation."

We needed to get under cover soon — fortunately, my uncle and I had a safe house in the city. Not all slaves are content to live under the domination of their Realm-bred masters. A few were willing to help outsiders work against the Dragon-Blooded, especially outsiders who paid handsomely for such aid. Since we didn't want the other captive talking if she was recaptured, we took her along — besides, it's simply not proper to leave women my uncle's age out in the snow alone with Dynasts and omen dogs after them.

HAVESH, THE VANISHER

I can't tell you when I was born. If I knew when I was born, my whole story would be very different. But I can tell you *where* I was born — one the top floor of the Salt Spray Tavern in Yane, in the Varang lands. And that's why the time matters so much. In Varang, you see, knowing when you're born determines what you're allowed to do in life, what your role and your station will be. But my mother, damn her name, was too drunk to know she was even in labor, much less listen to what hour the clock towers were chiming when I came screaming into the world.

It's not as though I would have been a noble or some such thing; she was a potmaid at a dockside tavern, after all, and I was her third brat. But at least I would have had something to cling to, some sort of place in society. Oh, I've done all right for myself *now*. But those first years were hard indeed. Being an outcast in a Varang city is — well, I suppose it's like being dirt-poor anywhere else. Only if you're poor, there's always the possibility that you'll get rich somehow — or at least well-off. But once an outcast, always an outcast; there's no changing it.

Mother could barely keep herself fed, much less the three of us, so we were all working as soon as we could. My brother Asim was born a peacekeeper, so he apprenticed to the city watch, polishing armor and boots and such while he learned what he could in case he ever had



the chance to become a full watchman. Panya, my sister, was born an entertainer, so one of the local panders took her in to run errands and such until she was old enough to take up the trade, not that that was very old in our part of Yane.

I, of course, was born nothing, so I had to take work where I could find it. I'd run messages for folks who didn't want to pay for a proper courier or do odd labor for shopkeepers who were happy to bend the rules as long as I worked cheap. I didn't steal much, but only because I didn't have to; I was strong and smart and knew when to keep my mouth shut, and that was enough to keep me fed. It wasn't a happy life, by any means, and I longed for a better one; but there's no way to get a caste in Varang when you're born without one.

I didn't see mother much, not that she was sober enough to care, and it was no big loss for me either. She hadn't wanted a third child and had always made that clear enough with her curses and her kicks. To her, I was another unwelcome mouth to feed, and the moment I was out the door and feeding myself, we were both happier with the situation. That also meant I lost touch with Asim and Panya. I'd occasionally see them in the street, but neither one could spare much time to talk. Panya was risking a beating from her pimp by talking to any man who wasn't going to pay for her, and Asim was too busy trying to impress his superiors in the vain hope that he could be a real guardsman some day. As time went by, we saw each other less and less, and I lost any real idea of what they were up to. It's a shame, I suppose, but life in the gutters of Yane doesn't leave much time for family sentiment.

EXALTATION

As I got older, I started spending more time as a guide for foreigners coming to Yane for the first time. Most of them didn't know much about the castes, but they knew that they'd need a guide, and I was usually quick enough getting to the incoming ships that I could find a patron before the real guides arrived. Some of the foreigners knew about the real guides but hired me on anyway, saying that I'd give them a "more honest view of the city" or some such thing. Or maybe they just didn't want their comings and goings so carefully noted.

One such foreigner got me started down the path I'm on now. He wore the colors of a cloth-merchant and seemed to know what they meant, but he brought no goods with him, and the tavern he had me bring him to was no place for a reputable merchant. When we arrived, he gave me my coin and bade me go on my way, but my curiosity was aroused, especially when he went into the alley beside the tavern rather than the tavern itself. So I ducked behind a few old barrels and listened as my "merchant" began to conduct his business in that alley.

It didn't take long to figure out what that business was. The man he was meeting was a local silversmith who was apparently anxious to advance in his caste — so anxious that he was trying to hire a foreign assassin, my "merchant," to kill an older smith — the silversmith's own uncle, as it happened; there's family loyalty for you — so he could step into his role. I had heard all the stories about foreign assassins, but this was the first time I had actually encountered one, and I was excited and nervous listening to them talk.

Everything was agreeable between them until they came to talk price. The first number the silversmith offered was enough to make my eyes bulge out of my head, but the assassin countered with an even higher figure. They haggled for a good long time, getting angrier and angrier, until it was clear that they wouldn't be dealing with each other even if the price was right. The assassin stalked out of the alley, not seeing me as I hid, and after I watched him go, I stood up and walked into the alleyway where they had been. The smith was still there, gnawing on his thumbnail as he paced back and forth, and he nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw me.

"I'll do it," I said, "for the first price you offered him."

He looked me up and down for a long time, and I could see what he was thinking. *An outcast, more than half a boy still and not even as tall as I am. Still, he looks strong, and he already knows too much....* "Half," he said. "He's a professional, and you're an outcast I know nothing about."

"Done," I said. Half that fee was still more money than I'd seen in my life, and now that I'd made my move, I couldn't take the chance that he'd change his mind. So, a deal was struck, and I went off to kill a man.

It's not as easy as you'd think, at least not the first time. I had to catch him alone, which took some doing. I eventually pounced on him on his way home from his shop one night after a late meeting with some particularly demanding customer. Then, to compound matters, I discovered he was wearing a chain shirt under that fancy gown of his. Unfortunately, I only found out about the chain when I tried to put my dagger through it, which made it a bit too late to back off and try another plan. So, as he drew breath to shout for the watch, I did the only thing I could, which was to grab him around the throat and start squeezing. He was a wiry old bird and fought like a demon, and I was sure I was going to lose him and lose my life in the bargain.

But as I hung desperately on to him, I suddenly began to feel new strength in my arms, strength like I'd never felt before. I felt... greater, somehow. His hands, which had been keeping mine away from his windpipe, suddenly seemed as weak as watered ale, and I crushed his throat effortlessly before even realizing I'd done it.



When his eyes rolled back in his head and I heard him rattle out the last of his air, I dropped him, and he fell like a sack of meal.

At first, I thought that it was only the rush of danger that had given me such strength. Then I noticed the light reflecting off the walls around me, purple and flickering like a candle seen through a glass of wine, but a thousand times brighter. I looked around, but could see no sign of where the light was coming from... then, I looked down and saw that my whole body was glowing with it. When I stepped over to look at my reflection in a puddle on the street, I already knew what I'd see, and the burning golden circle on my forehead clinched it for me. I was Anathema. I remember thinking to myself, *Well, at least I have something to belong to now.*

Didn't have too long to ponder it, though, since between the noise and the light, someone had gotten it into their mind to call the watch. A patrol of six came jingling around the corner and then stopped, gaping at me and the crumpled body at my feet. They were no threat to me, I knew that; right then, I felt like I could take on the Empress' own private legion and walk away unhurt. I needed some time to get my mind around what I had become, so I just turned to leave, when I heard a stunned voice behind me say, "Havesh?"

I turned back to look and damned if Asim hadn't worked his way up to guardsman after all. He was looking all stern and official with his armor and his spear; mother must have been proud of him. If only the fool had possessed sense enough to keep his mouth shut, he might be a captain today. But instead; he and his whole patrol knew my name now, and I'd heard enough things about the Wyld Hunt to know that it meant a death sentence for me if any of them made it back to report in.

"Asim," I said, walking over toward him with my hands out to show they were empty. The rest of the guards couldn't decide whether to gape at him or me.

"You've... changed," he said. A master of the obvious, was Asim.

"I'm sorry," I said, and meant it, and then, I put my fist through his head. The rest of them tried to fight back, of course, but they really never had a chance. One of them was smarter than the rest; he broke and ran, but I pinned him to the wall with one of the others' spears. Once I was sure they were all dead, including poor, stupid Asim, I left before any more showed up. I needed time to think.

So, I had become Anathema. Well, I was used to being despised by almost everyone I met; now, at least, I would also be feared. And if half the stories about what they — we — could do were true, I was now a power to be reckoned with. I certainly felt like one. I began to think about all the good folk of Yane, so confident in their superiority to little outcast me and decided that the best revenge would be to continue in my newfound career, at least until something better came along.

The next day, the mark on my head was still glowing, but I kept it covered when I met with the silversmith to collect my payment. I don't think it would have mattered; he had heard about the six guardsmen found by his uncle's body, and I don't think he could have been more scared of me if I was 12 feet tall and breathing fire. Looking back, I doubt he had meant to pay me when he first made the deal; after all, what good would the word of an outcast be against him? But he had brought every obol he owed me and hinted that he knew of other folk who might be able to use someone in my line of work.

My next kill was a turning point for me. I had just finished strangling a promising young clockmaker and was stuffing his body under the bed when his wife came in. She came straight for the bedroom, a pretty young thing that should have been out at the shops for a few more hours, and I was torn between needing to kill her and wanting to have her. Something in my spirit must have known what to do because, when she walked in, she came right up to me, called me darling and said she had missed me too much to stay away for so long. I looked in the mirror and saw what she had seen, the face of the clockmaker staring back from where I stood. So I romped with her on the soft, expensive bed that her husband's body was cooling beneath and slept the night there as well.

I slipped out early the next morning, and you should have heard the stories the rumor-mongers started telling after she found the body. "Killed right in his sleeping wife's arms," they said, "and she never heard a thing." The respect and fear in my client's eyes was wonderful to see, and the whole thing gave me an idea.

Since then, I've only taken jobs against well-off, high-caste folks. I study one for a good long time before I strike, learning his habits, his family and such. Then, I strike and do away with the body (usually sinking it in the harbor, though circumstances sometimes present other possibilities). That done, I step into the victim's shoes and live his luxury lifestyle for as long as I can get away with it. Eventually, of course, someone starts becoming suspicious that the master craftsman isn't actually crafting anything anymore or doesn't remember his brother that's just returned after a few months at sea. When that happens, I go someplace quiet and resume my own face, and the victim simply disappears. That's why they call me the Vanisher, and let me tell you, something like that does wonders for a killer's reputation.

The money's good, but the lifestyle's even better; however much money I might have had, an outcast could never hope to live the way I've been living these past years. The revenge is best of all, though; getting the chance to avenge myself on the society that wrote me off is a pleasure I can't describe.

JUNAN NIGHTWARDEN

I was born in Sijan, as one of the handful of living in the city of the dead. My father and mother were both members of the Morticians' Order, so it is no great surprise that I was raised to follow them in that path.

Of my growing years, there is little enough to tell. I chose to join the Funerists' Observance and earned my silver bracers in my 15th year. For seven more years, I served the Order faithfully and well and did little that would interest you. I could tell you how best to propitiate the spirit of a Fire-pected lector from the early years of the Realm or sing you the songs appropriate to the funeral of a Metagalapan hawkridger, but this is doubtless not what you have come to hear. Suffice it to say that I had a quiet and normal life, perhaps more normal than you might think if all you know of Sijan is legend and rumor.

EXALTATION

In the winter of my 23rd year, a woman came to Sijan to die. This was not, in itself, unusual; many men and women who know they are dying come to Sijan, to make their final funeral arrangements and to die in their own time. But this woman was still young and seemed healthy enough; and she was also very beautiful. Her skin was pale and smooth like polished alabaster, her hair black and glossy like onyx, her lips red and full like garnet. She went into the House of Death escorted by four Calinti soldiers. The soldiers were each grim and stern and watchful, but she only looked sad as she went inside to die. I could not see inside the house, but I watched from the street for a long time.





After a time, the Calinti emerged again, along with the woman's body and the two mortwrights who oversaw her death. I followed at a distance. They brought her to the Hall of Graceful Embellishment, where the mortwrights prepare the dead for their final passage, and were within for some time. I should not have stayed to watch, for I had no role in what was to become of her; but something in her eyes as she went inside the House of Death had taken hold of my heart.

While I was watching, four more men approached the Hall of Graceful Embellishment. Three of them were dressed as soldiers of an army I did not know, in heavy armor of black iron, their faces hidden beneath their visors. The fourth, their apparent leader, wore only robes, though he carried a long, wide, black-bladed sword at his side. His skin was as pale as the mystery woman's, and his hair was long and silver. All four of them wore an ebony brooch in the shape of a boot at their breast, though I did not, at the time, know what that signified.

As they approached the hall, the Calinti men stepped out to confer with them. I could not hear what was said, but at the end of the discussions, I saw the robed man hand the Calinti a coin pouch, as well as a small, carefully wrapped package. The Calinti nodded in approval and departed, and the newcomers went inside the hall.

One more man came to the hall while I waited and watched. I did not know his face, but he wore the bracers of a deadspeaker, those rare members of our order who

speak with the dead and occasionally take them across the veil between death and unlife. What secret did the dead woman hold, that one of the deadspeakers would be summoned here to speak with her? I could not bring myself to leave without knowing more.

Late in the afternoon, the four men with the ebony brooches emerged from the hall with the pale woman walking among them. The mortwrights had not been preparing her corpse for burial, but to rise and walk again; and the deadspeaker had not come to communicate with the woman, but to raise her. Her eyes were downcast, and her face was even sadder than it had been in life; but her beauty, though colder, was even more heartbreaking to me. The armored men circled around her like bodyguards, and I followed them as they made their way southward through the gray streets of Sijan.

It was not until they began to cross the Bridge of the Fallen, the bridge reserved for the use of the dead, that I fully realized who they were: servants of the Deathlords, come to Sijan to take delivery of a new concubine for one of their cold masters. I knew that such things happened; my order performed many services for one Deathlord or another, since their goodwill was often important in our line of work. Still, when I saw her beauty and her sadness, I knew that I could not let them take this woman, whatever the cost to me.

I hastened to cross the Bridge of Mortals and return to the path they were taking, and I was not far behind them. They seemed not to notice me — or not

to care if they did, for what could one man do against four soldiers of the dead? I had no more idea than they. But as they stepped out of the shadow of the first great mausoleum beyond the bridge, I moved close to them and called out, "Where are you taking her?"

They stopped and looked at me: three unreadable iron visors, one beautiful pale face and the arrogant, icy visage of the robed one. "She goes to serve my lord, the Walker in Darkness, though I do not see that it is any business of yours."

"Does she—" I licked my lips. "Does she wish to go?" She looked at me, eyes devoid of hope, and shook her head once, barely enough for me to notice.

He stepped toward me then, seeming to grow larger in the gathering darkness. A silver-gray ring began to shimmer on his pale forehead, and the shadows around him deepened. I felt the cold of winter; it seemed to be coming off him in waves. "That is of no consequence," he said. "A bargain has been made, and she will go." He grinned at me, his teeth as white as his skin. "Unless you would stop us?"

"I will," I said.

He shook his head and gestured, and two of the armored men began walking toward me, hefting their axes. "Do you know enough ancient wisdom to put your own spirit to rest, I wonder?" The robed man grinned wider.

I had no hope; they were armed and armored and dead besides, and I wore only my robes. But a voice then whispered words in my ear, and the shadows seemed to draw back from around me, and I spoke the words that I had been told. The light seemed to blaze around me and from me, and I felt as though I stood under the noonday summer sun. The armored dead that approached me seemed smaller somehow and hesitated in their march. I reached out and tore the axe from the hands of the nearest one, and it was light and easy in my hands.

The one I had disarmed growled beneath its visor and reached out to claw at me with the pointed fingers of its gauntlets. It raked its hand over my shoulder, and I felt a brief chill; but it pulled back as though burned, and smoke began to leak from its gauntleted hand. I raised my stolen axe, its edge now glowing like the sun itself and took the creature's head off with one easy blow. There was nothing within the armor, and the empty shell collapsed at my feet.

The second nemissary was already swinging at me, and I blocked its strike and counterattacked. This one took a bit longer to dispatch, but I still felt sure that it could not harm me. As I clove its helm in two and it fell, I heard a cold and bitter voice screaming, "Catch her!"

She had broken free from her remaining guard and was running back toward the Bridge of the Fallen, and the robed man and the last nemissary were in pursuit. She was fleet of foot and had reached the peak of the bridge's arch before they reached the base; and even as they began to close on her, she leapt over the railing and into the river, as though she would drown herself, as if her lungs were not already empty of air.

The robed one shouted an order, and the last soldier came to engage me. The silver-haired man called down as we fought, "You have not saved her, fool, but the Walker in Darkness knows you now, and you have doomed yourself." Then, he dove into the river after her.

The last soldier fought not to kill me, but to delay me, and I was hard put to strike him. By the time my last blow got through his guard and put him down, the two pale ones were long since out of sight down the river. I walked along the bank until the sun rose but saw no trace of them. What I did see was my own reflection in the water and the golden ring burning on my forehead. It was strange that I had not realized until then what I had become; the power and knowledge that had come to me seemed so natural, so right, that I barely realized I had changed.

Once dawn had come, I covered my forehead and returned to the city, where my bracers were taken from me and I was cast out of the Order. The Walker in Darkness was considered a patron to be courted and honored in order to gain his favor, and my actions had endangered that alliance. But I no longer cared. I knew in my heart that I had done the right thing and would not rest until I knew what had become of her.

Since then, I have been wandering the Scavenger Lands, seeking some trace of the mysterious dead woman, but I have found none yet. I have not yet dared to enter Walker's Realm in search of her, though that day is coming. As I wander, I do whatever I can to hinder the plans of the Walker in Darkness and his fellow Deathlords and to appease the unquiet dead where I find them, for a wandering spirit may too easily become a tool of the Deathlords. No living man yet knows what I have become, and I intend to keep it that way, unless I can find other followers of the Unconquered Sun who wish to stand against the Deathlords.





CHAPTER TWO

OBLIGATIONS OF THE CASTE



During the glorious days of the First Age, the members of the Night Caste were the Unconquered Sun's hidden troubleshooters. They traveled the world, hunting down all those who strove to overthrow the social order or otherwise wreak havoc. Rogue spirits, criminally inclined Exalted and all others who committed serious crimes lived in fear that they would one day awaken with a member of the Night Caste holding a knife to their throats.

Occasionally, the exploits of the Night Caste were celebrated with songs and parades, but more often, its work went unnoticed except by the other Celestial Exalted. This secrecy became the Hidden Suns' undoing — some grew weary of what they saw as a lack of recognition and sought fame and fortune by forming vast criminal empires. Others faded entirely into the shadows and began to follow their own concepts of justice and retribution rather than the orderly standards put forth by the Unconquered Sun. These vigilantes cared for nothing but their own twisted ideas of right and wrong — many noble warriors and wise kings died under their blades.

Because of their ability to hide, a few of the Concealing Shadows survived the initial purge of the Solar Exalted and lived for decades, hunting down and killing the Dragon-Blooded who had betrayed them, but eventually, the last of these silent killers were slain. Now, the Daggers of Heaven have been reborn into the Age of Sorrows. As with the members of the other Solar castes, these newly returned Exalted must now decide what they shall do.

The Unconquered Sun commands all members of the Night Caste to hunt down and slay the wicked who hide from sight and those who are well protected from direct attacks. However, some members of this caste ignore such impulses and set off to fulfill their own goals. Some become criminal masterminds who work to dominate entire nations through bribery, blackmail and murder. Others are peerless thieves or assassins. But a few keep to the old ways and walk the shadows, seeking to expose and eliminate all who work harm and seek to upset the natural order.

HARMONIOUS JADE

Learning the truth about the Children of the Sun is not easy. I can remember fragments of the life I once lived but only in dreams or fleeting visions, and none of the other Exalts I have met seem to remember much more. To learn more, we must piece together the clues we have or study history and legend, trying to sift out the occasional fragment of truth.

When I first left the Salmalin, I had no purpose. I had spent my life in service to the Yozis, and everything I knew told me that was the highest and best purpose my life could have. Now, I had been driven away from that path, and I was left with no purpose, with nothing but the skills the Salmalin had taught me and the unwanted powers I had been given. I had been taught that the Unconquered Sun and his children had led the fight against my masters in the time before man; now, that ancient enemy had given me incredible powers and made me one of his children.

I cursed the sun at first, for marking me and taking away everything I had known. I thought about dying — perhaps returning to the Salmalin and giving myself up as a sacrifice or wandering in the desert until I either found a purpose or dropped dead. Instead, my feet led me back to Gem, where I rented a room from a toothless old woman and tried to find a direction for myself.

It was clear that the Unconquered Sun had chosen me and that he must have had a reason. Was he trying to take me away from the Yozi and the Salmalin? Then why not simply kill me, rather than grant me power? Did the sun seek to weaken his enemies by turning them against each other, hoping that I would destroy the rest of the Salmalin? But if that was his purpose, he would surely have chosen someone who would stand and fight until the Salmalin were all destroyed, rather than flee into the desert as I had. And when I thought of the power and the majesty of the voice that had filled my head, I could not imagine that he wanted me merely as an expendable pawn.

The Unconquered Sun must have had some other purpose for me, wanting me for my own sake. But why did he not make that purpose clear? From my first memories, I had been told what to do, where to go, who to kill. Now, there was no one to tell me what my mission was, and the one voice that would know was maddeningly silent. I decided then that the only reason the Unconquered Sun could have chosen me was that he needed a killer. And until I knew who the sun needed me to kill, I would kill for whoever paid me.

It was not an easy thing to do. That is, the killings were easy enough, but I had no idea how to meet those who needed a killing done or how to bargain for a price. I made many mistakes in my first months. I took jobs for prices I would now consider laughable or found that my employer was nowhere to be found after the job was done, leaving the majority of my fee unpaid. The punishments I suffered for my mistakes were not as immediate as the beatings of the Salmalin, but they were just as painful. And with every mistake, I learned.

Though I was amazed at just how many people would pay to have someone else killed, there were times when I resorted to killing someone merely because he had money that I could steal, though he might have wronged no one. One of these victims was a young man in merchant's silks, tall and pretty and obviously rich. I followed him back to his home and watched through his windows while he enjoyed a meal and a concubine before retiring to his silken bed. I waited for two hours after he blew out his lamp, then I slipped past his guards and climbed up the wall to his bedroom window, which was open to let out the oppressive heat of the day.

I opened myself to the world as I peered through the window, and even in the darkness, I could see him sleeping in his bed and could hear his quiet, regular breathing. I cloaked myself in shadow and silence as I stepped to the floor of his bedchamber, and even with my ears open to the world, I could not hear the sound of my own motion. But

the moment my foot touched the plush carpet, he sat bolt upright in his bed, then stood and faced me. Raising my bow, I drew back an arrow to silence him before he cried out, but before I could fire, he darted toward me and grasped the bow, and I felt the wood crack at his touch. The tension on the arrow slackened and was gone as the top half of the bow flopped uselessly to the floor.

Then, I stared at him for a long moment, and he back at me, for the glowing, half-filled golden circle on his forehead mirrored the ring upon my own.

At length, he said to me, "You have come here for wealth, but what you truly desire is knowledge of what you are and where your path lies. I cannot tell you your future, but I can tell you your past. Come... I will make tea." And he turned his back to me and began to walk downstairs. Stunned and afraid to hope that he might know what he claimed, I followed.

His name was Zeroun, and he was the first to tell me what it meant to be Exalted. He told me of the great kingdom we ruled in the First Age and of the treachery of the Dragon-Blooded, who supplanted our realm with theirs. He told me of the five castes of the sun and the roles we each played during the First Age. He told me that each of the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun was the reincarnated soul of one of the Exalted slain by the Dragon-Blooded's betrayal, and he gazed into my soul to help me learn who I had been.

I learned that those of my caste are called the Iron Wolves, or the Daggers of Heaven; we represent the Unconquered Sun when he is below the horizon, when the world is cloaked in shadow and night. We are the ones who walk unseen, go where we are forbidden and do that which should not be done in plain sight. From talking with Zeroun, and from meeting other Exalts as my travels progressed, I began to learn what it meant to be part of my caste.

Of all the Children of the Sun, we are perhaps the best suited to the world we live in now, the world which hates and fears us in equal measure. Our brothers, the Lightbringers, the warriors of dawn, may shine brightly on the field of battle, but the glow of their powers is difficult to hide from the Wyld Hunt or from other prying eyes. The Hammers of Heaven are as proud and persuasive as the noonday sun that calls them forth, but they are equally hard to mistake for anything but what they are. We, though, are made to slip through the darkness unseen and unheard, to use our gifts in an unexpected burst of dazzling brilliance and then to fade again into the concealing shadows when our work is done.

The greater question remains, though — what is our work? Why has our Sun-father called us back from the shadows of the First Age? To what end should we turn the mighty powers he has given us?

To hear Zeroun tell it, there are as many answers to that question as there are Children of the Sun. Many believe that we have returned to reclaim the Realm from the Dragon-Blooded, to throw down the towers of the Empress and bring about a new Golden Age. Others are

content merely to wander the world, doing good to wash away the stain of the Anathema. Still others relish the power they have over ordinary men. They seek to build their own kingdoms, or even cults, seizing power where they can and living a life of luxury on the bent backs of those who fear them too much to resist. These greedy Exalts threaten to breathe new life into the legends of the Anathema and their monstrous evil.

Zeroun has not yet decided what he believes. He is a Child of Twilight, a student and a scholar, and he is trying to speak to as many of us as he can, to try to decipher what the Unconquered Sun meant when he chose us. Zeroun was very interested in the words I heard when the power of the sun came to me and wrote them down carefully in one of his books once I assured him that I remembered them exactly. He believes that by piecing together enough clues like this, he can determine why the Unconquered Sun has chosen us and what we are needed to do. I asked him what he had learned so far, and he seemed frustrated and sad. "Not enough," he said. "There is a pattern, I know there is, but I do not yet know enough to see it." Then, he began to question me again about the Salmalin and what I had done while serving them.

I stayed with him for several weeks, reading from his library and looking through those of his notebooks he would let me see. I read bits and pieces of information on the Children of the Moon and the Maidens' Children, but Zeroun did not have much in his library about any of them. I asked him about this, and he told me that they were not important to him, at least not yet. "As with life," he said, "all springs first from the sun. Once I have learned why we have returned, the roles of the rest will fall into place."

I slept on a couch in his bedroom. While his servants clearly thought that he had taken me as a lover, he made no effort to share his bed with me, though I could see in his eyes that he wanted to. I might have let him, but I would not make the offer first; I wanted what was in his mind, not his crotch. He was never brave enough to ask, so apparently the Exaltation does not change everything about a man.

After he had learned all he could from me, Zeroun began making plans to leave Gem. The Unconquered Sun had whispered to him of another Exalt in a city called Yane, and so, that was where he would go next. He told me where I could find the tomb of the body I had once worn and said that I would find a bow there which would more than replace the one he had broken. "And once you have it, what will you do then?" he asked me.

I thought about that. I had learned a great deal from him, most of all how much more there was to know. "I think," I said slowly, "that I will do as you are doing: travel, speak to others of our kind and learn what I can of why we are here."

"Then I will find you," he said, smiling, "and we can compare notes." It was clear that that was not all he wanted to do, but once more, he was not brave enough to ask, so I let it go. I embraced him, kissed him chastely on the cheek and left him.

I haven't seen him since then, though I'm sure I will in time. I don't know how to find him, but I'm sure he can find me, and I'm sure he'll want to. Not only to compare notes, but also to inquire about the purse full of jade I took from his desk during our final embrace.

HUYLA

It took me a few days, but I eventually figured out what I could do. The huge leap I made when I heard a noise let me know I wasn't just crazy-mad with grief. I did lots of thinking sitting in that tomb. Nexus is my home. I was born here, my parents are both buried here, and Sliver died here. I'm not leaving. Whatever I was called to do, I'm doing it here.

And there's a lot to do — thugs rob beggars of their shoes, the undead and other vile monsters walk the streets, and Ophilis Ses killed Sliver. The other stuff is just as important, but Ses is going down. I've had dreams about him, something in the back of my head tells me that he was also called by the Unconquered Sun — I don't know how an inhuman beast like that got the sun's blessing, but I don't really care — he's going to die, not today or tomorrow, but he'll be fish meat soon enough.

But he's only the worst problem among many. His kind and the other Wyld-twisted, the dead, the spirits and the fey infest this city like poisonous rats. They feed on mortals, using them like cattle or toys. The mortals that aid these foul things are almost worse — everyone who works with the monsters must pay. Ses must die, for killing Sliver, for all the other deaths and, most importantly, because he is an abomination that cannot be allowed to live and spread his foul taint.

I've been chosen by the Unconquered Sun to rid Nexus of him and the other monsters that infest it. But I can't kill them all in an afternoon. I need to get some practice — he's been here more than a year and isn't going anywhere. He's a clever beast — I'll be the one with my head on a post if I don't know what I'm doing when I take on his gang. After I finish with Ses, I'll really get to work — the streets will run in torrents with vile ichor, and then, the rains will come, and Nexus will finally be clean. I'll keep it pure and safe forever more.

TWO WEEKS LATER

After getting some practice and finding out all I could do, I decided to take on my first big case, tracking down the South Bank Killer. There had been some really nasty murders going on down near the cheap brothels south of the docks. The killer was smart, taking out whores that no one cared about. Folks were talking about a bloody hand, a murder spirit that helps murderers kill, that only works with the most twisted and inventive killers. When Sliver and I looked into it, we'd figured the rumors were true — going up against someone allied with one of those spirits is a bad way to die, so we had to give the money back. This time, I figured that I could handle it — I went back and talked to the

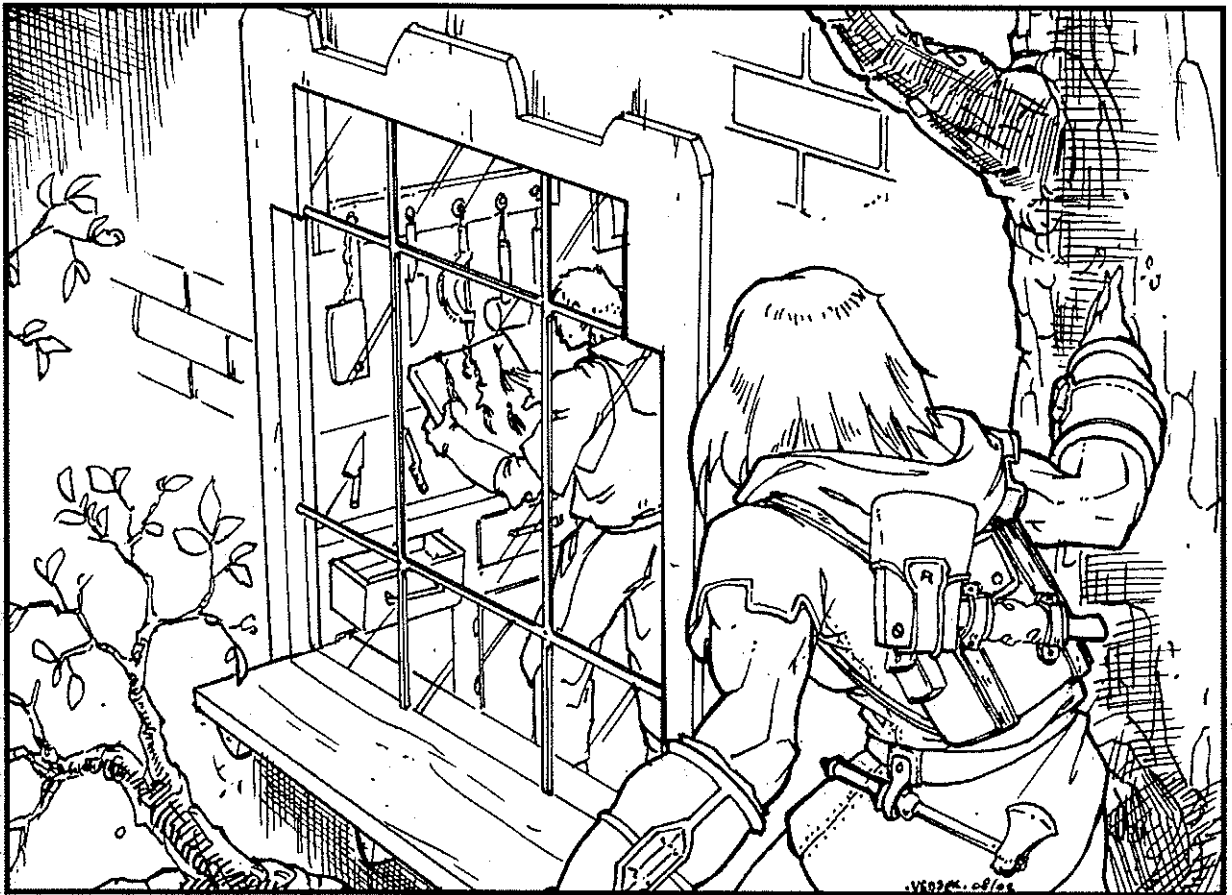


madam who'd hired us before. She was real sorry to hear about Sliver — don't they know I see his slack-faced head again every time some damn fool says how sorry they are.

I hung around waiting for the next murder — the madam, a once-pretty woman named Ylenora, let me stay at her place as long as I kept mostly out of sight. I doubt Ses knew I was still alive — his people hadn't infested this neighborhood yet. I had Ylenora put the word out that someone was to get her a message as soon as the next murder was committed. I didn't have long to wait — four days later, she came and woke me up. It was a couple hours before dawn, and someone had just found a body down on Satin Street. I got down there fast, before anyone had time to mess up the scene of the crime — a few leaps was all it took. There was one merc and someone else hanging around when I got there, and the body didn't look like it had been disturbed. No one would be rooting around in a butcher's display like that without good reason. I looked like I knew what I was doing, so the merc let me get close. The smell hit me hard — I was used to blood, but the smells from inside bodies were tougher. I wanted to get a look at the cuts, so I had to step over the loops of innards coiled all around her. Who could do this? I'd stop him, and I'd make him pay — sometimes killing over business is okay, but making someone look like a poorly gutted fish for the fun of it is too much. I knew only someone working with monsters could do this.

My new magics were a big help. The murder weapon was a butcher's knife, used by a short, skinny, right-handed man who wasn't very strong — he really had to saw on a couple of the cuts, but he was also really quick. He knew exactly what he was doing, and I don't think it was from all the practice he'd had on people. From the style of some of the cuts, I'm betting he was a butcher or maybe a butcher's apprentice — the woman was gutted just like a pig. I also found a green-blond hair on her heart, so he wasn't old and he had some forest blood in him. All the murders had been near the South Bank, so he was probably a local.

The next morning, I got to work. I asked around about butchers — to avoid getting noticed, I also paid some people to ask around for me. The money I'd gotten from selling the old coins from the Tomb of Night came in handy. I hadn't expected there to be a dozen young, skinny, short butchers or butcher's apprentices with forest blood in this section of the city. From here, the work was my own. Over the next few days, I went into each shop and got a bit of meat. I made certain to watch them all cut it. I had to go back several times in a few cases to make sure that the shop was busy enough that the apprentice was needed to do simple orders. That was my first break — after a few days of observation, it was clear that none of the apprentices knew enough to make those kinds of cuts in the time he'd had. That only left eight butchers, and two



were left handed. I kept an eye on each place — I watched them all close up their shops and go home. Everyone moves differently, and everyone looks at people differently. Two of the loud ones looked like promising candidates at first, but they mostly just went down to the taverns and drank. Then, I noticed the quiet butcher — outside his shop, he moved like he was scared, but he also watched everyone like he was sizing them up for his meat case.

I got on his roof and watched him through his window — he was real careful, but I noticed the locks of hair nailed to a board when he opened a drawer to look at them. He sat there and stroked the hair for a long time, then he got his knife and went out. I hadn't seen the bloody hand — spirits and similar monsters can hide from my justice while immaterial, but when they take physical form, they become my prey. I followed the butcher and shoved him into an alley. He started getting indignant and was about to yell for help, until I mentioned the locks of hair. He shut up and started to whine — then he started to plead. He said enough words that I got suspicious and noticed that a bloody hand was sneaking up on me. I've heard they don't normally try to save their mortal assistants, so I guess this guy was real good at killing. I threw a hatchet at it while making certain that I was still blocking the alley. It was tough, so I had to cut it down with my axe — when I was done, I was glowing, and the killer was covering. I'd had enough talk — words weren't going to bring any of the women back. I cut off his head, shouldered his body and went to talk to the captain of the Stalking Spiders, the mercenary company that takes care of hunting down local murderers. They'd been after the South Bank Killer for a while, and I didn't mind collecting the reward they had.

ELIAS

I never saw the woman I helped escape again — she fled as soon as we got back into the city. After we donned some rough disguises at the safe house, I went to our contact in the Guild to arrange passage out of the coastal states. The sapphire ring I got off of the body of the dead Dynast paid our entire passage.


We had to wait two days before they could get us out — during this time, my uncle and I talked. At first, he was too scared to speak — getting out of the dungeon because his nephew had suddenly become a demon lord left him very shaken. I got him some wine and waited while he drank enough to calm his nerves. If he'd known anywhere else safe to go, I think he might have fled. After a few hours, he was willing to talk, but I think he expected me to sprout horns and bat wings at any moment. It scared me when he spoke my name in the past tense and asked what my real name was. He was shocked when I started talking about the time we had been together and about my growing up. We talked all night and eventually blood held true over fear — by the time we were ready to leave, he had realized that I was still his nephew Elias, the only real difference being that I can now do far more than I ever could have before.

They smuggled us out of the South Shore in wine barrels. Once we passed the last checkpoint, the driver opened the barrels, and we rode up to Whitewall in the back of his cart. Whitewall may not be my favorite city, but it looked far more inviting than a dank dungeon. Wearing better disguises, we joined a caravan bound for Gethamane and, from there, took an iceship back home. Along the way, I took many long walks in the evening. While these were ostensibly to stretch my legs, mostly I was attempting to understand what I could do. Fortunately, I quickly learned to suppress the vast glow that had accompanied the first manifestation of my powers. As a result, I only had to spend one evening waiting out in the cold for the brilliant aurora around me to fade. On the positive side, the torc I acquired kept me warmer than any coat I'd ever owned, as well as ensuring that I always looked impeccable — definitely the ideal tool for a spy.

I also did a great deal of thinking while wandering the taiga — half-formed images haunted my days, and strange nightmares filled my sleep. I remembered people and places that I think no living person has ever known. These memories came with new emotions. I remembered being a hero — I worked in the shadows to keep my kingdom safe from harm. After much reflection, it seemed only right that I continue this same mission. I had hoped to spend my life drinking fine wine, enjoying diplomatic parties and occasionally risking my life breaking into desks and stealing diplomatic pouches. However, that was not to be — I'd been given a great gift, and it seemed only right that I should use it. I was surprised to discover that I truly was a patriot and that I honestly wished to use my new-found powers to help my own people.

Uncle Shalas liked my idea, but he was concerned about the reaction of the Oligarchs. They'd never dealt with one of the "Anathema" before — I must say I greatly prefer the terms that welled up from the depths of my new memory, "Solar Exalted" and "Night Caste" — Anathema simply does not inspire much confidence in my good intentions. I feared that, once the truth was known, my uncle and I would both be killed, but he was certain that enough people owed him favors that he would be safe. Beset by many doubts, we finally arrived home — I knew what I could do for them, but not how I would be received.

My uncle made his report — naturally, the Oligarchs wished to see me. I revealed some of what I could do — I showed them both my aura and the fact that I could completely suppress it. I also demonstrated how I could sneak past even the most alert and well-trained guards. At first, several of them looked highly dubious and a few were openly scared, but I talked for some minutes and managed to calm most of their fears. They asked what I wanted and then the serious dealing began — I'm quite glad Uncle Shalas was there to represent me — there's really nothing like family when life gets difficult. He negotiated a deal that was far more than I expected. I've got a lovely estate



on the outskirts of Icehome, complete with an income sufficient to keep me in style. Of equal import is the fact that I now answer to no one but the Oligarchs. Although I do not technically have any staff except my uncle and the people who run my estate, I can now requisition any goods and personnel I need, and these requisitions can only be vetoed by a majority vote of the Oligarchs. In essence, I'm now the 13th most powerful person in the Haslanti League, just after the 12 Oligarchs. I'm certain that the Oligarchs will attempt to have me killed if I ever look like I have designs on their jobs or otherwise cause trouble. Fortunately, I'm both loyal and exceedingly difficult to kill.

A month after I got set up, it was time to get to work. Whitewall and the Realm had been talking about forming a closer alliance for a while — the imperial ambassador was expecting to receive a treaty from House Ragara that she would present to the Syndics. The Oligarchs originally planned to send several spies to observe the proceedings. Now, they were sending me. I knew I could do more than simply spy and realized that I needed to fully demonstrate my worth before any of them had second thoughts. I talked with the Oligarchs, and eventually, they decided that, in addition to carefully observing the meetings, I would also attempt to steal the treaty from the courier's diplomatic pouch, bring it to the forger accompanying me and place a revised copy likely to be somewhat less pleasing to the Syndics back in the courier's pouch.

The forger, myself and two additional spies took the next air boat down to Whitewall. Winter was beginning to set its grip upon that city by the time we arrived. I love winter but not in Whitewall — that city is fine in warm weather but becomes singularly depressing once the snows come. Normally, when one is making a winter journey by air boat, the first scent of cooking fires heralds the pleasure of exchanging the boat's cold drafty cabin for a warm inn and a well-seared joint of meat — here, all I had to look forward to was hostile glances and ill-cooked stews. Nevertheless, duty calls, and I can but answer.

We got ourselves installed in a dismal inn called the Burnished Shield — it wasn't what I was used to, but at least it was fairly distant from the outer walls, so the howls of the dead wouldn't trouble our sleep too badly. Our cover was that we were fur traders here to sell our last shipment before deep winter grounded the air boats and made iceship travel too difficult. One of the spies was a young woman named Jasy who had performed this same ruse in the past — she actually managed to make a tidy profit on her fur sales.

The actual mission was surprisingly easy. Our girl Jasy knew the regular courier. She hadn't arrived yet, so we kept watch on the gates for new caravans from the south. We knew she'd be coming soon — in less than a month, the heavy snows would have arrived. Not expecting any trouble, the courier wasn't even disguised. Although she was traveling as a member of an amber caravan, she openly wore her house mon. Once she had settled into her rooms, I got to

work — I watched day and night, only turning the observation over to my assistants for a few hours while she slept. Fortunately, Realm protocol is that the courier must personally present the sealed treaty to the ruler who is supposed to sign it. From her discussion with the ambassador, I knew the Syndics had agreed to meet her in three days. The night before the meeting, I snuck in and extracted the treaty. I had not expected the courier to sleep with it as a pillow, but opening the window created a cold draft sufficient to cause her to roll closer to the wall. I nimbly extracted the treaty and departed for my rooms at the Burnished Shield. The forger was a genius — he lacked the time to rewrite the entire treaty, but he had some truly amazing chemicals that allowed him to erase whole sections and rewrite them with a notably different intent. It took him less than an hour to repair the seal so that it looked completely untouched.

It was only an hour before dawn when he finished, but I had already noticed that our precious courier had a tendency to sleep late. Just as the sun was creeping above the horizon I exited her room and went to get some much-needed sleep. I greatly enjoyed being secretly present when the treaty was delivered — one of the Syndics killed the courier and the ambassador fled just ahead of their wrath. As hoped, the Syndics have now prohibited all members of House Ragara from entering the city and have refused to meet with the imperial satrap until they receive a formal apology from that house.

HAVESH, THE VANISHER

If you ask me, none of us has a role in life except what we choose for ourselves. Some of us have been given powers, but they're ours to do with as we will.

Me, I'm the bogeyman, the shadows beneath the bed, the daggered hand lashing out of the darkness. There's a reason the Dragon-Blooded call us Anathema, you know; we represent the destruction of everything they stand for. They can't stand against us one on one, so they hide in packs and cower in their fortresses, knowing that we'll be back to claim what once was ours.

Or some of us will, anyway. Personally, I have no wish to go back and reclaim the Realm; there's more than enough wealth and luxury for my lifetime right here in the Scavenger Lands, and it's far easier to take it from mortals than to try to lay siege to the Imperial City. Maybe the Dragon-Bloods did wipe us all out when the First Age ended; and if they did, we were weak and foolish enough to deserve it. When they grow weak enough and foolish enough, we can go back and claim the Realm again, but I'm in no hurry. Whatever wrong they may have done me in the past, I can't remember it, and I'm quite happy enough where I am.

Of course, the Dragon-Blooded are too afraid to believe that, so they'll strike me down as happily as anyone else if they find me. I've been careful enough that I don't think any of them have learned that I'm Anathema yet. They know the name of the Vanisher, of course, and some

of them probably suspect that he's more than mortal, but they haven't tried to track me down yet.

Oh, I don't doubt that we were once the great warriors and heroes that some claim, though I can't imagine that we were quite as perfect as those romantics make us sound. No one with that much power could be so virtuous all the time. I had some dreams about that, visions you might call them, right after I changed. Walking around in beautiful cities full of beautiful women, master of all I surveyed, crushing my enemies beneath my heel — it painted quite a pretty picture, I can tell you. Not all of it was that pleasant, of course; there was a lot of treachery and a bloody death at the end. It's a distracting thing to have running through your head, I can tell you. Still, it wasn't too much trouble; if you ignore the visions for long enough, they'll go away. There's no sense in asking all sorts of unanswerable questions about the ancient past that's dead and gone.

I've met an Exalt or two who claim to be able to see who we were in the First Age, but I've told them I don't want to know. I know all I need to know right now, thank you. I'm quite content living this strange little life I've built for myself. If some pretentious savant started telling me tales of the great hero I once was, she'd have me up and chasing some dream, marching against the Realm to tear down the walls and rebuild the glory of the First Age, when like as not, I'd be struck down by the Wyld Hunt before I got halfway there. No, I'll stick to my plush beds and my stolen faces, thank you very much.

Ah, there's my latest wife coming home from the market. She cuts a fine figure, I'll say that for her. She's a bit of a shrew, truth be told, but well worth the trouble when the lights go out. I think she was cheating on her

husband, the poor bastard, though she seems satisfied enough now that I've taken over.

THREE MONTHS LATER

Well, damn these dreams and all women besides! That fetching little wife of the armorer's heard me mumbling in my sleep about battles and betrayals and being a servant of the Unconquered Sun. She thought I was going mad and wanted to call in a physician, and I had to talk her out of it long enough to vanish the following night. That cost me a fine home, and now that her husband's been vanished, she's taking her comfort in the arms of the stable master. I *knew* she was sleeping around.

Then, to top it all off, she went and told the magistrates that her husband had been mumbling about the Unconquered Sun the night before he disappeared, and that got back to the satrap somehow, and it wasn't long before the Wyld Hunt came to Yane sniffing around for me. I had to hide out over in Talt for weeks until things settled down, and I didn't dare vanish anyone for fear of bringing the Wyld Hunt down on me again. I was a common thug again, living from hand to mouth and killing anyone I'd get paid for. Even now, I'm not sure I can pick up my old methods again. The Hunt knows the name of the Vanisher now, and I don't doubt that they'll be keeping a close eye on Yane for a while.

JUNAN NIGHTWARDEN

I do not know why I was chosen by the Unconquered Sun; whatever claims we may make, none of us can know the mind of a god with certainty. But I was chosen when





I stood against the forces of death, so, perhaps, I am meant to cast light into the dark places where the Deathlords do their evil. That, at least, is the course I will follow until a better one presents itself.

I believe, furthermore, that all of the Children of the Sun may have been brought forth to stand against the armies of the dead. By all accounts, the Deathlords are a threat that has never existed before; they appear in none of the histories of the First Age, as far as I have been able to determine. The libraries of Sijan would certainly have referred to the shadowlands if they had been known to exist in the past, for the Deathlords have a profound influence on that city of the dead.

Can it be a coincidence, then, that the Solars began to reemerge in great numbers only after the Deathlords began to make their presence known? I find the possibility unlikely. It is my firm belief that the soldiers of the Unconquered Sun have been brought forth to stand against the legions of death, to repel the incursion of darkness into the lands of the light.

At first, this was only an idle theory of mine. In reflective moments, I wondered if I was merely trying to imbue my personal quest with a greater sense of importance, so that I might feel more justified in the sacrifices I make. But while conducting some business in Nexus, I met a woman who shed new light on my theories.

Her name was Zelia, and she was one of the Sidereals, those forgotten Exalted who were thought to have died out when the First Realm fell. I certainly doubted her when she claimed to be one of the Chosen of the Maiden of Battles, who had come to seek me out and enlist my aid. She smiled at me, though, and bade me test her words.

We were in the tunnels below Nexus — my reason for being there is of no importance — and there was no one else nearby, so I began my test by launching a kick at her belly. She was already moving away as my foot swept the area she had been standing, but I took the opportunity to draw my knife. She had a sword at her side, but grinned and made no move to draw it as I closed on her again. I thrust toward what would have been her sword arm, and again, she dodged away with unnatural speed. My next thrust, toward her eye, was a feint; I had no desire to kill her, but I needed to know if she was who and what she claimed. This time, she did not flinch, but stood straight and still as the point of my knife stopped within inches of her eye. She knew it was a feint, knew the blow would never land, and the grin on her face proved it as she looked back at me.

"Do you believe me now?" she asked, drawing back the hood of her cloak with one hand. When I saw the crimson Caste Mark on her forehead glow, it was the final proof I needed, and I told her so.

"Good," she said, covering her head again. "We have much to discuss, you and I."

Once my business was completed, we returned to the surface and to the privacy of my inn room, where she began

to tell me of herself and her kind. The Sidereals, she told me, had gone into hiding when the First Realm began to collapse. Some hid even today within the Realm itself, trying to curb its most wretched excesses, while others traveled the world looking for newly Exalted Solars.

I asked Zelia why the Sidereals were looking for Solars; given that some were working within the Realm itself, what she described sounded suspiciously like the Wyld Hunt. She admitted that a few of the surviving Sidereals did indeed hunt and slay Solar and Lunar Exalted alike, but the majority of the Sidereal Exalted were intent on teaching us how to use our powers most effectively and rallying us to their cause. When I asked what that cause was, she smiled at me and said, "You already know it." I asked if she meant the war against the Deathlords, and she nodded.

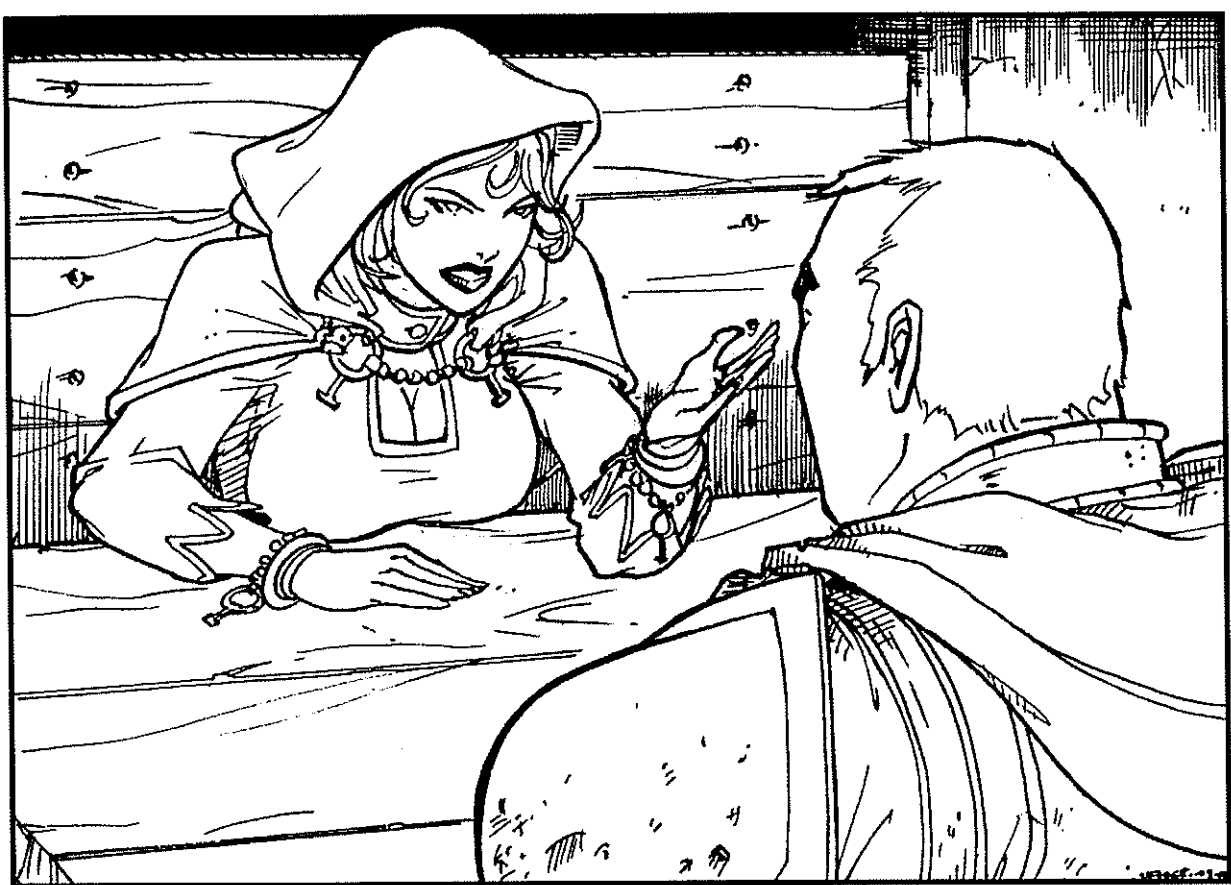
"We had hoped," she said, "that the Deathlords would not be a threat to the living. But when the Mask of Winters captured Thorns, it was clear that the living and the dead could no longer coexist in peace. There are few who can stand against the armies of the dead, Jiunan, but you and those like you are foremost among them. We need you and your brethren to help us reclaim the world for the living, before all the Scavenger Lands — if not all the world — become one vast shadowland."

We talked at length then, of what was known of the Deathlords and of the Abyssal Exalted, of their powers and their weaknesses and, most of all, of their goals, though that was what we knew the least about. That, in fact, was what Zelia said she needed my help with the most. "We must learn why the Deathlords have come to the lands of the living, Jiunan," she said. "They obviously want our lands and our people, but to what end? Someone must infiltrate their kingdoms and find out more about their goals. You are a warrior of the Night, and if anyone can sneak into their lands and return alive, it is you."

I had known that this was what she was driving at, but I was still taken aback when the words were spoken aloud. "The Walker in Darkness holds the nearest shadowland, but he knows me and expects me," I told her. "The Mask of Winters likewise will surely be expecting spies, now that he has openly shown his intentions. And the Black Chase and the Mourning Field have no lords that I know of and, thus, will teach us little. I will gladly help you, Zelia, for I hate the Deathlords as much as any man alive; but I will not walk into a trap, and I will not travel halfway across the world to risk my life."

She shook her head. "A small shadowland has been reported along the upper reaches of the Rock River by Realm patrols from Greyfalls. They do not know if the area is new or only newly discovered, but they have heard that there is a deathknight dwelling there, called the Dancer in Infinite Silence. I believe that he is relatively weak and has thus established a realm far from the other shadowlands. Still, I believe that we could learn much by observing him. Will you go and investigate this land?"

Part 2



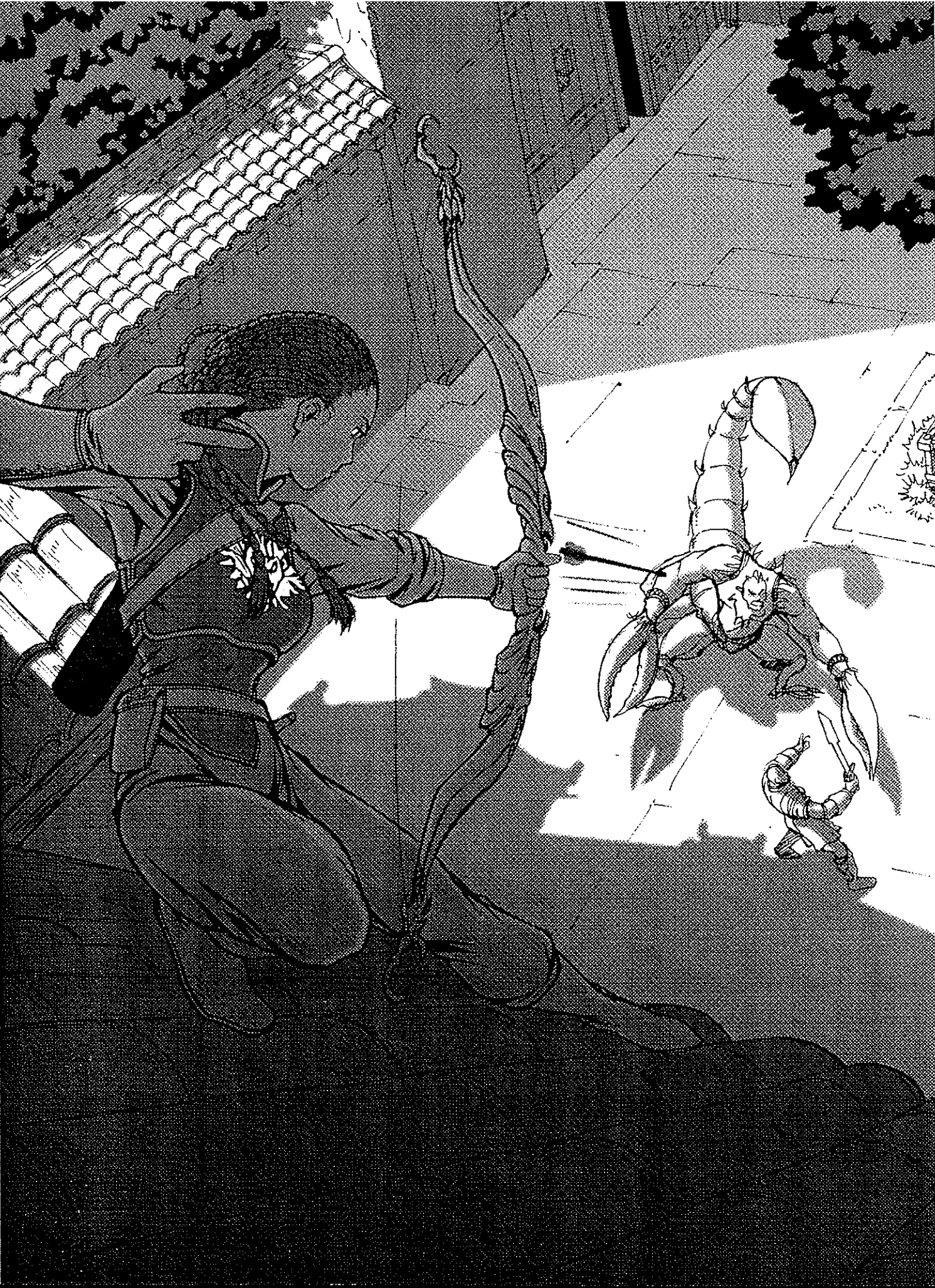
At length, I agreed, and thus began my long partnership with Zelia. When she had news of some new Deathlord activity in the shadowlands, she would call upon me to investigate to the best of my ability and to share with her what I knew. In return, she showed me Charms that would be of particular use against the Deathlords and their minions and even began to teach me the rudiments of sorcery. She knew of other Solars in the area as well and put us in contact with one another when something needed to be done. She also warned us when the Wyld Hunt showed signs of interest in the areas where we were operating and helped us avoid its attentions; apparently, others of her kind had somehow infiltrated the Hunt and passed on knowledge of its actions to her. I am certain that there is more to this than Zelia lets on; she is not telling us everything she knows. For the moment, her aid is valuable to me, so I will continue to accept it. But I no longer blindly accept her words as truth, as I once did, and I am watching her carefully to attempt to learn her true goals.

I have formed a Circle with several of the other Children of the Sun that Zelia introduced me to. All of us believe that the Deathlords are the greatest threat that the world now faces and have dedicated ourselves to stopping their expansion at whatever cost. We help the common folk of the Scavenger Lands against other enemies when

we can, for there are many forces that threaten them, and the more mortals we can keep alive, the less the armies of the dead will grow. Still, the greater parts of our efforts are always aimed directly against the Deathlords. Our names have become known to them, and while I do not believe that they fear us yet, we have thwarted them enough times that I am sure they will destroy us if they can. Still, we will not yield. The Unconquered Sun has called us to fight back against the encroaching darkness, and so we shall.

We of the Night Caste will be especially important in this fight. We understand the darkness better than any of our brothers; we bring the power of the Unconquered Sun into the shadows where his rays cannot reach. We are living proof that darkness does not equal death and that night does not mean that the sun has turned his face away from the world.

In the First Age, we were those who avoided the foot soldiers of the enemy and moved in to strike at their leaders, the heads and hearts of their armies. The armies of the dead are ever growing, and where there are too many enemies for the warriors of dawn to defeat, we can once again direct our blows at those who keep the dead fighting. The deathknights and the Deathlords must be our targets; once they fall, the realms of the dead will fade back into the Underworld, where they belong.



CHAPTER THREE

THE WORLD AWAITING US



The members of the Night Caste are the unseen eyes of the Unconquered Sun and the hidden bearers of his justice. Yet, they are infants in their station and thrust into a world where the Solars and their dark twins, the deathknights, stand as stark challengers to all those who currently hold power in Creation. Generally suspicious individuals by sake of their shared nature, those Night Caste who are in Circles are often incredibly paranoid, forced to defend four other Solars against countless unseen threats and subtle challenges.

Yet, the members of this caste are not just blandly vigilant automata. They focus their attentions of specific topics, each prioritizing threats differently and reacting as their individual inclinations dictate. Many are still lost in the mortal world, gratifying their desires with their newfound power. Others have already begun to raise their eyes to higher matters. Though it might be that members of the Night Caste are the Solar Exalted least likely to walk a strictly righteous path through life, they are not ignorant of matters of right and wrong. In many dark places, they have begun to enforce their swift and silent justice, striking down those who prey upon the weak and conspire to exploit the innocent.

The image the Immaculates have given of the Wretched is that of creatures who were living shadows, who could pick up and discard faces or walk unseen into the heart of an enemy encampment. They were a death that neither god nor Exalt could count himself safe from, and even one of the Yozis lost a fetch to the Night Caste Vaznia and her knife Glacial Rain. Now, as the Age of Sorrows dawns and the Second Age of

Man draws itself together for a time of war, Creation will see how horrifyingly true the Immaculate's portrayal is.

HARMONIOUS JADE

DEMONS

I was raised to serve the Yozis, to seek a way to undo the bindings locking them within their prison. I saw demons summoned and followed their commands. They are more powerful and terrible than I could ever hope to be, and it was right that I and the rest of the Salmalin served them, or so it seemed to me at the time. One day, they would return, I was told. They would wreak their vengeance on the world, and then, we faithful few would be uplifted to great power in recognition of our faithful servitude.

Now that I have been chosen, all of that has changed. I had been raised to think of the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun as the greatest mortal enemies of the Yozis. They were responsible for imprisoning the Yozis in the first place and were cursed by them as a result. As soon as I was touched by the Unconquered Sun, I became an enemy, to be hated and feared and killed. At first, I was angry at the sun, for I had always been taught that the Anathema were the greatest of our enemies, and I had been made into that which I most hated. But I felt no enmity with the Yozis even after I Exalted, and I could have become the greatest of their servants.

Instead, the Yozis decreed that I must die and sent my brothers and sisters to sacrifice me before I could speak a word



in my defense. Because of the Yozi's fear, I had to kill the only family I had, and how could I continue to serve them after that? Was I now more powerful than they, that they feared me so? They were already imprisoned — what more could I do to them?

The first time I faced demons after that day, the fear that had been drummed into me as a child was as dangerous to me as the demons themselves. Dace and I sought to defeat an Earth-aspected outcaste who had been capturing trade caravans near Varsi. We had traced him to some old ruins in the hills southwest of Puyo. Once I had scouted out the area, Dace led his company of troops against the sorcerer's own soldiers, while I slipped across the crumbling rooftops to try to get a clear shot at their master.

He stayed well concealed, though, and Dace and his men had almost reached the main square when the Dragon-Blooded finally emerged. Even as I drew back an arrow to slay him, three great shadows scuttled out from the building behind him, and one leapt to the roof in front of me in one mighty bound. It had the upper body of a man, dressed in fine clothes and jewelry, but below the waist, it was a huge, blood-red scorpion, its great stinger weaving back and forth in the moonlight.

Its two brothers stormed into the square toward Dace, leaving bloodied and poisoned soldiers in their wake. But the one facing me merely cocked its head and looked at me. "I know you," it said slowly. "Your soul bears the marks of one who serves us. Begone from here, and you may live to serve again."

I very nearly did leave Dace to his fate. I had heard tales of the tinsiana, the scorpion demons, in my time among the Salmalin. The tinsiana were deadly beyond words, always traveling in threes, and their stingers paralyzed the body but left the mind free, the better to feel the pain as the tinsiana tortured their victims to death over the course of years. . . . My old self would have fled in an instant, begging for forgiveness as I ran. But I was no longer mortal, and while my fear of the Yozi was still strong, I was stronger.

I let the arrow go, filling it with the power of the sun as it crossed the few feet between my bow and the demon. I think it was more surprised than hurt, thinking that I would not dare to strike at it; still, it let out a pained screech and lashed its great stinger at me. I dodged to one side, feeling the flows of Essence guide me out of the path of its attack, and fitted another arrow to my bow. The tinsiana leapt at me then, reaching out for me with claws and hands alike, and I barely had time to release my shot. This one struck true, and the demon spun backward off the rooftop, hands clutching for the shaft embedded in its eye.

I looked down from the rooftop in time to see it hit the ground and watched as its brothers whirled around, staring in horror at the fallen body. Dace took advantage of the distraction to take the head off one of the demons, which made the remaining one grow even more pale. . . . and more angry. It leapt at Dace in a frenzy of claws and tail, and both of them were moving so fast and engaged so tightly that I couldn't get a clean shot at the demon.

It looked as though Dace was getting the upper hand, so I began to climb down a pillar toward where the sorcerer stood. He had seen the first demon fall and knew that I was

somewhere nearby, but the shadows shrouded me from his view as I drew closer to him. When I reached the bottom, he had taken cover behind another pillar and was finishing some sort of spell; by the time I was in position to strike him, it was already too late. I heard Dace grunting with anger and risked a glance in that direction. A bundle of thick yellow-green vines had emerged from nowhere and was rapidly entangling Dace's arms and legs. The tinsiana, bloodied but still fighting, let loose a chilling howl and prepared to strike him down as he struggled to break free.

I had little time. I leapt from the pillar and drove my knee into the sorcerer's back, taking him completely by surprise as I slammed his head into the pillar he was hiding behind. While he staggered back, stunned, I drew back an arrow and fired at the tinsiana; I didn't have time to aim, so I had to rely on instinct and Essence to see it to its destination. The Unconquered Sun was with me, and the arrow, still glowing with the Essence I'd imbued it with, drove straight into the thing's back.

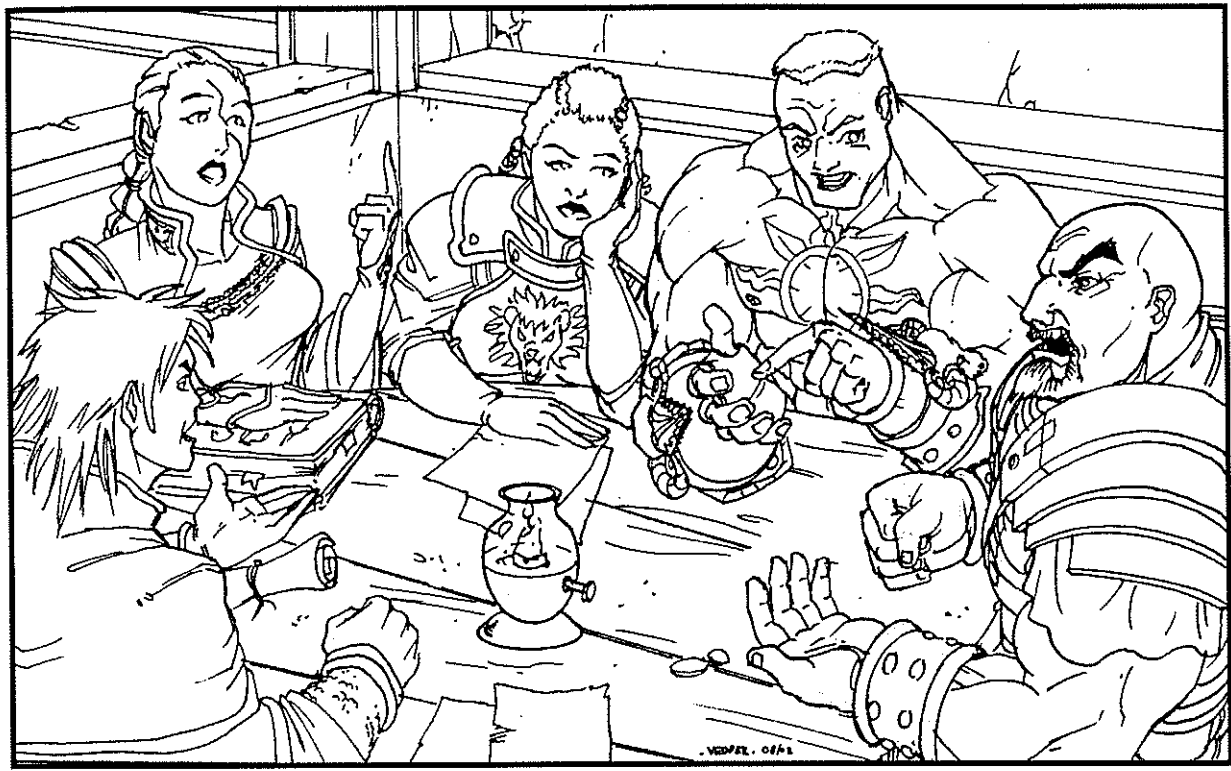
I didn't have time to see if I'd killed it because the sorcerer had recovered his wits and was coming straight at me with what looked like a polished granite spear tipped with a crystal blade. Luckily, he obviously hadn't spent as much time practicing with it as he had with his magic. I was able to bend to the side of his first thrust as I dropped my bow, get inside his guard as I drew my knife and stab him in the belly as he pulled back for another strike. After that, it was all but over — my first blow had injured him badly and shaken his confidence, and it didn't take more than another stab or two to take him down. When I looked back at Dace, he gave me a gruff nod as he pulled the last of the vines from his arms. The tinsiana lay before him on the ground in several large and bloody pieces.

Since then, I haven't feared the Yozi — at least, not more than they deserve. They are dangerous enough, to be sure, and hate me as much as any living thing, but they are no longer my masters. From time to time, I still feel like they're watching me, waiting for a chance to avenge themselves upon me. So far, though, they haven't had that chance, and I don't intend to give it to them.

OTHER SOLAR EXALTED

Since Dace and the others formed such a formidable Circle, I suppose that I expected them to be more unified in their purpose. I hoped that somehow, the unity of their vision would help guide me to the path I was meant to follow. Instead, I found them just as prone to argument and uncertainty as any mortal.

Panther and Swan were constantly urging the rest of us to raise a great army and strike against the Realm, calling it a cancer that needed to be purged before we dealt with any of what they called "lesser problems." Dace, on the other hand, wanted us to start building our own empire, gradually weakening the Realm as we proved that there was a viable alternative to supporting it. Arianna, a Twilight Caste sorceress, came to us with Swan but seemed to be his exact opposite. She wanted



to avoid the empire building entirely and try to gather together as many Solars as we could into a great assembly, then all decide what to do as a group. Whenever a possible new mission came up, there was an endless period of wrangling and argument before we agreed on a course of action.

After talking with Zeroun, I should have known that no two Children of the Sun agree on much of anything. Still, I was disillusioned by this uncertainty, and it was not long before I left the Circle for a time to try to find my own direction. Since then, I have met more of my brothers and sisters and have begun to develop more patience for our differences. I believe it is time for me to return to the Circle. Despite my misgivings, we are bound together by something stronger than mere companionship.

HUYLA DRAGON-BLOODED

There are many Dragon-Blooded in Nexus, and I like those I've met. The ones visiting from the Realm would gladly kill me if they knew about me, but they also keep the Realm safe and well run. Spirits don't often help killers gut whores there. The local Dragon-Blooded are strong, and many of them do their job, keeping mortals safe. Some of them are trouble though — they're stronger, faster and tougher than any mortal, and when they go bad, they can be worse than anyone but the Fair Folk, but when they're doing right, they're invaluable. There aren't enough people like me to root out all the monsters and troublemakers. I'll need Dragon-Blooded such as Vyyja Drenn to take up the

slack. Any who aren't doing their job are meat, just like any other monster. This is a human city, other things are welcome here only if they're useful.

After I took care of the South Bank Killer, I decided to meet some of the others in the same line of work as me. Vyyja Drenn's the captain of the Stalking Spiders, that's the mercenary company in charge of hunting down murderers around here. I carried the butcher's body down to her headquarters. It was late enough that no one noticed I was carrying a body. Despite what the stories say, that's not a common sight here. When I got to the heavily built gray building, there were a few candles burning on the upper floors. I knocked for a while — I was told to go away until I shouted back that I had the body of the South Bank Killer and wanted to talk to Captain Drenn. The door guard let me in and told me to leave the body downstairs. Then, he called for someone to escort me up to see her. I introduced myself, told her that the body of the South Bank Killer was downstairs and asked for my reward. She wanted to make certain it was him — I told her about what I'd noticed about the most recent body and about the collection of hair locks I'd seen. She asked for his address and told me to wait. Then, she started asking questions.

"Huyla, if your story proves true, you do good work. You carry that axe like you know how to use it — I might have a job for you."

"I work alone, I don't feel like following orders."

"Fair enough. Are you likely to be showing up with other bodies?"

"I kill monsters and keep people safe."



"Is that so? Some of my boys aren't too keen on vigilantes taking their bonuses. This one is OK, we didn't have many leads. Make this a habit, and they might start getting jealous."

"I'm not doing it for the money. I like being paid, but I do it because the monsters in this city need to die."

"Pull that hood down, and show me your entire face."

"No."

"If you don't, I'll have you exiled. Unless you're ready to leave or face the Council, do it."

"Here's my mark, the symbol of my sacred duty."

"I suspected as much — I remember the fuss with Harmonious Jade. She was too public and caused some trouble — she had to leave. We can't afford the kind of attention your kind can bring. Can you avoid attention?"

"Yes."

"Then do so — some Council members say we could use someone like you here in Nexus. The ones who threw Harmonious Jade out thought she was an isolated incident — the stories going around now say she's not. I'm personally not too keen on the idea of working with Anathema, but if your kind is back in force, then I'd prefer to have one on my side and so would Pellicia. She wants someone who is subtle and who takes care of trouble quietly. Can you do that?"

"I'm not looking to work for the Council."

"You're too big for it to ignore — if you aren't willing to work for the councilors, they can make life very tough for you. There are some things that need done here, and it sounds like Pellicia is willing to cut anyone willing to do them some serious slack."

"What sort of things?"

"You'll need to talk to Pellicia about that — you're not the only Anathema here in Nexus, and one of them is starting to worry some of the Council. I don't know the details, but they don't want to move against him directly."

"Ses?"

"Talk to Pellicia."

MORTALS

I walked into the office of Pellicia of the Council of Entities today — three days ago, she sent me an invitation to come see her. She said she wanted to congratulate me on getting rid of the South Bank Killer, but that wasn't why she wanted to see me. Captain Drenn had told her who I was, and Pellicia wanted to know if she could make a deal with me. She told me to place my hand on this stone that would let her know if I was lying. She asked me what my intentions were and if I was planning to work against the Council. She seemed pleased when I told her that I would leave them alone as long as they didn't interfere with my work. Then, she said that while some of the Council had considered offering Ses membership, others like her didn't trust him and would like to have him discreetly removed. She also told me that being indiscreet would get me exiled pretty quickly.

Pellicia also asked what I wanted to do after Ses was gone. I told her that mortals are prey — it's not their fault, but they're

mostly helpless against the real monsters. A mob or an army can defend itself against threats, but a few mortals alone are easy meat. There are hunters, and humans are simple to catch — so they need my protection. She told me that as long as the justice I enforce is within the laws of Nexus, she'd let me enforce it.

This arrangement will work for now. I didn't tell her the full extent of my plans — mortals don't just need a protector, they need to be able to live in a world, or at least a city, free from monsters. The Dragon-Bloods can stay if they know their place, but everything else must die. That will eventually include the Council. When our goals diverge, there'll be trouble, but until then, she's convenient. I imagine she thinks the same thing about me.

THE DEAD

Last week, the dead came to town. A group from Thorns marched into Nexus to make some sort of deal with the Council. That ain't my concern, but I remember a large group of undead here about a decade back. There were lots of mysterious murders, and more undead walked out with the group than arrived with it. This time, I was in a position to do something about that.

There were only a dozen, two deathknights and 10 walking corpses, seven shamblers and three nemissaries. I couldn't do anything about the deathknights — I had enough sense not to start a war between Nexus and Thorns, and I couldn't afford to have to fight the Council while Ses still lived here. The corpses were another matter — if any of them acted up, I'd destroy them. They all stayed in the Darkjoy Inn, a really fancy tavern in Cinnabar district. They took the basement rooms, but a careful search revealed that there weren't any under tunnels connected with the inn. They would have to go out through the front door if they wanted any recreation. The deathknights went out during the day, but the rest only left their rooms at night. I watched their inn from a ledge on top of the gambling house next door.

Shamblers just don't do much, so the three nemissaries were the ones to watch. For the first four days, they went to casinos and brothels — if you pay enough money, you can buy anything, even someone who will sleep with a walking corpse. On the first three days, it was easy; only two of them went out, and in both cases, they went to nearby places — it was easy to check back and forth between them. The fourth day, I got unlucky. All three went out in different directions. One of them went to Chained Heat, the brothel it went to on the first day — likely no problems there. I didn't know where the other two were going, and I couldn't follow both. I chose the taller one — it was headed toward the docks. It went to a shop in the Night Market and bought seven white kittens. The sorcerer's provisioner who sold him the cats grew pale at the request.

I didn't find out what happened to the other one until I heard the news about how a dancer at Vank's Return, the largest casino in the Cinnabar district, had vanished. I asked around, and sure enough, the dead one had been there but had left well before the dancer did. I don't believe in

coincidences, so I starting watching that particular corpse. It stayed in the next night, and neither of the other two did anything worse than try to cheat at cards. The sixth night, I got my break — the corpse I was watching took a palanquin down south to Sentinel's Hill. I followed close this time, jumping from rooftop to rooftop.

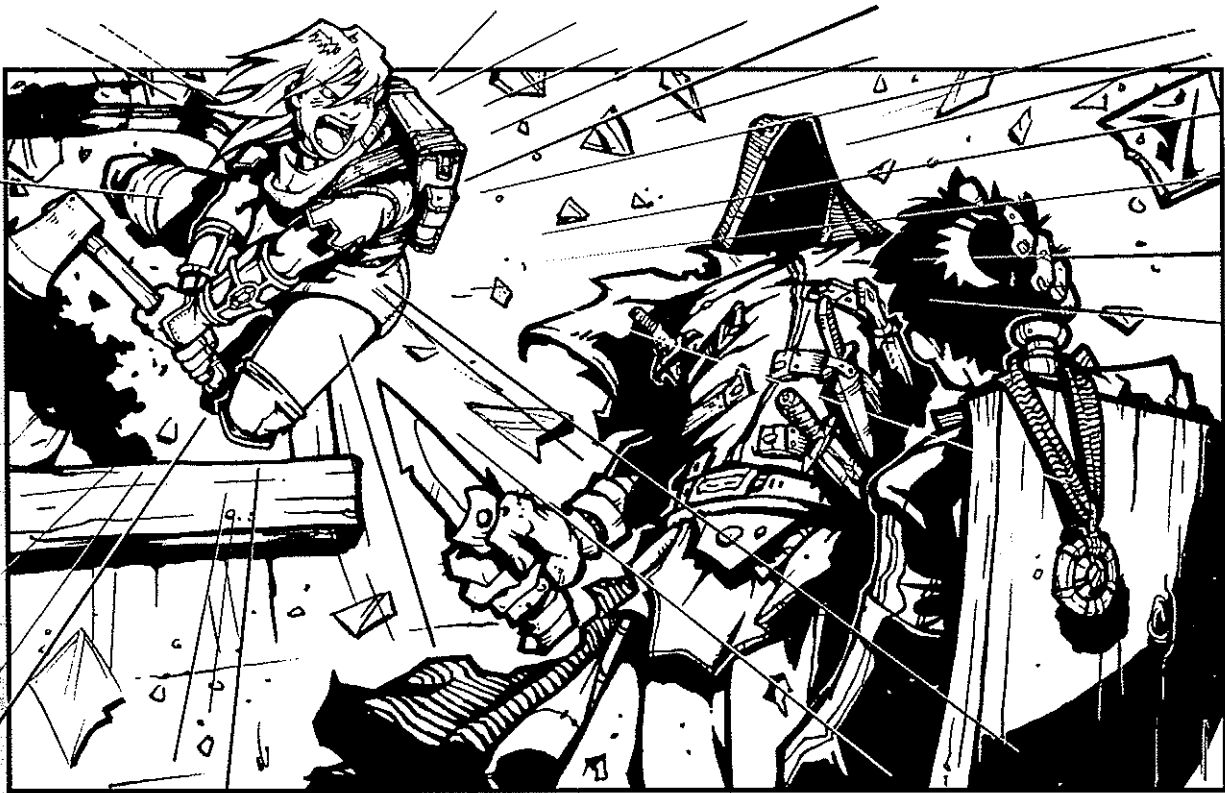
This one looked like he'd been dead for a while — his face clung to his skull like badly tanned leather, so you could see every curve of his bones. When I got close, I notice he made a strange dry crunching sound when he moved and smelled faintly of mildew. He dressed well though — clearly a wealthy and successful corpse. He was wearing long black and silver silk robes and high gloves of ruby red — other than being painfully thin, he almost looked alive, if you couldn't see his face.

He had his palanquin loaded onto a small gondola and got off when he reached the northern edge of the Sentinel's Hill. Then, he set off on foot — moving quietly and deliberately, like he was hunting. I was hunting too. He went to a small tavern where he clearly wasn't expected, since a lot of the patrons left when he arrived. I didn't have a good view from the ledge across the street, so I threw up the hood of my cloak and went in — the corpse had never seen me.

The bartender had seen dead patrons before — he found a bottle of black crystal and poured the corpse something that gave off faint gray fumes. The corpse sat there sniffing the glass and ignored the acts up on the stage until the fire-dancer showed up. The guy was *very* good, his brilliant red and blonde striped hair looked even more dramatic in the light of the whirling flames. The dancer at Vank's Return had

flame red hair — the corpse was collecting redheads. I left in the middle of the act and watched the tavern from above. The corpse left a short while after the dancer's act ended and waited in a nearby alley. The dancer must have had dinner or something — we had a fairly long wait, then he left and walked home in the darkest part of the night. The corpse followed him, and I followed the corpse. I climbed up to the dancer's window, while the corpse walked up the stairs. It knocked and brandished several large jade coins and a jeweled pendant when the dancer open the door. He almost closed it again, but the flash of the ruby caught his eye.

The ruby wasn't a bribe, it was a trap — the dancer stared at it and went slack in the face. The corpse hung the jewel from a chair, unfolded its cloak and laid the dancer down upon it, and then, it removed a large selection of knives from its vest. I didn't need or want to see any more — I burst in through the window. The corpse had several knives, but I threw a hatchet before it could react. It was fast, but not very tough, and I cut it badly. It threw a knife, but I needed to ready my axe and couldn't spare time to dodge. Fortunately, it wasn't much stronger than an ordinary person — I got nothing more than a small bruise. Then, I used my axe — the dead can't function when cut in half any better than anyone else. I took the jewel and the dead thing's body — I prayed over the body and smashed the jewel. By the time I left, the fire-dancer was starting to stir, but he was no longer my concern. I found out what happened to the other dancer when the embassy of the dead left the next day — they now had a new member.





I hate the dead. They bring nothing but more death. I kill, sometimes I kill a great deal, but I only kill monsters and their allies — I kill to avenge and protect. The dead kill to bring more people to the glorious death they're always ranting about. The Fair Folk are a more subtle threat, but the dead are the greatest enemy we have. They grow stronger and more powerful every time someone is added to their number. I've heard stories from refugees from Thorns. The dead aren't going to stop at one city. I don't much care what they do elsewhere, but if they come to Nexus to spread death or to conquer us, I'll destroy them all. Ses must die for what he did, but even he isn't evil enough to work with them. Once you die, you're dead, and any of them who come sniffing around the living need to be put down like rabid animals.

ELIAS

THE DRAGON-BLOODED

Far too many of the other Solar Exalted that I have encountered or heard about seem to feel that the Dragon-Blooded are little more than ravaging monsters. While the Dynasts of the Realm are excessively haughty and treat their mortal subjects as chattels, they are no worse than the mortal rulers of half a dozen other kingdoms I've visited. Even before my recent transformation rendered all thoughts of such a journey moot, or at least suicidal, I had little interest in visiting the Realm. However, the Blessed Isle is not alone on the list of destinations that I wish to avoid. I hate many of the Realm's policies, but the fact that the leaders are Dragon-Blooded is not the reason its government is so oppressive and corrupt.

Frankly, they don't seem all that different from anyone else. You've got cruel slave-lords, noble warriors, wise sages and monstrous tyrants, just like with mortal nobles. If you can say anything about the Dragon-Blooded, it's that they tend toward the extremes, the noble ones are somewhat nobler, and the terrible ones are worse than the worst mortals. Despite what I've seen in the coastal states, I have nothing against the Dragon-Blooded — one of the Dynasts is now my dear friend.

While visiting Chera, I heard rumors of a rogue Dragon-Blood. He went by Maraca — no one knew his real name or his house. He was supposed to be the greatest freelance spy in the known world. While such statements are seldom anything more than exaggerations, he still seemed like someone well worth meeting. He lived in a maze of tunnels under the city. I don't use the term maze loosely either, these tunnels were deliberately designed to be confusing — they were a near endless series of T-junctions and splitting passageways. The only way I was able to find the tunnels he lived in was to follow old Maraca himself when he went out to purchase groceries. Managing to follow him all the way through that maze without him noticing me rather impressed the man.

He was an exceedingly cultured individual, quite elderly too — I've heard he was almost 300. It seems that he had once been one of the Dynasts' top spies. Around 100 years ago, he uncovered some highly disturbing information about the head

of one of the Great Houses. His desire to continue working for the Realm vanished when he realized that if anyone ever found out this information, the rest of his life would be spent undergoing various torments in the dungeons of the Imperial Manse. No, I'm not going to tell you what he found out or even who it was about — he eventually told me, but he also swore me to silence, and I keep my word. Once he told me his secret, I shared my own. His century away from the Blessed Isle had given him a surprisingly open-minded view of the world — he is the only person who simply accepted me for what I am without fear or question. Likely, much of his acceptance came from the fact that, in his youth, he had read widely from ancient books. He was able to tell me many useful tidbits about my kind.

In any case, he was old now and wanted to retire. However, he had a great store of information and a singular artifact, and he didn't want either going to waste. He was seeking a worthy successor that he could turn them over to. I'd already passed the first test by getting into the maze. Next, he asked me to live with him for two weeks. If at the end of that time, I could tell him where he kept the medallion that the Empress herself had given him for work he had done against the Deathlords, I would be ready for his last test. He promised that he would examine it at least three times during that period. Initially, I believed following him would be easy. However, there were an abundance of trip wires and other alarms strewn throughout his private tunnels. I don't think he could always see me even when an alarm sounded, but that never stopped him from delivering a short lecture on care and observation. By attempting to follow his every move, I learned the location of every trip wire and loose stone in those tunnels. I still didn't manage to see him pull out the medallion's jade box from a secret panel behind his kitchen-god statue until I had been with him for 12 days. He was overjoyed — that night we shared a bottle of the Realm's finest plum brandy. His final request was that I steal something valuable from the office of one of the senior Dynasts. If I could do this while the Dynast was actually in her office, I'd be his successor.

That was an excellent challenge. I went in disguise and pretended to be a slaver selling unusual Wyld barbarians — always an excellent draw in the fighting pits. I managed to talk a good enough line that I was directed to Denovah Ylana, the Dynast in charge of entertainments in Chera. I talked at length about the joys of watching tusked and furred savages battle well-armed legions of slaves. As she listened intently, I used my magic to discreetly remove a stick of her special viridian sealing wax from the table in front of her.

Maraca was both satisfied and amused — he gave me his shadow belt and handed me his little book of secrets and codes. That was the last time I saw him, but we write frequently. He was sipping sherbets in Chiaroscuro when he wrote his last letter. A sweeter and wiser man I have never met and as much proof as I need that even Dragon-Blooded from the Realm can be well worth knowing.

OTHER SOLAR CASTES

The Oligarchs know that I am far more comfortable in large cities than out in the howling wilderness, but the demands of our nation are sometimes as important as my own comforts. Such was the case the time they sent me to check on the icewalkers. We had been hearing all manner of stories about a new alliance, but the last thing I expected to find was more of my own kind. I traveled by glider to Gethamane, which the new icewalker alliance was besieging.

I set the glider down a short walk from Gethamane, used Charms to conceal myself and went to pay a discreet visit to the icewalker camp. The icewalkers had the city completely surrounded — it looked like they would be mounting a major attack in several days. They appeared to be fighting a clean war, there were no captives impaled on stakes or roasting over slow fires — someone clearly had the icewalkers well in hand and that someone was worth meeting. I watched for a while and saw the great mammoth-hide pavilion where the leaders dwelled. It didn't seem politic to attempt to sneak into their dwelling, I didn't know what sort of creatures they were, and being noticed while one is skulking about unseen is always a remarkably poor form of introduction.

That night, I camped in the snow, thankful that my torc protected me from the cold. The next morning, I changed into my finery. A touch of Essence allowed me to impress upon the guards the importance of directing me to someone worth talking to, and so, I met some of the senior warriors. Calling upon the ties between the icewalkers and the Haslanti and dispensing a few "presents" such as feather-steel knives, I obtained a short interview with the two leaders, Yurgen and Samea. In typical barbarian fashion, they both showed up in all their finery, with their Caste Marks glowing. They were different from my own — according to what Maraca had taught me, I was looking at a truly enormous warrior of the Dawn Caste and an attractive and fairly young priestess of the Zenith Caste.

I introduced myself and asked if we could discuss the current state of relations between the Haslanti League and the icewalkers. They both seemed interested in negotiations, so we talked for quite a while. Yurgen was either the most terrifying individual I've ever met or the most mad. He was determined to conquer the entire northland, and although he never said so, I could tell he planned to lead his armies to the heart of the Imperial City and make the Blessed Isle his own. I suddenly understood far more about why people fear me so. I knew that I never wanted to be in a city that he wished to conquer — with the Scarlet Empress gone, I doubt there is any force that could openly stand in his way. Samea was quiet through the first part of our discussion, but when she spoke, I had no choice but to listen to her. At the time, she seemed fair and wise, but later, I found her even more frightening than Yurgen. He could slay any foe and lead any army to victory; but she could stand before an enemy force, or perhaps even before the Dynasts of the Realm, and when she left, they would do her will. I think only the fact that I am her equal allowed me to eventually realize the true extent of her influence.

I am not ready to fight them, and for now, they can be valuable allies. However, we will want many spies among their ranks. We will need God- and Dragon-Blooded spies who avoid direct contact with Samea. At a distance, they can likely resist her will. For now, Yurgen is content to hunt down our mutual enemies — with luck, he will do so for at least the next five years, the coastal states will not fall easily. However, eventually, he will wish to own the entire North. At that point, I must either kill him or show him that my home cannot be attacked.

Maraca told me ancient stories of the might of the wizards of the Twilight. Perhaps one of them could protect us from Yurgen and Samea. If not, then one day I will be sneaking into that same tent to attempt slay them both — I fear that day will be my last. I did manage to keep my own nature hidden from them. In that small way, I retained the upper hand.

LUNAR EXALTED

I recently realized the easiest way to tell a Wyld barbarian camp from one kept by the icewalkers: the smell. The scents of sour sweat, old food and general decay were so overpowering, I don't have the slightest idea how anyone could stand to live there.

The Wyld barbarians around the city of Crystal were getting restless, so it was time for another of my treks into the wilderness. I took an air boat up to Crystal, and then, after using Charms to hide my progress, I set off in my glider to overfly the barbarians. Their camp was easy to find — those things leave a path of devastation a blind man could follow. That night, I used my shadow belt to slip into their camp.

I was in luck — there was some sort of festival going on. I wandered closer, expecting to hear some of their plans, assuming that unruly mob ever actually made plans. There was all manner of interesting talk until the main attraction actually started. They were having some form of single combat. They had a couple of icewalker captives and a war mammoth. They were going to send one of their own up against a fully armed warrior on her mammoth. I didn't think that even those lunatics really believed that even the largest of their eight-foot-tall, bear-furred champions could beat a mammoth rider in single combat. The icewalkers also seemed to be puzzled, but one of them agreed — she looked like she hoped to take out a few barbarians before they brought her down. I decided to watch for a bit and then rescue the remaining captives — good will and detailed information are both things a wise spy never passes up.

The results were rather unexpected — the mammoth rider faced a single unarmed barbarian with a blood-red forelock. They were going to fight in a narrow box canyon. The great animal charged, and the barbarian suddenly transformed into a huge furred tyrant lizard with the same blood-red forelock. This beast leapt forward and took a bite out of the mammoth's flank. In an instant, the furred reptile shifted to a great saber-toothed cat, which leapt up and slashed at the mammoth's throat. After each attack, the creature shifted



response of the crowd, I was watching some spectacle. Other than one slash with its tusks, I haven't been able to hit the creature, and they're terrified. I turned away as the creature devoured its prey and closed in for the kill — there I could do but hope the icewalker's death would put a stop to later entertainments. I slipped to the back of the captives' rude prison, and they were in a shape and opened their bone and sinew to the touch. Being sensible barbarians, they kept away from the camp with me.

I found a glider that could carry two. Fortunately, only a few icewalkers knew how to pilot one — I found one for Crystal. After meeting Yurgen Kaneko, I found more icewalkers who would sing Haslantian songs. I helped them launch the glider off of the mountain and then set about attracting the attention of those savages. They couldn't stop a glider, but the Lunar Exalted can take the form of hybrid creatures and fly out of the sky. The savages hadn't yet figured out the nature of their captives — the barbarians were on their leader's grisly feast. I snuck back out and cut a number of the cords holding up the tent. I succeeded in setting several strategically placed traps that with a firedust grenade into the tent

holding their food stores. Naturally, that got their attention — from that point on, I played a deadly game of hide and seek, throwing my other two grenades and a few sling stones and then using my Charms and my shadow belt to move to another hiding place. By the time the Lunar started closing in, I'd taken down more than a dozen of their warriors and mostly wrecked the camp. With any luck, the remainder of the barbarians would starve to death.

When I was done, I shifted to shadow form and fled. It was then that I discovered that the Lunar Exalted can even track a bodiless shadow. She followed me for a day and a night, only a combination of my Charms, my prodigious skill at hiding and a well-timed avalanche caused by my sling allowed me to survive. The Lunars are vile and dangerous beasts, and I hope to never have to face one again — without their interference, we could work with the icewalkers and wipe out the foul Wyld barbarians in under a decade. A pack of these deadly creatures might be able to take down even Yurgen and Samea, but I would be loath to negotiate with those beasts for any reason.

HAVESH, THE VANISHER

MORTALS

Well, weak as they may be, they're good to have around. They build the cities and the beds, they grow the food, and they make the money; they do all the menial things we



n't have to be bothered with. They keep me in a lifestyle and camouflage me from the eyes of the Hunt. Beyond that, well, I don't much care about one way or another. I spent enough years kowtowing to one with more money or power than I had (which was much anyone) that I don't care to do it any more. Now, that's not to say that I go around lording myself over them — not by a long stretch. There are a hundred swords in any city to kill any Exalt a hundred times over, no matter how many mortals we strike down in the streets. No, I'll stay quiet and keep my peace, doing what I need to in order to survive.

I had crossed my mind more than once to go out and pillage somewhere off the beaten path, a comfortable village with plenty of food and pretty girls, and set myself up as a merchant. I've heard about more than a few Solar Exalts who've taken that route, becoming gods to some hundred or so who don't know any better. It hardly seems worthwhile. With all the barbarians and bandits and Fair Folk and who-knows-what-else roaming about the countryside these days, it seems like you'd have to spend all your time tending your little homestead rather than enjoying it. And frankly, the finest hut in a village won't compare to a decent inn in Yane, much less a high-ranking craftsman's shop. No, I think I'm happy enough where I am, thank you. That's not to say it's not good to teach them a lesson now and then. A lot of mortal folk in positions of power — nobles, nobles and such — get cocky about just how powerful they are because they have the power to order lesser mortals, which, in their case, means just about anything. Sometimes when I see that, I'll take the risk and remind them that they're not quite as mighty as they think. I remember one time when I was in Talt, laying low for a while after attracting too much attention in Yane. I was posing as a spice merchant since I had the clothes and the coin, and one day, while I was enjoying my lunch, another merchant hails me as a kindred soul, buys me a drink and invites himself to have lunch with me. A little too direct in his tastes, that was; but he didn't seem too bad a fellow at all. I played along with him. Right as he was finally leaving the cafe, though, he nearly ran over an outcast peddler who was walking along, minding his own business, trying to sell a few of his gaudy little necklaces to earn his next meal.

Well, this merchant went off into a great tirade about how worthless and pathetic all outcasts were — and how he was amazed they didn't all drown themselves once they got enough to realize the pointlessness of their lives and how he would as soon slit his own throat as put an outcast's necklace around it — all punctuated with a good swift kick to the ass now and then when he got to a point he felt was particularly important. The poor peddler just sat there and took it; you could see the anger and the humiliation burning on his face, but he knew he'd be bound for the gallows if he didn't take the merchant what he deserved.

At last, the merchant ran out of breath, gave the peddler one last kick and stalked off. The outcast started to slink away, with the rest of the crowd ignoring him as he went. As he did, I slipped over and bought one of the little trinkets; I'm sure he thought I was doing it out of pity, and I wasn't going to tell him otherwise. Anyway, I stuffed the necklace in my pocket and went about my business for the day.

That night, I paid the merchant a little visit, since he'd been thoughtful enough to tell me which inn he was staying at while he was in town. He woke up with a rag in his mouth, his wrists tied to the bedposts and me sitting practically on top of him, dangling that cheap little necklace from one hand. The dumb fear in his eyes was a joy to behold.

"I was born an outcast, you know," I said quietly. "Do you think that makes me worth less than you — or more?" I let the Caste Mark on my forehead glow a bit as I muffled the sounds in the room, since I suspected he'd scream a fair bit even through the rag. He did, too. "Well," I said to him, all friendly like, "let's see how much of what you said this morning you meant." And I slipped the necklace over his head. I think he thought I was going to strangle him with it right there, so it surprised the hell out of him when I put a dagger in his left hand instead. It took him a moment to figure it out, and then, he tried to stab me. But I'd bound his hands just right, and while he could reach his own throat, he could get nowhere near mine.

After a few moments, it was clear that he had no intention of cutting his own throat, and I told him so. "But I wouldn't want to make a liar out of you," I said, "so maybe you just need a little encouragement." And I started encouraging him, beginning with his feet and working my way up. It takes an awful lot of pain to convince someone to cut his own throat, you know. But when the pain gets bad enough, a man will do just about anything to make it stop.

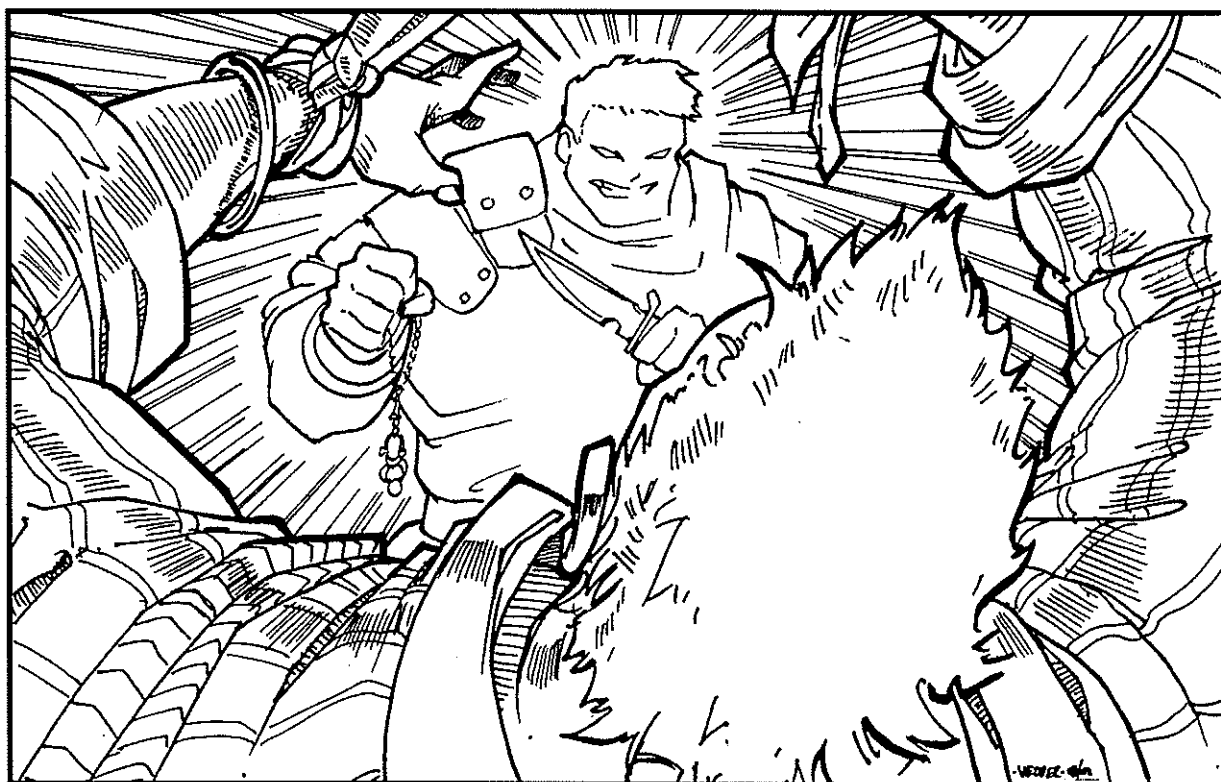
A few days later, they found the peddler who was selling the necklaces and hung him for murder. They had heard about the scene outside the cafe and found the necklace on the body, so it seemed pretty obvious. I felt bad about it, sure, but what was I to do?

THE DRAGON-BLOODED

Now this is where it gets dangerous. It's easy enough to say that we're more powerful than the Dragon-Blooded, and maybe we are, at least one on one. But there are so damn many more of them than there are of us that we'd be fools to try to take them on. With all the magic they have control of, both themselves and in all those First Age armories they're sitting on, there's no telling what they might be able to call down on us if we went after them as a group.

Now, that's not to say that I wouldn't snap a Terrestrial Exalt's neck if the opportunity arose, if I found one by herself and got the drop on her. After all, they'd do the same to me if they had the chance and probably more besides. But it's not because I want to wreak bloody vengeance for what they supposedly did to us in the First Age; it's just a matter of self-preservation. More than anyone else, the Terrestrials know what to look for in order





to spot a Solar — well, the Sidereals might know more, but you don't run into them very often. If I can take out a Terrestrial without getting spotted, that's one less Terrestrial that might one day be coming after me. But an organized campaign against the Terrestrials is the surest way I can imagine to call the Wyld Hunt down on yourself, and no matter how tough we may be, the Hunt has the numbers and the experience to take any of us down. Better to stay quiet and out of its way.

OTHER SOLAR EXALTED

I haven't met many others like me, and as far as I'm concerned, that's just as well. We're certainly more likely to attract attention if we bunch up, for one thing. And for another, the other Anathema I have met all seem to be fanatics of one type or another, and that's the last sort of person I want to associate with.

I know a lot of other Solars are gathering up into groups — Circles, they call them — to go off and accomplish some harebrained goal or another. It seems to me that they're just asking for trouble. If the Wyld Hunt can spot a single Solar acting by himself, how much more likely is it to spot four or five working together? I'm part of the Night Caste, which means I have a natural gift for staying unseen and unheard. But if I start traveling with a big lummo of a Dawn Caste with a daiklave as tall as I am or with a Zenith who wants to convert the world to the worship of the Unconquered Sun, all that secrecy goes right into the gutter.

I met a Twilight by the name of Zeroun a while back, and while he's smart enough to stay out of a Circle, he's still fishing for trouble. He goes around trying to find as many

other Solars as he can and quizzing them about how they came to be what they are and what they remember about the First Age and what they think their mission in life is. If the Wyld Hunt ever catches him, he'll be able to point it to a dozen or more of us, all going about our business and not asking for any trouble.

JUNAN NIGHTWARDEN

THE DEATHLORDS

Imagine that there is a kingdom near the place where you dwell, very close to your own land but still separate. It is a pleasant enough place; you prefer your own, but the inhabitants of this nearby kingdom seem content. From time to time, someone in your land will move to the neighboring realm, and they are always made welcome. There is plenty of food and land for everyone in both places, and your people and the people of this neighboring realm have always been at peace.

Then, one day, the ruler of this neighboring land begins to raid your kingdom. There are many beautiful women in his country, but he begins to take women from your land. His kingdom already has more land than it can farm, but it begins to seize land from yours. The people of your kingdom are drafted into your neighbor's armies and forced to fight. When you ask why, you are told that your neighbor needs your kingdom's help to make war on his other neighbors. When you complain that your neighbor is simply taking what he wants without asking, you are told to keep silent because the people in your land fear what your neighbor will do.

Who is evil in this tale? The people of the neighboring kingdom are no more to blame than the people of your own; they do what they are told, out of loyalty or fear. They may believe that what they are doing is right because their leaders tell them so, or they may lack the conviction to refuse to take part in what they believe to be wrong. This may make them cowardly, but it does not make them evil. But the ruler of the neighboring land, who takes from his neighbors what he does not need, who uses fear and intimidation to keep your people from fighting back — is he not evil?

The neighboring kingdom in this story is, of course, the Underworld, and its evil rulers are the Deathlords. The Deathlords will have all things in their keeping, given enough time. Why, then, do they seek to conquer the living? Generations of the dead dwell within the Underworld; why must the Deathlords steal their servants and concubines from among the living? The dead do not need to farm our land in order to feed themselves — why, then, do they seize it?

Like any aggressive warlord who seeks to take what he does not need merely because he can, a Deathlord who invades the land of the living is no more than a conquering bully. He has the advantages of fear and magic on his side, but that does not make his actions any more right.

Knowing this, however, it is important to remember that we will all dwell in the Underworld one day; we cannot regard all the dead as evil any more than we can regard all the living as good. This may sound odd coming from one who has dedicated his life to thwarting the Deathlords, but do not confuse the Deathlords with the dead.

Indeed, it is important to remember that the Deathlords themselves are not the ultimate rulers of the dead; there are still greater powers in the Underworld, and the Deathlords themselves may be pawns following the orders of some greater adversary. This does not excuse their actions, though. The common dead may follow orders out of fear, but the Deathlords have enough power to stand up for what is right. Perhaps some do, but far too many are striking against the living. These are the enemies whom we must fight by any means necessary.

THE DEAD

The spirits of the dead come in many forms, just as do the living. While those who willingly serve the Deathlords may be assumed to be our enemies, others are as independent and thoughtful as any living man and deserve as much respect.

The walking dead may be dismissed from this discussion, as they have no will of their own. The sorcerer or Deathlord who calls them forth is the sole reason for their existence and must be held responsible for whatever these mindless shells do. Zombies and the like may be put down as you would a rabid dog, with no thought of mercy; the higher soul that once dwelled in the body of such a creature has long since departed.

However, it is important to distinguish zombies from the type of ghosts known as nemissaries, which may, at first, appear quite similar. The body a nemissary wears may be its own or another's, but the mind within will always be far more

intelligent than any zombie. A nemissary may have survived many "lives" and many "deaths" and become more cunning with each one. Many of these creatures serve the Deathlords and should be treated as you would any dangerous foe; their powers do not compare to those the Children of the Sun wield, but they are still clever. Most nemissaries feel no shame in using others' bodies in place of their own, and this willingness to desecrate the dead allows them to move from corpse to corpse in time of need. Others serve in the Black Watch of Sijan, where they serve to guard their fellow dead, as well as to protect the living. The occasional unaligned nemissary may be an ally rather than an enemy, but I recommend using great caution before giving one your trust.

Ghosts, the intangible dead, are perhaps the hardest to categorize. Many ghosts are just as vibrant and sophisticated as they were in life and maintain an independent existence. These can often provide valuable insight into the local shadowlands, and you are as likely to find a ghost who does not support his Deathlord as you are to find a mortal who does not agree with his satrap, governor or magistrate. Like mortal dissidents, however, they may not be quick to speak of their opinions for fear of inviting punishment from their rulers.

As time passes, many ghosts gradually forget the lives they once led and are reduced to pale shadows of the personalities they once were. Many of these are bound into service by the Deathlords, who channel their rage onto the battlefield. Others may wander in any corner of the world, where their deaths went unnoticed or unmourned. These shades are as hazardous as wild animals and should be put to rest with compassion if possible. If the spirit is properly placated, it may go to its deserved rest even after many years of wandering; however, this course of action is not recommended for those who are not familiar with dealing with the spirits of the dead. If this is not an option, the swift and compassionate destruction of the spirit is advisable.

OTHER SOLAR EXALTED

Most of the other Solars I have met share my views on the Deathlords and have helped me make war on them to one degree or another. Of course, this common interest is generally what drew the other Solars to me, or vice versa, so I do not doubt that there are others out there who do not share our quest.

Despite the fact that we have all been chosen by the Unconquered Sun, we seem to have remarkably little in common. Some of us are proud, some shy, some cruel, some thoughtful, and some barely seem sane. If anything links us other than our Exalted status, it is our personal strength. Some Solars I have met appear to have always been exceptional individuals, even before becoming Exalted. Others seemed normal, even ineffectual during their early lives, but when a moment of danger or decision came, they possessed a strength of will that enabled them to press onward past setbacks that would have cowed or destroyed other men and women.

To digress momentarily, I have noticed that such a crisis nearly always seems to accompany an Exaltation. It may be





that we were always destined to be Exalted and that this “moment of truth” was somehow arranged to draw out the strength within us when the time came for us to change. On the other hand, perhaps this hidden strength is what the Unconquered Sun looks for in choosing what mortals to make his children, and anyone with the willpower to persevere may be Exalted during such an event. It is a question we will probably remain unable to answer — and one that is best left for scholars in any case. The Solars have more important matters to attend to than such philosophical navel gazing.

The strength of which I speak is not always physical in nature, but it usually is in those of the Dawn Caste, such as my Circlemate Dima. They anchor our lines of battle and train the mortals who we will one day need to stand and fight the armies of the dead beside us. They are not blessed with subtlety, but we of the Night Caste have enough of that to spare; their strength is in battle, and it is a great and necessary strength indeed.

The Zenith caste are just as valuable to our cause; while the Zeniths’ strength at arms cannot quite compare to that of the Dawns, the Resplendent Suns’ faith burns brightly within them and can be as dangerous to the dead as any blade or arrow. Their leadership is also invaluable; more than once, my Circlemate Ehren of Thorns has rallied a throng of mortal villagers to fight beside us against the dead when all the mortals’ instincts doubtless told them to flee or to surrender. The strength the Zeniths carry is a strength of will.

Mehadi is a member of the Twilight Caste and is probably the member of the Circle I am closest to. She knows as much about the history of the dead and the shadowlands as anyone I have met outside the Morticians’ Order in Sijan, and her knowledge of sorcery has proven invaluable both in our battles against the Deathlords and in my own study of those arts.

I have had less experience with the Eclipse Caste. While an Eclipse diplomat called Swan spent some time within our Circle, he spent as much time fomenting discord as he did strengthening our cause. He distrusted Zelia, our Sidereal benefactor, and urged us to abandon her freely and often; apparently, a Sidereal had tried to kill him once, and thus, he mistrusted all of her kind. His words were eloquent, and indeed, we had all wondered at what things Zelia might have left unsaid when she spoke to us. Still, we had worked long enough with Zelia to know that her goals were the same as ours, and while we did not completely trust her, neither would we reject her advice and aid. Swan left us shortly thereafter, and I cannot say I was sorry to see him go, useful though his gifts might have been to us.

SIDEREAL EXALTED

Zelia, Chosen of the Maiden of Battles, is the only Sidereal I have yet met, and she has been an invaluable leader and friend to my entire Circle. While she rarely travels with us, her knowledge of the Deathlords and her ability to predict their actions have been tremendously important to us all. Indeed, without Zelia, we would not have met at all and would each have been fighting against the Deathlords alone, if we had not died by now.

From what Zelia tells me, the Sidereals are no more unified in their goals than the Solars are. Many, like her, strive to gather and teach as many Solars as they can find, helping us fulfill our predestined roles to save and lead mankind. Others, a rogue faction she refers to only obliquely, are equally intent on seeing the Solars defeated and captured for reasons Zelia cannot or will not explain. They seek to extend the Realm’s dominance over all the world, and some even go so far as to assist the Wyld Hunt in its search for Solars, despite the fact that the Hunt would doubtless consider a Sidereal Exalt just as blasphemous and worthy of destruction as a Solar.

Such Sidereals represent a dangerous enemy indeed — and a difficult one to identify. Thankfully, they appear to be rare, but we must remain ever watchful to ensure that we avoid falling victim to such treachery. Even Zelia herself holds her secrets closely, and despite all my efforts, I have been unable to convince her to tell me more about the other Sidereals and their intentions. She represents a useful ally to my Circle, but I regret that we still cannot completely trust her.

THE FAIR FOLK

At one time in my wanderings after leaving Sijan, I was traveling toward the headwaters of the Avarice River. As I made my way through a thickly forested area, I caught a glimpse of movement among the trees to my right. I stopped and watched the area more intently, ready to defend or attack if need be, for there are many dangerous things in the wilds of the world. Then I saw movement again: the swirl of a silken robe, the brief glimpse of a pale leg. It was a woman, the first human being I had seen in days, and she was fleeing from me. Before I was even fully aware of my actions, I turned to pursue.

My heart quickened; could I possibly have found the one I was seeking, Walker’s concubine? Part of me knew that it could not be so; the Scavenger Lands were huge, and what impossible chance would have brought the two of us together in the midst of the wilderness? Still, who could say whether or not the Unconquered Sun had guided my footsteps to where I was meant to be? All these things flashed through my mind as I gave chase, though, in truth, I believed it was the woman I sought because I wanted it to be so.

As I chased her, the glimpses I saw through the trees seemed to reinforce my conviction that she was indeed who I sought. The pale skin, the long black hair, the robes so reminiscent of a Sijanese shroud, all these things gave hope to my heart and speed to my feet as I pursued her.

After some minutes, I emerged into a clearing and saw her standing beneath a great tree only a short distance away. Her hair was cast down over her eyes, but I could see her red lips smiling at me as if amused by the chase — or by the fact that I had caught her. She did not seem to fear me after all; my heart rose. I moved slowly toward her, my hands spread wide. “Lady,” I began, but let the word hang unaccompanied as she placed one pale finger to those full, red lips. She then moved closer to me, lifting her own arms as though to embrace me, and raised her face to mine. Her hair fell aside, revealing her green eyes staring deeply into mine.

Green eyes? part of my mind whispered. No, they were brown....

Even as I thought that, her eyes seemed to flicker in the forest light, and in that instant, they were as brown as polished oak. She made no comment, but moved closer to complete the embrace. I ached to hold her, though I told myself that desire was not what had impelled me to chase her; but the same suspicious part of my mind drew me back. "You are not her," I whispered.

She stopped then, and her still-brown eyes seemed to grow colder. "Does it matter?" she asked. "Am I not what you wanted? I saw her in your mind; you long for her. You long to feel her body pressed against yours, feel her caresses, feel her sweet breath in your ear." She stepped forward again, eyes half-lidded, red lips parted. "Let me give you what you desire...."

"No!" I shouted, stumbling back a pace.

Her eyes snapped fully open again, now as red as an open flame. "Give me what I desire," she hissed.

"No," I said again. I fumbled for my axe.

"Then die," she said.

We fought, and though I walked away and she did not, taking an axe to that face was one of the hardest things I have ever done. That was how I first encountered one of the Fair Folk.

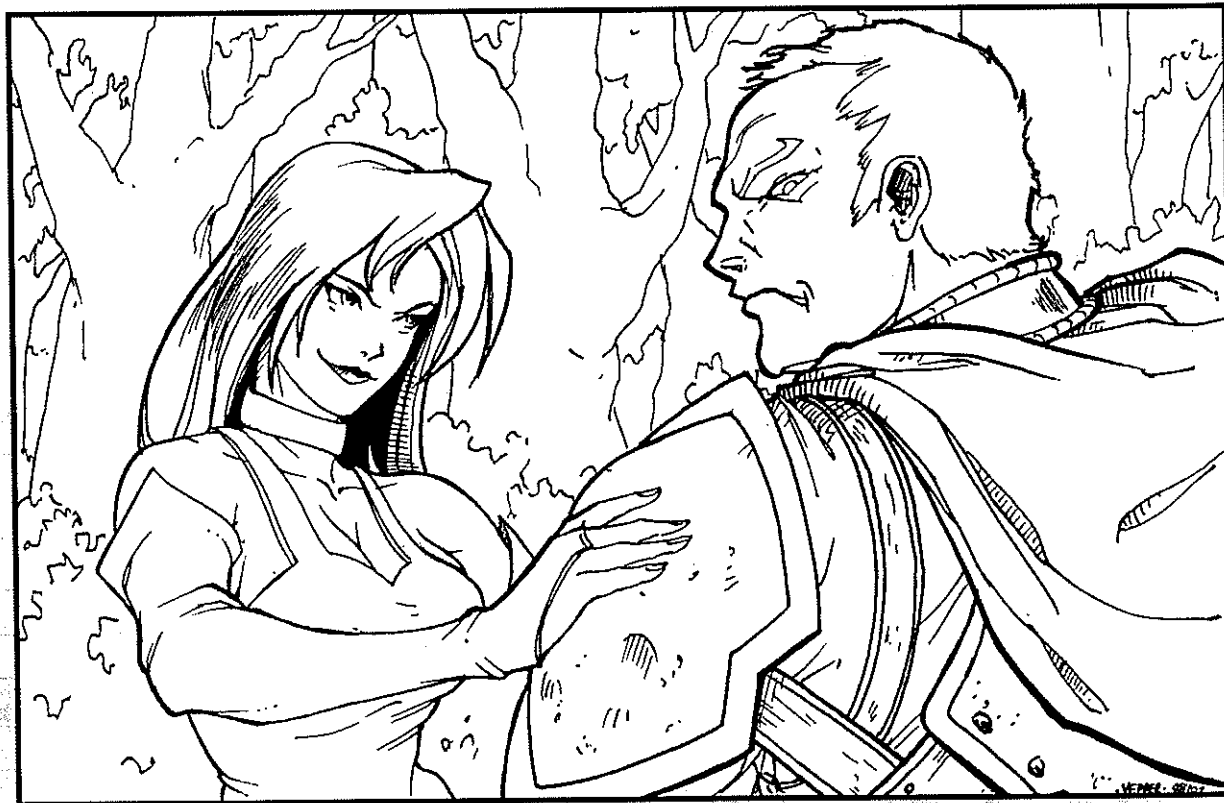
The Fair Folk, as they are called, represent a threat as great as that of the Deathlords, if more difficult to understand. Like the Deathlords, they enjoy nothing more than drawing living humans into their domains, with no care or conscience about what the human's life may have been like beforehand. With the Deathlords, though, we at least understand some-

thing about how the transition is made: Alive, we are in our world; dead, we are in theirs. But the attacks of the Fair Folk may come at any time, in any place, and though we may not be dead afterward, we may wish we were.

The Fair Folk seek to feed on our thoughts and dreams, draining away what makes us human in order to sate their endless appetites. I have seen men return from the "care" of the Fair Folk staring, dull-eyed and drooling, devoid of life in all but the most technical terms. Some were sold to the Fair Folk as slaves or captured in raids emerging from the Wyld lands; others went willingly, eager to taste what they perceived as the delights that the kingdoms of the Fair Folk offered. Perhaps, to them, the trade was worthwhile.

I have been told that there are some Fair Folk who can control their appetites enough to live among men, not taking enough vitality from any one human to ruin him. If so, I have never met one, nor do I care to. I cannot bring myself to trust a creature that would gladly feed on the fruits of my mind.

Some Exalts I have met want to destroy the Fair Folk and wipe out the Wyld regions (though they are not sure quite how to do so). They are fools. The Fair Folk have powers we cannot imagine, and our own gifts are far less threatening to them in their homes. At present, most of the Fair Folk are content to remain in the Wyld, coming forth to claim slaves or the foolish from time to time. If we begin an organized campaign against them, who can tell how many thousands of them would pour from the Wyld and destroy everything they touched? No, the best way to deal with the Fair Folk is to avoid them entirely, and failing that, to fight them only if you must.





CHAPTER FOUR

VOICES NOT OUR OWN



Now that the Solars are returned, many peasants and shopkeepers speak of the warriors of Dawn Caste leading vast armies against the Realm or the sorcerers of the Twilight Caste casting spells that can destroy an entire city in an afternoon. However, those in power have other fears. With their innate skill at stealth and deception and their ability to use the most potent of their powers without alerting others, the members of the Night Caste present a unique opportunity and a particularly terrifying problem to nobles and rulers throughout the known world. A skulking assassin or a near-invisible spy can sneak in and out of the most carefully guarded palace. The massing of a great army or tales of great valor and heroism generally announces the presence of a member of the Dawn Caste — fame similarly follows the priests of the Zenith, the sorcerers of the Twilight and the ambassadors of the Eclipse. However, the Concealing Shadows can disguise their activities sufficiently that often the only evidence of their presence is found in the bodies of their victims and the fact that a crucial document or a unique artifact is now mysteriously missing. While such capacities can be exceedingly useful to any ruler, many fear the Night Caste more than any other Solar-caste.

MORTALS

During the First Age, the members of the Night Caste were among the most feared of the Solar Exalted. None could do wrong or plot against the state without their knowledge. The memory of the inexorable Daggers of Heaven lingers even

in the Age of Sorrows, in the form of tales about the Wretched, the degenerate Anathema who shambled through the nighted streets of the Old Realm, peering into windows and listening at doors for those who sought to overthrow the Solars' hated regime. When the Usurpation came, it was members of the Night Caste who held out the longest against the Terrestrial onslaught, carrying out their lonely and futile wars for decades or, in a few cases, centuries. But these stories are distorted, and they depict the Iron Wolves either as gibbering, bandage-wrapped outcasts or as diabolical tricksters of demonic insight. Neither image is true, and in the modern era, most mortals would not recognize one of the Concealing Shadows if directly confronted with evidence of her nature. That is good, for there are none among the Anathema so hated and feared, save perhaps the Unclean, and even they are not so feared as poisoners, assassins and twisters of the mind.

HUSAM, HIGH PRIEST OF THE SALMALIN, TO HIS FOLLOWERS

Brothers and sisters, we have been betrayed by one of our own. Our dark masters — may the day come soon when they wreak their vengeance on this cursed world! — brought to us a girl-child years ago, young and lost and helpless. We raised her, guided her, made her strong and swift and silent and showed her the true path to service. And serve she did, for a time, spilling the blood of our enemies in the name of the Yozis — all hail their power!

But days ago, she returned to us changed, bearing the mark of the cursed ones who helped the gods — may they writhe forever in torment! — imprison our masters at the beginning of time. She returned here seeking to destroy us, to complete the task that the gods themselves could not complete, to slay the Salmalin and thus end any hope that the Yozi — praise their infernal might! — would return to their rightful place as rulers of this world.

Yes! She came to slay us all! But we would not be dissuaded from the righteousness of our cause, not even by such a one as she, tainted with the powers of a forgotten god. Many of our brethren fell in valiant combat against her — may their souls continue to serve in eternity! — but she was at last driven from our sacred stronghold and sent howling into the desert.

But this is not the end, my brothers and my sisters. She yet lives, the one who has repaid our care with treachery — may she twist forever in the Silent Wind! She lives, and she knows our ways, our faces and our home. She must be destroyed, no matter what the cost. Do not underestimate her power, for those she serves have filled her with their corrupt energies. But also, do not fear her, for one who serves the Yozi with a pure heart can defeat any enemy.

Let it be proclaimed thus to all true believers: The woman known as Harmonious Jade — may her brain swell within her skull until it bursts! — is an outcast and an enemy to all Salmalin. She must be watched wherever she goes; her plans must be thwarted whenever she tries to bring them to fruition; she must be slain if possible and hindered otherwise. She is now truly Anathema to us.

The priests of the exiles have spoken! Let it be so.

VESTEN SMOKE, OVERSEER OF THE TOWN OF BLEYN TO HIS LIEGE, THE DYNAST SESUS CERULEAN

My lady, I implore you to send assistance as soon as you can. If your humble servant may be so bold as to make a suggestion, I believe the Wyld Hunt itself is needed. If it is unavailable, then perhaps you could spare several of your own guard. A being that I believe to be one of the Wretched has recently been seen in Bele. Two nights ago, one of my guards is certain that he saw this demon looking through my files. I ordered the palace locked down and searched — during the search, while I was resting, he appeared by my bed and had the audacity to order me to cease my private interviews with young slaves who wished permission to wed. I called for my guards, but he vanished the instant my head was turned.

I assumed that he had departed to wreak his havoc elsewhere, but tripled the guard on my palace as a precaution. Despite these efforts, I awoke the next morning to find the head of my prize slave-hunting hound Aleira on the pillow next to me. He had further defiled her corpse by placing a note between her perfect ebony jaws. The note said that he was watching me and that changes were coming soon. The Anathema are too terrifying for a mere mortal like myself to deal with. I appeal to Your Exalted Majesty to please aid your loyal servant in his hour of need.

LAVINA SLENT, ASSISTANT GARDENER-SLAVE OF THE DYNAST SESUS CERULEAN, TO HER BROTHER, DOREN

"Mistress Sesus is dead. I saw the man who killed her."

"What! Are you alright? What was he like? Who was he?"

"Doren, he was amazing. I've never seen anyone like him. I only got a brief glimpse, but I'll remember him for the rest of my life. He had the look of someone from the Far North, but he wasn't a barbarian. He was dressed in the finest silks I've ever seen — it looked like he was wearing a black rainbow — even the Sesus never had any clothes like that."

"What was he doing?"

"I'd heard some commotion up at the palace and went out to take a look — you were still asleep. There was this great glow coming from the Sesus' bedroom window, then most of the sounds stopped, and a few moments later, this figure jumped down to the ground. He landed not more than three yards from me. I think he saw me, too, because he tipped his hat at me — he had a Rath-bird feather in his hat just like Dynast Oridan. But this assassin was incredibly beautiful — he glowed too, almost as bright as the aurora. It wasn't just light like everyone else is talking about; it's like he was surrounded by a huge glowing animal. It looked a great glowing cat, all gold and purple and marked like the pale black-tipped ones Slenus raises over at Dynast V'neef's mansion. I've never seen anyone like him; except for the glowing sign on his forehead, he was formed just like a man. I'm betting he'll come back."

"Lavina, he likely didn't even see you — he's certainly not coming back to carry you off to his kingdom."

"I know that silly, I'm only 14 — he wouldn't be interested in anyone like me. I think he'll be back to kill the other Dynasts. I had a dream after I saw him — he came back, killed all the Dragon-Bloods in their beds and became our king. He freed all the slaves and chased away all the soldiers from the Realm. He even let all the household families divide up the palaces between them. He was ever so elegant in his great robes, and he banned the hunts and killed everyone who had ever taken part in one. I know he's coming back. Someone like that wouldn't just kill the Sesus and then leave."

STASIO, MAGISTRATE'S HAND

To the illustrious Vasilko Yevhen, Magistrate of Yane, greetings.

At your command, I have begun an investigation into the recent series of disappearances in Yane that have been attributed, by common rumor if nothing else, to the entity called the Vanisher. My goal has been to determine what manner of being has committed these crimes, if indeed they can all be laid at the feet of a single individual. Once the nature of the quarry is known, a plan can be devised to capture or destroy it.

The rumors of the Vanisher have contained many elements: some true, some exaggerated and some wholly fabricated. Therefore, if it pleases my lord, I will begin by summarizing the facts regarding these disappearances that I have personally verified.

A total of nine cases have been identified, spanning a time period of just over one year. Several other cases that were at first considered to be related have not been included in this total; these exceptions will be discussed in detail later. In each case, the victim was a male of middle to high caste and at least moderate prosperity and standing within his caste. There does not appear to be any pattern regarding which castes the victims belonged to, and while some of the victims knew each other socially, others had never met.

In each case, the victim disappeared unexpectedly, usually overnight, with no sign of a struggle or other unusual circumstances. In seven of the nine cases, the victim's wife and/or other family members were present in the victim's home during the time when the victim vanished, and none reported seeing or hearing anything unusual during the time when the disappearance took place. In some cases, coins or other valuables vanished along with the victim; while some have taken this to mean that the victim left of his own volition, I believe that the kidnaper is merely taking the opportunity to seize some extra profit when an opportunity arises.

None of the victims have ever been seen again, nor have any ransom demands been received or any bodies found. In one case initially attributed to the Vanisher, the body of the victim washed ashore in Yane Harbor several days after his disappearance. Since no other bodies have been found, this is believed to have been a murder unrelated to the Vanisher cases and has tentatively been attributed to the notorious assassin Ranlea of Gem, who is renowned for her ability to kill silently.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these cases is that almost all of the victims seemed to experience some sort of memory loss or personality change in the days or weeks prior to their disappearances. Examples include individuals not recognizing old business associates or family members who they had not seen recently; craftsmen being unable or unwilling to pursue their arts or doing so with a markedly reduced level of skill; individuals no longer taking part in pastimes that they had previously enjoyed; men showing a markedly increased interest in carnal pleasures; and generalized changes in personality that family members found hard to categorize beyond stating that the victim had "not seemed like himself" before the disappearances.

In one particular case, the victim was heard talking in his sleep on the night before his disappearance. His wife noted several references to the Unconquered Sun (a god often associated with the Anathema), as well as comments regarding what seemed to be some sort of battle. When she confronted her husband the following morning, he attributed the words to a nightmare and seemed markedly evasive when pressed for details. The wife attempted to summon a physician to discuss the matter, but the husband, while obviously distraught, remained adamantly opposed to any such plan.

The following night, as stated above, the husband disappeared. His wife brought the events of the previous night to the attention of the investigating magistrate, and the latter worthy

official thought enough of the events to ask representatives of the Wyld Hunt to Yane to investigate the matter. While the Hunt did not find any definite evidence of Anathema activity, its tentative conclusion was that this particular victim had been possessed by one of the Anathema and had fled his home rather than risk discovery. Since there has been no similar evidence in any other cases, this case has also been removed from the list of suspected Vanisher activities.

The personality changes in the other cases, however, have led me to suspect a possible culprit in the disappearances. As my lord is doubtless aware, the Fair Folk feed on the dreams and souls of men, eventually reducing them to mindless shells with no personality left. The potent magics of the Fair Folk are also widely known, as are their abilities to travel unseen and to mask their presence with powerful illusions.

It is my belief that the Vanisher is actually one, or more, of the Fair Folk who has entered the city unseen and is now feeding on certain individuals who have somehow attracted attention. Initially, the victims lose some of their memories, which explains the personality changes. At some point, though, the changes become too obvious or perhaps other entities within the Wyld wish to share in the "feast." Whatever the reason, the Vanisher somehow removes the victims to the lands of the Fair Folk, where they doubtless fall victim to the same wasting away that befalls any individual that falls prey to such a creature.

Many Fair Folk are known to have an unnatural interest in sexual activity, which might explain the widely reported changes in sex drive among the victims before their disappearance. Precisely what this may portend regarding the fates of the vanished victims is unclear — and perhaps thankfully so.

I recommend that we attempt to locate a savant expert in the Fair Folk, who can advise us how best to protect our citizens against such beings or perhaps inform us of a way we can placate the Vanisher. Perhaps an outcast can provide as much "food" for it as the high-caste victims it has chosen in the past; if we can redirect its hunger to less important targets, the Vanisher may become a more tolerable presence in Yane or, possibly, even an asset to the city.

Whatever your decision, I stand ready to implement it.

Yours in service,

Stasio

HIGH FUNERIST SEKINE OF SJJAN ADDRESSING THE COUNCIL OF MORTICIANS

This council is doubtless already aware that the concubine intended for the Deathlord Walker in Darkness, and so ably prepared by the members of this order, has escaped from her guardians before reaching the Walker's Realm. This council almost certainly also knows that the party responsible for this escape is, regrettably, a member of the Funerist's Observance — that is to say, a former member. What is most likely not known is the nature of that member's transformation. However, an emissary from the Walker has come to me



with most disturbing news regarding this matter. Jiunan, the former funerist who so disrupted this straightforward business transaction, has become one of the Anathema.

Gentlemen, please! Maintain your composure! Such behavior is unbecoming to men of your august station.

In point of fact, this news may represent the best possible resolution to this sorry business. If Jiunan had been a mere mortal member of the Order, we might be held at fault for not discovering his perverse nature and either correcting his behavior or removing him from the Order. I need not tell this council what consequences we might face if we were held to be responsible for an event such as this by the Deathlords.

On the other hand, the Anathema are known to be unpredictable and dangerous, and we can hardly be blamed if one of them, unbeknownst to us and through no fault of our own, emerged in such a troublesome manner. Even if we had some foreknowledge of his intentions — which I have assured the Deathlord we did not — we could hardly be expected to restrain such a powerful being.

Jiunan has, of course, been cast out of the Order and banished from Sijan. I have assured the Walker in Darkness that we will pass on any future information we obtain regarding his whereabouts and have also issued a sincere formal apology. With these things accomplished, I respectfully suggest that we consider the matter closed.

OTHER SOLAR EXALTED

Members of the Night Caste often find their most natural allies among the members of the Zenith and Eclipse Castes. These Solars are the ones most often involved in complex and devious manipulations and grand schemes involving large numbers of mortals and other beings. Important treaties and large-scale social movements draw opposition. While members of the Zenith or Eclipse Castes work in the open, their Night Caste allies secretly observe all who oppose these plans. Using their many formidable talents, the Night Castes disgrace, slay or otherwise neutralize all who stand in their way of their allies.

When they are working together with members of several other Solar castes, Night Caste Exalted typically act as scouts and spies, going places that no one else in their Circles can manage. Occasionally, they bring back information to the others. However, they often take care of problems on their own. They are frequently more independent and isolated than the members of other Solar castes. Night Caste solo operations sometimes disturb Circles who rely upon either hierarchical leadership or cooperative decision making. This independence is one of the reasons that members of other castes frequently distrust the Concealing Shadows. However, the members of stable and harmonious Circles realize that there is little better protection against external betrayal and deception than having an expert at these matters among their number.

DACE

Harmonious Jade? Yes, I worked with her for a while. A good enough woman, if a hard one to figure out. But I

wouldn't expect anything less from a Night Caste, at least from what I've heard about them.

I've known some damned fine scouts in my time, but I never saw a woman move as silently as she could. Or a man, for that matter. And she's a deadly shot with that great golden bow of hers. I'd hate to be on the wrong side of her, that's for certain. But as deadly as she was, she was oddly naive about the damndest things, like she'd been raised out in the wilderness or something.

I know little about where she came from. She never talked about it much, but then, not many of us do. It must have been a hard life, though, and a bloody one. Her first answer to any problem was always to find out who was behind it and then kill them. It may sound a little odd for a lifetime soldier like me to talk about someone being too bloodthirsty, but it's the truth. I'll grant you that she's a gifted killer, but a little negotiation will save a lot more lives sometimes. I don't think she ever understood that, and it put my men in danger more than once. We quarreled over that a few times, and I think that's why she eventually left the Circle. But I'd work with her again.

FROM THE TWILIGHT AZURE PATH TO HIS LOVER OPHILIS SES

My sweet, you do seem to have been fortune-cursed since you arrived in Nexus. The odds of another Night Caste Exalted living there were astronomical, but now that we seek the power of the gods, there are no coincidences. I have confidence that you can deal with all other setbacks, but my divinations indicate that she could prove a serious problem. Your prowess with carefully planned assassinations is unrivaled. However, we do not know her full capabilities. She is newly Sun-called and has already slain all of our best aides. I fear that if she is not dealt with soon, I will receive a sad missive informing me of your death. No matter how careful you are, you must still sleep, and none of your guards can protect you from another like yourself. Every night, I think about what you did to Madame Juranoto and Dynasty Legate Polwis and worry that you will suffer a similar fate.

How can anyone stop one such as you — no guard can see your passage, even the finest watch-beast feels no more than a faint rustle in the air when you pass. You can scale any tower and walk through the most tightly locked door like it was made of gauze and smoke. Her powers are now limited, but who knows what she will learn to do in a few weeks. She wishes you dead and might well pursue you to the four corners of the world. She commands powerful items and could soon be your equal — I am not willing to risk your life.

Last week, I came up with an answer. She seems almost impossible to kill, but I doubt that her mind is similarly well protected. One of my buyers found a new spell of Celestial power — the metal parchment bearing this one was found in the underways of the ruins of Rathess. Such spells are rare and nearly priceless, obtaining it cost the lives of two of my mortals, but the results are well worth it. Called the Three-fold Binding of the Heart, it allows me to bind almost any

being to my will, even a newly called one of our own kind. We must simply entice her someplace where it can be safely used upon her. I leave that in your capable hands.

RANLEA OF GEM

"The Vanisher?" Please. Anyone who uses a lame nickname like that in order to drum up business doesn't deserve to call himself an assassin. Or maybe he just doesn't use his own name because he's not good enough at hiding to avoid the law. Either way, he's hardly competition for me. Of course, all of his victims have just been mortals anyway; I've moved beyond that, so he wouldn't be my competition anyway. And at least one death's been attributed to me that I think he's responsible for, but he hasn't dared speak up about it. Well, I'm not complaining; it's good for my reputation, so I'll let him give me all the credit he wants.

He's good, though, I'll give him that. Killing someone silently is tricky enough, but making the body disappear afterward would take a lot of work. He must have some sort of gift to make that possible. I wonder if he's a Dragon-Blood? Hmm... maybe I should go after him next. It'd cut down on the competition, and taking out someone that's supposedly so dangerous would certainly do wonders for my reputation. That merits some further thought.

OTHER CELESTIAL EXALTED

There are few among the Celestial Exalted who do not fear the Hidden Suns on some level. The handful of Exalted who have survived from the First Age all remember the Night Castes at the height of their power, when they were mad living shadows, with eyes and knives that not even the fortresses of the Yozis could protect against.

The Lunars fear the Night Caste because they were once subordinate to these Solar spies and killers. The No Moons well remember the deadly precision of the Iron Wolves, and the word has gone out to young Lunars that they should be wary of these perilous individuals. Though few of the young can understand the danger the immature members of this caste pose, their elders are well informed, and Night Castes who deal with even middle-aged Lunars should expect them to be well prepared against trickery.

The Bronze faction hates and fears the Daggers of Heaven because those Sidereals remember well the horrors of the Wretched, and they are not the only ones who worry. The Sidereal Exalted of the Gold faction must wager everything on their ability to keep the Solar Exalts under their thumbs until those Solars are thoroughly indoctrinated and will follow the Gold faction agenda of their own accord. It is the Hidden Suns who will pry and poke at their benefactors' secrets, and the Gold faction must see that this does not happen.

The Deathlords and their Abyssal servants are likewise quite wary. The Deathlords know well the power of the Night Caste, and now that it has returned, these ancient ghost-kings know that they can no longer sleep safely. They have passed this suspicion on to their servants, and the Day Castes are often

employed in a counterespionage role. They guard and cover their Deathlord masters, seeking to detect and neutralize the Night Caste assassins who they know will eventually come.

LUNAR EXALT STONE BEAR, TO HIS PACK

The woman Harmonious Jade, Daughter of the Sun at Night, is precious to our people, and let all here remember it. She stalked and slew our enemies beside us and did not flinch or tire. Let her name be praised and remembered.

Though she was born of the Sun, she travels under the Moon. Of all the Children of the Sun, her kind is closest to us, since the night is also our time. Like us, she is a silent hunter, springing from the shadows to cut down her prey in an instant.

But know this... not all the Children of the Sun at Night are to be so trusted. Long years ago, all of the Children of the Sun loved and respected the Children of the Moon. But as time passed, some of them grew haughty and cruel and would not turn aside from their arrogant path no matter how much we begged them to. When we tried to show them that they were wrong, we were treated as betrayers, spurned and cast aside, even though the truth of our words would be shown soon enough, in the Time of Sadness. And the Children of the Sun at Night were foremost among those spying on us, mistrusting us, making us appear to be the enemy.

Even today, as the Children of the Sun return in greater numbers, there are those among them who distrust and fear us, who feel that we must be driven away or destroyed to make room for their new empire. Of these, the Children of the Sun at Night are the most to be feared, for, of all their kind, they are the finest stalkers and hunters. They can come to us unseen, unheard and unsmelled by even the keenest senses among us and can strike us down before we even recognize their presence. Until we can make them understand that we do not seek to harm them, but to aid them, they may be as fearsome an enemy as any that we have faced.

The Sun-touched woman Harmonious Jade is trusted and beloved of our nation; but remember that, for now, she is the only one.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF THE SIDEREAL EXALT ZELIA

Jiunan and his Circle continue to do well. They are little closer to learning why the Deathlords have emerged, but they have done an exceptional job of drawing the attention of the armies of the dead. The Deathlords' attacks on the southern borders of the Scavenger Lands have become slightly less frequent in recent months. Jiunan's Circle has largely taken over the planning of the campaign against the shadowlands, leaving me free to focus on the larger issues involved in bringing the Realm's stagnant grip on the world to an end.

Since the episode with Swan, I've been trying to determine what impact his accusations have had on the group. While everything I've told them has been true, it wouldn't do to have them prying too closely into my affairs and intentions. Dima and Ehren seem so enthusiastic and dedicated to the cause that I doubt they'd be interested in questioning my purposes. Mehadi knows





JOE VEITCH 03/02

pose and is too focused on her studies to pay much attention to the reasoning behind what I do. But I cannot be sure about Jiunan. As one would expect from the Night Caste, he is very hard to read; the Nights seem able to conceal their emotions as well as they do their bodies. Still, his efforts have not faltered, and his passion still seems strong; I do not yet sense that the Circle's service to me is ready to end. And with so much yet to be done, may the Maidens grant that that time is far off still.

ABYSSAL EXALT WHITE BONE SINNER ADDRESSING HIS MASTER, WALKER IN DARKNESS

The woman is gone, master. I have failed you.

As we were leaving Sijan, we were accosted by a mortal — or so it seemed at the time. He wore the robes of a Funerist, but none of their kind would dare challenge us. This one, however, asked if the woman truly wanted to join you — as though he had a right to ask such a thing or as though it mattered! — and he would not stand aside from our path, even when I displayed to him the powers I have been granted. Thinking him a suicidal fool, I sent two of my escorts to destroy him while I guarded the woman.

As the ghosts approached him, he threw off his disguise and revealed himself as one of the Solar Exalted. I do not know how I failed to sense the power in him before, but it was plainly apparent now as he began to dispatch the ghosts with scornful ease.

I ordered the last ghost to guard the woman and prepared to destroy the enemy myself. However, even as I

escape. I knew that she was important to you, master, so I pursued her rather than continuing the battle, leaving the last ghost to delay the Sun-touched one's pursuit.

I followed her for a night and a day, master, but she must have had aid from other Sun-touched or similar creatures, for I lost her trail and could not find it again. When it was clear that I had lost her, I returned here to inform you of these things and await your judgment. I hope that you will permit me to gather a Circle and return to the lands of the living to find both the woman and the Sun-touched, so that they may be returned here to experience your displeasure personally.

Of course, master. I see, and I await your punishment.

SIX MONTHS LATER

Yes, master, I have learned well the price of failure. I will not fail you again — I... I cannot bear the thought of it.

Yes, I remember his face; it has burned in my memory during every minute of my torment. Yes, my well-deserved torment, of course, master. May I gather my Circle and seek him in the world of the living?

Thank you, master. Shall I destroy him utterly or bring him here so you may personally supervise his punishment?

Of course. It shall be done.

THE DRAGON-BLOODED

The Dragon-Blooded have perhaps the greatest reason to fear the Wretched. Most members of the Night Caste strongly oppose the Dynasts of the Realm, and many have used their

talents to slay or disgrace members of the Dynasty. However, the outcaste Dragon-Blooded of the Threshold also have reason to dread the newly returned Wretched. Before the return of the Solar Exalted, these Dragon-Blooded were the most powerful force in most of the Threshold, and their lineages often held high position or ruled outright as petty princes. Now, they must face beings as far above them in power as they are above ordinary mortals. While all of the Solar Exalted are deadly threats, Night Caste Exalted are perhaps the most difficult to fight because they are the hardest to find. Locating a member of the Night Caste who wishes to remain hidden can often be as difficult as attempting to smash smoke with a mace.

A LETTER FROM THE DRAGON-BLOODED VENOR AJAVA TO HIS WIFE

I sent this by swift rider, so by the time it reaches you I shall be fully recovered and will be returning home to Nathir. Lord Ses let me out of my contract and gave me a good bonus — that's what you get for almost dying for someone while wearing his face. Between the scandal that forced us out of the Realm and these recent troubles, I've decided that I'll be living a quiet life for the next few decades.

The woman I mentioned in the last letter, Huyla, was still after the boss. She killed Diagen last week. Ses's lover came upriver from Great Forks — he's an Unclean wizard, not someone you want to mess with. He mentioned some new spell that would solve the problem and worked out a plan with Ses. As the most senior of the Dragon-Blood's left, I got elected to take point. Huyla was out for revenge because Ses killed her lover, so Ses let out a fake rumor that he was actually holding her lover hostage and that the lover's death had been faked. She might not believe it, but we knew she would come and check it out. To keep her from uncovering the truth, there were only three people in on this plan, Ses, his lover Azure Path and me.

Ses used some magic to take on the face and body of the lover, while Azure Path used even worse magic to make me look like Ses. Ses was in a cell, and I and some guards were supposed to slow Huyla down enough that, while she was fighting to free him, Azure Path would have time to cast some spell on her. It all sounded good, except for the fact that I had to go toe to toe with a Wretched who desperately wanted to kill the person whose face I was wearing.

I still don't know how she managed to sneak in like that. The first thing we noticed was that five of the eight guards were dead. She stopped when she saw me. I played Ses really well, I did a whole "nice to see you Huyla, I have a deal to offer you" routine. I knew she wouldn't agree, but it would make her angrier and less suspicious. I wish Azure Path could have cast the spell then, but he told me that it was flashy enough that the only way to make sure Huyla didn't notice in time was to cast it while she was busy fighting someone.

Huyla stopped talking and leapt at me — I've never seen anyone swing an axe like that. I almost lost an arm with that blow — it was a good thing I was wearing Ses's fancy armor. The guards closed in and kept her busy for a while — when they were

all dead, she turned her attention back to me. She got one more blow in, it cut right through my armor and severed a few ribs. I was hurt bad and figured I'd be going down with her next blow. Then, she stopped. Ses looked like himself again, and she just looked at him like a young girl in love, albeit a remarkably ugly girl with a glowing demon-mark on her forehead.

Huyla works for Ses now. The problem is, I heard Ses and Azure Path talking about this spell. It's not stable — it will likely wear off in a year or two. Then, she'll remember everything — I don't want to be around when that happens. Huyla had some sort of deal with the Council of Entities, so Ses decided to leave town like she chased him out and have her play like she'd won. The plan was for her to take over his operations here, with me making sure she knew what to do. I'd have gotten really rich, until the spell wore off and she gutted me like a trout. Then, they'd know it was time to come back and cast the spell again.

I didn't let on I'd heard any of this — I simply asked to be released from my contract since I'd been banged up so bad. Lord Ses agreed — he was feeling unusually generous, I guess suddenly acquiring a pet Anathema puts a light into anyone's day. Be especially careful about destroying this particular letter. I've never heard of anyone breaking this code, but Lord Ses wouldn't be any too happy if word of what he had done got out.

I don't feel bad about leaving either. The new Wretched will be useful until she turns on him — she's incredibly strong and can move like no one I've ever seen. She's not stupid either. I have no idea how she found the location of Ses's underground stronghold. He didn't bother releasing info on it. He just assumed she'd find it. I guess that's one of the main reasons I'm going to retire for a while. You and I grew up thinking we were the lords of the world. We're nothing — I'm 84 years old, and this kid almost killed me in just a few quick passes, after dispatching eight well-trained mortal guards. I keep hearing more tales of their ilk around, and frankly, it makes me want to spend the rest of my life on our farm. There's no future in fighting Exalts such as this. They're worse than Lunars, and unlike with Lunars, people don't yet understand that you need an army at your back to wear them down.


THE FAIR FOLK

Many Fair Folk are particularly interested in the Night Caste. In the fey's eternal games of power and intrigue, the aid of a being who excels at stealth, assassination and discreet observation is a pearl beyond price. Most Fair Folk realize that the newly returned members of the Night Caste are inexperienced enough that the fey can manipulate them into being exceedingly useful tools. Few of the Fair Folk worry what will happen once the Concealing Shadows grow more fully into their power, for that is not their way. For now, the members of the Night Caste are seen as invaluable commodities.

FROM THE DIARY OF THE NOBLE FROSTED LAPIS

Eagle Pinnacle was killed in his bed last night. What an exquisitely fitting fate for the tender of my heart. Even better, a fixed thing did it — I suppose that is the risk one takes when





living in the fixed world. Eagle's Manse was perfection itself, but I never could understand how he could live surrounded by all of that stark changelessness. Since I knew nothing about it, I imagine he was killed because of some deal he made with the gods of Whitewall or the rulers of some other fixed place. Now, his eyes will nevermore open to regard his perfect assemblage of blood flowers, his crystallized song birds or his collection of letters from all those he loved and then discarded like stale sweetmeats. I shall go to his funeral in all my best finery and gloat over his corpse.

The story of his death was so exciting — someone slipped in and slit his lovely throat from ear to exquisite ear. After that, the assassin fought his way out from among Eagle's best guards and even managed to kill two of them. Devotion Firefall told me that she heard that Eagle was killed by one of the Anathema. I wish mother were around to tell me again about the time she met one of them back in the old time when the world was larger. They sound absolutely glorious, especially the ones like this assassin who can slay one of us in his most protected inner sanctum. I want one — I must find a way to entice one into my service or to bind it to me — all the stories tell of how powerful they are, but even the most powerful being has its weaknesses.

TWO WEEKS LATER

I saw him today. I had despaired of finding a way to obtain a pet Solar Exalted, but now, I have a target in mind. One of my spies brought me a tale of having seen a being of great power transform into a shadow and slip into a deathland. I wonder who he killed there? Naturally, I ate my spy's eyes — he got an excellent look at my prince of the night. Long white hair, eyes the color of pale sapphires and excellent taste in clothes. I hope that he was the same one who slew Eagle Pinnacle — he must have been, his kind are so terribly rare these days. If I had one in my collection, Devotion Firefall would beg to come to my palace to see it. The Anathema looked so deliciously powerful — he could spy on my rivals, slay my enemies and still have time to warm my too-empty bed. The only remaining problem is finding some way to bring him to me. I must learn if he has family or anything else that he truly loves. I am told these beings were once mortals — you can make most mortals do anything if you hold their families hostage.

THE DEAD

The dead are notoriously difficult to destroy — few fear assassination by even the most powerful living beings. However, the intrigues of the Deathlords are both intricate and deadly. Because of their special abilities, Deathlords find the Iron Wolves both worrisome and fascinating. All of the Deathlords know that Night Caste Exalted can be incredibly useful, but their spying could also prove the undoing of their allies or masters. A few Deathlords have made tentative alliances with members of the Night Caste, but such deals have been short-term affairs where the Deathlords offered magic, wealth or information in return for the Nights performing some specific task. Others hunt

the Night Caste Exalts down, fearing the information their observations could uncover.

A LETTER FROM NEMISSARY ULRIC WARFACE TO LOVER CLAD IN THE RAIMENT OF TEARS

Great queen, a live thing has been spying upon us. When the Syndics of Whitewall abruptly pulled out of our proposed closer alliance, I became suspicious and began an investigation. I could find no evidence that any hidden vitality had defiled our sacred halls, but in the absence of any other possibilities, I called in several life-hounds to go over the entire pavilion where we entertained the envoys from Whitewall. The best was able to find unnaturally faint traces of some living being of great power. It lingered around both the meeting room and the envoys' quarters. The hound tells me that it could only have hidden itself with a combination of a powerful artifact and magics that were as strong as any I have ever known. I know not what use this creature put the knowledge that it learned, but in the few hours it was among us, it managed to gather enough information to destroy that most promising treaty. I am certain it was not one of the dead. It was either a god or an Exalt.

I fear that it is one of the beings known as Anathema that have recently begun plaguing the world. Given its evident prowess at remaining hidden even from us, I can only recommend that we have life-hounds present at all important meetings with outsiders. I realize that the hounds' gloriously dead appearance makes many of the living ill at ease, but I see no other solution. Even then, I am far from certain that even these measures will keep us safe. Only our best life-hound was able to detect it at all. Perhaps your necrotic wisdom will grant you some better solution to this problem.

SPIRITS

While the intrigues of the spirit courts are not as lethal or twisted as those of the dead or the Fair Folk, the immortal gods carefully guard many secrets and would pay dearly for those of their fellows. However, many spirits remember the ancient days of the First Age, when the members of the Night Caste worked with the Celestial Censors to root out all corruption and disloyalty in the ranks of the spirit courts. The spies of the Night Caste were greatly feared in those long-ago days, and this fear has not completely faded. While the powers of the Concealing Shadows tempt some spirits into alliances with them, most small gods fear the return of the Night Caste will signal a return of the old Celestial Order and an end to the freedom many of them have enjoyed in the Age of Sorrows. As a result, only the most foolish or the most confident spirits make deals with the newly reborn members of the Night Caste, and many provide subtle aid to those who would hunt down and destroy them.

SONDOK, DEMON OF THE SECOND CIRCLE, IN THE DREAMS OF HARMONIOUS JADE

Treacherous whelp! Do you not know me? I taught you the ways of the sword and of the axe, of bending delicately away from

the blows of your enemies and of spilling their sweet lifeblood upon the dusty ground. You were to be the one who could free us from this iron and marble prison, the one who would let us loose to wreak our vengeance upon the cursed world that once we ruled. But instead, you have betrayed and abandoned us, forgotten us, we who made you everything that you are! But know this, bitch-child: We have not forgotten you.

Here we remain, in our green-skied prison, until some petty sorcerer calls us up like trained dogs to do his bidding. But if ever we come across you in our time on your miserable world, know that your very soul is forfeit to us for your treachery. We are bound here for a time but not forever, and there will come a day when we find you and claim you for our own. And when that time comes, you will wish that you had spent every day of your life peeling off your own skin with a dull knife and bathing in salt water, for such a fate will seem a blissful dream compared to the torments that await you. All the Children of the Sun will pay for what they have done to us, but your pain will be ten thousand times that of all the others combined, for you were meant to be ours and turned away from us.

A SPEECH BY PELLICIA TO THE COUNCIL OF ENTITIES IN NEXUS

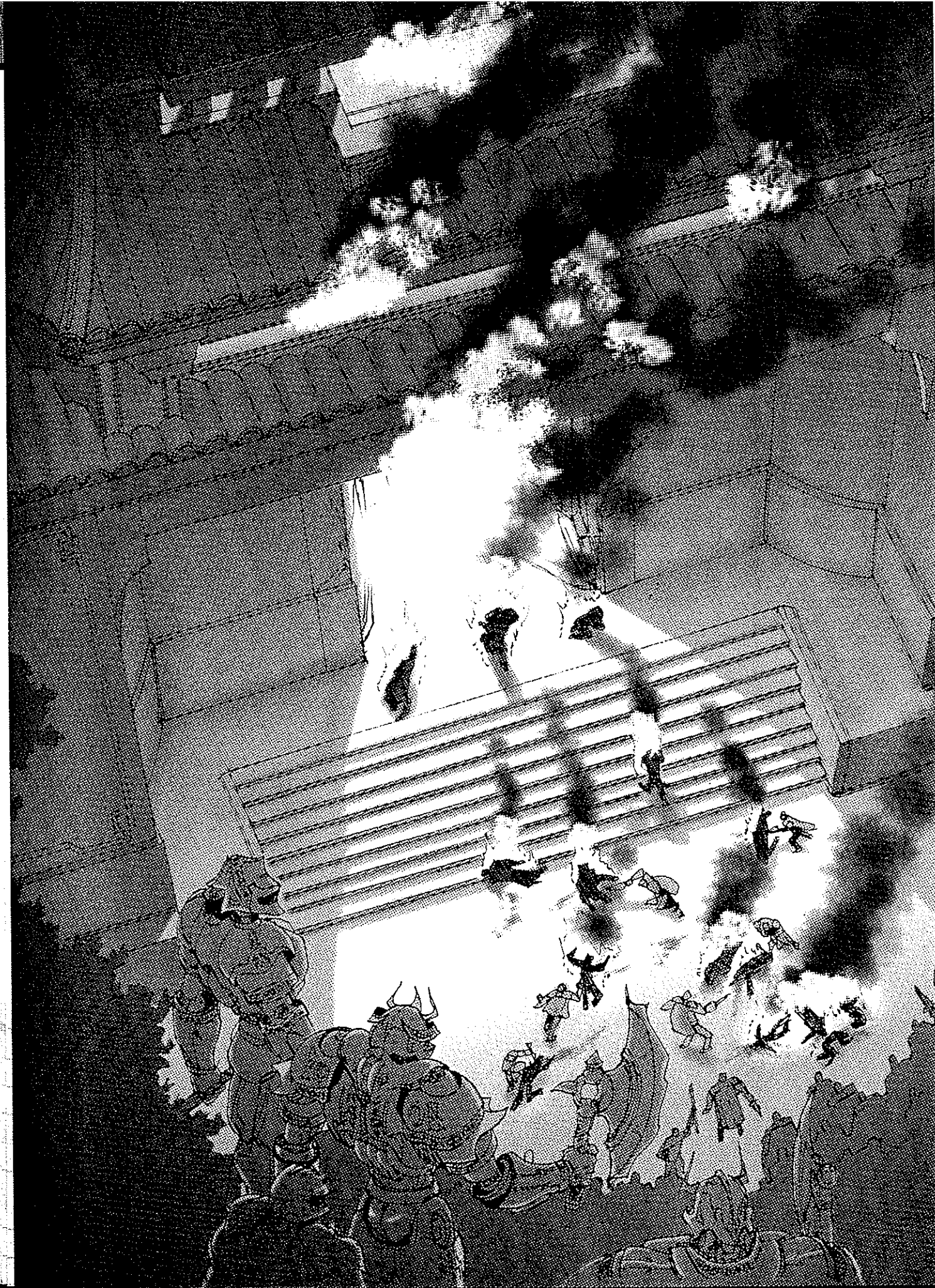
Honored fellows, I bring a matter of some concern to all of us. As you know, I recruited the Anathema Huyla to our service over a month ago. For her own reasons, she made her first priority dispatching Ophilis Ses and destroying his organization. I'm certain all of you noticed the hasty departure of Ophilis Ses and his remaining lieutenants two weeks ago. Since that time, Huyla has proven to be an able peacekeeper, but a few disturbing reports of additional activities by her began to surface. She has done nothing that warrants action, but she has been

acting in a highly unusual manner. I have employed several diviners and asked favors of someone I know in Yu-Shan. Huyla is under the influence of powerful magic. I can only assume that Ses is the source.

While I know that a few of you were favorably inclined toward Ses and his activities — you should all remember that our vote against him stands. Also, anyone who possesses the capacity to permanently enthrall one of the Anathema is perhaps too dangerous to live. We shall discuss his fate later — the question now before us is what to do with Huyla. Killing her would be possible but also exceedingly difficult. However, I may be able to break the spell upon her. While we all know of the dangers the Night Caste represent, she is also an invaluable resource. Our alliance with the Forsaken Dace has proven to be highly successful, and I believe all of you realize the advantages of an alliance with one of the Wretched. Huyla lacks the wide-ranging ambitions of Harmonious Jade — should this change, we will have had time to learn Huyla's weaknesses so that we can more easily dispose of her.

I recommend attempting to break the spell and making what use of her we can. I have found hints that it may be possible to keep the spell intact, but to redirect it, so that she is instead under our thrall. While doing so could prove both difficult and dangerous, the advantages of possessing a permanently enthralled member of the Wretched are immense. With her under our control we could ask what we wished of her, without fearing her betrayal. An ally of vast power is a great boon, but a pawn of similar power is a prize beyond measure. I now call a vote upon how we are to deal with the Anathema Huyla.





CHAPTER FIVE

DREAMS OF THE FIRST AGE

Like all Celestial Exalted, the Solars experience flashes of the dreams and memories of the other beings that have played host to the divine power that lies within them. This residue of other lives is an inextricable part of the Exalted condition. Every Nightbringer must, from time to time, remember that those who held this power before him were earthbound gods of death, criminals beyond opposition and, ultimately, hunted beasts brought to bay and destroyed by their lessers.

These visions emerge unbidden and unpredictably. An Exalted can suffer visions from contact with seeming insignificant stimuli, while exposure to the most important items in the past Exalt's life might cause no reaction. Visions range from waking dreams indistinguishable from reality to varying degrees of *déjà vu*. In other cases, dreams haunt the character after contact with reminders of the past — or for no reason at all. Regardless of how they manifest, these visions can provide an understanding of the past, keys to great power and insights into the thinking of elder Exalted. Offered in this chapter are a number of such visions, which can be delivered directly to players or be used as a basis for other stories by the Storyteller.

THE VOYAGE HOME

The dream always starts with a gentle rocking and the smell of the sea. I open my eyes and look around my cabin, a perfect little home in bleached wood and deep-blue enamel. My lover (my wife?) lies next to me, her lithe curves a thing of beauty as she sleeps beneath the sheets of azure silk, but I do not wake her as I rise and don a robe of woven glass. Her time is the night, when the moon hangs heavy and silver over the waves; but the dawn is for me.

The door swings open at my touch, and I emerge onto the deck in the predawn dimness. The ship is vast, like a huge white building gliding effortlessly through the sea. I glance over the rail, watching the waves churn against the hull a hundred feet below. Any of those waves could drown a man or swamp a sailboat, but the *Triumph* moves effortlessly through them, rocking only to its own rhythm and paying the vast strength of the Western Ocean no more mind than a man pays to the blades of grass through which he walks.

The eastern sky is purple with the impending sunrise, and I begin to walk toward the stern for the best view. It takes some minutes, but I am in no hurry; the sea breeze and the roar of the waves are pleasant companions in my solitude. I see no crewmen; I know they are there but only for my comfort. The ship does not need them to find its way to our destination.

Just as I reach the stern, the Unconquered Sun peers over the horizon and bathes ship and sea alike in his radiant glow. I bask in the warmth for long minutes, as the *Triumph* propels me onward to my destination. I am not a child of the Dawn, but the return of the sun is always a moment to be relished.

At last, I bow my head in thanks and make my way back toward the cabin. Ahead, like a target toward which the ship's bow is aimed, the pearled towers and nacreous walls of Clepsys shine brilliantly in the morning sunlight. I am almost home, and the joy of the return equals the joy of the journey.

I swing the door of my cabin silently open again, shrug free of my robe and return to the bed, curling up beside the one who shares it with me. *There is time enough before we reach Clepsys,*

I think and then drift softly back to sleep again, lulled by the smell of the salt air and the gentle rocking of the sea.

AMBUSH

The sound of horses brings me to full wakefulness. I have been here for hours, or so it seems, waiting for the bandits to make their way to where the trade road crosses the narrow but swift-flowing Silver River. We knew that they would target the caravan that was due to cross the bridge tomorrow morning, and this was the logical place for them to set their ambush... so we had set our own ambush first.

There are perhaps 30 of them, mostly men, dressed in thick, worn yeddim leather and carrying swords and spears that look grimy but still sharp. About half of them also carry bows, which look like the bandits made them themselves. Still, they knew how to use the things; we'd learned that much from the wreckage of the last caravan they'd gone after. We didn't keep many guards on the caravans as a rule; there were few folk desperate enough to attack a Realm caravan within our domain because they know what will happen if they're caught. Something like what's about to happen here.

The bandits fan out on both sides of the road and both sides of the river, muttering crude jokes to each other as they settle into their positions, hunkering down behind the massive trunks or gnarled roots of the ancient trees that grow here. Their tactics are sound, I'll give them that; they can cut off a retreat in any direction and can save most of their forces if they're attacked from any one side. Any one side on the ground, at least.

I nod my head once in the early morning darkness. Mortal eyes could not possibly see me, but I know that my brethren can see as well in the night as I can. As I begin to climb down the trunk of the tree I've spent the night in, I know that they are climbing down as well. There are four of us here, and that will be more than enough.

We are as silent and deadly as tree snakes as we take our first victims, breaking necks or slitting throats while an impermeable veil of Essence conceals us. Half of the bandits are dead or dying before one manages to croak out a bubbly warning to his comrades. Hearing where the sound came from, I make a mental note to chastise Enea for being sloppy again. Then, I draw forth my daiklave; now that the bandits are alert, there is no further need for subtlety.

The battle, if you can call it that, is short and grim. The bandits are nearly blind in the darkness, and they can hardly move for the terror that fills them as they realize they are being attacked by the Daggers of Heaven. One bandit, the leader, rallies some of the survivors to him and tries to punch through our lines, not knowing that our lines consist of only four individuals. I stand unmoving and unseen against a tree trunk and let him pass scant feet away from me, knowing that he will be easy enough to track once the others are dead.

Perhaps a minute has passed before the last of the bandits at the bridge falls. As we regroup, I can see that Enea has a long cut on her forearm; that might excuse her sloppiness — or might be another symptom of it. That will

be decided later. For now, I instruct her to post a few bandit heads along the trail so the caravan will know its path is safe. The other three of us follow the survivors through the woods.

For two hours, we trail them through the thickening forest, and I briefly wish that I had brought some Lunars along to speed the pursuit. Still, there is no need; the bandits have no way to hide from us, and before dawn, we come to the decrepit village these thugs call home.

I feel a moment's pity for those who live here, but they have the same choice as everyone else. If they wish to share in our wealth, they may join the Realm and pay us our due; if they wish to be left alone, we will not disturb them. But if they remain outside the Realm and try to take what belongs to us, they will pay in blood.

I leave my other two companions concealed in the brush on opposite sides of the village as I slip from hovel to hovel, moving unseen and unheard toward the sturdiest of the shacks. As I come near, I hear a gruff voice telling how he and his men were attacked by dozens of invisible devils, and I cannot help but smile. Then, I smash open the door and release the constraints on my anima, letting its ghostly white glow illuminate the scene within.

The bearded bandit who led the escape is standing before a trio of elderly men, no doubt explaining his failure to the village leaders. His bedraggled survivors stand off to one side, heads downcast in misery and failure. All of the faces in the hut snap up to stare at me as I stand in the doorway.

"You know what you have done," I say to the old men, ignoring the bandit leader. They look at each other as if seeking a way out and then slowly nod. "You know the price that is to be paid for this." They nod again. "Do you have anything to say in your defense?"

There is a moment's silence, and then, one speaks up. "We were hungry," he says plaintively. "We were desperate to have enough food for the winter, and you have so much...." His voice trails off. He is well aware of how pathetic his excuse sounds.

"You may share in our bounty if you choose to obey our laws," I say. "But you will not have what you have not earned, and you will pay for trying to take it."

I'll give the bandit chief credit for bravery, at least. While I spoke, he had edged slowly to one side of the hut, as though I would not see him; and at this point, he raises his sword and charges me, letting loose a roar that would doubtless have terrified a mortal man. I drop into a lunge, drawing my dagger and thrusting my arm out as I do, and his roar turns into a wet gurgle as the blade sinks into his throat. My eyes never leave the three elders, even when one of the bandits at the side of the room is noisily sick.

"Do what you must, Exalt," the leftmost elder says.

The surviving bandits are executed, of course, as are the elders who permitted the raids to happen. The rest of the village is rounded up to be brought back to civilization. In a few years, they'll thank us for this, and their children will certainly have a far brighter future than they ever would have in that pathetic little village.

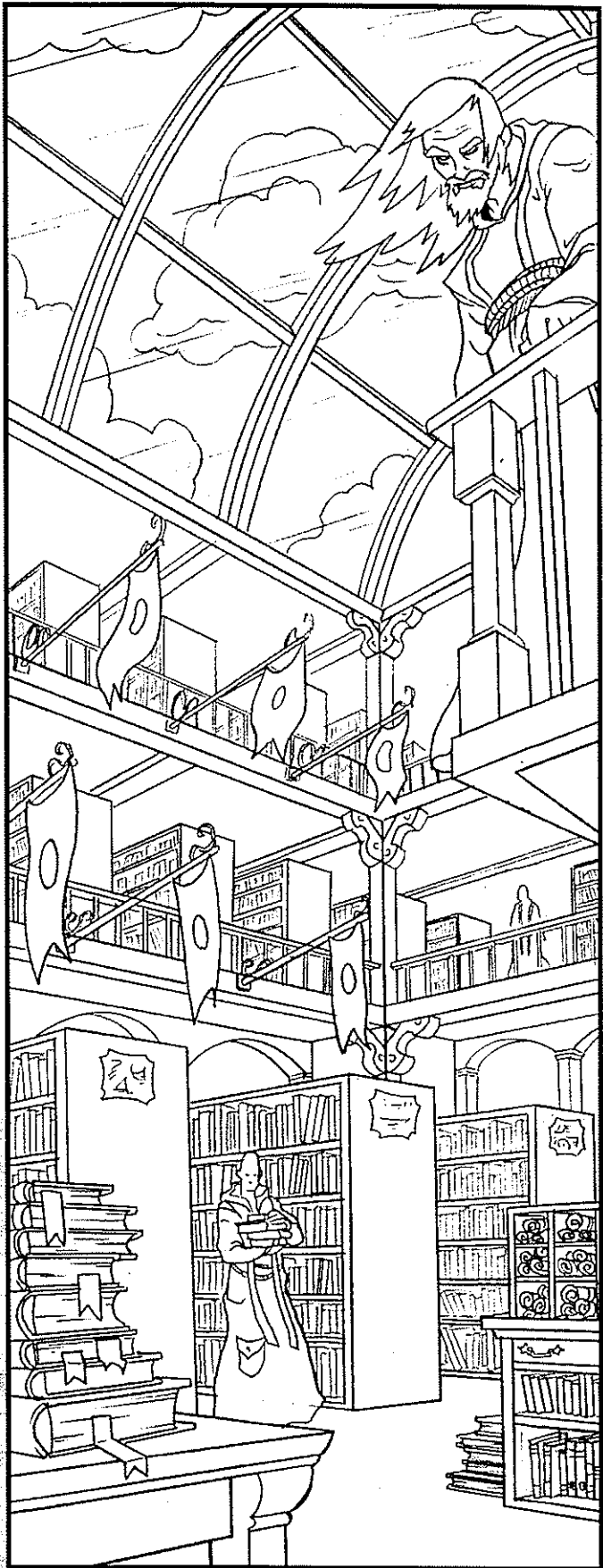
THE LIBRARY

An envoy from a group of villages on the edge of the forest had come to Denandsor to beg for our aid. Some great Wyld-spirit had emerged from the deep woods and was ravaging the outlying fields, killing farmers or dragging them back to its domain for some unknown purpose. The villages had paid their tributes to us for many years, and their need was great, so I agreed to lead a unit of soldiers to destroy the thing. First, though, I needed to know what it was, so once the envoy had told me all he knew of the spirit, I made my way to the Great Library.

No matter how many times I walked into the library, my heart was still filled with awe and pride as the great hall opened before me. Though it was no Library of Sperimin, row upon row of shelves ascended to the vast round skylight far above me, the polished wood gleaming in the brilliant sunlight. Beyond the brass rails of the wide wooden walkway, more layers of shelves descended into the depths, intermittently lit by the hovering spirit-lights that swirled like fireflies in the dimness below. A few scholars sat at desks around the edges of the great cylinder, murmuring requests to the library gods that whisked the desired books from the shelves to the desks and back again. I did not know precisely what volumes I sought yet, so I stepped onto one of the round brass-and-crystal desks hovering obediently by a gap in the railing and told it to descend.

As the desk moved smoothly to my destination, I looked up through the shaft again, shading my eyes against the glare from the skylight. Spirits and desk-bound researchers wheeled in the upper stacks like songbirds flitting from branch to branch. Here and there among the layered shelves, passageways opened into the deeper regions of the library, where the less-requested books were kept. I had often wondered how far back those passages extended, particularly the ones below ground level; the library tower would restrict the size of the upper halls, but the lower ones might well extend for miles. I had never needed to travel too far from the main shaft, though I had often wondered what nearly forgotten works might be nestled in the farthest reaches of the library. I made a mental note to return on some idle afternoon and see what I could find in the most distant stacks.

My desk glided to a gentle stop before a shelf of books bound in black leather and trimmed in silver: *Anastacia's Catalogue and Classifications of Known Spirits*. While not offering as much detail as I would need, it would enable me to choose the direction of my next course of study. I clicked my tongue, and one of the spirit-lights came to hover obediently over my shoulder. I drew the first book of the series from the



shelf, settled back into my chair and began to read, hanging there suspended in the main shaft of the library.

The day moved onward into night as I read, and as the sun moved away from the skylight above, rings of gentle moon-blue light began to emanate from the shelves themselves to illuminate the shaft. I moved from shelf to shelf occasionally as my research demanded, or sent an elemental to fetch a tome I desired to examine. I spent an hour or so in one of the side tunnels, reading an obscure history of the Eastern lands by the steady, living light of my tireless spirit companion.

At last, I had learned what I needed; I knew the nature of the entity that was plaguing the farmers' villages and had narrowed its name down to one of several possibilities. I felt confident that I could drive the spirit off with a minimal risk to my troops, though I was certain they could slay it if it turned out to be necessary. Feeding a mote of Essence to the spirit-light in thanks for its service, I had the desk return me to ground level.

As I strode past the great iron guardians at the library doors, my attaché approached me, and I told him to have the troops ready to leave in the morning. Night had settled like a blanket over Denandsor, and the myriad sparkling lights of the city mirrored the countless stars above. I thought, for a moment, how blessed I was to dwell in such a city in such an age and thanked the Unconquered Sun for his countless gifts.

UNDERCOVER

Today was my meeting with the boss — I'd finally get my chance to eliminate Gilded Whisper. She was a disgrace to our kind — three years ago, she had vanished from the Solar palace in Crystal and gone rogue. She resurfaced in Gethamane, running the crystal syndicate that controlled the underways and much of the illegal soul-gem trade throughout the Northland. Hergang was composed of equal parts Gethamane locals and underfolk from the caves — she ruled them with enchanted blood oaths and a swift blade. We of the Night are sworn to destroy those who place themselves beyond the law, not to create our own rule of theft and murder.

The underways were said to run from Gethamane to Crystal, and a few claimed that they even reached as far south as the sea. Her alliance to one of the underfolk clades gave her nearly free access to these forbidden tunnels. In my guise as an apprentice smuggler, I had received secret cargoes of Eastern drugs and deadly azure trance stones, all coming through these tunnels, free from any law or other interference. Her power was growing, and only her death or capture would smash her organization. The civil authorities were paralyzed by her Essence and quickly falling to her agents. To stop the smuggling, the contract killing, the extortion and the terror they inflicted on all who opposed them, Gilded Whisper must die.

I had spent a month masquerading as a member of her organization — using my magics and the people in my organization, I stopped a plot by a rival faction within her organization that would have stolen a quarter of the local extortion monies. I received a promotion to chief smuggler in return and was invited down into the tunnels to meet with her.

The meeting was short, she took little notice of me — thankfully, she had no reason to attempt to penetrate the magics disguising me. I created a magical duplicate to leave the tunnels and made myself invisible. I could not follow her closely, but I must get her alone, away from the pair of ronin lion dogs who guarded her, if I was to have a clear shot at destroying her. Down I went, into the depths of the underways, where she kept her secret citadel. She had set traps behind her, pools of venom that could only be crossed by carefully counterbalanced bridges, eerily beautiful bell stalactites that rang throughout the tunnels when anyone brushed against them and, of course, the dwellers in the underways who had allied themselves with her. Mere invisibility was not enough to hide from them. Their glowing violet eyes were their weakest sense — I had been told they could track as well as the finest daz hound and hear a faint whisper dozens of yards away. Only my most potent Charms protected me from their notice. At one point, I was forced to release the rat I had captured. They were surprised by its presence so deep under the earth — one of them grabbed it in its fleshy palps, while the others swarmed near, eager to partake in the dissection and the feasting — if they captured me, my fate would be the same.

Running silently across the ceiling, moving as swiftly as a racingsable, I caught only the barest glimpses of this eldritch world of pale glowing crystals, twisted inhuman towers that spanned great caverns and smooth narrow paths designed for the amorphous feet of the disturbingly manlike underfolk. At last, I could smell her trail ending in one of their black seven-sided towers. The locks and wardings upon this structure were formidable, but my own magics enabled me to climb it with some difficulty and, eventually, to slip in through a window without disturbing a single enchantment. The interior of the tower had been fashioned like a typical Solar dwelling in Crystal, yellow glow stone panels, furniture covered in affectionate silver and blue live-silk and a few minor enchantments crawling around cleaning and searching for intruders. Precise jumps and perfect silence enabled me to avoid their notice, while I reached Gilded Whisper's chamber. I don't know when she learned I was here, but she was waiting for me. I'm guessing that she only noticed my presence when I used Essence to pull myself through her door.

"Welcome, my sister in Night, have you come to join me?"

"Hardly. You can either surrender and return with me to Crystal, or you can die at my hands."

"Aren't you being rather hasty? You are in my palace, surrounded by my guards."

"I see none in here, and the wards I just placed on your door will keep everyone else outside for a short while."

"I could use another of our kind — between the two of us, we could control the entire Northland in two years."

"The Sidereals are correct, Whisper. Our kind is becoming corrupt. But while I still live, any who betray their position or abuse their power will pay for their crimes — surrender or die."

She filled the air with glittering shuriken — I blocked her attack in a whirl of steel and jumped for her, my lightning chain crackling in my hands. She dodged, and my blow turned her

opulent marble sleeping couch into smoking fragments. She did a back flip, threw three knives to distract me and grabbed for the sheath of her daiklave hanging on the wall. I'd heard stories of the blade Foe-Blinder—if she held it, my life would be short and filled with pain. I called a bow and arrow of solar power and fired at the blade itself. Not expecting such an attack, she was unprepared when it flew from her grasp before she had even drawn it. A flash of light filled the room, and then, she vanished. Invisibility would not save her, I moved so that I stood atop Foe-Blinder and rooted myself to the earth. Filling the air with javelins of solar power and then sweeping my chain so that it struck everything in the room, I was pleased to hear her cry out. Closing my eyes, using hearing alone, I swung my chain as a lethal whip, while all she could do was hurl her powerful but easily deflected missiles.

The worst villains are always the most contemptuous of others. Believing herself invulnerable, she had neglected the defensive arts, concentrating solely upon methods of attack. She was stronger than I was, and her weapons scored deep furrows into the rock walls, but I protected myself so well that few of them even grazed me. Grabbing three javelins, I sent them each to continue to attack her. Every few seconds, each of them would bounce off of a wall and strike her again. She fought well, but I could see her glow fading and her power waning. Victory was neither glorious nor quick — she tired gradually, each blow did slightly more damage than the last, until her bleeding body lay at my feet, looking little different than the bodies of the many mortals she had slain.

With time to listen, I could hear the lion dogs charging the door and scores of underfolk advancing upon her tower. Even my many powers could not win me free of such a horde. Fortunately, the Twilight wizard Zarelin had created a journey stone for me. I cut off Gilded Whisper's head and crushed the stone while thinking of the Palace of Justice in Crystal. In an instant of shifting colors, I was there. With a gesture, I transformed my hunting suit into brilliant robes of office and addressed my assistants who had been awaiting my return.

"The criminal Gilded Whisper is dead, take her head to Meru to officially record her death, and then, announce it to the city. Her gang will crumble within days if we execute large-scale raids an hour or so after we release the news."

RAIN ON THE LAST DAY

It was raining in the white city, and from that alone, I would have known that something was wrong. It had not rained within the walls of Meru in decades, because we, the Children of the Sun, would not permit it. Rain was for farmers.

I was hiding behind a crumbling marble wall, my daiklave unsheathed at my side, and that, too, was wrong. This was my city, and I one of its lords; this was a place where others would hide from my wrath, where I walked with the mark of the Unconquered Sun shining proudly on my brow. But now, my perfect white city was crumbling around me, and the unwanted rain made the marble slick beneath my boots, and I was in hiding.

I heard the thunderous footsteps out in the street and knew that the warstriders were coming for me again. I risked

a glance out from my hiding place and saw a score of Dragon-Blooded soldiers and three warstriders fanning out across the street, searching for stragglers of the Solar tribe.

They had turned on us just before dawn, as we gathered in the temple to celebrate the coming of the new year. I was late for the ceremony, as I often had been in the past, so I was able to watch the warstriders as they walked unhindered past the temple guards, several taking up positions outside every temple door with their massive swords at the ready. As I came closer, wondering what they were doing there, I heard the singing start from within the temple. Even at that distance, my skull throbbed at the pain of the sound; I couldn't imagine how horrible it must have been within the temple itself. The warstriders and the guards didn't flinch; I drew my Essence to my eyes and saw that all of them had plugged their ears with wax. They had known this was coming, whatever it was.

As I staggered back, trying to get away from the horrible sound, I saw my brethren pouring from the temple doors, their bodies covered in clinging flames, blood streaming from their ears, and I watch the warstriders begin to butcher them. The guards turn their flame spears on those who make it past the striders. The Children of the Sun are difficult to kill, and they struck down some of the guards and some of the striders, but not enough. Not nearly enough. There was something else in the temple, too, an endless mechanical clattering like a thousand steel ants. I could not see what caused it and did not want to.

Now, I was hiding for my life, fleeing those who had betrayed us. I was far from the temple now, but I knew that it was burning because the flames tinted the underside of the storm clouds with a baleful orange. The fire seemed to be spreading despite the rain, turning that whole section of the city into a massive pyre for those who had been betrayed. I wanted nothing more than to wade into them and cut them to ribbons, but I knew I could not defeat them all. I had to get away, to find the other Solars, to raise an army to avenge my fallen brothers.

Between the footsteps of the warstriders, I heard the click and creak of a door opening behind me. I turned, ready to strike, and saw the familiar face of Hadeon, Exalt of Saturn. He was a trusted advisor to the Deliberative, one of those who would have presided over the new year's ceremonies. His robes were dirty and smeared with blood, but he must have escaped the slaughter. He would help me, if anyone would. The Dragon-Blooded would pay for what they had done.

Hadeon smiled as he recognized me, and I turned to join him behind the door. He spoke a word in an occult tongue as I neared him and reached out to touch my chest. He barely tapped me, but the force of his blow sent me flying backward into the puddle-filled street. As I scrambled to my feet and tried to find where my daiklave had landed, I heard the shouts of the soldiers and the quickened pace of the warstriders. I glanced back at Hadeon and saw the ineffable sadness on his face as he closed the door in front of him once more.

Then, I found my daiklave, and there was no more time to think as I charged through the rain to make the Dragon-Blooded pay dearly for my death.







CHAPTER SIX MAGIC OF THE NIGHT

Like all Solars, the members of the Night Caste are powerful and versatile individuals. Yet, their predilection for stealth, for gymnastic perfection and for excellent perceptions serve to unify them. What follow are a number of Charms directly useful to the caste, a forgotten martial arts form for assassins and a series of Charms for two-handed combat that may prove effective for light and agile fighters such as members of the Night Caste. Also included in this chapter are a number of artifacts and Hearthstones useful to the Night Caste and mundane equipment useful to any practicing the caste's role as spies and assassins.

NEW CHARMS

EBON SHADOW STYLE MARTIAL ARTS

EBON SHADOW WEAPON USE
Characters may use both fighting chains and sai freely with all Charms in the Ebon-Style Martial Arts cascade.

IMAGE OF DEATH TECHNIQUE

Cost: 2 motes
Duration: Up to 24 hours
Type: Simple
Minimum Martial Arts: 2
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: None

The character can use her Essence to temporarily appear to be dead. The instant she performs this Charm, she falls to the ground, seemingly deceased. A careful examination and a successful Perception + Medicine roll of difficulty 3 is necessary to determine that the character is actually still alive. While this Charm is in effect, the character can hold her breath 10 times as long as normal, and she does not need to eat or drink. Although the character can use her senses of hearing, touch and smell normally, she cannot see or move while this Charm is in effect. However, she can act normally the turn after she chooses to end this Charm.

WALL CLIMBING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1 mote
Duration: One turn
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Martial Arts: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Image of Death Technique

The character using this Charm can climb walls, ropes, chains and other vertical surfaces as easily as he can walk along a floor. Using Wall Climbing Technique, the character can climb up to his normal movement rate per turn. In his next turn, the character must either activate the Charm again, remain where he is (if such is possible) or attempt to leap or climb down normally.

DISTRACTING FINGER-GESTURE ATTACK

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Martial Arts: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Wall Climbing Technique

The character can make a complex sign with her fingers and charge it with Essence. This sign distracts and slows a single opponent. It takes only an instant to make and is performed at the beginning of the turn. The character's Martial Arts score is subtracted from a single opponent's initiative roll, and the Charm prevents this opponent from splitting her dice pool that turn (although the opponent may use Combos and reflexive and extra action Charms normally and may abort to dodge or parry as usual). If, for any reason, the opponent's initiative roll is reduced below 1, the opponent may not act that turn.

EBON SHADOW FORM

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Martial Arts: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Distracting Finger-Gesture Attack

The Exalt moves with the speed and ease of a flickering shadow. While using the Ebon Shadow Form, she adds her Martial Arts score to her initiative total. In addition, she adds a number of dice equal to her permanent Essence to her Stealth score, and the difficulty of all attacks against the character is increased by a number equal to the character's permanent Essence. The character can also decide whether any of her attacks made with hands, feet, sai or fighting chains will do bashing or lethal damage. This decision must be made before a given attack is rolled. This Charm is incompatible with armor. Characters cannot use more than one Martial Arts Form-type Charm at a time. If a character is killed while under the effects of Ebon Shadow Form, her body dissipates into acrid black smoke. She leaves no ghost, and her physical remains provide no evidence of her identity (though her gear may).

SEVEN POINTS OF WEAKNESS STRIKE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Martial Arts: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Ebon Shadow Form

The character uses her Essence to guide her hand, foot or weapon so that it strikes the weakest point in her target's armor. As a result, a number of points equal to the character's Martial Arts score are subtracted from the target's lethal or bashing soak before damage from this attack is applied.



LIMB-IMMOBILIZING METHOD

Cost: 3 motes
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Martial Arts: 4
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Seven Points of Weakness Strike

A character trained in the Ebon Shadow Style learns all of the weak points found in living bodies. With a slight touch, the martial artist can immobilize one of her target's limbs. The character need merely tap an unsuspecting target, a normal unarmed attack at +1 difficulty. The attack can be blocked or dodged as normal and does no damage. The attacker can choose which limb is paralyzed, and the target limb is immobilized for the remainder of the scene. Immobilizing a human's leg halves his movement speed, and the target's player must make a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll every time his character is struck to keep him from falling. Characters with both legs immobilized can only crawl and must generally perform stunts to attack, dodge or parry. Immobilizing the leg of a horse or other animal with four or more legs merely halves the distance it can move every turn. Immobilizing an arm keeps the target from using that arm to attack. This attack does no actual damage to the target, but it may cause off-hand penalties, and paralyzing both the target's arms makes it very difficult for him to fight effectively. This attack has no effect against the undead, automata and other beings that have no vital functions to obstruct.

PARALYZING TOUCH ATTACK

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Martial Arts: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Limb-Immobilizing Method

This Charm allows the character to stun or incapacitate a target with a mere touch to one of the five vital centers. To perform this attack, the character must lightly tap the target on one of several possible nerve points, making a normal unarmed attack. This attack does no damage. However, the Exalt's player may roll a number of dice equal to her character's Martial Arts + the number of extra successes she made on the attack, against a difficulty equal to the target's Essence. Each extra success on this roll reduces the target's Dexterity by one dot. If the target's Dexterity is reduced to zero, he is paralyzed. Lost Dexterity returns at the end of the scene. The effect is also dispersed if the player of a character with Medicine and Martial Arts at 3 or higher makes a successful Wits + Martial Arts roll at difficulty 3 to remove the paralysis. Removing paralysis is a normal dice action, and the target

may move normally in the next turn. With a successful Wits + Stealth roll of difficulty 1, this touch can be made to seem like a simple pat on a shoulder or an unintentional push. This attack cannot be used against the undead or other beings that lack vital centers.

ELUSIVE FLICKER EVASION

Cost: 4 motes
Duration: One turn
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Martial Arts: 4
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Ebon Shadow Form

The character becomes as difficult to hit as a dimly lit shadow. Until her next action, add a number of dice equal to her permanent Essence score to all dodge attempts, including Dodge attempts involving reflexive Charms such as Shadow Over Water. If, for some reason, she has no Dodge pool, she may reflexively dodge attacks with her Essence.

BLOW-CONCEALING GESTURE TECHNIQUE

Cost: 2 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: Instant
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Martial Arts: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Elusive Flicker Evasion

The character can make an Essence-enhanced gesture that renders his opponent unable to notice or react to an attack the character makes. The opponent cannot dodge or parry the character's blow without the use of Charms. The target's player may make a reflexive Wits + Awareness roll for the attack, with a difficulty equal to the attacking character's Essence. If the roll succeeds, the opponent may use any reflexive Charms or abilities she possesses to counter the attack but may not avoid it nonmagically. If the roll fails, the opponent may use only Charms that specifically state they work on attacks the character is not aware of. This Charm may explicitly be used in a Combo with Charms of other Abilities.

SHADOW-BODY STYLE

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: One scene
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Martial Arts: 5
Minimum Essence: 4
Prerequisite Charms: Blow-Concealing Gesture Technique

This Charm allows the character to flatten her body in order to pass through narrow spaces as easily as a shadow slides under a door. The character can fit her entire body through any space wide enough for her to fit her fingers through. The character is shadowy and indistinct, composed



of tangible darkness and not flesh. It is impossible to identify the character while this Charm is in effect, though her gear may betray her. Even if her anima banner activates, only her Caste Mark will shine forth, and her anima banner, while bright as usual, will be muted and generic.

The Exalt cannot wear any armor when using this Charm, but she adds a number of dice equal to her permanent Essence to both her lethal and bashing soaks while the Charm is in effect. This Charm is incompatible with any other Charms that increase the character's natural soak and have durations longer than Instant. A character using this Charm sees as easily in total darkness as in light, though she must actually use her eyes to see, and so, this magic lends no aid if she must fight blindfolded or in thick fog.

SHADOW-STEPPING MOTION

Cost: 7 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Martial Arts: 5

Minimum Essence: 5

Prerequisite Charms: Paralyzing Touch Attack, Shadow-Body Style

In ancient times, Exalted assassins circumvented the protections of their enemies by stepping directly through them. By using this Charm, the Exalt steps into a shadow and steps out of another shadow far away, near his destination. The Exalt must have a shadow to step into, and he must have seen his destination before, though seeing it through a familiar, sorcerous scrying or what have you also counts. The Exalt then steps into the shadow as a simple action. He reappears at the beginning of next turn in the nearest unobserved shadow near his intended destination. That destination cannot be more than a number of miles away equal to the Exalt's permanent Essence, and if there are no unobserved shadows within 100 yards of that location, the Charm fails (though the Essence and Willpower are still spent).

There are certain sorcerous wards (the same as those that will block teleportation, which is what this Charm is) that prevent the use of this Charm. Generally, it cannot penetrate the Manse of a sorcerer, a god's sanctum or any other such forbidden place.

MELEE

DUAL SLAYING STANCE

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Melee: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

The character guides his hands with Essence, allowing him to fight with weapons in both hands. This Charm reduces multiple action penalties by 2 for an attack or parry action performed by a character wielding two weapons and completely eliminates the penalty for using a weapon in the character's off hand. The character can activate this Charm a maximum number of times per turn equal to his Melee score.

SUN-AND-MOON METHOD

Cost: 2 motes

Duration: One turn

Type: Extra Action

Minimum Melee: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Dual Slaying Stance

Through harmony with the Essence flows, a character holding a weapon in each hand can strike once with each weapon without penalties for off-hand use or multiple actions. In a single turn, the character can make two parries, two attacks or one attack and one parry without any penalties for multiple actions. However, a character cannot split his dice pool when using this Charm, and the character's parry is a normal single-attempt parry unless the Exalt is also using Two Swords Technique. In order to use this Charm, the character must have weapons in both hands. This Charm may explicitly be placed in a Combo despite its non-Instant duration. This Charm may be activated reflexively but Combos as if it were of the Extra Actions type.

TWO SWORDS TECHNIQUE

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Melee: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Sun-and-Moon Method

The character can now allow Essence to manage his hands for him and receives no penalty for fighting with two weapons for an entire scene. He may use either weapon to perform any combat action without penalty. This does not allow him to take extra actions as if he were using Charms, but he may split his dice pool normally. In addition, this Charm completely eliminates the off-hand penalty and also allows the character to sacrifice an action for the turn make a "cascading parry." This consumes both his actions for the turn. The cascading parry's dice pool starts at the Exalt's Dexterity + Melee + the sum of the two weapons' defensive bonuses and drops by 1 for each successive parry attempt. A character using Two Swords Technique can abort to this defense, just as if he were aborting to a full dodge or a full parry. In order to use this Charm, the character must have weapons in both hands.

STEEL DEVIL STYLE

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Melee: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Ready in Eight Directions Stance, Two Swords Technique

The character enfold himself in Essence, allowing it to guide his actions as he whirls through a breathtakingly graceful whirlwind of deadly blows. So long as he has weapons in both hands, a character who has activated this Charm is an incredibly deadly opponent.

Whenever the character is attacked, he may make a reflexive automatic parry attempt with whichever of his weapons he chooses at his Dexterity + Melee + any other modifiers. In addition, he may reflexively counterattack any hand-to-hand attack with whichever of his weapons he chooses. This counterattack is rolled after the automatic parry, and if the automatic parry is successful, extra successes on the parry attempt are added as bonus dice to the counterattack roll.

The parry and the counterattack are "normal" actions for the character, and so, the character could enhance his counterattacks with Excellent Strike or his defense with Golden Essence Block, but the character still cannot invoke the effects of more than one different Charm per turn without a Combo. In addition, a character under the effects of this Charm may not use or benefit from extra action Charms, nor may he use or benefit from any effect that causes him to make another parry or another riposte. The counterattack bonus dice added by extra successes on the parry attempt are a Charm bonus and count against the character's Attribute + Ability maximum for bonus dice if he uses other Charms to enhance the riposte. The counterattack effect of Steel Devil Style cannot be used in response to other counterattack effects, but the automatic parry is still active against these attacks.

In order to use this Charm, the character must have weapons in both hands. If the character is no longer using two weapons, he loses access to the Charm's effects, though he can use them again the instant he is rearmed. A character under this Charm's effects who no longer has a weapon in either hand is still unable to activate extra action, full parry or riposte Charms while disarmed and must terminate the Charm's effects (this can be done reflexively and does not require dice or count as an action) in order to permit these types of effects to work on him.

INVESTIGATION

DEATH REVEALING METHOD

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Investigation: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Crafty Observation Method

By touching a weapon, the character can instantly determine the appearance of the person who was killed by it last and the appearance of the person who wielded it then. Similarly, if used on a corpse or even a fragment of bone or hair, the character can get an image of the person while she was alive and will know both her name and exactly how she died.

LORE

BREWING VENOM TECHNIQUE

Cost: 4 motes, 1 willpower, 1 health level per pot created

Duration: One week

Type: Simple

Minimum Lore: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Chaos-Repelling Pattern

The Exalt must spend an entire scene (30 minutes) boiling a small pot of water. During this time, she meditates and focuses her Essence into the water, transforming it into a deadly poison. The difficulty of the Stamina + Resistance roll to avoid the poison and the penalty it causes are both equal to the character's Lore Ability score. This penalty persists for a number of minutes equal to the character's permanent Essence.

The damage done if the victim's player succeeds in making a successful Stamina + Resistance roll is equal to half of the brewing character's Lore (round up), and the damage done by the poison if the victim's player fails the roll is equal to twice the brewing character's Lore.

At the character's choice, the poison brewed can either be a deadly toxin that does lethal damage or a powerful narcotic that only does bashing damage. Either poison must be ingested or delivered via a weapon to be effective. Each pot made contains poison enough to envenom a dozen weapons or to poison a large meal. The poison is odorless, tasteless and colorless, requiring a Perception + Awareness roll of a difficulty equal to the brewing character's Essence to detect.

Like all other weapon venoms, each dose of poison can only be used against a single target. Once it has been used, the poison must be applied to the weapon again to be effective. The poison transforms back into harmless water after a week. Each batch must be brewed as either



a thick weapon venom or an ingested venom that is as thin as water. Charms such as Poison-Resisting Meditation and Immunity to Everything Technique affect this poison normally.

ENVENOMED WEAPON PRANA

Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 health level

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Lore: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Brewing Venom Technique

With a seemingly harmless touch, the character can envenom a single weapon, a single plate of food or a goblet of wine. The difficulty to resist the poison and the penalty and damage for the poison are all the same as for Brewing Venom Technique. At the character's option, the poison brewed can either be a deadly toxin that does lethal damage or a powerful narcotic that only does bashing damage. Either poison must be ingested or enter a wound to be effective. The poison is odorless, tasteless and colorless. The poison lingers in the drink or the weapon for the next full day — after this time, it dissipates harmlessly. This Charm cannot be used to poison food or drink in the same turn that it is consumed or to envenom a weapon in the same turn that it is being used to strike a target.

MASTERY-OF-POISON TECHNIQUE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 health level

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Lore: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Envenomed Weapon Prana

The character can use this Charm to either envenom a single weapon on the same turn that it is used to strike a target or to poison a single plate of food or goblet of drink. Also, the character may poison a weapon, food or drink that is up to one yard per point of permanent Essence away. The difficulty to resist the poison and the penalty and damage for the poison are all the same as for Brewing Venom Technique. At the character's choice, the poison brewed can either be a deadly toxin the does lethal damage or a powerful narcotic that only does bashing damage. Either poison must be ingested or enter a wound to be effective. The poison is odorless, tasteless and colorless. The poison lingers on the drink or the weapon for the next full scene — after this time, it harmlessly dissipates.

MEDICINE

VENOM ANODYNE METHOD

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Medicine: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Grievous Injury Recovery Method

To be effective, characters must use this Charm the instant they are subjected to poison damage. This Charm instantly negates all damage from poison and renders the poison harmless.

BODY PURIFYING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Medicine: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Wound-Mending Care Technique, Venom Anodyne Method

This Charm allows the character to cure others of all damage caused by poison or acid provided that he can get to them within 10 turns of their being poisoned or burned. The character can also touch poisoned weapons, food or drink and render it harmless with a touch. If she has time to handle and caress a venomous animal, she can render it nonpoisonous for the next day, but this cannot be done in combat, and it does not effect magical animals such as dragons.

ATHLETICS

FISH SWIMMING TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Athletics: 2

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: None

This Charm allows the character to swim almost as well as a fish. While he still needs to breathe normally and cannot swim in armor, he can swim at his normal movement rate and never needs to worry about drowning in relatively calm water. This Charm reduces the difficulty of all Athletics rolls related to swimming by 1 (to a minimum of 1).

SWIFT WATER PRANA

Cost: 6 motes
Duration: One hour
Type: Simple
Minimum Athletics: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Fish Swimming Technique

The Character can now swim at twice her movement rate if unarmored and at her normal movement rate if wearing no more than light armor. In addition, she swims underwater easily and can hold her breath for up to Stamina x 10 minutes — each success on a Stamina + Resistance roll extends this time by 10 minutes. She can swim in the worst seas without risk of drowning, and her player need never make Athletics rolls for the character to stay afloat. Although the character cannot swim if wearing anything heavier than light armor, she can still walk along the bottom while holding her breath. This Charm reduces the difficulty of all Athletics rolls related to swimming by 3 (to a minimum of 1).

FOE-VAULTING STYLE

Cost: 3 motes
Duration: Instant
Type: Supplemental
Minimum Athletics: 3
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Monkey Leap Technique

As a part of any attack, the character may vault over the head of any foe she is facing. At the end of this vault, the character lands behind the foe and may attack this opponent from behind. This attack does no additional damage, but it gains all of the benefits of attacking from behind (see *Exalted*, p. 238). Normally, this Charm can only be used once on a given foe — enemies who are expecting this maneuver can pivot around rapidly enough to parry or dodge attacks. However, against the unsuspecting, this is often a devastating technique.

SOARING CRANE LEAP

Cost: 2 motes
Duration: One turn
Type: Reflexive
Minimum Athletics: 4
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Monkey Leap Technique

Supported by both air and Essence, the character can almost fly, leaping vast distances in a single fantastic bound. Rather than making an ordinary movement action, she can leap (Strength + Athletics) x 10 yards vertically or twice this distance horizontally. The character can attack and perform other actions in the same turn that she performs Soaring Crane Leap but gains no special bonuses to these actions. If desired, this Charm can be

used to leap down from great heights, effectively making the character almost immune to falling damage.

MOUNTAIN-CROSSING LEAP TECHNIQUE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Athletics: 5
Minimum Essence: 4
Prerequisite Charms: Soaring Crane Leap

This Charm allows the character to leap long distances in a single bound, which takes the remainder of the scene (or about five minutes in real time). The character can cover a distance of five miles per point of permanent Essence. If he does not know his destination, his player may be required to make a successful reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll on the Exalt's landing or have him tumble and potentially take up to three dice of bashing damage. The character may take no other actions except to parry and counterattack during the scene he's leaping. If the character can fly or otherwise navigate through air, doing so immediately ends this Charm's effect and leaves the character dependent on whatever means of locomotion he activated. A character can reach a height of several miles at the apex of the leap, so flight effects of short duration are suicidal unless the character can survive such a long fall.

CLOUD-FOOT STYLE

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: One scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Athletics: 5
Minimum Essence: 2
Prerequisite Charms: Spider-Foot Style, Feather-Foot Style

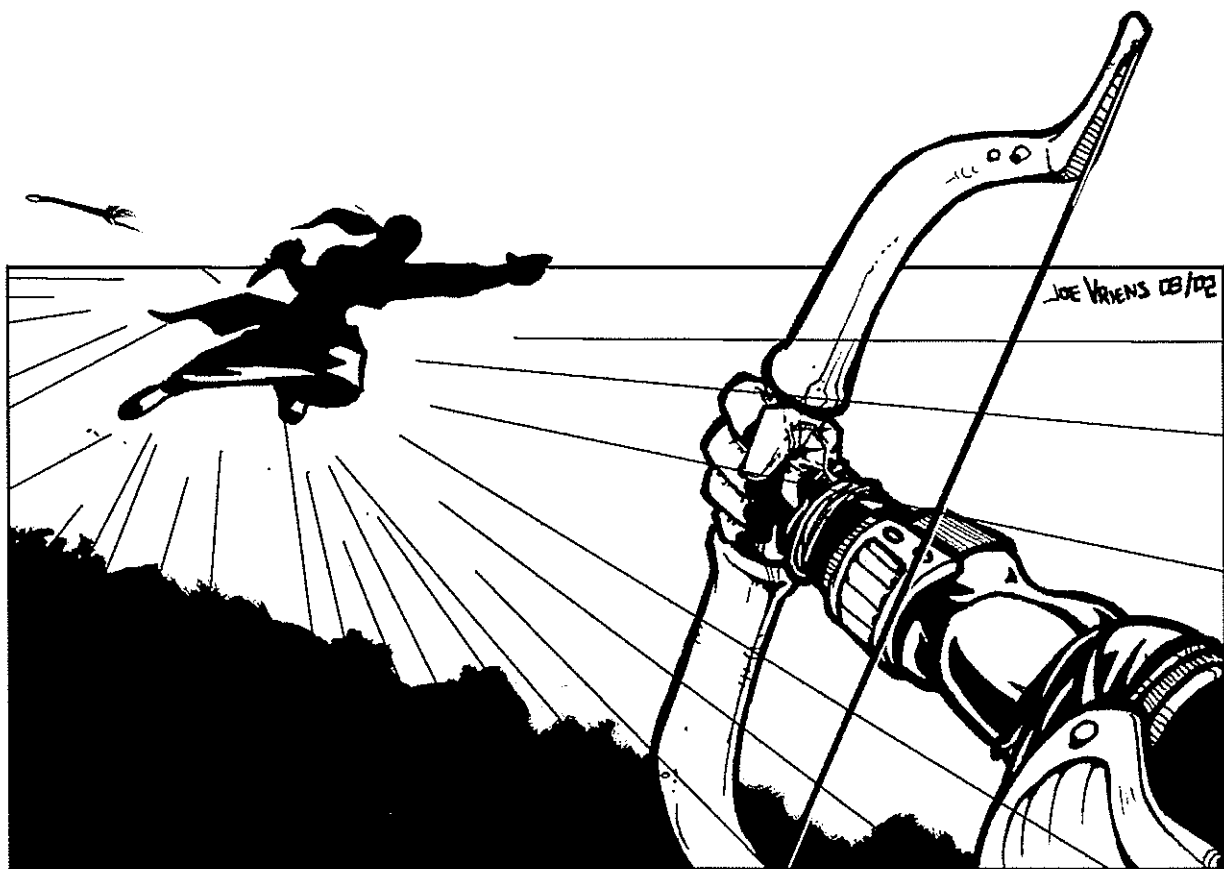
Through the use of this Charm, the Exalt can obtain the effects of Spider-Foot Style and Feather-Foot Style for the remainder of the scene, allowing her to walk up horizontal surfaces, across ceilings and also over fluid surfaces such as water. The Exalt may stop, stand, kneel or otherwise do whatever she wishes — the effects will not end until she wishes for the Charm to dissipate or the scene changes.

EAGLE-WING STYLE

Cost: 4 motes, 1 Willpower
Duration: One Scene
Type: Simple
Minimum Athletics: 5
Minimum Essence: 3
Prerequisite Charms: Spider-Foot Style, Feather-Foot Style

The character can focus her Essence to actually repel the ground — she leaps and will continue to move





through the air for the rest of the scene. The character moves with a speed up to triple her sprinting distance per turn. She can effectively fly like a bird, but she must keep moving at no less than half her sprinting distance every turn, or she will have to land and end the Charm. Though she can “climb” higher obstacles such as walls and cliffs by zooming along the vertical surface, a character flying with this Charm cannot naturally maintain an altitude higher above the ground (or whatever flat, stable surface lies below her) than three times her normal vertical leaping distance — so, no more than 3 x her Strength + Athletics in yards.

To direct the flows of Essence, the character must keep one arm extended out in front of her. As a result, she cannot use bows or any other two handed weapons while flying. However, she may use thrown weapons, fight unarmed or wield one-handed hand-to-hand weapons normally, regardless of how fast she is moving. The character can engage in aerial duels with opponents capable of taking to the air, or she can hurl thrown weapons at foes on the ground or swoop down and strike them as she flies past.

Flying characters may be attacked only by ranged attacks, by other flying or leaping characters or on the

initiative count when they attack someone on the ground. Keep in mind that any foe who rolled a higher initiative can delay his action and attack the character as she swoops by. People other than the character's target who attempt to strike the Exalt as she swoops in for the attack do so at -3 dice (due to the Exalt's speed), unless they are using long weapons such as spears or poleaxes. In such cases, the penalty is reduced to -1. The Exalt's target can attack the Exalt normally and without penalty, but only during the initiative count in which he, the target, is attacked. Otherwise, he must use some sort of ranged attack.

EAGLE-WING STYLE TRAVEL SPEEDS

Dexterity	Speed in MPH
1	47
2	53
3	59
4	65
5	71
6	77

AWARENESS

OWL-EYE TECHNIQUE

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Awareness: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Sensory Acuity Prana

A character who uses this Charm can see in absolute darkness without penalty. For the next full day, the character can see equally well on a bright sunny day, on a clear night under the full moon or in a totally lightless cell 10 yards underground. The only sign that a character is using this Charm is that her eyes become somewhat luminescent in dim light, flashing Solar gold from certain angles. This Charm does not allow the character to see more easily through fog or smoke, nor does it help her detect spirits or anyone who has been rendered invisible.

BARRIER-BYPASSING SENSES

Cost: 6 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Awareness: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Unsurpassed (Sense) Discipline

The character can transcend physical limits and extend her senses past a single barrier. The character can see, hear, touch, smell or taste anything that is on the other side of a barrier that is no thicker than the character's Essence in yards. The character can observe events on the other side of a closed door, hear a conversation inside a locked stone cell or feel a powerful artifact locked inside a safe. The character cannot actually interact with the object, simply gain sensory impressions.

EYE OF THE UNCONQUERED SUN

Cost: 12 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Awareness: 6

Minimum Essence: 6

Prerequisite Charms: Unsurpassed Sight Discipline

This potent Charm allows the character to pierce all forms of deception and disguise. Everyone using magical or mundane disguises is seen in their true form, even a Lunar Exalted whose Tell has not yet been spotted or an Immaculate using Shrouding the Body and Mind. Everyone who is hiding is revealed to the character's gaze, regardless of whether they are using ordinary Stealth or potent invisibility magics, including mind-altering effects such as Mental Invisibility Technique. Everyone and everything that was deliberately disguised or hidden

can be clearly seen. No known magic can deceive the power of this Charm — Eye of the Unconquered Sun is a perfect defense against invisibility and concealment. When a character uses this Charm, his Caste Mark glows as if the Exalt's anima banner were at the 12-15 mote level if it does not already, shattering all illusion and invisibility Charms and making mundane stealth impossible.

DODGE

LEAPING DODGE METHOD

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Dodge: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Shadow Over Water

When attacked, the Exalted makes a prodigious leap to take herself out of harms way. When making any dodge using this Charm, the character avoids the attack by leaping up to (Strength + Athletics) x 3 yards vertically or twice this distance horizontally. The Exalt can choose the exact direction and distance of this leap, so long as it is away from her attacker. Leaping Dodge Method is explicitly permitted to be part of a Combo with any Dodge Charms, including Reflex Sidestep Technique. This Charm will break multiple attack techniques if the attacker cannot follow the dodging character.

LARCENY

INESCAPABLE SHADOW OF THE SUN

Cost: 1 mote per die

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Larceny: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Seasoned Criminal Method

None can challenge the ability of the Night Caste to walk among criminals, learn their methods and infiltrate their ranks. Likewise, when members of the Night Caste become corrupted, none can excel their ability as natural rulers of the underworld. It is said by many that, during the First Age, some among the Night Caste led organized criminal groups, which helped govern lawless areas and protect the vast cities of that era. It is unknown if this is true or simply history garbled by the propaganda of the Immaculates, however.

Through the use of this Charm, the Exalt can add 1 die per mote of Essence spent to any activities relating to navigating the criminal underworld, planning crimes, recruiting criminal underlings or comprehending the criminal mindset. The character cannot more than double his Attribute + Larceny dice pool. This Charm does not



aid in technical larceny such as picking locks and pockets or actually executing con games and espionage rings. It simply allows the character preternatural skill as a crime boss or a scourge of crime.

IMPASSABLE PORTAL TECHNIQUE

Cost: 7 motes

Duration: Special

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Larceny: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Lock-Opening Touch

Sometimes, locking a door is as valuable as opening one. With a single touch, the character can lock any door. Regardless of whether the door previously had a lock or not, it is impossible to open for a number of hours equal to the character's permanent Essence. A key that would ordinarily open the door will not work until after the scene is over. The only way to open the door in the meantime is to break it down. Doors that do not possess locks can be pushed open normally once this Charm ends, but lockable doors remain normally locked after the Charm ends.

STEALTH

UNSEEN GHOST WALK

Cost: 7 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Essence in minutes

Type: Simple

Minimum Stealth: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Invisible Statue Spirit

This Charm allows the character to literally vanish from sight. She can become completely invisible. The only limit to this Charm is the fact that the character must move slowly and carefully (move no more than six yards per turn) and cannot engage in any form of combat or perform any other activity that involves rapid movement. Any such movements instantly disrupt the Charm and render the character visible. However, the character can walk slowly down a corridor, pour a dram of poison in someone's cup or steal a treaty from a table. Characters using Unseen Ghost Walk are not immaterial. They can be detected normally by touch, scent or hearing.

Enemies' players may attempt a reflexive Perception + Awareness roll each turn for the enemies to spot the character. If the observer saw the character disappear, noticed the character last turn or witnessed an action performed by the character, the difficulty for the check is only 1. However, the difficulty increases by one every turn that the character remains undetected, to a maximum of 5. If the observer has some reason to believe that someone is around (a knocked over vase, footprints in the sand),

the difficulty for spotting the character starts at 3 and scales up. Just looking casually for the invisible Exalted has a difficulty of 5. Even when spotted, any actions taken against the character are at a +2 difficulty.

MUNDANE ITEMS

NEW MARTIAL ARTS WEAPONS

Fighting Chain

Fighting chains are slender, sturdy chains with thumb-sized weights on either end. Most fighting chains are between three and five yards long and are used in a manner similar to a seven-section staff. In addition to making ordinary attacks, fighting chains can be used to wrap around a target. Also, in addition to being able to use the weapon to perform stunts involving grabbing onto, swinging from and pulling objects, these weapons can be used to perform clinch and hold maneuvers. These are otherwise normal clinches or holds, save that they can only use the character's Martial Arts (rather than Brawl) and that they can be done at a range of up to three yards.

Sai

Sai are three-pronged, fork-shaped weapons as long as large daggers, which are specially designed to twist weapons out of an opponent's grasp. The central spike is used to stab opponents, while the two curving side blades can be used to catch an opponent's weapons and disarm the opponent. Sai are normally used in pairs — when using sai, characters reduce the difficulty of all disarming attempts by 1 (to difficulty 2, see *Exalted*, p. 238-239).

Tiger Fork

A tiger fork is a spear with a three-pronged tip — this weapon resembles a sai mounted on a long shaft. Tiger forks can be made as either long or short spears, but in both cases, the two curving side projections can be used to catch an opponent's weapons and disarm the opponent. Characters wielding tiger forks reduce the difficulty of all disarming attempts by 1 (to difficulty 2, see *Exalted*, p. 238-239).

NEW MISSILE WEAPONS

Blowgun

Blowguns are narrow hollow tubes between one and two yards long that are used to fire small darts normally tipped with some form of poison. This weapon uses the Thrown skill.

Crossbow

Only the people of the Haslanti League and a small number of elite mercenary formations use crossbows. They based the design of these weapons on artifacts found during their excavations of the frozen city of Crystal. The Haslanti keep these weapons secret and will not sell them to outsiders. If Haslanti troops are forced to abandon a crossbow, they pull out a specially



Name	Speed	Acc.	Damage	Defense	Resources	Minimums
Fighting Chain*	+3	-1	+2L	+2	•	S••, D••••, MA••••
Sai	+3	0	+0L	+2**	••	D•••, MA•••
Short Tiger Fork*	+1	-1	+3L	+1**	•	D•••, MA•••
Tiger Fork*	+3	-1	+3L	+1**	•	S••, D••••, MA•••

*This weapon can be used by a character on foot to attack a mounted opponent without penalty.
 **Reduce the difficulty of all disarming attempts by -1 when using this weapon (see Exalted, pp. 238-239).

designed pin, and the complex reloading mechanism falls to many pieces. The Haslanti use three types of crossbow. The largest is over a yard long and made of steel and brass. This is a slow weapon normally only used from fixed mountings on iceships, air boats and city walls. The medium-sized crossbow is the standard ranged weapon of the Haslanti infantry. It is the length of a short sword and is made of iron and ivory.

The smallest crossbow is an assassin's weapon made of feather steel. The entire bow is no longer than the length of a large man's hand and is normally worn strapped to the back of the user's forearm. This crossbow even can be folded flat so that the entire weapon can be concealed under bulky sleeves. Bolts for these mini-crossbow are normally poisoned. Haslanti weaponsmiths can duplicate the crossbows' intricate gear-driven automatic cranquin mechanism, but they are incapable of making improvements on such a sophisticated device.

Crossbows can only fire two types of bolts, blunt-headed fowling bolts that do bashing damage and steel-tipped armor-piercing bolts — crossbows cannot fire either broadhead or frog crotch bolts. Crossbows use the Archery skill but are not compatible with Archery Charms that allow characters to fire multiple arrows per turn. Exceptional crossbows add +1 to accuracy and 50 to range but cannot increase their rate.

Firedust Grenade

These weapons are small spherical or egg-shaped containers made from cheap pottery or, occasionally, blown eggshells. Filled with firedust and containing special detonators made from a combination of firedust, tinder and flint, these grenades explode on contact with a hard surface. When the grenade hits, it does the listed damage to the target. Anyone within two yards of the impact point instead receives 4L damage. Apply this damage if the grenade is parried or misses its target in a situation where it will certainly burst. Anyone with Craft (Alchemy) •• and a supply of firedust can create firedust grenades. These grenades may go off if a character drops them, falls more than 10 feet or is knocked back more than 2 yards. These problems can be prevented if the grenades are stored in a padded case. Removing a grenade from a

padded case takes a full turn; at the beginning of the next turn, it is ready to be thrown.

Poison Needle

Poison needles are the ultimate in subtle assassination instruments. These tiny spikes are as long as a small finger and as wide as a house cat's fang. They can be thrown with the flick of a finger or even held in the mouth and spat at a target. While they do very little damage, they have special grooves to hold poison. A single scratch delivers their venom, which means that any botch made when using a poison needle results in the character accidentally poisoning herself.

Shuriken

Shuriken are small star-shaped blades that can be thrown in large numbers. A skilled attacker can throw a handful of shuriken at once. When throwing multiple shuriken, subtract one die from the Dexterity + Thrown pool for each throwing star used in the attack. If someone with a Dexterity + Thrown dice pool of seven dice was throwing four throwing stars, they would have a dice pool of 3 (7 - 4) dice for every star. All shuriken used in this fashion must be thrown at the same target. Make a single attack roll and apply it to all of the throwing stars, and apply the target's defense roll likewise. Shuriken are often poisoned. A Character can throw up to his Thrown ability in shuriken in a single attack. Exalted who throw multiple shuriken may use Charms to enhance this attack. At the character's discretion, any bonuses from such Charms can either have their full effect on a single one of these shuriken, or the bonuses can be divided up between each of the shuriken. For example, a character that received a +6 bonus to her attack roll and was throwing three shuriken could apply the +6 to a single shuriken or +2 to each shuriken. However, a single Charm cannot apply its entire bonus to all shuriken in a single throw. However, characters can create Combos that allow them to use the same Charm multiple times, so that each shuriken can benefit from the full affect of a Thrown Charm.

Sleep Grenades

Filled with pollen from the rare lethe-flower trees of the Eastern Jungles, when one of these fragile pottery containers shatters, it disperses a fine cloud of these spores. Indoors, this pollen can fill a room up to 20 feet on a side. Outdoors, these grenades are ineffective in high



wind. In relative calm outdoor situations, they still only affect individuals within two yards of where the grenade hits. In either case, the players of everyone who breathes the spores must make a Stamina + Resistance roll of difficulty 2. The characters of those who fail fall unconscious for the next 30 - (Stamina + Resistance) minutes. Because of their supernaturally resistant natures, Exalted only require one success on a Stamina + Resistance roll to resist the effects of sleep grenades, and the length of time they sleep is measured in turns, not minutes.

Players of characters who are outdoors need only make a single roll for their characters to resist the spores — indoors, players must make a new roll every turn their characters are in the same room with a cloud of these spores. Anyone with Craft (Alchemy) and a supply of lethe-flower pollen can create sleep grenades. Wearing a wet scarf over her face will completely protect the user for the effects of these grenades. Like firedust grenades, they will explode if dropped and must be kept in a padded case to avoid going off if the character falls or suffers knockback.

Sling

Slings are small pouches with thongs attached to either side. A stone or lead sling “bullet” is placed in the pouch, and the sling is swung in a circle at high speed, hurling its projectile at great velocity. Slings are inexpensive and can use any rock of approximately the correct size as ammunition, but they are slightly more difficult to use than bows. Slings use the Thrown skill.

Folding Glider (Resources •••, •••• outside of the North)

The Haslanti are regarded as the premier manufacturers of gliders. This model is made from ultra-light feather steel and spider silk. This glider weighs only 20 pounds, and when fully folded, it fills only half of a standard traveling pack. It takes two turns to assemble it into an exquisite glider with two narrow, bird-like wings that are each 12 feet long and a tail that unfolds like a fan. In one additional turn, the character can strap herself into the glider and is then ready to launch. Launching a glider

requires that the pilot jump off of a precipice at least five yards high unless there are at least moderate winds blowing. Launching from off of a cliff, and most other standard glider rolls, are only difficulty 1. The player of a glider pilot attempting to become airborne from ground level with a good headwind must succeed in a Dexterity + Ride roll of difficulty 2 for the character to get airborne. Gliders can normally fly as fast as a galloping horse, and with a favorable wind behind them, they can fly somewhat faster. Folding a glider requires only a single turn. All Northerners with two or more dots in Ride know how to pilot a glider. Anyone else who wishes to know how to operate one must have at least one dot in Ride and purchase a specialty in Glider.

ENCHANTED ITEMS

HEARTHSTONES

HEARTHSTONES OF AIR

MEMORY STONE (MANSE •)

Trigger: Constant

An Exalt who carries this stone will never forget anything. Every image or incident, from a face seen in a crowd last week to the contents of a treaty that he hurriedly read before being chased off by guards, will be remembered in perfect and exact detail. The wearer’s player can even make Perception + Awareness rolls after the fact for the Exalt to notice further details about an event. Although this Hearthstone does not allow the wearer to learn Abilities, Charms or spells any faster or easier, the wearer could read a 1,000 page ancient tome and remember every word and illustration 50 years later. These unnaturally sharp memories soon fade forever if the character ever ceases to be attuned to this stone (the stone, not the Manse). If the character reattunes, the memories are still gone. This Hearthstone is clear and colorless, with a shining rainbow opalescence inside.

Name	Acc.	Damage	Rate	Range	Resources
Blowgun	-1	Str+0L	2	50	•
Crossbow	+1	5L	1	125	••
Mini-Crossbow	0	3L	2	75	•••
Siege Crossbow	0	8L	1/10	250	•••
Firedust Grenade	0	9L	3	10	••• (••• outside of the South)
Poison Needle	-2	1L	3	5	•
Shuriken	0	Str+0L	Special	10	•
Sleep Grenade	+2	Special	3	10	••• (••• outside of the East)
Sling	-1	Str+2L	1	100	•

WIND JEWEL (MANSE •••)**Trigger:** Concentration

This Hearthstone grants the wearer the ability to control minor winds and light breezes within 10 yards. The character can easily perform simple feats such as clearing a room of smoke in a few minutes, blowing out torches or stilling the wind to enough that uncovered candles can burn without fear of being blown out. The wearer can also precisely direct the wind so that it can blow out only one candle from a candelabra or rattle the pages of a single open tome, while not disturbing the other papers on a table. To perform such complex and exacting feats requires a Wits + Larceny roll. Success indicates that the wind has performed only the desired feat, failure means that either the wind cannot achieve that task or that it has also affected nearby objects, while a botch means that the wind has affected something quite different from what was desired. The wearer can also summon up a moderately strong breeze to help or hinder a ship. It can add or subtract up to 20 miles per hour from the speed of any single craft up to the size of a yacht or small cargo vessel (add •• to the ship's speed) and up to 10 miles per hour for larger ships (add • to the ship's speed). These same breezes can also be used to blow the character upward so that he takes no damage from falls. Occasionally, tiny breezes will play around the wearer when he is exceedingly upset. This stone is a transparent sky blue, with a slight cloudiness inside.

HEARTHSTONES OF EARTH**STONE OF THE EARTHWEB (MANSE ••)****Trigger:** Constant

An Exalted bearing this Hearthstone never need fear sneak attacks or stumbling around in the dark. While wearing it, the Exalt can feel the earth around her just as a spider can feel the strands of its web. Within a radius of 10 yards, the Exalt can feel everything that rests upon the ground and is on the same floor she is standing on. She can feel size, approximate weight and any movement of all such objects and individuals. A large chest would be a heavy rectangular weight, while even the most carefully hidden assassin would feel like a live person standing very still. As long as the Exalt is standing upon the ground or a floor that is built directly upon the ground, she can feel everything upon the ground that is within her range. However, if she is standing upon the upper story of a building, then these perceptions only apply to objects and people resting upon that upper floor. Also, the Exalt

cannot sense anything that is not on the floor. Hanging lamps, assassins standing upon desks or couching in windowsills cannot be felt with this item (although the desk the assassin is standing on might seem oddly heavy). This Hearthstone is a rough light-gray stone covered with a complex network of black veins. While using this stone, the character suffers no penalties for poor visibility and can effectively detect all invisible characters, so long as they touch the ground (obviously, this has no effect on mind tricks such as Mental Invisibility Technique).

WONDERS**SLING OF DEADLY PROWESS (ARTIFACT •)**

While many Exalts enjoy using flashy weapons such as powerbows and daiklaves, others prefer having more subtle armaments that can be easily hidden in a pocket or the side of a boot. This sling consists of a cord and pouch that appear to have been exquisitely carved or forged from a single piece of one of the Five Magical Materials. Unless it is attuned to someone, this sling is solid and completely inflexible. If the character spends 3 points of Essence to attune herself to this item, it becomes ready to use. The bonus provided by Magical Material is the same as for powerbows.

SPIDER GRIPPERS (ARTIFACT ••)

This item consists of a set of boots, gloves, elbow pads and kneepads that allow a character to cling to walls and other surfaces like a spider. The character can walk up a wall at (Dexterity +12)/2 yards a turn. She can even climb sheer slick surfaces such as the ancient glass towers of Chiaroscuro. These items also allow the character to walk on narrow or slick surfaces such as wet mossy rocks or tightropes without risk of falling or to jump onto a rain slick ledge without risk of slipping. The character's hands, feet, knees and elbows adhere to the surface being traversed unless she desires them to release. While using this item, a character can fight without penalty, even while clinging to a wall. Also, the character can safely climb while carrying any weight she could normally carry. While the pieces can be from various expensive materials, they are most commonly made as a set of black leather boots, gloves, elbow pads and kneepads constructed with a small amount of the Five Magical Materials, which automatically alter their size to fit the wearer. To use this item, or even to cause it to resize, the wearer must commit 3 motes of Essence to the gear.



Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range	Artifact
Sling of Deadly Prowess	+1	+4L	2	150	•



BELT OF SHADOW WALKING (ARTIFACT ●●●)

In the ancient days of the First Realm, the greatest members of the Night Caste all wore these enchanted belts. Most have been lost — the few dozen that remain are highly prized by their owners. Each of these items is a night-black belt made from leather from the wings of giant bats. The belt can control shadows and cause them to conceal the wearer. As a result, the difficulty of all Perception + Awareness rolls to see or hear the wearer are increased by 2. However, this is only the least of the belt's powers. When the wearer expends 5 motes of Essence, she can transform into a shadow for a scene. In this form, she can slip under a door or slide through the thinnest crack. This ability can only be used when the sun is down. Also, in well-lit regions, observers will notice the existence of an unusual shadow with a successful Perception + Awareness roll at difficulty 3 unless the wearer conceals himself in a larger shadow.

When the character is a shadow, she can only be attacked with sorcery, Charms or weapons made from the Five Magical Materials. Otherwise, she is immune to harm, although she can be trapped in a room that is sealed tightly enough. The character can wear any armor and can take any object she can carry into the shadows with her. However, it is impossible to transform any other living things into shadow, and any living things the character carries are left behind when the Exalt fades into shadow. Once the scene ends, the character must remain in solid form for at least three full minutes before transforming back into a shadow. Attuning this garment requires the commitment of 6 motes of Essence. The belt has no settings for Hearthstones.

CIRCLE OF SPIRITS (ARTIFACT ●●●)

This item is a circlet formed of one of the Five Magical Materials, with a setting for a single Hearthstone. Anyone who is attuned to this circlet can see and hear all immaterial spirits. Also, this item has additional properties depending upon what material it is made from. Using spirit circlets requires the wearer to commit 3 motes of Essence to activate both the Hearthstone and the circlet.

Orichalcum: All rolls to sense spirits or other occult phenomena are made at -1 difficulty (minimum of 1).

Moonsilver: All Stealth rolls to hide from spirits are made at -1 difficulty (minimum of 1).

Jade: Gain one additional die to all rolls to attack spirits or to defend against their attacks.

Starmetal: All rolls to bargain or negotiate with spirits are made at -1 difficulty (minimum of 1).

Soulsteel: All spirits except the dead increase the difficulty of all attacks against the wearer by 1.

GAUNTLETS OF DISTANT CLAWS (ARTIFACT ●●●)

This item consists of a pair of bracers attached to lightweight fingerless gauntlets with open, uncovered palms. These items do not interfere with manual dexterity and can even be worn while the character is picking locks or performing delicate surgery. On command, each gauntlet can extend a trio of razor sharp claws. These claws are deadly weapons that also reduce the difficulty of all Athletics rolls involving climbing by 1 (to a minimum of 1). In addition, the character can fire each set of hook-like claws as a projectile attached to a fine but nearly unbreakable chain. The chains can fire up to 15 yards. Used in this fashion, the gauntlets can be used to attack distant foes or as grappling hooks. In addition, the character can retract either hook with a single thought. The hooks retract instantly and with such force that, if the hook is embedded in a high parapet, the character has the choice of it either allowing the claws to relax their bite and return to the gauntlet or of allowing the gauntlet to pull him up to the claw in mere seconds. Retracting the hooks is a reflexive action. Clever character can even use these items to swing from building to building or to retrieve small items. These claws can only be used in pairs and require that the character commit 3 motes of Essence to each of them. These weapons can be made out of any of the Five Magical Materials and receive the standard benefits from such construction. The left gauntlet has a setting for a single Hearthstone.

ULTIMATELY USEFUL TUBE (ARTIFACT ●●●)

In its normal form, this item is simply a short hollow tube, slightly less than a foot long and the diameter of an average finger. One end has a blue rim, while the other has a red rim. In this form it can be used as crude flute. This tube can also be used as a snorkel, a staff or a blowgun. Not only can the character breathe freely through the snorkel, it also keeps out all waves and spray and automatically lengthens as the character descends in the water, to a maximum length of two yards.

To use this item as a staff, the character must pull on the ends of the tube, until an inner sleeve slides out. The tube can be expanded to a length of up to two yards. To use it as a blowgun, the character need only expand it to a length of one yard. At this point, whenever the character puts it to her lips, spends a mote of Essence and blows, the weapon will fire a dart at a target. The darts created by this artifact are poi-

Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Artifact
Melee Claws	+1	+1	+4L	+2	●●●
Name	Accuracy	Damage	Range	Rate	Artifact
Fired Claws	+2	9L	15'	2	●●●



Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense
Staff	+3	+1	+4L	+2
Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range
Blow Gun*	+1	1L**	2	100
* This dart requires 1 mote to create and fire.				
** The attack is poisoned, and Strength does not add to damage.				
Poison	Diff.	Success	Failure	Duration/Penalty
Paralytic Poison	2	3B	6B	4 hours/-3
Lethal Poison	2	2L	4L	4 hours/-2

soned, with the type of poison depending upon which end of the tube is being used. Blowing from the blue end fires a dart tipped with a poison that produces unconsciousness, while blowing from the red end fires a dart tipped with a lethal poison. Using this item for any purpose requires that the character spend 4 motes of Essence to attune it to herself. Only someone who has attuned this item can alter its length.

CLOAK OF VANISHING ESCAPE
(ARTIFACT ●●●●)

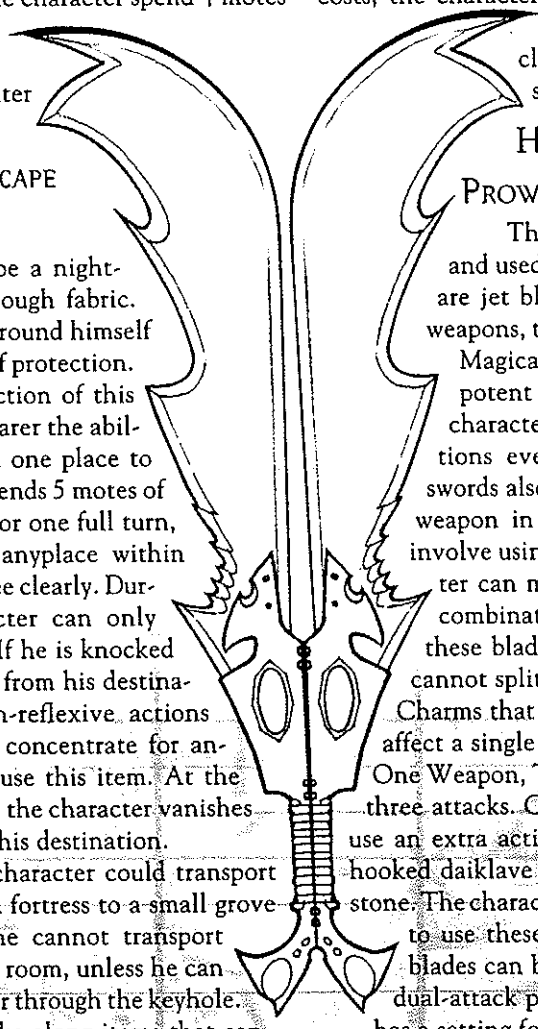
This item appears to be a night-black cloak of extremely tough fabric. Anyone wearing it pulled around himself gains an additional 1L/1B of protection. However, the primary function of this cloak is that it gives the wearer the ability to move instantly from one place to another. If the character spends 5 motes of Essence and concentrates for one full turn, he can transport himself anyplace within Essence miles that he can see clearly. During this turn, the character can only perform reflexive actions. If he is knocked down, forced to look away from his destination or performs any non-reflexive actions during this turn, he must concentrate for another turn to successfully use this item. At the beginning of the next turn, the character vanishes and instantly reappears at his destination.

Using this item, the character could transport himself from the walls of a fortress to a small grove several miles away, but he cannot transport himself into a neighboring room, unless he can clearly see under the door or through the keyhole. The character can only take along items that can

also be concealed under the cloak. He cannot carry more than a single additional person along on this journey, and carrying along any other living thing larger than a house cat or a small dog costs an additional 5 motes of Essence. In addition to the other costs, the character must also spend 5 motes of Essence to attune himself to the cloak. The clasp of this cloak has a setting for a single Hearthstone.

HOOKEK DAIKLAVES OF DUAL PROWESS (ARTIFACT ●●●●)

These hooked swords are always found and used in pairs. Their hilts and sheathes are jet black, but like most other magical weapons, they can be made of any of the Five Magical Materials. While each blade is a potent weapon, when wielded together, a character can take two hand-to-hand actions every turn without penalty. These swords also eliminate the penalty for using a weapon in the off hand. Each action must involve using one of the swords — the character can make two attacks, two parries or a combination of both. However, when using these blades to take two actions, characters cannot split their dice pools. All extra action Charms that grant extra attacks or parries only affect a single blade — if the character used the One Weapon, Two Blows Charm, she could make three attacks. Combos can allow the character to use an extra action Charm with each blade. Each hooked daiklave has a setting for a single Hearthstone. The character must commit 8 motes of Essence to use these blades — 4 for each blade. The blades can be used singly, but only grant their dual-attack powers if used together. Each blade has a setting for a Hearthstone near the hilt.



Name	Speed	Acc.	Damage	Defense	Artifact	Minimums
Hooked Daiklave	+2	+2	+5L	+5	●●●●	S●●, D●●●, MA●●●



APPENDIX I: SIGNATURE CHARACTERS

The Iron Wolves are the wrathful left hand of the Unconquered Sun. Those who would conspire against the light, they perceive. Those who would use guile and insightfulness to overthrow the righteous, they thwart. Those who evade the grasp of the Dawn and the incantations of the Twilight, they strike at. Their methods are often morally questionable, but righteousness must defend itself, even at great cost. Historically, the Concealing Shadows bore the burden of distinction and guilt as the covert agents and assassins of the Unconquered Sun and of the Solar Deliberative. Now, in the Age of Sorrows, they must

choose their paths. Will the Daggers of Heaven be the defenders of a new order, or will they use their powers to become mocking shadows, criminals and assassins beyond the reach of any law?

This book presents the dawn of the Age of Sorrows from the points of view of five of the Nightbringers. These characters are described in this appendix as starting Solars. They can be used as pregenerated characters or as jumping-off points for character designs. With experience points added, they can form the foundation for more mature Solars.

HARMONIOUS JADE

Quote: *I do not claim to know everything about your city, but I know what can be done and what cannot be done. What you ask can be done — but there will be a price.*

Prelude: Orphaned at birth, you were sold into slavery before you were a week old. You learned to use the bow before you could walk. You learned to move unseen before you could feed yourself. The beatings were fierce and frequent when you made mistakes, but you made very few mistakes more than once. You were shaped into a killer in the service of the Yozis, and while your cult's isolated headquarters was your home, all the cities of the Southlands were your hunting grounds. All through your adolescence and young adulthood, you killed the enemies of your cult or those whose own enemies would pay the cult for your services. You never doubted your skill or the rightness of your cause, until one day when your target was far better guarded than you had expected. You had to flee from his guards long before you came close enough to strike, and it was only your sudden Exaltation that permitted you to escape at all.

You returned to the cult, hoping that it could help you understand what had happened to you. Rather than rejoicing in your newfound skills, the cult reviled you for your transformation, and tried to sacrifice you to the very Yozis you had faithfully served for so long. But your powers were greater than the cultists suspected, and you fought your way free of them.

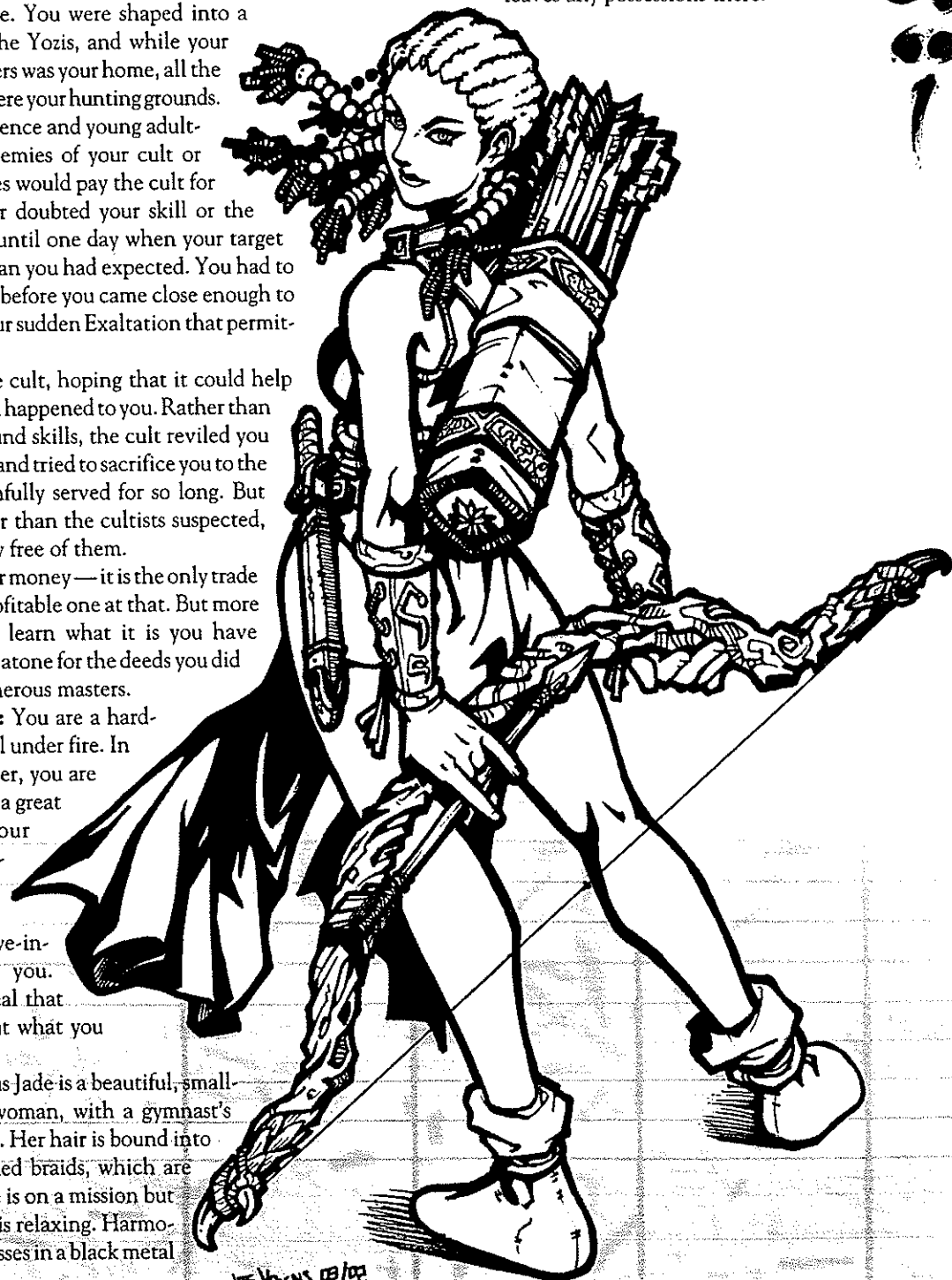
Now, you still kill for money — it is the only trade you know, and a very profitable one at that. But more than that, you seek to learn what it is you have become and, perhaps, to atone for the deeds you did in service to your treacherous masters.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a hardened killer and very cool under fire. In social situations, however, you are remarkably naïve about a great number of things; your childhood was so far removed from the ordinary that even simple things may be awe-inspiring or puzzling to you. There is still a great deal that you need to learn about what you have become.

Image: Harmonious Jade is a beautiful, small-framed, dark-skinned woman, with a gymnast's body and a model's face. Her hair is bound into hundreds of long, beaded braids, which are bound tightly when she is on a mission but hang loosely when she is relaxing. Harmonious Jade normally dresses in a black metal

breastplate, decorated around the edges with orichalcum. Beneath it, she wears a white or gray silk shirt and a pair of slightly baggy gray pants. She also wears sure-footed, soft-soled boots and a black belt.

Equipment: Short orichalcum powerbow set with a freedom stone, quiver with a dozen arrows, orichalcum breastplate, exceptional knife. Harmonious Jade owns no more than she can easily carry; her Demesne is a small cavern in the hills south of Chiaroscuro, but she rarely leaves any possessions there.



HUYLA

Quote: This city is under my protection — I shall cleanse it of inhuman monsters and all those who aid them.

Prelude: Your family fled to Nexus when your father quit the Lintha Family. You grew up around the docks of Nexus. Your father was murdered when you were very young, but your mother earned enough to keep some semblance of a roof over your head. When you were old enough to work, you got a job running errands down at the docks. When you were 15, you met a man named Sliver. He was in his 20s and made his living as a fixer. He asked you for some information, and you ended up helping him rescue some children that had been captured by ravagers. You were helpful enough that you got him to give you a job as his assistant. Between retrieving stolen goods, beating up blackmailers and occasionally intimidating a merchant's competition, you earned a better living than you ever had before. You were also happy, and eventually, you and Sliver fell in love. He was one of the few people who could see beyond your ugly face and notice the bright, passionate person that you were. For the first time in your life, you were truly happy.

You were with him for almost five years, then you both ran afoul of a new ganglord named Ophilis Ses.

Ses was a Night Caste Exalted snakeman from Great Forks who wished to expand his operation into Nexus.

When you two got in his way, he killed Sliver and came after you. Although overcome by grief when Ses delivered Sliver's head to your doorstep, you ran. Unable to get away, you were trapped near the mysterious and deadly Tomb of Night. You became Exalted the moment you fled into it, seeking to avoid death at Ses's hands. You found you could actually both see and survive in the Tomb of Night and that it was a powerful Manse.

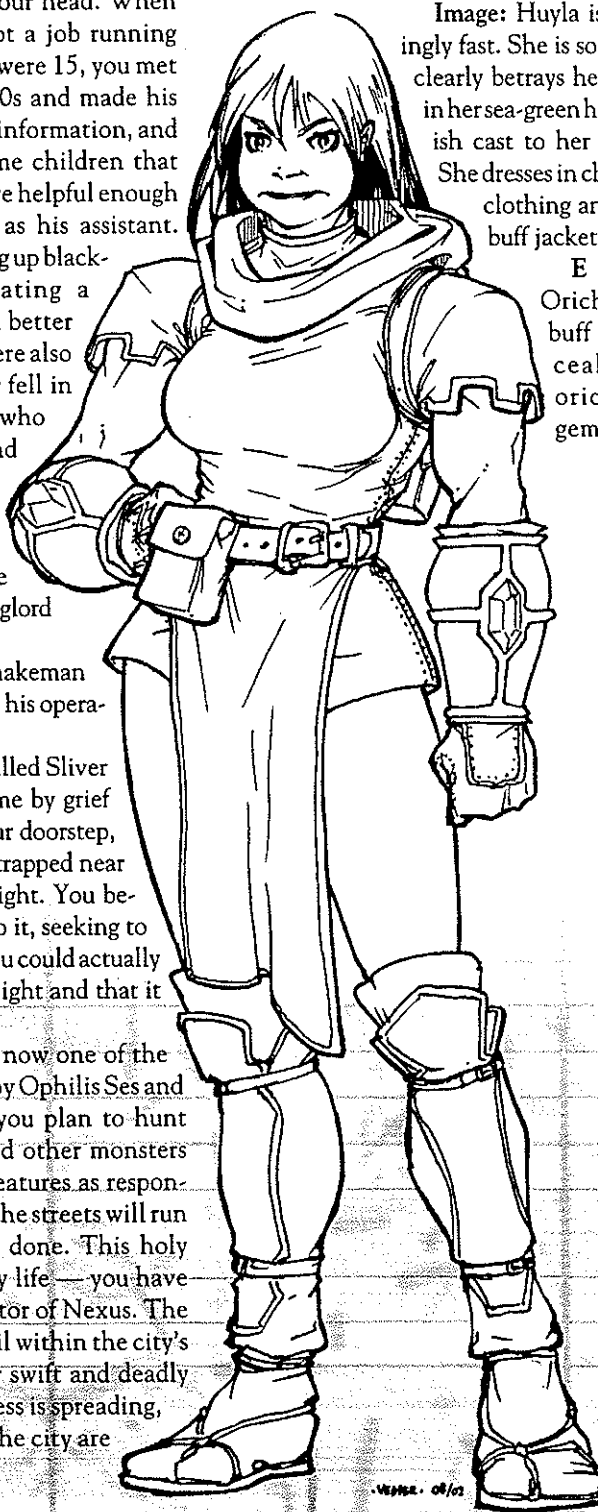
Once you realized that you were now one of the Solar Exalted, you took a vow to destroy Ophilis Ses and his entire organization. After that, you plan to hunt down all of the Fair Folk, undead and other monsters that inhabit Nexus. You see these creatures as responsible for all of the ills of your city, and the streets will run with their foul ichor before you are done. This holy work give purpose to your now-empty life — you have decided to become the hidden protector of Nexus. The monsters and any others who work evil within the city's boundaries must now answer to your swift and deadly justice. Currently, word of your prowess is spreading, and people in the poorer sections of the city are

beginning to talk about a new and mysterious vigilante.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a person of few words and direct actions. You grew up on the streets and have a simple and harsh morality — anyone who hurts those weaker than they are must pay, and all inhuman creatures must die. Hunting down Ses and the other creatures that infest Nexus consumes you — you have no life outside of your work.

Image: Huyla is large, but surprisingly fast. She is somewhat stocky and clearly betrays her Western ancestry in her sea-green hair and a faint greenish cast to her slightly puffy skin. She dresses in cheap but serviceable clothing and normally wears a buff jacket.

Equipment: Orichalcum reinforced buff jacket (with concealed plates), orichalcum bracers, gem of adamant skin





NAME: Huyla
 PLAYER: _____
 CASTE: Night

CONCEPT: Crimefighter
 NATURE: Judge
 ANIMA: _____

ATTRIBUTES

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

ABILITIES

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

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Artifact _____ ●●●●○
 Contacts _____ ●○○○○
 Influence _____ ●○○○○
 Manse _____ ●●●●○
 Resources _____ ●●○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○
 _____ ○○○○○

CHARMS

Name	Cost
Precision of the _____	_____
Striking Raptor _____	1/Die
Armored Scout's _____	5
Seasoned Criminal Method _____	10
Ten Magistrate's Eyes _____	3
Crafty Observation _____	_____
Method _____	5
Graceful Crane Stance _____	3

Name	Cost
Monkey Leap Technique _____	1
Thunderbolt Attack Prana _____	5, 1w
Increasing Strength _____	_____
Exercise _____	3/Dist
Sensory Acuity Prana _____	5
Sight in Lightless _____	_____
Caverns _____	_____

WEAPONS

Cestus
 SPD 4 ATK 8 DMG 7L PRY 8
Thrown Hatchet
 ATK 7 DMG 5L RATE 2 RNG 15

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

VIRTUES

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

ANIMA

HEALTH

SOAK
 B 16 L 11 A 9
 -1 MOBILITY PENALTY

ESSENCE

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
 PERSONAL 12 | _____
 PERIPHERAL 29 | _____
 COMMITTED 7 | _____

LIMIT BREAK

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

VIRTUE FLAW

Deliberate Cruelty

EXPERIENCE

-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"/>

ELIAS TREMALION

Quote: *I know I'm sworn to protect the Haslanti League, but what I really want now is a hot bath and a glass of fine wine.*

Prelude: The only son of a wealthy and prominent Haslanti merchant family, you were a disappointment to your parents. Although they provided you with the finest education, you showed little aptitude for commerce. Instead, you spent your days clambering over the rooftops of Icehome, spying on your friends and occasionally engaging in petty theft and wild dares. In desperation, your family sent you to study with your uncle, Shalas, who worked in the Haslanti diplomatic corps as a high level spy. He took you on as his aid and spent several years schooling you in formal manners and complex codes. You discovered that you enjoyed the complex whirl of a life spent traveling from court to court and had a talent for discreet observation and stealing documents.

Prepared for the life of a Haslanti spy, you looked forward to eventually succeeding your uncle and being the focus of both prestige and intrigue. You were horrified when you and your uncle were captured by Dynasts while you two were in Cherak to copy sensitive Realm documents. You were Exalted when you two were cast into a dungeon with no hope of escape or rescue. Your newfound powers enable both of you to win free of the Realm-controlled coastal states. Once back in your beloved Haslanti League, you offered your services as a spy and assassin and now hold only slightly less power than the ruling Oligarchs.

Although you are now one of the mighty Solar Exalted, you are still a Haslanti patriot and a daring rake. You initially pledged your powers to help protect your nation from all harm but are gradually realizing that you could also help the League expand and extend its influence throughout the North.

Roleplaying Hints: You are proud and deeply loyal to the Haslanti League. However, you are also profoundly devoted to all of life's pleasures. While you will do what is necessary to protect the League, you greatly prefer grand parties where you can sip fine brandy and dance with the exquisitely dressed wives of royalty to venturing out into the wilderness to spy on rude and hostile barbarians.

Image: Elias is a tall, slender young man of 25. He has pale skin, ice-blue eyes and long, straight, shining white hair—he moves with an easy and somewhat flamboyant grace. Elias dresses in

expensive jewelry and fine silks and always carries many carefully concealed weapons hidden in various pockets and folds of clothing

Equipment: Orichalcum chain shirt, feather-steel slashing sword, feather-steel knife and two throwing knives, sling of deadly prowess, Collar of Dawn's Cleansing Light, belt of shadow walking, folding glider



WEDDER 4201



NAME: Elias Tremalion
 PLAYER: _____
 CASTE: Night

CONCEPT: Spy
 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 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 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 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 type="checkbox"/> SAIL _____	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STEALTH _____	●●●○○	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIALIZE _____	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		CHARMS	
<u>Artifact</u> _____	●●●●●	Name	Cost
<u>Backing</u> _____	●●●●○	<u>Precision of the</u>	
<u>Resources</u> _____	●●●●○	<u>Striking Raptor</u>	1/Die
_____	○○○○○	<u>Harmonious Presence</u>	
_____	○○○○○	<u>Meditation</u>	6
_____	○○○○○	<u>Body-Mending Meditation</u>	10
_____	○○○○○	<u>Flawless Pickpocketing</u>	
_____	○○○○○	<u>Technique</u>	3
_____	○○○○○		
_____	○○○○○		

WEAPONS

Sling
 ATK 9 DMG 6L Rate 1 RNG 150
Slashing Sword
 SPD 11 ATK 9 DMG 5L PRY 9

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

VIRTUES

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

ANIMA

HEALTH

SOAK
 B 8 L 8 A 7

ESSENCE

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
 PERSONAL 12 | _____
 PERIPHERAL 29 | _____
 COMMITTED 15

LIMIT BREAK

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

VIRTUE FLAW

Foolhardy Contempt

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

EXPERIENCE

HAVESH, THE VANISHER

Quote: *He was dead the moment you paid me; his body just hasn't stopped moving yet. That will happen when I say the time is right and no sooner. I do not care to be rushed.*

Prelude: You were born among the outcasts of Yane, in the Varang lands where caste means everything — and you, therefore, meant nothing. Raised on the streets with the others who had no place in society, you survived by working as a day laborer, taking whatever jobs you could for whatever meager pay you were permitted to earn. You grew up tough and bitter, convinced that there was no way to improve your lot in life.

Then, one day, you overheard a craftsman trying to hire a foreign assassin to kill his uncle in order to advance his own career. The offered price was more money than you had seen in your lifetime, but the assassin felt it was not enough. When he left, you emerged from the shadows and offered to take the job. You could see the doubt in the craftsman's face, but he reluctantly agreed. As it turned out, killing a man was remarkably easy, and as you squeezed the life out of him, you felt new strength and vigor flow into your own body. When a city watch patrol appeared on the scene — too late — you were easily able to defeat them and make your escape before more arrived.

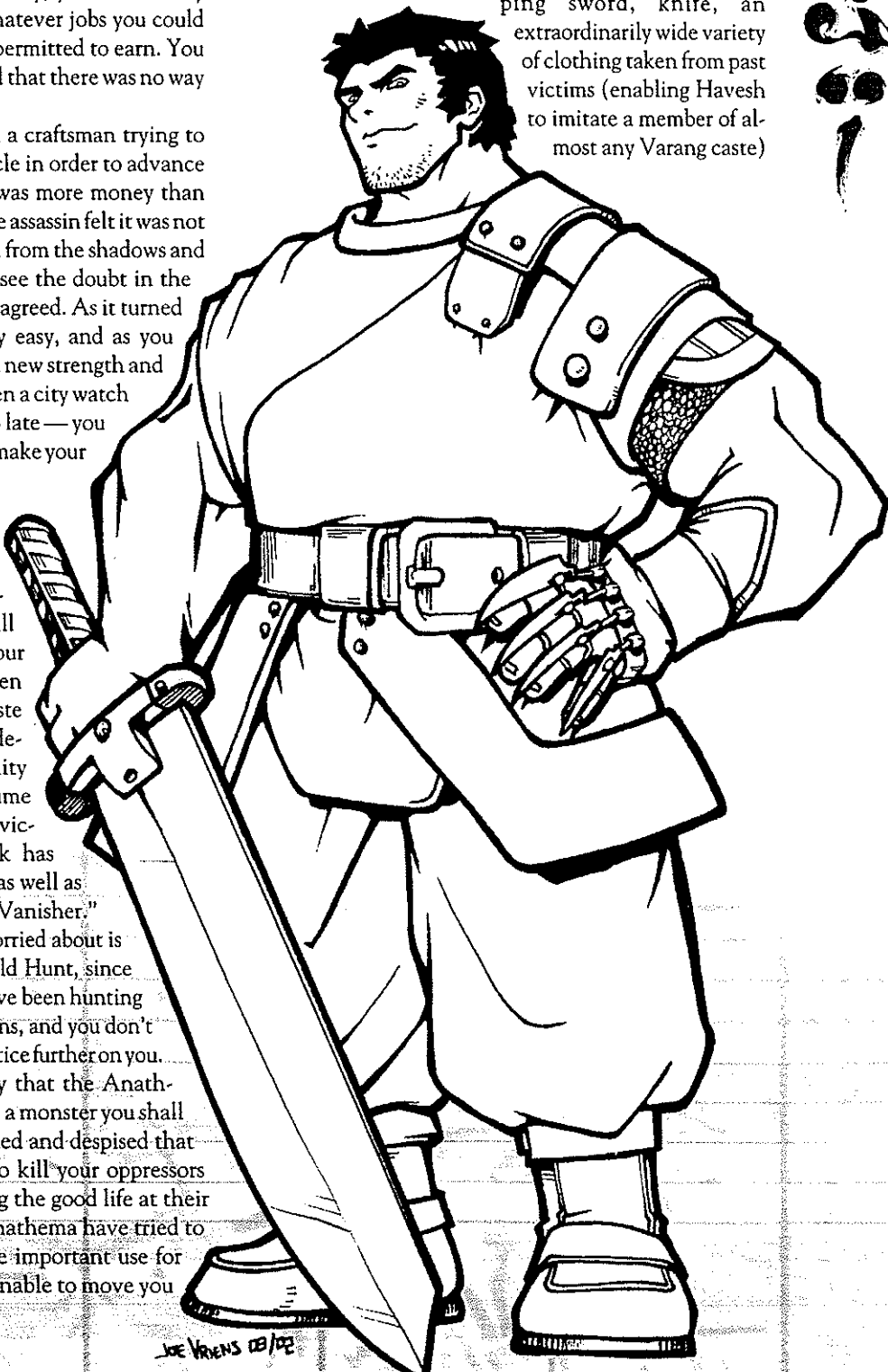
Since that day, you have used your powers to become a near-legendary assassin in the Varang lands. Once you have been hired, you observe your victim carefully, then kill him, dispose of his body and use your Charms to take his place. You then enjoy the lifestyle of your high-caste victim — the lifestyle you always deserved — until a new opportunity comes along. At that point, you resume your own shape, and your original victim simply disappears. This trick has earned you a fearsome reputation, as well as your infamous nickname — “The Vanisher.”

The only thing you're really worried about is coming to the attention of the Wyld Hunt, since from everything you've heard, they've been hunting and killing Anathema for generations, and you don't want to give them any reason to practice further on you.

Roleplaying Hints: They say that the Anathema are monsters? Very well, then, a monster you shall be. You spent so many years scorned and despised that you now relish the opportunity to kill your oppressors almost as much as you enjoy living the good life at their expense. Recently, some other Anathema have tried to convince you that there is a more important use for your powers, but they have been unable to move you as yet. Power is its own reward.

Image: Havesh is a compact, copper-skinned man, with formidable muscles and large, strong hands. His hair is short and black, and his eyes gray, though his true face is seldom seen. When he is in his own form, he wears the black and gray clothes of an outcast, though their cut is unexpectedly fine. Most of the time, however, he is living the life of another, and his current appearance is anyone's guess.

Equipment: Razorclaws, orichalcum chain shirt, chopping sword, knife, an extraordinarily wide variety of clothing taken from past victims (enabling Havesh to imitate a member of almost any Varang caste)





NAME: Havesh, the Vanisher CONCEPT: Assassin
 PLAYER: _____ NATURE: Bravo
 CASTE: Night 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> BRAWL	●●●●●	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PERFORMANCE	●●●○○	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> OCCULT	○○○○○
NIGHT		ECLIPSE		SPECIALTIES	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ATHLETICS	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> BUREAUCRACY	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> Performance	○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AWARENESS	●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> LINGUISTICS	●○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> (Impersonation)	●●○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DODGE	●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> RIDE	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/>	○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LARCENY	●●●●●	<input type="checkbox"/> SAIL	○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/>	○○○○○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STEALTH	●●●●●	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIALIZE	●●●○○	<input type="checkbox"/>	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		CHARMS	
<u>Artifact</u>	●●●○○	Name	Cost
<u>Influence</u>	●○○○○	<u>Ferocious Jab</u>	1
<u>Resources</u>	●●●○○	<u>Fists of Iron</u>	1
_____	○○○○○	<u>Dragon Coil</u>	3/Turn
_____	○○○○○	<u>Ox-Body</u>	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Seasoned Criminal</u>	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Method</u>	10
_____	○○○○○	<u>Flawlessly Impenetrable</u>	_____
_____	○○○○○	<u>Disguise</u>	7
_____	○○○○○	_____	_____
_____	○○○○○	_____	_____

WEAPONS

Razor Claws
 SPD 6 ATK 8 DMG 8L PRY 9
Chopping Sword
 SPD 4 ATK 3 DMG 8L PRY 3

ANIMA

LIMIT BREAK

□□□□□□□□□□

VIRTUE FLAW

Deliberate Cruelty

WILLPOWER

●●●●●●●○○○
 □□□□□□□□□□

HEALTH

SOAK
 B 8 L 8 A 7

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

VIRTUES

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

ESSENCE

●●●○○○
 PERSONAL 16 | _____
 PERIPHERAL 37 | _____
 COMMITTED 5 | _____

EXPERIENCE

JIUNAN NIGHTWARDEN

Quote: *I know that you are restless, spirit. If you will go in peace, I can ensure that the proper rites are performed to let you rest in the tranquility you deserve. If not, know that I will lay you to rest by other means.*

Prelude: You were born in the great mausoleum-city of Sijan and apprenticed to the Funerists' Observance at a young age. You learned the burial rites of a dozen lands and the best ways to propitiate restless spirits from throughout history. It was a good enough life, and you would have been content to live it for the rest of your days... until you saw her.

She was the most beautiful woman you had ever seen; and after her funeral, when the Deadspeakers' Observance brought her to unlife, her cold, marble beauty nearly stopped your heart. But before you could even speak to her, agents of the Deathlord called the Walker in Darkness came to claim her; she had been chosen as a concubine by their master. You could not bear to see her treated so, not when you could see in her beautiful dead eyes that she did not want to go. So, you followed the dead ones out of Sijan, and when they were about to pass beyond the reach of the living, you confronted them. That was when you Exalted. You destroyed some of her "escorts" and distracted the others long enough for her to escape, whereupon one of the Walker's agents gave chase to her, swearing vengeance upon you.

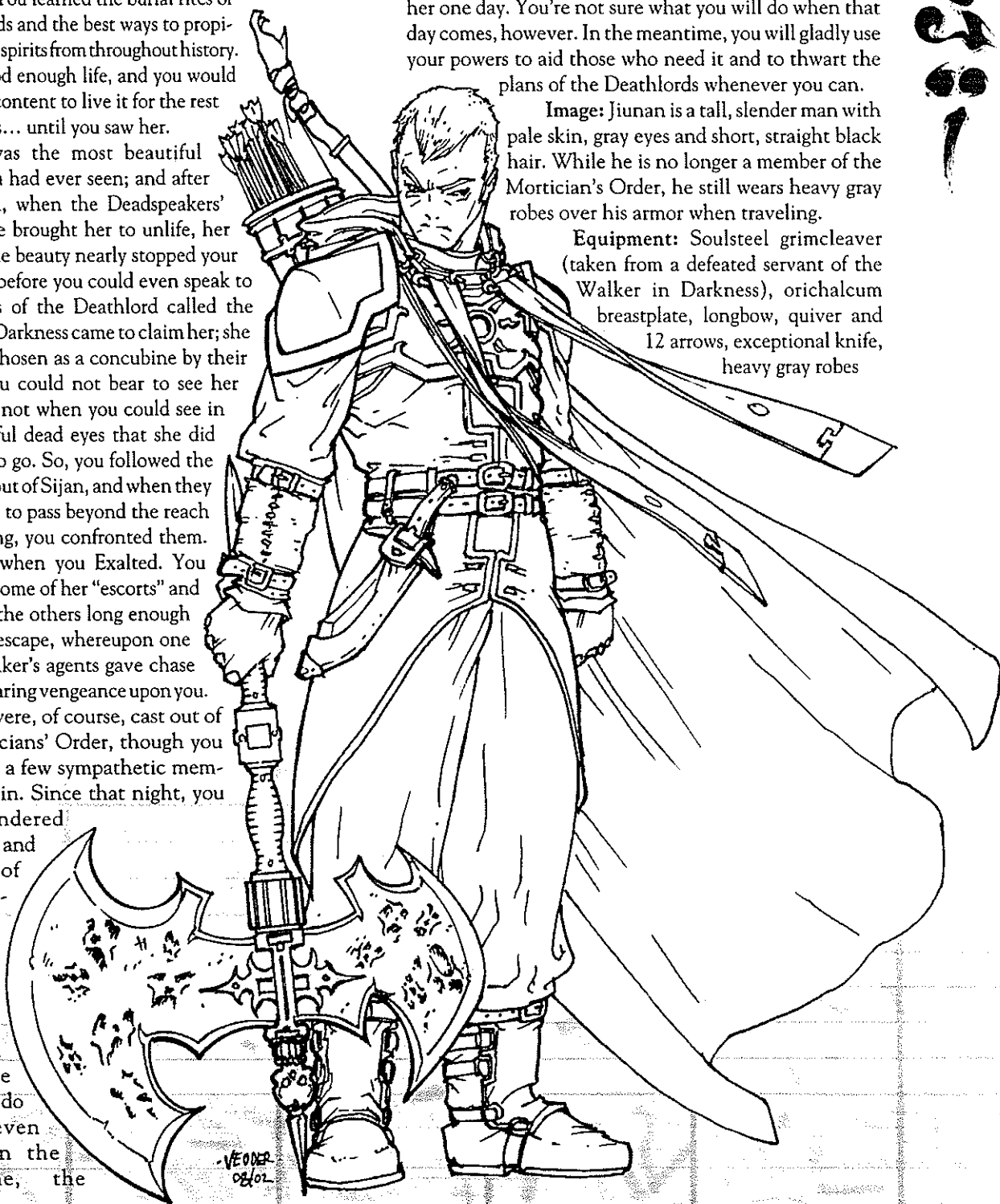
You were, of course, cast out of the Morticians' Order, though you still know a few sympathetic members therein. Since that night, you have wandered the length and breadth of the Scavenger Lands, trying to find a dead woman whose name you do not even know. In the meantime, the

lands are full of uneasy dead that must be put to rest... one way or another.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a haunted man in several senses of the word, obsessed with the image of a woman you have seen only once. You eat little, drink less and smile... well, never. You have no real idea where the woman you seek can be found, so you are simply wandering where the wind takes you, confident that you will find her one day. You're not sure what you will do when that day comes, however. In the meantime, you will gladly use your powers to aid those who need it and to thwart the plans of the Deathlords whenever you can.

Image: Jiunan is a tall, slender man with pale skin, gray eyes and short, straight black hair. While he is no longer a member of the Mortician's Order, he still wears heavy gray robes over his armor when traveling.

Equipment: Soulsteel grimcleaver (taken from a defeated servant of the Walker in Darkness), orichalcum breastplate, longbow, quiver and 12 arrows, exceptional knife, heavy gray robes





NAME: Jiunan Nightwarden
 PLAYER: _____
 CASTE: Night

CONCEPT: Hunter of the Dead
 NATURE: Martyr
 ANIMA: _____

ATTRIBUTES

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

ABILITIES

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

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		CHARMS	
<u>Artifact</u> <u>●●●●○</u>	Name	Cost	Name
<u>Contacts</u> <u>●●○○○</u>	<u>Retrieve the Fallen</u>		<u>Spirit-Cutting Attack</u> <u>2</u>
<u>Resources</u> <u>●●○○○</u>	<u>Weapon</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>Ghost-Eating Technique</u> <u>5</u>
_____ <u>○○○○○</u>	<u>Iron Raptor Technique</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>Spirit-Repelling</u>
_____ <u>○○○○○</u>	<u>Edge of Morning</u>		<u>Diagram</u> <u>10</u>
_____ <u>○○○○○</u>	<u>Sunlight</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>Reed in the Wind</u> <u>1 per 2</u>
_____ <u>○○○○○</u>	<u>Corona of Radiance</u>	<u>5, 1w</u>	<u>Shadow Over Water</u> <u>2m</u>
_____ <u>○○○○○</u>	<u>Spirit-Detecting</u>		_____
_____ <u>○○○○○</u>	<u>Glance</u>	<u>3</u>	_____
_____ <u>○○○○○</u>			_____

WEAPONS

Soulsteel Grimcleaver
 SPD 6 ACC 10 DMG 10L PRY 7
Longbow
 ACC 6 DMG 5L RATE 3 RNG 200

ANIMA

LIMIT BREAK

VIRTUE FLAW

Ascetic Drive

WILLPOWER

●●●●●●○○○

HEALTH

SOAK
 B 9 L 9 A 8

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

VIRTUES

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

ESSENCE

●●●○○○
 PERSONAL 16 | _____
 PERIPHERAL 37 | _____
 COMMITTED 12 | _____

EXPERIENCE

APPENDIX II: OTHER NOTABLE NIGHT CASTE



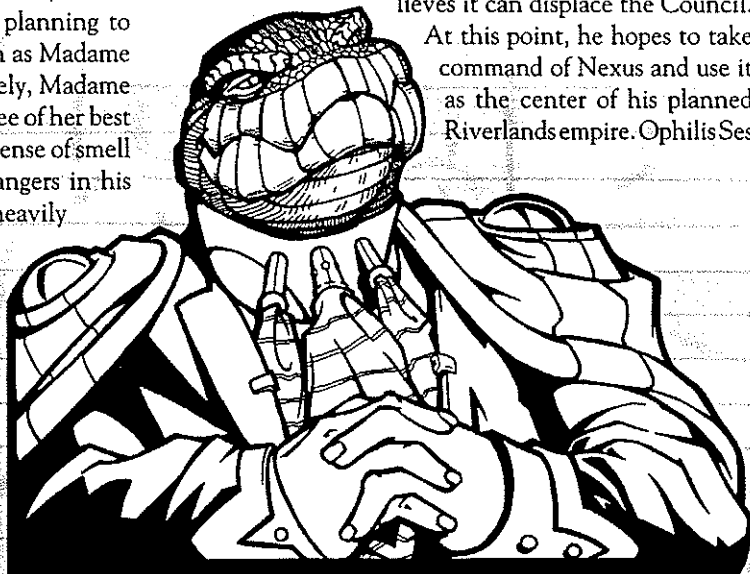
OPHILIS SES

Ophilis Ses, often known simply as Ses, was born in the city of Great Forks. He was part of a small and despised enclave of snakemen. Like the rest of his family, he joined the powerful Tang-Zen syndicate, a criminal organization that employed a few snakemen. Ses started work as a lowly “younger brother” who acted as a bodyguard for payment collectors, but his skill and dedication allowed him to rise rapidly through the ranks. By the time he was 28, he was the boss’s senior lieutenant. He had been planning to assassinate his boss, an aging woman known as Madame Juranoto and take over her job. Unfortunately, Madame Juranoto learned of his plans and sent all three of her best enforcers to kill him in his sleep. Ses’s keen sense of smell allowed him to realize that there were strangers in his bedroom, and he awoke surrounded by three heavily armed killers. This combat caused his Exaltation, and he was able to swiftly slay all three of his attackers. Later that night, he went to Madame Juranoto’s office, where she was waiting for confirmation of his death, and killed her too. By the next morning, he was firmly in charge of the Tang-Zen syndicate.

Within a year, Tang-Zen had become the largest criminal syndicate in Great Forks,

and Ses had set his sights on even greater glory. Leaving the primary branch of the Tang-Zen syndicate in the hands of his lover, the Twilight Caste Exalted Azure Path, he moved over a third of his wealthy and powerful operation to Nexus, the largest city in the Riverlands. Since this time, he has been gradually expanding his power base. So far, he has abided by the strictures of the Council of Entities, but he plans to do this only until his organization is widespread enough and powerful enough that he believes it can displace the Council.

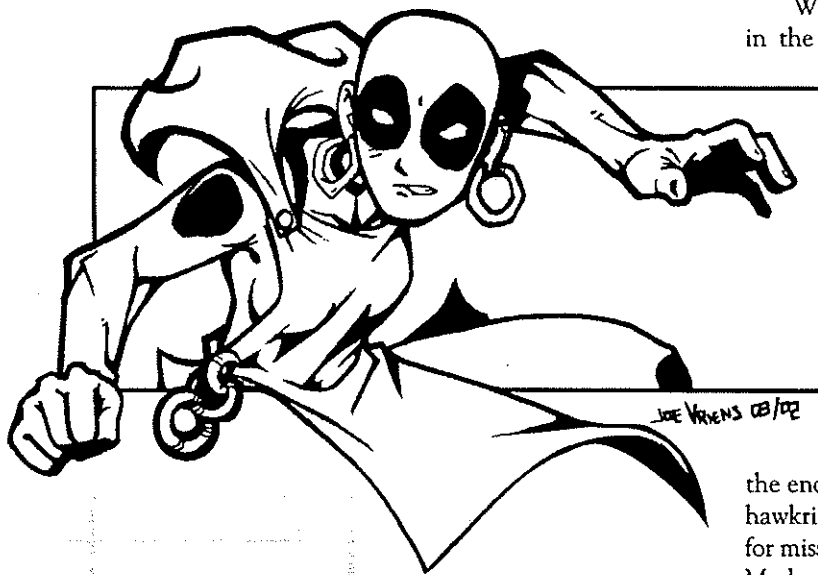
At this point, he hopes to take command of Nexus and use it as the center of his planned Riverlands empire. Ophilis Ses



is a young-looking snakeman with green-bronze scales similar to those on a copperhead.

FAKA KUN

Faka Kun is a famous performing acrobat who also works as the South's greatest thief. She is one of the diminutive Djala people — slender, hairless dwarfs between four and five feet tall who have chalk-white skin and large black panda-like spots. The Djala are renowned for their grace and agility, and Kun was one of the greatest of their number even before her Exaltation. She grew up in the Gerontine Circus, which regularly traveled a circuit along the coast, from the Lap to the Varang City-States. She gained early acclaim as an acrobat, but fame alone was insufficient; she also wished for wealth beyond what even a highly skilled circus performer could aspire to. When she passed through various cities, she used her training to rob the great houses of their jewels and other small valuables. On one such trip, she robbed the satrap's villa and stole a number of extremely precious First Realm artifacts including a set



of enchanted gauntlets with extendible golden claws. Unfortunately, she broke a hidden trip wire when stealing the gauntlets. Just as she was climbing out the villa's window, four guards burst into the room. They pursued her over the rooftops of the city and finally cornered her on the roof of a warehouse — she was three stories above the ground, and the nearest building was more than 40 feet away. Knowing the dismal fate of thieves in the Lap, she turned to fight against overwhelming odds and was suddenly filled with a burst of inhuman energy. Within seconds, all four guards were dead. She then jumped to the next building with ease and then sat down, as she overcame with a vision of the Unconquered Sun.

Today, Kun continues to travel the South. Now, she owns her own small circus, which is largely a cover for her thefts. She is primarily interested in stealing powerful First Realm artifacts and has amassed a large collection at this point. Faka Kun is primarily motivated by a sense of adventure and a desire for wealth, but recently, the influence of the Unconquered Sun has been making her think of greater and less selfish goals. She plans to free the Djala people from the oppressive rule of the Varang City-States and to donate a portion of her now-great skill and wealth to helping them remain independent.

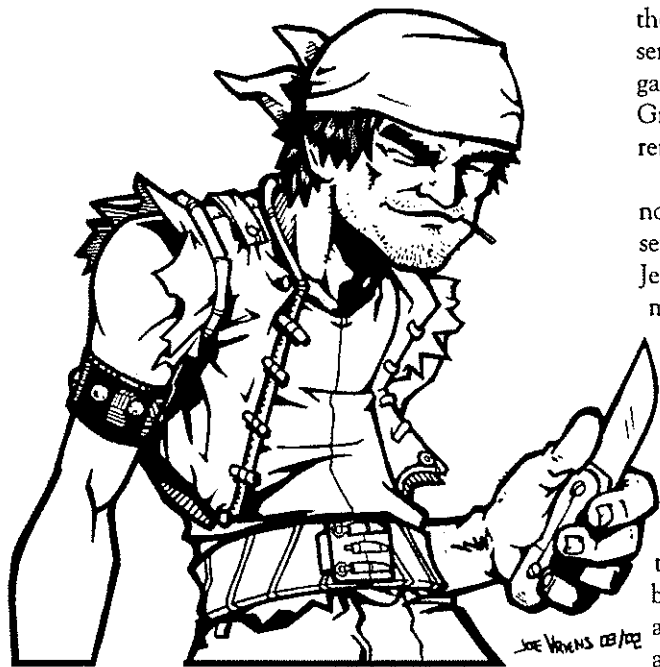
GRILO

Grilo, the son of a Metagalapan miner, grew up dreaming of being a hawkrider, as did most children on Mount Metagalapa. Unlike most, however, Grilo was small, nimble and strong enough for the job, and despite his humble roots, he earned a place among the hawkriders of his generation. His arrogant attitude did not win him many friends among his fellows, however, and the fact that he had the skill to back up his boasts only made it worse.

While scouting the area before a raid against a town in the Hundred Kingdoms, Grilo ventured somewhat farther afield than he had intended and stumbled upon a hunt being conducted by warriors and nobles of the Fair Folk. Some were mounted on what looked like winged deer, while others flew on their own glittering wings or simply by some magic of their own. Clapping with delight at the new prey who had wandered into range, the faeries took off in pursuit. Grilo fled with all his skill, dipping and turning until his mount was nearly exhausted, but it was only his sudden Exaltation that enabled him to escape the clutches of the Fair Folk.

He returned to the Haltan town in time to witness the end of the raid, which had not gone well. His fellow hawkriders, already not fond of him, began to berate him for missing the raid; but when they saw the blazing Caste Mark on his forehead, they fled from him in terror, shouting a mixture of curses and protective charms over their shoulders as they did. It was clear to Grilo that he could not return home, and with the newfound powers at his disposal, he did not feel that he needed to.

Since then, Grilo and his hawk Falada have taken employment with the Guild as scouts, flying far above the routes of particularly important caravans and watching for any signs of trouble. Grilo has not told the Guild about his Exaltation, and if his employers suspect that he is anything more than an expatriate hawkrider, they have said nothing about the possibility. For the moment, Grilo seems happy enough with the pay and respect he earns from the Guild, though he has begun to seem a little bored with the monotony of caravan duty. He has spoken of his desire to



see the world around many a Guild campfire but has so far shown few signs of acting on that desire.

Falada's presence at Grilo's Exaltation seems to have had some effect on the great hawk, as the two are able to understand each other to a preternatural degree. Falada has also displayed greater strength and endurance since Grilo Exalted and seems to be more like an equal in their relationship than a mere mount.

The hawkriders of Metagalapa have begun to hear rumors that one of their kind is working for the Guild and naturally suspect that Grilo is the one in question. While they would not dare to confront an Anathema directly, they are trying to learn as much as they can about his whereabouts and may well try to harm him in some indirect fashion, such as by attacking Falada when Grilo is away or by trying to harm his reputation within the Guild.

JENCIR OF CHANOS

Jencir was a loyal child of the Realm, as were his parents and their parents before them. He knew that the Realm was the greatest empire that had ever been and that he was privileged to have been born there. He wanted to do whatever he could to serve the Realm, and it was with a great sense of pride that he was accepted to become a member of the All-Seeing Eye. He served the Empress with great zeal and provided the Eye with useful information regarding the activities of House Ragara on several occasions. He enjoyed several rapid promotions, and his career seemed to be one with limitless potential.

After the Empress' disappearance, however, all of that changed. Jencir knew that the Dragon-Blooded lords of House Ragara would no longer hold back their desire for vengeance and that his life was in danger if he remained on

the Blessed Isle. He was, however, unwilling to stop serving the Realm. Using the influence he had already garnered within the Eye, he had himself transferred to Greyfalls in the Threshold, where he hoped to be able to remain both useful and safe.

House Ragara has a long reach, however, and would not be so easily thwarted. A Dragon-Blooded assassin was sent to kill Jencir and would certainly have succeeded if Jencir had not suddenly Exalted, to both parties' immense (and, in the assassin's case, fatal) surprise. Without even realizing what he was doing, Jencir killed the assassin and disposed of the body, then began to ponder the implications of this wholly unexpected development.

Since the assassination attempt, Jencir has been living a somewhat panicked double life. All that he knows of the Anathema are the stories he was told in the Realm, and he finds it hard to believe that he has become such a monster without growing horns and fangs and developing a thirst for human blood. He has killed a Dragon-Blooded, one of his rightful superiors, and feels that he should be punished for that crime; more than once, he has been on the verge of turning himself in to the Wyld Hunt. At the same time, he knows that he is a competent agent of the Eye, and his transformation has





not caused his sense of duty to slacken. Indeed, he is perhaps more useful to the Eye now than he ever was before.

For the moment, he continues to monitor house activity in Greyfalls and to report his findings to his superiors in the Eye. He has tried his best to ignore the dreams of betrayal and death that haunt his sleep, believing that they are only nightmares as a result of his change. However, the Unconquered Sun has been sending him more and more visions, even during his waking hours, and Jencir has begun to suspect that there might be something more to the story than he has been told. Whenever time permits, he has tried to research the history of the Old Realm and learn more about how the Anathema were destroyed. His resources are limited, however, and he has learned very little so far. If he were ever to learn the truth about the fall of the Solar Exalted, he could change from a loyal servant of the Scarlet Throne to one of the Realm's most implacable and dangerous enemies.

KALONICE STORMWIND

Born in a small fishing village in the Wavecrest Archipelago, Kalonice was drawn to the sea since before she could walk. She spent all of her spare time watching the sailors and fishermen tend to their boats and nets and had to be dragged away from the docks by her mother (or driven away by aggravated fishermen) nearly every day of her childhood. Since the women of Wavecrest are not permitted to sail, and it was clear that Kalonice would never be happy on land, her parents greeted her announcement that she intended to become Tya with resigned acceptance.

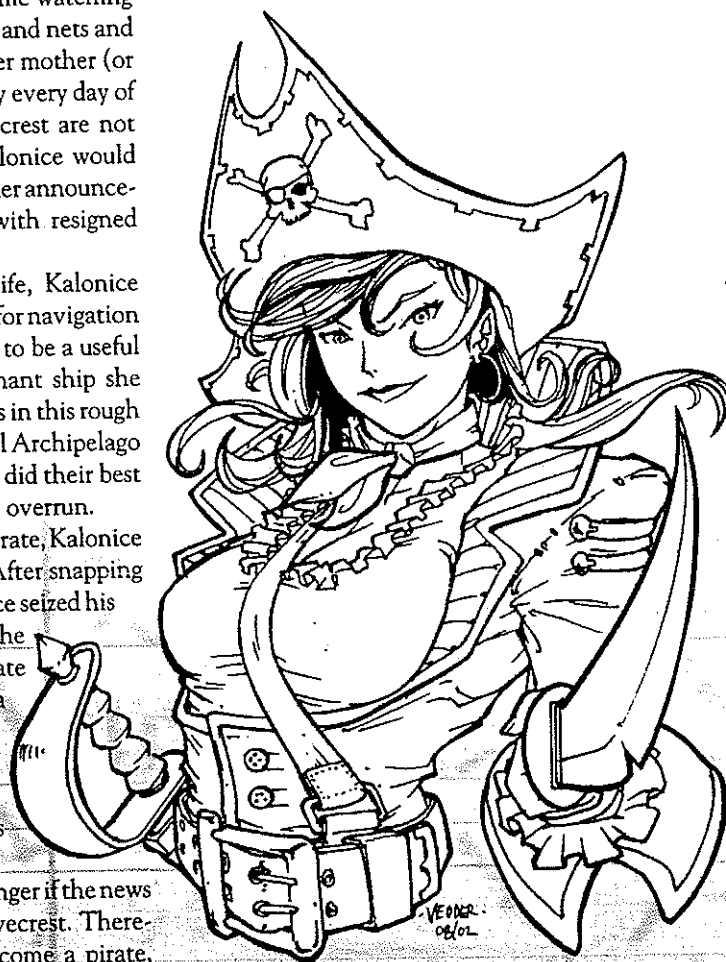
Despite the hardships of shipboard life, Kalonice loved life as a sailor. She had a natural talent for navigation and an excellent weather sense and proved to be a useful asset aboard the *Moontide*, the Tya merchant ship she crewed. She would likely have spent decades in this rough but happy life if a pirate raider from the Coral Archipelago had not chosen to attack her ship. The Tya did their best to fight back, but the *Moontide* was quickly overrun.

Cornered below decks by a lust-crazed pirate, Kalonice Exalted just as she was about to be raped. After snapping the pirate's neck with a single blow, Kalonice seized his cutlass and led a Tya counterattack. When the brief, bloody fight was over, not a single pirate had survived, and both ships were under Tya control. The captain of the *Moontide* had been killed in the initial attack, and Kalonice was unanimously selected as the new captain, out of respect for her skills as much as fear of her newfound powers.

Kalonice knew that she would be in danger if the news of her Exaltation reached the folk of Wavecrest. Therefore, she announced her intention to become a pirate, sailing against the Coral Archipelago and others who

made the seas unsafe for the people of Wavecrest. To her delight, almost all of her crew elected to join her on this dangerous mission. In the pirate vessel, which she renamed the *Stormwind*, Kalonice escorted the *Moontide* back to Abalone and then began her life as a privateer.

Kalonice's powers have gained her significant success against both the Coral Archipelago and the Lintha Family, though the young Exalt is worried for the continued safety of her mortal crew. A recent day-long battle with the Dawn Caste pirate Moray Darktide of Skullstone ended inconclusively at sunset but may have had a more lasting effect on Kalonice herself. She found herself strangely drawn to the charismatic Darktide, and though nothing has come of the attraction yet, for the first time in her life, Kalonice has begun to wonder about the wisdom of living the pseudo-male life of a Tya. She has stopped taking the sterilizing extract expected of all Tya, and some of her most trusted lieutenants believe that it is only a matter of time before she openly rejects the Tya concept and declares herself simply a woman sailor. Her devoted crew would likely follow her, but the ramifications of such an action in the male-dominated West could be dire indeed.



C A S T E B O O K N I G H T



The Assassins of the Unconquered Sun

Thieves, tricksters and deadly killers, the Night Castes of the Solar Exalted are the wickedly cunning spies of the Unconquered Sun. Yet, these shadowy avengers are more than mere thieves and assassins. With their dark powers and incredible agility, the Night Castes are a silent but deadly force for righteousness. Those who would scheme to evade the power of the sun should fear, for the shrouded blades of the Night Caste will show no mercy to such wickedness.

The Greatest Spies Creation Has Ever Seen

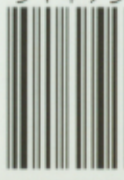
Caste Book: Night is fourth in the Caste Book line for Exalted — books detailing the different Castes of the Solar Exalted. Within its pages are all the secrets of the Night Caste, from their Charms of stealth and agility to their fragmentary memories of the First Age. The book contains new Charms, rules and artifacts to help them carry out their holy mission.



ISBN 1-58846-662-0 WW8833 US \$14.95



5 1495



9 781588 466624



WHITE WOLF
GAME STUDIO



AGE OF
SORROWS

www.white-wolf.com