

SONS OF A CAVALGIER



A SETTING SOURCEBOOK FOR

EXALTED



SCAVENGER SONS™

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER ONE: THE NORTH	8
CHAPTER TWO: THE EAST	20
CHAPTER THREE: THE SOUTH	34
CHAPTER FOUR: THE WEST	48
CHAPTER FIVE: THE SCAVENGER LANDS	60
CHAPTER SIX: NEXUS	98
APPENDIX ONE: GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN THE THRESHOLD	126
APPENDIX TWO: THE FAIR FOLK	130



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INTRODUCTION

*Like all men in Babylon, I have been proconsul; like all, a slave.
I have also known omnipotence, opprobrium, imprisonment.*
— Jorge Luis Borges, “The Lottery in Babylon”

The world of Exalted is a dangerous place, especially outside the Blessed Isle. Life is cheap and death is just as easy to come by. Most states are corrupt autocracies, propped up by the imperial legions and by their own secret police and security forces. The poor are subjected to crushing taxation by the rich, and the middle class struggles to survive despite the government's best efforts to strangle the economy. Residents of the Threshold have other worries as well. In addition to the tax man and random violence at the hands of government security forces, they must also fear the local spirits. Unrestrained by the Immaculate Order, these beings must be placated by sacrifices, lest they ruin the crops, render the town infertile or simply call down curses on the heads of those who offend them. Beyond the pale of civilization lie still other threats; Wyld-twisted barbarian tribes, Lunar Anathema and their nations of beastman offspring, and

the deadly Fair Folk. All of these make life in the Threshold difficult at best, impossible at worst.

But life finds a way. With the fragments of the First Age and sheer determination, the people of the Threshold cling to existence, conquer the world around them, build great cities and even prosper at times. There are many, especially among the Dynasty, who claim that civilization in the Threshold owes its continued existence to the imperial legions and the threat of the Realm's mighty defense systems. Those arguments would sound much more convincing were it not for the Scavenger Lands.

This region lies in the heart of the East, and has never bowed its head to the Empress. Proud and independent, its people protect themselves from the dangers of the world around them, or adapt to them and make them strengths and allies. Though the region houses

no imperial garrison and the Empress would gladly let the Fair Folk take them all, the Scavenger Lands endure. Warlike, ingenious, and clinging fiercely to their hard-won place in the world, the people of the Scavenger Lands are a constant embarrassment to an empire that claims only its oppressive rule can save the world from chaos and destruction.

But now, the Empress is no more, and the world is turning once again. Storms loom on the horizon, and dearly held assumptions are about to be challenged. The Solar Exalted have returned, and the Realm staggers closer to civil war with every passing day. What will the future hold: an age of war and strife, of misery, death and starvation, or will Creation begin the long, hard climb back to the glory of the First Age, or to what it imagines the First Age to have been? Destiny is in flux; heroes can remake history and change the path of nations.

THE THRESHOLD

In this book, the term Threshold refers to the city-states, petty kingdoms, republics and confederacies that ring the Inner Sea. Beyond them lies a considerable territory of vast elemental wastes and unsettled lands inhabited by tribesmen, barbarians, Fair Folk and spirits.

Much of this land is not described in great detail, even in this book. Creation is vast, and trying to cover everything in one book would have been futile. Also, we wanted to leave plenty of room for Storytellers to make the setting of Exalted their own. The game doesn't exist for us to tell a story that you read, but for you and your players to create your own.

Where possible, we describe important or interesting places to help provide a compelling setting for adventures. Take the North — the Haslanti League, a small confederacy of city-states around the White Sea, is covered in detail, while the heavily settled and extremely loyal coastal strip along the Inner Sea is not. We made this choice because the Haslanti are young and expansionist, have not yet been brought under the imperial yoke, and possess remarkable devices that they are using to explore strange ruins in the farthest reaches of the North. The loyal states on the coast of the Inner Sea are primarily agricultural principalities whose rulers always pay their yearly tribute to the Dynasty and never complain about their Imperial garrisons.

Given that we had only so many pages, it seemed wise to focus on the notable and the exceptional. This emphasis skews the book's outlook somewhat — many of the states described in it are at odds with or neutral toward the Realm, even though such attitudes are not the normal state of affairs. Most states in the Threshold are loyal to the Realm because they don't dare act any other way. Even with civil war looming, most nations are barely beginning to experiment with the idea of

independence. The rebellious states depicted are leading the pack, and like many pioneers, there will be casualties among their ranks even if the Realm's reign ends. The empire has not ruled Creation for more than 750 years because of good public relations machinery.

THE SCAVENGER LANDS

The Scavenger Lands are more than a nest of rebels against the iron-booted empire. They represent a diverse region, with a complex history dominated by Nexus and by the 7th Legion, a military unit that survived the Contagion and founded the city of Lookshy. They aren't just the "good guys" — more than any other region, they are torn by strife. Kingdom fights kingdom for ideology, for arable land, for the rights to toll bridges, for access to the region's many rivers, even just to take slaves.

Despite the near-constant strife and turmoil, this fractious region is also a land of freedom: from the empire's brutal taxes, from conscription into imperial service, and perhaps most important, freedom for a kingdom to genuinely rule itself, answerable only to its own people. Many might claim such freedom is meaningless, that the wars between the states of the Scavenger Lands consume far more resources and kill far more inhabitants than any imperial action. The people would answer that if they must die, as all mortal men must, they would rather do so at the order of their own king. If they must slave and toil, as everyone does, far better to labor for their own profit than for the good of the far-off Dynasty.

Now the Scavenger Lands are arming for war. The Fair Folk and the barbarians are growing restless. The civil unrest wracking the empire will surely lead to attacks on the Scavenger Lands, either by a new ruler of the Dynasty eager to demonstrate power, or by imperial commanders seeking resources to fight a prolonged civil war. Trapped between the growing turmoil in the Realm and the menaces rising in the vast forest to the East, the folk of the Scavenger Lands can see that a time of tumult is coming and an age of trouble is at hand.

NEXUS

No book about the Scavenger Lands would be complete without a look at Nexus, the city of vice, crime and thriving business that forms the commercial heart of the region. As Lookshy is to the Scavenger Lands' military power, so Nexus is to its economic strength. Who are the members of the city's mysterious Council of Entities, and how do they govern this anarchic morass? What role does the Guild play, and what is day-to-day life like in the City of a Thousand Thieves?

Nexus is many things to many people: a Mecca for commerce, sin, and violence. Within its districts, men have died fighting over a cracked plate, and others have

risen from that poverty to become merchant princes or even petty kings. No other city in the world is so thick with sorcery, treachery, wealth or adventure. If there is anyplace in the Scavenger Lands that Solar Exalted can safely hide, it is in this warren between the River Harlot's Legs, along with so much else that cannot bear the scrutiny of more civil regions.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Scavenger Sons covers a lot of territory, from an overview of the Threshold to a detailed portrait of Nexus, one of the largest, most corrupt and most prosperous cities in Creation. In structure, it resembles an onion, with greater detail in each successive layer: beginning with the Threshold as a whole, then covering the various Scavenger Lands, and finally describing Nexus, the crown jewel of the region's bandit-states.

Take from it what you wish; all of it is intended to spur your own creativity. The text is full of adventure hooks and places for players to become involved. Where you find unanswered questions, feel free to answer them. Where you find uncertainty, decide for yourself. Characters in Exalted are so powerful and their possible actions so diverse that a book full of hard-and-fast facts is likely to be useless to most of the people reading it.

Chapter One: The North describes the frozen North, a harsh land renowned for long and bitter winters. The people of this land are as enduring as its wildlife, scraping out a meager existence against a backdrop of ice and hardship.

Chapter Two: The East covers the verdant East, a land of forests and fertility, but also of strife and conflict. This chapter deals mainly with areas outside the Scavenger Lands proper, as the Scavenger Lands have their own section.

Chapter Three: The South describes the South, a land of bustling cities and hard-headed people where life is often cruel to those not swift enough to grab at Fortune. These kingdoms sport poverty and wealth to rival Nexus, along with tyranny and corruption unmatched anywhere in Creation.

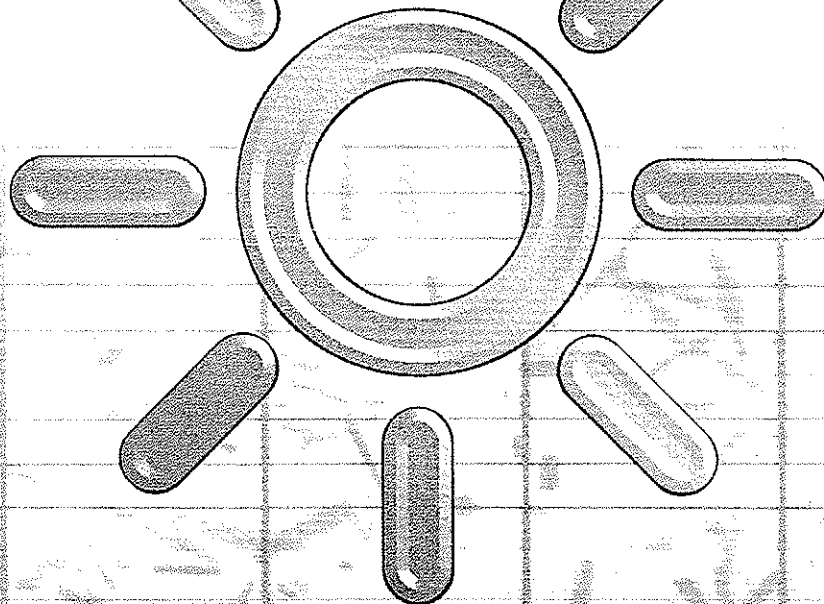
Chapter Four: The West describes the seafaring nations of the Western Ocean. Its peoples range from the peaceful Wavecrest Archipelago to the nefarious Lintha Family, a gang of bloody pirates whose reach extends throughout the Threshold.

Chapter Five: The Scavenger Lands describes the history of the River Province, from the Contagion to the modern day. It also describes the major nations of the region, from the Spartan warriors of Lookshy to the sybaritic inhabitants of Great Forks to the magnificent equestrians of Marukan.

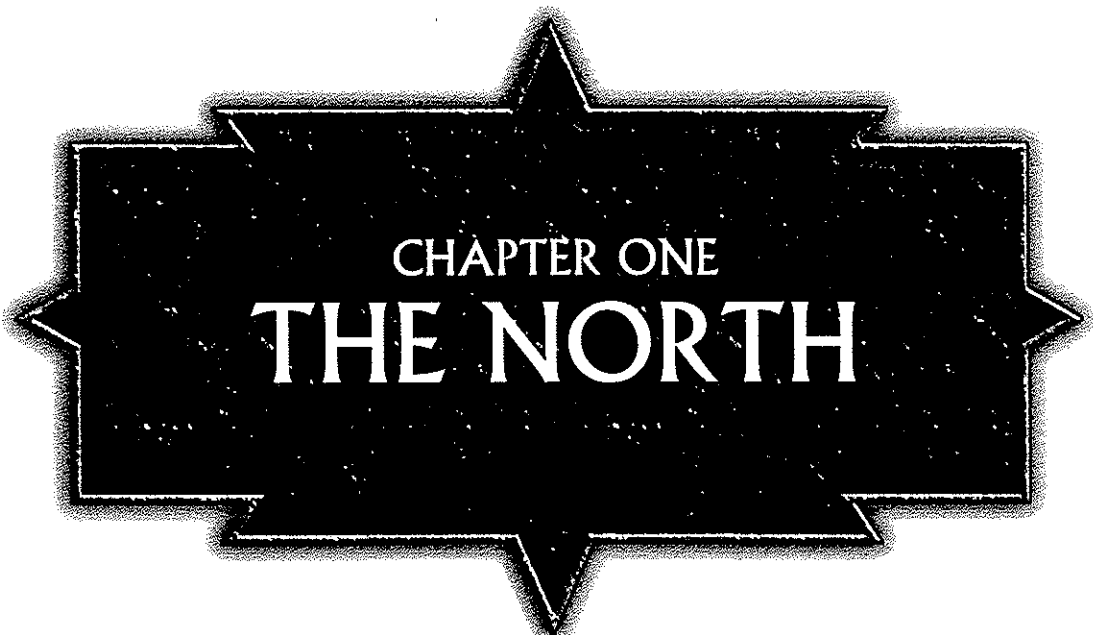
Chapter Six: Nexus covers the metropolis variously known as the City of Yellow Fog, the Haven of a Hundred Diseases and the City Without Rule. Here, under the autocratic leadership of the Council of Entities, traders from across half of Creation come together to buy, sell, trade, swindle, and bilk one another out of magnificent fortunes. It is said that in a single day, enough commerce takes place in Nexus to buy entire kingdoms and their inhabitants.

Appendix One: Groups and Organizations in the Threshold describes various groups whose influence extends across the world, or who can be found in every region.

Appendix Two: The Fair Folk covers the fey, among the most dangerous enemies of Creation. This appendix provides considerable detail on the fey, but pays special attention to those Fair Folk who dwell peaceably among men as princes, workers of wonders or as mere citizens.







CHAPTER ONE

THE NORTH



A land of harsh winters and short summers, the North is the most sparsely inhabited region of Creation. Yet on its meager bounty thrive strange and wondrous societies, full of individuals rugged enough to overcome the brutal punishment their land deals out to them each and every winter.

GETHAMANE

Far in the northernmost reaches of this frozen region lies the mountain-city of Gethamane. No one knows the origins of this ancient fastness. The inhabitants tell stories of how their distant ancestors came to Gethamane a century after the Contagion. Fleeing plague and starvation, they travelled north, beset by hordes of furred, semi-human raiders similar to the Eastern Arzechk tribe. The survivors of these raids eventually stumbled on a huge, snow-covered mountain riddled with a vast network of passages and rooms — a mountain city empty of both furnishings and inhabitants. Assuming that the prior tenants had perished during the Contagion, the newcomers named their new home Gethamane, meaning sanctuary in the tongue of the Old Realm. Now, centuries later, the true origin and past history of Gethamane remains lost to humankind.

Standing as a testament to the glories of the First Realm, Gethamane's large halls are covered in intricate

and beautiful carvings of unknown plants and beasts. The entire city is lit with glowing crystals that brighten during the day and dim at night. Gethamane consists of hundreds of twisting corridors connecting countless rooms. Their original purposes unknown, the smaller rooms have become dwellings while the larger now serve as meeting halls, shops and the residences of the mountain city's inhabitants. The only remaining traces of the prior inhabitants are the three temples and the sunken gardens. Unlike the rest of the city, these locations remain as pristine as when they were found. From the scant evidence, Gethamane's previous inhabitants were humans who engaged in all manner of commerce with exotic spirits and long-forgotten chthonic entities. Nothing more is known of these strange folk.

THE TEMPLES

The city's three temples are all large, open rooms located near the top of the mountain, distinguished from other chambers by jewel-encrusted carvings of mountains and enormous flying creatures. Almost everyone entering these rooms is struck by an eerie sense of presence and watchfulness. Those who spend the night sleeping in a temple report being haunted by vivid, confusing dreams. Most remember only fragments of these dreams; memories of frantic searching or desperate flight are common. Many dreamers then



spend the next few nights in sleepless dread or eager anticipation, and some find new answers to problems that were troubling them.

A very few who sleep in a temple feel called to serve as priests afterwards. From that day onward, they leave their previous lives behind and work at the temple. These acolytes keep the temples clean and well polished and make offerings of flowers and animal blood upon the altars. Late at night, they also perform odd ceremonies in which they cover the floors of the temples with elaborate patterns drawn in ink, colored sand, and sometimes their own blood. Chanting in unknown tongues, the acolytes sometimes disturb the sleep of those who live nearby. The acolytes assiduously clean up the patterns afterwards; if interrupted during this cleaning, they become extremely agitated and beg leave to finish their task.

Occasionally, someone who sleeps in a temple is driven mad and flees from Gethamane, never to return. Attempts to restrain these unfortunates have proven extremely difficult. If bound or locked up within Gethamane, they injure themselves in their attempts to flee. Those lunatics who do not perish in the wastes outside quickly return to sanity once out of sight of the mountain-city, but they consistently refuse to return to or speak of Gethamane again.

THE SUNKEN GARDENS

The sunken gardens lie at the base of the mountain. These long, narrow, windowless chambers are brightly lit by dozens of large hexagonal panels fashioned from glowing azure crystal. These chambers contain many rows of trays carved from finely polished black obsidian and filled with edible fungi and mosses. These trays provide the inhabitants of Gethamane with a nutritious but somewhat unsatisfying diet. Bland though it may be, this food serves as an excellent supplement to the game hunted by the inhabitants and to the berries they gather during the short summer months.

THE UNDERWAYS

Safe from wind, cold, and snow, provided with light and food, the inhabitants of Gethamane are perhaps the best fed and most prosperous of the folk who inhabit the Northern interior. However, dwelling in ancient ruins has its price. The rock under the mountain-city is riddled with tunnels. Most passages through Gethamane are square-shaped, their walls and ceilings dark gray and slightly rough. The delvings that extend deep underground are black, rounded, and faintly slick to the touch.

All manner of mysterious creatures dwell in these lightless underways, and sometimes these nameless beasts creep into the corridors above. The lords of Gethamane



A TRAVELER'S ACCOUNT OF THE UNDERWAYS

We went down into the tunnels to find treasure. They find violet diamonds down there sometimes, and a few lucky ones have even come back with glow stones. They're like blue ice, they are, and one the size of an egg will light up a whole room as bright as a lamp. Those fetch a fine price in Nexus or the Realm. We got greedy and went down too far. Some sort of living black ooze got Mara, and I never saw what happened to Danak. I heard a clicking sound behind me, and when I looked back, there was only a spot of blood along the ledge where he'd been.

After my friends were taken, I was lost and alone. I never thought to see the surface again. I sat down to eat the last of my food, and this thing came up to me. Sort of like a man, it was, with two arms and two legs. It had grayish-blue skin that looked slick as oil, and nothing on its face except a little slash of a mouth and two huge eyes, glowing and blue. It touched my face with its soft hand, and I knew that if I let it have one of my eyes, it would lead me out. When it was finished with me, it led me back to the surface. The socket didn't even bleed much afterwards. I'll never go down into those tunnels again.

have posted guards at the several dozen entrances to these lower tunnels, to prevent the denizens of the depths from gaining access to the city. Those who wish to seek long-lost treasures in the bowels of the earth may go down at their own risk. If all else fails, the guards warn the inhabitants of whatever horror may have gotten loose in Gethamane. Though losses are few, almost every year some beast from the depths comes up and drags several unfortunates down to its stygian lair.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR GETHAMANE

Dawn:	City Guard, Tunnel Guard
Zenith:	Priest of the Old Temples, City Elder
Twilight:	Scholar, Underways Explorer
Night:	Thief of Antiquities, Robber
Eclipse:	Itinerant Merchant, City Elder

WHITEWALL

The city of Whitewall is one of the larger settlements in the Northlands. Located on rocky taiga, it lies several hundred miles from the region's southern coastline. This prosperous metropolis of more than 700,000 inhabitants is ruled by the Syndics, a trio of powerful spirits. Much of Whitewall's prosperity comes from large deposits of valuable ores located in the mountainous

lands adjoining the city. Every year, merchants come along the ancient travelers' road seeking to trade spices, cloth, and the bounty from dozens of distant lands for Whitewall's excellent ores and fine weapons, armor, and beautiful jewelry. However, visiting or staying in Whitewall has its dangers. In addition to the several rich mines nearby, the city is also located less than a day's travel from a large Shadowland and only three days' travel from a Wyld region that abounds with predatory Fair Folk. Local stories tell of how the Shadowland and the Wyld region developed well after the city had been settled. After almost a decade of ceaseless battle with the walking dead and the Winter People, the inhuman Syndics that rule Whitewall approached their enemies and made pacts with both sets of enemies.

THE PEACE

By the conditions of the peace, the road to Whitehall is inviolate. The road itself dates from the First Realm and possesses some minor magic. It is built of virtually indestructible, fused glassy stone and remains clear of snow and ice in all but the worst weather. Anyone — living, dead, or fey — may use this road, and none may harm any other on the road. Even the Deathlords and the most powerful of the Winter Folk abide by this pact. The penalty for breaking the peace of the road is death by torture. A pair of rough-hewn stone pillars flanks the road every 40 yards. These columns mark the road and serve as gibbets for the bodies of those few who dare violate the peace.

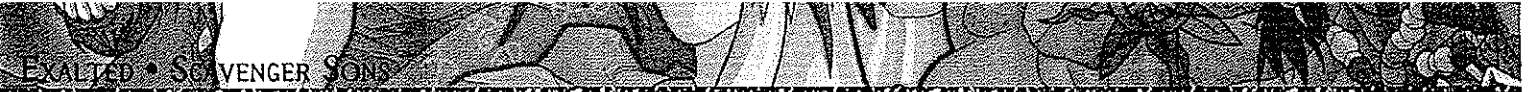
The Syndics' pact also protects the city, but to a lesser extent. During daylight hours, the many eldritch creatures in the region leave the city and the surrounding area strictly alone. Between sunset and sunrise, these beings may freely hunt anyone not behind the city walls or on the road. Also, Fair Folk and the undead may enter Whitewall if they obtain the permission of someone inside the walls. They may not use magical coercion to obtain it, but can often get it through bribes or threats.

THE SYNDICS

Little is known about the details of the Syndics' pact with the Winter Folk and the Deathlords, but countless stories and rumors hint at unwholesome practices by the ruling spirits. Though the tales of occasional human sacrifice are untrue, many regard the fact that the Syndics are embodied spirits as something of a mixed blessing. Without their magical power, Whitewall would undoubtedly be unprotected by the pact. However, being governed by a triumvirate of nearly identical inhuman beings who appear to have been sculpted from ice and silver can be somewhat disconcerting to the average mortal.

The Syndics regard the city's safety as far more important than the life of any particular inhabitant, an attitude with occasionally unpleasant consequences. To fulfill their





end of the pact, every year the Syndics must set two dozen living people outside the walls for the undead and the Fair Folk to consume. Those guilty of murder and other capital crimes form the vast majority of the sacrifices, but in years when few people commit serious offenses, travelers unprotected by wealth or bonds of kinship may be snatched from their beds by the Syndics' elite guards. Those who openly oppose the rule of the Syndics have joined the condemned in the past, and so dissent usually remains private.

The pacts make everyone inside the city relatively safe from inhuman threats, yet also virtually imprison them in their stronghold. Anyone attempting to live outside the city's high, whitewashed walls is easy prey. More than two-thirds of the city's residents are farmers, herders, and miners who work outside it during the day and retire to the safety of its boundaries before nightfall. The militiamen who guard the gates during the night are an exceptionally paranoid lot. All know the trickery in which the Fair Folk and the dead frequently engage. Even the most innocent-seeming wretch who knocks on the gates after sunset could be the vanguard of an inhuman army, ready to torture some poor unfortunate into letting dozens of its comrades inside.

ATTITUDES TOWARD TRAVELERS

As a result of the pacts, travelers who arrive at Whitewall after dark must camp on the road and pray that they do not roll or stumble off of it in their sleep. Tales tell of merchants who awakened during the night to find a wolf-eared noble of the Winter Folk or a pack of grave-eaten wights crouching by the roadside, watching them. Those who panic at such sights and accidentally step off the road are never seen alive again. Inside the city, the guards patrol the walls and streets, constantly searching for evidence of monstrous incursion.

Such living conditions have made the people of Whitewall a suspicious lot. Strangers, especially those who have no advocate in the city, are greeted with reserve at best and open distrust at worst. The city's considerable wealth often attracts outsiders, but most visitors regard the locals as wary and unfriendly. Grim and taciturn though they are, however, the inhabitants of Whitewall are also extremely loyal to anyone they know well. Once the local people trust a traveler, they will heartily welcome her on subsequent visits. Except for specially approved ambassadors, deathknights and Fair Folk are forbidden entrance into the city; even the Terrestrial Exalted are looked on with suspicion, as their magical powers remind many people of the inhuman neighbors they dread.

Despite rampant local suspicion of the Dragon-Blooded, the Syndics are allies of the Realm. Whitewall has a small imperial garrison, and the Syndics are perfectly willing to work with the Realm's ambassadors and officials. Whitewall's ruling spirits have had con-

siderable practice negotiating with powerful and dangerous enemies. Understandably, Whitewall is not a safe place for Solar Exalted — unless they happen to be natives of the place. Outsiders found to be Solar Exalted and apprehended are likely to be turned over to an ambassador of the Realm. Solar Exalted native to the city are likely to be protected, by the other inhabitants if not by the Syndics. In Whitewall, personal loyalty is far more important than politics.

CULTURE

High stone walls dominate the city, fifteen yards tall and four yards thick at the base. A wide path along the top allows for regular guard patrols. Reinforced by the powers of the Syndics, the pale walls that give the city its name are proof against all but the strongest magics.

The difficulty of expanding the walls and the necessity of accommodating everyone living in the vicinity means that Whitewall is a crowded place. Not even the Syndics or the most powerful merchants can boast the vast villas that house the wealthy in more hospitable regions. From rich man's townhouse to poor man's hovel, buildings inside the city are made from the same gray-white stone, most standing between three and five stories tall. Few have much outward ornamentation, in keeping with an inward focus imposed by the icy winters and the fortress mentality shared by the city's inhabitants. Decoration is largely reserved for interiors, where the folk of Whitewall spend most of their time. Heavy tapestries in rich hues line the walls of wealthier dwellings, and even the poor frequently drape their dwellings with rugs in bright, inviting colors. In Whitewall, no one is ever invited into someone's home casually. Receiving such an invitation is a clear sign that the recipient's host considers him a long-term friend and ally.

The land surrounding Whitewall is rich and fertile, but the nearby mountains cause unusually harsh winters. During the long snowbound months, the inward-facing character of the city becomes even more pronounced. From late fall until late spring, frigid temperatures and frequent blizzards render travel to and from Whitewall almost impossible. The inhabitants withdraw inside their homes, where most work at various crafts producing goods to sell to traders in the warmer months. The exceptionally long winter nights increase fears of attack by the city's inhuman enemies, and the constant tension intensifies minor conflicts and disputes. Most new visitors who stay through this season are treated with suspicion by neighbors, who generally regard them as possible agents for the horrors waiting outside the walls. The choking howls of the undead and the sweetly tempting songs of the Fair Folk are often heard at night, especially during the depths



of winter. Such serenades cause fearsome nightmares in all who hear them.

Every few years, a greedy or demented individual believes the promises of the Fair Folk, or attempts to practice some form of necromancy. In either case, the end result is an inhuman host loose in Whitewall. A few of these creatures attempt to force people to invite whole armies of monsters into the city, but most are content to become solitary predators. The guard generally notices and repels large-scale incursions quickly, but lone monsters hunting the city's back alleys are much more difficult to locate. Whenever the militia finds evidence of smaller-scale monstrous activities, the soldiers must spend long and sleepless nights tracking down the inhuman killer that stalks the city's streets.

MONSTERS AND JUSTICE

To aid in battling monsters, either en masse or singly, the Syndics occasionally hire Exalted as monster-hunters. Currently, Whitewall plays host to a half-dozen outcaste Terrestrial Exalted. Exalted willing to serve as freelance hunters can make a substantial sum when their services are needed. In the aftermath of any incident involving monstrous attack, the normally dour populace holds a feast in honor of everyone who aided in destroying the invaders. Such festivals usually degenerate into something between a wild party and a drunken brawl. The celebrants consume alcohol and other intoxicants in prodigious quantities, and large street fights are common. The festivities tend to leave broken windows, shattered bones, and occasionally a looted shop or two behind them. These parties are one of the few occasions during which residents of Whitewall openly praise visitors they do not know well.

Justice in Whitewall is as harsh as the surrounding landscape. Crimes like theft, fraud, or tax evasion are all punished with large fines, or by periods of indentured servitude if the offender cannot pay. Serious crimes are punishable by mutilation, usually the loss of a hand or an eye. Individuals convicted of capital crimes face an exceptionally grim fate. Murder, treason, arson, consorting with the inhuman hordes outside, or attempting to assassinate the Syndics, their judges, or their guards carries a gruesome death sentence — offenders are put outside the walls, to suffer whatever calamity may befall them. Convicts are dressed in specially marked clothing and exiled from the city without supplies. Their clothing ensures that they will be denied aid and comfort by any traveling caravan. Instead, they starve to death on the traveler's road or seek food off of it and risk attack by various inhuman predators. A few exceptionally hardy individuals have managed to survive the several-week journey to the nearest city, but the vast majority become prey for the Fair Folk or the dead.

The few survivors are assumed to have either proved their innocence or endured sufficient punishment. In

either case, they may return to the city, though few do. No one so exiled during the long winter months has ever been known to survive the experience.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR WHITEWALL

- Dawn:** City Guard, Freelance Monster Hunter
- Zenith:** Servant of the Syndics, Immaculate Missionary
- Twilight:** Monster-hunting Sorcerer, Craftsman
- Night:** Thief, Street Performer
- Eclipse:** Guild Merchant, Independent Trader, Ambassador to the Fair Folk or Undead

THE HASLANTI LEAGUE


The northernmost government of any appreciable size is the Haslanti League, a loose confederacy of city-states located along the shore of the frozen White Sea. Only the capital city of Icehome contains more than 100,000 inhabitants, but together all of the nine member cities possess considerable wealth and power. Ruled by a council of wealthy merchants, known as the Oligarchs, the League owes its success to the White Sea itself. Except along its southernmost reaches, the surface of the sea remains frozen year round. Using large, exquisitely crafted iceships with complex sails and finely made steel runners, the League transports people and goods between the various city-states with great speed in even the coldest weather.

The cities themselves are designed with the region's harsh winters in mind. All buildings stand at least two stories tall and have doors on the first and second floors. The lower doors are known as winter doors, the upper ones as summer doors. A person leaving the first floor of one of these buildings does not walk out under the open sky, but instead enters a warren of tunnel-like covered streets. In the depths of winter, one can walk anywhere in any city, protected from snow and cold. Some people keep to the tunnels during the fleeting summer months as well, but most use the summer doors in season to walk on the well-built roofs of the covered streets under the bright northern sunlight.

FARMING AND HUNTING

Though farming is only possible in the southernmost Haslanti cities, the region boasts adequate food in all but the harshest years. Edible mosses and lichens grow in rocky areas near many of the cities, from which the locals brew a musty-tasting but nutritious broth. Local citizens practice ice fishing in all but the coldest depths of winter, and some fishermen even manage to land the black northern dolphins and small whales. The Haslanti also eat game and berries gathered during the brief, cool summers.

In addition to mass reindeer hunts and large-scale trapping of hares and other small animals, the Haslanti are exceedingly skilled at hunting the large woolly mammoths



that inhabit the colder regions of the north. Some mammoth hunters use gliders, hurling flaming pitch bombs to panic entire herds off of steep cliffs. Others stalk the beasts on the ground, hidden inside mobile frames covered with mammoth hide. In lean years, special priests use ancient and exhausting magics to control the minds of the dominant mammoths and lure the herds into pens and other traps. Such techniques guarantee regular supplies of meat for the League's many inhabitants, but some of the more daring young men and women still go hunting with only spears, crossbows, and skis. To these intrepid souls, killing a lone bull mammoth is a glorious contest of human versus beast.

The Haslanti cities kill hundreds or even thousands of mammoths every year to feed their residents, and so mammoth tusks and bones are widely available. Most Haslanti regard such leavings as having little monetary worth, and many use them to build the support pillars and gateways of their houses. In these icebound regions where trees are rare and wood is extremely valuable, bone and ivory are common substitutes. The finest pieces are traded with the Guild expeditions that visit the Haslanti in the summer months. These large stocks of ivory bring the Haslanti grain, spices, bolts of cloth, bright dyes, firedust, and many other valuable commodities otherwise unavailable in their harsh climate.

BARBARIAN RAIDERS

Despite the relative abundance of food, life in the far North is not without peril. The White Sea stretches up to the foothills of the seemingly endless northern mountains. Along its northernmost shores live dangerous beasts and half-human savages. Most of these Wyld barbarians are hairy, brutish cannibals. Those touched by the Wyld are typically huge, occasionally more than eight feet tall, and are frequently covered with white or pale gray fur. In good years, the beasts and barbarians remain in their icy abodes. During especially harsh winters, these marauders move south and attack the Haslanti cities. Most of the barbarian tribes use skis and crude ice-skates to cross snow and ice at high speeds.

To defend against the many dangers facing the League, all of its cities lie behind stout walls, and the League as a whole maintains a substantial navy of swift, well-armed iceships that patrol the northern portions of the White Sea. These craft constantly watch for signs of invasion by large predators or Wyld barbarians. To further aid in their mutual defense, the cities are all connected by a network of trained carrier pigeons. The members of the messenger corps instantly relay any evidence of trouble to the entire League.

When emergency signals go out from a League city, or when its pigeons cease to arrive as scheduled, the nearest cities dispatch swift ice-boats, gliders, and the dirigibles known locally as air boats to discover the problem and provide any needed assistance. The fastest gliders usually arrive within half a day of the start of any serious trouble.

The glider pilots report back to the iceships or air boats using codes flashed with hand mirrors, and then either return home or land on the larger, slower vessels to make detailed reports. By the end of the second day, any serious events occurring in one Haslanti port are known to all of the League's sister cities.

ICESHIPS AND AIR BOATS

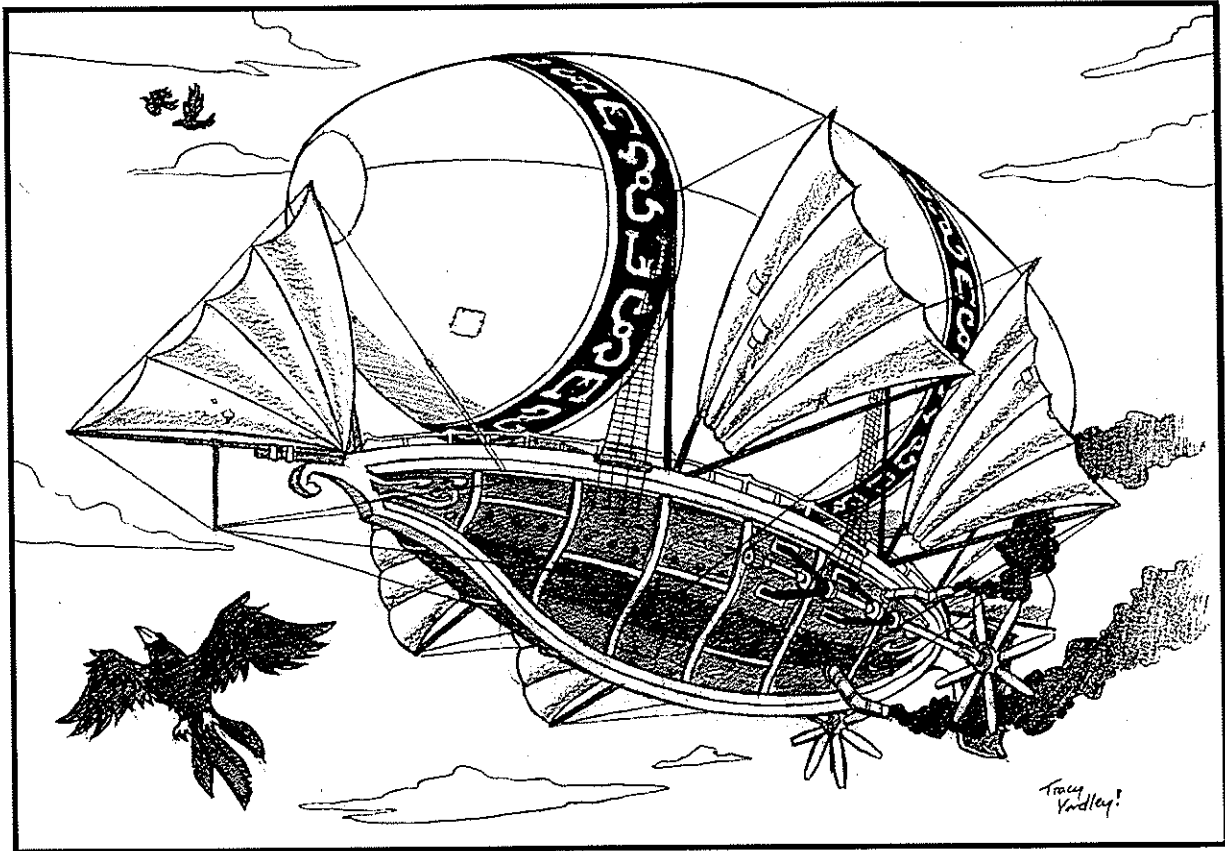
Haslanti iceships and air boats are the cornerstones of the League's complex transport and communications network. Iceships consist of large, low-slung frames supported by steel runners. Equipped with large and complex sails, these vessels can carry heavy cargoes or large numbers of troops as fast as the wind. Air boats are giant balloons fueled with burning oil. An air boat pilot's keen knowledge of air currents allows her to catch favorable winds in almost any desired direction. These vessels are also equipped with large, pedal-driven propellers and elaborate fins and vanes that allow them to move even in dead calm, or to tack against an unfavorable wind.

HASLANTI AIR BOATS

Haslanti air boats are hot-air dirigibles powered by specially constructed sails and large pedal-driven propellers. The air in the gas bag is heated by kerosene or other hot-burning oils. The balloon is made of silk, the basket from a whalebone or feathersteel frame covered in wicker, silk and specially constructed plywood. The largest air boats can carry up to 70 passengers and many tons of cargo. The smallest ones carry a dozen people and somewhat fewer tons of cargo than their larger counterparts. Horses cannot be transported in the fragile basket of an air boat, but these vehicles can travel as fast as a horse at full gallop. However, these craft cannot fly during thunderstorms or other severe weather. A boat crew caught out in a storm must land and stake down the craft or take it into shelter to prevent damage.

The Haslanti never sell their air boats — they want no competition for the skies and regard the secret of constructing these vehicles as a national treasure. However, a few individuals who performed important services for the Haslanti League have received a small air boat and instruction in its use. Air boats are only given to individuals whom the Haslanti believe will not sell their secrets to outsiders.

The basket of an air boat has armor of 3L/5B, and a man-sized section has five health levels. The gas bag is unarmored and can take eight health levels before it is so badly torn that the air boat must immediately land for repairs. At least two dots in Sail are necessary to pilot a Haslanti air boat.



Air boats provide observation platforms, launching stations for gliders, and aerial siege engines from which to drop bombs of flaming pine resin or burning casks of oil. Also, when the winds are favorable, the largest air boats can deliver up to six dozen highly trained soldiers to a city faster than even the swiftest iceship. Once in place, the troops drop down silently using ropes or gliders the color of the sky. Used at night, these sky-troops have proven exceptionally effective at breaking even the most difficult sieges.

In times of peace, the Haslanti air boats also function as merchant vessels carrying small valuable cargoes. These vessels have enabled the Haslanti League to expand its trade federation beyond the bounds of the White Sea. In the past fifty years, the League has established several settlements in high mountain valleys to the northwest of the White Sea. The new cities of Crystal and Diamond Hearth are both located on routes with stable air currents that allow air boats at different altitudes to sail easily to and from other League ports. These cities have already proven to be excellent sources of high-quality ores, ice-blue glow stones, diamonds, platinum, and similar valuable commodities. Located in remote valleys, both of these settlements are proof against all but the most determined beasts and barbarians. Unfortunately, their isolation also makes them dependent upon outside food supplies shipped in by air boat.

RECENT DISCOVERIES

Miners in Crystal recently uncovered what may be the ruins of a large, forgotten First Realm metropolis buried in a glacier a few miles from the city. Visitors can dimly glimpse massive walls and wide streets though the many yards of clear bluish ice. No usable First Realm artifacts have yet been discovered, but the excavations continue. Unfortunately, these explorations have proved somewhat hazardous. Several groups of ice-miners have been killed in the ice, while others have vanished without a trace.

The city of Diamond Hearth has built small camps further north, from which its miners can exploit the exceptionally pure ores often found in the northernmost mountains. Within the past four decades, the miners have begun bringing back large nuggets of a fine and exceptionally light iron known as feathersteel. Armor and weapons made from feathersteel are of exceptional quality and very lightweight. In addition, feathersteel has proven extremely useful in the manufacture of air boats and gliders. In recent years, the Haslanti have reduced their imports of wood for building such craft and begun exporting small ingots of feathersteel.

The price of feathersteel is high, however. The deposits near Diamond Hearth are rich, but feathersteel is only found in regions forever locked in the depths of winter. Miners in these areas have only Wyld-tainted beasts, barbarians, and the occasional Fair Folk or walking corpse

for company. Workers in these frozen and hazardous locations get paid exceptionally well, but few stay for more than a year, and one in seven who go to the mountain camps do not return alive.

IMPERIAL AMBITIONS

Recent Haslanti expansion has brought the League into increasing contact with other northern states. The Haslanti have a relatively peaceful history, but a faction currently exists in the council of Oligarchs that advocates the conquest of other northern states, including the wealthy city of Whitewall. The warmongers are led by Greyna Thold, a young and exceptionally charismatic Oligarch. While the Haslanti are currently not well-equipped for a war, residents of some nearby states have begun to worry about future aerial assaults by Haslanti commandos. League relations with Gethamane remain relatively cordial, but those with the inhuman Syndics of Whitewall were never good and have grown steadily worse. As a result of tensions with Whitewall, the previously neutral Haslanti states are also gradually turning against the Realm. Some of the more conservative Oligarchs fear angering the powerful (if distant) Realm and are seeking to curb this expansionist clique before they do something rash.

The Haslanti League maintains close ties with several large bands of icewalkers. Presently, this alliance mostly consists of mutual aid in fighting the Wyld barbarians. However, several Oligarchs have proposed asking the icewalkers for assistance in planned Haslanti conquests.

THE FUTURE OF THE HASLANTI LEAGUE

Without outside help, the Haslanti League's dreams of expansion are doomed. Enraged by the excavations at Crystal that have disturbed a First Realm artifact, large numbers of twisted beasts and Wyld barbarians descend upon this mountain outpost and destroy it. A few months later, barbarian attacks on outlying cities increase, as do the occurrences of frozen fog (see page 16).

In the aftermath of these troubles, the expansionist faction of the Oligarchs no longer has the resources necessary for their plans, and the Haslanti League must spend much of its recent surplus defending its present borders and keeping its citizens safe. The League survives these trials, but its dreams of conquest vanish for years or decades. Only the aid of powerful beings like the Exalted might allow Haslanti warriors to defeat the barbarians easily enough for the League to consider expansion. Certainly, if the expansionist Oligarchs received sufficient aid from young Exalted, the Exalted would find themselves welcome in the League.

Recent tales of the icewalker leader known as the Bull of the North (see page 19) have worried many Haslanti, and more than a few Oligarchs fear their current allies may soon turn against them.

SUPERSTITIOUS DREAMS

Many travelers have remarked that the people of the Haslanti city-states seem moody and secretive even when compared to other northerners. Most Haslanti worship spirits of ice, dreams, and fate. Their beliefs in fate and in dreams are central to their culture. The Haslanti regard all dreams as important, and people discuss their dreams with everyone they know. Some particularly vivid dreams are believed to have deep meaning, and are taken as clues to future events. People who have mysterious dreams often go to special diviners who interpret them.

Those whose dreams suggest they will die soon are treated as foredoomed, avoided by all but their loved ones and closest friends. Similarly, those who dream of gaining great wealth or similar boons often become magnets for attention from others seeking to profit from the dreamer's coming good fortune. Lying about dreams is considered more serious than lying about waking life, and the Haslanti refuse to trust anyone known to lie about dream visions. Those who refuse to discuss their dreams are seen as overly secretive or assumed to be hiding some future disaster or disgrace.

Dreamstone imported from the far south is highly valued in the ports of the League, as the stones allow people to share their most important dreams more clearly with their families and their diviners. However, because dreams are sacred, using dreamstone for entertainment (as is the custom in much of the South) is considered perverse and debased. Many visitors regard the Haslanti as superstitious and pay little heed to their talk of prophetic visions, but a large percentage of Haslanti dreams come true.

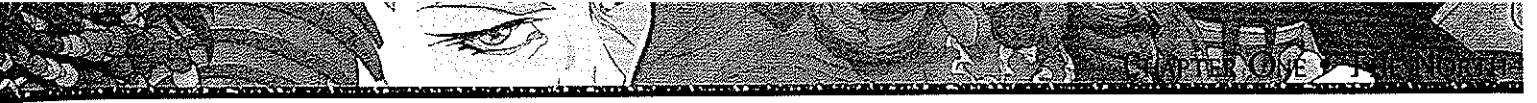
For more information on dreamstone, see page 47 of this book.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR THE HASLANTI LEAGUE

Dawn:	City Guard, Air Boat Marine, Mammoth Hunter
Zenith:	Northern Scout, Dream Interpreter
Twilight:	Scholar of Antiquities, Air Boat Engineer
Night:	Thief, Glider Commando
Eclipse:	Merchant, Ambassador to the Icewalkers, Iceship or Air Boat Pilot

THE SHADOWLANDS

The shadowlands are one of the North's most serious problems. In this harsh and frigid land, many people seek help from the greatest and most final power of all — death. The North is home to several dozen shadowlands, large



and small, where the Deathlords hold sway. Loners, outcasts, misfits, civilized folk twisted by exposure to the Wyld and others unfit for normal society often cluster around these dread realms, which rarely hold more than a few hundred living residents. Even compared to the shadowlands elsewhere in the Threshold, these villages are dark, eldritch places. In the northernmost shadowlands, the cold is constant and extreme, and the sun is always dim. Few visit these little hells on earth; those who do are advised to watch the inhabitants carefully.

The folk of these small settlements are extremely clannish and distrust all outsiders. Anyone wishing to join a shadowland must brave the locals' intense suspicion and prove herself useful and acceptable. While shadowlanders rarely kill those who might enhance their survival, anyone who lacks obvious value can be made to serve other, more sinister uses. Newcomers who do not measure up to the residents' expectations are slain, their possessions divided up and their bodies eaten. Visiting travelers who seem unlikely to be missed are likewise considered potential prey. Shadowlanders also frequently raid isolated farmsteads, carrying off the inhabitants to feed the hungry mouths of the village. While the folk of the shadowlands are careful to conceal evidence of their depredations, few people willingly live or travel near these dwellings of the dead.

During long winter nights, many northerners tell gruesome and terrifying tales of travelers who got lost in the wilderness of snow and ice and used the last of their energy to stumble toward the lights of a hungry shadowland, only to be devoured by its ghoulish denizens. Other stories tell of shadowland residents who beg hospitality from traveling caravans or isolated farms and then slay their sleeping hosts. These stories have more than a grain of truth to them, and all right-thinking northerners shun such places. However, the shadowlands offer some advantages to the twisted individuals willing to live there. The Deathlords provide the inhabitants with an abundant supply of slick, wet-looking coal to heat their dwellings, as well as carrion and frozen carcasses to eat.

Normally shabby and disreputable-looking, most shadowlands appear deserted until visitors notice the furtive inhabitants lurking in doorways and peering out of windows. A typical shadowland consists of one or two long streets, fronted by low buildings made of rough-hewn stone. With thick, forbidding walls against the cold and small windows covered by several layers of oiled cloth, the buildings appear dark and uninviting. The only exceptions are the few buildings inhabited by those eminent residents whom the Deathlords have rewarded with immunity to cold. These dwellings typically have large, open windows like staring eyes. Some of these prominent citizens even sculpt their dwellings out of ice and packed snow.

SHADOWLANDS AND THE DEATHLORDS

Those who serve the Deathlords particularly well are often granted near-immunity to cold. Notable for their stark white hair and colorless gray eyes, these individuals can walk through the most frigid blizzard wearing only light clothing and suffer nothing more than mild discomfort. These death-touched individuals are the leaders of the shadowlands. In return for this power over cold and other advantages, all the residents of the shadowlands must serve the wishes of the northern Deathlords. Some act as personal servants to the Deathlords and deathknights, while others create useful crafts. Most are sent outside the Shadowland to help the legions of the dead bring back the bodies of any dead humans and animals they can find. In addition to the occasional frozen wanderers, these scavengers often resort to grave robbing and murder to please their foul masters.

While few northern towns are willing to risk the wrath of the Deathlords by attacking shadowlands, any shadowland resident found outside his village is usually killed. Even the Guild refuses to trade with shadowlands for fear of alienating their other northern clients. Instead, a few intrepid or greedy merchants trade secretly with these unwholesome settlements. As long as the prices are good, there will always be some northerners who do not question where various carved onyx statues, antique jewelry, aged silks, long-frozen meat, and similar goods came from.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR SHADOWLANDS

Dawn:	Hunter of Men, Brigand
Zenith:	Speaker with the Dead, Priest of the Deathlords
Twilight:	Renegade Warlock, Priest of the Deathlords
Night:	Grave Robber, Spy
Eclipse:	Emissary of the Deathlords, Local Ruler

THE FROZEN FOG

In the furthest reaches of the North, near Gethamane and the northernmost ports of the Haslanti League, one of the most potent threats to life is the dreaded frozen fog. White, opaque, frigid and oddly dry, this fog periodically descends in huge billowing masses. Anything not protected from its touch is covered by a thin layer of ice within minutes of exposure. A bare hand exposed to frozen fog will become frostbitten in less than a minute. Frozen fog becomes increasingly common the further north one travels, and some reports suggest that endless banks of this deadly white haze lie past the eternally frozen mountains. Some people theorize that, if a traveler were to go far enough north, the mountains would drop away, leaving only a boundless sea of icy mist.

Inside the fog, visibility rarely extends farther than twenty feet, and sometimes less than half that distance. The fog can descend upon a settlement in less than an



FROZEN FOG

Exposure to frozen fog is deadly. Every 10 turns, anyone not completely wrapped in warm furs or similar protection takes one level of lethal damage. No damage roll is necessary; armor does not protect against this damage. The bulky clothing necessary to protect against frozen fog adds 1 to a character's maneuver penalty and fatigue value.

Beings that can soak at least one die of lethal damage can resist damage done by frozen fog without protection, as can beings protected by the Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit or other, similar Charms. Also, any individuals or creatures whose bodies have been twisted in a Northern Wyld zone are automatically immune to frozen fog. Such Wyld-twisted individuals are not immune to ordinary cold, merely to the frozen fog's unnatural chill.

hour and often serves as cover for attacking bands of Wyld barbarians. No one knows how these half-human creatures can survive exposure to the fog, or how they see in it, but clearly they do both quite well. Most scholars assume that sufficient exposure to Wyld areas in the farthest northlands renders the barbarians immune to the fog's effects. Certainly almost all of the raiders who follow the fog are visibly twisted by the Wyld.

These savages attack anyone outside when the fog descends. They also attempt to smash open doors and windows to let the fog in. Those not protected from the fog are weakened by even a short exposure. These frostbitten wretches make easy prey for the ever-hungry barbarians. Several kinds of Wyld-twisted animals, including the huge and vicious dead-white omen dogs, are known to follow the fog. Those few northerners lucky enough to survive animal attacks in the midst of frozen fog report hearing the eerie sound of creaking ice just before the onslaught. The animals apparently roll in any water they can find; the resulting ice coats their fur and provides additional protection against the frozen fog.

Even to those protected from the bitter cold by thick furs and other heavy clothing, the fog can still prove deadly. Frozen fog is a mobile manifestation of the chaotic energies of the Wyld. Individuals surrounded by particularly thick fog banks occasionally stumble out of the fog to find themselves dozens or hundreds of miles away from their previous location. Everyone who has survived such a transport reports hearing distant bells shortly before being moved.

Some victims tell stories of a shining figure in white furs and ivory armor, carrying a staff covered in bells. Shortly after seeing this apparition, they emerged from the fog far away from their original spot. No one has ever

succeeded in getting close to this mysterious figure. Likewise, no one knows how common the fog's translocation effect is, since many who experience it likely get lost and die of exposure far from any shelter. Though the destination appears random, each fog bank appears to translocate its victims to roughly the same region.

THE ICEWALKERS

While many of the North's inhabitants prefer to huddle around fires inside thick-walled dwellings, some wander throughout the region. Known as icewalkers, these nomadic bands of hunters and herders follow vast herds of mammoth, elk and reindeer across the bulk of the northlands, from the lush, cool taiga to the frozen depths of the northernmost mountains. The icewalker tribes have effectively domesticated the beasts they follow, but allow them to wander as they choose. Whenever obvious danger threatens, the icewalkers are quite capable of controlling the movements of their herds.

Through summer and winter, these wanderers travel the north, walking, skiing, and using the tamer herd animals as riding beasts or pack animals. During the warmer months they live in collapsible huts made from intricately carved wood and ivory frames covered with mammoth, elk, or reindeer hide. When the weather turns colder, they cover the huts with packed snow, which provides excellent insulation against the frigid weather.

TOTEM BEASTS

Each tribe of icewalkers pursues a particular type of animal. Some follow the migrations of reindeer or elk, while others accompany vast herds of mammoth on their seasonal travels. The animals provide the tribes with food and all manner of useful items — no portion of the beast is wasted. In addition, the icewalkers tame many of the younger animals as beasts of burden and for riding. Each group regards its chosen animal as a totem and a source of identity. The tribe venerates the spirits of its herd and identifies with them. Members of one mammoth tribe, for example, are welcomed and considered kin by all other mammoth tribes. By contrast, icewalkers do not regard tribes with different totems as kin. In prosperous times, tribes who follow different animals may be allies, but during the long cold winters, or whenever two herds are competing for scarce food, these groups can become bitter enemies who slaughter the people and animals of their rival.

WINTER TRIBUTE

Relationships with outsiders are even more erratic than those with fellow icewalker tribes. As long as their herds stay in warmer or more populous northland regions, the icewalkers are usually content to trade with various cities and towns. They exchange meat, hides, ivory, ant-



lers and occasionally tame animals for metal goods, cloth, and similar products of civilization. In most cases, the icewalkers briefly camp outside a city or town while the herds slowly wander through the area, and exchange goods in a huge trade festival held just outside the city walls.

Small or poorly defended settlements often receive far different treatment, especially during lean years or unusually harsh winters. In these times, the normally peaceful icewalkers become fierce bandits who besiege villages and demand foodstuffs and useful goods. Villages and towns that comply with these demands are left alive, albeit hungry and destitute in the dead of winter. Those who attempt to fight back are slaughtered. Showing compassion only toward their own kind, the icewalkers have been known to kill all of a town's inhabitants and pile their severed heads in the middle of the town square. Unlike the Wyld barbarians of the north, the icewalkers do not eat their slain foes, even in the most desperate times. If a village shows no extreme resistance, most tribes only kill any individual who attacks or threatens them and sell the rest as slaves to passing Guild caravans. Some civilized folk advocate killing all icewalkers, but the tribes are numerous and warlike enough to make such mass slaughter unlikely.

Many settlements, especially smaller ones with fewer resources, solve their icewalker problem by paying tribute to passing tribes. Ostensibly, the town gives the tribe food and goods to protect the town's inhabitants from any rival tribes or other marauders. In reality, tribute forestalls attack by the tribe being paid. Though often expensive, such tribute is usually much less costly than attempting to fight a band of well-armed barbarians with powerful war steeds, and less than the fee the tribe might request if the payment were not freely offered.

In sharp contrast to other Northern states, the Haslanti League has a treaty with most icewalker bands. Tensions still rise when food is scarce, but relations between these two groups are otherwise almost friendly. Icewalker tribes passing by Haslanti towns prefer trading to banditry in all but the harshest years.

RELATIONS WITH SETTLED FOLK

Icwalkers typically regard the settled inhabitants of cities and towns as lesser beings whom they alternately pity and fear. Toward their chief rivals, the Wyld-tainted barbarians of the far North, the icewalker tribes feel fury and hatred. Icewalkers are extremely suspicious of anything not fully human; Wyld barbarians, Ravagers, and others tainted by inhuman forces are anathema to them. They view such monstrosities as a threat to the stability of the world, and most icewalkers will go out of their way to kill such beings. Icewalkers will also gladly kill any Fair Folk, deathknight, or undead creature they can safely attack. However, the tribes generally prefer to avoid conflict with such dangerous inhuman foes.

Most of the North's more civilized inhabitants are perfectly happy to let the icewalkers and the barbarians slaughter each other. In fact, this ongoing conflict is a major reason that none of the northern states have seriously attempted to destroy the icewalker peoples. The icewalkers may be dangerous and uncivilized, but they can be bribed, and their fighting skill helps to check the monstrous excesses of the savage Wyld barbarians. In effect, they form an army that the Northern states need not pay the full cost to maintain.

The rampant cannibalism of the Wyld barbarians is one of the reasons that the icewalkers universally shun this practice. Rapacious and aggressive, the icewalkers think nothing of human sacrifice or the slow torture of their enemies, but they draw the line at cannibalism as a mark of the Wyld. Anyone guilty of this abhorrent deed is condemned to suffer a slow, painful death. Wyld barbarian raiders often slaughter surrendered villagers and feast on their corpses; those who surrender to even the hungriest icewalkers are likely to lose all their food and animals, but will still be alive to seek help. The settled peoples of the North detest both groups of nomads, but see the icewalkers as the lesser of two evils.

Many settled northerners worry that the often-squabbling icewalker tribes may one day unite and become a formidable military power. Prophecies have existed from time immemorial that a great warlord among the icewalkers will unify the tribes and go forth to conquer the entire North, and now some worry that these prophecies may be coming true.

Within the past two years, a mysterious leader known only as the Bull of the North has gathered a following among the elk and reindeer tribes. This person is said to be recruiting additional tribes and to be seeking some way to ally with the powerful mammoth tribes. No one knows if the Bull of the North will succeed, but the Syndics of Whitewall and many of the smaller northern states all fear the power of a united army of icewalkers with elk-mounted cavalry and deadly war mammoths. Even the Haslanti Oligarchs, with their close ties to the icewalker bands, fear the changes that the Bull of the North is bringing. No one knows much about this mysterious individual, but some stories suggest that he or she may be some variety of Exalted, an embodied spirit, or perhaps a Wyld shaman possessed by a powerful and malefic spirit. The Haslanti Oligarchs and the lords of Gethamane are both offering large rewards to any spies willing to gather useful information on the Bull's plans.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR ICEWALKERS

Dawn:	Warrior, Hunter
Zenith:	Shaman, Mystic
Night:	Scout, Hunter
Twilight:	Bone-Crafter, Teller-of-Tales
Eclipse:	Speaker to Towns, Messenger Between Clans





CHAPTER TWO THE EAST

The East is the cradle of life. Aspected to the element of Wood, this region embodies the essence of fertility and growth. Yet nature is not a pleasure-garden, full of tame animals and roses without thorns. Nature is a savage place, where predators hunt prey and only the strong, the swift or the fortunate live to struggle through another day. The East exemplifies this reality along with growth and bounty.

The East is home to the diverse and warlike Scavenger Lands, but holds much more of interest as well. The tree-dwelling Haltan, the funerary city of Sijan and the mysterious ruins of Rathess, the ancient City of the Dragon Kings, are only a few of the peoples and places that lie within the borders of this vital and prosperous region.

SIJAN

Three day's ride to the north of Nexus lies the necropolis of Sijan. Built on the shores of the River of Tears, Sijan lies near the border of the Black Chase, one of the East's largest shadowlands. Much of the area surrounding Sijan is grayish marshland, full of dank smells and towering banyan trees. During the night, ghostly werelights haunt this ill-aspected fen. To the north of the city, this unpleasant marsh becomes a forest of coal-black trees that bear neither leaves nor fruit. As in all shadowlands, the dead walk here, and only the bravest or most foolhardy members of the living visit the place.

Sijan itself lies just inside the realm of the living. Within its bounds, roughly 20,000 people make their livelihoods working with the dead. Sijan is a city devoted entirely to the funerary arts. The wealthiest families of Nexus, along with occasional queens, presidents, and high nobles from further afield, send their deceased relatives to Sijan to be prepared for burial. Catering to all customs and manners of belief, the embalmers, morticians, necro-surgeons, gravediggers, paid mourners, shroud weavers, mausoleum builders, and other funerary personnel are well versed in the funeral rites of the Threshold's more prominent religions and cultures.

For an additional fee, Sijan's trained professionals will custom-design funerary arrangements, either for specific individuals or for newly-founded cities and princes seeking to establish new traditions. Ever willing to please their clients, living and dead, the funerists of Sijan embalm, cremate, expose, or even reanimate bodies, depending on the wishes of the deceased. The folk of Sijan regard the wishes of the dead as more important than the desires of the living, and the city's funerists frequently use secret necromantic rituals to learn a deceased client's preferences.

BURIAL OPTIONS

The city maintains several large necropoli with burial options ranging from simple tombs to elaborate mausoleums for those who wish to be buried here. Alternately, bodies can



be prepared and laid in elaborate coffins or sarcophagi for shipment to distant burial grounds. At considerably greater expense, a full burial team from Sijan can even accompany the body to its final resting place. The sight of one of Sijan's night-black river galleys docking at Nexus typically signals the beginning of a huge and elaborate funeral. The wealthiest clients usually engage the burial team to construct a mausoleum near the deceased's home. Funerists typically request high fees for commissions that will keep them away from their beloved city for many months, but the results of their work are universally acclaimed as the height of the funerary arts in the Threshold.

The most exotic burial option lies much closer to Sijan. Some clients wish the deceased to be prepared for a new and grand unlife in the neighboring shadowland. Using special techniques that can take as long as a year, the funerists prepare the body so that the deceased will survive the passage into death with maximum retention of memory and personality. The vast majority of these clients rise as ordinary ghosts rather than as hungry ghosts or walking dead.

These and other extensive services command high prices and bring great wealth into dreary Sijan, but the city's inhabitants have enough compassion not to charge exorbitant prices for every burial. All the dead brought to Sijan will receive a proper funeral, regardless of their guardians' ability to pay. Very often, paupers and other poor folk from Nexus make their way to Sijan with the bodies of their loved ones, knowing that their dead will be buried in a respectable manner. Such bodies are typically turned over to the more advanced students at the city's funerary schools, to receive simple but careful burials as practice exercises. In exchange, those who rise as ghosts after charitable burial are indebted to the city. More than a few important denizens of the Underworld have their origins in the City of Tombs, and they remember their humble beginnings. (For more information on the funerists of Sijan, see page 82 of Chapter Five: The Scavenger Lands.)

TOMB RAIDERS

As the ultimate destination of many thousands of the wealthiest individuals in the eastern lands, Sijan is the subject of countless stories of immense riches in its crypts. For hundreds of years, jewelry and other precious objects have been buried in scores of crypts and cemeteries. Dreams of attaining some of this buried wealth have spurred many hopeful thieves to try their hand at grave robbing or pilfering from the buildings where the dead are prepared for burial. Some such thefts succeed, but few talk about those in Sijan. The stories of failures are known far too well.

All captured grave robbers meet a terrible fate, for the dead will accept no lesser revenge. Most tomb raiders are killed and their bodies dumped in the marsh as food for animals. Any ghosts that rise are enslaved by the fen's incorporeal residents and sold to the slave markets of the

Underworld, while hungry ghosts are bound to the city to serve as the eternal guardians of the tombs they once attempted to rob.

Tomb raiders who wantonly destroy bodies or who impersonate funerary personnel suffer even more horrific punishments. Some are put to death by methods that take years, and many continue to suffer long after their demise. The worst offenders have their corpses and spirits mutilated and are displayed outside the city as a lesson to those who would steal from the dead. While daring comrades have occasionally rescued the corpses of a few thieves facing such fates, most of the guilty spend several lifetimes deeply regretting their actions.

THE CITY PROPER

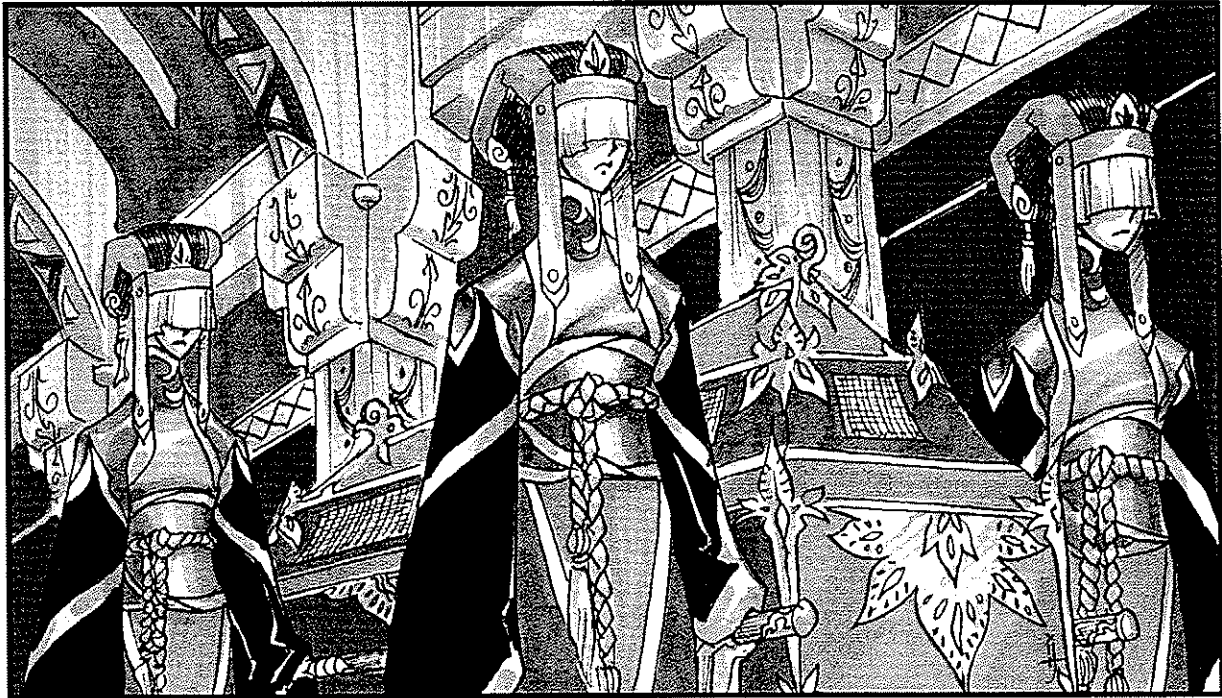
Most of Sijan's inhabitants were born in this dark city and trained in a profession followed by one of their parents. However, outsiders with a proper appreciation for the dead are always welcome here. Every year, boats dock at Sijan bearing a few quiet and morbid youths who know that serving the needs of the dead is their true calling. Some necessities also take up the career of funerist after they rise in Sijan.

Built of sickly gray stone, spotted with lichen and in places overgrown with bone-pale ivy, Sijan has little business other than dealing with the dead. The land nearby will support neither crops nor animals, and so Sijan ships in most of its food from Nexus. Few clothiers or members of similar mundane professions exist inside the city; many of the inhabitants wear garments made by the shroud weavers, and make little distinction between goods created for the dead and the living.

Among the few other lucrative businesses in Sijan are several large gaming parlors, where those so inclined can make unwholesome bets in games of chance that use the knuckle-bones of grave robbers as dice. Those who want burials more expensive than they can afford sometimes bet their afterlife, or occasionally portions of their own bodies, in an effort to win a grand funeral for themselves or their loved ones. Winners gain fancy mausoleums, or even an endless existence as one of the undead. Losers have hands or eyes removed for use by the funerists or become mindless walking-dead servants of the city after they die. The most foolish sometimes make bets where losing gets them killed on the spot, so that their corpses can be reanimated to serve the whims of a deathknight.

In addition to these unpleasant entertainments, the city holds several vast libraries known to contain large numbers of ancient tomes. The stacks are open to all undead and available to funerists for a small fee; other visitors must pay dearly for access to these vast stores of knowledge. These libraries are said to contain works from the First Realm as well as volumes penned by famous writers and scholars after their deaths. Sijan's deepest crypts date from the First Age, and were built long before the coming of the nearby

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Shadowland. Other Anathema were entombed in Sijan after the usurpation of the Dragon-Blooded. Vast wealth and antique magics wait in these ancient tombs, guarded by protections as impressive as these treasures.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR SIJAN

Dawn:	Bandit-Hunter, Grave Guard
Zenith:	Funerary Priest, Reformed Tomb Robber
Twilight:	Librarian, Necrosurgeon, Savant of Death
Night:	Grave Guard, Hunter of Hungry Ghosts
Eclipse:	Speaker to the Dead, Funeral Negotiator

THE REPUBLIC OF CHAYA

Three weeks' travel south of Nexus, and more than a week's journey inland from the coast, lies the Republic of Chaya. Foreigners who travel to this idyllic place marvel at the peace and harmony found here. Lying amid meadows and young forests, Chaya is one of the East's most fertile and prosperous regions — a land of gentle rains, lush vegetation, and abundant crops. More than 180,000 inhabitants make up the republic, scattered amid several walled towns. Each town is governed democratically, with all inhabitants voting on all decisions in weekly town meetings. Each town also elects a representative who spends half the year living in the town and the other half in Chaya's capitol city of Lartyn. With a population of 25,000, Lartyn is the largest settlement in the republic, but differs little from its smaller cousins.

Chayan buildings are mostly made of wood and generally stand less than four stories tall. These dwellings,

along with wooden furniture and other goods made in the towns, are sturdily constructed, with great regard for the danger of fire. Fruit trees line the wide streets, adding to the impression of cleanliness and order. The republic boasts few precious metals or gemstones, but the local cloth is finely made and Chayan woodcarvings command a respectable price — especially hardwood jewelry, an item much prized in many other lands.

The inhabitants of Chayan towns are generally peaceful and responsible, to the delighted astonishment of many an outlander. Chayan merchants may bargain for the highest prices and thieves may occasionally pick a careless visitor's pocket, but the minor violence and irresponsibility characteristic of most human habitation is largely absent from these villages. Residents dispose of their garbage in designated middens, voices are rarely raised in anger, and vandalism, tavern brawls, and even serious rudeness are rare. Despite the peace and abundance of this apparently blessed land, however, travelers to it are remarkably few. During most of the year, visitors can expect to be treated with kindness and respect. In the summer months, however, a yearly scourge descends upon Chaya that tends to make outlanders think twice about journeying through the republic.

THE SECRET OF CHAYA

Every summer, the land of Chaya undergoes a frightful alteration when the fire trees bloom. These medium-sized, deciduous trees bear large numbers of scarlet blossoms a few weeks after the middle of the month of Resplendent Fire. The scent of the flowers is intoxicating to all who smell it. For outsiders, it acts as a mild euphoric, lowering inhibitions in much the same manner as a mug or two of



FIRE TREES

For visitors to the Republic of Chaya, exposure to the blossoms of the fire tree acts as a mild intoxicant. Visitors should lower their Willpower by two points for the duration of their exposure. Natives of Chaya lose all Willpower for the duration of the flowering season, and become wildly emotional and prone to violence. Fire tree season lasts for approximately three weeks; the blossoms' effects fade within a day or two of the season's end.

strong ale. Natives of Chaya, by contrast, respond much more strongly to fire tree pollen. For the entire month during which the fire trees bloom, local inhabitants lose all inhibitions. They become wildly passionate, prone to extreme emotional outbursts and fits of crazed excitement. Because fire trees are considered sacred and are planted near every habitation, every denizen of the republic is affected by the flowers' scent.

Because the blossoms render the inhabitants incapable of restraining their emotions, they have designed their towns and cities to minimize problems. Few buildings burn during this passionate season, and normally fewer than a thousand residents die in the fights, accidents, and murders that abound when the fire trees bloom. Many locals become quite violent under the blossoms' influence, but they rarely kill each other. They are more likely to kill domestic or wild animals, a habit that accounts for the rarity of livestock and pets in a typical Chayan village. Many others abandon themselves to wild orgies in which heaving mobs of people frenziedly seek ultimate pleasure. Others binge on food and intoxicants, ceasing these bouts of excess only when the individual passes out. Visitors who have experienced fire blossom season report that the local folk can sense the visitors' resistance to the fire trees, a difference they see as threatening, and unnatural. Gangs of frenzied Chayans drunk on fire tree pollen often hunt down like animals those outlanders unlucky enough to be spotted.

After fire tree season ends, the inhabitants remember little of what happened. Local people explain the season's madness as the influence of their gods, whom they believe become incarnate in the people during the blooming time. It could well be that the actions of powerful gods or spirits produce some fire tree madness. The fire trees also help explain the land's otherwise unusual peace. The outlet of fire tree season allows the inhabitants to better control their baser impulses for the rest of the year, and also accounts for another beneficial side effect. Fire trees do not grow well outside the boundaries of the republic, and native Chayans deprived of the blossom's scent for more than a few years gradually go mad. The people of Chaya therefore have little motive for conquest, and none of the

republic's neighbors are interested in conquering a land whose inhabitants go mad on a yearly basis.

All of the tiny principalities surrounding the republic have a superstitious dread of the Chayans, and many folk who live nearby are reluctant to speak of them. However, most people will warn polite travelers not to remain in Chaya during the height of summer. Wild stories of the Chayan republic are told throughout the East, but few in Nexus or more distant realms know more than the Chayans' reputation for violent outbursts.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR CHAYA

Dawn:	Soldier, Strategos
Noon:	Fire-Tree Gardener, Immaculate Priest
Twilight:	Teacher, Architect
Night:	Thief, Guard
Eclipse:	Merchant

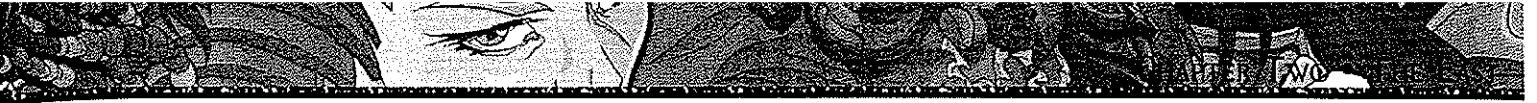
CHAYAN EXALTED

Although the sanity of most Chayans is tied to the presence of the fire trees, Exaltation removes this dependence. When the fire trees bloom, native Exalted suddenly find themselves reacting like outsiders. They are somewhat intoxicated by the blossoms, but they no longer experience the ecstatic loss of control felt by their fellow Chayans. Also, an Exalt's vast quantities of Essence accentuate her natural passions, and so most are no longer as peaceful and orderly as other Chayans. As a result, most Exalted leave the Chayan Republic, never to return. Their transformation leaves them forever outside this strange society.

THE LINOWAN

In the Northeast, the deep forest lies well back from the eastern shore of the Inner Sea. A wide band of meadow stretches away from the coast to meet a deciduous forest; behind those, extending as far as any outsider has ever ventured, is an apparently endless expanse of pines, spruces and giant redwoods. According to the stories, these trees grow taller the further east one travels, until they reach several miles into the sky with trunks larger than the wall-span of a small town. This thickly forested region is lush, pleasant, and exceedingly rich, but also torn by conflict. Where the vast coniferous forest touches the meadows and deciduous woods, two societies fight a seemingly eternal war.

The Linowan people live in the meadows and deciduous forests toward the coast. Though the meadowlands are undoubtedly fertile, few till the soil or sow the fields. Instead, the Linowan dwell in large towns and small cities, connected by a wide network of traders. Local rivers are thick with trout and salmon, and in the spring and summer



the trees and bushes overflow with dozens of varieties of edible acorns, berries, and nuts.

The Linowan people have skin the color of oak leaves in autumn, and straight, shiny black hair with green highlights. They dress in skins, bark cloth, and wool from the wild sheep and goats they hunt in the northern hills of their land, and they ply the rivers and go to sea in canoes that can hold as many as three dozen warriors. They reject the Immaculate Philosophy and worship the Maidens, the Unconquered Sun and the spirits of the ocean and the rivers.

THE ENDLESS WAR

The Linowans' greatest enemy is the vast redwood forest and all who inhabit it, especially the powerful Haltan people. The Linowan constantly work to expand the meadows and deciduous forests eastward, slowly pushing back the huge, dark coniferous forest. With equal ferocity, the Haltan attempt to spread the redwood forests all the way to the coast of the Inner Sea, destroying the meadows and the broad-leaved woodlands. The Haltan and the Linowan are locked in a war for their chosen environment, each fighting and dying to expand their homeland.

Linowan warriors regularly travel the edge of the redwood forests, cutting down advancing saplings and killing any Haltan they find. Occasionally, in ceremonies celebrating valor and martial prowess, large bands of Linowan warriors vow to travel into the redwood forest and cut down a tree. Most such raids fail, and a quarter of the raiding parties are never seen again, but the rewards for success are great. Those who return bearing portions of a redwood's vast trunk are hailed as heroes and earn the right to wear special gold pendants in the shape of the sun. The tree raids are necessary, because Linowan custom decrees that the houses of great chiefs must be built solely of redwood planks.

Equally great rewards are heaped upon warriors who manage to bring back living Haltan captives. The possession of even a single captive is a signal for a joyous celebration. The people of the warrior's village or town hold an enormous party that lasts several days. During this time, the villagers tie up the captive outside the chief's house and consume immense quantities of sweet berry-wine. After the captive has watched the celebrations and been treated to displays of the people's wealth and power, he or she is burned in the center of the village, in a fire fueled by redwood. Captives who show courage and honor die tied upright to a large plank; those who show fear are strangled first and their bodies thrown carelessly on the flames. If many captives are taken, the celebration may last for more than a week and surrounding villages and towns are invited to join the festivities.

TRADE AND RAIDING

Though warfare with the redwood forest and its inhabitants makes up a large portion of their legends, the Linowan

are also widely known as fearless sailors. In their huge trading canoes, the Linowan regularly sail as far as Nexus, and even across the Inner Sea to the Realm. There, they trade woven blankets, elaborate horn and wood carvings, and similar finely-made goods for well-worked metal, rare spices and other products of civilization. Linowan sailors also hunt all manner of sea and river beasts, including whales and kraken. In the Linowan capital of Rubylak, the entrance to the queen's house is carved from the jawbone of an enormous whale. Queen Arkasi also has a magic canoe over 20 yards long, built of whalebone and kraken hide.

Though the Linowan reserve most of their fierceness for the Haltans and their forests, they frequently also play pirate, attacking any passing ships that appear to be easy prey. Ships that follow trade routes near Linowan territory are advised to travel well armed. Vessels that trade regularly and deal fairly with the Linowan are given specially woven flags to fly when sailing near Linowan waters, and these ships are never attacked. Not surprisingly, a thriving trade in duplicate flags has arisen among some of the Linowan's neighbors. The Linowan are aware of this, and so Linowan raiders occasionally approach flagged ships and ask where they got their flag. Crews unable to answer their questions are captured and sacrificed as allies of the Haltan. Though loyal to their friends, the Linowan have no mercy on any they believe may be aiding their lifelong enemies.

Linowan warrior parties also sometimes take their war canoes on raids against the less settled lands to the north and south. These raiders are armed with spears, javelins, and spear throwers, clad in buff-colored jackets of leather and bark cloth, their faces painted in terrifying patterns of bright colors. Though relatively disorganized and unable to match a disciplined military force, Linowan warriors fight with a nearly unmatched ferocity that makes them more than a match for the semi-civilized villages and towns of nearby regions. Linowan raiders take property and occasionally slaves. Only chiefs and nobles can own slaves, however, and the Linowan will not sell slaves to the Guild, so slaving is rarely the sole motive for such raids.

The Linowan are staunch allies of the Realm. The Realm's sophisticated nobles and seasoned soldiers regard them as little better than savages, but the Linowan have proven themselves capable warriors. A number of Linowan warbands are currently serving as auxiliaries to the Realm, engaging in raids at the behest of the empire. Queen Arkasi hopes to persuade the Realm to provide her with warriors and Dragon-Blooded to help fight the Haltan. However, the Realm sees little threat in the reclusive Haltan and benefits from Haltan trade with the far East. Given the Realm's current political state, military aid to the Linowan is highly unlikely. Instead, the Linowan alliance with the Realm primarily serves as a way for Linowan warriors to gain honor, glory, and occasionally considerable quantities of loot.





NOBLES

Linowan nobles are individuals who have performed feats of valor or exceptional prowess. Warriors who return from the redwood forests with captives or redwood logs are given noble status, as are exceptional crafters, storytellers, shamans, healers, or anyone else widely acclaimed to be worthy. All nobles receive gold or silver pendants, lip plugs, or ear spools from the queen to indicate their status. In addition, noble shamans, storytellers, warriors, and others belonging to the most important professions are all given special wooden masks imbued by tribal shamans with the powers of various spirits.

Carved in grotesque animal shapes and inlaid with numerous bright-colored materials, these masks grant their wearers special abilities. Each mask has a specific effect related to the wearer's profession. Some warriors' masks may induce terror in all enemies who see them, while others armor the wearer against damage or boost her fighting prowess. A law-giver's mask might allow the wearer to tell truth from falsehood, while a storyteller's mask might grant the power to create small illusions or even allow the wearer to take on the semblance of various people and animals.

These masks are sacred items. Anyone who wears a mask he has not earned is damned as the worst sort of thief and immediately tortured to death. The exact tortures inflicted depend on the specific type of mask. For stealing a mask that grants prowess in battle, a thief might have his hands slowly cut off, while the stealer of a storytelling mask might have his tongue and lips sliced away. Afterward, the thief is burned alive. Unlike the deaths of war captives and enemies, these executions are not celebrated. Instead, they are performed with great solemnity to honor the defiled mask.

CUSTOMS TOWARD VISITORS

The Linowan treat new visitors with trust and respect. However, travelers who attempt to cheat or steal from them quickly lose their favor. The Linowan tolerate no enemies within their lands, but are content to merely send most unfriendly or dishonest travelers far away. Most minor offenses committed by travelers result in exile, or (more commonly) public whipping followed by exile. Exiles are branded on the face to prevent their return. Perpetrators of more serious crimes are assumed to be spies with ties to the Haltan. Captives deemed guilty of such crimes are treated as Haltan prisoners and die by fire after the appropriate celebrations. Similar treatment is reserved for any Linowan known to have aided the Haltan, with a macabre addition. A Linowan guilty of aiding the Haltan is tortured during the celebration, with every celebrant getting the chance to cut, burn, or otherwise mutilate the traitor. The only limit on torments inflicted is the requirement that nothing kill the traitor before she is burned.

LINOWAN MASKS

The magical masks made by Linowan shamans are specially crafted to assist in the performance of a specific task. Each mask is tied to a separate Ability. The wearer gains one die in this Ability as long as she is wearing the mask. This effect can raise an Ability above 5, but does not increase an Exalted character's natural dice pool for the purposes of Charm effects.

A Linowan mask must be created for a given individual, who must participate in the creation of the mask. These masks are useless in the hands of those other than their intended wearers. No character can be attuned to more than one mask at a time, though some exceptional individuals change careers and have several masks over their lifetimes.

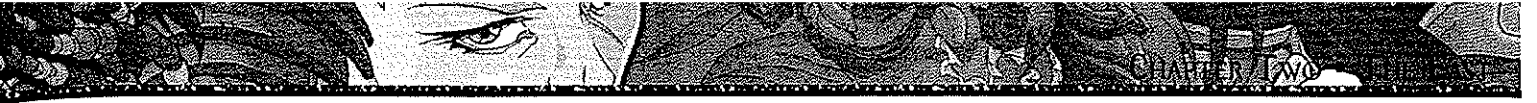
Linowan masks are an Artifact • background. A player whose character possesses such a mask should work out with the Storyteller the specific deed of valor or feat of skill that earned the character the right to own this mask. This deed was almost certainly performed before the character became Exalted.

Creating a Linowan mask requires a month of work from both individuals involved, and the shaman must have a Craft (Shaman) score of •••• or higher and a Lore and Occult score of at least •• each. An individual cannot make a mask for herself — creating one is a two-person task. The making of these masks is a closely guarded secret of the Linowan people, taught only to elder shamans. Owning such a mask grants the character an automatic dot of Influence regarding Haltans.

As allies of the Realm, the Linowan have been told that all Celestial Exalted are dangerous and evil Anathema. However, the imperial force in the Linowan lands is small, and the Linowan are more swayed by individual honor than by reports from distant bureaucrats. Solar Exalted who comport themselves with honor will be carefully watched, but accorded the normal courtesy extended to other visitors. Any Solar Exalted who proves at all untrustworthy, cowardly, or dishonorable will be turned over to the Realm ambassador for a large bounty. Their ties to the Realm also keep the Linowan from letting any Solar Exalted settle in their lands.

MADNESSES OF THE LINOWAN

Several odd forms of madness occasionally afflict the Linowan. Those who spend too much time around Wyld areas or other places frequented by spirits and the Fair Folk sometimes become Vatal — possessed by Vata, the cannibal spirit. The Vatal live solitary lives in rude huts in the pine forests. Their teeth and nails grow into deadly fangs



and claws, and they lust for the taste of human flesh. Any who travel near the dwellings of such monsters are pursued relentlessly through the woods. Only large numbers or the close proximity of a village or town will dissuade the Vatal from attacking. While normally solitary predators, Vatal also sometimes serve as the hounds of the Fair Folk. When the local Fey wish to feast upon humans, they often gather up a small number of Vatal to chase and corner their prey. Stories of pursuit by a pack of howling Vatal and their oddly silent, inhuman lord will cause even the bravest Linowan to look cautiously into the darkness. Like the Vatal, the Fair Folk in this region rarely enter settled places. However, they regard all who travel through the meadows or the forests as their rightful prey. A few highly skilled warriors specialize in hunting Vatal. Identified by their grisly necklaces of Vatal claws, all who survive their first hunt and return with a trophy are made nobles.

Hal fever is the other madness unique to the Linowan. On rare occasions, Linowan who live too near the redwood forest or who visit it frequently become drawn to the grandeur of these great trees. They gradually lose touch with those around them, and in time their hair turns a deep, rich green. Linowan shamans can sometimes banish this affliction, but in many cases the individual either flees to the Haltan or is killed by her relatives.

Many Linowan affected by Hal fever manage to channel this fascination with the forest into an obsession with exploring and conquering it, to the point that they violently resist all efforts to keep them from it. Though their fellows praise them for their bravery, all know that warriors in the grip of Hal fever will likely soon fall prey to the Haltan or the Fair Folk who hunt the woodlands.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR THE LINOWAN

Dawn:	Warrior, Mercenary, Sea-Hunter
Zenith:	Noble, Priest of the Sun or Sea
Twilight:	Lore Speaker, Shaman
Night:	Scout, Spy into Haltan Lands
Eclipse:	Ambassador to the Realm

THE HALTAN REPUBLIC

In the coniferous forests immediately to the east of the Linowan live the mysterious Haltan. Like the forest-dwelling barbarians to the far East, the Haltan live up in the giant trees that cover their land. However, unlike these uncivilized savages, the Haltan people have a complex society marked by fine metalwork, large libraries, exquisite architecture, and a unified central government. Haltan cities and towns stand on a series of huge wooden platforms in the branches of their prized redwood trees. Their capital city of Chanta is a marvel of aerial engineering. Throughout their territory, across the branches of the great trees that form a nearly continuous canopy, the Haltan have built a complicated network of aerial bridges that connect their various

settlements. To aid in foraging and gathering, these bridges extend to all portions of the forest.

The Haltan are an attractive but unusual-looking people. Like the Linowan, they have ruddy brown skin and beardless, high-cheekboned faces, but their hair is a deep, rich green. Scholars have noted that the Haltan are one of the few green-haired people living outside of the West. The Haltan typically go barefoot, and their toes are slightly more prehensile than the norm. However, they are fully human and exhibit none of the twistings produced by exposure to the Wyld. Instead, they seem no more than a people extremely well adapted to their unique way of life.

THE HALTAN AND THE FOREST

The Haltan revere their trees as gods and treat them with love and respect. They seek to expand their sacred forest, and warriors sometimes go on expeditions to the deep woodland's edge to plant trees. In addition to the reverence they display towards their forest, they are widely known for their unusual closeness to nature and their ability to tame all manner of beasts. In their treetop cities and towns, the inhabitants keep a vast menagerie of pets and other domesticated animals.

Typical Haltan pets include brightly colored birds, arboreal lizards, and small monkeys, but many Haltan have managed to tame giant bats, wolf spiders, climbing apes, and huge eagles with wingspans taller than a man. The Haltan can tame any animal that can live high in the trees. Many Haltan have multiple animal companions, and a few have a dozen or more. Some of these animals are pets; others earn their keep by guarding shops and houses, hunting, gathering, or occasionally performing simple repetitive tasks. In these arboreal cities, small troops of lemurs shell nuts for bakers, baboons gather grapes and apples, and giant wolf spiders retrieve hunters' kills. A few visitors also report darker and more mysterious connections between the Haltan and their animals.

In the more remote Haltan cities, some tamed beasts speak and think as humans. Centuries of breeding animals whose ancestors were twisted by the Wyld have produced several lines of sentient and near-sentient creatures, including giant bats, snakes, wolf spiders, and mospids. These animals are rare, highly renowned, and possess some of the rights of citizens. They are usually only found in the company of the wealthy and powerful. Reports also speak of a few animals with human features and humans with animal parts, which have led some visitors to mistakenly claim that the Haltan breed with their prized animals on occasion. Such liaisons do occur, but are forbidden by Haltan law. The human-like animals and animalistic humans are not the products of human-animal breeding, but are individuals savagely warped by the Wyld. Like citizens of any other civilized nation, the Haltan regard most Wyld mutations as abominable. They regard as



sacred any mingling of human and animal traits, however, and see such beings as holy, if somewhat disturbing.

THE HALTAN AND THE FAIR FOLK

The Haltan have an odd relationship with the Fair Folk. Long-established treaties of mutual non-interference make the Fair Folk disinclined to trouble anyone who is up in the trees, and Fair Folk strictly avoid Haltan settlements. For their part, the Haltan tend to stay up on their aerial bridges and seldom venture down to the ground, where they become fair game. Anyone on the ground in Haltan lands may be freely hunted by the Fair Folk, and none of the Haltan will attempt to aid the quarry. Part of this treating with the Fair Folk involves regular sacrifices to their dark hungers. Linowan captives serve this function well. Any Linowan taken captive by the Haltan are brought deep inside the forest and then set free on the soil. The Fair Folk carefully observe all such sacrifices; less than a dozen of the many thousands of captives have ever made their way free of the forest.

Such practices naturally increase hostility between the Haltan and Linowan peoples. Using their impressive skill with swords, spear throwers, and razor-sharp steel war boomerangs, Haltan warriors and hunters make short work of attacking Linowan ground forces. Open attacks on the Haltans' forest homes rarely succeed, but brave and fortunate Linowan sometimes manage to sneak into outlying treetop settlements and massacre dozens of Haltan as they lie sleeping. In return, daring Haltan warriors accompanied by a variety of tame and sentient predators slip into Linowan villages near the forest, killing some while they sleep and capturing others for sacrifice to the Fair Folk.

The Haltan lands are one of the places where cooperative Fair Folk who have forsaken their Wyld areas may easily live among humanity. Such individuals are forbidden to prey upon unwilling victims, but are free to exchange a wide variety of services for the right to feed upon dreams or emotions. Although some Haltan are wary of Fair Folk dwelling among them, others see the Fair Folk as useful intermediaries and the source of many advantages for the Haltan people. The fact that the Haltan allow Fair Folk to live in their cities is yet another of many reasons that the Linowan hate the Haltan.

Occasional Fair Folk take pleasure in feeding a single Linowan's obsession with the vast redwood forest. Most of these mind-twisted wretches are overcome with an irresistible urge to destroy the huge trees, and quickly become toys and meat for the Fair Folk. However, a few transcend this compulsion and instead come to love the redwoods. These lucky individuals are given the opportunity to join the Haltan and forsake their old allegiances.

HALTAN PETS

Most Haltan have one or more exotic pets. The Haltan people have spent generations breeding such animals to be tame, loyal and intelligent. Haltan player characters can also possess such pets. Haltan Exalted may only possess a single Familiar, but may have as many loyal, moderately intelligent, tame animals as they have dots in Charisma.

All such animals are as smart as clever monkeys or 3-4 year old children. Such pets cannot speak, but can understand the spoken word and perform simple tasks, as well as communicating simple concepts through posture and facial expression. Little pets like mosquitos or small monkeys cost 1 bonus point; dangerous pets, like lynx-sized tree cats, or large useful pets like giant wolf spiders, cost 2 bonus points. Such pets can also be bought with experience points if the character is in Haltan lands. The experience point cost for such pets is double their cost in freebie points. Abused or neglected pets will eventually turn on their owner or leave, while those that are well-cared for and loved may even willingly die for their owner.

Companion animals who can think and speak as well as a human are much rarer. The cost for such creatures is 3 bonus points for small pets and 4 bonus points for large or dangerous pets. Characters without at least two dots in Property and one dot in Influence cannot have such animals. Sentient animals have some rights among the Haltan and are never given to anyone the beast dislikes. Normally, these creatures prefer to associate with individuals of some importance.

TRADE WITH THE HALTAN

Needless to say, travel into Haltan lands is not particularly popular except with Haltan escorts to take the visitors through the trees. As a result, trade with the Haltan can be a somewhat delicate affair. Traders regularly visit the Haltan Republic, most of them repeat customers well known to the Haltan people. Many of these traders run family businesses through which they gradually introduce their children to the Haltan and their exotic way of life. More often, however, the Haltan send their own merchants to distant lands. While most Haltan leave the security of their forest reluctantly and feel ill at ease on the ground, some do get the urge to travel. These wandering traders often achieve significant wealth and power selling rare Haltan woods, expensive spices, and powerful medicinal herbs in Nexus, the Realm, and occasionally even in distant cities like Gethamane and Chiaroscuro. These same traders also make excellent

HALTAN WEAPONS

Spear Throwers: Spear throwers are specially carved, thin flat sticks, usually the length of the thrower's forearm, that allow the user to throw javelins farther and with greater force. The user balances the javelin on the spear thrower and throws normally while retaining her grip on the spear thrower. Like javelins, spear throwers use the Thrown Ability. Spear throwers add +2 to the damage of javelins and double their range without decreasing the accuracy of the weapon. 0.5 lbs., Cost: •

War Boomerangs: These curved, flat pieces of sharpened metal spin through the air with deadly force. While not normally designed to return, highly skilled characters can make the weapon perform this impressive feat. Characters who have two or more dots in Thrown may make a second, reflexive Dexterity + Thrown roll if the boomerang misses its target. If this second roll succeeds, the boomerang curves around and lands within 3 yards of the thrower. If the thrower rolls three or more successes, then the boomerang returns to the thrower's hand. 0.5 lbs., Cost: •

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Rate	Range	Property
War Boomerang	+0	+3	2	20	•



profits selling all manner of foreign luxuries and exotic animals to the ever-curious Haltan.

Other, more adventurous Haltan traders travel far to the East. Such traders make frequent contact with the various savage tribes living in the deep forest. Sharing with the Haltan a knowledge of forest life, these primitives are often more accepting of Haltan visitors than of merchants from more different lands. Many traders return from the East bearing unique carvings and valuable plants from the furthest Eastern reaches. Haltan intermediaries are among the most reliable sources for the potent medicinal plants of Eastern lands, and the tales they tell of these exotic regions have inspired others to attempt such dangerous and epic journeys.

In recent years, a number of Haltan beast trainers have begun leaving their forest to give fabulous shows where their trained animals perform amusing and sometimes magical tricks. Trainers and animals travel in large boxy wagons drawn by the slender gray, green-maned horses bred by the Haltan for traveling outside the forest boundaries. The best of these shows can command large sums from nobles and wealthy merchants, who marvel at the skill and grace of the animals involved. The trainers freely display their animals' abilities, but will never willingly sell their prized beasts, and will go to any length to retrieve beasts that are stolen.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR THE HALTAN

Dawn:	Warrior, Hunter
Zenith:	Hetman, Animal Trainer
Twilight:	Physician, Architect, Veterinarian
Night:	Scout, Spy into Haltan Lands
Eclipse:	Ambassador to the Forest Tribes, Ambassador to the Fair Folk, Trader

RATHESS

Deep in the southern reaches of the Eastern forest, where temperate trees give way to tropical vines and exotic hardwoods, treasure hunters brave one of the East's most infamous traps. Troubadours spin tales of the City of the

Dragon Kings of Rathess, one of the gems of the First Realm. Famed for its extensive and beautiful gardens, legends say that the long-dead lizard men who inhabited this vast metropolis bred thousands of exotic plants and manufactured a multitude of strange and powerful drugs. These saurian humanoids existed before humankind, and were once the staunch allies of humanity. In Rathess they performed powerful and exotic magics, traded their herbal bounty with human merchants, and worshipped their supreme deity, the Unconquered Sun. This glory ended with the Contagion and the collapse of the First Realm. Within less than a century, the jungle had completely reclaimed the city.

RATHESS TODAY

Intrepid travelers have explored a tiny portion of the city, but the rest remains a mystery holding wealth yet to be found. This once-proud metropolis is overgrown with vines, lianas, and fast-growing jungle trees. Viridian monkeys live in the main square, and deadly predators hunt in its broken streets. Even the intact portions of Rathess appear confusing to the eye. Built by and for sentient reptiles, the architecture is disturbing to human visitors. Although Rathess is clearly built on a radial plan, the strange angles of its streets and the oddly jutting ornaments that festoon the walls of its buildings can be subtly disorienting. Only in the section of the city identified as the human quarter can travelers find comfortable right angles and conventional (if antique) styles of ornament.

Many of the buildings are largely intact, but their furnishings are long gone, stolen or destroyed by the passage of time. Some structures remain tightly sealed and appear completely untouched by time's ravages. So far, any treasures they hold have resisted the attentions of even Exalted scholars and looters. Today, the true wealth of Rathess lies buried beneath the earth. For reasons now unknown, over half of this city was built underground. Most believe this was done to accommodate the lizard-like habits of the Dragon Kings; some claim that the entire city once lay above ground and that a magical catastrophe caused it to sink.



Regardless of the cause, many levels of corridors and rooms are buried deep in the earth. Those who venture too deep rarely return, and so only nine levels below the ground have been even partially mapped. The upper levels have been largely stripped clean of their once-plentiful trinkets and artifacts, forcing treasure hunters deeper downward in search of fresh finds. Although no one has yet returned with proof, the sealed tombs of several Anathema are said to lie in the furthest reaches below the human quarter. A number of the Dragon Kings' alien enchantments have been found in or near these tombs. Given the powers of these few artifacts, scholars and treasure hunters are eager to discover more.

HAZARDS OF THE CITY

Unfortunately for treasure hunters, journeys into the depths of Rathess are often one-way. Deadly plants thrive in regions kept lit by eternally bright First Age light panels. Visitors face a vast variety of vegetable toxins and the snares, tendrils, and hallucinogenic pollens of the city's plentiful carnivorous plants. In addition, the underways of Rathess are home to a vast array of animal life. Nesting in the darker sections of its buried halls, hidden predators lie in wait for careless trespassers. Unlucky treasure seekers may fall afoul of chameleon cats, packs of carnivorous monkeys, or the rarely seen but deadly creatures known as stalkers.

Savants who examined the remains of dead stalkers have pronounced these creatures a degenerate remnant of the city's once-proud inhabitants. Covered in thick scales, with long snouts, forward-leaning bodies, dagger-like claws on their feet, and long, thick, flexible tails, these bestial creatures closely resemble the many dragon-king skeletons already found by scholars. However, the stalkers have lost all civilization and much of their presumed forebears' brilliant intellects. They hunt the city in packs, using spears, thrown rocks and their formidable natural weaponry to great effect. As so often happens in the Threshold, fate is cruel to those who wish to steal the riches of Rathess, for the stalkers seem to prefer the taste of human flesh above all others.

Stalkers are strictly nocturnal and flee the light of day, a pitiful contrast to their ancestors' devout reverence for the sun. They rarely appear on the surface, but lurk throughout the underways, including those portions of the city once inhabited by humanity. They prefer the dark and partly lit sections of the under-levels, shunning places where light panels remain intact. Many lair in the shallow, bubbling pools of heated mud that lie throughout the underways — once a pleasant luxury for the long-dead Dragon Kings, now lairs for their bestial ultimate offspring.

The well-lit portions of the underways contain predators as well, along with thriving communities of animals seen nowhere else. The many deadly plants are safe havens for packs of small, brilliantly-furred beasts and bright-winged insects with luminous shells. Both are valuable — the packs of animals vocalize together, making beautiful and exotic harmonies, while jewelers prize the wings and carapaces of the insects. Those who capture such creatures can sell them

for high prices, but a visit to the corridors under Rathess combines all the horrors of cave exploration with a journey through the most dangerous portions of the far southeastern jungles. The dangers ensure that these unusual creatures are rarely brought to market despite their value.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

If current stories are true, even greater rewards await those lucky few who survive the city's lowest levels. Recently, a severely injured treasure hunter crawled out of the underways clutching a strange spherical amulet. Before she died, she spoke of finding a corridor that led directly from the ninth under-level upward into a sealed building above ground. Much of the building was a stalker nest, but the treasure hunter spoke of rooms in the upper portions that had remained untouched since the days of the First Realm. Ironically, the sphere she carried back proved to be a potent healing talisman that would almost certainly have saved her life if she had known how to use it.

The unfortunate woman's description of the way into this building was mixed with delirious rambling, and no one has yet successfully deciphered it. Plenty of people are trying, however. Parties of explorers frequently stay in the better-preserved empty buildings on the surface, the Guild has established a small semi-permanent encampment, and the Realm is planning to send large contingents of scholars, archeologists, and savants to build a base on the surface of the city. Though the wealth of Rathess lies in the underways, even a well-armed military camp could not survive down there for long.

THE FOREST PEOPLE

In the farthest Eastern lands, the trees grow ever taller and the growth becomes thicker and more impenetrable. Unlike the extremes of the North, South and West, all of which rapidly become hostile to life, the unending forest of the farthest East supports an abundance of living things. The superabundance of animal as well as plant life is said to continue even after the earth itself gives way to a cathedral of unimaginably vast trees stretching endlessly from zenith to nadir.

Throughout the far East, the trees are alive with arboreal creatures. In addition to lemurs, monkeys and apes of all sorts, there are several types of arboreal and semi-arboreal humans. Little is known of these beings other than brief glimpses through the foliage — glimpses all the rarer because many such encounters leave no survivors.

Some of these strange creatures are degenerate breeds of humanity with unnaturally long arms and legs, and feet similar to an ape's. Others have an odd greenish cast to their skin and leaf-like hair on their heads. Both types are twisted by extensive proximity to Wyld areas. Some are ancient barbarian tribes who have roamed this land since before history. Others are the Wyld-twisted descendants of the First Age inhabitants of this verdant land, who have lost much of their humanity in the centuries since the

Contagion that ended the Golden Age. The outside world knows little about any of these beings, except that they are highly aggressive and lethally proficient with blowguns and small bows. The barbarians typically use darts and arrows tipped with deadly herbal poisons, and frequently kill and rob travelers who stray too near their territories.

CIVILIZED INHABITANTS

Other inhabitants of the farthest East bear all the marks of humanity. Most of these forest tribesmen resemble the Linowan, with reddish brown skin, hazel eyes, and straight shiny black hair with curious green highlights. There, however, the resemblance ends. All but the youngest of these tribal natives bedeck themselves in brightly colored hair and bodypaint, and most mark their significant achievements with vivid tattoos or complex scarification. Many Eastern tribesmen braid flowers or other plants into their hair, and their shamans sometimes have small plants like bracken ferns or ivy growing out of their skins.

These peoples lack knowledge of metalworking and have little use for fire. As children of the forest, however, they are adept at extracting its bounty. They wear loin-cloths and vests of woven leaves and fibers. Hunters and warriors carry ironwood spears, throwing darts, elaborately carved long bows and poisoned wooden arrows.

Though they often attack travelers who appear weak or unwary, most tribes will trade with larger groups, and sometimes provide guides. The herbs they gather from the furthest reaches of their territory are known to be extremely potent. Some of these plants can heal the near-dead, slay instantly without a trace, or give the eater vivid and often terrifyingly accurate visions of distant lands and other times.

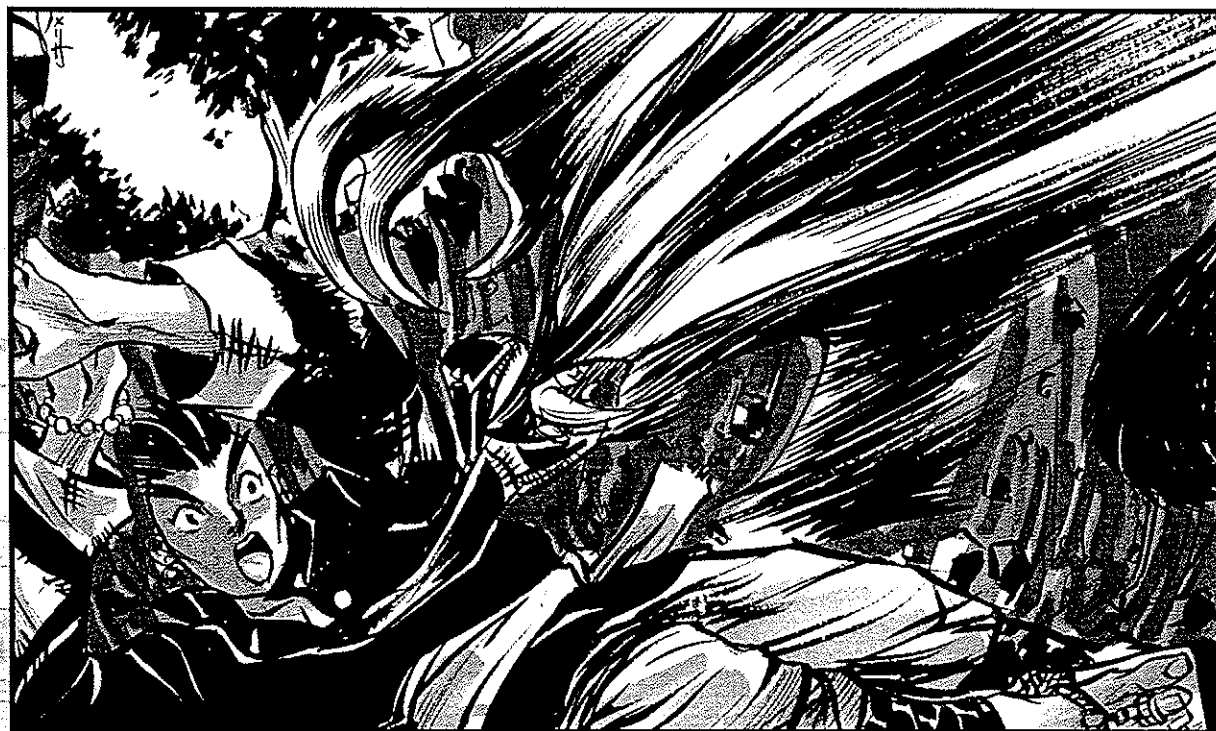
In addition to their herb lore, the tribes weave lightweight baskets tight enough to hold water, and their bark and wood-fiber cloth is tougher and more flexible than the finest leather. These wares are much sought after by traders.

The forest peoples display as much talent with animals as with plants. Several tribes living in the deep jungles to the southeast have tamed the giant bats native to that region. Although these bats possess hands, most scholars and naturalists believe them to be no more intelligent than the average ape. However, some forest tribes treat the bats as citizens. Fully sentient giant bats are rare even in the deepest forests, but several tribes have allied with colonies of these unusual creatures. Sentient and non-sentient bats alike serve as scouts and guards. Their shrill cries warn the tribes of aerial intruders, and some are trained to gather fruit from the highest tree branches. A few of the tribes sell small trained bats to visitors.

TRIBAL HABITS

Most forest tribesmen spend the vast majority of their lives high up in the giant trees that cover their homeland. These trees often stand more than 150 yards tall, with bases as large as 20 yards in diameter. Villages built by the far Eastern forest people are a mixture of wide ledges carved into ancient hollow trees and platforms of woven branches connected by bridges of vines and lianas more than a foot across. Although they not need fear attack from the predators that walk the forest floors, the forest tribes must still guard against such arboreal hazards as giant snakes, huge spiders, and Wyld barbarians. In fact, a hunt for Wyld barbarians is one of the few things that can bring these generally warlike tribes together. Likewise, brave outlanders

Forest





can win the friendship of the fierce forest people by helping to defeat these inhuman foes.

Because their habitations are hidden from view by the lower branches of trees or concealed in hidden draws, the only easy way to contact these tribes is to set out in a well-equipped group and periodically leave offerings. Any tribesmen nearby will notify others and seek out those who wish to respond to the visitors. If the outsiders leaving offerings appear weak, fearful, or poorly organized, the tribesmen are likely to rob them. If they resist, they may be killed. Outland groups who appear confident and well armed are usually offered an opportunity to trade. Individuals who behave with bravery and decorum will be invited to the tribes' treetop villages. Proper decorum among the forest people, however, differs sharply from what most outsiders might expect. A would-be trader may find herself required to reciprocate the fearsome threats initially made by the tribe, eating such local delicacies as live grubs and the fried legs of large tree spiders, and enduring large doses of hallucinogens without acting in a disgraceful fashion. The tribes make no allowance for visitors with any fear of heights.

Outsiders who consistently behave properly may be rewarded with tattoos or scars marking them as permanent allies of the local tribal gathering. At least half a dozen gatherings are known to exist in the more accessible portions of the far East, all with territorial boundaries stable enough to make finding one's allies again relatively easy. Anyone who earns one of these coveted markings receives particularly generous trading terms, and may even be invited to help gather some of the rarer plants from the forest's furthest eastern reaches. The forest tribes do not often make such arduous expeditions, which amount to epic journeys for an outsider. A few traders have described accompanying tribal shamans to the portions of the forest that extend beyond the Earth and into the realm of purest wood. Civilized folk often discount their wild tales, which abound with impossibilities: living plant-dragons, mobile predatory orchids, migratory leaves, and so on. However, the potent drugs and unnaturally bright vegetable dyes that are the reward of such adventures inspire many individuals to dream of accompanying the forest folk on just such a fantastic journey.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR THE FOREST TRIBES

Dawn:	Warrior, Hunter
Zenith:	Shaman
Twilight:	Herbalist, Storyteller
Night:	Hunter, Explorer
Eclipse:	Speaker to Outsiders, Trader

DEEP-FOREST DRUGS

DEATH SAP

The most widely known and feared of the drugs from the Eastern forest is death sap. This potent vegetable poison comes from the bright blue berries of a vine found in the farthest East. When crushed, boiled and strained, the result-

ing thick azure liquid is the most deadly poison known. Death sap is almost tasteless; if its color is masked by dark ale or other dark-colored food or drink, it can easily be given to an unknowing victim. Once ingested, death sap is certain death for mortals. Against the Exalted, the difficulty of the Stamina + Resistance roll to withstand it is 4. It inflicts 10L damage on a failure and 5L if successfully resisted. Its duration is 1 minute, and the penalty is -1. It also turns the lips of its victims bright blue, and so its presence is easily noticed once someone has fallen afoul of it.

Death sap can also be used to envenom weapons, which reduces the difficulty of the Resistance roll to 2, but does not decrease the venom's damaging effects. It degrades rapidly when exposed to air, and so an envenomed weapon will only stay deadly for twelve hours after the venom is applied. The venom only affects the first target damaged by the weapon. The weapon must do one or more levels of lethal damage to the target for the venom to take effect. Death sap leaves a bright blue stain around any wound it enters, so its use is difficult to conceal. Individuals caught using poisoned weapons in cities often face severe penalties. Some herbalists distill death sap to produce a non-lethal paralytic drug that is just as toxic, but that only causes bashing damage.

Cost: ••• for a small bottle containing six doses of either type of death sap.

SOMA

A potent drug used by Wyld tribes far to the East, soma has recently become popular in Nexus and several other Eastern cities. Soma temporarily boosts the user's Strength by one, her Stamina by three, and adds three dots to her Endurance. This drug also negates all penalties for damage while it is in effect. The effects of soma last for a number of hours equal to the user's normal Stamina. However, the drug is not without drawbacks. It dulls the user's mind and causes her to focus primarily on physical tasks. As long as the user is under the influence, soma increases the difficulty of all Intelligence, Charisma, and Manipulation rolls by +1. After the drug wears off, the user is physically and mentally exhausted. She loses one point of Willpower and all of her physical attributes are likewise reduced by one point until after she has eaten a large meal and slept for at least ten hours.

Repeated use of soma can cause serious harm. Unless the user waits at least a week before taking it again, she must make a Stamina + Resistance roll once the drug wears off, against a difficulty equal to the number of doses she took within the past week. If the roll fails, the user permanently loses one point of Stamina. A botched roll means that the user loses two points of Stamina. Characters whose Stamina is reduced to zero die.

Cost: ••• per dose in the East, •••• elsewhere.

BRIGHT MORNING

Also known as vision dust, this purple powder is made from a mixture of various Eastern berries, including the

rare skullweed. Smoking bright morning produces mild hallucinations and a general sense of euphoria, and also enables the user to perceive spirits, ghosts, and Essence flows. An ordinary human character who uses this drug can wield the Spirit Sight and Strike Spirit charms without paying any Essence cost or making any rolls. The drug's effects are enhanced for an Exalted; it provides Exalted users with all the benefits of the Spirit Sight, Strike Spirit, and Magic Sight charms without the necessity of making dice rolls or spending Essence. The effects of bright morning last for three hours, during which its characteristic mild hallucinations and disorientation increase the difficulty of all mundane Perception and Wits rolls by +2. This penalty does not apply to magical perceptions.

Bright morning is illegal in the Realm. The Exalted lords of the Realm do not wish mere humans to be able to share any of their power. Elsewhere, however, the drug is legal and popular among those who can afford it. Unfortunately, it is also addictive. Anyone who uses it more than once a week must make a Stamina + Resistance roll to avoid addiction. An addicted character loses one dot from her Perception due to continual, low-grade hallucinations. The addict must also take at least two doses a week or else lose an additional dot of Perception and two dots of Willpower, in addition to taking three levels of bashing damage that do not heal until the user takes her next dose or breaks the addiction. Kicking the addiction requires several weeks of intense discomfort and either a successful Willpower roll against a difficulty of 3 or no access to the drug for a full month.

Cost ●●● (●●●● in the Realm) per dose.

LIFE FLOWERS

Found only in the darkest depths of the Eastern forest, where the trees grow several miles tall, life flowers are the dried blossoms of a species of rare glowing blue orchid. The ingestion of a single ordinary life blossom causes wounds to heal more rapidly and cures almost all known diseases. When a wounded character takes a life blossom, he heals wounds three times as fast as normal, and is cured of all but the most dire illnesses and infections. An even rarer species of life flower glows soft purple and is so potent that it cures all known diseases. Those who ingest this flower recover from all injuries at five times the normal rate. The purple life flower only grows in the most distant portions of the East, where the ground has given way to endless trees. Benefits from both types of flower apply only to wounds the character incurred before he ingested the blossom.

Cost: ●●●● (blue flower), ●●●●● (purple flower)

EASTERN WILDLIFE

Even the most accessible portions of the far Eastern woodlands hold dangers that threaten all but the boldest travelers. In addition to the degenerate barbarians who war ceaselessly with the forest tribes, these woods present countless other hazards. In the southeast, large jungle cats, carnivorous plants with hallucinogenic sap,

and hungry tarantulas more than a yard across all happily take human prey.

Other dangers await in somewhat more temperate regions. Gigantic tyrant lizards hunt large prey and steal kills from other predators. More than one hunting party in these forests has lost their kills and their lives to these deadly beasts. The most fearsome of the forest's large hunters live on or near the ground, so anyone who can move through the trees need only worry about giant spiders, poisonous snakes, and the man-sized hawks that occasionally fly off with small children.

WOLF-SPIDER PACKS

One of the forest's most lethal inhabitants is rarely seen. In some places, thick ropy webs up to a dozen yards wide stretch across the edges of dimly lit clearings. In the correct light, these webs are almost invisible, and are strong and sticky enough that freeing oneself from their grip requires considerable effort. The few survivors of these traps tell horrific tales of black, hairy multi-legged creatures the size of large dogs waiting at the edges of these huge webs. The creatures are a rare form of giant wolf spider that hunts in large packs. The largest packs build webs big and strong enough to capture adult tyrant lizards.

HATRA

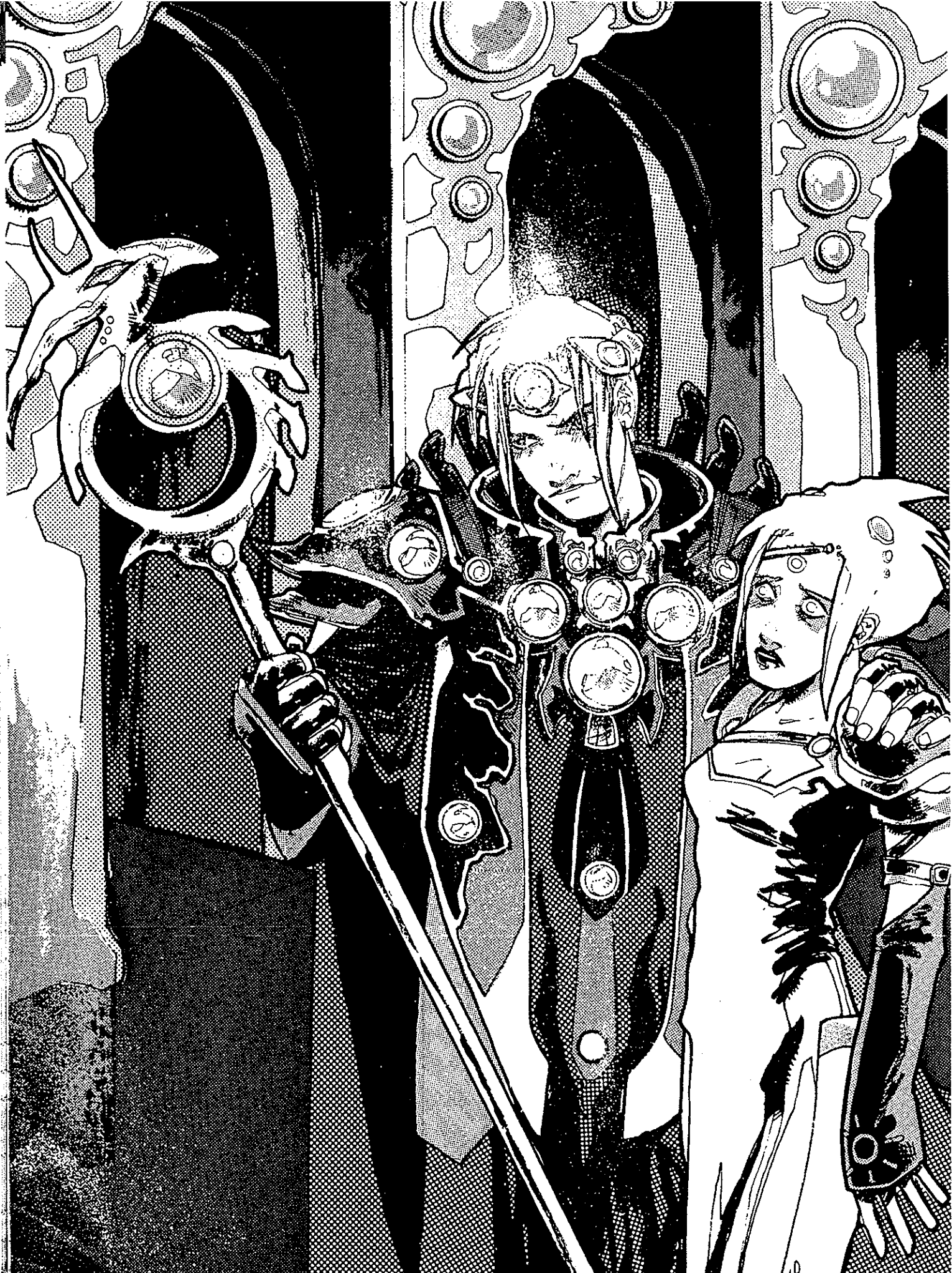
Another terror of the deep forests is the hatra. This ravenous creature lives in the northeastern temperate regions, and resembles a horridly toothed mixture of monkey and flying squirrel. Packs of these loathsome, pale beasts roost together in trees and descend on victims passing underneath. The hatra's razor-sharp jaws inflict savage wounds, and these creatures can bring down prey as large as horses. A dozen of these tiny monstrosities can kill a person in minutes; a pack of hatra, typically between thirty and fifty strong, can easily dispatch a careless or inattentive band of travelers.

BURROW LOK

Perhaps the deadliest predator in the temperate forests is the burrow lok. The size of a small pony, this underground terror excavates burrows that frequently extend up to 30 yards. Resembling a giant badger with long, surprisingly slender limbs, the burrow lok can jump 30 feet or more. It periodically digs large chambers whose roof cannot support any beast larger than a half-grown child, so that anyone walking over such a chamber will fall in. The burrow lok then launches itself in a vicious sprint, leaping on its prey and savaging the victim with its saber-like fangs and long digging claws.

Because most victims of the burrow lok do not survive its attacks, little is known of this creature's anatomy and habits, except that it fears light and has thick, rank-smelling fur. During mating season, or when hunting is poor, the burrow lok occasionally emerges from its den and stalks the night. The creatures have poor eyesight, but their keen senses of smell and hearing can draw them to small campsites miles from their dens.







CHAPTER THREE THE SOUTH



Despite the warmth and gentle seasons of its most habitable places, the South is a harsh land. Beyond the arable coastal strip, the landscape swiftly becomes dry and barren, a cruel and unforgiving region frequently matched by its people. The folk of the cities and farmlands are no less tough-minded, despite their kinder surroundings. The brutality of the barren lands has left its mark on the entire region, a fact that outlanders would do well to remember.

The South thrives on trade, especially the lucrative commerce in gemstones, firedust and other valuable southern resources that centers in the cities of Gem, Paragon, and Chiaroscuro. The three largest cities in the South, each of these metropoli contains a million or more residents, nearly all of whom depend in some way on trade for their livelihood.

GEM

The furthest south of the three vast cities, Gem is ruled by Rankar VII, a hereditary Despot who maintains a royal monopoly on trade in gemstones. In this city, all carvers, appraisers, and sellers of gemstones are royal slaves, with whom all business in gemstones must be conducted. Anyone attempting to buy or sell stones privately is fined, enslaved or executed, depending on the offender's status and the value of the stones involved. Gem lies far enough south to be largely free of domination by the Realm. It is currently engaged in a bitter trade war with

Paragon, which has recently been expanding its own gem-mining operations.

The city of Gem lies so far to the south that the blazing heat around it in summer is almost impossible to endure. Caravans travel by night and sleep under shade during the day. The city itself is largely protected, however, being built into the side of an extinct volcano. On the shady side of this peak, further sheltered from the sun by a jutting plateau of frozen lava, Gem is protected for most of the day from direct sunlight. Only at the height of summer, during the midday hours, does the heat rise to troublesome levels. The denizens of Gem have transformed several of the volcano's vast lava tubes into subterranean streets, lined on either side with market stalls and dwellings. Each lava tube is between 8 and 20 yards in diameter, leaving adequate room in the larger tubes for luxurious houses and sizable shops.

During the brief winter rainy season and most of the fall and spring, daily life in Gem is much like that of any other city. The place changes drastically, however, during the long, hot summer months. To avoid the worst of the heat, the entire city sleeps during the peak daylight hours and rises again at sunset. While the poor swelter in their crowded tenements, the middle classes move into cool basements dug in the city's volcanic basalt and the wealthy into small but luxurious apartments located in the most exclusive lava tubes.



THE GEM-BAZAAR

The city's largest lava tube has another use. Sheltered by the mass of the mountain, Gem's celebrated sunken bazaar is known throughout the South. Here, surrounded by stone, the city's major market runs day and night. Lit by orange and yellow glowstone mined locally and supplemented during the day by light reflected from large mirrors, the market is packed with merchants and traders buying and selling all manner of wares. The market's cool, sheltered location allows foodstuffs to remain fresh and the pleasantly chilled air of this cavern is a blessed refreshment after the summer heat of the city's most exposed portions. This market also houses the true heart of Gem, the pavilions of the Despot's jewel merchants.

Situated where the lava tube widens slightly, under vast canopies of bright translucent silk, the Despot's merchant-slaves buy and sell stones from throughout the South. In addition to the obvious advantages provided by its sheltered location, guards at either end of this lava tube ensure that thieves rarely make off with any of the Despot's precious treasures.

In these well-guarded pavilions, the Despot's slaves buy and sell huge numbers of emeralds, rubies, and sapphires; six colors of amber imported from the East; all five types of jade; four colors of the brightest glowstone; three colors of diamonds; and all shades of opal. The merchant-slaves even sell the rare dream opal, also called dreamstone — a brilliant green stone that records the dreams of any sleeper it touches.

Though dream opal remains quite rare, its relative abundance in Gem has given rise to the curious institution of the dream-merchants. A number of wealthy merchants own pieces of dream opal that they give into the keeping of specially trained lucid dreamers. For a fee, the merchants have these dreamers record exceptionally vivid and wondrous dreams. A brief touch of the stone on the forehead of a waking person insures that she will have this dream when she next sleeps. A few wealthy connoisseurs pay large sums for the lucid dreamers to custom-make special and exotic visions. Dreamstone also has other, more secret uses. Some nobles have been known to sneak bits of dreamstone into the beds of their rivals in an effort to divine their secrets from their dreams.

The greatest prize available in the stone markets of Gem, however, is the tiny bits of yasal crystal occasionally recovered in the most distant and hottest portions of the surrounding desert. This exceptionally rare, saffron-yellow stone can be worked into charms that can capture and hold all manner of spirits. The rarest of gemstones, yasal commands a staggeringly high price. Pieces not stolen by greedy thieves almost always end up in the hands of princes and the Dragon-Blooded.

NOBILITY AND POWER IN GEM

While the gemstone monopoly has made Gem's Despot fabulously rich, the city's noble houses must subsist on

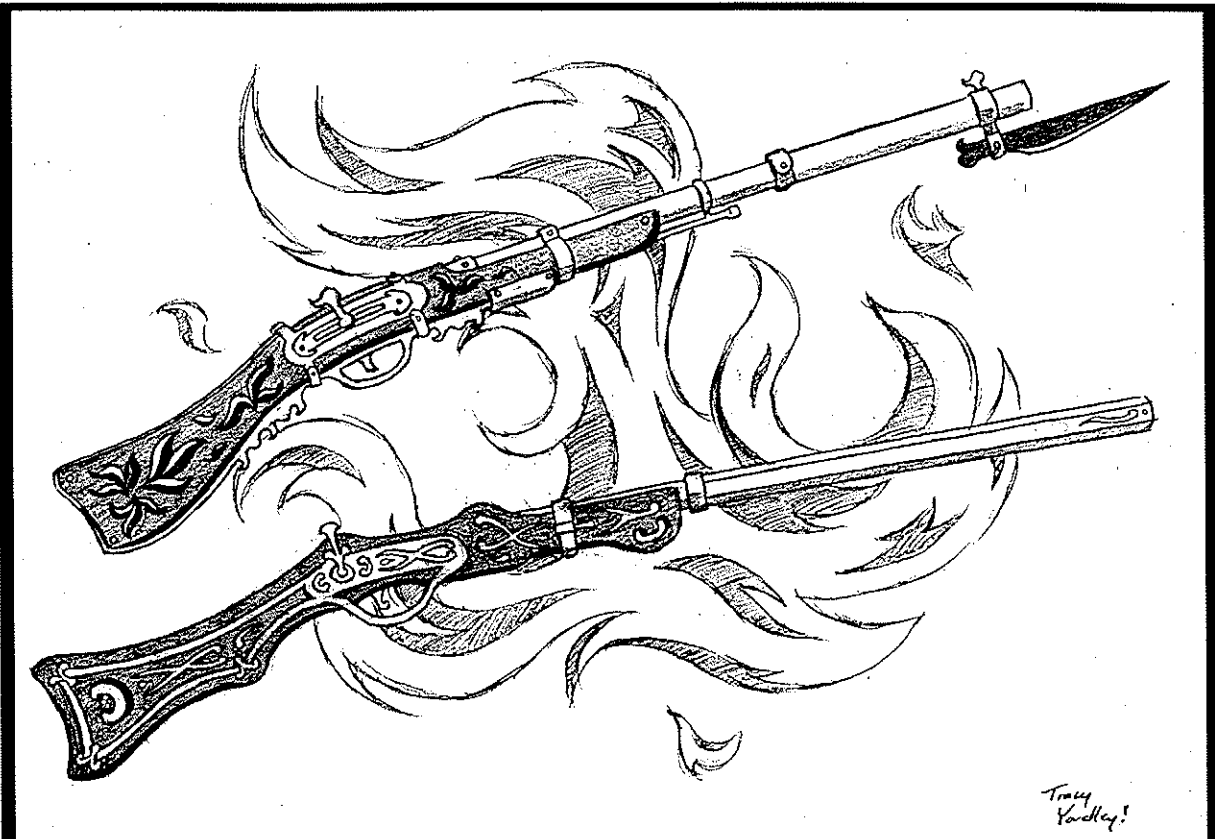
SOUTHERN MERCENARIES

The strict hierarchy that marks most Southern states is reflected in the organization of the Southern militaries. Southern mercenaries, especially those based in Gem, are widely believed to be the best-trained force outside of Nexus and the Realm. In addition to strict training and careful discipline, some Southern mercenary troops possess portable cannons pulled by teams of fierce Southern horses. These weapons, combined with stocks of firedust, have allowed Southern mercenaries to successfully lay siege to all but the best-defended cities. For closer combat, many of these troops carry hand-held firewands, carefully crafted from wood and brass. Able to shoot long goutts of deadly flame, firewands have turned the tide of more than one battle. They are especially useful in turning cavalry charges, since only the best-trained steeds can overcome blind panic in the face of these loud and fearsome weapons.

less plentiful sources of wealth. Each house has been granted a royal monopoly on a certain popular good or service. The Arbani family controls the local manufacture of firewands. The House of Sahlak controls the dream parlors and the brothels. House Iblan dominates the gold and silver trade. The Circla family runs the gladiatorial arena and a large gladiator training facility. Trasti House runs the gambling houses and the public banks. The only way to obtain a monopoly is to pay the Despot a vast sum, followed by heavy annual fees to ensure continued ownership. Each noble family is eager to expand its operations and to ensure that its own businesses remain profitable. Many nobles seek to sabotage the businesses of other families in an attempt to wrest rivals' monopolies from them.

Theft, robbery, poison, and even knives in the night are all common methods in this frequently deadly competition. However, the Despot has placed strict limits on such conflicts. If innocents are harmed, especially any who happen to be wealthy visitors, the Despot steps in with his army of well-paid mercenaries. For minor infractions, one or often both parties involved are merely stripped of their monopolies. Severe infractions such as the incident five years ago, where a firedust bomb blew up in a gambling house and killed more than a hundred people, are dealt with more harshly. All of the nobles involved were publicly strangled. The Despot's justice is swift, and anyone whose actions might deprive the Despot of his rightful profits is immediately turned over to the royal magistrate's draconian ministrations.

In addition to its abundance of precious stones, Gem is the site of the largest mercenary hiring market in the South. The Despot, eager for ready access to mercenary troops, strongly supports this commerce in soldiers-for-hire. Now



FIREWANDS

Firewands are one-shot flamethrowers powered by firedust. Made from finely turned brass with wooden or metal stocks, these weapons are the prized possession of any soldier lucky enough to own one. The extensive damage they do makes them extremely useful; as proved repeatedly by Southern mercenaries, troops armed with spears and firewands can readily defeat massed cavalry charges. Firewands can shoot deadly goutts of flame up to 10 yards. Attacks with firewands use Dexterity + Archery.

All firewands are breechloaders. The firedust must be loaded down the front of the barrel, and the weapon can only hold a single shot. Reloading a firewand requires one full turn. Also, while readily available in the South, firedust can be expensive and difficult to find elsewhere. Southern travelers outside their native region are advised to use their firewands sparingly. Many soldiers fit bayonets on the ends of their firewands and use them as crude spears once the weapon has been fired. Weight: 4 lbs.

Name	Accuracy	Damage	Range	Rate	Resources	
Firewand	+1	12L	10**	Special*	•••	
Name	Speed	Accuracy	Damage	Defense	Resources	Minimums
Bayonet	+0	+1	3L	+0	•••	S•-

* Ten yards is the maximum range the jet of flame will reach. Firewands have no longer ranges.
 ** Reloading a firewand requires one full turn where the character is doing nothing else. No combat, dodging, or movement is possible during this turn. Also, firedust normally costs • per shot in the South. Outside the South it costs anywhere from •• to •••, and can be difficult to find in any but the largest cities.

that the trade war with Paragon is threatening to explode into armed conflict around the various mining camps, the Despot has sent mercenaries to guard all of his city's richest mines, and is hiring more. As Paragon is an ally of the Realm, the Despot is beginning to look to opponents of the Realm for aid. Any Celestial or outcaste Terrestrial Exalted who

promise to help Gem in this conflict will be welcomed into the city, though kept discreetly out of sight. The Despot is also considering freeing gladiators in return for their promise to help defend Gem, a policy almost certain to bring confrontation with the Circla family.



CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR GEM

- Dawn: Mercenary, Market Guard, Gladiator
- Zenith: Immaculate Priest, Desert Mystic
- Twilight: Sorcerer-Assassin, Gem Merchant
- Night: Jewel Thief, Spy, Assassin
- Eclipse: Bureaucrat for the Despot, Fixer

PARAGON

Located at the confluence of two small rivers amid verdant almond and olive groves, Paragon was built near the ruins of a destroyed First Realm metropolis. Though almost all of the ancient city's First Realm artifacts were discovered long ago, one of them changed the destiny of this land forever. Using its power, an ageless god-king known as the Perfect came to rule Paragon. Worshipped and obeyed by all of Paragon's citizens, the Perfect's rule is absolute. From the highest noble to the scruffiest street urchin, the Perfect commands all.

Not surprisingly, Paragon is allied with the Realm. The immortal Perfect has much in common with the long-lived Dragon-Blooded who rule there. Like them, he values stability over all and wishes to avoid disruption or even significant changes in the social order at all costs. Most Dragon-Blooded see the Perfect as merely a mortal with a powerful toy, but they acknowledge his power and pay him respect when in his city. In acknowledgment of the ties between them, the Realm recently sent eighteen Dragon-Blooded soldiers to Paragon to augment the small imperial garrison and aid the city in its budding conflict with Gem.

The Perfect maintains few ties with ordinary human rulers. He is jealous of Gem's wealth and views Chiaroscuro's Tri-Kahn and the Varang nobles with disdain. Like the Dragon-Blooded, the Perfect distrusts all Celestial Exalted, especially Solar Exalted. Any Solar Exalted discovered within the bounds of Paragon will be brought to the Perfect and forced to swear citizenship, for his artifact binds Exalts as well as spirits. Currently, the Perfect controls only a single Dawn Caste Solar. The

Realm is unhappy about the Perfect controlling any Celestial Exalted, but the Perfect is an ally of convenience. Should the Perfect add to the number of his Exalted slaves, the Realm may send the Wyld Hunt to deal with them.

THE RITUAL OF SUBSERVIENCE

All commoners in Paragon, and every newcomer who becomes a citizen, must undergo the ritual of subservience. In this ancient rite, prospective citizens grasp the royal scepter and swear their allegiance to the throne. The scepter is an artifact from the First Age, and oaths made while touching it are forever binding. Everyone who takes this particular oath of loyalty receives a mark on their palm — an eye-shaped sigil blazoned in softly glowing scarlet ink. This sigil remains visible for the rest of the individual's life. No known sorcery can remove it. The sigil also allows the Perfect to see through the eyes and hear through the ears of any citizen wherever they may be, though the people of Paragon know of this ability only through rumors and stories. Though he can only use one citizen's senses at a time, the Perfect nonetheless possesses unusually complete knowledge about his realm.

All commoners must swear to obey all commands issued by the Perfect or his magistrates; never to attempt to harm the magistrates, nobles or the Perfect; and to abide by all the laws of the city. The scepter does not remove the citizens' free will, but forces them to pay for any transgressions. Oath-breakers suffer severe pain radiating from the sigil of citizenship. For most offenses, the agony ends when the criminal confesses to a local magistrate. Breaking the most serious oaths — for example, by attempting to harm the Perfect — is punished by death. Citizens who break a capital oath die writhing in torment within hours after their criminal act. As soon as they commit such a transgression, the eye on their sigil closes, a clear sign of their doom to everyone who sees them.

Sigil-inflicted pain and death always takes place indoors during the night. Some speculate that the scepter's original creator did not want the ancient city's daily life disturbed by the sight of transgressors publicly dying in agony. A few oath-breakers attempt to remain outdoors every night to avoid punishment, but such wretched individuals rarely last long, and all who see them crouching in doorways or sleeping in gutters shun them.

Like the common people, the nobles of Paragon also take oaths of loyalty. They undergo their own ritual of subservience at age 14, at the same time that the Perfect confirms or denies their right to their titles. Any youths that the Perfect has reason to distrust are demoted to commoner status. A noble's oaths are considerably less limiting than a commoner's; nobles merely swear never to plot against or attempt to harm the Perfect and to obey any direct command from him. In addition to whatever duties the Perfect sees fit to impose on them, confirmed nobles

ONE FUTURE OF GEM AND PARAGON

As the rivalry between these two cities worsens, desert tribes loyal to the Perfect of Paragon begin raiding Gem's caravans, those leaving its mines and those traveling to Chiaroscuro and other ports. Using troops on loan from the Realm, the Perfect eventually manages to capture several of Gem's finest mining fields. Since profits from these mines are now divided between Paragon and the Realm, both benefit from these conquests, while Gem gradually becomes poorer, smaller, and considerably less important.

serve as magistrates who mediate disputes, dispense justice, and report problems to their immortal overlord.

Paragon citizenship cannot be rescinded, but citizens can petition to leave Paragon. Once the appropriate departure fee is paid, any citizen is free to leave. Outside the city boundaries, the sigil guarantees that the Paragonese will obey the laws of Paragon. It does nothing, however, to prevent them from committing acts considered crimes elsewhere. For example, slaying someone in another land who is not a citizen of Paragon is not a crime against the Perfect's edicts and therefore may be done with impunity.

Almost a century ago, the Perfect used his finest troops to capture and force citizenship on several tribes of fierce desert nomads who were foolish enough to attack caravans coming from Paragon. The descendants of these nomads are likewise forced to swear subservience, and to protect the same caravans their forebears raided. They also frequently raid the caravans of other cities, returning a portion of their stolen wealth to the Perfect.

THE POWERS OF THE PERFECT

In addition to letting the Perfect share the senses of any citizen, the scepter also protects the Perfect in other ways. Though still human, the Perfect has not aged a day since he first discovered the artifact's qualities. The Perfect is also highly resistant to damage. He can soak lethal and even aggravated damage with his full Stamina. His long life has granted him Stamina, Intelligence, Perception, Wits, Charisma, and Manipulation of 5, and a Willpower of 9. His unbreakable tie to the scepter also grants him immunity to all Charms that affect perceptions, thoughts or emotions, as well as completely protecting him from the effects of Emerald and Sapphire Circle sorcery. Should it become necessary, the current Perfect can pass the scepter's powers to another, who would then become the Perfect. Doing so, however, requires the demise of the present Perfect. Merely killing the Perfect and taking the artifact does no good; to take the Perfect's place, the killer must also know the rituals necessary to harness the scepter.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Paragon is laid out in keeping with its ruler's love of absolute power. Built on a strict grid, the Perfect's palace lies in the exact center of the city. A large stone plaza surrounds this vast mansion, both structures decorated in elaborate abstract mosaics. The city is orderly but stark, an impression heightened by the greenish-black basalt and shining white marble used in most of its buildings. These

sharply contrasting colors give the cityscape a monochromatic look, which is matched by the dull and muted shades worn by most of the citizenry. The exceptions are the Perfect and his magistrate-nobles. The Perfect makes all public appearances in shining robes of cloth-of-gold, adorned with pearls and fine silver threads. His magistrates wear exceptionally bright colors while on duty: brilliant red, deep blue, and several exotic green dyes imported from the farthest East at great cost.

Because all citizens owe them homage and obedience, the magistrates are required to dress in a visible and distinctive fashion. Foreigners who come to Paragon wearing equally flamboyant dress are occasionally mistaken for magistrates. Impersonating a magistrate is punishable by death, and so visitors must swiftly mend their error if they hope to avoid serious consequences. Magistrates normally ask vibrantly dressed foreigners to change their clothes while visiting Paragon.

Paragon welcomes visitors, and many merchants come to the city knowing they will find honest shopkeepers and fair (if tough) bargains. Under the tight control of its ruler, Paragon is one of the safest, cleanest, and most orderly cities in the known world. Crime, especially violent crime, is extremely rare. Traders and merchants from all over the world need have no worries about thieves or brigands once they are safely within the city walls. However, while Paragon is popular with merchants and weary travelers seeking a comfortable respite from the desert's dangers and discomforts, few come to enjoy the city and fewer still seek to become citizens.

Among those that do are poor and weary outlanders, who come to Paragon in small numbers each year seeking citizenship in exchange for their daily bread. The Perfect makes certain that the poor of his city receive adequate simple fare to ensure that no one ever hungers. Citizenship is freely given to all who ask, and many a poor traveler sees Paragon as an island of stability amid the troubles that continually plague the Threshold. Some visitors comment that the inhabitants of Paragon seem unusually placid, and many have noticed that the streets are markedly quiet compared to other cities. These observers wonder if the sigil of the Perfect drains the will or saps the life-force from the citizenry. In fact, not the sigil, but the certain knowledge of harsh punishment for any crime or rebellion, even committed accidentally, is what drains the city of its vibrancy and joy.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR PARAGON

Dawn:	Soldier of the Perfect, Desert Tribesman
Zenith:	Magistrate-Noble, Immaculate Priest
Twilight:	Tailor of Magisterial Robes, Savant of the Perfect
Night:	Desert Guide, Spy for the Perfect
Eclipse:	Magistrate-Noble, Ambassador to the Realm





CITIZENSHIP AND THE EXALTED

Like other people, Exalted can freely become citizens of Paragon. In general, they suffer the same penalties for breaking their citizenship oaths as anyone else. The usual fate may or may not apply, however, to individuals who become Celestial Exalted after swearing the oaths. Any such person who feels oppressed by Paragonese citizenship loses the oath-mark and ceases to be a citizen the instant she becomes Exalted. In contrast, individuals who are content to remain loyal citizens of Paragon retain their mark and their citizenship. Those who lose citizenship can regain it by once again swearing the oath to the Perfect. The unknown magics that occasionally remove the sigil are not subject to conscious control. Becoming Exalted does not remove the oath-mark. Like anyone else, if an Exalted cuts off the marked hand, the sigil reappears on the healed stump.

CHIAROSCURO

The largest and oldest city in the South, Chiaroscuro lies in the fertile coastal belt along the Inner Sea. During the First Age, it was the South's largest and most prosperous port, larger even than Hollow in the East. The old city of Chiaroscuro was built entirely of magically crafted glass. Brilliantly colored towers more than two dozen stories tall stood on broad vermilion glass streets. Shops and houses were decorated with glittering stained glass walls and windows. At the height of the First Age, this vast city is believed to have supported a population of more than 20 million.

Three caravan roads stretched outward from Chiaroscuro to the east, south, and diagonally to the southeast. Each road was made of vermilion glass, roughened to provide excellent traction. Special magics protected travelers on these roads from sandstorms and kept the glass clear of sand and debris. During the height of the First Age, magical carriages as fast as the wind regularly plied these trade routes. The roads remain, but their magic has faded and the city itself has changed greatly since its long-vanished heyday.

Chiaroscuro suffered vast destruction during the troubles that ended the Old Realm. Almost all of its magnificent towers now lie in ruins, and rubble fills many streets. In place of magical carriages, caravans of stinking camels and dusty horses plod down the blood-red roads. But the breakwaters of blue glass still protect the harbor, and Chiaroscuro remains the largest and finest harbor-city anywhere in the South or West. Although the old city lies in ruins, it and the regions surrounding it are still inhabited by almost a million

people. Dozens of ships leave and dock every day at this enormous port, from the Realm, the West, and other Southern cities. Travelers flock to Chiaroscuro to trade, join caravans and board ships for destinations throughout the known world. Amid the ruined splendor of the Golden Age, tens of thousands come to seek their fortunes.

CHIAROSCURO TODAY

The modern city of Chiaroscuro is a spread-out, ramshackle affair. In some portions of the old city, whole blocks remain largely intact. The transparent windows that once shut out the bustle of the street are mostly shattered, but many residents call the more intact buildings home. Most of the inhabited buildings stand three to five stories tall. Of the few taller towers that remain even partly intact, only the lowest levels are currently occupied. None today know how the people of the First Age made their way to the highest floors of these ancient skyscrapers. Those areas that were never reclaimed are surrounded by wards of salt to contain the hungry ghosts and evil spirits that lurk in these areas.

The old city center is the wealthiest portion of modern Chiaroscuro. It suffered the least destruction, and most buildings contain at least some habitable portions. Amid the ragged stumps of once-vast towers, the streets remain magically clean and bright. In this district, wealthy merchants display silk carpets, fine jewelry and precious stones from the far South, while prosperous travelers sip fruit sherbets and eat honeyed dates under the shade of brilliant glass awnings.

Many residents also live in the enormous new city, built on the outskirts and in the most ruined portions of the original. The poorer classes survive in ragged hovels cobbled together from the shining rubble of the ruins. Though some portions of the new city have been rebuilt into a semblance of order, most of these poor districts exude an unmistakable air of shabby decay.

Other portions of the city are dominated by the large foreigners' quarter, where visitors and temporary residents live in a vast sea of tents and impermanent structures. Some come to trade, others to seek work. Many come to join the endless stream of caravans and trading expeditions that regularly depart for all corners of the South. In time, most inhabitants of the travelers' quarter continue on their journeys. Some find reason to stay and move into the city proper. Others lose all hope or have nowhere else to go, and drift into the wretched squalor of the ruins.

THE PLAZA

In the heart of old Chiaroscuro's most ruined district lies the Plaza—a thriving neighborhood of six intact, spotlessly maintained blocks of low-rise apartments and shops amid a sea of shattered glass and vast stretches of ruins. A powerful spirit has ruled here since the days of the

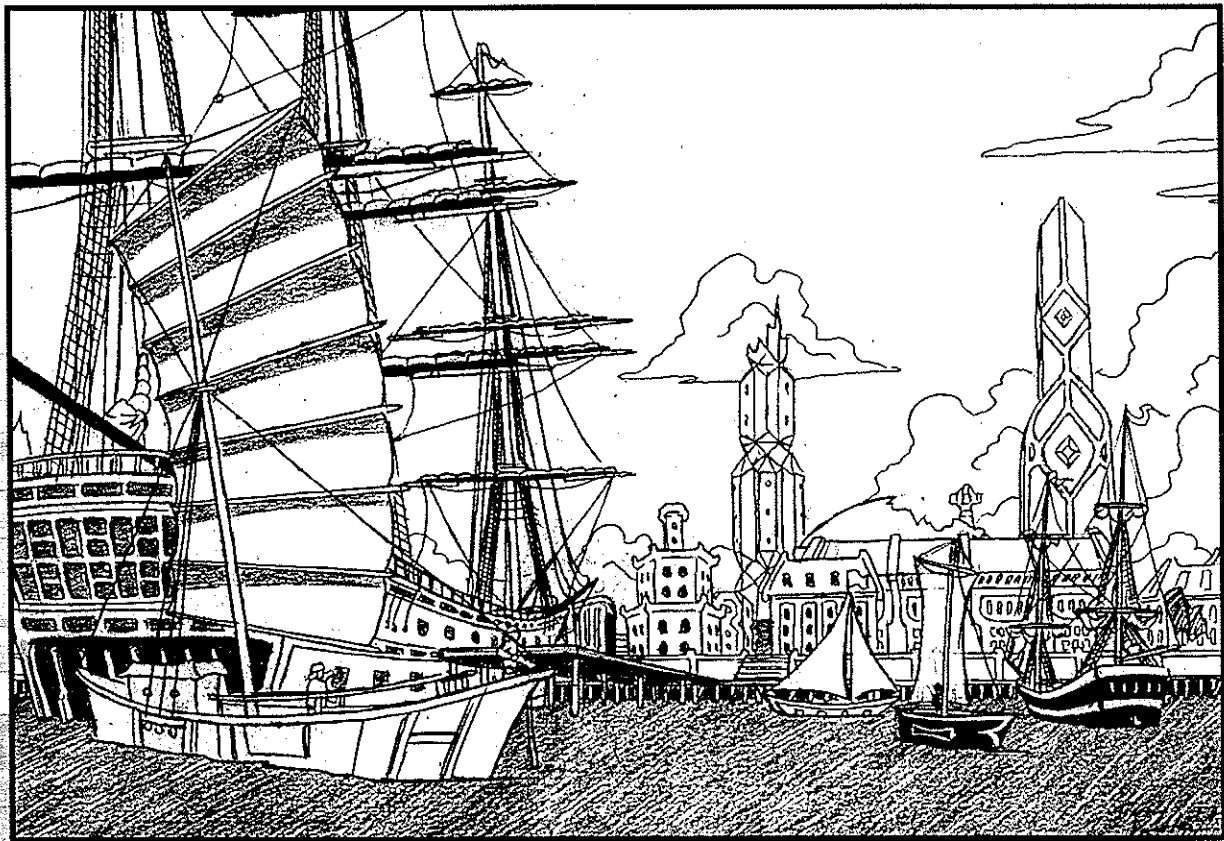
First Age, and controls the neighborhood even today. Known only as Grandmother Bright, this spirit protects the Plaza and ensures the prosperity of its inhabitants. Although even Grandmother Bright lacks the power to restore the potent magics once possessed by the area's dwellings and shops, she has managed to keep all of the modest, five-story apartments whole. They even possess unbroken windows, as well as magics that keep the buildings comfortable and well-lit.

Grandmother Bright normally stays in a covered pavilion located in the center of the Plaza. While she sometimes walks the streets of her neighborhood and talks happily with the residents, she only leaves its boundaries in times of great danger to the entire city. Grandmother is a tall, slender elderly woman with long gray hair. She always wears brilliant robes of gold and vermillion, and at night her face and hands glow softly.

After dark, the streets of the Plaza are transformed. Once the sun sets, the living give way to throngs of ghosts. The spirits of former Plaza residents remain here, walking the streets as translucent, insubstantial shades. Ordinary folk who venture outdoors at night are often greeted by these once-living shadows, who seek everything from help avenging their deaths to a chance to converse with the living. However, most ghosts are content to interact with their fellow spirits. The ghosts cannot enter any of the buildings unless the owner invites them. Although no one

but Grandmother Bright knows this, the Plaza's spectral population is limited to 1,001 — precisely matching the number of its living inhabitants. Whenever someone dies there and rises as a ghost, that person's spirit or another ghostly resident must depart for other realms. Women who live in the Plaza are barren — if they wish to have children, they must either move out or pay Grandmother Bright for the privilege of having a child. Those who choose the latter become pregnant once another resident leaves or dies.

Despite the difficulties of childbearing and the nighttime hauntings, many of Chiaroscuro's inhabitants would pay vast sums to live in the Plaza — a willingness that does them no good, as only those favored by Grandmother Bright may settle in the neighborhood. The few who tried to move in without her permission speak in hushed voices of shops and apartments haunted by horrifying apparitions, and ill luck that refused to abate until they left. If an approved resident wishes to move, he must find a replacement willing to move in on the same day that he leaves. In addition, all prospective residents must perform a valuable service for Grandmother Bright, and swear never to harm the Plaza or any of their neighbors. Activities outside the Plaza are not Grandmother Bright's concern. One current resident is a highly paid assassin who never takes contracts on other Plaza residents. There are always individuals eager to move into the Plaza, and so replacing residents who have died poses no difficulty.





Though all visitors are welcome, anyone who attempts to seriously harm any of the dwellings or inhabitants meets a terrible fate. Those who commit violence in the Plaza are instantly transformed into blank-faced, mindless servants. These gold-skinned thralls carry loads, sweep streets and perform a wide variety of other helpful services. If removed from the Plaza, these walking husks will try to return. If restrained, they will sit down and wait to be freed. Although they no longer require sustenance, in time they will age and die. No known magics can restore someone in this state. Only Grandmother Bright can do that, at the price of several difficult services. Inhabitants of the Plaza are protected from harm only within the boundaries of the neighborhood, and so few willingly leave it.

In addition to providing safety and comfortable housing, Grandmother Bright can also offer all manner of information. Treasure hunters, spies, and those seeking prophecies all come to her door. All who seek anything from Grandmother, whether a place to live or the location of buried treasure, must bring her a single beautiful object. She prefers old or natural objects to new-made ones. For minor services, this payment may be sufficient. For more significant favors, the gift serves merely as payment for the request. The actual service rendered frequently carries another price.

When Grandmother Bright requires additional payment, she always asks for a specific valuable item, or else commands the petitioner to convince a specific person to perform a specific action. In most cases, the price is high, but commensurate with the favor asked and the ability of the petitioner. Someone coming to her seeking a lost child might merely need to convince a minor noble to set a toy boat containing five lotus blossoms on the ocean. By contrast, someone seeking the location of a First Age artifact might be asked to bring Grandmother Bright an enchanted jade dagger belonging to a Dragon-Blooded general or to convince a famous duelist to slay a specific wizard in single combat. Exalted, Fair Folk and other powerful beings receive correspondingly difficult tasks. The actions that petitioners to perform are never random. Many observers correctly believe that Grandmother Bright works to ensure the safety of the entire city, and makes her requests as part of a plan to manipulate fate and history on a larger scale.

PICKING THE BONES OF GLORY

Although the rest of Chiaroscuro lacks an active guardian spirit, the city retains some traces of its original grandeur. Only a small portion of dwellings still have running water, but the sewer system remains largely intact. Throughout the city, people use the many working public fountains for water, and public baths for their sanitary needs. In all but the most ruined districts, the

streets retain enough magic to stay clear of dirt, sand, debris, and even rubble. For a place so thoroughly wrecked, Chiaroscuro is surprisingly clean.

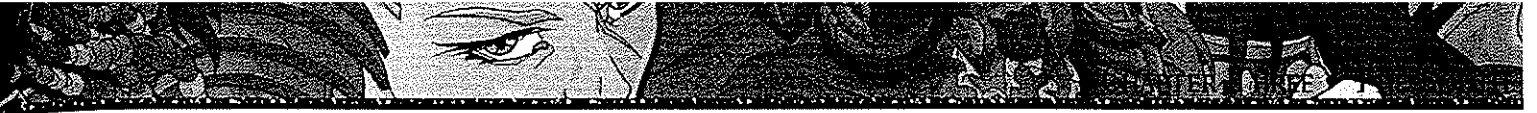
The city's inhabitants have become exceptionally skilled at cannibalizing the fragments of bright-colored, steel-hard glass found in rubbish heaps and ruined buildings. Scavengers make rude knives and spears from pointed shards, while the city's finest glass workers shape such debris into fabulous works of art. Although even these master crafters cannot mend broken pieces or make more of this miraculous material, they produce swords, spears, arrowheads, and even reinforced buff jackets, breastplates and lamellar armor using glass fragments. In demand from humans and Fair Folk alike, these exceptional weapons and exquisite suits of armor are one of Chiaroscuro's most expensive and famous exports.

GLASS WEAPONS AND ARMOR

If actually forged, rather than merely cobbled together from found fragments, any pointed or edged weapons made of Chiaroscuro glass add +1 to Accuracy, Damage and Defense because of their light weight and the extremely sharp edge they hold. Such weapons count as Exceptional Weapons. Similarly, armor made from this glass adds another +1 to the armor's lethal and bashing soak. Armor and weapons of Chiaroscuro glass are quite expensive, however. Add one dot to the price of all weapons, breastplates or reinforced buff jackets and two dots to any suits of lamellar or reinforced breastplates made from this glass. No merely mortal smith can forge chain or articulated plate armor using this material.

THE DELZAHN NOMADS

Chiaroscuro is ruled by the Tri-Khan, the hereditary leader of the nomadic Delzahn tribes, who first re-inhabited this city many hundreds of years ago. The current Tri-Khan is a proud, powerful and clever ruler. By all rights, Chiaroscuro's vast port is so important that the city should be a virtual puppet of the Realm. Instead, the Tri-Khan has maintained its independence by playing a dangerous game of shifting allegiances and multiple favors. Before the disappearance of the Empress, the Tri-Khan kept the city's Dragon-Blooded garrison small and isolated. Now that the Scarlet Empress is gone, he plays the various imperial houses against one another. Through deft maneuvering, he has done away with his Terrestrial Exalted minders, either murdering them or arranging their withdrawal. He has also covertly offered assistance to the Realm's many regional enemies, counting on the trouble they cause to further distract the Dragon-Blooded from his peaceful fiefdom.



In addition, the Tri-Khan has close ties with the Guild. In return for the ability to discreetly buy and sell any goods without restriction, the Guild uses its considerable power to help keep Chiaroscuro free from domination by the Realm. Currently, Chiaroscuro is an open city, where anyone may come to buy or sell whatever she wishes. While some commodities, especially those illegal in the Realm, are best dealt with discreetly, the Tri-Kahn and his nobles prohibit no sales and deny no one entrance to the city or its markets.

Of course, this dangerous balance only works so long as Chiaroscuro does not appear to threaten the peace of the Realm. To avoid open conflict with the Realm, the Tri-Kahn has publicly prohibited all Celestial Exalted from entering his city. In practice, this merely means that Celestial Exalted in Chiaroscuro are well advised to keep their existence and powers carefully hidden; any who happen to be discovered are given a choice between exile or service to the Tri-Kahn. Also, any Celestial Exalted who are wanted by the Realm or noticed by its representatives are handed over to the tender mercies of the empire, unless they pay sufficient bribes or can prove their worth to the Tri-Khan.

Although the Tri-Kahn appears to obey the Realm's commands, Chiaroscuro remains open to any and all visitors. So long as they are discreet, deathknights, Fair Folk, spirits, outcastes and any other beings may trade or even settle here. Of course, those who use their powers to disrupt commerce or cause trouble will swiftly face a well-armed squad of town guardsmen or the Wyld Hunt. The balance of power in Chiaroscuro is delicate, and upsetting it is exceptionally dangerous.

DELZAHN CULTURE

While some of their descendants have lost their taste for war and travel, the traditions of the Delzahn remain strong in Chiaroscuro. These valiant warriors still hold that a man's honor lies in his deeds and his ancestry rather than his appearance. By custom, therefore, all Delzahn men wear veils of brightly colored cloth whose embroidered patterns declare their lineage and personal glories to all who know how to read the designs. When traveling, Delzahn males wear white or dun-colored robes to keep off the sun; in the city, those who can afford them wear garments of fine white linen bedecked in masses of gold and silver jewelry. Any merchants bearing new or unique baubles, fine daggers, or similar fripperies can earn significant wealth from the vanity of these proud men. In sharp contrast, the Delzahn believe that a woman's only true asset is her beauty. All women go bare-faced, and unmarried girls in search of husbands typically wear light, gauzy clothes designed to proudly display their bodies.

Today, the Delzahn nomads and their settled kin make up more than a quarter of the local population. The

presence of the Delzahn is responsible for one of Chiaroscuro's more curious institutions, the Dereth. The Delzahn, like most people in the South, rigidly divide the lives of men and women, and give to men most positions of power and prestige outside the walls of a family's household compound. Among the Delzahn, however, gender is not always based on birth. Men who wear a specially ornamented pale gray sash and women's clothing are acknowledged to be women, and women who wear men's attire and a pale gray veil are treated as men. These people, known as Dereth, are regarded as somewhat odd and unusually lucky at love.

Few parents wish their children to take up the gray and become Dereth, but doing so is seen as a fact of nature, much like being born with unlucky green eyes or a limp. Although jokes are not uncommon, all Delzahn are expected to treat Dereth as members of their chosen gender. Some outsiders are less understanding, often to their regret. Rude foreigners who mock effeminate gray-sashed men have been beaten or even killed by the brothers or lovers of the Dereth in question. Similarly, visitors who taunt women wearing gray veils may be challenged to a duel or simply cut down, if they seem unworthy of an honorable death.

DELZAHN NOBILITY

Because of their numbers and their considerable martial prowess, Delzahn rule over Chiaroscuro remains largely unquestioned. The Tri-Kahn and his extended family of siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews form the ruling family. The Delzahn emphasis on kinship also confers noble status on anyone who can trace a direct line to a member of the royal family. All members of these noble lineages are accorded additional rights and privileges. Given the extent of the royal clan, almost one in six Delzahn are nobles of some degree; in fact, Chiaroscuro currently holds over 40,000 of them. Strutting around the city in brilliant robes, wearing glass scimitars and flanked by mailed bodyguards, the most powerful of these nobles command respect from most inhabitants and deal roughly with any who attempt to block their passage.

Many Delzahn nobles honor their nomadic ancestors by regularly staging hunts. Mounted on swift, fine-boned horses and sturdy camels, the nobles and their guards ride off in search of sand lions and golden-horned desert antelope. These hunts are also military exercises, and serve to hone the skills of the excellent Delzahn cavalry.

The nobles also collect taxes from ships and caravans that dock at or enter the city. Of course, every tax collector takes a cut—generally as much as he believes he can keep without angering the royal family. Fortunately, though few taxpayers acknowledge it, the tariffs are reasonably equitable, since each merchant or ship captain may pay her taxes to any tax collector she wishes. The sights of several





tax collectors bargaining with the captain of a wealthy fleet, or of prosperous nobles hiring gangs of young toughs to guard certain docks or gates against incursions by rival tax collectors, are unique to this city.

Despite the evils that have befallen it over the centuries, Chiaroscuro is still a lively and bustling place. It is far from peaceful, however. Fights in the streets frequently erupt, often sparked by the highly elaborate Delzahn dueling code. Many young Delzahn men, especially those from noble houses, are sensitive to even insignificant slights and eager to prove their dueling prowess. Most duels end at first blood or when one combatant is driven out of the dueling circle, but death and maiming occur with some frequency. Duels over jealousy or accusations of dishonor are often to the death. While some visitors regard these duels as an enjoyable spectator sport, to say nothing of an excellent opportunity for gambling, foreigners are not exempt from challenge. A visitor may refuse to duel a Delzahn commoner, at the cost of no more than the foreigner's honor; anyone challenged to a duel by a Delzahn noble must either fight or flee the city before the next sunrise, never to return. Since many young nobles are masters of several weapons, having choice of arms is small comfort to a petty merchant who has inadvertently slighted a noble youth's lineage and now must pay the price of ignorance.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR CHIAROSCURO

Dawn:	Noble Wastrel, Cavalry Warrior, Mercenary
Zenith:	Delzahn Immaculate Shaman, Immaculate Priest
Twilight:	Scholar, Physician
Night:	Thief, Performer
Eclipse:	Noble Tax Collector, Merchant

THE VARANG CITY-STATES

The fourth major power in the South is the Varang City-States, located amid the fertile river valleys near the southeast grasslands. This area occupies a narrow strip from the shore of the Inner Sea to the farthest reaches of the South, and its rulers control the overland trade between the far southern and southeastern regions. Each of the seven major Varang cities has a population between 50,000 and 250,000; while individually smaller than their rivals, the Varang confederacy as a whole is as wealthy and populous as the larger southern metropoli.

Visiting merchants frequently become exasperated at the difficulties of doing business in this hidebound state, the region's wealth and advantageous location often more than makes up for such troubles. The Varang cities all lie on an exceptionally fertile plain, with large rivers to the north and immense

mineral wealth to the south. Therefore, many regard the rigidities of Varang culture as a small price to pay for access to its wealth and trade routes.

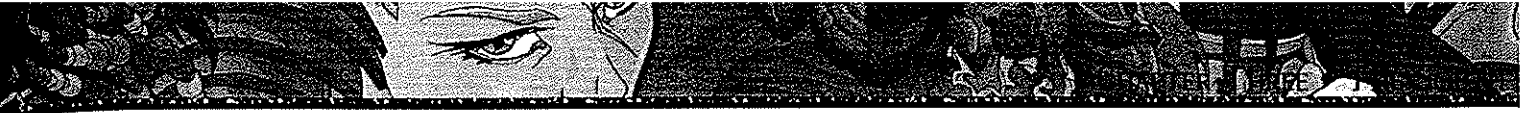
VARANG ASTROLOGY AND OTHER CUSTOMS

Life in the Varang confederacy can be quite confusing to outsiders. The Varangan calendar, based on the natives' excellent mechanical lore and highly developed astronomy, is the most accurate and complex in the Threshold. Mixing solar, lunar, and stellar cycles, Varang astrology is similarly advanced. These two disciplines combine to determine the station in life of virtually every citizen, and thereby shape the foundation of Varang society. Enormous clock towers toll the hours in every city, wealthy citizens carry ornate spring-driven pocket watches, and local astrologers use intricate horoscopes to determine the caste and sub-caste of almost every individual born in this region. An individual's place in society depends on the castes of her parents and the exact hour and minute of her birth. For example, a younger brother is always subordinate to an elder one, for as long as both live. Persons born in one hour are destined to serve in the trades of war, while others born but half a day later might be proclaimed artists or artisans.

Although each hour is given to a specific set of professions, the caste of a person's parents and the order of birth determine where that person falls in the profession's hierarchy. The eldest daughter of a powerful magistrate, assigned to the stonemason caste, might be selected to design elaborate tombs and mausoleums. The third son of a laundress, assigned to the same caste, would instead become a carrier of stone and rubble or perhaps a sharpener of stone-carving tools.

The Varang believe that knowing and accepting one's place in the world allows each individual to perfect his inner nature and to become an ideal exemplar of his station in life. To prevent social awkwardness and promote harmony, citizens of the Varang confederacy have an elaborate dress code that reflects each person's social status. Colors, patterns, and even small tassels or embroidery all denote specific information about an individual's birth order, caste, and status in their caste. The code allows for a surprising amount of individual variation, but all citizens must maintain the overall pattern. Individuals who portray a status or caste to which they do not belong are subject to fines or public whippings.

It takes months or even years to learn to read the subtleties of Varangan clothing, but outsiders can usually distinguish high- and low-caste individuals within a week or two. Fortunately, most Varang are forgiving of foreigners' mistakes, generally considering them evidence of moral and mental weakness rather than deliberate offenses.



Apart from their social complexity, Varang cities can also be physically confusing to visitors. Each city is built on a separate street plan designed to express some principle of cosmological order. The capital, Yane, is built on a precise radial plan, like a vast series of nested wheels. The huge palace-complex of the ruling caste resides in the exact center of the city, the axis around which the entire Varang world revolves. In sharp contrast, the main street in the hexagonal city of Kriss is a six-sided spiral which winds from the center to the periphery, while city blocks in Talt are all equilateral triangles. To further increase the confusion, most Varang buildings proclaim their function with brightly colored paint or trim rather than signs. When visiting any of these cities, outsiders are strongly advised to hire guides.

THE PLACE OF FOREIGNERS

Outsiders occupy a curious position in Varang life. The Varang live in a rigidly controlled society, but also control several important trade routes between the south and the southeast. As a result, travelers from many diverse cultures are relatively common. Talt, which lies on the eastern border, and Kriss, on the western border, always have large numbers of visiting foreigners. Some Varang see outsiders as degenerate beings whose lives lack a proper foundation, but many view them as the ultimate symbols of chance. Because outsiders have no caste and their role in life cannot be determined by their dress, they might be anything or anyone. The only equivalents in Varang culture are actors and actresses, who as a caste are considered dishonest and disreputable because their profession requires them to dress as members of different castes during performances.

Some unscrupulous Varang hire foreigners to perform tasks that cross caste boundaries, or that all right-thinking Varang would find reprehensible. Popular stories and ill-printed rag-paper novels frequently depict devious foreign spies working for insane or blatantly evil high-caste Varang. In addition, many Varang gamblers associate foreigners with chance and good fortune. Gamblers down on their luck sometimes seek out foreigners as companions, lovers, or gambling partners in high-stakes games. Since gambling is extremely popular among the Varang, attractive foreigners are frequently asked to be gambling companions.

Such beliefs do much to shape the popular opinion of foreign traders. To help keep contact with foreigners inside the bounds of propriety, a special caste of merchants has sole authority to make deals with foreign traders. However, given the desire of many Varang to purchase foreign goods with little additional markup, these merchants are frequently paid a small fee to act as signatories and witnesses for deals struck between outland traders and avaricious Varang. In Talt and Kriss, members of this merchant subcaste have offices where they witness and sign such deals. Not all Varang are so eager to deal with

outlanders, however. Many distrust all foreigners and avoid them as much as possible.

Despite popular tales to the contrary, all sensible foreigners refrain from getting involved in the complex networks of Varang intrigue. In a society where advancement hinges partly on birth order and partly on the death of elder family and caste members, assassination is an uncomfortably common pastime. Since most foreigners are believed to have numerous disreputable skills, some wealthy Varang attempt to hire outlanders familiar with Varang culture to spy on their rivals. Others simply wish to hire foreign assassins on the theory that magistrates cannot question killers who have long since departed the country. Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that significant numbers of foreigners who visit the Varang City-States are freelance spies and assassins. Pay for such work is high, primarily because punishments for foreigners caught perpetrating these crimes range from enslavement in the royal mines in the far south to slow and painful execution.

OUTCASTS

A foreigner's place outside the caste system gives her a position of slightly scandalous mystery. Native Varang who lack a caste can claim no such distinction. These literal outcasts include orphans, foundlings, and others whose time of birth is not known. Those who fail at or loathe their assigned castes also occasionally join these ranks; a few of these even become outcasts voluntarily. In general, only those who are mad or otherwise impossible to train in their assigned station are made outcasts. Since the lot of a Varangan outcast is rarely happy, only the most desperate choose it. Given the stigma associated with outcast status, even the poorest and most isolated Varang attempt to record a time of birth for their children, and so the number of outcasts is relatively small. Even a city of 100,000 rarely contains more than several hundred such miserable inhabitants.

In sharp contrast to typically colorful Varangan dress, outcasts may only wear shades of gray or black. Lacking any assigned job, they must live by their wits. Many work as casual labor, doing odd jobs for minimal pay. Others become ill-paid streetwalkers, getting business from those too poor to afford even the cheapest of the geisha class, or beggars and rag pickers who sell the best of the foul refuse they find to disreputable shopkeepers. The most successful either leave the Varangan city-states, sell inexpensive goods from pushcarts or find wealthy patrons and become interestingly bohemian poets and artists, illicit lovers, or occasionally spies and assassins.

Not surprisingly, many outcasts turn to crime. While con artists and pickpockets usually prey on outsiders unaware of their dubious status, a few highly skilled outcasts make excellent livings as cat burglars, jewel thieves, forgers, and fences. Naturally, the town guard first looks to the





outcast community whenever a crime is committed. Non-violent crimes committed by an outcast bring up to ten years' enslavement in the royal mines; for violent crime, the penalty is death. Not surprisingly, outcast criminals are either suicidally foolish or extremely adept.

Despite their apparent similarity in lacking a caste, the contrast between Varang attitudes toward outsiders and outcasts is quite marked. Outsiders are seen as having the potential to be any caste, while outcasts are deprived of their proper place and so only fit for worthless tasks.

RELATIONS WITH THE REALM

Although ruling-caste Varangans are as suspicious of foreigners as anyone else, the Varang City-States are closely allied with the Realm. Merchants from the Realm receive slightly better prices than traders from the Threshold. Criminals or Celestial Exalted fleeing the Realm's harsh justice will be captured by the Varangan guard and deported. In return, the Realm has stationed small garrisons in Talt and in several western border towns to assist in the city-states' defense. The alliance with the Realm helps the Varang maintain their isolation from other foreign influences, a fact that makes it palatable to the Varangan overlords.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR VARANG

Dawn:	Soldier, Outcast Thug
Zenith:	Immaculate Priest, Local Noble
Twilight:	Astrologer, Designer of Raiment, Savant
Night:	Foreign Assassin, Outcast Thief, Police Detective
Eclipse:	Geisha Caste Entertainer, Trader with Foreigners

HARBORHEAD

Just over two week's travel east of the Varangan city of Talt, in the foothills of the Summer mountain range and in the veldt below them, lies the warlike nation of Harborhead. Both nations' ties to the Realm help ensure that Harborhead rarely takes on the Varang City-States. However, the armies of Harborhead are constantly attempting to expand southeastward, and have recently launched prolonged campaigns against some of the nearby jungle tribes.

SLAVE ECONOMY

In addition to land and cattle, the armies of Harborhead take slaves from their enemies. Slaves make up almost a quarter of Harborhead's population, but local laws of manumission create a constant demand for more. Only criminals or battle captives and their children can be lawfully enslaved. Anyone whose parents were born in

Harborhead is automatically freed provided she swears allegiance to the King and renounces all foreign gods, even if she was born of slave parents.

In the cities, slaves are the servants of the wealthy and middle classes; on the vast farmsteads and cattle ranches, they perform all the necessary menial tasks. Slaves also serve as an important source of national income. The capital city of Kirighast contains vast slave markets where war captives are sold to all buyers. Harborhead slaves are especially prized throughout the South, and the threat of being sold to foreign lands where even their grandchildren will never be free helps quell thoughts of rebellion.

Widespread use of slaves allows the people of Harborhead to concentrate on their most beloved pastime, warfare. From childhood, every native of Harborhead is trained to use weapons and to fight. While most grow up to become farmers or shopkeepers, everyone can fight when an enemy force dares to invade this land. During wartime, the standing armies are overwhelmed by eager volunteers. Only the most skilled combatants can join this nation's armed forces, making Harborhead among the most feared military powers in the Threshold.

THE ROYAL GUARD

Like many of the Eastern armies, the Harborhead military at large actively recruits men and women. The Royal Guard, by contrast, is an all-female elite military force. Most young girls in Harborhead dream of joining it, but the Guard accepts only the strongest, fastest, and fiercest young virgins. Any young woman who meets the guard's exacting physical standards may join, but must swear to neither marry nor take lovers from outside the guard while she remains a member. Women may freely petition to leave the guard anytime the kingdom is not at war. For the duration of their service, they are considered the sacred brides of Ahlat, god of war and cattle. Breaking their vow of chastity with anyone outside the Royal Guard is punishable by death. Between skirmishes with various minor southeastern tribes and frequent attempts to conquer fertile lands to the east, the Royal Guard often spends years on a wartime footing. Many a tragic saga tells of guard members who fall in love with civilians during wartime and die before they can be with their love, or who leave the guard only to find that their love has married another.

All members of the Royal Guard must retire at the age of 27. Retirees receive excellent pensions, and are expected to marry and raise the next generation of guardswomen — rarely a problem, since retired guardswomen are highly prized as lovers and wives. A few retirees take lovers from among their fellows or keep their oaths and remain as trainers, but the vast majority soon find a suitable spouse from among many eager suitors of both sexes.



In addition to a small contingent assigned to protect the king and the royal palace, the guard acts as the king's special shock troops. They train ceaselessly and are known to drink the blood of their enemies. The guard is sent in to break sieges, terrorize larger forces, and force a way through otherwise unbreakable battle lines. They are armed with slings and special firedust grenades, as well as firewands to repel cavalry charges and mass attacks. Most take ears or other trophies from those they kill. They fight ferociously and to the death. They normally take prisoners, but if any of the opposing army is known to have harmed or defiled a captive guardswoman, the guard brutally tortures and slays all the prisoners to assuage the anger of Ahlat.

Like the neighboring Varang City-States, Harborhead is allied with the Realm. The slave markets of Kirighast help keep the Realm supplied with menials, and soldiers from Harborhead are happy to fight the Realm's battles. Before the disappearance of the Empress, ties between Harborhead and the Realm were strengthening, and the king of Harborhead had petitioned the Empress not to interfere with his planned conquest of the easternmost portion of the Varang nation. These plans went on hold in the immediate aftermath of the Empress' disappearance, but in recent weeks the people of Harborhead have begun to arm for war.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR HARBORHEAD

- Dawn:** Aspiring Hero, Royal Guardswoman, Hunter of Escaped Slaves
- Zenith:** Priest of Ahlat, Immaculate Priest
- Twilight:** Astrologer, Cattle-Breeder, Veterinarian
- Night:** Thief, Varangan Spy
- Eclipse:** Ambassador to the Realm, Traveling Slave Merchant

SOUTHERN MAGICAL GEMSTONES

DREAMSTONE

Also known as dream opal, this greenish stone can record the dreams of any sleeper in physical contact with it. Smaller, acorn-sized stones can only record the dreamer's first dream, while larger thumb-sized stones record every dream in a given night. No stone yet found can hold more than a single night's worth of dreams. When the stone holds one or more dreams, any waking person who touches the stone to her forehead will have the recorded dreams the next time

she falls asleep. Dreamstone users experience these dreams as if they were their own. Alternatively, if the holder sits quietly while touching the stone for a time, she will experience the dream as a vivid waking vision. Dreams can be replayed any number of times, but must be erased before a stone can record more dreams. Erasing a stone requires the user to clasp the stone lightly and perform a special type of meditation that clears the user's mind of all dreams held inside it. Learning the meditation rarely requires more than a few hours, but learning to have dreams worth recording is an art that can take a lifetime.

Weight: 0.1 lbs., Cost: ●●● (small stones) ●●●● (large stones).

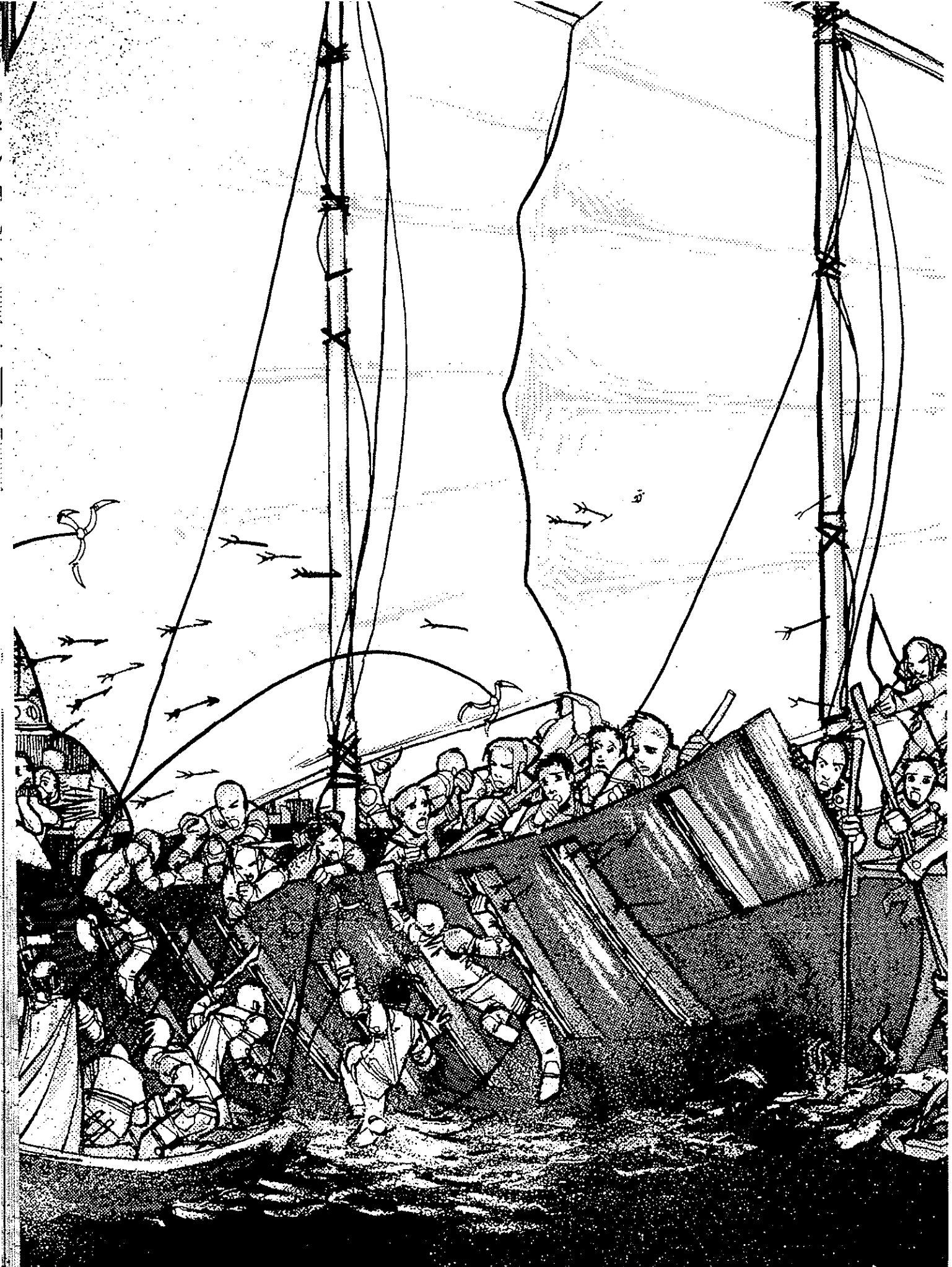
YASAL CRYSTAL

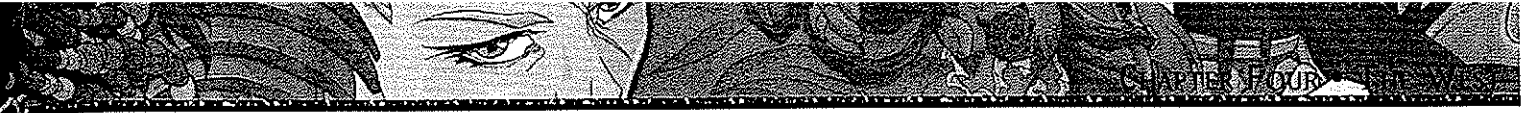
This extraordinarily valuable yellow gemstone can capture minor spirits and newly made ghosts. To imprison a spirit, the user must touch the spirit and spend a point of temporary Willpower. The spirit cannot have an Essence greater than 2, though some very large and rare stones can imprison spirits of up to Essence 3.

Once imprisoned in a piece of yasal crystal, spirits can communicate with anyone who touches the stone. However, the spirits cannot escape on their own or use any of their Charms. Instead, whoever touches the stone can use a captive spirit's powers as if they were his own, *if the holder of the stone has the spirit's permission*. Because spirits resent imprisonment as much as any other being, the holder must usually bargain with the spirit, typically requesting the free use of its powers for a set number of times. After exhausting all the uses, or after a set time period (rarely more than a month), the holder agrees to free the spirit. While the holder is under no obligation to keep this promise, those who break it end up with uncooperative spirits inside useless rocks. Also, spirits who manage to break free from such an oathbreaker often attempt to take dire vengeance on him, and may have the assistance of friends and allies.

To simulate the bargaining, the stone's holder makes a Charisma + Bureaucracy roll with a difficulty equal to the spirit's Essence. Every extra success grants the character two uses of the spirit's powers. Failure gives the character a single use of the spirit's powers, and a botch means that the character has angered the spirit and it will never work for him. Each stone can hold only a single spirit at a time, and anyone holding the stone can free the spirit at will.

Weight: 0.1 lbs., Cost: ●●●●●





CHAPTER FOUR THE WEST

It is a tribute to the brutal conditions of the Northlands that more people live in the island-studded Western Ocean than dwell on the North's entire vast tundra. The West is a land of sailing and sea trade, of island nations that are each a self-contained world, all struggling to wrest a livelihood from an often hostile environment. This region is the most free of the Realm's influence, for good and ill; with no imperial garrisons to harry them, the oceans of the West crawl with pirates, and all of the region's inhabitants fear barbarian raids or attack from the Fair Folk.

THE WAVECREST ARCHIPELAGO

With a population of over 250,000, the three large islands that make up the Wavecrest Archipelago form the largest single Western state. Wavecrest's largest island, Abalone, has a land area of around 25,000 square miles and is the biggest island in the West. The other two islands both measure over 5,000 square miles. Located toward the south and at a moderate distance from the Realm, these islands seem to bask in a perpetual verdant, sunny springtime.

GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY

Unlike the majority of the Western islanders, residents of Wavecrest are not completely dependent on the sea for their livelihood. Blessed with rich black volcanic soil, all three islands support large forests and tracts of agricultural land where the locals grow luscious breadfruit, mangoes, and dozens of berries and fruits, as well as maize, pigs, and chickens. Taro root, maize, bananas, chicken, and fish form the staples of the local diet. This abundance of food guarantees the Wavecrest Archipelago an important place in Western commerce, and the Wavecrest islands are widely known as the breadbasket of the Western Ocean. Many small isles whose people subsist on little more than fish, shellfish and kelp regularly purchase fruit and grain from Wavecrest to supplement their meager diets. Candied guavas, mangoes in brandy, and similar Wavecrest delicacies are likewise prized throughout the West.

Wavecrest is ruled by an elected president known as the Feathered One, named for the cape of office he wears. Woven of the feathers of seven species of tropical birds, this cape is ancient and is said to confer wisdom, honesty, and forethought on all who wear it. This may or may not be true, but the cape does demonstrably protect the wearer against assas-



sination attempts. Aided in his duties by a council of priestesses and the mayors of Wavecrest's various cities and towns, the Feathered One seeks to promote commerce and maintain harmony among the three islands' many inhabitants.

Widely parodied as a nation of farmers, merchants, and shop-keepers, the inhabitants of Wavecrest are somewhat more peaceful than most of their neighbors. Their land is rich, the climate warm and pleasant, and the nearest other islands are distant enough to make casual raids an expensive pastime. Politically, Wavecrest's only major rival is the Coral Islands. Wavecrest is officially neutral toward the Realm, but in practice serves as one of the Realm's passive allies. There are no imperial kasernes in the Wavecrest Archipelago, and the land accepts outcasts. However, the republic welcomes ambassadors and advisors from the Realm, and the Feathered One knows that harboring Anathema will not be tolerated. As a result, only Solar Exalted who are extremely discreet and not being hunted by the Realm are likely to find a home in Wavecrest.

A WOMAN'S PLACE

Like elsewhere in the West, women are generally forbidden to participate in seagoing ventures. However, the Wavecrest islands are also home to substantial land-based craft industries and agriculture, activities at which women are widely believed to be superior. This division of labor makes the lives of men and women largely separate in the Wavecrest Archipelago, and members of each sex hold power in their own sphere. Men are sailors, traders, fishermen, divers, marines, shipping agents, traveling storytellers, couriers, or else follow similar trades that involve the sea or travel between islands. Men and women share the land-bound jobs, but women make up the majority of jewelers, blacksmiths, shopkeepers, merchants, tavern owners, cooks, and farmers. Unless they are unusually skilled or successful at such professions, or clearly unable to perform seagoing work, men who hold "landlubber" jobs are seen as lacking or inferior. Female visitors are rare and are most often assumed to be Tya (see page 59). As a result, locals treat them as men.

THE VOLCANO GODS

Volcanoes hold a special place in the beliefs of the Wavecrest islanders. Hamoji, the republic's largest volcano, lies near the center of the main island of Abalone, at the heart of the largest Wyld land in the West. The deep Wyld covers several square kilometers around the smoking mountain. The shape of the mountain often changes, sometimes daily. Hamoji

occasionally spews forth jets of glowing violet lava, clouds of blood, poisonous flowers and other such oddities. Similar Wyld zones surround several of the archipelago's other large volcanoes, and a few tiny, nearby volcanic islands as well. These volcanoes often erupt at the same time as Hamoji.

When the volcanoes are particularly active, special priestesses carry living convicts up to the mountains' summits and hurl them into lava. None know if the volcano spirit devours these offerings, if they are swallowed by the Wyld, or if some unknown Fair Folk take the broken bodies. The victims are never seen alive again, though it sometimes rains brain matter or fresh bone fragments after a sacrifice.

The justice system of Wavecrest is an outgrowth of the sacrifice custom, designed to provide the necessary living material. Anyone convicted of a crime more serious than public rudeness must spend time in the local prison. Terms range from a week for petty theft or minor vandalism, to years for crimes like murder, treason, or piracy. The prisons are clean and safe and the convicts well fed, but they essentially function as holding pens for sacrifices to the volcano spirits. When the volcanoes to act up, the priestess comes to choose sacrificial victims. Serious offenders are picked before minor offenders, but the prisons can be swiftly cleared of residents if the volcanoes are particularly active. Only the end of his term can save a prisoner from this horrible death. As few locals wish to risk being fed to the volcano gods, the people of Wavecrest are unusually law-abiding.

The majority of the people of Wavecrest believe these sacrifices are necessary for the safety of the islands. On rare occasions, the lives of convicts prove inadequate, and a more impressive sacrifice is needed. At such times, only the sacrifice of the Feathered One is sufficient. The last such sacrifice occurred more than fifty years ago, but everyone elected to this high office knows that they may be called upon to give up their lives for Wavecrest. The volcanoes invariably cease activity within an hour of the Feathered One's death in the heart of Hamoji. Because he must give his life if there are no other victims, the Feathered One encourages all magistrates to vigorously pursue even relatively minor offenders.

MILITARY STRENGTH

Being largely self-sufficient and reasonably non-aggressive, Wavecrest has a small navy. While more than sufficient to protect the republic's waters against incursions by pirates and raiders, this standing force cannot hold off a full-scale invasion. On the rare occasions when these islands go to war, the ranks of the navy swell with volunteers and



conscripts. The Feathered One then selects an experienced admiral to lead the expanded naval force. Currently, only the Realm and the Coral Islands are strong enough to have any hope of conquering Wavecrest. The Realm is nominally allied with the Wavecrest Archipelago, but the rival Coral Archipelago has been expanding toward Wavecrest for more than a decade. Wavecrest ships are favored targets for Coral privateers and naval raiders, and many on both sides expect either a treaty or a war between these two powers within a few years.

The Wavecrest islands' Wyld regions pose the only other major threat to the republic's safety. Strange and dangerous beasts occasionally emerge from these areas and threaten to destroy all that lies in their path. Since uninhabited forests cover almost half the land area of the three islands, Wyld beasts can escape notice for weeks or months; a few even mate with local animals and reproduce. Whenever such creatures are sighted, the priestesses and their heavily armed assistants go out to hunt down the beasts. Substantial bounties also attract the islands' most daring hunters, as well as thrill-seeking Terrestrial Exalted from the Realm.

Dangers can come from the sea as well. The chaotic regions around the small volcanic islets have occasionally released enormous sea beasts and deadly water elementals. When these threats appear, the priestesses send the navy and anyone else they can recruit to destroy them before they ravage the archipelago's ships and coastal towns.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR WAVECREST

Dawn:	Whaler, Hunter, Pirate Chaser
Zenith:	Volcano Priest, Immaculate Priest
Twilight:	Chart Maker, Magistrate
Night:	Thief, Hunter
Eclipse:	Merchant, Professional Diplomat

THE CORAL ARCHIPELAGO

In sharp contrast to the peaceful Wavecrest Archipelago, Coral is a militant dictatorship bent on dominating its neighbors. The second-largest state in the West, Coral is made up of almost two dozen islands, with a total population of more than 200,000. Located near the western shore of the Realm and somewhat to the north, the Coral Archipelago is a series of coral atolls, none larger than 150 square miles. The inhabitants of these tiny islands are dependent on the sea for their livelihood. The atolls have little arable land, suitable for small gardens, fruit trees, and berry bushes. Fortunately, the largest islands also contain small stands of iron palm trees, whose wood is prized for building

large, sturdy ships. Unlike many of the more southerly islands, the Coral Archipelago has distinct seasons, and suffers chill winds and cold rain for much of the year. Many visitors claim that the weather accounts for the natives' aggressiveness; the locals are eager to conquer distant lands because anywhere is better than Coral.

GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

Ruled by a popularly elected dictator known as the Sea Lord, the prosperity of the Coral Archipelago is built on booty and conquest. The dictator is normally chosen based on promises to provide large public works, lavish festivals and similar public benefits. These extravaganzas are funded largely through tribute and plunder, sources of income that are also essential to providing the islands' high standard of living without collecting taxes. A dictator who cannot give the people their expected bread and circuses is quickly voted out of office.

The primary check on the Sea Lord's power is Coral's large military bureaucracy, in which by law no dictator can have served. The soldier-bureaucrats are loyal to Coral first and to the Sea Lord second. The Sea Lord may command the military during his term of office, but rulers who overstep their bounds face swift justice at the swords of their guards.

A representative from each island in the archipelago assists the Sea Lord. Elected from among the wealthiest inhabitants of each island, this council of 32 plutocrats has little formal power, but advises the Sea Lord on all matters. While the Sea Lord may rule as he sees fit, incurring the displeasure of the plutocrats is a quick way to leave office, for the plutocrats have the right to call a new election. They can do so as often as once every two years, and a Sea Lord who disregards their wishes will face regular elections until he is defeated. Like many on these islands, the plutocrats openly work for their own interests. Bribing plutocrats is an accepted practice, and most of those who attain this rank do it to make themselves and their friends and allies rich, rather than out of a sense of civic duty.

Other than the Sea Lord and the military, Coral has no nobility or other official class distinctions. Status is based purely on wealth. Those who achieve great wealth are believed to be specially blessed by the Ocean Father, a powerful god revered by all the Coral islanders. The poor are seen as lesser beings with little physical or spiritual worth. Although the state is rich enough that none starve, those who depend on the bounty of the Sea Lord for subsistence must wear special clothes to mark their shame.

The only way for the poor to gain any status or respect is to join the military.

More than in any other Western state, women are lesser beings in Coral. Only men can vote, and though women may own property, they are technically under the authority of their fathers, brothers, or husbands. Since women cannot serve in the military, acquiring wealth is their only path to power. Two of the largest trading firms are headed by women, but even prosperity does not make them equal to their male counterparts. Common opinion attributes female success to the actions of lovers or male relatives, and well-off women are the subject of many ribald jokes.

JUSTICE IN CORAL

Like everything else in the Coral Archipelago, justice is based on money. All crimes committed in these islands carry a monetary value. Instead of such common punishments as exile, mutilation, slavery or death, criminals in Coral are either fined or must become indentured servants for a specified duration. Once they have repaid the value of their crime in cash or labor, they are free. Half the fine for a crime is paid to the Sea Lord and half to any victims. Indentures for

crimes against property are normally set at twice the value of the property. Violent crimes usually impose high fines and lengthy indentures.

For a healthy young man convicted of a crime, an alternative to indenture is military service in one of the archipelago's convict brigades. Used as shock troops and laborers, convict-soldiers who capture an amount of booty equal to the cost of their indenture are immediately freed. They pay the Sea Lord loot equal to the cost of their indenture and may keep any additional treasure. However, convict brigades are rarely deployed in situations where taking loot is likely, and those troops not killed suppressing a riot or attempting to quell tribesmen are often reduced to near-cripples by the manual labor to which they are set when not deployed in the field.

MILITARY MATTERS

Military prowess is highly regarded in Coral. In addition to keeping a share of all goods they capture, after two decades of honorable service all recruits are allowed to retire with substantial pensions. These generous terms make the navy of Coral attractive to individuals from many nations. Although barred from high rank, foreigners may join the naval forces. Outlanders willing to provide information about their homeland's defenses or shipping schedules may even receive commissions. Coral has the largest navy in the West, and has gradually been expanding it over the past century. In addition to raids on merchant ships and poorly defended towns, Coral's navy also engages in conquest whenever it sees an opportunity. With each new island added to the state, the navy's power grows.

Perhaps the most potent weapons in Coral's arsenal are the Sea Lord's letters of marque. Pirates who swear never to interfere with ships belonging to Coral or its current allies are officially recognized as privateers, after paying a hefty licensing fee. In addition to providing safe ports for pirate ships, and a ready market for their booty, Coral ambassadors often ransom successful pirates captured by enemy powers. Depending on how much the pirate has fattened Coral's coffers, the ambassadors will sometimes even arrange for the ransom of the privateer's ship as well. Many in Wavecrest and other Western states see the Coral Archipelago as little more than a large, organized nest of pirates, a view not far from the truth.

The captains of vessels that regularly trade with Coral receive special papers to identify them as Coral allies. When a pirate ship closes to within hailing distance, the captain of an allied vessel announces that he has a certificate of passage, and the pirates then send over a representative to inspect it.

THE DIPLOMATS OF CORAL

Coral's military provides its diplomats as well as its bureaucrats. Though these individuals negotiate treaties as in most other countries, Coral is unusual for rolling its diplomatic corps, intelligence agency and special operations force into one organization. Diplomats in Coral are trained from a young age in the martial arts and military tactics. These youthful officers serve as spies, escorts for elder statesmen, and even elite military forces, leading strikes against valuable targets. Those who survive and earn promotion are taken out of the field to serve as negotiators and senior bureaucrats.

The people of Coral believe that diplomats should be men of action, with experience in real-world affairs. Such people, in their view, make better representatives of the nation than savants and professional hand-shakers who only know how to ingratiate themselves with their fellow diplomats. These hard-edged functionaries, accustomed to violence and brutal necessity, form the stable core of Coral's often tumultuous political landscape. No matter the twists and turns of the political scene, they ensure the safety of the state by whatever means necessary — including the assassination of citizens, even plutocrats, who endanger the nation.

These papers are changed every moon, so old papers cannot be kept or copied. To further fatten his treasury, the Sea Lord sells these certificates of safe passage. Any captains willing to pay the Sea Lord's price can buy immunity from Coral's pirates. The Sea Lord maintains tight control over this unique trade; anyone caught buying or selling counterfeit certificates is declared an enemy of Coral, marked for death by all loyal citizens and allies of the archipelago. Anyone who brings the Sea Lord the head of such a criminal, along with the counterfeit certificate, can count on a substantial reward.

RELATIONS WITH THE REALM

Their open tolerance of piracy and general contempt for hereditary nobles make the people of the Coral islands outspoken opponents of the Realm. Fortunately for Coral, the archipelago has few resources that the Realm needs, and pirates tread cautiously around imperial interests. Consequently, the empire has so far tolerated Coral's existence. The current Sea Lord's ambition to conquer Wavecrest and many of the other island kingdoms might have roused the Realm to action in other circumstances, but the looming threat of civil war is likely to hold all the Realm's attention for the foreseeable future. The Sea Lord's antipathy toward the Realm, however, is

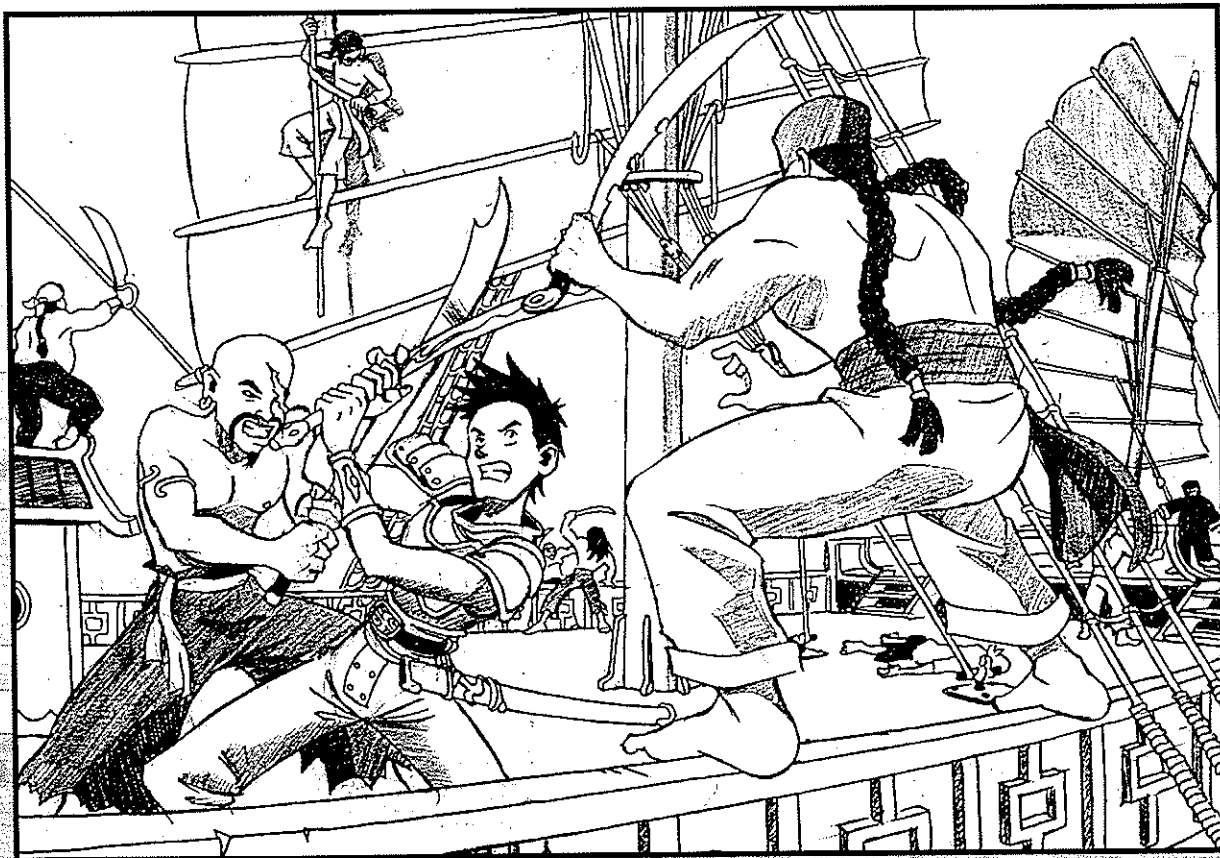
no help for any Anathema found in the archipelago. Unless protected by powerful political ties, will either be killed or pressed into service.

The Sea Lord eventually hopes to hold sway over all the civilized nations of the West, and doubtless has grander designs as well. Ships from Coral trade extensively with Nexus, Lookshy and Chiaroscuro in an effort to purchase the finest weapons and military goods. Outsiders are openly welcomed, especially those able and willing to aid Coral in its expansionist designs.

OUTLANDERS IN THE ARCHIPELAGO

Except for licensed privateers, the wealthy, and soldiers of all sorts, foreigners are seen as little better than women. Many Coral islanders see outlanders as potential conquests for their powerful military or their hard-hearted merchants. The traders of Coral are widely known as the most tight-fisted and rapacious in the West. Unfortunately, between their stocks of iron palm wood, the booty they get from their navy and privateers, and the goods brought by their far-flung trading argosies from the Realm and the coastal towns of the North, few in the Western islands can afford not to deal with these grasping businessmen.

In spite of the contempt felt toward foreigners by many in the archipelago, Coral is a popular destination





for wealthy travelers, for the money-hungry Sea Lord allows all manner of illicit vices in his territory. The largest cities of Coral, including the capital of Azure, are infamous as places where every possible commodity is for sale. Wealthy visitors come to Coral to purchase slaves and to sample all sorts of forbidden entertainments in the abundant brothels and drug dens.

The rich, the foolish, and the desperate also come to wager their fortunes in the archipelago's gambling halls. In addition to more conventional forms of gambling, some attempt to redeem their monies in the infamous black casinos, where losers forfeit their lives and the wealthy watch their inferiors play games of life and death. Two of the largest casinos have highly popular back rooms where the jaded and the reckless come to bet all manner of intangible commodities, including their youth, talent, health, and sanity.

These two casinos, the Diving Sea Snake in Mantaville and Vason's Luck in Azure, each house one of a pair of First Realm artifacts found 200 years ago. These artifacts enable gamblers to lose and win almost anything imaginable. Rich old men frequently bet large portions of their wealth against impoverished youths willing to bet a decade or more of their own life spans. Other people bet their health or beauty in return for a chance to win the fighting prowess of various once-great warriors, or the musical talent of skilled but aging bards.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR CORAL

Dawn:	Privateer, Convict Brigade Member
Zenith:	Magistrate, Priest of the Ocean Father
Twilight:	Shipwright, Weather-Sorcerer
Night:	Agent of the Sea Lord, Foreign Spy
Eclipse:	Gambler, Warrior-Diplomat

THE LINTHA FAMILY

In the more southerly portions of the West, the dreaded Lintha Family, also known as the Lintha pirates, is the scourge of the sea. Based in a vast patch of sargasso seaweed that contains a potent Wyld region, these pirates have repelled all attacks on their stronghold. The sargasso lies in thickly twining tangles on the ocean's surface and traps all ships whose captains do not know the few secret paths through its green tendrils. Inside the sargasso field are a few tiny islands and countless wrecked ships. The seaweed keeps even the most battered wrecks from sinking; some of the vessels in this graveyard are decades or even centuries old.

Near the heart of the sargasso field lie a few huge wrecks that last sailed the seas during the days of the Old Realm. These shining, eternal hulls and the small islet by which they rest form the center of the Lintha

pirates' activities. A veritable pirate city has grown up around this spot — the enclave of Bluehaven, with a population that sometimes grows as high as 10,000.

No one knows how long pirates have used this site, but a few of the oldest tell stories that depict the Lintha Family as the scourge of the seas since the days when the ancient ship hulls they now live on were new. Today, these ships and various newer hulls are linked by a network of walkways, and a few have even been joined together into a vast warren of hulls and decks. In this nest of shipwrecks, the hidden masters of the Lintha Family plan their raids and grow fat on the spoils of dozens of cities and hundreds of ships. The few outsiders who have visited Bluehaven and lived to tell about it describe chambers appointed with fabrics and trinkets stolen from all over the known world, lorded over by strutting pirate-nobles dressed in gaudy splendor.

Several of Bluehaven's longtime inhabitants have blue or green skin and gills. Some gained these features from exposure to the low levels of Wyld energy that pervade the region; others are Wyld barbarians who joined the Family or pirates whose ancestors were exposed to Wyld energies and whose descendants were born with the changes. To aid in the capture and looting of ships trapped in the tendrils of sargasso weed, the pirates of Bluehaven also have special shoes that allow them to walk on water. Made of yard-wide, circular pieces of zeelwood bark, coated with wax boiled from the flesh of the lion shark, the shoes enable their wearers to move freely over the surface of the sargasso field. Many sailors tell bone-chilling stories of hideous green-skinned pirates running across the weed-strewn waters and swarming up the sides of trapped ships, slaying all aboard who will not command a high ransom.

The threat of the Lintha pirates reaches far beyond their weedy hideout. Their low, fast galleys attack ships throughout the islands and shipping lanes of the southwest. Using unwholesome magics, degenerate sorcerers and priests among these pirates have made pacts with various elemental powers and terrible sea beasts, so that their best ships need only use oars and sails in emergencies. Instead, they are propelled through the water by elemental spirits, or pulled by enormous harnessed whales or kraken. Some stories even claim that the Lintha pirates have salvaged one or two magical engines from Old Realm ships and used them to create vessels that can travel faster than the swiftest dolphin.

Because many of the Lintha pirates can breathe water and swim inhumanly well, they are also adept at stealthily attacking anchored vessels or even small coastal villages. They approach by swimming beneath

WATER SHOES

In the West, many sailors and fisher folk often find it useful to be able to walk on water. Water shoes, an item unique to this region, are made from yard-wide, dish-shaped pieces of zeelawood bark, coated with wax boiled from lion shark flesh. The shoes are near-useless in any but the calmest seas and are most commonly used in inlets, bays, and similar sheltered environs. However, the shoes can also prove invaluable on the open ocean, since they allow sailors to repair external damage to a ship's hull.

Water shoes do not allow the wearer to move faster than a walk. If the wearer falls, he must discard the shoes and swim; once lost, it is impossible to regain footing on water while wearing water shoes. The shoes must also be removed before the wearer attempts to walk on land. On land, anyone wearing water shoes may only move one yard per turn, and will damage the shoes severely.

Weight: 5 lbs., Cost: •• (••• outside the West).

the water, climb silently onboard or ashore, and then kill anyone on guard. They can then gather loot and depart before anyone is aware of their presence. When attacking anchored ships, the Linthas often kill everyone aboard and take the vessel. Sailors watchful enough to shout a warning when they see the silent shapes of these pirates surfacing around their ships are richly rewarded by their captains, for saving the lives and cargo carried aboard the vessel.

FAMILY CULTURE

The Lintha Family is constantly expanding its operations. Over the past few hundred years, increasing wealth and power have made it far more than a rough group of bloodthirsty pirates. Today it forms a vast criminal syndicate that stretches over the southernmost Western islands and the coastal cities of the South, including the ancient port of Chiaroscuro. Using a complex network of hand signals and secret graffiti, Lintha Family members arrange meetings and exchanges in dozens of coastal cities. In addition to actual piracy, the Lintha Family is known to deal extensively in smuggling and operates a profitable slave trade.

It is easy to join the Family, but nearly impossible to leave it. Entering the Family involves payment or else providing a service to a Family representative. The higher the payment or the more impressive the service, the higher the new recruit's initial position. While skilled assassins, thieves, or pirate captains can enter as uncles or similar positions of distinc-

tion, even the lowest deck hand or wharf rat can steal a small trinket for a Family lieutenant and gain entry as a younger brother or sister. The Family employs assassins, appraisers, merchants, forgers, footpads, cutpurses and smugglers, as well as actual pirates. Almost anyone with useful skills can find employment within its illicit ranks.

Regardless of position, a complex and secret initiation follows, where the new member pledges eternal obedience and secrecy to the Family. Any member who betrays the Family in any fashion is invariably found dead. Living under constant guard or fleeing to the far corners of the world can delay death for a time, but eventually the traitor will turn up flayed alive, dead of some obscure and painful poison, or occasionally the victim of a rare and horrible disease.

Merely seeking to leave the Family does not carry such onerous penalties. However, some time after the ex-member has departed, a Family representative inevitably shows up with a new assignment. If the former member completes the assignment, all is well. Refusing a direct order from the Family carries the same penalty as betrayal. Individuals who flee far from the Family's sphere of influence may only receive occasional orders, but all ex-members live in fear of a late-night knock on their door.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

With the destruction of Sharktooth, the privateers of Coral have emerged as the Lintha Family's main competition. The Coral pirates have greater backing, but the Linthas are more numerous and ruthless. Also, while the privateers of Coral primarily hit trading ships, the Lintha pirates frequently attack towns as well. The generally subdued rivalry between these two powers sometimes erupts into violence, and sea battles between rival pirate ships are not uncommon. The current talk of Coral, however, is the present Sea Lord's attempt to make a treaty of neutrality or perhaps even an alliance with the Lintha Family. Such a treaty would greatly increase the power of both groups and could upset the stability of the entire West. Several of Wavecrest's best diplomats and spies are endeavoring to learn more details of this alleged pact, and will likely attempt to sabotage or disrupt any negotiations between the two pirate powers.

The Lintha Family is suspected of having close ties to the Guild, though no one has yet proved that the two groups do anything more than occasionally sell goods and slaves to each other. A number of Western leaders suspect that Guild support is one key to Lintha power, and many have sought to prove the existence of this supposed alliance. Since the Lintha





are widely hated across the West and Southwest, proof of Guild connections might easily force the Guild to reduce or possibly even remove its support.

FAMILY SECRETS

The Lintha Family's closest-held secret is the true location of Bluehaven, known only to Family members (though suspected by many). The field of sargasso weed, along with the wrecked hulls and even the small islands, all float on the surface of the sea, and deep currents slowly move the entire region from place to place. As a result, the location of Bluehaven constantly changes. The paths through the sargasso weed also change frequently, a fact that has left many a vessel easy prey for patrols by pirate ships. Only a few of the Family's most skilled navigators know the ancient and secret formula used to predict Bluehaven's movements and determine its position at any given time. These locations, along with the current safe paths through the sargasso weed, are provided to Family captains who must journey to Bluehaven during a certain period. Only the captain can see these charts; the rest of the crew must rely on his directions and readings.

These locations have occasionally passed from greedy captains to foolhardy raiders who seek to loot Bluehaven. A few naval vessels from various powers have even attempted to invade the Lintha stronghold and kill the grandmothers and grandfathers of the Family. All such attempts have ended in the thick sargasso weed, where attacking ships constrained by narrow paths become easy prey for the ballista, pet sea beasts and powerful First Age weapons of the pirate lords. In one case, the few survivors reported that vast whirlpools opened at the pirates' command and swallowed all the ships remaining outside the edge of the sargasso field.

Despite these dangers, a few small, carefully organized looting expeditions against Bluehaven have actually succeeded. Every few years, greedy and foolish glory hunters purchase charts of the way to Bluehaven and the safe paths through the sargasso weed. Those rare individuals lucky enough to buy an accurate version stand at least some chance of garnering riches from the elusive Lintha city.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR THE LINTHA

FAMILY

Dawn:	Assassin, Enforcer, Pirate
Zenith:	Priest of the Yozis, Family Leader
Twilight:	Master of Curses, Ship-Finding Sorcerer
Night:	Thief, Spy, Blackmailer
Eclipse:	Fence, Beggar, Rumor-Gatherer

THE SKULLSTONE ARCHIPELAGO

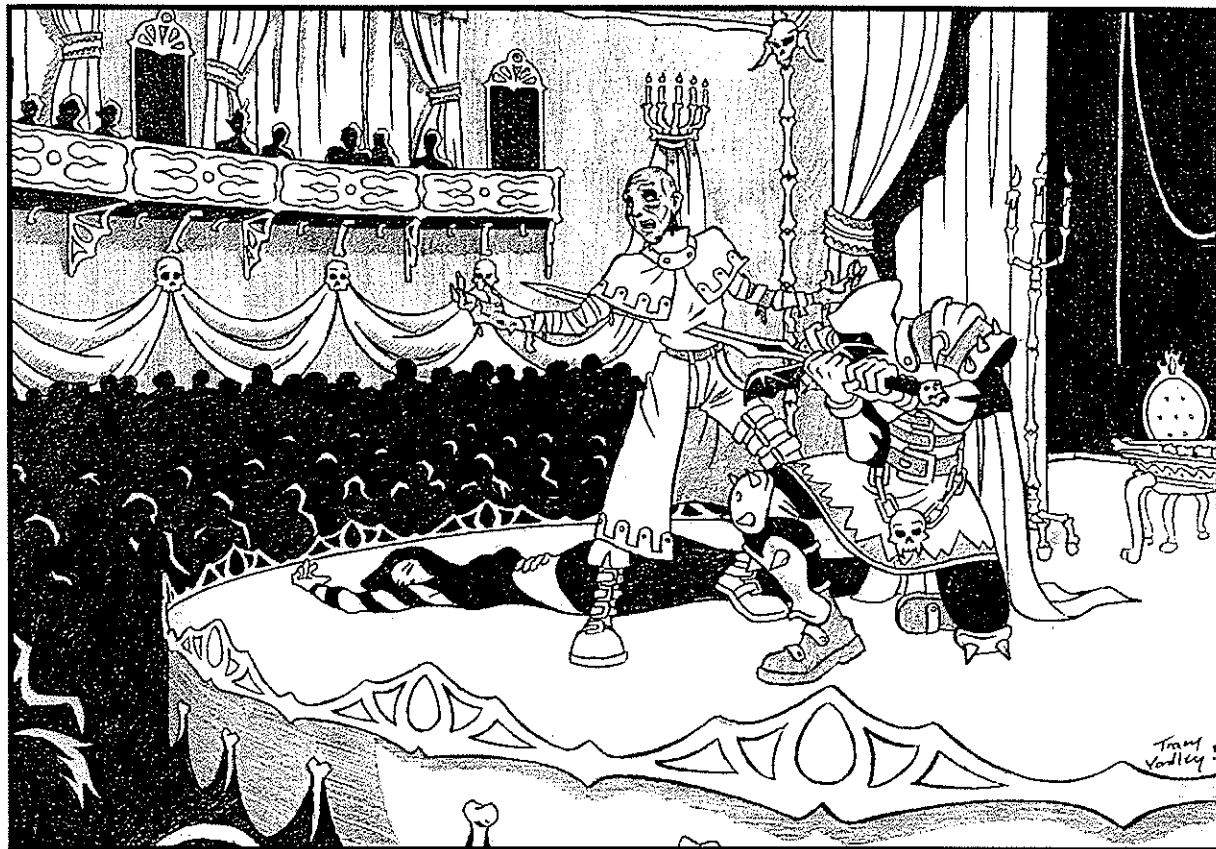
The Skullstone Archipelago centers on Darkmist Island, capital of the Skullstone nation and site of the West's largest and most infamous Shadowland. A volcanic island of gray rock with beaches of fine black sand, its jagged expanse is pocked by small and frigid lakes, and supports little life other than a few species of blighted moss and corpse-pale lichen. Along the coast lie a number of port towns where the living and the dead mix freely. Built of unmortared stone, with narrow streets and tall buildings, these ports are chill and dark even on the brightest summer days. At the center of the island is the necropolis of Onyx, carved from the naked rock of a long-extinct central volcano. Sculpted in levels rising up the mountain's sloping sides, Onyx is the capital of Skullstone and the residence of its ruling Deathlord.

The other four islands in this archipelago lie on the border marches of the Shadowland and are somewhat less eerie. Like Darkmist, they all formed around extinct volcanoes, but are less devoid of life. On these outlying islands, pale trees, dark-colored brush, large flightless birds and many species of bat share the land with the men and women who make the islands their home.

Throughout this bleak island chain, small cities and towns built of dark stone house a thriving state of over a hundred thousand living people ruled by the dead. The local Deathlord, known as the Silver Prince, and his deathknights are the absolute rulers of these islands, and all of the living obey their directives. While one or more deathknights appear at all public functions, the Silver Prince only shows himself at the yearly festival held in his honor. He wears robes made from thousands of razor-edged soulsteel shards and an ornately carved, pearly deathmask that hides his face. His long black hair gleams like a living man's, but his flesh is mummified where it can be seen through his raiment. Although he occasionally holds private audiences with distinguished or powerful visitors, he has never been known to reveal his true form.

A NATION OF THE DEAD

In contrast to mortal nations, citizenship in Skullstone extends far beyond death, for the inhabitants have a chance at immortality. All citizens of this dread land are judged immediately after death, and the deathknights are said to use arcane and terrible magics to determine the fate of the individual's body and soul. They base their judgment on the individual's honor, his loyalty to Skullstone and the ability of his spirit to withstand the difficult transition into death.



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The majority of the dead are found wanting and are raised as mere zombies or skeletons. Those whose served their dead masters well and whose souls are found to be of exceptional worth are brought back as undead ghosts. Although only about one in eight living residents eventually receives such rewards, anyone from the lowliest apprentice scribe to the wealthiest sea captain has an equal chance at a glorious unlife. They need only live an honorable life and have a strong spirit, along with skills or knowledge that the deathknights deem important.

To become undead, the deceased must be given to the Judgment Houses, into the care of the so-called Black Judges, within three days after death. Any who wait longer can only be brought back as walking dead. To avoid such a tragic fate, most inhabitants of the Skullstone Archipelago order loved ones or retainers to bring them to one of the larger cities when they are dying. Many who are near death then ensure the deathknights' prompt attention by committing suicide in a Judgment House. The Houses contain special rooms known as rebirth chambers, where the dying hold elaborate suicide ceremonies. During these rituals, the living bid their loved ones goodbye and await their hoped-for return as a member of the undead elite. Many believe that those who die in the well-appointed Judgment Houses on

Darkmist Island are more likely to retain their souls, and so many of Skullstone's elderly and ill spend their last days on Darkmist. The black-sailed ships that carry the dying to Darkmist are a common sight in Skullstone ports.

The lucky individuals brought back as departed spirits comprise Skullstone's nobles and courtiers. The living can attain wealth and prestige, but noble rank and the privileges that attend it are granted only to the dead. Although the Silver Prince and his deathknights rule, a two-branched council of the wise undead advises them. The dead elect the Elder Council, the living the Younger Council. The Elder Council holds seven seats to the Younger Council's five, and the Silver Prince and his followers treat the Elder Council's opinions with greater respect.

THE LABORS OF THE UNLIVING

Skullstone is a wealthy state, largely through its use of undead labor. The soulless walking dead perform most menial tasks, toiling ceaselessly for the Deathlord and for any citizens, living or dead, with the means to rent them. Jewelry and fine metalwork is given a mirror-bright polish by zombie hands, wealthy merchants use skeletal footmen and scullery maids, and Skullstone's war galleys hunt down pirates swiftly and effectively, propelled by ranks of untiring skeletal



oarsmen. Here, the living are largely free from manual labor and dire poverty is almost unknown.

In part, Skullstone's wealth derives from the fact that its undead slaves can harvest all of the sea's bounty. In addition to the vast fishing fleets common throughout the West, undead divers gather precious coral, rare shellfish, huge pearls, valuable debris from hundreds of shipwrecks, and many similar treasures. These unfeeling servants stay beneath the sea for hours at a time, diligently searching for whatever they have been commanded to collect.

Fortunately for the squeamish, the Black Judges have perfected a complex embalming process that allows the zombies to stay exceptionally well preserved. Although they are clearly mindless walking corpses, they rot very slowly and emit little stench. Among the living, undead servants are symbols of status and wealth. While a poor shop-keeper might only have a single unkempt skeletal assistant, members of the middle and upper classes have multiple, well-preserved servants. In well-off shops and households, such servants are dressed in loose dark robes and wear smooth metal masks to hide their lifeless faces.

The undead also have more exotic uses. Several cities, including Cliffhaven and Port Jyna, are noted for their elaborate necrodramas. Skilled zombists in these towns train undead performers to act out various simple playlets. The quality of the performance is lost on most outsiders, but violent plays with real weapons are popular among less discerning patrons. The brothels of Skullstone also offer living and dead partners, though few outsiders are tempted by such charnel delights.

Even though Skullstone is one of the two wealthiest and most powerful states in the northwest, few outlanders care to tarry here. Traders may be eager for its wealth, but most consider it a blighted and unwholesome land. Those who do visit rarely leave the travelers' quarters near the docks. The exceptions are the few immigrants who arrive every year, with dark tastes or sufficient greed or desperation to overwhelm their finer sensibilities, drawn to the eeriness of this strange realm just as some born here are drawn to livelier lands.

Many deathknights also come to Skullstone. All who swear allegiance to the Silver Prince are made champions of the realm, and receive special rights and privileges. In return, they act as magistrates, naval commanders, mayors, and Black Judges. Other Exalts who renounce all outside allegiances are also welcome, but receive no special treatment while they live.

Unwholesome as it is to most outland eyes, the Skullstone Archipelago is rarely troubled by raiders. The pirates of Coral occasionally attack Skullstone's ships, but not even the Lintha Family are daring enough to assault a land ruled by a Deathlord. Maintaining a contemptuous neutrality, the Silver Prince has refused to ally with either the Coral Archipelago or the Realm.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR SKULLSTONE

Dawn:	Marine, Necro-Brigade Leader
Zenith:	Priest of the Deathlord, Necropuppeteer
Twilight:	Savant of Death, Embalmer of Zombies
Night:	Thief, Professional Gambler
Eclipse:	Zombie Trainer, Merchant, Emissary of the Silver Prince

THE DENZIK MERCHANTS

The sargasso islands of the Lintha Family are not the only mobile habitations in the West. The Denzik merchant company built an actual floating city more than a century and a half ago, a flotilla of over 100 large sailing barges connected by sturdy ropes and thick cables. Built to survive storms and pounding waves, the Denzik city-ship sails a regular yearlong circuit from the Realm to the prosperous Silverfin island group, to Chiaroscuro and then to the coastal cities of the southwest. Following this route, the city-ship arrives at a new city or town every few weeks. The city's more than 20,000 inhabitants steer it to within clear sight of their destination and sail to port in smaller boats, then spend the next week or two trading with the locals.

Although both sides stand to make tidy profits, many communities greet visits by the Denzik floating city with mixed feelings. Such visits provide excellent opportunities for many small and moderate-sized coastal towns to trade for all manner of useful goods, but many settlements find the influx of several thousand boisterous Denzik a daunting prospect. Some islands prohibit all but a few Denzik from landing, while others open their casinos, taverns, and brothels to the hordes of newcomers eager to spend their freshly earned trading bonuses. Since the Denzik city-ship is well armed and large enough to fight off even the fiercest pirate fleet, many non-Denzik ships chart their courses to sail along with the Denzik for a portion of their journey. Arriving in port at the same time as 20,000 eager traders rarely leads to prosperous commerce, and so ship captains who follow the Denzik frequently sail with the city-ship for the middle portion of their journey and then break off toward a different destination.

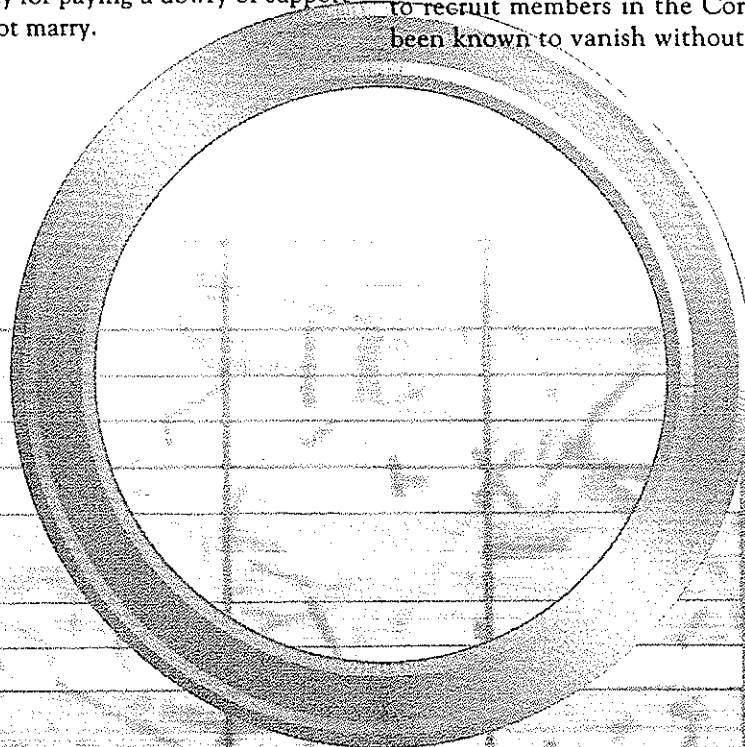
THE TYA

Most of the West's many island cultures are strongly patriarchal. In some Western states, including Coral, women have power and authority only within their own households and must be chaperoned by a husband or male sibling in public. Elsewhere in the West, women may freely participate in the social life of the island, but may not sail, raid, or engage in other activities involving travel beyond their home island. In all cases, women who must travel by ship are sequestered and subject to special taboos.

However, unlike the repressive nations that dominate the South, women in the West have another option — a society, known as the Tya, that is open to all women. The Tya choose to live as men. They forgo the protection of their families, give up their dowries and their right to support by male relatives, and must never ask a man to fight their battles. In addition, they are expected to take an extract made from certain shellfish that renders them temporarily or sometimes permanently sterile. Members of the Tya are marked by male attire and by the complex swirling tattoos on their cheeks and foreheads. Noble or wealthy families are generally reluctant to allow their daughters to become Tya, and some women and girls must escape vigilant guards to join. Many poor families, by contrast, care little if their female children join up. Some even encourage them, since a daughter's departure removes the necessity for paying a dowry or supporting her if she does not marry.

Most Tya become sailors on the fleet of ships the group maintains, while others settle on those islands that deal cordially with their kind. Some live in Tya guild houses on various islands and hire out as guards, mercenaries or similar martial professions. Others become tradespeople, living above their shops and only visiting the Tya houses for special seasonal ceremonies. Throughout most of the West, wild tales about the Tya abound. They are said to indulge in perverse and secret rites, and to have close ties with the Lintha Family. While some Tya have been seen on Lintha ships, actual alliances are pure rumor. Stories that the Tya assault and mutilate any men who offend them are also widely told, but virtually unsubstantiated.

Reactions to the Tya vary throughout the West. People in the Wavecrest Archipelago and its allies accept the Tya as a normal, if odd, part of society. Tya sailors occasionally serve on non-Tya ships, mixing freely with male crews. The Tya are also regarded as the best shell-carvers, and Tya physicians and deep-divers are valued for their exceptional skills. Although Tya cannot hold public office in Wavecrest, they are accepted as men in all other ways. The Coral Archipelago lies at the other end of the spectrum, treating the Tya as degenerate foreigners. Like all other women from faraway regions, the Tya are accepted as men, but are strongly encouraged to keep to the foreigners' quarter. Tya who attempt to recruit members in the Coral Archipelago have been known to vanish without a trace.







CHAPTER FIVE THE SCAVENGER LANDS



To the east of the Realm, across the Inner Sea, lie the nations widely known as the Scavenger Lands. To the Dynasty, they are a source of irritation and sometimes shame, a region that has halted the inexorable tide of imperial expansion. To those who would rebel against the Realm, the Scavenger Lands are a symbol of freedom and hope, a place where peoples and nations can stand free of the Realm's bribery, coercion and political influence. To their inhabitants, they are home, and though the denizens of these lands jealously guard their freedom, it is so natural to them that they scarcely notice it unless it is threatened.

Regardless of viewpoint, no one denies that the Scavenger Lands are full of danger, chaos and war. This region is no utopian state, but a real and thriving place, marked by greed and conflict and ruled piecemeal by petty warlords. Its freedom from imperial might also deprives it of the stability the Realm brings to areas under imperial dominion. Some say the Scavenger Lands remain free because they are invulnerable to attack, while others claim that the Empress left these lands unconquered so that her kingdom would never lack enemies. The truth is for you to decide.

This chapter briefly describes the history of the Scavenger Lands and the cultures of some of its major states. As with much else in this book, the picture is incomplete, leaving a great deal of room for an enterprising Storyteller to make her own legends, kingdoms and menaces.

HISTORY OF THE RIVER PROVINCE

During the First Age, the River Province was the heartland of the Realm, fabled for its mineral wealth and fertile soil. Dozens of cities sprouted up along the region's many rivers, and merchants would come from throughout the Shogunate bringing wondrous treasures to trade for metals, grain, livestock, and finished goods. The raw goods of the East were shipped north or south to cities on the Yanaze River and then transported downstream to cities at the river mouth, thence to be loaded onto ships and carted to all corners of the Realm.

The Great Contagion shattered the River Province. Cities were decimated, fields salted and ruined, mines destroyed, and wide swaths of landscape twisted by the Wyld. Shadowlands sprang up where the death toll was highest, and many of the great Manses succumbed to abandonment and decay.

The Scarlet Empress used the defense systems of the First Realm to drive back the Fair Folk and barbarians, but hers was a vast and impersonal act. Certainly most of the survivors had no idea what had transpired. In many places, the defense systems caused as much devastation as the conflagration that had come before. The Scarlet Dynasty was born that day, but the birth was little heralded by the common folk left alive.



Refugees from throughout Creation made their way to the River Province, drawn by stories of the region's great wealth and fertile land. They found blasted Manses, dark battlefields, and ruined cities. They also found survivors, and areas where the fires of the Contagion had not burned so deep. Despite their often stark differences, local survivors and refugees worked together to rebuild. Fifty years later, when the agents of the Scarlet Empress came seeking oaths of fealty, a number of fledgling city-states had already formed in the ruins of pre-Contagion towns and cities. Most of these states saw no reason to acknowledge the Empress' claim to the imperial purple.

For five years the Realm's diplomats tried to cajole, buy, or coerce the disorganized remnants of the River Province back into the fold. They enjoyed some success along the coastlines, where they could use warship diplomacy when negotiation failed. However, most of the "upstart nations" — the term Scavenger Lands had not yet become common — refused any kind of alliance with the Realm.

In the 57th year of the reign of the Scarlet Empress, imperial legions invaded the River Province. Using what are now the cities of Port Calin, Celeren, and Marin Bay as staging grounds, the legions drove systematically eastward, leaving garrisons and installing puppet rulers in each city or town they conquered. They quickly found that conquering the River Province was relatively easy; keeping it pacified was not.

After two years of fighting, the Realm controlled the province's major cities and most smaller cities and towns, with two exceptions. One was Sijan, which the Realm left undisturbed out of respect for the dead. The other was Lookshy, where negotiations were continuing with the Seventh Legion. The Seventh was a powerful military force-cum-nation whose territory lay at the mouth of the Yanaze River. The legion's commander, General Nefvarin, was a strategic prodigy, and had gathered up large stocks of First Age weaponry in the period just after the Contagion. Few of his contemporaries were willing to challenge his battlefield acumen, and his troops were better equipped than the forces of the Realm.

Even in the cities they controlled, the legions faced sneak attacks and ambushes. In the countryside, they controlled only what they could see. Resistance was unorganized, undisciplined, and unprepared, but also fierce, determined, and well-equipped with First Age weapons.

Despite its ferocity, the resistance would most likely have failed before long through its lack of coordination and structure. New cadres sprang up almost as quickly as others were wiped out, but the imperial legions were used to dealing with uprisings and revolts. As time passed, however, resistance attacks decreased in number but began to increase in effectiveness. The resistance cells were becoming better organized and more sophisticated, courtesy of the Seventh Legion. Throughout months of ongoing

negotiations with the Realm, Legion troops at Lookshy had been training the most promising cells in the art of revolution. Knowing he could not hope to defeat the three reinforced imperial legions surrounding his camp, General Nefvarin set out to wear down the Empress' forces and to build an army that could support his efforts to force the Realm out of the River Province.

The 63rd year of the Scarlet Empress' reign exploded in a storm of violence against imperial outposts and units. Patrols on the road were attacked by organized, battle-ready guerrillas, and warships burned to the waterline in port or were sabotaged on the open water. Isolated encampments and fortifications were sacked or besieged. For two years, the legions of the Realm fought a losing battle against these guerrilla fighters while facing a possible counterattack by the Seventh Legion. Eventually, early in the 69th year, the Scarlet Empress withdrew her troops back to the lands of her allies.

THE SECOND INVASION

Many in the River Province celebrated, believing they had driven off the forces of the Realm for good. Nefvarin knew better. He took steps to solidify the tenuous lines of communication formed during the revolt and shepherded the first overtures toward a formal alliance between the free countries of the River Province. Several city-states on the Yanaze began building warships to patrol the rivers and escort merchant vessels along the shores of the Inner Sea as trade between nations began to recover, while the inland kingdoms began drilling their new forces for a renewed attack.

The assault was not long in coming and was far worse than anyone expected. In Realm Year 75, the Scarlet Empress invaded again, with a total force of four legions. Lookshy was besieged, and the newly formed city of Nexus captured and occupied. Provincial warships caught on the rivers were destroyed; those that had been at sea when the invasion occurred were reduced to privateering, acting primarily as raiders and destroying the occasional warship. Even Sijan, spared occupation during the first invasion out of deference to its unique role, was garrisoned during this round of warfare.

Once again, the imperial legions found that taking ground was the easy part; holding it was far more difficult. Despite their early successes, the Realm offensive quickly bogged down. The countryside was in open insurrection, and Lookshy withstood siege for over a year, inflicting heavy casualties against several assaults. Legionnaires in all the cities except Sijan could safely move only in groups.

In Year 76, the legions of the Realm were defeated at almost every turn. Lookshy smuggled a powerful First Age weapon into the surrounding imperial camp, a device that shattered the souls of all who heard its deadly song. The Seventh Legion then sallied forth to slaughter the few

imperial troops who survived. After this bloody victory, the Seventh marched to the site of what is now the city of Great Forks, where it engaged and destroyed the imperial Fourth Legion. In Nexus, the ruling Emissary proclaimed that all Realm forces must withdraw from the city and never again enter it. Within a week, every officer above the rank of talonlord in Nexus was slain, and the remaining imperial forces withdrew down the Yanaze River.

THE THIRD INVASION

The Realm made a final effort in Year 88, landing with seven legions of imperial foot and at least twice that many auxiliaries raised from tributary states. The resulting conflict was a genuine war that saw the use of a great deal of First Age magic, including some very powerful weapons. The city of Lookshy was once again besieged and the Seventh Legion field forces cut off from their base.

This war was short, brutal and ugly. Troops from Melevhil and Nathir harried the imperial forces in the Gray River basin, while the Seventh Legion tied down several imperial units. The final battle took place in the fields outside Melevhil, between the Empress' Own Guard and the Seventh Legion Mobile Force. Over a hundred dragon-blooded heroes took the field, and all of the Guard's 19 warstriders all were cut down by the battle's end. The forces of the Realm fell back, having lost many of their First Age weapons and officers. Their fleet was scuttled in a surprise attack, and the Realm was forced to evacuate its troops with merchant vessels.

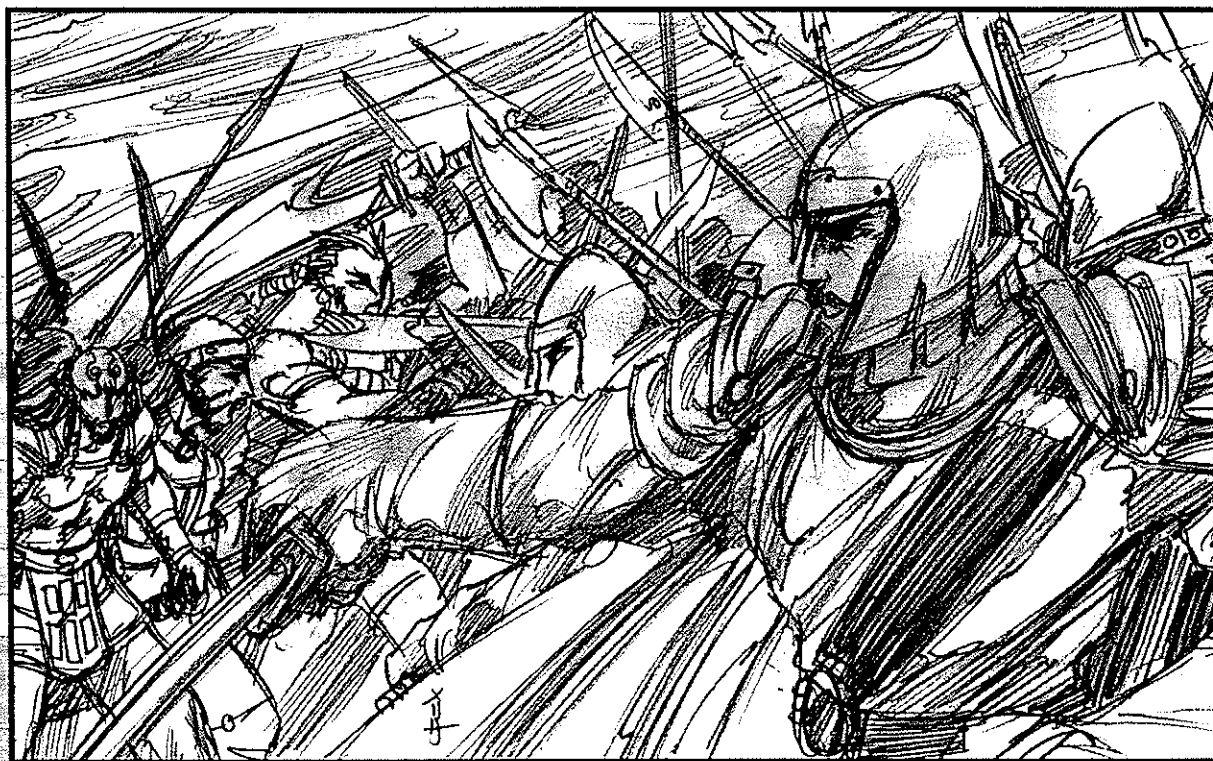
THE FORMATION OF THE LEAGUE

The outcome of the third invasion gave rise to a defensive alliance among the powers of the Scavenger Lands, known as the League of Many Rivers and signed in Realm Year 95. Less an organization than a compact of mutual assistance, the League was an agreement between the states of the Scavenger Lands to band together against outside foes and prevent conquest by divide-and-rule politics. Though Lookshy was the de facto regional leader, the compact made no specific allowances for the Seventh Legion to command regional forces in times of war. The agreement openly embraced regional conflicts and specifically permitted member-states to solve disputes through military force. Nevertheless, the League pledge gave the region an identity and sent a signal to the Realm that the River Province was willing to unite to protect its sovereignty in the face of aggression.

RESOURCE CONFLICTS

Most of the early states in the region grew up from the territories of various shogunate daimyos. As a result, most had contentious relations. The Seventh Legion's political core was composed of the regional superdaimyo's household troops, and most of the major states saw Lookshy's role in regional politics as an attempt to preserve the status quo and assert its continued dominance.

These early days of independence saw several sharp scuffles over power, in which Lookshy fought all the other states at once and in various combinations. The region





HEROES OF THE REALM WARS

The most striking feature of the first Realm Wars was not that they were fought, but that the Scavenger Lands won. At the time, the people of this region were poorly organized, ill-coordinated, small in numbers, and unready for a major war. Indeed, many of the smaller cities had trouble keeping brigands from their gates, let alone trained imperial soldiers. Their advantage lay in the talent, determination and heroism of their leaders.

Names like General Gilshalos Nefvarin, Birk of Neverwater, Morrician Aldis Nerin, Warlord Kerin, and Dictatrix Alix Brightsword are known in fable and history as the leaders of the war, but around them are a constellation of other heroes: dedicated talonlords of the Seventh Legion, the infamous spy Mara, Garil of the Horselords (nomads who eventually settled in Marukan), the mercenary Order of the Sword and Axe, and a host of others. Without these courageous and gifted individuals and groups, the River Province would now most likely be part of the Realm.

These heroes form the mythology of the Scavenger Lands, and to them are ascribed many legendary deeds, wise sayings and traditions. Children learn their names and people strive to emulate their example. Their ghosts appear occasionally, delivering portents and signaling events of great import.

drifted into a sullen quiescence punctuated by border raids and diplomatic incidents, while the local states built up their militaries and trained them to something like professional caliber.

These efforts led to a sustained conflict in Realm Year 265, when the Laris and Velen administrative districts went to war over water rights to the Sandy River. The resulting conflict drew in most of the regional states, and was an attempt to wage total war by a culture that could barely afford to keep soldiers away from the fields. It was the last war in the area in which First Age weaponry figured constantly — by the time it ended, most states had depleted their treasuries and arsenals. Most had also done so much damage to their physical and human First Age infrastructures that the region could no longer support governments of any appreciable size. Power devolved to a prefectural level, and only in the next century did larger states begin to re-emerge.

The Realm made an adventure against the region in Year 301, just after the collapse of most of the provincial combatants had put an end to the internal hostilities. The Realm sent two legions and a large contingent of auxiliary forces drawn from various satrapies, including a substantial contingent of Linowans, against the Scavenger Lands.

The Seventh Legion deployed two field forces, caught the imperials in a pincer just south of Sijan, and routed them. The Seventh took large numbers of prisoners, including a satrap and two dragonlords, whom it ransomed back to the Realm for a princely sum. The resulting scandal ultimately led to the disgrace of House Iselsi and ended the Realm's ambitions in the area for the next few centuries.

THE ARCZECKH HORDES

Four hundred years ago, in Realm Year 364, the League faced a new foe: the Arczeckh barbarian hordes. Although Arczeckh raids on southward-bound caravans had been a problem for decades, the barbarian tribes had never grown strong enough to challenge the League. Never before had the Arczeckh posed a problem to League cities; at worst, they raided the occasional town on the periphery of the wastelands where they lived.

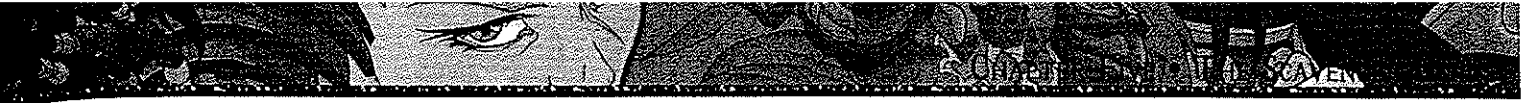
This state of affairs changed when Mokuu became chief of the Chalan tribe. Cunning and politically savvy, Mokuu began welding the diverse peoples of the Arczeckh into a unified whole with promises of looting and treasure for everyone, and by murdering fellow chieftains who refused go along. Within a few years, the majority of the Arczeckh tribes followed Mokuu's commands, and he sent his hordes to invade the southern reaches of the League.

Over the next five years, Mokuu's forces overwhelmed the defenses of several League cities, including Matetha, Darangin, Aryvyras, and Cho-Holuth. The Arczeckh seemed poised to strike at the major trade centers of Meresh and Nechara when the armies of the League finally turned them back. After serious losses, the horde retreated, only to return two summers later to raze the city of Meresh and plunder Darangin, Matetha and Cho-Holuth a second time. General White of Lookshy responded with an ambush at the city of Nechara, in which the Seventh Legion caught Mokuu's forces against the bank of the Maruto River and crushed them. The two leaders' personal guards fought for almost an hour, their titanic battle ending when White used powerful sorcery to call down the fires of the sky. This magical assault slew Mokuu and critically injured White.

Without Mokuu's leadership, the horde broke up and returned to Arczeckhi lands. Though the tribes continue their raiding to this day, they have never again banded together to attack the Scavenger Lands. Some war leaders have tried to unify the Arczeckhi tribes, calling on the spirit of Mokuu — now a minor god of war — but none have managed to be more than a nuisance. Nonetheless, the Arczeckhi remain a constant concern to the southern members of the League.

THE FAIR FOLK ATTACK

In 547, an alliance of Fair Folk nobles opened hostilities against the Hundred Kingdoms region of the River Province. Though they brought some creatures of the



Wyld with them, all the Fair Folk who took part were shaped; their assault was a war of conquest rather than annihilation. This conflict marked the end of the League of Many Rivers. Most of the League states had been eager to lend forces at the beginning of the war, but none were prepared for the sheer length of the fighting.

The Fair Folk had prepared well for the war and gathered a great host of hobgoblins, either bred in their own Demesnes or collected from clutches abandoned in the retreat from the Contagion. Even with the Scavenger Lands' iron weapons, the war against them ground on and on. Though the Fair Folk could not stand against the humans in open battle, they used their powers of glamour to move and strike swiftly. The faerie proved adept at using illusion and misdirection to dismember human forces that would have ground them to dust on the open battlefield. Only after seven years of campaigning were the Fair Folk driven from the Scavenger Lands, primarily by Nexus mercenaries and Seventh Legion troops.

During the last three years of the war, sheer exhaustion forced almost every small League kingdom to quit the fray. Lacking the direction or ability to operate in concert, their armies had been individually set upon and cut apart. The war against the Fair Folk starkly illustrated the region's weakness, and most states subsequently chose to form a new defensive alliance that could deal with threats more easily.

The resulting Confederation of Rivers took steps toward military cooperation and established a forum for shared deliberations. The latter proved almost useless, even in a time of war. However, the existence of formal military and political relations allowed constant backchannel communications greatly superior to previous efforts, which had relied on the vagaries of messengers and embassies.

THE LONG PEACE

The Confederation went untested for almost two hundred years, during which the Scavenger Lands did not face a clear threat to their existence. On a smaller scale, however, the kingdoms of the Confederation had several opportunities to fine-tune their alliance. In the years between the Confederation's founding and the war with the nation of Thorns, countless situations required action by the Confederation as a whole; then as now, nowhere in the Threshold was free of political turmoil, banditry or barbarian incursions. For almost two centuries, the relatively minor problems of sacked towns and civil war were the mainstays of Confederation politics. In that time, the Confederation became a political entity in its own right, very different from the League. Where the League of Many Rivers had been an alliance of powerful individuals, ultimately as fragile as any gathering of heroes, the Confederation was a gathering of nations. During the Long Peace, the Confederation developed distinct goals, agendas and an institutional identity.

THE WAR WITH THORNS

In Realm Year 748, the hereditary autocrat of Thorns died. The kingdom of Thorns had always been an ally of the Realm, but engaged in military adventures reluctantly and sent a minimal contingent when asked to provide its share of imperial forces. The Realm approached the younger son of the deceased autocrat and offered him the throne if he would undertake military action against the Confederation. Discontented with his father's rule and embittered toward his elder sibling, he agreed.

With the help of a dozen Dragon-Blooded advisors, the younger son seized the throne and threw his new kingdom into a frenzy of war preparations. The Confederation, soon alerted by its spies, began to shore up its defenses. When Thorns deployed its forces far beyond its regular borders in Year 752, the Confederation called out its own troops. The Seventh Legion struck first, using a commando team to stage a night attack against the Thorns camp. The campaign progressed in this spirit for several months with neither side gaining any appreciable advantage.

Despite its Dragon-Blooded leaders, the army of Thorns remained the hastily assembled force of a rural puppet state, dogged by operational ineptitude and incompetent small-unit leaders mainly breveted from regular infantry troopers when Thorn expanded its forces. The army of Thorns fell back in disorder in the autumn of 752 and spent the next year retraining.

In the early summer of Realm Year 754, Thorns took the field once again and marched on the Scavenger Lands. This time, luck was on the attackers' side. At Deren's Ford, the Thorns army mauled a force of Seventh Legion and Confederation troops. The retreating soldiers fell back to their strongpoint at Mishaka, where they endured several months of siege as the Dragon-Blooded kept them penned up in a deliberate bid to draw in the other Confederation armies.

The strategy succeeded — far too well, as it turned out for Thorns. Outside the walls of Mishaka, the allies of the Realm confronted three legions — one field force of Lookshy's Seventh Legion, a composite force of Nexus mercenaries and a third drawn from various Confederation states. Against these, the Realm fielded five foot legions from Thorns, reinforced by imperial special forces acting as non-commissioned officers. Both sides used First Age weapons on the battlefield, and the fight was a brutal one. Though the forces of the Scavenger Lands held the field at the end of the day, all of the units involved took serious losses. The light foot from Great Forks, serving as a mobile reserve, were wiped out almost to a man. Though no armistice was signed, the Battle of Mishaka marked the end of the war; Thorns was too exhausted to fight on.



PRESENT AND FUTURE

Today, the Scavenger Lands are once again arming for war. Among the first to taste the bitter fruits of the empty throne, they have learned the hard way that the disappearance of the Empress has not lessened the forces that threaten them. The Empress vanished during the Calibration of Realm Year 757; by the autumn

of 758, the Deathlord known as Mask of Winters had seized Thorns and established his fortress of Juggernaut. Given the speed of his campaign, most military observers believe that the Deathlord started to make his move before the Empress' disappearance was confirmed. Since seizing Thorns, his deathknights have skirmished with troops from Lookshy and the Confederation. Though the soldiers of the Mask are most often shambling

Realm Year	Event
-1	The Seventh Legion of the Shogun, controlled by the Daimyo of Deheleshen, arrives at the site of their daimyo's city, which was leveled by the Fair Folk. They build an encampment there and begin to fortify their position.
1	End of the Great Contagion.
20	Seventh Legion forms the city of Lookshy on the ruins of Deheleshen, as civilian settlements spring up near the fortifications.
45	Emissaries from the Scarlet Empress arrive at several city-states in the former River Province, seeking oaths of fealty. Several cities sign; many more, including Lookshy, refuse. Threats of force coerce several additional cities to sign on.
47	First invasion by Realm forces. Based in several coastal cities allied with the Realm, elements of the Fourth Imperial Legion begin a systematic campaign of conquest, bypassing Lookshy. Scattered resistance soon intensifies; the legions find that they truly control only what lies in their sight, and not always that.
52	The Council of Entities takes control of Nexus.
53	After 6 years of fighting against guerrilla forces, with increasing losses, the Fourth Legion withdraws to its allied city-states.
75	The Realm attempts another invasion, this time with four legions. Lookshy is besieged and Nexus occupied for a few months. Resistance throughout the River Province is fierce but disorganized, plagued by rampant coordination problems. After several weeks of occupation, the Emissary of Nexus decrees that all Realm forces must withdraw from the city because none but the Council of Entities may keep an army within the city walls. Troops of the Realm kill two Council members, but are themselves stalked by the Emissary. Within five days, all officers above the rank of Talonlord are slain. The imperial soldiers vote to withdraw and accept exile when offered the opportunity.
76	The imperial forces at Lookshy are destroyed by a First Realm weapon and a subsequent sally by the Seventh Legion. The Seventh endures a forced march to the current location of Great Forks, where they engage and destroy the Fourth Legion. Realm forces again withdraw from the River Province.
83	Realm ships engage in allegedly unofficial and unsanctioned attacks on merchant vessels near the Scavenger Lands. In response, various states authorize letters of marque against the Realm and begin building their own warships.
88	Realm forces invade one last time with seven full legions (not counting allied forces), including the Empress' Own Guard. They are again turned back, with great difficulty. The Legions of Lookshy are scattered and divided, but forces from Melevhil and Nathir keep several imperial units pinned down while guerrilla warfare cuts up the others.
89	The Empress' Guard is destroyed on the fields of Melevhil, thanks in part to the actions of General Vondy Beulen, who defected with his command staff and several Dragons of loyal troops to the Seventh Legion. This battle marks the last time Realm troops are deployed in force against the River Province.
95	The Free Cities of the River Province form a loose coalition, signing a treaty of mutual aid and support. Members of this League of Many Rivers included Lookshy, Nexus, Sijan, and over a dozen other cities and towns along the Gray River basin. For simplicity's sake,

hordes, his lieutenants are extremely formidable. Foremost among them are Seven Seasons Widow, the Abbot of Hunger and Dust, and Prince Resplendent in the Ruin of Ages, all of whom have slain Dragon-Blooded fighters from Lookshy.

The Scavenger Lands have never known a time without war or the threat of it looming on the horizon. Without the Realm's defenses to deter the enemies of

Creation, the challenges of existence can only grow even harder. The region's last few harvests have been excellent, and local leaders have set much of this bounty aside as insurance against hard times to come. During these brief years of plenty, the rulers of the Scavenger Lands are doing their best to arm their people and prepare them for what may be a dark time ahead.



- presumptive borders for the region's nations are based on the old administrative districts of the Shogunate.
- 103 Trying to quell dissent and frustration in the Threshold's various tributary and vassal states, the Scarlet Empress creates the Deliberative.
- 104-109 The coastal states of the River Province break treaty with the Realm and petition to join the League of Many Rivers. After discussion, they are allowed to enter the covenant. Protests from the Imperial Manse are met with derision.
- 263 Tensions rise between the Laris and Velen administrative districts over apportionment of water from the Sandy River. These arguments arise from local conflicts that date back to First Age border disputes.
- 265 Militia forces from the Velen administrative district seize control of irrigation and viaduct pumping stations in a dozen different places along the Sandy River and destroy others. Larisian forces respond by wrecking the dikes at Lowground and Sutter's Marsh, destroying those towns. War breaks out between the two districts.
- 301 Realm expedition crushed.
- 435 Arczeckhi hordes invade from the South, ravaging several cities of the Scavenger Lands' Hundred Kingdoms. Turned back by a coalition of Hundred Kingdoms forces, mercenaries hired by the Guild and a Legion of Lookshy regulars, the barbarians retreat to their wastelands.
- 547 Fair Folk attack the Hundred Kingdoms.
- 554 Fair Folk driven back.
- 557 In an attempt to deal with problems discovered during the second Realm invasion, representatives from the River Province's major cities and towns forge a new, stronger treaty, creating the Confederation of Rivers.
- 748 The Autocrat of Thorns dies. His younger son agrees to invade the Scavenger Lands in exchange for the throne of Thorns. The Realm sends in Dragon-Blooded "advisors" to help the younger son seize power from his elder brother; the Empress then legitimizes the usurper. The Realm sends additional advisory forces and deploys First Age weaponry to the area under the pretense of loaning it to the Realm's new ally.
- 750 Forces from Thorns, reinforced by imperial troops, invade the western states of the Confederation of Rivers. The war goes badly for the Thorns military — its soldiers are unused to war, whereas the people of the Scavenger Lands have been hardened by constant conflict. Surrounded by Dragon-Blooded soldiers, the Autocrat of Thorns has no option but to pour more and more money and blood into the war.
- 754 Confederation forces defeat the army of Thorns and its Dragon-Blooded allies at Mishaka. In a bloody battle, the military of Thorns is annihilated. Popular discontent pushes Thorns to the brink of civil war, and the autocrat retains the throne only because of his Dragon-Blooded allies.
- 757 Scarlet Empress disappears.
- 758 Shadowlands forces belonging to the Deathlord Mask of Winters invade Thorns. Weakened by civil disorder and its losses against the Confederation, the kingdom offers no meaningful resistance and falls in a matter of days.
- 762 Present day.

THE SCAVENGER LANDS TODAY

The name "Scavenger Lands" was first bestowed on this region as an insult by the Realm, but has since become its name to all folk outside its borders. The region's natives call it the Confederation of Rivers, on the rare occasions when they can raise their heads above the business of getting on with life and devote a few minutes' thought to the lofty realms of international politics. The Confederation is a loose collection of satrapies, diktats, duchies, kingdoms, principalities, republics, democracies, theocracies, city-states and other, stranger forms of government — a brilliant tapestry of humanity rich in potential, wealth, and strife.

The gently rolling landscape of the Scavenger Lands contains dozens of streams and small rivers that gave the onetime River Province its original name. These countless waterways are tributaries of the province's three largest rivers:

the Yellow, the Yanaze and the River of Tears. Since the First Age, these watercourses have shaped life in the Scavenger Lands. Seasonal floods deposit rich soil along the banks of rivers and creeks, and the abundance of small waterways makes irrigation easy. The rivers also lend themselves to trade, which brings with it a cosmopolitan culture. The diverse folk of the Scavenger Lands often have religious, familial, and political ties to places elsewhere in the region, or elsewhere in Creation. This polyglot collection of cultures even formed its own common language — the patois known as Rivertongue, a debased form of Old Realm, filled with words borrowed from every corner of the world and introduced by refugees in the aftermath of the Contagion.

Trade is the lifeblood of the Scavenger Lands. Raw ore flows from mines in the northeast down to Nexus, where it is refined, forged, and sold to merchants who carry the finished products to ports across the Inner Sea. Grain

RIVERS OF THE SCAVENGER LANDS

Although four main rivers — the Yellow, the Gray, the Maruto and the River of Tears — dominate the terrain of the province, it is the countless smaller rivers that gave the area its historical name and that play equally vital roles in trade and irrigation. Even where the Wyld dried up a river or changed its course, signs of the waterways' presence remain: cities deep in the interior with street names like "Dockside" and "Wharfrun", marked by massive river-gates and sand-filled locks where once the rivers flowed.

The following list of major rivers is incomplete, but covers the region's most important waterways.

Gray: Stretching northwest from the depths of the southern jungles, the Gray is broad and shallow for most of its journey. Nexus sits in the peninsula created by the confluence of the Yellow and the Gray rivers to form the Yanaze.

River of Tears: Created during the First Age as a mega-engineering project, this river passes by Sijan on its way to the Yanaze, the Inner Sea and the White Sea. Its banks are low and its waters brackish. Salt flats and marshes are scattered along its length, and the life the river supports is strange and fell. Most communities along the River of Tears are located on one of its tributaries in order to secure fresh drinking water.

Yanaze: Sometimes called "the mighty Yanaze", this river is the widest in the Scavenger Lands. After the River of Tears joins it, the Yanaze is wide enough at some points that someone standing on one bank can barely see across it, and so deep that blue-water sailing vessels can traverse it as far as Nexus even during the dry season. The Yanaze is spanned at several points by huge bridges, immense works of First Age construction.

Maruto: Located in the eastern reaches of the Scavenger Lands, the Maruto is swift and treacherous for much of its length, making travel hazardous. Several parts can be traversed only with the aid of portage trails or canals that bypass the worst sections of whitewater.

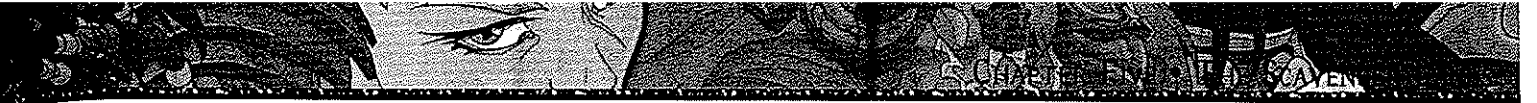
Rolling: A short tributary of the Yellow, the Rolling River passes close to Great Forks.

Avarice: A short, narrow river that empties into the River of Tears, the Avarice is named for the many wars fought along its length, as local principalities try to control its waters for crops and drinking. As well as fueling these conflicts, the Avarice supplies water to Sijan.

Rock River: The Rock River is named not for its craggy river walls, or its pebble- and boulder-strewn bottom, but for the most common sight on this river: the towed barges that carry ore from cities and mines in the mountains down to Nexus. The Rock's two tributaries are also called Rock River. When locals differentiate between the three, the main river is the Greater Rock, the smaller, northern tributary is the Shorter Rock, and the longer tributary is the Lesser Rock.

Meander: Aptly named, the Meander wanders through the forests of the eastern Scavenger Lands, until it finally splinters into a hundred smaller streams and brooks deep in the woodlands.

Yellow: The Yellow River is the longest in the Scavenger Lands, running from Mara's Kick deep in the eastern forests all the way to Nexus, where it joins with the Gray River to form the Yanaze.



is grown in the southeast, loaded onto barges on the Yellow River, and carried to the ports of Nexus, Goodharbor, and Port Calin, while other ships carry foodstuffs and trade goods back upriver from the coastal towns. Logs from timbering operations in the far east of this region float in huge rafts down to sawmills, to be cut into lumber and sold. So important are all kinds of trade that a common Confederation proverb runs, "The business of the Scavenger Lands is business." The powerful Guild makes its home here, as do a host of smaller merchant houses.

Trade has brought prosperity with it for much of the Scavenger Lands, especially those areas close to the rivers or the sea. It has also brought peril — fast-moving bandits strike at convoys on land, and river pirates are common. Often, these "outlaws" are really forces of the local duke, operating under false pretenses. Some of these brigands, like the Dragon-Blooded outcaste Maren Sidaris, are respected for their gallantry and peculiar honor, while those like the infamous river pirate Blackedge are hated and feared. Blackedge himself has the dubious distinction of being a hunted man through half the Scavenger Lands, and fair prey for bounty hunters in the rest.

THE CONFEDERATION TREATY

Most nations in the Scavenger Lands are signatories to the Confederation of Rivers, a document composed after the Fair Folk invasion of Realm Year 547. The Confederation treaty is deliberately vague in some respects and strict in others. It specifically defines how many troops, as a percentage of a given country's able population, can be requested for the Confederation's defense, and under what conditions. It defines the circumstances under which signatories can preemptively interfere in the affairs of other signatories. It makes vague references to honoring trade and commerce agreements and also mentions regulation, but these strictures have never been spelled out or rendered into any sort of law.

One explicit section concerns the creation of a Council of the Concordat, less formally known as the Confederation Council. Each member nation selects a single representative to act as its voice in the council, which in theory serves as the Confederation's governing body. Because most people in the Scavenger Lands see the Confederation as hardly better than a joke, those assigned to the council are often dilettantes with little talent and less sense. The vast majority of them are idiots, leavened every so often by the competent but politically undesirable. Not surprisingly, the Council is generally ineffectual, except when imminent danger threatens the Scavenger Lands as a whole. In these situations, the councilors leave matters to the military experts in whom the Scavenger Lands fortunately abound.

The Council makes its home in Marita, an otherwise unremarkable city on the western fringe of the so-called Hundred Kingdoms. Its sole advantage is its relatively central location in Confederation territory, on the Yellow River.

Marita has no real industry or trade; it exists solely to cater to the whims of the Council members and their entourages. These escorts vary in size from the scant handful that serves the small kingdom of Metagalapa to dozens or even hundreds of guards, functionaries, slaves and family members sent by major cities like Port Calin, Varsi and Lookshy.

MIST ISLAND

Where the Rock River flows into the Yellow, the Yellow widens for many miles, becoming almost a fast-moving lake. In the center of the widest portion is a deep bank of nearly impenetrable fog. None have yet gone in it and returned. At times, the fog thins enough to reveal the wrecks of ships that have tried to best it over the centuries, cast up on the jagged rocks the mist conceals. Sometimes the fog parts further, revealing a green island beyond the rocks; on occasion, fortunate observers can make out structures on the island and movement ashore. Who or what may be on this island, no one knows.

THE COUNCIL OF THE CONCORDAT

Despite its grand-sounding name, the Council has little real power. It cannot levy taxes or troops, except in a crisis, and a three-quarters majority must agree before crisis status is officially declared. It cannot enact edicts, sign treaties, or enforce policy. Its sole genuine function is to act as a clearinghouse for ideas, which are then acted upon by any governments inclined to adopt them. Backroom deals and bribery are commonplace, debate and discussion are omnipresent, and nobody is entirely sure what is going on at any given time. Most councilors only know that some action is being taken about some threat or other, that someone will have known all along it wasn't a good idea if it fails, and that everyone will claim it was their idea in the first place if it succeeds — whatever the action in question may be.

Countries outside the Scavenger Lands are allowed to have Council representatives, but most share the natives' disregard for it and so do not bother sending envoys. The two notable exceptions are the Realm, which knows better, and Mask of Winters, who takes his diplomacy seriously. He frequently orders one of his deathknights to attend the Council.

Despite its disorganization, however, the Council has a surprisingly good record in dealing with imminent threats to the Scavenger Lands. Most councilors have a nose for real danger and react to it by delegating their authority to a professional military. Bickering and fighting can and do go on during a crisis, but the region's military leaders make certain that important tasks get done, usually with little delay.





The sharp contrast between the Council's apparent skill at dealing with genuine threats and its utter incompetence at almost every other time has given rise to rumors of conspiracy. Some suggest the existence of a secret "inner council" that can manipulate the larger body as needed. Others speak of a spirit, possibly a river god, that assists the Council in times of need, or of Anathema who work to ensure the safety of the River Province. Certainly something seems to watch over the Confederation, though most residents of the Scavenger Lands seek no further explanation than the Seventh Legion at Lookshy.

ANATHEMA CULTS

The Cult of the Illuminated is not the only group seeking out reborn Solars. Across the Scavenger Lands are dozens of small cults, most numbering no more than a handful, who seek the power and glory of the Exalted. Some have writings purporting to be from the First Age, before the fall of the Exalted. Others are simply interested in power, or in the fragments of myth that have survived through the ages, or in refuting authority in some fashion; in some places, worship of the Anathema is a stylish way for young nobles to tweak the noses of their elders.

These cults can be of valuable assistance to any Exalted they happen to discover. They can also pose great danger, especially if the Exalted fails to live up to the particular cult's beliefs (usually a mishmash of lies, myth, invention, misremembered details, and the occasional fact).

MILITARY POWER

Much of the world outside the Scavenger Lands sees the Confederation as a military machine waiting to spring into motion, a coalition whose members fight one another as practice for fighting the outside world. The truth is that the many elements of its armies are too diverse, too different in training and too caught up in internal rivalries to form a coherent force. If the Confederation gathered all the troops promised to it and tried to make them into an army, it would take a month or more just to get them in one place and a year of training to make them fight coherently.

Wisely, Confederation commanders don't try to accomplish the impossible. Instead, different units fight in local formation, using their favored tactics. Carefully kept records of tactics and local politics help match units with forces that can complement them, while ensuring distance between elements likely to be mutually hostile. This task is a daunting one and not always successful, as the disaster in 754 at Deren's Ford proved. The commanders of the Confederation armies have little choice, however. Given

the politics of their fractious region, the existing system is the only one that can work.


The military legacies of the First Age and the League of Many Rivers era aid considerably in uniting forces from different nations. Most countries in the Scavenger Lands use the same general structure for their militaries as the League-era states did, which were in turn based on the legions of the Shogunate period. A country may call a formation a talon, a company or a hand, led by a commander, a dictatrix or a captain, but all these terms refer to a unit of a hundred soldiers. Similarly, soldiers and officers typically learn League-era field signals, even if they use different schemes when operating alone. This general uniformity enables Confederation forces to operate together routinely, and such practices are encouraged by the Council and by advisors from Lookshy.

The result is an army often disjointed during its early days in the field, but that rapidly gathers cohesion and strength as operations continue. By the time Lookshy's crack field forces enter the picture, they are backed by a fairly coordinated mob of local worthies. Each component force operates under its own command, doing what it does best, coordinated by the Confederation general on the scene. Confederation armies tend toward an overabundance of skirmishers and light troops, and their scouting ability is phenomenal. On the other hand, they typically lack heavy forces aside from Seventh Legion field troops and any Nexus mercenaries sent to the scene.

The kingdoms of the Confederation frequently employ mercenaries, but rarely include them in strategy discussions or give them command of native military units. Mercenary troops are sacrificed if necessary, used as needed and never trusted more than absolutely required. Too many former rulers have put their faith in hired troops, only to find that some rival was actually the highest bidder, and that the mercenaries guarding their walls served another master. Some mercenary units have spent decades or centuries earning a good reputation, but these are rare exceptions, and even they are not wholly trusted. More than one such unit has fallen from its lofty height when the original commander left or died and was replaced by someone more interested in quick profit. No prince wants to be the victim of an otherwise principled mercenary unit's first moral compromise.

Nonetheless, trusted foreigners occasionally turn up in the service of Scavenger Land kings and princes. Each year, Lookshy hires out thousands of soldiers as military advisors, elite troops and guardsmen, and trainers. These warriors bring with them the code of conduct, training techniques, battlefield tactics, organizational skills and experience of the Seventh Legion. Wise leaders listen carefully to what advisors from Lookshy have to say.

Many countries also sponsor officer exchanges with Lookshy, sending gifted young soldiers to serve with the Seventh for a time in order to learn their secrets of tactics,



training, and logistics. Lookshy encourages these exchanges; the officers involved bring back with them concepts of honorable conduct, fair discipline, respect, and honesty that can only improve the militaries with whom Lookshy may have to operate.

THE NAVY

Though the Confederation has no formal navy, every country on the rivers has its share of vessels for local defense and patrol, ranging from swift-running galleys and corsairs to heavy, flat-bottomed river warships. Lookshy,

Port Calin, Marin Bay and several other kingdoms also possess a number of seaworthy vessels, the largest being the massive First Age warships of Lookshy and Port Calin's navies, their hulls raised from the depths with the aid of powerful water spirits or stolen from the Realm. In this ad hoc naval force, even more than with land troops, captains work together unofficially, sharing patrol routes and intelligence. Their fleets are the first line of defense against an attack by the Realm. Their constant war against pirates is the only thing that prevents raiders from strangling trade in the region, and the officers of the various fleets know it.

SHADOWLANDS

Quite a few small shadowlands are scattered throughout the Scavenger Lands, the result of terrible battles or disasters. Most are home to only a few ghosts, and are generally no more than cold and lonely places. The following shadowlands merit special mention, however, because of their size or an unusual feature that makes them important.

The Mourning Field: Located a few miles from Lookshy, the Mourning Field is the stretch of ground where the Sixth and Ninth imperial legions were encamped when a First Age weapon fractured their souls and slew them en masse. After the attack, the ground was salted to prevent hungry ghosts from rising. To this day, the area is a blasted wasteland, where only scrub trees grow and no natural animals will stay for long. Here there are neither walking dead nor gruesome siege engines, but only the fragmentary whispers of ghosts whose bones have long since turned to dust. These pathetic spirits mutter to themselves in confusion, their memories and personalities shattered by the terrible weapon that killed them. Lookshy mounts a constant patrol around the perimeter of the Mourning Field as an act of atonement toward the dead. Each patrol rider leads a second mount, fully outfitted for battle in the old style.

The Black Chase: A fell forest of ebony pine and black ash a mile or so north of Sijan, the Black Chase is eerie and still. Sound behaves oddly here; it is easy to get turned around or lost in these woods. Most paths rarely cover the same ground twice, and any attempt to blaze a new trail fails.

Two roads pass through the Black Chase. One follows the eastern shore of the River of Tears and is mostly safe, at least in the daytime. The other road, which no mortal willingly travels, leads deep into the heart of the forest. If anyone alive knows what lies at the end of this second road, they do not speak of it. Many tales tell of those who strayed off the river road and wandered so deep into the Black Chase that they

could no longer see Sijan or the River of Tears. The details change with each telling, but all such stories agree that those who enter the forest rarely return. Those who do resurface are forever changed by the experience, rarely for the better.

Thorns: The shadowland around Thorns was established just four years ago when the Deathlord Mask of Winters seized control of the city. Several smaller shadowlands exist in the area, but most have not yet reached their full extent. They are likely to end up overlapping when they reach their final size.

Mask of Winters still resides in the shadowland of Thorns, having marshaled his armies there around his corpse-fortress of Juggernaut. The Mask is scrupulously polite in diplomatic affairs, but most assume he is simply biding his time until some pretext or another enables him to declare war. No evidence exists of a systematic campaign to exterminate the living of Thorns, but food is scarce and poverty common. Most of the living who remain in the region dwell in the city itself, clustered around the feet of the now-dead autocrat who nominally still rules there.

Walker's Realm: Located on the plains west and south of Great Forks, this shadowland barely looks the part. Walker in Darkness, another young Deathlord, makes his home here. The only signs marking this shadow-realm apart from the rest of the plainlands are a curious stillness to the air and the pale, fragile look of the grass.

Walker maintains good relations with his living neighbors, doing business through his new agent, the Green Lady. The Deathlord's former agent disappeared under mysterious circumstances some years ago. The Lady appears mortal enough, with fiery red hair and emerald eyes that match her enameled armor. Her laughter is bright and infectious. She fights with weapons of soulsteel and moonsilver, and commands the dead as easily as she entices the living. Her aspect so far remains unknown.

STRICTURES ON ACCESS

For centuries, ships from throughout the River Province were allowed to sail up the Yanaze without inspection or papers, except for the infamous robber barons of the Hundred Kingdoms. A recent incursion by a band of Lintha pirates, who snuck upriver to ravage several towns and shipping concerns, prompted Lookshy to begin searching—sometimes cursorily, sometimes not—every upriver-bound vessel not bearing ambassadorial or Guild markings. Several smaller Confederation states have expressed concern over this new policy (and at least one is selling its ambassadorial markings, at a significant price), but so far no one has tried to run the blockade. Because Lookshy demands no fees and places no restrictions on what goods may be imported, most merchants grudgingly comply.

On land, states patrol their borders closely, and most people are alert for and wary of strangers. Any outsider might be a criminal, a barbarian scout, an agent of the Fair Folk, a spy from a neighboring kingdom, a ghost or a spirit walking among mortals. Large groups of travelers can expect to be stopped by a border patrol, whose members will assess any relevant taxes on the group's cargo. Individuals traversing a major road or waterway can expect to be stopped and questioned, and may be detained if they seem suspicious. Groups sneaking across a border will be treated as smugglers, individuals as spies or vagabonds. Some places in the Hundred Kingdoms are particularly paranoid about spies, making safe travel exceptionally difficult in that region.

SCAVENGER LORDS

The scavenger lord is a social class peculiar to the River Province. Such people may be called many things: savant of antiquities, explorer-prince, relic hunter, and in some places, grave robber or thief. "Scavenger lords", however, is the term most often used to describe those who recover lost secrets and restore the treasures of the First Age.

A successful scavenger lord is part merchant, part scholar, part mystic, part thief, and part leader. Few of them work alone; even the most subtle and cunning explorer-princes need someone to watch their backs. Digging up cities reclaimed by Earth spirits takes hundreds of diggers and sifters, as well as sacrifices and rituals to cajole the spirits into giving up their hard-won property.

Many First Age devices like daiklaves or powerbows are easy to figure out; others are more enigmatic, or more difficult to turn toward a practical use. Successful scavenging involves not only finding and identifying First Age devices, but also discovering a way to make a profit from them. The shabbiest sort of scavenger lord is a walking carnival of broken things, ready to demonstrate some dinged-up wonder of the Golden Age for a jade coin, or tell the ridiculously exaggerated story of a battered relic's past for an apple or a smile from a pretty young boy. More successful members of this odd breed

can make considerable monies by channeling their treasures toward the appropriate purchasers.

Becoming a scavenger lord's apprentice is a singular honor in the eyes of many families, outside of Sijan and Lookshy. In Sijan, scavenger lords are thought of as little more than grave robbers and given scant respect. The average folk of Lookshy see scavenging as a necessary job, but not a particularly honorable one. Everywhere else in the Confederation, children dream of becoming an apprentice to a scavenger lord, of traveling to far-off lands, risking their lives in ancient tombs, and rescuing the inevitable fair damsels, beautiful princesses, or handsome young princes, depending on the specific scavenger lord involved.

WHERE TO SCAVENGE

Many ruins have been thoroughly looted by successive waves of scavengers, but new discoveries still occur throughout the Scavenger Lands. The River Province is littered with ancient tombs, temples and shrines, remnants of cities depopulated in the Contagion and never resettled, forgotten Manses, ancient battlefields, catacombs and sections of cities that have been cut off by the Wyld or by the vagaries of reconstruction.

All of these places have their own peculiarities and dangers. Many are in disrepair and might easily collapse on an unwary scavenger. Others are protected by traps or guardians, often mystical in nature. Many ruins, particularly Manses, have become the homes of Wyld-twisted predators or clutches of hobgoblins and trolls. Some of the richest sites for scavenging lie at the heart of small Wyld zones or shadowlands, making them inaccessible to all but the most powerful or foolish scavenger lords. Some scavenger legends speak of vast treasures to be found beneath the waves, buried at the bottom of lakes and rivers, either in sunken ships or in sites swallowed by the waters since the Contagion. Those few scavengers who can get at these locations often wrest vast fortunes from the watery depths.

WHAT TO SCAVENGE

Scavenger lords collect everything, because almost anything related to the First Age has value to a collector of antiquities or can be put to some commercial use. Two types of goods, however, command the most attention and net a scavenger lord the largest profit: weapons and any type of device that enhances an individual's everyday life.

Weapons from the First Realm, whether intended for Exalted or unExalted troops, command a hefty price tag. The scavenger lord's only problem is keeping them long enough to sell them. The Seventh Legion's purchasing agents will deal in good faith with anyone who offers them goods, but they're always very low bidders. Buyers willing to pay more may be honest, but are more likely to cheat or murder the seller. Life-enhancing artifacts—light crystals, stoves that burn without fuel, the magnificent clothing of the First Age, and so on—likewise command excellent

prices from wealthy individuals. They rarely bring such astronomical profits as military hardware, but they also tend not to provoke the same urges toward betrayal and murder as an arsenal of weapons that can help a warrior single-handedly carve out a petty kingdom.

Every scavenger lord most dreads discovering a truly magnificent artifact. Not only are these devices often cursed or incredibly dangerous to handle, they also attract the wrong sort of attention. Sorcerers, god-bloods, outcaste Terrestrials, elder members of the Dynasty, Lunar Anathema — every ambitious being who thinks she can bend the artifact's magic to her ends will be looking for the scavenger the instant she hears of the object's appearance. A scavenger lord unlucky enough to find one of these items must even worry about the scrupulously good and honest, who may attempt to seize the device and destroy or hide it to protect the world from its power.

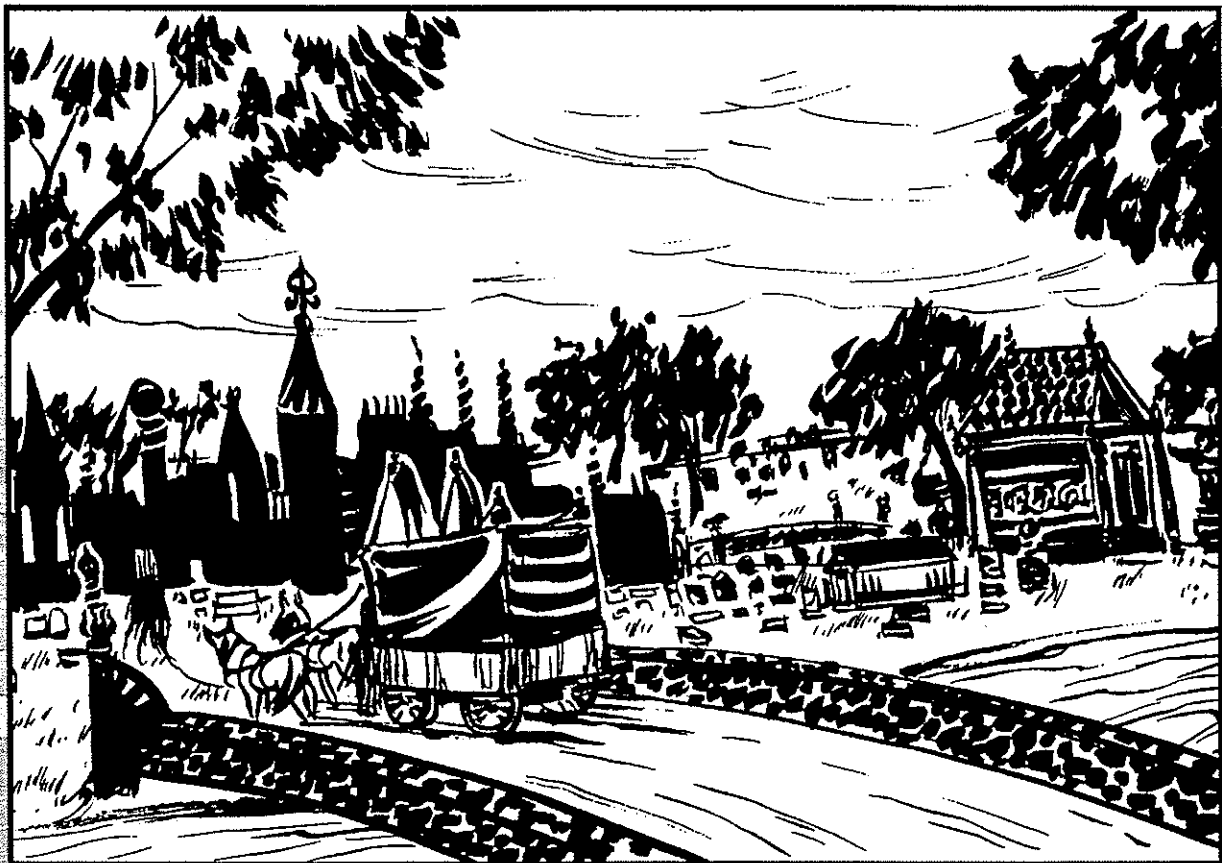
Certainly, no one can be trusted to purchase such an item without betraying the scavenger or killing him to keep the discovery secret. Even if the scavenger lord does manage to sell his find, the buyer is likely to meet an untimely end at the hands of a rival contestant for the item. Such a rival is then likely to come looking for the scavenger lord, either to wipe out evidence of the artifact's existence, or to force the scavenger to reveal where she found it. Either way, the scavenger lord has scant chance of surviving the encounter.

Many a wise scavenger lord has done the painful but intelligent thing and closed the door on a discovery that could bring her nothing but woe. If she is alone or with someone too ignorant to realize what they have stumbled on, the scavenger need only conceal the fact of her presence in the place where she found the artifact. If a scavenger has partners, particularly partners who might not recognize how dangerous it would be to possess the object, matters can become much more complex.

EXALTED IN THE SCAVENGER LANDS

Tolerance is the name of the game throughout much of the Scavenger Lands, and the Immaculate Philosophy wields little power and commands little respect in these parts. However, the Scavenger Lands are not necessarily — nor have they ever been — a safe haven for rogue Celestial Exalted. Myths of the Anathema date back centuries before the Great Contagion, and are part and parcel of most people's belief structures even in this region. Even those who suspect that the Order is less than truthful about human souls still believe the Anathema are dangerous. If a being walks like a god and talks like thunder, you need not know her origin to understand she can mean trouble.

Lunar Anathema are dangerous and well-known threats, and several have vexed the Scavenger Lands over the ages. Likewise, the Terrestrial Exalted of Lookshy are highly visible beings, and most inhabitants





TOMBS OF THE ANATHEMA

Some Solar Exalted were taken to Sijan and entombed in deep graves there, bought by Dragon-Bloods who had killed their masters out of necessity rather than hatred. Many other Solars were buried where they fell. Their tombs were raised by Earth-Aspected Terrestrials and surrounded with terrible enchantments and traps, not only to keep out grave robbers out, but also to keep the slain Exalted trapped in the dark. Because so many Exalted who escaped the betrayal made their last stands at their homes in the River Province, many of them are buried there.

Some of these tombs were carefully marked, to keep people from stumbling on them unawares. Others were hidden, to prevent grave robbers or loyalists from finding them. After all this time, most of the region's twenty or so tombs are long forgotten.

Not all of them have faded from memory, however. Half a dozen lie in or near Nexus, each carefully watched by agents of the Emissary. A dozen more are known to exist, scattered throughout the Scavenger Lands and mostly well guarded by whoever rules nearby. Several have been looted, but many still stand inviolate, as impregnable as when they were erected over a thousand years ago.

of the area are familiar with them. Add to these the regular cast of incarnate gods, Fair Folk, mortal sorcerers and various magical and Wyld-twisted individuals who make up the region's supernatural population, and Solar Exalted don't stand out much. In general, local people treat them as nothing more than especially dangerous magical beings.

The Wyld Hunt cannot work openly in the Scavenger Lands, but agents of the Bronze faction (like Ahn-Aru; see *Exalted*, p. 311) can and do, either operating incognito or disguised as Immaculate missionaries. In extreme cases, the Hunt has secretly entered the Scavenger Lands to finish off Exalted too dangerous for a Sidereal to take on alone.

Legends persist of Exalted who live high in the mountains, deep in the forests, or quietly in the cities, residing in their supposed strongholds even before the Empress vanished. Since her disappearance, the stories have grown more recent, more common, and more credible. Whatever the truth of the tales, there are certainly those in the Scavenger Lands willing to aid any enemy of the Realm, no matter how dangerous or wanted.

LOOKSHY

Built on the ruins of the city of Deheleshen, the city-state of Lookshy is the most powerful state in the Scavenger Lands and the nerve center of Confederation military

power. Although several nations in the region can claim armies as large as Lookshy's, none can equal the training, readiness and iron discipline of Lookshy's forces.

Lookshy is divided into upper and lower cities. The Lower City consists mostly of docks, warehouses, and inns and taverns for those planning to reside in town for only a few days. The Upper City sits high on a promontory overlooking the mouth of the Yanaze River. Heavily fortified, it nestles behind thick walls of First Age material, capped in spots by sturdy towers filled with ancient weapons. From these fortified eyries, the guns of the Upper City control the mouth of the Yanaze and block access to the interior of the Scavenger Lands.

The Upper City is dominated by the Lookshy Manse, a massive fortress at the city's heart that looms over the countryside. The final fallback position should Lookshy come under siege again, the Manse has not been battle-tested in centuries, but its vast strength is undeniable. The city keeps much of its food stores in tunnels and silos beneath the fortress, and the Manse also houses the Seventh Legion's fabled armories of First Age weapons. A few smaller weapons caches are kept in the city's outer wall, and many more weapons are permanently installed in the towers.

Four curtain walls separate the Upper City's various districts. Each district is intended to be self-sufficient, with its own wells and cisterns and enough stored food to allow it to survive a lengthy siege, even if cut off from the rest of Lookshy.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The General Staff of the Seventh Legion runs things in Lookshy. After General Nefvarin's death from the failure of his anagathics almost two centuries after the Contagion, an oligarchy of older military officers assumed leadership of the Legion. This six-person General Staff elects a commanding officer whenever the previous one dies or resigns, and can remove him from office by unanimous vote. The post of commanding officer and seats on the General Staff are in theory held for life, but mortals normally retire at 68 and Dragon-Blooded at 260.

The Seventh Legion controls the city's military forces, leaving civil government to the General Staff Office of Civil Relations. The civil ruler of Lookshy is the Legion's Officer in Charge of Base Relations. In theory, this position is an important but junior one; the base officer is formally charged with seeing that the camp is laid out in a military fashion and with managing camp followers.

In reality, the base officer is one of the most important people in Lookshy. He sees to the city's civil defense, makes certain the local spirits are placated, looks after agriculture, keeps order and attends to every other government service with a staff three times as large as the rest of the General Staff put together. In addition, a capable base officer almost is almost always invited to serve as part of the General Staff.

With city government essentially a staff function, the Seventh Legion exercises virtually complete power in Lookshy. Elected councils from the city's various districts have their say over district-level affairs, but the ultimate authority lies with the General Staff-appointed base officer, and her decisions are beyond appeal. Justice is based on Shogunate-era military law, and can be quite harsh.

The Seventh Legion does not claim overt control over any areas outside of Lookshy and its agricultural suburbs. Instead, the Civil Affairs Department of a field force's general staff rules whatever areas the field force happens to occupy. The Seventh's field forces are excellently equipped for this task, as they must often bring order to areas struck by disaster or regions whose government has collapsed amid war or civil unrest.

INHABITANTS OF LOOKSHY

Residents of Lookshy fall into four classes; soldiers, citizens, helots, and visitors. Lookshy exists primarily to support its army, and no inhabitant of the city forgets how important the field forces are to the entire region's stability and prosperity. Those on active military service consequently receive immense respect and deference. A retired citizen-general, normally a person of importance in his own right, will make way for a lowly helot who is currently on active duty.

Citizens are free individuals, and make up the military's officer corps. All citizens are trained in weapons use, tactics, and military drill. All citizens may be called up for active service at any time, with the few exceptions granted to individuals whose talents are better put to use supporting war efforts at home.

Helots are serfs, not slaves. Implying otherwise is a good way to earn quiet enmity or a quick beating, depending on whether or not the helot can get away with an assault. Most helots work the fields and paddies around Lookshy; others serve as laborers, craftsman's assistants, scribes and so on. They may change jobs with the permission of their current supervisor, and they receive food, shelter, and medical care as well as discretionary pay for their labor. Helots are provided for in their old age, and superlative work offers the chance of elevation to citizen status as a reward. Like citizens, helots are drilled in the use of weapons and trusted to take care of them, and they make up the bulk of Lookshy's line infantry. Honorable service on the battlefield is one of the fastest ways to gain citizenship. Though many such grants are posthumous, they confer freedom on the helot's spouse and children.

Visitors, traders, mercenaries, ambassadors and such make up the final category. Though other local folk treat them politely, they quickly learn that citizens and helots on official business are usually more important than they are, and that military personnel are always more important than a mere visitor. Woe to the trader who complains when her buyer gets up to help a foot soldier with his

CONSTRUCTION IN LOOKSHY

As an armed camp, Lookshy was built to exacting standards. The city has been besieged dozens of times in its history, and military building rules continue to be strictly enforced. Streets are at least fifteen feet wide, gaps between buildings no less than five feet wide. Buildings are made of stone, with slate or stone roofs to reduce the threat of fire. Many structures incorporate defensive charms and sorceries to strengthen walls, cut the risk of fire further, sound an alarm when attacked, hold doors and windows secure, or similar effects. These features are especially common in older construction.

All windows in Lookshy include wooden shutters fronted with bronze. Buildings must be lower than the city walls (no more than five stories tall), and stand at least 30 feet from the wall faces to prevent their being used in an assault. Buildings taller than three stories have arrow slits on the top floor. With regard to other defensive measures, those that pose no risk to the inhabitants, have generally been used in at least some parts of Lookshy. The more sorcery or First Age craft a defense requires, the less likely it is to be incorporated into the newer sections of the city.

purchases! Outsiders who comport themselves with honor and integrity while visiting Lookshy are welcomed with open arms when they return. Those who do not are treated with contempt or banished.

Dragon-Blooded are treated as if on permanent active duty, but otherwise receive no special privilege in Lookshy society. Terrestrial Exalted serve side-by-side with unExalted officers, and can expect the same chances of promotion as any other officer. Although their abilities give them an edge, they are also expected to excel because of their powers. Exalted status carries no automatic grant of favor or high rank in the Lookshy military.

Many citizens accord the Exalted extra respect, but this typically stems from religious feeling, familial ties and the Exalt's citizen status. Memories in Lookshy are long, and ties of honor are remembered. Dragon-Bloods spring mostly from the bloodlines of prominent citizen families, established by the Terrestrial heroes who founded Lookshy in the dark time after the Contagion. Promising young Dragon-Bloods of those lines are expected to measure up to the heroes of legend, and are treated accordingly.

This favoritism works to the favor of ordinary mortals as well at times. A Terrestrial Exalt may see whole generations come and go during his service career, and may grant a citizen special dispensation because he is the great-grandson of a sergeant-at-arms who once saved the





Dragon-Blood's life. Patrician families often have close ties based not on birth or marriage, but on ancestors who served together for centuries.

Though the people of Lookshy show typical social prejudice toward the deformed (called dogfodder in the local idiom), the old tradition of exposing unhealthy or crippled newborns is longer considered proper. This practice lost its social sanction after the Exaltation of Batad Ferek, who was born without legs. Hidden from view and raised in secret by his family, he grew to be a brilliant strategist and a valiant warrior. While not actually illegal, the exposure of deformed infants is considered the mark of an unfashionably conservative family, and can have unpleasant social consequences.

THE MILITARY

The primary business of Lookshy is warfare. Almost 20 percent of the population is under arms at any time, formed into four field forces. At any given time, two of these are on patrol, one is split into smaller units on detached duty as advisors, and one garrisons the city itself. Field forces rotate through this duty every four years. Troops spend one year in garrison, two years in the field, and one year acting as military advisors to local governments. Each field force is equivalent in size to an imperial legion, and is heavy with combat specialists and auxiliaries. When necessary, Lookshy can muster almost six field forces of reservist troops, not including reserve logistical support units or the defense forces of Lookshy Manse.

All citizens of Lookshy are trained in military arts from a young age, and citizens and helots alike serve a five-year term between the ages of 18 and 24. Helots serve as line infantry, while citizens act as junior officers or elite troops. Each year's cadre of conscripts undergoes three months of basic training and joins the field force on garrison duty. At the end of its garrison year, the force goes into the field. Field forces on patrol duty are constantly on the march throughout the Scavenger Lands, repelling barbarians, battling Fair Folk, chasing bandits, or moving from one fortified kaserne to the next to show the Seventh Legion's colors and make sure no enemy has silently decimated a region.

After two years on patrol, the field force's troops are dispersed to various regional states as military advisors. Troops whose service will end at the five-year mark are sent on two-year advisory tours, while soldiers invited to remain in the Seventh Legion serve only one year as advisors. The latter return to Lookshy in their fifth year, when their field force is re-formed to train the next cadre of recruits.

Helots on advisory assignments usually work as bodyguards, train local forces or act as non-commissioned officers in nations whose armies are too disorganized to field small-unit leaders. Citizens on advisory duty act as genuine military consultants, helping foreign rulers and generals plan strategies, build strong armies and execute

campaigns. Advisors from Lookshy serve on both sides of most wars in the Scavenger Lands. They will not cross swords personally, but their advice may well be indirectly responsible for the deaths of soldiers from Lookshy serving on the other side of the conflict—a situation most soldiers consider just one of the hazards of service.

RELIGION

The inhabitants of Lookshy, and many others who dwell in the Scavenger Lands, nominally follow the Immaculate Philosophy. The state religion of the pre-Contagion Shogunate, it still has many adherents, especially where Dragon-Blooded are common.

The version practiced in the Scavenger Lands, however, is not quite the same religion as the one followed in the Realm. Local people attempt to emulate the Five Immaculate Dragons, but neither respect the dictates of the Immaculate Order nor answer to the commands of the Mouth of Peace. Their faith is much more individualistic, with the head chaplain of the Seventh Legion acting as the leader of the faith when necessary. The Immaculate Philosophy as practiced in Lookshy is less oriented toward social control, instead emphasizing pre-Contagion values of personal responsibility, loyalty to one's superiors and personal honor as the key to Exaltation in the next incarnation. Missionaries from the Immaculate Order are permitted in Lookshy, but they are closely watched and their few converts frequently ostracized or discriminated against.

LOCAL INDUSTRIES

Most people in Lookshy view trade with disdain, but they also know how vital it is to their city's survival. Lookshy's war machines need parts and materials of all sorts, and the city needs markets for its goods and news of the outside world. Traders and merchants can therefore expect a grudging welcome from this proud military bastion.

A handful of merchant houses claim Lookshy as their home port. These organizations invariably act as agents of the Seventh Legion, but are nonetheless welcomed in many ports of call. "Shifty as a Lookshy merchant" is a proverbial condemnation of spies and busybodies; "honest as a Lookshy merchant" is a well-earned compliment. Lookshy-based traders often receive more respect from their competition than they do from their fellow citizens, many of whom look down on them for sullying themselves with such matters as trade and interest rates.

Most business is conducted in the Lower City. As a free port, Lookshy is a haven for Scavenger Lands merchants wishing to sell their wares to ocean-going traders. Trade goods from Lookshy—mostly weapons and other military items, made in the armories of the Upper City—are brought down by funicular and warehoused, then transferred to ships as deals are concluded.

THE FUTURE OF LOOKSHY

Lookshy is a city on the cusp of greatness. For centuries, it has acted as warden and guardian of the River Province, respecting the wishes of a daimyo dead for seven centuries. General Nefvarin and his staff used anagathics to extend their lives well beyond the usual Dragon-Blooded span, but they too have been dead for centuries, and their descendants as well.

Increasingly, the following question comes up in the junior officers' mess, or at the rare dinner-gatherings of the great families: why is Lookshy's great power kept harnessed, used to protect warlords, simpletons, spirit-worshippers and merchants? Some suggest that, with the Scarlet Empress gone, the Realm will never again be a threat, and that the time has come for Lookshy to assert itself more strongly by bringing the fractious states of the Scavenger Lands to heel. Others, even more ambitious, suggest that a civil war in the Realm will offer the perfect opportunity for the Seventh Legion to seize control of the Imperial Manse and the Realm's defense grids. To those who call such a dream improbable, its supporters say it is no more so than a single junior officer parlaying that same power into the modern Realm.

For now, these opinions are only the rumblings of a handful of disaffected officers. But those voices will grow in number and strength in the years to come, and they will be a very real force pushing Lookshy into taking a more active role in shaping the future of the region. Even in a society as devoted to martial discipline as Lookshy, mutiny is still possible.

Lookshy's other thriving business is training in the arts of war. The salons and weapon-masters of Lookshy are renowned for their skill in a vast variety of weapons and fighting styles, as well as for their ability to turn the most spoiled and indolent noble into a soldier capable of acquitting himself honorably with a sword in battle. He may not become an ice-eyed killer or a brilliant general, but he will learn to manage himself and his troops well.

As a result, many nobles send their children to learn from a Lookshy weapon-master or train in the salon of a well-known strategist for a year or two. Membership in the salons of the most talented strategoi is a sign of distinction, and competition can be fierce for spots in the top circles. Trainers can be found to teach almost any weapon or martial art. The more obscure the technique, the more expensive, and the more difficult it is to find a master willing or able to take on new students.

Lookshy's weaponsmiths and armorers are known throughout Creation for the quality of their work. Weapons

and armor slated for export are excellent, but a buyer must travel to Lookshy to find the best workmanship. The finest weaponsmiths will only forge a blade for a customer after first observing her fighting style for some time. The resulting weapon is invariably the perfect length and balance for the prospective owner's style and needs. A blade made by a Lookshy master smith is an exceptional weapon, but only in the hands of the user for whom it was forged; it loses all benefits when wielded by any other. (For details of exceptional weapons, see *Exalted*, p. 326.) Getting a weaponsmith to agree to forge a blade is no simple matter; the best smiths are often booked up for years in advance.

Weapons and armor are Lookshy's primary exports, but the city's craftsmen also produce other goods: tents, cheap and durable clothing, camp stoves, wagons and other military equipment. All such gear, based on the Seventh Legion's own materiel, is of excellent quality, durable, easy to use, and as lightweight as possible. These items can be somewhat hard to find during periods of conflict, since most manufacturers have contracts with the military to supply its needs before offering their wares for public sale.

CITY ARMORIES

Lookshy is famed for its stores of working First Age weapons, with good reason. The Seventh Legion was a well-equipped formation to begin with, and its battlefield successes over the years have further swelled its stocks of powerful weaponry.

The most common First Age weapons in the city armories are daiklaives, dire lances and other hand-to-hand weapons. These require little or no upkeep, and are the least affected by the passage of time. Slightly less common are suits of jade armor and powerbows, both of which also stand the test of time well but are susceptible to battlefield damage. These weapons and armor are common enough that every Dragon-Blooded in Lookshy carries some enchanted item, and elite troops may wear whole panoplies of equipment on the battlefield.

Less numerous are weapons that require complex maintenance, special ammunition or refined fuels. Some of these devices still work after a fashion, but many operate in a pale shadow of their former glory. These devices may have less powerful effects than they should, or may work only occasionally. Others work consistently and at full power, but are fragile and prone to breakage from age or lack of spare parts, or else require rare and expensive substitute reagents to operate.

Many of Lookshy's larger weapons were originally siege engines, intended to smash fortress walls or repel large numbers of enemy infantry. A small number of these are kept mounted on field carriages for mobile deployment. Most of the rest are mounted on the walls or in Lookshy Manse, used to control the harbor from the Upper





City fortifications. Others are mounted in the towers on the outer wall for use against besiegers. Such devices are normally tightly secured and issued only when needed. Some are irreplaceable — the last known examples of weapons whose principles of operation are long forgotten.

The Legion's armories also hold several weapons that no one knows how to operate, or that are hazardous to the wielder. Some are broken but still function erratically. Others are enigmas, weapons whose purpose cannot be discerned or whose operation has been lost to the centuries. Rumor has it that the armories also contain war-gear of the Anathema, found when ancient arsenals were emptied, or taken by Lookshy soldiers in raids against tomb-robbers.

Finally, the original Seventh Legion carried in its train First Age devices of vast destructive power, intended as weapons of last resort. Some of those weapons, like the device whose song shattered the souls of the imperials besieging Lookshy in Realm Year 76, survived the Contagion in working order. The current commanders of Lookshy rarely discuss any such devices that remain in their armories. It is public knowledge that Lookshy has such weapons, but their numbers and powers remain among the city's most closely guarded secrets.

DEALING WITH THE ARMORIES OF LOOKSHY

Almost any common First Age weapon or military device the Storyteller can think of might be located in the armories of Lookshy, possibly in quantity. Rare or fragile weapons are less likely to remain in the city's stocks, but nothing is out of the question. The more dangerous a weapon, the more heavily guarded it is. The most powerful and destructive weapons in Lookshy's arsenal lie in Lookshy Manse's deepest vaults, huge storage halls constructed at the height of the Shogunate, and are guarded by deadly traps and automatons. Any Solar or Lunar weapons existing in Lookshy are likely to be in the same vaults.

The Seventh Legion is always on the lookout for more First Age weapons, and pays handsomely for any on offer. It also sometimes pays handsomely for those not offered for sale. The Legion has occasionally seized First Age stockpiles by force of arms, although the General Staff prefers to negotiate to avoid damaging their reputations or the goods. The Seventh Legion never sells First Age devices, and they are rarely issued to anyone except members of the Lookshy military.

For examples of First Age gear, see the Wonders and Equipment chapter of the Exalted rulebook, as well as *The Book of Three Circles* and the *Exalted Storytellers Companion*.

General Netvarin,

It is with deep shame and regret that I must write this letter, in response to your request. There are no reinforcements, and there will be no evacuation.

The central government is attempting to keep matters quiet for now, but the entire Shogunate has gone up in fire and plague. This new disease is eradicating whole cities, and where it isn't, the Fair Folk and the barbarians are. The problems in your area are occurring all over Creation. Panji Kenat refused to see it, but Kiran was right. We were foolish, and now we are paying for it.

This is my last official command to you, you are encouraged, but by no means required, to hold your position at Deheleshen for as long as you can. Provide what support you can to the people of the River Province. If your position becomes untenable, or when you can no longer fulfill your mission, you are authorized to take whatever steps you must to secure the safety of your troops.

Do what you can.

Preserve what you can.

Save your people for as long as you can.

May the Dragons bless us all, though I fear there is little they can do to preserve us now.

Governor Vegos Myrnan, Director of River Province Post and Taxation, Talon of the Dragon of Water, Daimyo

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR LOOKSHY

- Dawn: Helot Legionnaire, Weapon-Master, Strategos, Bodyguard
- Zenith: Immaculate Chaplain, Civilian Affairs Officer, Ranger
- Twilight: Staff Officer, Military Savant, Weaponsmith, Assault Engineer
- Night: Merchant, Intelligence Officer, Military Advisor, Special Forces Troops
- Eclipse: Strategos, Merchant-Spy, Military Advisor

GREAT FORKS

Called the City of Temples or the House of Festivals by some, known simply as Decadence to others, Great Forks is one of the most prosperous and enlightened cities in the Confederation. Known for tolerance, art and culture, and revels, Great Forks is a favorite destination of those looking for a good time, though not necessarily a relaxing one.

Great Forks came into being almost five hundred years ago, in Realm Year 278, when three groups of refugees from ongoing regional conflicts arrived simultaneously at the confluence of the Rolling and Yellow rivers.

To the so-called Scarlet Empress, self-proclaimed Ruler of the Blessed Isle and Defender of the Realm,

I must inform you that I reject your claim to the title of Empress. While you certainly command a number of legions and can therefore claim to control the Blessed Isle, these alone do not make you the shogun. Your actions in reactivating the ancient defenses of the Realm and casting back the Fae are commendable. But they do not make you the shogun, either.

Shogun is a title you must earn, and I cannot support your claim to it. You are unknown to me, and so I must assume you are a low-ranking officer who happened to be in the right place at the right time. You have not yet demonstrated strategic acumen or political ability. I will not submit to the rule of a functionary, nor will I turn control of this legion over to you or your emissaries. If you wish to become the true Shogun of the Dragon-Blooded, you will have to defeat me in battle and prove you deserve the title.

My last official orders from my daimyo were quite clear: defend the River Province and provide what support I can. This I have done, and this I shall continue to do as long as my lungs draw breath. Come and get us if you wish. We will be waiting.

General Nefvarin Gilshalos, Lord of Lookshy Manor, Commander of the Seventh Legion of the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate

Each band of refugees had been granted a deed of the land by a nation that laid claim to the area, and was accompanied by a powerful spirit that had protected them during the journey. The spirits were named Spinner of Glorious Tales, Weaver of Dreams of Victory, and Shield of a Different Day, generally shortened by ordinary mortals to Talespinner, Dreamweaver, and Dayshield.

As the three groups readied for battle over the land they had traveled so long to find, the spirits entered discussions. At the time, the shadowland now known as Walker's Realm was ruled by the Deathlord Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. The Princess Magnificent was ill-disposed toward her neighbors, and a major cause of the area's abandonment. The spirits knew a war between their three peoples would only leave the winner too weak to withstand an attack from the shadowland.

The spirits found they had much in common, as did the peoples they watched over. In the end, the spirits agreed to share the lands they all claimed, and to make their peoples one. After they had settled their united folk into their new home, the spirits set about dealing with their undead neighbor. Talespinner and Dreamweaver together created a story of a mighty victory over the

Deathlord, while Dayshield warded the people and her spirit allies behind invisibility and mists of illusion.

The tale of the two spirits was part dream, part lie and part reality. The Spinner of Glorious Tales told of a simple hero who found the secret to the Deathlord's demise, and Weaver of Dreams of Victory prepared to spread that secret across the Scavenger Lands so that any child who desired might slay forever the Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers. Had the Princess Magnificent deigned to notice it while they were working the magic, she could likely have halted their spell. But she did not, and so was convinced to go elsewhere under fear of her final demise. If she harbors any resentment toward the three guardian spirits, she hides it well, lest they conclude their deadly tale.

THE ERECTING OF GREAT FORKS

With the Deathlord gone, the Three set about creating a city for their people to inhabit. Within a year and a day, Great Forks arose from what had been plains and beaches, built by the three peoples and by lesser spirits and elementals commanded to assist in the task. Within a decade of its founding, the city had grown prosperous enough to survive the demise of the three states that had sponsored it. Great Forks was a charter member of the Confederation of Rivers, signing the articles in Realm Year 557.

Great Forks has since become a thriving city of more than a quarter of a million citizens, and nearly twice that many slaves. The Three rule the city by decree and example, tending toward leniency and tolerance unless someone is injured or killed without consent. Below the Three, a merit-based human bureaucracy runs the city from day to day.

Great Forks was built to last, and to accommodate future expansion. Even today, some sections of the city are sparsely inhabited even though they were built centuries ago. Large stores of food, water, and weapons are set aside in storage vaults underground, and the city's walls are thick and strong. Despite its reputation for decadence and excess, Great Forks is also a mighty fortress if necessary.

The Three encourage learning and education among the citizens, and Great Forks is home to some of the River Provinces' most famous savants and sorcerers. Many of these individuals vacation in Great Forks, in townhouses subsidized and staffed by the government in exchange for lecturing at the university. Great Forks goes to great lengths to maintain good relations with its neighbors, and is a valued member of the Confederation. Its leaders provide logistical assistance and medical drugs, as well as jade, to back many Confederation undertakings.

The Great Forks military counts a number of spirits and elementals among its ranks and is backed by the power of the Three, but its mortal ranks were devastated at the Battle of Mishaka in Realm Year 754. While the Confederate forces emerged victorious from that battle, the army





of Great Forks was wiped out almost to a man. Of the three thousand troops sent to Mishaka, less than a hundred returned. The Great Forks military has spent the past eight years slowly recovering from that shattering loss, which robbed it of its best troops and most experienced officers. The military still includes individuals with formidable martial skill and discipline, and on paper Great Forks once again boasts a sizable army. However, the city's forces still suffer from weak leadership, and only a fool would rely on them in a crisis. The military is adequate for patrolling and enforcing the city borders, but Great Forks must rely on the power of the Three to protect it from external threats. The Three believe it will take another decade or more to rebuild the army into an effective fighting tool.

LOCAL INHABITANTS

The average inhabitant of Great Forks is much like that of any other city in the Scavenger Lands. Though Great Forks is commonly regarded as "soft" by the region's other powers, its people still live in the savage Second Age of Man. They enjoy civilized pleasures, but the citizens of Great Forks know that violence is never far away.

The people of Great Forks delight in athletics and fitness, as well as in festive dances and feasts thrown by the city's many temples. Most citizens do not have to work very hard compared with their counterparts in other states; they earn their livelihoods as part of the temple bureaucracies or with the city's markets, its university, or as overseers and managers of slave gangs. This relatively leisurely lifestyle is part of what makes the city's constant festivals and parties possible, and all of it is founded on the labor of slaves.

SLAVES

Great Forks thrives on the slave trade, buying slaves most frequently from the nearby Hundred Kingdoms region. Without slaves, the city's qat, marijuana and tobacco fields would be half the size they are now, at best. The only part of Great Forks' agriculture that does not depend on slaves is the fruit crop. Grapes and other fruits are easily ruined by "clumsy" slaves, and are harvested by paid citizens instead. Likewise, the city's arenas would be much emptier without slave gladiators, and its gymnasiums less attractive without their slave masseurs.

Slaves have many rights in Great Forks. They can own property, marry, may only be subjected to certain forms of punishment and may not be cut off from their families. Manumission is possible, at a set price. However, slaves are still property and are treated as such by law. Killing a slave is a civil rather than a criminal offense. By contrast, the helots of Lookshy are free individuals legally treated as people.

Most field slaves receive a daily ration of mete (meh-teh) leaf, a plant similar to qat that acts as a physical stimulant while dulling the mind and memory. Ingesting mete makes the subject perfectly suited to dull, repetitious

THREE SPIRITS OF GREAT FORKS

The rulers of Great Forks are mighty spirits, perhaps the most powerful currently manifesting in the Scavenger Lands.

Spinner of Glorious Tales (Talespinner): It is said that the Spinner of Glorious Tales was once a mortal who traveled from town to city to village, parlaying his storytelling gifts to earn his living. According to legend, he attained such skill that he joined the Spirit Courts after he died, so that he could spin stories forever.

Talespinner is a patron of wanderers and storytellers. In his natural shape, he appears as a male human, middle-aged and roughened from travel, with a halo of yellow light around his head. However, Spinner of Glorious Tales is a talented shapeshifter whose only limitation is that he must always appear as a traveler of some sort. He can look like anything from a mendicant to a traveling prince or even a migrating bird or fish.

Of the Three, Talespinner alone can leave Great Forks for long periods of time, and so he often acts as the spirits' ambassador to faraway places. One of his Charms enables him to return to the city in the blink of an eye, so long as he can set his feet on a road that eventually leads to it.

Weaver of Dreams of Victory (Dreamweaver or Victory): This spirit does not speak of its origins, or of how it came to watch over the people it led to Great Forks. Dreamweaver appears as an ever-changing cascade of all the people those who see it have ever known; its domain includes dreams, warfare, and the loom.

Weaver of Dreams of Victory feels close kinship with Talespinner and Dayshield, and ties the Three to each other. Dreamweaver has never been known to leave the city, but has manifested in the dreams of citizens many leagues away to bear some message or warning of great import.

Shield of a Different Day (Dayshield): Dayshield manifests as a strong warrior, proud and beautiful, with raven tresses and eyes like granite. Her weapons are a vast shield that cannot be breached or bypassed and an unbreakable lance. She has strong ties to defensive warfare, and like Talespinner is a patron of cities and civilization.

tasks that require little concentration or mental ability. An individual who has eaten mete will work meekly all day, stopping only when ordered to, and will remember little of the tedium, recalling instead a dull euphoria and waking dreams brought on by the drug.

SUPERNATURAL DENIZENS

Spirits and elementals make up an important part of Great Forks' population, assisting in everything from military matters to bureaucracy and agriculture. Water elementals coax fish into the city's nets, ifrit guard the palace, and wood spirits scout the forests and grasslands that surround the city. These spirits serve the city for the same reasons mortals do; out of gratitude or obligation, from a sense of place, because it is expected of them, or even for payment — though spirits, unlike mortals, are rarely paid in jade.

People with spirit blood are common in Great Forks, and many inhabitants claim descent from a minor godling or greater elemental. Many of these bastard offspring of the little gods exhibit a variety of powers. Though no match for an Exalt, they are often physically superior to mortals, and many have magical insight or even the ability to use a few spirit Charms.

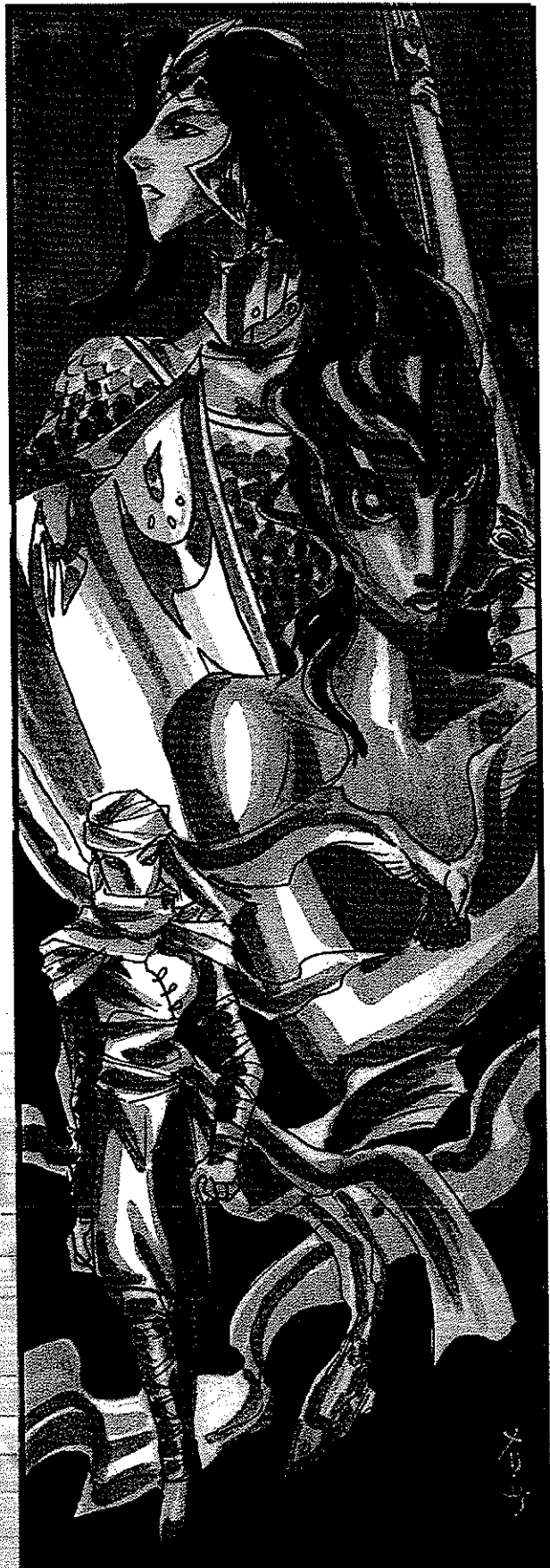
Fair Folk also live in Great Forks, drawn in some numbers to a city so devoted to the expression of passions. The Three generally let the Fair Folk be, as long as they do not hurt anyone unconsenting or attempt to extend their influence among the population.

TRADE IN MEDICINES AND POTIONS

Drugs, chemicals and philtres are part of everyday life in Great Forks. The city's markets abound with sellers of nostrums, euphorics, love potions, herbal tonics and alchemical mixtures of every type, nature, and effectiveness. Distillations of lotus, poppy, and willow are sold for pain, and concoctions from simmering vats of rotting fruit are used to chase away fevers and chills. Other, stronger medicines and drugs can be found by those who know to ask. Most of the city's denizens recognize that the difference between curing and killing is often merely a matter of dosage, and poisons are easy to obtain. Local authorities are equally knowledgeable in these matters, however, and poisoning deaths rarely go undetected.

The city exports some of the finest wines and cordials in Creation, although local vintners and distillers keep the best in Great Forks for their own consumption. Home-grown qat and mere are popular with slaves, craftsmen, traders and farmers alike. Tobacco and marijuana are also grown in quantity, and while not as good as that raised elsewhere, they are strong and cheap. Small amounts of other drugs and potions are also exported, but at prices so high that few can afford them.

The thriving trade in drugs and chemicals has given Great Forks some of the most gifted doctors and surgeons outside the Realm, and the city boasts many fine hospitals. Of course, finding a doctor who can guarantee being sober for your operation is sometimes more trouble than putting up with the ailment.



Great Forks

RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Great Forks is aswarm in godlings, spirits, and cults, a fact nowhere more evident than in the religious district, which takes up a third of the city. Hardly a day in Great Forks is not holy to some half-dozen cults or religions. All such holidays are honored equally, usually with parades, music, and festivals. The streets of the Temple District are often crowded with revelers, the temples thronged with petitioners. It is said that an individual wise in the way of the temples need never starve or thirst; she can simply move from party to party and partake of the rich foods and wines laid out in honor of this godling or that spirit.

HOUSE CYNIS

Not surprisingly, Great Forks is a favorite haunt for members of House Cynis, even when the edicts of the Scarlet Empress forced them to visit in secret. Even before the Empress vanished, House Cynis' "secret" presence was something of an open joke among the inhabitants of Great Forks, as well as a matter of some concern. Many scions of Cynis were content to hold wild parties and orgies, but some have darker tastes that they could not indulge even in the Imperial Manse without risk. In Great Forks, these individuals supposedly feel freer to indulge their perversions. They may be underestimating the dangers, however; the Three take a dim view of any harm that comes to their people.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR GREAT FORKS

Dawn:	Rebellious Slave, Young Officer, Temple Guard
Zenith:	Cult Priest, Bureaucrat of the Three, Chemical Spiritualist
Twilight:	Alchemist, Surgeon, Lecturer, Former Sorcerer
Night:	Temple-Robber, Cult Agent, Great Forks Police Inspector
Eclipse:	Dilettante, Bureaucrat of the Three, Drug Merchant, Professional Partygoer

SIJAN

Sijan is an old city, so ancient that no one knows when it was first built. Some tombs outside the city walls predate the First Age, including mausoleums so ancient that not even the morticians and record-keepers know who lies in them, or how old they are.

The city lies between the River of Tears on the west, the Avarice River to the south, and the fell forest of Black Chase to the north. Two bridges across the Avarice lead to the Plains of the Dead, as the vast cemeteries of Sijan are

called. The Rising, or eastern bridge, is also called the Bridge of Mortals, and only the living may cross it. The Setting, or western bridge, is known as the Bridge of the Fallen, and only the dead may cross it. The busy Rising Bridge is the chosen route of countless death-wagons or parties of young morticians going to cut back weeds and brush in the Plains of the Dead; the Bridge of the Fallen also sees fairly heavy traffic.

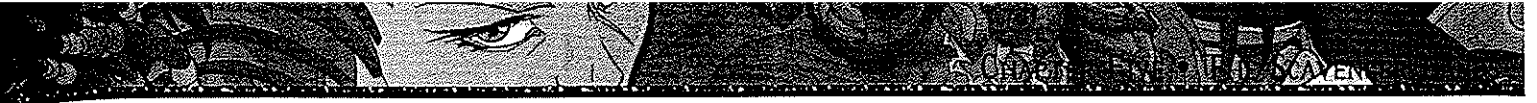
The Plains of the Dead stretch for miles in every direction, reaching almost to the horizon. Vast mausoleums rise up from the earth, some the size of small towns. Some of these massive structures are tombs for a single hero or ruler, built in their honor, or to propitiate them and keep them asleep beneath heavy wards and sorceries. Others hold the populations of whole towns or even cities, housing all the dead who made their way to Sijan from a certain kingdom or great battle.

The mausoleums, tombs and burial yards of Sijan are constantly being reclaimed by nature — especially near the River of Tears, where the soft ground and rampant undergrowth quickly consume any monuments that are not scrupulously maintained. The valley of Sijan was once much deeper and steeper, but millennia of building and overgrowth have stacked tombs, crypts and bones on top of one another in such profusion that the valley floor has risen over a hundred feet. Many of these underground tombs are still maintained by expert morticians, who descend into the mazy spaces beneath the crypts to propitiate the buried ghosts.

In some areas, no one still living remembers the funerary arrangements and rituals of those buried there. Places where the necessary rites to keep the dead resting quietly can no longer be performed are often dangerous for the living. The few ghosts that still remain amid these ancient bones sleep uneasily, if at all, and they are quick to take out their resentment at being forgotten on any living mortal they discover.

Fortunately, these wrathful sprits are easily propitiated. A promise to make sure that their burial places are repaired and the rites performed will usually set them at ease. However, if an unlucky individual forgets or breaks that promise, the ghosts' anger is as vast as their age. Unfortunately, the dead do not always recall the details of their funeral rites, and they have little patience with claims that the rituals have passed from memory. Recovering these lost but vital details can be exceedingly difficult, especially when the ghosts come from societies that predate the Realm.

The city of Sijan itself is a quiet place. No revelers disturb its streets, and no festivals mar the silence save those celebrated for the dead. Mortal revels are held behind closed doors, in taverns and feast-halls cut into the stone far below the surface of the earth, so as not to disturb the dead. No sounds escape these restaurants and dance halls, and the revelers sleep off their excesses in rooms below rather than venture out inebriated into the silent streets.



Visitors to Sijan who venture out at night are sometimes never seen again, or else found dead the next morning, their corpses cold and gray-haired in the dawn. Like any other city, Sijan has its criminals, not all of them living. Some ghosts are driven to robbery and murder by history and circumstance, and even a city as careful with its dead as Sijan must occasionally give rise to hungry ghosts.

The roads around Sijan are likewise hazardous at night. Though they will not set foot in the city of the dead, the horrors of the Black Chase have no compunction about patrolling the roads leading to it. Likewise, most hungry ghosts move their bodies outside the city to hidden dens in the nearby swamps, from which they hunt the woods and fens, preying on swamp life and unlucky travelers.

THE MORTICIANS' ORDER

The Funereal Order of Righteous Morticians and Embalmers, as they are formally known, is the closest thing to a government that Sijan possesses. The Order is divided into three groups, called Observances. Each has its own unique duties, though some overlap exists. The Funerists' Observance are Sijan's masters of ceremony, rite and ritual, the supervisors and in some cases designers of the city's many funeral services. Funerists know the burial rites of dozens of cultures, which rituals are needed to propitiate the dead, and what forms should be observed based on the client's status in life. In some cases, new cities will commission a master of the Observance to design burial rituals for their people. Rumor has it that several centuries ago, the Scarlet Empress commissioned her own burial rite, in case her unfortunate demise should actually come to pass.

The Mortwrights' Observance prepare the body for its final disposition. They are the world's best embalmers, morticians, necro-surgeons and flesh-crafters; their services are said to be in high demand among the Deathlords, who use them to beautify their concubines and to teach their own necromantic experts. Mortwrights also design and build Sijan's many tombs and mortuaries, as well as the traps that guard these houses of the wealthy dead.

The Deadspeakers' Observance is the smallest of the three; its members are those who contact the dead. These mediums can discern the wishes of those who left no testament, or whose families either cannot or will not come to consensus about the burial. This Observance also guards the techniques used to bring the dead to unlife and the rituals of exorcism that, on very rare occasions, serve to forever banish the restless dead to the shadowlands. The Deadspeakers are the most secretive of the Observances, and most people who visit Sijan never see one.

All members of the Morticians' Order wear heavy gray gowns, with thick overshawls to protect them from Sijan's ubiquitous chill. A given mortician's rank and Observance are known only by the heavy silver bracers he wears. With experience and exposure, outsiders can learn

DEATH IN THE SCAVENGER LANDS

The two hundred tribes and nations of the Scavenger Lands have nearly a thousand different ways of celebrating, venerating, or mourning a loved one's passing, and almost as many of acknowledging the death of an enemy. The one thing they all have in common is the city of Sijan and its professional funerists. Sijan plays an important role in almost every part of the Scavenger Lands. Her jet black funeral galleys roam the rivers unmolested by brigand, pirate, or robber baron, and members of the Mortician's Order with their silver bracers are a common sight in almost every city. To the people of the Scavenger Lands, this degree of influence is appropriate. Proper adherence to the rituals of death matters every bit as much as following the guidelines for running a successful business. The dead are not an abstract concept, and ghosts are not myths; they are a powerful and often dangerous reality. An experienced warrior would no more consider abandoning a foe's body without proper burial than leaving an opponent a clear shot at her back.



to determine a mortician's branch and rank by the ornamentation and design of his bracers, but few have enough contact with the Order to learn the patterns.

Despite the strict oaths they swear regarding conduct, the wishes of the dead, the sanctity of their role as guides to the afterlife and the need for circumspect behavior, a small number of morticians have been known to abuse their role, and occasionally their clients. Naturally, this happens more often with the bodies of the destitute or those who lack family or friends to protest such behavior, but even the rich and powerful are not immune to the actions of a sufficiently deranged mortician. The Morticians' Order rarely needs to punish these crimes — the ghosts of Sijan can see to their own justice. The fate of those who trespass against the dead is a terrible one; stories claim that the screams of some miscreants echo in the caverns beneath the city for months or even years.

The leaders of the three Observances meet once a month in council to determine the course of Sijan's government — a largely ceremonial duty compared to their jobs as chief administrators of their respective Observances. Sijan's tiny living population spends little time worrying about war, bandits or barbarian raids. Even the Fair Folk avoid this funeral city, whose cold aura and leaden certainty of death saps their very existence. The laws of the Morticians' Order have been tried and tested for millennia, and few situations arise that the Order has not dealt with in the past. When the masters do meet over an urgent matter, they can draw on vast wisdom from

Sijan's libraries, and from its legions of dead inhabitants as well. It is said that the wisest savants of the First Age frequently advise the masters in their deliberations.

MILITARY

Sijan has no real military, because it needs none. The Morticians' Order has no interest in the squabbles of the living, and who would be mad enough to invade the City of the Dead? Even during the Realm's invasion in 750, the imperial legions merely requested permission to post a detachment of soldiers in Sijan. The morticians granted their request, so long as they did nothing to interfere with the day-to-day business of the city.

Sijan maintains a small town guard to quell disturbances, keep order and present a deterrent so that foolish or desperate bandits do not attempt to sack the city. Though the revenge of the dead for such an act is as sure as the turning of the seasons, Sijan exists to safeguard the dead, not rely on them for protection.

Most of Sijan's guardsmen are mortals, dressed in dark reinforced buffcoats and armed with staves and swords. A sizable number of undead also serve in the guard. The most famous of these are the Black Watch, who wear suits of superheavy black plate armor. Wielding massive swords of dark steel and capable of standing still for weeks at a time, the nemessaries of the Black Watch are often ghosts who were the victims of grave robbery, and who now delight in silently stalking the city for tomb raiders. Ghosts also serve in the guard as spies and lookouts.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Although Sijan is a signatory to the Confederation of Rivers, that status is purely diplomatic. The City of the Dead maintains strict neutrality, burying the corpses of the Realm and the Threshold alike. The morticians' appointee to the Confederation Council generally stays silent unless asked his opinion, and is little more than an observer. The servants of the dead send a council representative as a gesture of respect for their neighbors, and their neighbors generally reciprocate.

The exception is the city of Great Forks. Alone among the Scavenger Lands, Great Forks employs no Sijanese funerists, and no citizens of the City of Temples go to Sijan after they pass on. The black galleys of the dead do not dock in Great Forks, even to resupply. The cause of this coldness is unknown; the Three do not speak of Sijan, and the Council of Morticians does not speak of the matter either, except to mention a severe disappointment or misunderstanding when pressed. Neither side wishes to escalate or resolve the issue, and so it stands as an unspoken barrier between the two cities' people.

GREYFALLS

Located on the Lesser Rock River, the small city of Greyfalls is the last bastion of the Realm in the Scavenger

THE MUSEUMS OF THE DEAD

Sijan's libraries are famous, but difficult and expensive to access. The city's museums are less well known, but much easier to get into. Over the centuries, grateful clients and families have donated irreplaceable artworks and pieces of history to the Morticians' Order, or have given them as payment for elaborate funeral services.

Having little use for these trophies, the Morticians built museums to house them for the public, living and dead. Some museums are general, while others concentrate on a given period of history or on cultures now vanished from the Earth. In this way, Sijan remembers not only individuals who have died, but nations and societies that have passed on as well. Some members of the Order have begun seeking out treasures to place in the museums, and a few Deadspeakers have even commissioned their unliving clients to recreate long-lost artworks so that the living may see at least some traces of forgotten history.

City museums are typically located in elaborate mausoleums that were paid for but never inhabited, or that were commissioned but never fully paid for. Although heavily guarded, the museums are mostly open to the public for a small fee. The morticians often recommend them as a diversion to the families and retinues of clients who must undergo lengthy preparation prior to interment.

Lands. Captured by the crews of a pair of Realm warships that made their way this far upriver in Realm Year 88, the area was granted to the Realm in Year 91, as part of the peace treaty ending the Third Invasion. The Scarlet Empress has worked hard over the centuries to maintain this toehold, which consists of the city of Greyfalls, half a dozen small towns and a large stretch of sparsely populated upland.

Greyfalls is one of only three places in the Scavenger Lands where the Realm keeps an official presence, and the only one where that presence is significant. A tiny Realm delegation in Sijan helps to arrange state burials, while in Marita, a dozen low-ranking members of the Thousand Scales are on hand for the Confederation Council to hand documents to.

Because of its unique status, Greyfalls has become the place where the Scavenger Lands go to transact business with the Realm. Realm merchant houses that cannot do business on Scavenger Lands soil have holdings in Greyfalls, allowing them to compete with the Guild in the lucrative trade offered by the Scavenger Lands. All such business is transacted at the Greyfalls dock, rather than the free port at Lookshy, so that the Realm receives the full amount of import and dock taxes on any goods. Part of the Empress' peace treaty involved free passage for Realm ships down the Rock and Yellow Rivers, in

BLACK ASH

Black ash is a short tree, rarely growing over 25 feet tall. It has strong, flexible branches, with dark gray or black bark and leaves, and its wood is black or ash-gray. Some trees bear wood darker than the famed ebony trees of the Southeast, though black ash is less lustrous and harder to carve. Black ash grows in almost every shadowland, and never appears outside one. This strange tree is most prolific, however, in the death-touched Black Chase forest near Sijan. Despite its commercial value for construction, furniture and carving, relatively little wood is taken from the Black Chase. Loggers have learned they are not welcome in that forest, and even taking lumber from the outskirts of the woodland is an invitation to disaster.

Relatively small amounts of black ash make it onto the market, usually sold to dealers by agents of the Deathlords, or by brave merchant-adventurers willing to risk the dangers of a shadowland in order to fell specimens of this prized wood for milling elsewhere. Some will pay a high price for black ash, and not always just in cash. One story in current circulation tells of a Guild factor who became so enamored of black ash's beauty that he resolved to panel his entire manor with it, eventually sacrificing his five daughters to the Yozis in order to gain enough influence and money to complete this task.

Though there seems to be no basis for this idea, many see black ash as a bad luck charm and a bad omen, which makes for considerable difficulty getting local aid in cutting it from a shadowland. Northern black ash is also popular among the deathknights, who can harvest it freely and who use it for arrows and bowstaves — a fact that does nothing for the tree's already sinister reputation.

exchange for a yearly fee paid to the states on the banks of those rivers, rather than allowing the states to tax individual vessels. This agreement broke down recently, and ships of the Realm are being stopped and duties assessed.

The Realm historically kept a strong military presence in the area, but the events of the past five years have conspired to reduce that force to a fraction of its former size. It remains impressive, however, at least on paper. The units still stationed near Greyfalls have been heavily reinforced with Dragon-Blooded and are integrating local troops into their ranks.

Even at its full strength, this detachment has never quite equaled its portrayal. Soldiers sent to Greyfalls tended to be those unable to make it anywhere else, but not quite hopeless enough for the Vermilion Legion. Its officers included the politically incautious, the inept and victims of palace intrigue. Most common soldiers were usually insubordinate, criminal or simply incompetent.

This situation has changed somewhat since the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress. Most of the Dragon-Blooded remaining in Greyfalls have no political ambitions, or else no chance of fulfilling them. In the absence of political appointees and catspaws, these officers have begun to forge a real weapon out of local troops and the remnants of their detachment. Whether this force will see action is another question. The many Confederation spies in the region have reported the changing reality to their masters, and the militaries of several local states have paid greater attention to readiness in preparation for unexpected adventurism by the imperial garrison.

GOVERNMENT

Greyfalls is a city of towers and minarets, domed buildings and wide tree-lined streets, against a backdrop of looming mountains and the towering Gray Falls that gave the city its name. In addition to its status as a huge transshipment port, local exports include glass and crystal fineries, and some of the best paper available throughout the Scavenger Lands or the Realm. Such products are heavily taxed when sold to Scavenger Lands traders and Guild members. The tariffs effectively channel the bulk of these goods to the Blessed Isle for sale, and ensure the involvement of Guild merchants — in whose interests the Dynasty has silent stake — as middlemen for the sale of the rest.

Politically, Greyfalls and its handful of surrounding principalities make up what the Realm calls the River Province Administrative District. The area has a satrap, ostensibly the governor of the entire River Province, and a bureaucracy that focuses mainly on collecting taxes and trade duties rather than on government. Before her disappearance, the Scarlet Empress maintained an official residence in Greyfalls, though she never visited it. The majordomo of this palace is a major player in local politics, and commands a cadre of troops and functionaries.

Actual interference by the Realm in the daily lives of Greyfalls' inhabitants has varied over the years, mostly at the whim of the reigning satrap. While the locals typically exercise considerable autonomy, few local leaders are under any illusions that they are more than puppets of the Realm. Attempts by local states to assert their independence beyond well-established levels are an invitation to immediate military intervention by the garrison.

This arrangement is typical for the Realm. Beyond toeing the line to imperial policy and paying yearly tribute, each local ruler is expected to make available to the Realm a certain number of troops as auxiliary forces. The rulers are nominally compensated for this loan, and the troops are not supposed to be marched more than twenty days' journey from their home without their lord's permission. However, the payment amounts to less than the expense of fielding the troops, and local rulers are hardly in a position to object to remote deployments.

THE NURI

Most of the ruling elite of the Greyfalls area are descended from the Nuri clan. More like a tribal nation than a great family, this extended social group has long enjoyed the Realm's special favor.

When the Realm first arrived near Greyfalls, the Nuri were an oppressed population. A simple people, they had migrated from the Eastern forests fleeing Wyld barbarians. The inhabitants of Greyfalls mostly relegated these outlanders to menial labor or enslaved them. When the Realm seized control of the city, they released the Nuri from bondage, armed clan members and placed them in positions of power. In return, the Nuri happily quashed local dissent and secured the region for their Dragon-Blooded patrons.

The Nuri today remain loyal servants of the Dragon-Bloods. They willingly offer up troops for foreign service and have proven themselves fierce warriors for the Realm. Nuri forces travel wherever they are ordered without question or qualm, they provide larger contingents than required, and the troops acquit themselves with honor.

Despite their loyalty to the Realm, the Nuri are not lickspittles. Since their liberation by the Realm, they have grown proud and warlike, as well as acutely conscious of how much the Realm matters to their survival and how exposed their position is. If the Realm ever abandons Greyfalls, the Nuri plan to either make themselves so indispensable that the Dynasty will take them away as it retreats, or else grow strong enough to defend themselves from their former subjects.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR GREYFALLS

Dawn:	Nuri Warrior, Insubordinate Legionnaire
Zenith:	Immaculate Mission Priest, Local Immaculate Order Fanatic
Twilight:	Exiled Imperial Savant, Nuri Assimilationist Scholar
Night:	Stock Thief, Imperial Archon, Lookshy Spy
Eclipse:	Politically Embarrassing Dynasty Diplomat, Nuri Quisling

THE MARUKAN ALLIANCE

The southeastern reaches of the Scavenger Lands are dominated by warm savannahs with isolated patches of forest. Fed by the many small watercourses that ultimately flow into the Yellow River, these fertile fields are covered in tall grass and wild grains. The rivers are rarely wide or deep enough to accommodate even flat-bottomed barges, and wagon trains are the only practical method of moving

cargo. Most of this region's cities are known for their horses and yeddim. Together, these communities form the Marukan Alliance. The Alliance's capital city lies on the edge of the Confederation border, dangerously close to the growing shadowland around Thorns.

MARUKANI SOCIETY

The Alliance is largely a collection of medium-sized towns; the only city is Celeren, centered around the fortress-manse of the same name. Marukan territory makes up the largest state in the Confederation, and fortified ranch compounds dot the countryside. These ranches have extensive pasturage, as well as gardens for fruits and vegetables. The common products of the area are cattle, sheep, grain, and (of course) horses.

The people of the Marukan Alliance are riders of horses in the same way that Westerners are sailors—the activity defines them and shapes most aspects of their lives. A typical Marukani child can steady herself on a horse almost before she can walk. To the inhabitants of Marukan, horses are companions and friends, not mere pets or beasts of burden. To be caught abusing a horse is a sure way to earn the distrust of any Marukani.

The Marukani wear bright-colored clothing, usually of silk and fine wool. Reds and yellows are the predominant shades, with greens and blues often providing a garish counterpoint. Horse hide is shunned, but the locals commonly wear leather made from lamb or cattle skins. Ornate decoration is the rule, even for functional items like armor—a typical suit of Marukani armor is lovingly emblazoned with feathers or swooping pauldrons, while helmets incorporate carefully sculpted visors. Marukani society frowns on traffic in slaves, but battle captives or their descendants are kept as servants if they cannot afford ransom. These individuals have rights to their own persons, may own property, and can buy their freedom for a fixed sum. Under Marukani law, a captive's family can be kept in servitude for four generations, after which all members must be freed.

The high point of the Marukan year is the month-long Spring Market, when yearlings are sold and new foals judged for suitability and training. While many buyers come for the yearlings, which fetch high prices, smart buyers look for older horses raised and trained by the Marukani. A mature three-year old has usually been fully trained and is ready for work, needing only to become familiar with its new partner.

The Spring Market is also a time for celebrating the dead in a riotous country-wide wake, filled with singing, dancing, and drinking. Revelers recite the accomplishments of those who died in the past year, and huge wagons stuffed with the remains of the most honored deceased are sent north to Sijan. There, these heroes are interred in mausoleums bought centuries ago by the Alliance. The people celebrate the passing of great horses as much as the death of great men and women, and the wagon trains to Sijan frequently carry the remains of horses as well as humans.

GOVERNMENT

Marukan is governed — to the extent that its freedom-loving folk will allow — by a council of elders that meets in the Celeren Manse. The council's leading voice is the elder of the Mayhiros clan, the Terrestrial Exalted family that owns the Manse. The Marukani tolerate little intrusion into their personal lives, and so the council generally concerns itself with foreign diplomacy. Council elders are elected by each town or group of ranchers to ten-year terms, and most elders serve only one of these. A new election occurs whenever an elder dies or retires, and so the council undergoes a slow but constant turnover.

Council dictates and policies, as well as regular correspondence, are carried by circuit riders. Part wilderness scouts, part police force and part mail service, the circuit riders travel from town to town carrying the post, investigating serious crimes and watching the borders of Marukan for horse thieves, brigands or invaders.

Justice among the Marukani is as swift as their steeds and as harsh as the Southern deserts. When possible, trials are held by a jury of local elders and overseen by a circuit rider. However, circuit riders can take whatever action they deem necessary against miscreants. These officials have been known to hold a trial without benefit of a jury, or pass down summary judgments. Hefty fines or death are the two fates that face the guilty — Marukani justice does not embrace imprisonment.

MILITARY ORGANIZATION

Because of Marukan's size, its military is divided into two forces: the Guards and the Cavalry. The Guards are heavily armored infantry, intended for siege work and assaults. The Cavalry, by far the larger branch, consists of three fighting arms. The first are the Lancers, highly mobile skirmishers who fight from saddle and foot. The second are the Arrows, horse-archers whose powerful compound bows allow them to fire a devastating rain of shafts from formation or as skirmishers. The third arm, the Hammers, are cataphracts, armored in lamellar and carrying maces and lances. All four forces together give the Marukan army a blend of speed and striking power necessary to patrol their lands and keep their pastures safe. Only the Hammers and the Guard are full-time soldiers; the rest of the Marukan army is drawn from householders and townsfolk who serve when the need arises. Both full-time forces are based at Celeren, though they often spend time on field maneuvers.

The Marukan are particularly concerned about their safety these days, for good reason. Rumors abound that the Deathlord Mask of Winters has been discussing alliances with nearby states, but so far no ambassadors have come to Marukan. The Marukani have also suffered increased raids by bandits and horse-thieves in recent years, especially from their neighbors to the north and west.

HIPARKES

If the Marukani Alliance can be said to worship a god, it might well be the spirit Hiparkes, a patron of horses and riders. Hiparkes takes several forms, but most often appears as a noble stallion, nineteen hands at the shoulder, with a mane of flowing silver and a cloud-gray coat. His eyes flash brilliant green, and his voice is the rolling thunder of hoofbeats. He and his spies watch over equines of all types. Hiparkes punishes harshly those who abuse or mistreat their steeds, but smiles on good companions to their mounts. He favors the people of Marukan and their neighbors, who have long attempted to improve ordinary horses through breeding programs. Hiparkes' mortal servants oversee these breeding programs, and the Followers of Hiparkes evaluate the newborn foals at the Spring Market. They check the beasts for defects or weakness; foals who do not pass inspection are raised and sold, but are never permitted to breed.



CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR MARUKAN

Dawn:	Infantry Soldier, Herd Guard
Zenith:	Follower of Hiparkes, Devoutly Immaculate Rancher
Twilight:	Breedmaster, Smith
Night:	Circuit Rider, Stock Thief
Eclipse:	Ranch Owner, Town Squire

THE HUNDRED KINGDOMS

Starting at the confluence of the Maruto and the Yellow rivers and extending east along the Maruto, Rock and Yellow river basins up to the edge of the Eastern forest lie the Hundred Kingdoms, a collection of small principalities, autocracies, republics, diktats and petty kingdoms. Many are no larger than a fortified town plus a handful of villages covering perhaps a hundred square miles of land. Though the Hundred Kingdoms are a fractious lot, they are the breadbasket of the Scavenger Lands, providing much of the fancy grain consumed in the River Province, as well as exporting considerable quantities of rice and barley.

Heavily resettled by bands of refugees from across the world, this region was known as the Laris and Velen administrative districts during the League of Many Rivers era. The boundaries of these two political entities were determined not by the realities of the day, but instead were based on First Age markers. A subsequent history of division and rancor finally came to a head in the latter half of the third century, when disputes over water allocation erupted in violence that eventually fractured not only the



two provinces, but the entire League. As the fighting spread, long-standing resource conflicts and rivalries, most dating back before the Contagion, became additional reasons for battle. Before the turmoil ended, most of the states in the League had broken up. The Laris and Velen districts splintered into dozens of tiny countries, each generally hostile toward most of its neighbors.

The Laris and Velen region was protected from invasion in following years by the forces of Lookshy and various states to the west, most of which had retained greater political cohesion. The resulting area, called the Hundred Kingdoms, has existed in an uneasy balance for almost 400 years, occasionally exploding into violence as some coalition of pocket states or would-be regional ruler attempts to seize control. So far, none has succeeded.

CULTURE AND ECONOMY

To give the reader an accurate glimpse into the different societies of these tiny kingdoms would take a decade, and such a narrative would be out of date by the time it was finished. Yet despite the many variances in local traditions, the Hundred Kingdoms have some similarities. Most of them are autocracies or simple democracies, and most rely on agriculture or mining as their primary sources of wealth. The region's soil is rich, dotted with deep veins of ore that yield substantial amounts of copper, tin, iron, and other metals, including silver and gold. Rumors even suggest deposits of moonsilver and orichalcum, buried in abandoned mines in the mountains to the north. No one knows for certain whether or not the tales are true.

THE HORSES OF MARUKAN

Several breeds of horse are used in Marukan, each for a different purpose. Marukani rider horses are bred for intelligence, demeanor, loyalty, and good looks, and are popular with nobles; a Marukani rider is the first horse of many a prince and princess. Drays are large haulers, capable of pulling heavy loads, while swifts are fast runners able to outpace almost anything on four legs. Battlers are powerful warhorses trained to fight, strong and strong-willed; they need a steady, firm and respectful master. Scouts are smart and rugged, smaller than the other breeds, but persevering and hardy. The steeds known as finest are a rare breed. Even the richest breeders own only a handful each, and few Marukani will part with a horse of this prized bloodline for anything less than a king's ransom, though these horses are sometimes given as a gift to an honored guest or ally.

Creature	Physical Att. Str/Dex/Stam	Willpower	Health	Attack Spd/Acc/Dmg	Dodge/Soak	Abilities
Rider	4/2/3	4	-0x/-1x2/ -2x2/-4/1	Bite: 6/3/1L Kick: 3/2/6B	4/0L/3B	Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 2
Dray	6/2/4	3	-0x/-1x2/ -2x4/-4/1	Bite: 5/3/1L Kick: 2/2/6B	3/0L/4B	Athletics 4, Brawl 1, Dodge 1
Swift	4/3/4	3	-0x/-1x2/ -2x2/-4/1	Bite: 5/4/1L Kick: 2/2/6B	6/0L/4B	Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 3
Battler	6/3/5	5	-0x2/-1x2/ -2x3/-4/1	Bite: 6/6/2L Kick: 3/6/8L	6/2L/5B	Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3 Intimidation 3
Scout	4/2/5	6	-0x2/-1x2/ -2x/-4/1	Bite: 6/4/2L Kick: 3/4/6B	4/1L/5B	Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Stealth 1
Finest	6/3/5	5	-0x2/-1x3/ -2x3/-4/1	Bite: 7/6/2L Kick: 4/6/8L	6/2L/5B	Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3 Intimidation 3, Stealth 1

NOTE: The scout, finest, and rider all have Wits 4 and Perception 3. The finest has an Intelligence of 2, as do 40 percent of riders. All Marukan horses cost ••• except battle mounts, which cost ••••, and finest, which cannot normally be purchased (but would cost •••• - •••••, depending on the situation).

Kingdoms on the rivers often have a third source of income: tolls extracted from up- or downriver traffic. Castles on the river's edge, equipped with ballistae, archers, and occasional First Age weapons, ensure that most passing vessels will stop to be searched and assessed. Some captains try to sail past these castles — a maneuver that often simply requires sailing as close to the far edge of the river as possible, since both banks are rarely under the same kingdom's control. A certain number succeed in dodging the tolls, but most simply pay the fees and pass the costs along to consumers farther upriver.

These tolls are an ongoing source of strife for the Hundred Kingdoms. Countries upriver of the toll not only face higher prices for imported goods, but are less likely to be able to extract their own tolls. If trading vessels must suffer too many tax stops, merchants will either cease sailing upriver or take action to deal with the problem. More than once, coalitions of independent merchants have hired mercenaries to level the river-keeps of a kingdom that got too greedy, and on occasion the Guild itself intervenes directly in such matters.

Slaving and banditry are common pastimes in the Hundred Kingdoms, particularly in the southern reaches. Some savants estimate that a quarter of the slaves traded in the Confederation originate in the Hundred Kingdoms; others call that estimate woefully low.

MILITARY AFFAIRS

Despite their simmering disputes, the Hundred Kingdoms rarely engage in total war. They support no massed, disciplined militaries except in times of genuine crisis, and own few First Age weapons except for one or two in the hands of a Dragon-Blooded champion. Instead, the locals rely on palace guards and do most of their fighting by proxy, through mercenaries and hired champions.

This region's warriors and champions are more valuable alive than dead, because no one can ransom a dead man. Likewise, the various kingdoms engage in little outright war; the objective of most raids is to seize slaves. The Hundred Kingdoms fight according to a strict set of unwritten laws — among them that war is a summer occupation, and it ceases in time for harvest. Troops in the area will abandon a siege and go home if a conflict bumps up against the season for taking in the rice and barley.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR

THE HUNDRED KINGDOMS

Dawn:	River Pirate, Mercenary, Champion
Zenith:	Local Warlord, Slaver
Twilight:	Cloistered Sorcerer, Steward
Night:	Freelance Spy, Highwayman, Assassin
Eclipse:	Local Merchant, Professional Casanova

THE ARCZECKHI BARBARIANS

The Arczeckhi are bandy-legged, vicious brutes living near the edge of the Great Eastern Forest. They pose a constant nuisance and occasional real threat to the people of Thorns, the Hundred Kingdoms and Marukan. Squat and powerfully built, their bodies are covered with a thick mat of curly hair. Their eyes glow a dull cherry red, and their ears sport cat-like tufts. They have sharp pointed teeth, and their hands end in three powerful fingers tipped with horny black claws.

The Arczeckhi do not ride, although some of their chiefs use war chariots in battle. They prefer short stabbing swords, spears, axes and maces as weapons, although many also carry self bows or hatchets. Most wear some sort of armor, often scattered pieces scavenged from the bodies of fallen foes.

The shamans of the Arczeckhi worship dark spirits, and their rituals often revolve around cannibalism or human sacrifice. Interactions between tribes, and between members of the same tribe, are governed by a complex set of taboos, laws, rituals and customs. The bedrock of Arczeckhi society is the belief that anyone strong enough can get away with anything. The Arczeckhi see outsiders as little more than hindrances or prey; the more philosophically inclined among these brutes regard non-Arczeckhi as less than completely real. This primitive form of solipsism often surprises the few outsiders who live long enough to discuss such matters with the barbarians.

The Wyld Barbarian and Wyld Shaman templates on pages 281-282 of the Exalted main rulebook can be used to represent Arczeckhi, except that the average Arczeckhi has an Appearance of •. All Arczeckhi have the Poxes of Eye Color [glowing red, can see in the dark] and Fur [thick black mats, 1L/1B]. Because of their deformed legs, they cannot ride with any proficiency. Arczeckhi can never earn more than Ride •, and pay double the regular experience cost to do so. The rest of their afflictions are cosmetic, and have no real game effect (other than making them look only vaguely human). Arczeckhi are interfertile with humans, but the result is always an Arczeckhi, although often one more intelligent and charismatic than the average.

FARHOLD

Far up the Maruto River lies the Iron Forest and the town of Farhold. A rugged outpost of stone and logs carved from the woodland, Farhold was settled a little over a century ago by explorers who found the tall, strong local trees perfect for a myriad of purposes. The town has since





THE TEN TRIBES

Before the loggers came to the Iron Forest, Elder Oak favored the tribes of humans who lived in the area. With 10 major septs and several smaller offshoots, the Ten Tribes have lived in the Iron Forest for as long as anyone could remember. Their earliest tales speak of a great journey from a far-off nation to the East, but educated folk gave these little credence.

Unrelated to the Forest People, the Ten Tribes are ground-dwellers, though not afraid of heights. Before the loggers came, the tribes courted the favor of Elder Oak, who made their hunts successful and their people prosperous. To appease him, they cleared deadfalls, fought fires, and acted as good companions to the forest. But Elder Oak saw that the foresters, properly trained, would make even better companions, and so he abandoned the tribes.

Some of the tribes have reacted by trying to emulate the loggers' behavior, in the hopes of regaining Elder Oak's trust. These tribes cut down deadwood and float it downriver, hoping that whatever spirit receives it will speak favorably for them with Elder Oak. Some tribesmen have even gone so far as to join the loggers in an attempt to learn the rituals they use to charm the Elder Oak.

Other groups, like the Red-Scar, reason that if Elder Oak has no choice, he will come back to the Ten Tribes, and so are attempting to exterminate or drive off the loggers. These varying approaches have done nothing to alleviate traditional rivalries between the tribes—violence between septs is at an all-time high. In this new environment, the established pattern of conflict between tribes, which stressed counting coup, honorable conduct and war for warriors only, has been largely forgotten as the tribes fight for survival.

grown to almost 8,000 inhabitants, much of that expansion occurring in the last few years. The walls of the town and the lumber encampments that surround it are mostly built of stout ironwood logs, tall and heavy enough to withstand barbarian assault and the depredations of the huge beasts that roam the Eastern forests.

Forestry is this region's primary industry. The loggers cut mostly oak and ash, along with some redwood and ironwood. Trees are felled and trimmed, then floated down the Maruto to Farhold. The loggers see themselves as shepherds of their forest—they cull the old and dying trees and thin out the full-grown, healthy ones so that the forest doesn't choke itself. Those who harvest wood in the Iron Forest are also careful to plant three seedlings for every tree taken, lest Elder Oak pay them a visit one night.

Elder Oak is a Grandfather Tree, and a powerful one. The forests surrounding Farhold are his, and he does his

best to protect them from disease and fire. Elder Oak and the loggers have come to an understanding; so long as the foresters do not clear-cut or otherwise savage the woodland, Elder Oak will not leave their unrecognizable remains outside the gates of Farhold for the guards to find.

Because the loggers generally abide by this compact (especially after the first few examples), Elder Oak rewards them with trees he has encouraged to grow straight and true, free of parasites and disease. Those who offend him invariably find that the trees they cut are blighted, or that the wood twists and warps, making the tree useless for anything but firewood or pulp. Clear-cutters and those irresponsible with fire receive a visit from Elder Oak, and locals believe that the less said about the aftermath of such visits, the better.

Greater threats by far than Elder Oak are the barbarian tribes that live in the area, particularly the Red-Scar tribe. The Red-Scar takes its name from its practice of smearing red berry dyes into tribal markings. This group is the most aggressive of the Ten Tribes, but young warriors from many other tribes also attack the loggers, with or without the approval of their leaders. Raids against logging camps and teams are common, and most loggers have become as skilled at felling men as timber with their sharp axes. Even so, logging teams lose more members to barbarian assaults than to accidents. Many teams have taken to bringing packs of dogs and tame wolves to help protect them from ambushes and sneak attacks by stealthy natives armed with ironwood spears and arrows.

The danger has not deterred adventurers of more civilized lands from journeying into these forests. Some are fortune-seekers hoping to make contact with the Forest People who live beyond the Ten Tribes. Others are scholars who come to catalog the thousands of unique plant and animal species in the area around Farhold. Most such expeditions travel with a heavily armed escort and a number of experienced guides, but some never return despite these precautions.

In spite of their woodcraft and ferocity, the Ten Tribes have had little real success in their campaign against the foresters. They have driven up the costs of doing business and killed many loggers over the last century or so, but remain too disorganized and undisciplined to actually drive the foresters out. Recently, however, this situation has begun to change. Several logging camps have been destroyed, and the deep-toned wooden drums that carry news between the Ten Tribes speak of changes in the forest. The drums say that the Red-Scar tribe has a new leader who carries immense power. A few Red-Scar tribesmen captured by the loggers claimed that their new chief can take the shape of beasts, and that she can hurl thunderbolts that strike men dead. These same captives were freed in a daring raid hours after being taken. Whatever the truth, this mysterious leader is clearly behind the Red-Scar tribe's newfound success, and the loggers are offering a substantial bounty for her head.

These recent events have also prompted the owners and managers of the various logging firms to hire mercenaries to help protect the camps and end the attacks, but so far they have met with little success. Consequently, the cost of timber is likely to rise sharply in the near future.

IRONWOOD

Ironwood is a short, straight-trunked deciduous tree that grows only in certain regions of the East. Its dense, tough wood burns slowly and gives off noxious smoke, but makes excellent charcoal. However, its true value lies in its amazing strength. Ironwood makes an excellent material for weapon hilts, siege engines, and structural beams for houses.

In the hands of barbarian craftsmen who grew up working it, ironwood can take on almost mystical qualities. A special mixture of herbs and simple sorcery can further strengthen ironwood, giving it the resilience and strength of steel. Tribe members sometimes sell these weapons, but the secret of the hardening treatment lies in the hands of the tribal wise men, and they have never revealed it.

Game Effects: Most bladed weapons made of ironwood subtract 1 point from their Damage and Defense values, and are prone to damage and breakage. These penalties do not apply to ironwood weapons subjected to the ritual treatment for hardening.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR FARHOLD

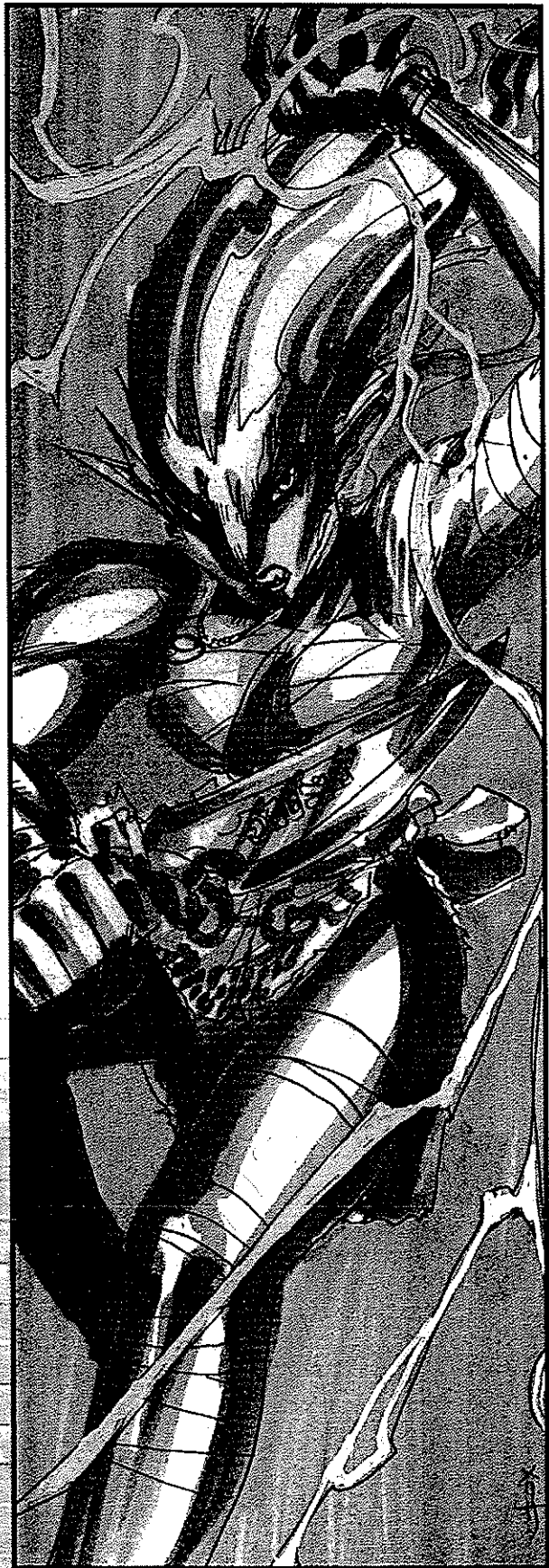
- Dawn:** Red-Scar Warrior, Lumberjack
- Zenith:** Tribal Shaman, Dog Handler
- Twilight:** Herbalist, Sawmill Technician
- Night:** Tribal Scout, Topper, Hunter of Tribesmen
- Eclipse:** Emissary to Loggers, Lumber Merchant

DENANDSOR

The First Age city of Denandsor, now known as the Empty City, lies some two weeks' journey from Great Forks, near the southern edge of the Scavenger Lands, in the small country of Melekin.

During the First Age, Denandsor was renowned as a center of learning and trade. The city's merchant kings sponsored trade missions throughout Creation, and the Library of Denandsor contained ample materials for most types of research. Today, no merchants exist to ply their wares in the city's marketplaces, and no blacksmiths pour iron in its foundries. No children play in its gardens, no warriors stand watch on its walls. Not a soul, alive or dead, walks the streets of Denandsor for long. Once a thriving metropolis, it has become a city without even ghosts.

No one alive knows what catastrophe befell the inhabitants of Denandsor. Fragmentary records from elsewhere suggest that the city's Dragon-Blooded governor attempted to use a powerful artifact to protect his domain from the Contagion, but no records more specific have survived.



Whatever the cause of the city's fall, no one willingly stays in it for more than a few hours or a day at most. Those forced to stay longer are either driven into a catatonic state by the experience or simply disappear, never to be seen again. A sense of unease and dread creeps over all who walk Denandsor's streets, growing stronger the longer a person remains in the city, until it finally blossoms into an overwhelming urge to be elsewhere. The feeling fades over time, but extended exposure to the city heightens the reaction and shortens the time it takes to succumb.

Scavengers from Melekin occasionally enter the city seeking relics and treasures. Because only the strongest-willed can stay for long, large sections of Denandsor have yet to be explored, and so treasure-hunting expeditions often meet with success. The outskirts and areas adjacent to major roads have been thoroughly plundered, but many areas off the main roads remain largely untouched. The dangers of exploring them include magical defenses, complex mechanical traps

and the occasional still-functional guardian automaton, as well as more mundane problems such as finding a way into a building with handle-less doors and whose imperishable materials are extremely resistant to tools.

THE TREASURES OF DENANDSOR

Although many scavengers have made off with minor trinkets and artifacts over the centuries, no major stores of antiquities have been discovered in Denandsor. The city has not yet been plundered for arsenals of First Age weapons, and explorers have found no signs of the fabled vaults of the merchant-kings or the city's fabulous library. No signs of the library's contents, or of certain treasures known to have been in Denandsor at the beginning of the Great Contagion, have yet been uncovered outside the city, either. Most people believe these treasures were hidden somewhere in Denandsor, buried deep in a catacomb or locked away in a high tower.

WALKING THROUGH DENANDSOR

A character in this eerie city will start to feel a vague desire to be elsewhere after a number of hours equal to half her Willpower, rounded down. When this period has elapsed, reduce the character's temporary and permanent Willpower by one each, and refigure the period of time for the character's new Willpower. When the character's permanent or temporary Willpower reaches zero, or if the character fails any Willpower check involving terror or fear (for instance, the roll to resist the Dawn Caste anima effect), the character is seized with an irresistible urge to leave the city by as direct a route as she can manage. Unintelligent creatures are unaffected by Denandsor's aura, but any intelligent creature, including familiars and spirits, will suffer from the city's air of terror. This miasma of fear and despair makes Denandsor one of the most spiritually void places in Creation.

A fleeing character can spend a point of her temporary Willpower to resist the urge for one turn, but the character still suffers a penalty of -2 to all actions. Characters restrained from flight will gain a derangement every minute, until they accumulate derangements equal to their original permanent Willpower points. When this happens, the character becomes catatonic.

Once a character has left Denandsor, she quickly regains the permanent Willpower lost to the city's effect. Characters regain 1 point of permanent Willpower for every hour they spend outside the city, but a character's temporary Willpower remains drained until she regains it naturally. Keep in mind that the effects of the city's aura are cumulative. If an affected

character returns to Denandsor after losing Willpower to the fear it engenders, her permanent and temporary Willpower values immediately drop by a number of points equal to the largest number of points she lost to the aura previously. This automatic drop is reduced by 1 point for every (12 months - 1 month per point of the character's normal permanent Willpower score) that the character remains outside Denandsor.

An unExalted character who gains temporary derangements from the aura loses them at the rate of one per year. Exalted characters shed derangements at the rate of one per month. UnExalted characters generally do not recover from aura-induced catatonia, but Exalted characters generally emerge in (12 months - 1 month per point of the character's normal permanent Willpower score).

For Example: Scar has a Willpower of 10. After 5 hours in the city, her Willpower drops to 9. Four hours later (after a total of 9 hours in the city), it drops to 8. Four hours after that (after thirteen hours of exposure), it drops to 7, and so forth. She breaks and succumbs to panic after 25 hours of exposure, assuming she hasn't left the city voluntarily or failed a fear-related Willpower check.

Assuming she stays until she breaks, her Willpower returns at the rate of 1 point per hour, but for the next (12 - her original 10 Willpower, for a total of 2) months, her temporary and permanent Willpower will drop by 10 whenever she enters the city. For two months after that, they'll drop by 9, and so on, until 20 months later she will be able to enter the city without losing points of temporary and permanent Willpower.

The greatest treasure of Denandsor, of course, is the city itself. Any individual who found a way to lift the enchantment that prevents the city's habitation would essentially own perhaps the last remaining intact First Age city. The sorcerer Bagrash Köl once claimed that he understood Denandsor's secrets, and certainly a number of outcaste and Sidereal magicians have tried to break its eerie spell over the years, but none have yet managed to undo the enchantment. Many Dragon-Blooded and Sidereal sorcerers have attempted this feat without success, but none of them had access to Solar Circle magic.

DENANDSOR'S GUARDIANS

Before the Contagion, Denandsor guaranteed its internal peace with sophisticated automatons made of brass and silver. Resembling giant suits of super-heavy plate armor, the automatons made loyal, if somewhat unimaginative, protectors. They served as police and as escorts for nobles or valued merchants. The majority of them remained in the city after its fall, and a good number are still functional.

Most of these so-called guardians are quiescent when first discovered, resting in a kind of mechanical hibernation. If left unmolested, and if the area they are assigned to guard is likewise undisturbed, the guardian normally stays in torpor. If characters deface or break into buildings, engage in acts of violence or enter Denandsor clad for war and remain in a guardian's area for more than a few minutes, the guardians will come to life. Their specific reactions depend on the last set of instructions they received; some will attack immediately, while others attempt to discern what the intruders are doing or to apprehend them. Attacking a guardian or failing to obey its instructions brings swift retaliation.

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Virtues: Not applicable to a mechanical system. Utterly loyal to Denandsor natives.

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3 (Battering Punches +2), Dodge 2, Melee 3, Archery 2 (Dart Launcher +1), Resistance 2, Linguistics 1

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Fist: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 8L Defense 5

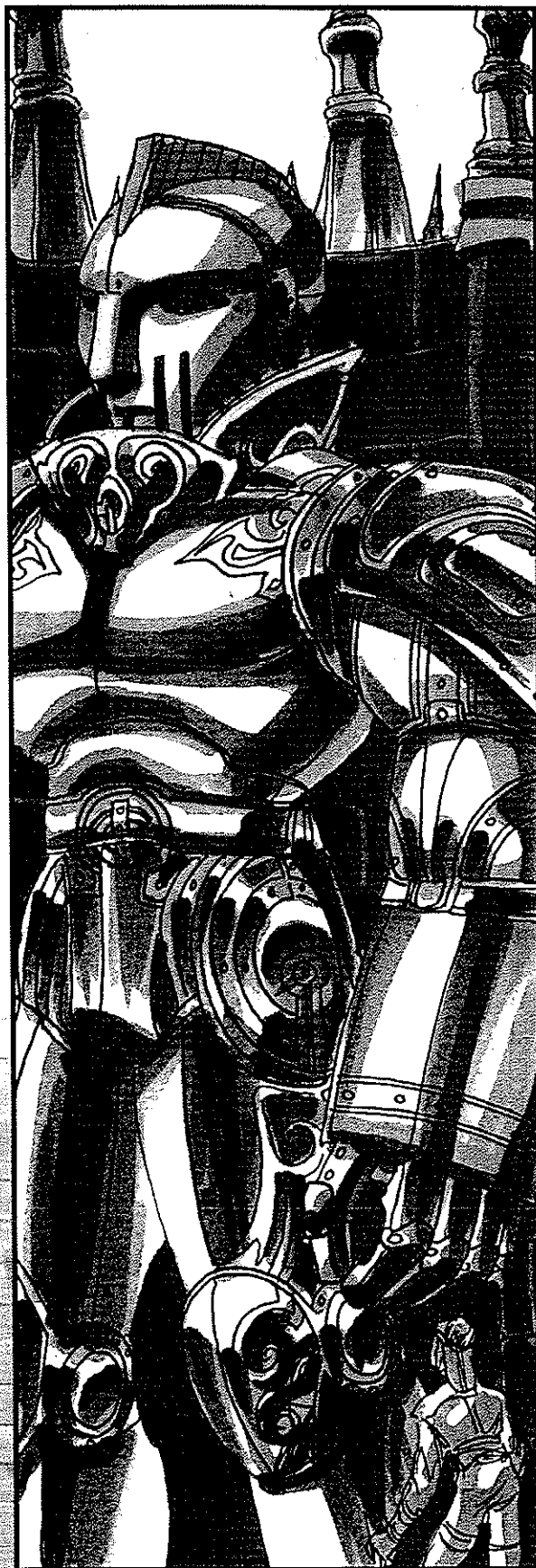
Great Sword: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 13L Defense 5

Dart Launcher: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 10L (Range 25, Rate 2, Ammo 10)

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 15B/19B (Durable Construction)

Willpower: 10 **Health Levels:** -0 (x5)/-1 (x6)/-2 (x3)/-4 (x2)/Incap

Other Notes: Guardian automata are mechanical creatures, and therefore not subject to fear, poison, mind control, disease or any other effect that relies on a sentient or living target in a conventional sense.



Denandsor

CALIN

Calin joined the Confederation of Rivers a little over three hundred years ago, and was the last area of the Scavenger Lands to associate itself with rebellion against the Realm. Prior to joining, Calin was a tributary and nominal ally of the Realm, whose leaders abandoned those obligations when it became clear that the Deliberative was a sham. Some in the Confederation claim Calin only joined for the economic benefits, rather than for high-minded political reasons. Certainly, Calin is anything but a progressive state; its traditional-minded government consists of a weak shogun and a number of powerful daimyos, with little voice for anyone not in the highest ranks of the wealthy and powerful.

Occupying the promontory north of the Yanaze, the country of Calin stretches north to Marin Bay, and east as far as the River of Tears and Nexus. The countryside is dominated by rolling hills and small streams, pastures and managed forests. Mid-sized walled towns and fortified manors strung together by carefully maintained cobblestone or gravel roads are the predominant markers of civilization. Though travelers are advised to go armed in Calin, as in any of the Scavenger Lands, this small shogunate is safer than many other parts of the world, except perhaps the Blessed Isle.

GOVERNMENT

Politically, Calin is an elected monarchy. The shogun serves for life, and the citizens of Calin elect a new one on her death — “citizens” meaning the members of the fourteen noble houses, those wealthy or politically savvy enough to acquire a writ of citizenship, and certain high-ranking military and administrative officials. Legally, anyone can be elected monarch, but no shogun outside the fourteen noble houses has ever been chosen.

Calin’s civil and military bureaucracies are similarly based around the house system. The kingdom is divided into patronages, granted by the shogun to whomever she wishes, save her own family. The royal family keeps the patronages they owned upon the shogun’s accession, but may not receive new ones except under very specific circumstances. A patronage gives the recipient family almost complete control over its governmental fiefdom, unless the shogun for some reason revokes it. Along with immense responsibility, patronages also confer great power, and usually substantial wealth. More importantly, they allow the house in question to perpetuate the system of favors and debts that eventually allows them to elevate one of their number to the throne.

The patronage system prompts near-constant jockeying for position and influence within the shogun’s court. Members of the various houses, influential merchants and tradesmen hoping for lucrative contracts and tax breaks, Guildmasters, sorcerers, Dragon-Blooded outcastes, and others all vie for the attention of the monarch, other members of the court, or the people in general.

Known by some as the Great Game, this web of intrigue and deception has existed for centuries, and woe betide the foreigner who stumbles into the Game unawares. Blackmail, espionage, the dueling code, manipulation of the legal system and even assassination are all tools in the Game, but they must be used subtly. To have one’s schemes discovered can lead to the shaming of one’s house, the loss of a patronage, death for the offender or even exile for the offender’s entire noble house, all at the whim of the monarch.

ECONOMY


Although some of the neverending court intrigue and plotting involves society’s lower levels, most of Calin’s three-quarters of a million people remain untouched by the Game. Trade, much of it in locally grown grain, is the lifeblood of the Calinti; Port Calin has a much friendlier reputation than Lookshy, and is a favorite stop for merchants and traders heading further south or north who don’t want to travel far up the Yanaze to reach Nexus. The Guild maintains a huge Guildhouse in Port Calin, as well as large numbers of warehouses and slave dens, and many independent merchants make frequent stops here as well. Much of Port Calin exists to support these merchants; the port has docks, slips and wainwrights, sailmakers and harness-makers, metalworkers to make fittings and fasteners, barrelwrights, bankers, horse-and-yeddim traders and map-makers in abundance, as well as innkeepers, restaurateurs and tavern and brothel owners.

Port Calin and the nearby towns of Goodharbor and Riversend are also known for their fishing industries. Huge

EXILES IN DISHONOR

Only a handful of noble houses have been exiled over the centuries. Most have fled to far off lands, or to exile in Nexus or on the Blessed Isle. Only one is rumored to have stayed in Calin. Over a century ago, the Gilan family assassinated the shogun, a member of the Kejihno family, after a dispute over which family had actually won the election. The ringleaders were executed, and the Gilan family ordered exiled. Before the order could be enforced, however, House Gilan’s thirty-seven members disappeared without a trace.

Since then, the Kejihno family has suffered from bouts of misfortune — bad trade deals, ruinous marriages, poor investments, and the sudden and inexplicable deaths of favored scions. Some claim that the Gilan family is still in the area and secretly working against the Kejihno. Others point out that this run of bad luck is not much worse than setbacks suffered by other families, and call the idea of a conspiracy hundreds of years old by a politically destitute noble family ludicrous.



hauls of sea trout, bass, swordfish, lobster, crab and other saltwater delicacies come into these ports every night, to be served locally, salted and sold to merchants, or iced down and brought by fast galley to nearby cities like Nexus and Sijan. The best fishing boats and galleys carry huge First Age ice chests on board. These chests can magnify the effects of even a small chunk of ice, making it last ten times as long as five times the coldness of ordinary ice. As time goes by, however, these chests are growing less and less common.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR PORT CALIN

Dawn: Duelist, Ambitious Young Officer
Zenith: Lame Noble, Immaculate Monk
Twilight: Fixer, Shipwright,
Lending-House Accountant
Night: Poisoner, Spy, Blackmailer
Eclipse: Assayer, Negotiator

MOUNT METAGALAPA

To the east and north of Great Forks lies a small mountain range, utterly unremarkable except that one of its mountains floats several hundred feet in the air. Savants theorize that the mountain was ripped from its earthly bonds by some sorcery of the Fair Folk during the Great Contagion.

Those on the mountain who survived its skyward journey included miners at work in the tunnels deep within it, shepherds on the hillsides, a Seventh Legion patrol and the bandits they were hunting, a small walled school, and assorted wanderers and madmen. After the magical cataclysm, these disparate folk found themselves isolated from the rest of the world and surrounded by strange beings of the Wyld: bestial birdmen that raided their flocks and seized whoever or whatever they found.

The survivors banded together, setting aside prior disputes in the face of the man-eating birdmen and the harsh climate. The few Dragon-Blooded used their sorceries to befriend or enslave birdmen tribes for use as servants and soldiers, and started a breeding project to create beasts of burden from the region's large hawks and condors. The people retained some contact with the surface world—messages could be exchanged by heliograph, loads of refined ore could be dropped from great heights, and the birdmen could sometimes be convinced to carry small cargoes back up from the ground below. Occasionally, a Dragon-Blooded would make the risky journey up or down from the floating mountain, which its inhabitants named Metagalapa. The population of the hovering rock grew slowly, constrained by scarce food. Few valleys were large enough to graze livestock, let alone grow grain, although the Metagalapans have had some success with fungiculture in played-out mine tunnels.

About a century ago, the mountain's isolation came to an end. Metagalapan warriors, riding great hawks produced by their successful breeding program, swooped into towns and cities all around the mountain range. They bartered for whatever they could, exchanging fine steel and copper, brass

and tin for grain, cotton, medicines, and slaves. What they could not get by trade, they took. First their birdmen would smash a town's defenses, with hawkriders acting as leaders and shock troops. With an area secured, raiders would fly in on giant rocs, load up the huge birds with the needed goods, and return to Metagalapa. Nearby towns soon learned that those who put up only a token resistance were spared total depredation, but any who fought back were stripped to the last valuable. Towns that traded with the hawkriders were left alone. Despite this latter policy, the hawkriders have few friends on the ground. Some in the region, especially the Haltan, are determined to do whatever they can to punish the hawkriders for their attacks. Many among the Haltan are also interested in the Metagalapans' hawks and rocs, which they regard as an attractive prize.

Metagalapa's human population numbers about 4,600, led by a Council of Riders elected from active and retired hawkriders. The birdman population is perhaps twice that, with about two-thirds acting as servants of the Hawk People. The rest remain wild, raiding Metagalapa and the groundsiders, which does not help relations with Metagalapa's neighbors. Most Metagalapans are involved in keeping the mines running; only about a hundred serve as hawkriders. The hawkriders are the elite of this small society; below them are the condor-riding merchants and traders, who number less than fifty. Perhaps a thousand birdmen are trained for combat, while the remainder work in the mines or at other menial tasks.

THE HAWKS OF METAGALAPA

The infamous hawks of Metagalapa are truly monsters of the species, with wingspans up to 30 feet and claws that can cut a man in half. A product of careful breeding and sorcery,

THE FUTURE OF THE HAWK PEOPLE

The hawkriders and condor merchants are divided into two camps. The current majority believes they should continue taking only what they need from the groundsiders, trading whenever possible. A smaller but vocal faction, composed mostly of younger hawkriders and a handful of merchants, advocate taking what they want from the "inferior" groundsiders without regard for their concerns.

Whichever side wins this debate, the Metagalapans will soon find that they are not nearly as immune to groundsider attack as they believe. Over the next five years, the Haltan gather strength, making alliances with various spirits of the Air and training strix to attack birdmen and their nests. The Haltan strike, savaging Metagalapa before the unprepared Hawk People can respond. While the hawkriders and condor merchants survive, along with some of their birdman allies, Metagalapa is no longer safe from assault.





these warhawks have long lifespans, often outliving their riders — which is fortunate, because they suffer from low fertility and only a handful of hatchlings survive each year. Despite their massive size, the hawks can carry only a small load, normally no more than 150 pounds. Their endurance is also low; while a warhawk with rider can reach speeds of 120 miles an hour in a combat dive, most can only travel 50-75 miles in a day, and can only sustain that rate for a few days.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Intelligence 1, Perception 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Awareness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Presence 3 (Intimidation +2).

Attack:

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 9L Defense 6
 Beak: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L Defense 3
 Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 2L/4B (Hide)
 Willpower: 4 Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
 Other Notes: Control Rating 4 to ride (5 if not trained and willing).

GREAT ROCs

Dwarfing their smaller cousins, the great rocs of Metagalapa approach the size of the Hybroc. With a wingspan of 50 feet or more, a great roc can carry a sizable load or a howdah on its back. Products of powerful sorcery, the rocs are extremely long-lived — none have yet died of old age — but they are also virtually infertile. The successful hatching of a baby roc is cause for celebration among the Metagalapans. Only a few dozen of these massive beasts exist, and the Metagalapans are loath to

HAWKRIDERS

The men and women who ride the giant hawks are selected at an early age and raised with their mounts, forming bonds of friendship and loyalty that last a lifetime. Normally, hawkriders are short and slight of build, but quick-witted and keen of eye. Hawkriders too old or injured to ride into battle help manage the day-to-day government of Metagalapa, or train the next generation of riders.

In battle, hawkriders remain on their warhawks as long as possible, attacking from above with javelins or bows; they only enter into hand-to-hand combat after expending their ammunition. Even when they must stoop to melee fighting, they use long lances to keep their opponents at arms' length for as long as possible. Hawkriders most commonly use their swords in duels or when grounded. This style of combat is safer for the Metagalapans, and more importantly, for their precious warhawks. Most hawkriders wear only a buff jacket and helmet for protection, although some wear a breastplate instead.

risk them in battle. They prefer to bring the rocs in long after the fighting is over.

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6, Intelligence 1, Perception 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Awareness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Presence 5 (Intimidation +2)

Attack:

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 5 Damage 10L Defense 4
 Beak: Speed 5 Accuracy 4 Damage 11L Defense 2
 Dodge Pool: 4 Soak: 4L/6B (Hide)
 Willpower: 3 Health Levels: -0x2/-1x3/-2x3/-4/Incap
 Other Notes: Control Rating 3 to ride (5 if not trained and willing).

BIRDMEN

Birdmen have powerful foot claws prehensile enough to grasp and throw javelins with surprising accuracy; broad wings instead of arms, with a small grasping hand at the midpoint of the wing; and large eyes that can pick out a sparrow miles away. Their voices croak and rattle, but are still understandable. Excited birdmen typically forget to speak and instead revert to their native language, an unintelligible squawking to most mortal ears.

Birdmen prefer javelins and throwing darts over most other weapons. Barbarian birdmen use javelins if they can get them, or else throw rocks. The largest birdmen can carry small foes short distances and drop them, if they succeed with a Grab attack.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

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

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Thrown 3, Dodge 3, Brawl 3, Endurance 3 (Long Flights +1), Melee 1, Stealth 2, Socialize 1, Survival 2

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Claw: Speed 3 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L Defense 5
 Javelin (Thrown): Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 7L
 Javelin (Hand-to-Hand): Speed 7 Accuracy 6 Damage 6L Defense 5
 Dodge Pool: 7 Soak: 3L/4B (Hide)

Willpower: 3 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Other Notes: Birdmen are almost always Extras. Some civilized birdmen are quite intelligent and even personable, but these are the exception (and will normally not be Extras).

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR METAGALAPA

- Dawn: Hawkriders
- Zenith: Miner, Sun Worshipper
- Twilight: Metalsmith, Sorcerer
- Night: Birdman Hunter, Spy
- Eclipse: Roc-riding Merchant, Hawkriders



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CHAPTER SIX NEXUS



This fabled city is known by many names: some reverential, some derogatory, some simply indulgent. Nexus has been called the City of a Million Lice, the River Harlot's Legs, the Threshold Jewel, the Bright Sword and the City of Black Snow. The names bestowed on it come not only from its location and major trades, but from its undeniable character. Nexus is a city of wonders, riches, mystery, danger, crime and vice. As its name suggests, it is the crossroads of the world. Every good or service imaginable can be found in Nexus if the price is right, and people of every nation go there to seek fortune and fame, making it the most diverse place in Creation. To see a street or market in Nexus is to see the rainbow of humankind laid out for the observing. Men and women of every skin color, culture and appearance imaginable throng the city's byways on endless errands of commerce, romance, crime and passion.

The amazing diversity of Nexus does not mark it as a city of harmony. If anything, the kaleidoscope of different groups gives the average individual more faces to distrust. The often-violent interplay of cultures is an ever-present backdrop of Nexus life. Though the constant clash of expectations and preconceptions is a matter for jest to long-time residents, their jokes are gallows humor. Not a day goes by that an innocent hand gesture, figure of speech or habit proves to be a killing insult to some observer.

To this mix is added the constant conflicts over wealth and status that bedevil humankind regardless of

race or nation. The street criers and news-sellers never lack for scandal — a vain plutocrat severs the fingers of a Guildsman whose rings challenged the beauty of the plutocrat's own, a greedy artisan sells kettles whose alloy is tainted with quicksilver in order to increase her own profits, a jealous kitchen-worker is found to have befouled his employer's food with excrement. Ever jealous and quick to anger, humanity is no different in Nexus than anywhere else in the world, and grudges fester here as they do everywhere else.

Along with all its undeniable wickedness, Nexus offers an enormous capacity for comfort and pleasure. Human nature makes an idyllic existence impossible in the long run, but there are times when life in Nexus comes close. Wealthy residents or visitors can attain temporary bliss through a vast cornucopia of available drugs and sexual gratifications, but even the poorest skiff-poler can lose himself for a few hours with some hand-rolled hashish cigarettes or the warmth of a whore's embrace. Public festivals and sporting events abound for those with the leisure to attend them. Street performers wander the market stalls, and singers frequent the ale halls and public houses. Luxury seems to be everywhere in Nexus, awaiting those with the means to take it, or available at discount rates for those who can't afford the best.

While many outside it see Nexus as defined by the dichotomy of rich and poor, nothing could be further

NEXUS PRIDE

The citizens of Nexus are a peculiar lot. Many of them divide the world into two groups: those who live in Nexus and the poor unfortunates who do not. For these proud inhabitants, Nexus is the center of Creation. Some even place their beloved city above the natural order — the day begins not with sunrise, but when the Emissary wakes in the morning and passes his waste into the River of Tears. This attitude is reflected in one of the city's more obscure laws. It is illegal for anyone not on the Council of Entities to relieve himself directly into the river — he must instead use a receptacle, which he may then empty into the water.

from the truth. From its seat in the Scavenger Lands, Nexus is without a doubt the most cosmopolitan and well-rounded population center in the world, in addition to being the largest city in the East, and certainly the world's richest. Only when viewed through preconceptions of social extremes does Nexus become a city sharply divided between want and comfort. When viewed as the sum of its parts, Nexus emerges as embodying the entire spectrum between vast wealth and grinding poverty. Its treasures wait for those able to take them — above all else, Nexus is a city of opportunity.

Those who define Nexus by its tremendously rich and bitterly poor are correct only in the literal sense that the city holds some of the richest and poorest individuals in Creation. Certainly the magistrates of the ruling Council of Entities possess fabulous wealth, while whole generations live and die on the river shores without seeing food that isn't someone else's leavings. Likewise, the madams of the richest harlotries live like nobles from the income of their establishments, while many a miserable streetwalker lives and works amid the poverty of the Nighthammer district without any hope of betterment.

But Nexus also contains citizens of every means between these extremes. Indeed, its vibrancy depends on the existence of a vast and prospering middle class who have every hope of improving their already comfortable lot. In a world often inhabited only by the powerful and the impotent, Nexus has evolved through its acceptance of those who are neither.

THE FLOODING HILLS OF HOLLOW

Geographically, Nexus stands on the remains of the First Realm city of Hollow, which resembled modern Nexus in its purpose and affluence. This history has greatly benefited Nexus, as almost no year passes without someone unearthing a previously unknown section of the old city.

THE SALAMANDERS' TALE

One day, three salamanders converged at a slimy spot where three great rivers crossed each other. At the center of the patch of slime, someone had dropped a shining garnet. Each salamander regarded the tiny gem, and its fellow salamanders, with curiosity and wariness. One salamander had no mouth. Another had no eyes. The last was as deaf as a stone.

"Well, brothers," said the blind salamander, "it seems we are at an impasse. Whatever shall we do?" The blind salamander, though he could not see the gem, knew it must be important, for he could hear the deaf salamander's gasps of wonder and the excited shuffling of the mute.

The dumb salamander, unwilling to reason with his fellows but eager for the gem, pounced on it, only to be thrashed into submission by the tails of the other two.

"Not so fast, brother," pronounced the deaf salamander. "If you wish, you may work in exchange for the garnet, but you cannot take it for your own." Defeated, the mute salamander curled up and made a burrow in the slime.

Trusting in his own caginess, the blind salamander then succumbed to greed, and tried to grab the gem. Conjuring dreams of wealth and decadence in his mind's eye, he never saw the third salamander raise his tail to strike his stubborn head.

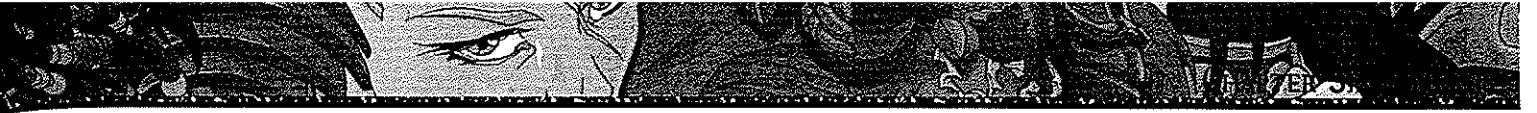
With the blind and speechless salamanders out of the way, the deaf salamander approached the gem and proclaimed, "This is mine." Even if the other two could come up with an opposing argument between them, the deaf salamander wouldn't be able to hear it.

To this day, the deaf salamander sleeps curled around the garnet. The blind salamander walks in oblivious circles around him. The mute salamander merely stares at the gem from his own muddy nest, far away.

Savants generally agree that Hollow was home to as many as ten times the current population of Nexus during the First Age, and that the infrastructure on which Nexus was built is only a small portion of the original area.

NEARBY RIVERS

Nexus lies at the confluence of three great rivers: the Yellow and the Gray, which join in the middle of the city to form the third, the Yanaze River. Just as water from these rivers flows downhill, so does the price of property and the quality of the civil engineering — as it surely must have during the heyday of Hollow. The mansions of the Council of Entities sit atop the crests of the highest



hills, free from the rats, disease, flooding and stink of life near the water. Below the villas and manors of the ruling class, the city sprawls inward.

The rivers provide Nexus with its vitality. They are the routes by which commerce travels, they provide the water necessary to sustain life, and they flood periodically, washing rich soil to the low flood-plain farmlands that surround the city. Although clean during flood-time, the river water is typically tainted by ore-smelting byproducts generated in the city's vast ironmongery, the daily wastes of almost a million citizens, discarded trash and the occasional corpse. This last is a serious offense, and the Council investigates it closely — hungry ghosts are a real problem for the entire city.

In addition to the ironmongers' wastes, the rivers also serve as dumping grounds for the detritus of people who have nowhere else to dispose of it. Alchemical wastes, spoiled food, raw sewage and vast troves of incriminating evidence are just part of the items regularly dumped into the fast-moving waters. Drinking from or swimming in stretches of the Yanaze immediately downstream of the city is an invitation to disease. Just past the city's edge, the water sometimes turns black with sludge. Families who fetch river water boil it three times to separate the waste from the drinkable portions: "once for what you can see in it, once for what you can't, and one last time to keep the spirits happy."

Ironically, this vile water vastly enriches the farmland below the city. The lands downriver from Nexus not only receive a yearly covering of floodborne silt, but also nutrients from the gallons of decomposed waste. While the vegetables and grains grown near Nexus may taste dubious and prove remarkably resistant to chewing, they are nonetheless healthy specimens. More palatable foodstuffs grown in less hostile environments are consumed by those who can afford better fare than the "swamp rice" for which Nexus is infamous. In addition to rice, quinoa also thrives in the floodplains, and cabbages and many varieties of squash are cultivated in the hills above.

Flooding is a fact of life in this city bounded by three major rivers. At any given time, part of Nexus lies underwater, and those forced to live in the flooded areas simply cope. The spring rains invariably bring a large flood, and periods of heavy precipitation in the city or upstream of it often push the Yanaze River over its banks as well.

The higher parts of the city are safe from inundation, but the lower regions suffer from periodic flooding. Some parts of the city literally never dry out. In certain metal-working factories, a brackish pool of water from the last flood always remains in the lower cellars. Some smiths have turned this curse into a blessing, building cisterns that fill during floods and using the collected water to cool their forges. In many places, squatters fashion crude raft homes out of planks and logs they find floating in the

rivers; they then float these rafts on the rivers or on stagnant inland ponds. Water wheels and mills are common, and the rivers do much of the work in Nexus.

FLOOD CONTROL

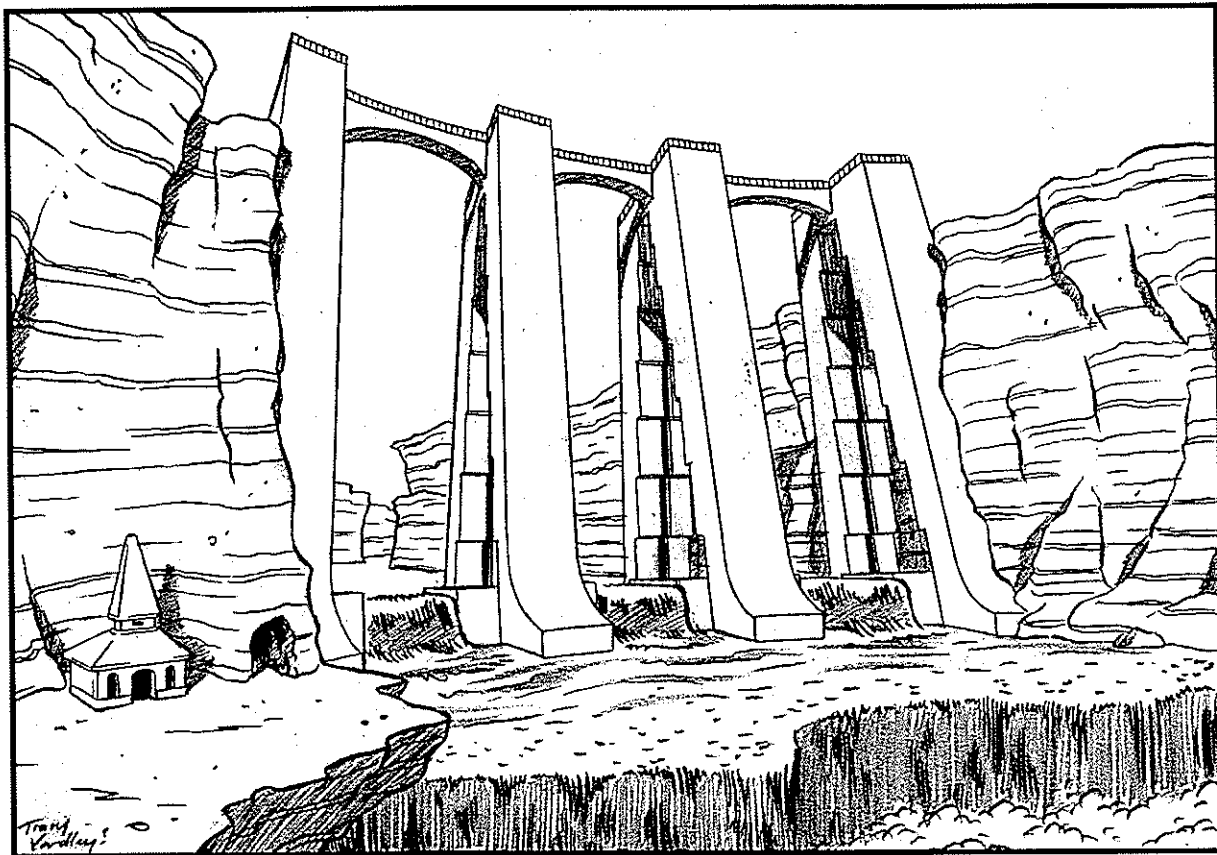
Flood-control devices of a sort exist on all three waterways, though none are currently functioning. The Gray River, the narrowest of the three, was once spanned by a conventional dam about thirty miles upstream. Although the dam collapsed long ago, the residents of Nexus never repaired it, being unable to mount the titanic effort needed to rebuild it with their inadequate tools and materials. The broken dam stands to this day, slowly eroding at the sides and base where it originally collapsed. Fragments of the collapsed segment still lie in the riverbed below the fallen dam: huge, cracked, immovably thick sheets of First Age stone almost impossible to dent with modern tools.

A more complex dam stands across the Yellow River. To all appearances, this dam is retractable, with seven segments each nestled inside the prior one, all made of the same imperishable stone that built the Gray River dam. Even at its low point, the River of Tears flows uninhibited over the lowest partition of this segmented dam; the series of sluiceways and graduated stone grooves cut into the valley walls suggest that the dam, when extended to its full height, may climb to almost 600 feet.

Unfortunately, the workings of the dam's control system have long been forgotten. No one has ever seen the dam at its full height because no one knows how to activate the mechanism that raises it. Nexus residents and the Council of Entities are reluctant to experiment — if they somehow managed to extend the dam, there is no guarantee that they could retract it again. Choking the Yellow River is a sure way to cripple access to Nexus and destroy the region's income. Savants and civil engineers with greater understanding of such matters also warn that reducing the Yellow River's flow to the city could have untold effects on the aqueducts and waterways by which so much of the city gets its water. A small force of Confederation troops garrisons the area around the dam to prevent anyone from attempting to activate it.

The third "dam", far down the Yanaze River where it meets the River of Tears, is something of an anomaly. For decades, none of the residents of Nexus had an inkling that a flood-control mechanism existed in this river. Given their ignorance of Hollow's original population, they simply assumed that the river was left unharnessed. That belief changed when Balak the Stone, an Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded, visited the city of Nexus and felt a psychic reaction to the stone that made up the device beneath the waters of the Gray River. He formed a small exploratory party, seeking the source of the material that was calling to him. At the bottom of the





Yanaze's bed, Balak and his team found an immense jade glyph. Neither Balak nor any of the savants he consulted could determine its function or meaning.

The jade had been rendered imperishable by First Age magics, and was almost as hard as the adamant chisel Balak used to remove his sample. After several years of research into the strange symbol, it was finally determined to be an unknown type of river-control system whose operating mechanism was beyond current comprehension. Like the mechanism that activates the dam on the Yellow River, the sigil was a curiosity or at most a remote peril. Unaffected by the inconclusive outcome of the discovery, Nexus returned to its daily business with a shrug and has since left the mysterious jade symbol alone.

THE HILLS

The hills that make up and surround Nexus are another important part of the geography of the City of Steel and Ash. At the peak of the slopes stand the most luxurious residences of the Bastion district and the upper reaches of the Cinnabar district. Here, upstream from the shit and slag dumped into the lower reaches of the rivers, the water is relatively clean and the air untainted.

The farther down the hills one goes, the harsher the environment becomes. "Nexus snow," a mixture of coal ash from city forges and tiny bits of gangue from the ore, clogs the air of the lower districts, choking children and

settling in old men's beards. Drafts of the stuff, known as "ash devils," sometimes whip through the streets, tormenting urchins, staining the lesser marketplaces and occasionally even smothering weak fires and forges. Luckily, talismans against these malignant spirits are relatively easy to come by.

As the sun sets each night, yellow smog belched forth by the forges mingles with fog brought in by the cooling rivers, creating a soupy, noxious stench known as "poor man's breath." Heavier than the air, this stinking cloud slowly rolls downhill, dissipating only in the morning light. It burns off in strong sunlight, leaving those affected groggy at the brink of the new day, only to return again the next night.

TRANSIT

The steep hillsides make the transport of goods to their higher reaches difficult. Anyone can walk from her home in Firewander to the master's kitchens up in the Sentinels Hill district, but a metalsmith trying to take a bundle of copper cloak-clasps from Nighthammer to the armorer's barracks in Cinnabar would find the task impossible unless the smith was wealthy enough to own his own pack animal.

To aid travel between areas of the city, the residents of Nexus adapted the ancient ratchet-and-pulley transit system that once existed in Hollow. Beneath the streets of



THE THIRD DAM

Unknown to the people of Nexus, the third river-control device is still functional and constantly operating. Everyone knows that the River of Tears is a sorcerous prodigy, carrying water from the surface of one ocean to another through a mechanism that is no longer clearly understood. Part of that magic comes from the stone glyph.

The glyph is composed of an extremely pure jade coaxed from the heart of the Imperial Mountain over a millennium ago by the Celestial Exalted at the height of their power, assisted by the Mountain Folk. Thereafter, the stone was carved and enchanted for 201 nights. It was built to harness and focus the ambient Essence of the area, and formed the far end of the circuit of power that would impel the River of Tears to begin its course. The symbol itself, a square within a circle, was broken into more than a thousand pieces, which were brought to the banks of the Gray River and arranged at the bottom by enslaved demons.

The device works by drawing power from the earth beneath it, using that power to shape the region's ambient Essence and geomancy to encourage the river in its course. The magic behind the device is virtually immeasurable; it can manipulate the shape and destiny of a large enough portion of Creation to allow a river to flow from one sea to another. If it were damaged, it might go wildly out of control and do terrible damage to the fabric of Creation itself, or perhaps just crack and release enough Essence to instantly vaporize the hundreds of millions of gallons of water in the River of Tears and the Yanaze.

the highest hills, wage-earners paid by the Guild and the Council turn enormous axles, which rotate gears that connect to pulleys on the surface. The pulleys themselves are linked by heavy cable, to which carts of all sizes have been attached. The largest of the pulley-cars in the system, which accesses both the Big and Little markets via Wander Street, can carry as much as a half-ton each, and run from the Nexus district through Sentinels Hill to Firewander.

The going is slow by cable car, but it takes far less work to load and unload a car than to carry such a load up the hill by hand. Rides cost variable amounts based on how much is being transported and how far. At each entrance station, a Guild-employed linkman aids riders with their parcels (unless they are transporting large or heavy loads, which are the traveler's responsibility) and hands them a ticket, color-coded to the district in which they board. When

THE UNDERCITY

Not all of Nexus exists on the surface. Built of and on ruins as it is, Nexus extends several levels below the surface in many places. Some homes are accessible only by tunnels that originate almost a half-mile from the dwellings they reach. Entire alleys and streets exist beneath the surface city, their once-usable entrances and exits sealed off and now accessible only by stairs specially altered for the purpose. Many parts of the Nighthammer and Firewander districts (see below) have been converted in this manner, and communities of "sunless folk" live their whole lives below ground, buying their food from undercity merchants or sending their children to market above ground.

they exit, the next district's agent assesses their fee, which is paid directly to the Council and the Guild.

Inefficient though they are, for some the pulley-cars are the only option. Problems include expense — the city maintains only three pulley-car routes because of the massive manpower required to collect fees, turn the axles, and police the routes for fare dodgers and would-be "highwaymen" intent on stealing precious cargo. Still, commerce must take place, and the long cars may carry as many as three dozen people at a time, packed to capacity with travelers bound for homes and shops in the better districts.

The pulley-cars are not the only transportation system in Nexus. Poor vendors may own their own rickshaw-style carts, and dogs pull light wagons, but carhorse- and yeddim-drawn heavy wagons dominate the streets.

RIVER TRAVEL

The smaller rivers and waterways that wind through Nexus — giving the city such descriptions as, "a few thousand homes connected by a few million bridges, canals, and streets" — bear a similar variety of vehicles, including skiffs, gondolas, people-barges and flat-bottomed pole-boats. Just a few years ago, Nexus also boasted a water-pulley not unlike its pulley-car system, but abandoned the device because the water-wheels that powered it virtually automatically made stopping impossible, repairs expensive and difficult, and injuries to riders and maintenance workers frequent. The vast water-sludge, with its huge wheels at the end of the Gray River, still exists, but the cables and gondolas have been removed. Children sometimes recklessly splash down the flume on makeshift rafts, but few do it twice after facing the problem of how to quit when they've had enough. More than one thief has also hurled himself into the waterway in an attempt to evade pursuit.



OLD HOLLOW

The old city of Hollow provides more than a historical influence on modern-day Nexus. The ancient city is the skeleton upon which the new city was built. In addition, a small group of savants and magicians believe that Hollow may have left Nexus a less pleasant legacy.

According to fragmentary First Realm documents available for translation, the old city's name may not have come from its geographic situation, but from a word considered archaic in the late First Age. The word *hullufv* means "creeping sickness" or "wasting illness." The revisionist scholars believe that the old city may have been predisposed to outbreaks of disease for reasons never fully understood, and that contemporaries saw as a property of the area, just as some tropical regions are prone to bleeding fevers.

Recently, rumors have cropped up all over in support of this idea. Tales of plague-spirits haunting the streets of Nexus in the wee hours have begun to circulate, even if the city's mercenary companies have never seen anything to substantiate them. Minor epidemics have swept through Nighthammer and Firewander, prompting a spike in sales by apothecaries of herbal remedies and soothing balms. Many Nexus residents are carrying as many talismans and charms as they can to ward off illness. Blessings to further ensure good health have become the order of the day, along with increased supplications to the spirits and more business for legitimate sorcerers. A few outlandish suspicions even tie the legacy of *hullufv* to the Contagion, suggesting that the first outbreaks of that unparalleled catastrophe occurred in Nexus.

Beyond the rumors, some recently discovered hard evidence appears to substantiate the notion that Hollow was a plague-city, or at least that it once harbored a significant population of the ill and dying. Excavations in Firewander to repair that neighborhood's sewer service have unearthed many long-buried areas. With each new catacomb and

vault, the excavation teams uncover more and more charnel houses and even mass tombs. The remains in these sepulchers share striking similarities: blighted bones, bent bodies, and twisted features.

One persistent rumor concerns a morbid nursery rhyme supposedly carved into the crypt of a very young child from a family of means. The words, "Fall away, ashes, fall away, skin," made the rounds as a supposed omen of impending misfortune. Since then, the phrase has become common graffiti throughout the city. One day last month, it appeared in chalk on the front of every building on Carter Street. A few stories from the underground neighborhoods concern children who heard what they thought were other children playing, chanting the rhyme for a jumping game, but they discovered the areas empty when they investigated.

Many citizens are bracing themselves for a period of public terror, as typically happens when a powerful evil spirit finds its way into the city. Most such spiritual invasions end quickly, often in showy confrontations with the Emissary. Others have stretched on for some time. Advocates of the *hullufv* theory are skeptical, arguing that the legacy of Hollow is more than just another charnel horror. A spirit capable of that much damage during the early Shogunate would be a menace of incredible power in the modern day, not just another hungry ghost.

Not surprisingly, espousing the *hullufv* theory is considered treason by the Council of Entities. The council has retained small groups of mercenaries to suppress stories of the sick city, beating the rumors into submission and sending them underground. In any event, much of the damage has been done. Almost every citizen of Nexus is familiar with the *hullufv* theory, even if she doesn't believe in it. Regardless of how hard the council and its enforcers crack down, they cannot quiet the songs the children sing in the streets or the tales residents tell each other in the beer-halls.

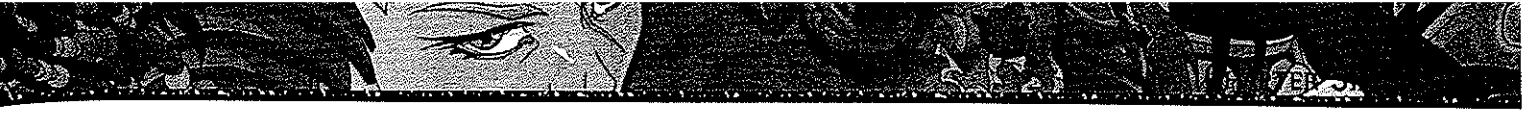
ARCHITECTURE

Nexus today would be vastly different if not for Hollow. The soaring towers and arching bridges of Nexus are impossible to duplicate, given the current state of Realm and Threshold technology. Nexus has not simply crawled into the discarded shell of a previous culture, however. Over its many long years of life, Nexus has taken the abandoned streets of Hollow and made them its own.

Modern Nexus is a hodgepodge of previously existing edifices and new buildings built to suit the needs of the

current population. The city takes great pride in its look, which integrates the grandeur of the First Realm with the here-and-now needs of its people. Outsiders often regard the polyglot architecture of Nexus as a blight, viewing its builders as a group of Threshold rustics out of their league (the prevailing opinion in much of the Realm) or as highbrow pretenders (a sentiment occasionally expressed in the smaller Threshold territories).

The old city is indeed a wonder, and none alive today can even guess how its builders accomplished their architectural feats. Some of the buildings, including the office



block in which the Guild makes its headquarters and the tower in which the Council of Entities convenes, climb majestically into the air, many stories tall. Delicate open-air bridges span the gaps between the tallest buildings; these glorious buttresses seem not so much to hold the buildings aloft as to tether them to the earth, preventing them from drifting upward to the heavens. Aqueducts and integrated wells provide water and a sense of balance, with the city taking nourishment from the life they bring.

The still-extant surfaces of the old streets are smooth and even. The buildings are in geomantic harmony with their surroundings, and feel almost as if they grew from the soil exactly where their functions mattered the most. None of the old city is blighted by the rough-hewn, ugly buildings that so often afflict less polished rural communities. From the pearly marble of the Council's tower and the Guild's bungalows to the simple, elegant lines of the converted tenements in Nighthammer, Nexus is a wonder and a beauty. Even in districts made ugly by crime, pollution, overcrowding and stench, the architecture beneath all the vulgarity still pleases the eye. This feature gave rise to a traveler's proverb that warns visitors to Nexus, "Don't look so hard at the buildings that you miss the cutthroats slitting your purse-strings."

Other marvels of the old city include features that craftsmen can no longer duplicate, like heavy granite doors that slide effortlessly into the walls on mortised tracks that have remained lubricated for untold years. Many of the most prestigious homes feature running water. Hallways uniquely suit the buildings of which they are a part — long, low tunnels in kitchens reduce the intensity of odors that reach the rest of the building, while passages to atriums and solariums slowly broaden and brighten with sunlight as one approaches their end. The poet Doriunder wrote that, "Nexus appears to have grown from the ground in one solid, seamless shape; the men who lived there were surely such marvels that they merely carved away everything that wasn't a city."

Doriunder's word "seamless" is literally true in many cases. The old city of Nexus does not appear to have been assembled or built, but to have organically evolved. Even floor tiles and ceiling joists, when inspected closely, are still clearly part of the vast structure of the whole city, with the gaps between tiles and arches that support the walls etched into the stone for cosmetic purposes.

If the old city is a model of beautiful design, the new residents' additions to it are examples of supreme attention to function. Modern society might not be able to match the old city's architectural marvels, but it does not lack for other, more mundane innovations. The pulley-car system is one example, built into the access tunnels and air circulation ducts of older buildings and also onto the streets. Similar ratchet-and-gear systems allow access by elevator to the many levels of the old city towers. Smelting

technology is, of course, more advanced in Nexus than in any other place in the Threshold, with the tremendous heat necessary for ironworking generated by simple but effective blast furnaces built into the walls of the smelting plants. On rainy days, entire portions of the city can be covered under blanched yeddin-skin "umbrellas," which are suspended by tethers and raised by immense, open fires that lift the skins with their rising warm air.

The new culture of Nexus occasionally alters the old city to suit its needs rather than simply adding on to it. The underground neighborhoods, while occasionally converted from newly discovered chambers of the old city, are mostly excavated by Nexus residents. While less dazzling than the old-city architecture, they are supremely functional, making allowances for air movement, chimneys, waste elimination and access. It is said that one need never see the sunlight in Nexus unless one so desires; one can take the tunnels to wherever one wishes to go.

The extensive docks on the rivers are another testament to the ingenuity of the people of Nexus. While foundations for docks existed as part of the old city, they were universally too large to accommodate the shipping barges by which Nexus does the majority of its commerce. Not long after Nexus was repopulated in the wake of the Contagion, new and fully functional docks had been built, enabling Nexus to grow into the force it is today.

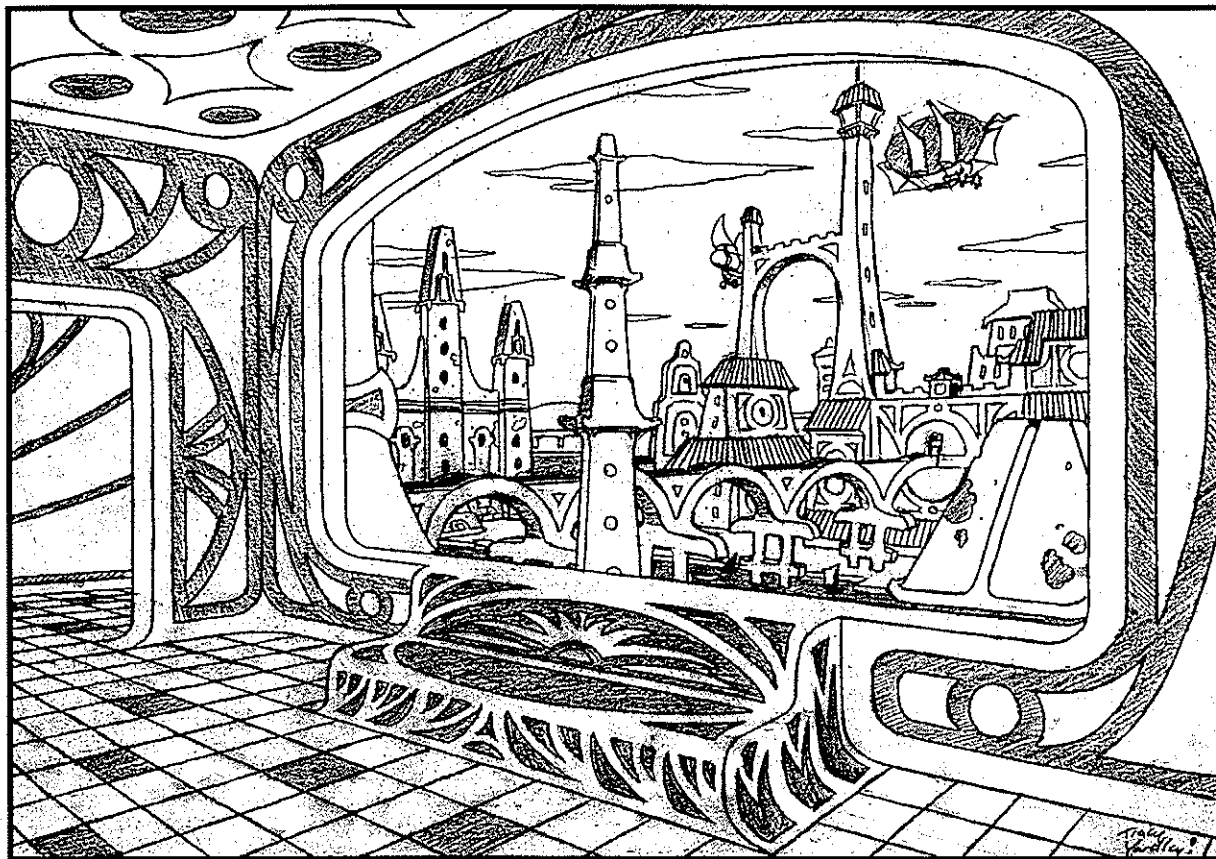
In the end, Nexus is nothing so much as a symbiosis of new and old. Ancient architecture thrives with its new additions, creating a contrasting but complementary city.

THE POWERS THAT BE

Nexus is without a doubt the largest city in the East, home to almost one million inhabitants. It straddles three vital routes of river trade, serves as the meeting point for people throughout the Threshold, and is in many respects looked to by its peers as a sterling model of a thriving metropolis. This vast collection of humanity suffers its share of problems, however. Among its seemingly endless strings of descriptive appellations are several that evoke the city's dark side: the City of Murderers, the Kingdom of Thieves and the Den of Vices. Wide-eyed rustics fear the streets of the Nexus for their myriad dangers, and even the savviest Guild procurer knows that whatever power he wields by day, his throat is no more resistant to slitting than a common whore's.

To make daily life and business possible while allowing maximum flexibility for profit, a tenuous balance exists between the Council of Entities and the Guild. The Council of Entities eschews any formal role as a legal body, because the Guild prefers decentralized political power in order to maximize its own profits. By legitimizing the government to protect them, the Guild risks giving that same government power it may later wield against the Guild. In order to draw the Guild and the countless other





businessmen who make the city their home, the council keeps its hand as loose as possible. Instead, it relies on a powerful set of unwritten social rules to prevent total chaos. The result is a place without formal law, but with a strong sense of order. Nexus is anarchy in the literal sense that it has no formal government. Politically, however, it is more stable than many regions of the Realm.

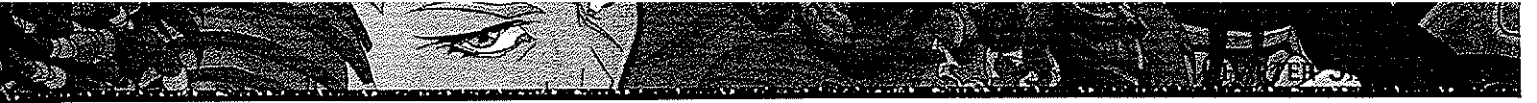
NEXUS SOCIAL LAW

While no strictly codified set of laws governs Nexus, only the most naive observer would believe that the city operates without social obligations and rules. For example, even though he has committed no legal infraction, a thief will face consequences if he is caught stealing a loaf of bread from a baker's stall in the market. The lack of formal law as often as not works against a would-be "criminal," who eventually finds himself facing his erstwhile victims on their terms; no legal procedure exists to protect him from their wrath. For years, vengeance killing has been the third most frequent cause of death in Nexus, behind old age and other forms of murder. That reality helps to give Nexus its deadly reputation throughout the Threshold and the Realm — more people die from murder or revenge killings than from disease or accident. Despite its physical beauty and vitality, Nexus is seen as a savage city, denigrated by "civilized" visitors as a hellish barbarian dressed to dine at the Empress' table.

The social and political order in Nexus melds the desires of the city's preeminent factions, the Council of Entities and the Guild. Respect for existing social rules arises from the fact that both factions have the power to make others heed their desires. Countless histories record the terrible deaths of those who resisted the council and the Emissary; back when Nexus was a loose collective of gang territories and despots' domains, many of their petty leaders succumbed to curses and supernatural deaths. As the city calmed and stabilized, the Guild exerted its influence to protect commercial interests and spread beyond the boundaries of the city. Over time, the desires of these various powerful groups became *de facto* laws, public policies in all but name. This process has served Nexus well, allowing it to function and prosper without the overhead and bureaucracy typical of a more traditional government.

THE COUNCIL OF ENTITIES

The Council of Entities maintains social order with public decrees, which can take any form. If a councilor says it, so shall it be done. Despite the council's resistance to acting like a government, it keeps a record of decrees for its own satisfaction. Because decrees can change at any moment, the council prefers a written record of its position. If one councilor declares it illegal to eat the tough meat of the *thabi* fish from the River of Tears during daylight hours, and another councilor later declares that only such fish



may be eaten during daylight hours, the council and citizenry need to know exactly what is the current state of *thabi* consumption.

A small staff of clerks recognized by the council constantly watches over and adds to the ongoing archive of council decrees, known as the Incunabulum. Any councilor who makes a decree immediately dispatches a servant to the seventh floor of Council Tower in the Nexus District, who appends her words to the city's social contract. If the new decree contradicts an older one, the older item is stricken from the record. To take care of this vital job, the staff of the Incunabulum keeps its own minor attendants on retainer. At any given point, the Incunabulum may be as long as a thousand handwritten pages; each new addition or change means that the maintenance staff must pore over the existing canon for contradictions and nullifications.

The practical result of such "suggestive government" is inscrutable to Nexus outsiders. To those who enter its precincts for the first time, Nexus seems like a madhouse, a chaotic city peopled by those who inherently understand local custom because "that's how it's always been." Even those who move to Nexus at some point in their lives rarely adapt completely. Native residents explain away the difference by claiming that, because they were born in Nexus, they have always felt the city's pulse. Foreigners often find Nexus a frightening place in which death and wealth walk hand-in-hand, conversing in a strange and intimate language. Habit and tradition blend seamlessly into "law," with the unaccustomed left added in the wake.

Regardless of whether it is called a government or merely a collection of interested individuals, the Council of Entities sets most public policy in Nexus. Its structure is unique in the Threshold, however, and so deserves special mention.



THE INCUNABULUM

The document that records the proclamations of the Council of Entities, despite the council's insistence to the contrary, is practically a collection of laws. The only thing preventing the council's decrees from becoming formal laws is the absence of a system by which decrees may be appealed and their applications tried. Decrees cannot be argued, interpreted or tested. To the council and to those who observe the decrees, they are simply the city's way of life. Much as no law governs the death of a man who wanders out of town and is killed by a wolf, no law governs the death of a man who crosses the street without whispering a verse of reverence to the Councilor of the Sun.

The Incunabulum is actually two separate listings of decrees. A body of six proclamations, known as the Dogma, enumerates the core principles upon which Nexus society is built. Not even the councilors may change the Dogma, unless all are in agreement. A few of the Incunabulum staff have occasionally hinted that the Emissary may change the Dogma, but such an act has never occurred in the history of Nexus.

The lesser proclamations of the Council of Entities, known as the Civilities and running a few hundred times lengthier than the Dogma, lists all the other "rules" of Nexus. These may be changed or overturned at any time by any council member, which often happens many times over the course of a single day.

THE DOGMA

- No taxes shall be raised, save by the council.
- None shall obstruct trade.
- None shall bring an army into Nexus.
- No one shall commit wanton violence.
- None may falsely claim the council's name or sanction.
- None shall harbor a fugitive from the council's wrath.

EXAMPLES OF THE CIVILITIES

- None shall touch the blood of another man with their bare flesh.
- When one takes a meal, he must never do so in darkness.
- No song or prose may invoke the name or office of the Councilor of Midnight.
- The woman called Harmonious Jade is hereby exiled from Nexus and must depart by sunset tomorrow, never to return.
- The sweeping of floors in shops or market stalls is to be done only during hours when no commerce is scheduled to take place.
- A child may not be sold after his third year of life.
- Striking a harlot is akin to breaking an artisan's wares without purchasing them.

Metrinke,

I hope this letter finds you healthy, well and proud. Since I left the home where you and your mother reside, I have found much to do in the company of the Council of Entities and its many assistants. The title I have earned is that of District Assayer – a sort of glorified tax collector, but I also count population, record decrees and even carry communications from one councilor to another. I'm having a grand time of it, but Oren says that's just because I haven't had time to grow cynical yet. He doesn't understand how I could have grown up so optimistic. "Hasn't Nexus threatened you to the point of bitterness, boy?" he always asks me. I'm sorry, but I see it like you do, Metrinke: it's a place of wonder.

It was with a wide-eyed thrill that I bade farewell to the home you so graciously offered me. I knew my future with the council would bring me many exciting experiences, and it has. As a friend, I wanted to share them with you. As something of a "big brother" to you, I wanted to let you know a small part of what goes on here. Perhaps, in a few years when you are old enough, I can put in a good word for you and you can join me among the ranks of the council's representatives.

The councilors themselves are a colorful lot. Nine figures make up the council, and each may address his peers whenever a matter of import comes to his attention. I am told that the number is nine so that, should the council not see eye to eye on a matter, they may cast lots, and the idea that receives the most lots in its favor becomes policy. It is a marvelous system in theory, but I admit I have never seen this method used. Each of the councilors is so devoted to duty that he rarely troubles his fellows with the issues in his heart, but resolves them for his peers and for Nexus as a whole.

The most important figure in the Council of Entities is the Emissary, but you already knew that. He's very old – probably over a thousand years, if what I've heard in the dormitories can be believed. Everyone says he's the same Emissary who chased the thieves and renegade barons out of Nexus in the early days, but can that be true? I am beginning to suspect so, wild though such a tale is. I'll leave you to decide for yourself. I'll probably never be sure, though, because he invariably wears his silver mask whenever I've seen him. He values his privacy very much.

Of the nine councilors, I like Thalevar the best. His title is August Councilor of the Eclipse, and he is the most charismatic – which says a great deal! He is also the most knowledgeable councilor with regard to diplomacy and the waterways, so you can see he is a very important man in Nexus. His hair and beard are a shining platinum color, and he always has a broad smile on his face. His aides are outgoing, always scurrying this way and that, making sure the docks are kept open for trade.

Ephiselle is the Midnight Queen. She joined the council only recently, after I became District Assayer. The last man to hold her title (actually, he was the Councilor of Midnight) became a star and rose into the night sky. At least, that's what Narmi told me, and he's usually pretty well informed about these things. They said the old councilor left his blood behind, because when he became a night star, he had no need for it any longer. Anyway, Ephiselle is a little distant. She tends to matters of physical dexterity and things that the council calls secret. I've never carried a message to her or from her; I've only seen her at the tower where the council meets. She is quite beautiful, but she often covers her face with a veil of spider-silk. I don't mean to gossip, but she and Thalevar are often at odds, or so it seems.

Brueghel is the Evening Master, very knowledgeable and wise, counting among his duties the keeping of secrets and the spread of new ideas. He ordered the building of the library at the foot of Sentinels Hill. As smart as he is, though, he scares me a bit. He is terribly secular, deeply concerned with his own comfort and desires. I have heard dreadful things about him that I fear to repeat: that he can take the form of water and that he eats only flesh. The other councilors often look to him despite his youth, when he offers his opinions, the others consider them with seriousness.

The Midday Husband, Hayle, is a robust man. He's a foot taller than me, even! His hair is always a wild tangle and he jokes far more than any other councilor, though he can be serious when the need arises. He is the patron of artistic endeavors, and also concerned with the health of the citizenry. Among other things, Hayle is responsible for the public sewage system and for making sure that none of the river's runoff poisons the wells — not exactly a glamorous duty, but surely an important one. He has a potent Charm that keeps sickness at bay and prevents the underground plague-spreaders from making anyone in the city sick.

The Dawn Sergeant is Pellicia, Hayle's sister. She keeps an eye on the city's mercenary interests, as well as making sure it can muster a formidable force when necessary. She's not much to look at in comparison to Ephiselle, though she's certainly prettier than your sister, the toad-licker! (Please tell her I said hello, thank you.) Pellicia handles the sword, spear and ax better than any man I've ever seen, and she talks about new weapon designs that she'd like a few of the mercenaries to try. We'll see how well they do. None of the other councilors seem to trust Pellicia very much — probably because they wish they were half as tough as she is.

Gen is the Minister of Ways, and a very spiritual man. Everything in him seems attuned to the world beyond ours. He embodies serenity. I've seen him talking when no one else was in the room, and he can do fanciful things like floating his walking stick through the air to his hand or making his quill write by itself. He rides to the Council Tower in a carriage drawn by nothing and he walks without moving his legs. Whenever Gen looks at me, he scowls, but I like him anyway. I think it's because I respect him so much; he has never been selfish or rude.

Udelph is the Doctor. If a matter affects the people of the city, Udelph speaks for them. He is very stern, his short stature and wide body remind me of a wall that stands against the other councilors if they try to do something that he believes will harm ordinary folk. He is also very pragmatic, sometimes ruthlessly so. He once agreed to burn down a tenement block infested by evil spirits, even though there were who knows how many people still inside. But he knew it had to be done, or the rest of Nexus would have suffered. A few innocent families died that night, but many more would have perished if the council hadn't done what was necessary.

Lady Kratz is the Astrologer; she consults the stars and lets the other councilors know what prophecies they have in store. She has the largest entourage of any of the councilors, including a few sorcerers. She also has the most ostentatious habits: once, I had to peel a thousand and one grapes in preparation for one of her visits. Another time, she ordered her chair to be lifted by four porters and turned throughout the course of a council meeting so that she could always face the moon. Some suspect her of being in league with darkness, but I think her ways are the ways of nature, once nature moves beyond the surface of the world. (Yes, I've been studying a bit of astrology, too!)

I have to run now, Metrinke. I'm due to prepare a decree that must be brought to the Council Tower. I have no idea what the Doctor's going to say, but it will surely be important.

Tell your mother and sister hello, and keep well.

Love,

Diebald

Diebald,

I'm sorry I couldn't deliver this letter. I want to the address you told me, but no one matching the description you gave me lived there. It was an old man and his blind daughter, and they told me that whoever lived there before them had been murdered by a robber. The new tenants had rented the flat from the Lay Estates Council, which means that the house must have reverted to Nexus ownership after a lapse in lease. I checked the transfer of deed in the district hall, and the property did revert to Nexus after the death of the owner. What's curious is that, as an estate, the flat should have become the property of the next of kin — but the two next of kin were also listed among the deceased.

I apologize for being the one to break the bad news.

With condolences,

Nell

Below the councilors themselves, the Council of Entities becomes quite informal, which lends some legitimacy to their claim that they are not a government. Of the million-odd residents of Nexus, perhaps five percent serve as agents of the council in one capacity or another. These include legions of aides and assistants, clerks and record-keepers, librarians and assayers, and buyers of goods. Spies and paid informants account for another five percent of the population, though there is some overlap; many assayers and other minor officials moonlight as council snoops, and others inform on their professional peers.

STORYTELLERS: THE COUNCIL

We haven't provided any hard-and-fast Traits for members of the Council of Entities, for multiple reasons. First, any story involving the Council of Entities should focus on them as personalities to help or hinder the players' characters rather than as mechanical obstacles to be overcome. Second, we have no idea what sort of power level your story involves. For the most part, the council members should probably exceed the capabilities of the players' characters in each councilor's area of specialty. If your story involves epic characters, they may be superior to the council, but you and your players should decide where to draw that line.

Storytellers are encouraged to focus on the individual personalities and quirks of the Council of Entities. Stories can stem from their desires, their schemes, their vendettas and their treacheries. They may even serve as a *deus ex machina*, should a story need it, as they form a diverse crowd. Only as a last resort or as the crux of a specific story should characters ever come to blows with the council.

These civil servants distinguish Nexus from so many other Scavenger Lands and Threshold states. Agents of the Council of Entities have no official rank — everyone assumes they are operating with the council's blessings, and each operation they undertake gets as wide a berth as if a councilor himself was doing it.

Needless to say, this state of affairs leaves considerable room for corruption in the hands of those who are less than scrupulous about using the power of their office. Councilors and their aides barter favors and information, such as determining when a new block of tenements will be open for public application. Aides who can arrange for visiting mercenary companies to stay at certain inns receive free lodging. Time with harlots is free for a clerk who lets the madam know when a new ship is due in town so that she can send her whores to meet the sailors at the dock. More so than in any other city, a "shadow economy" of backscratching, favors and considerations has evolved in Nexus.

A popular joke has it that the richest men in Nexus have no money, but instead possess enough clout to live off the handshakes they make every day for "help" from council agents. Bribes and money are only the most visible forms of corruption — the real payoff lies in influence peddling and the exchange of favors.

Unlike officials and government agents elsewhere, whose duties tend to be more strictly defined, the council's aides take on almost any imaginable duty that the council deems necessary. A district assayer may collect taxes, serve as a census-taker, transport messages between councilors, serve decrees (either publicly or to the keepers of the Incunabulum) or anything else the council wants. An aide's days are always chaotic, but rarely dull.

The council does use specific expertise for certain tasks; if taxes must be collected or a decree committed to paper, they will likely request an assayer to complete the first job and a scribe the second. In certain situations, however, an aide may find herself assigned to tasks far outside her usual purview. If, for example, the council suspects that a scribe is parlaying insider information for favors elsewhere (not that anyone in Nexus sees anything explicitly wrong with that), they may give the scribe's responsibilities to someone else. Likewise, if an assayer is suspected of "forgetting" a few too many coins in his pockets (but not so many that the council orders him slain or exiled), the assayer may find himself inspecting blast furnaces after dark in Firewinder.

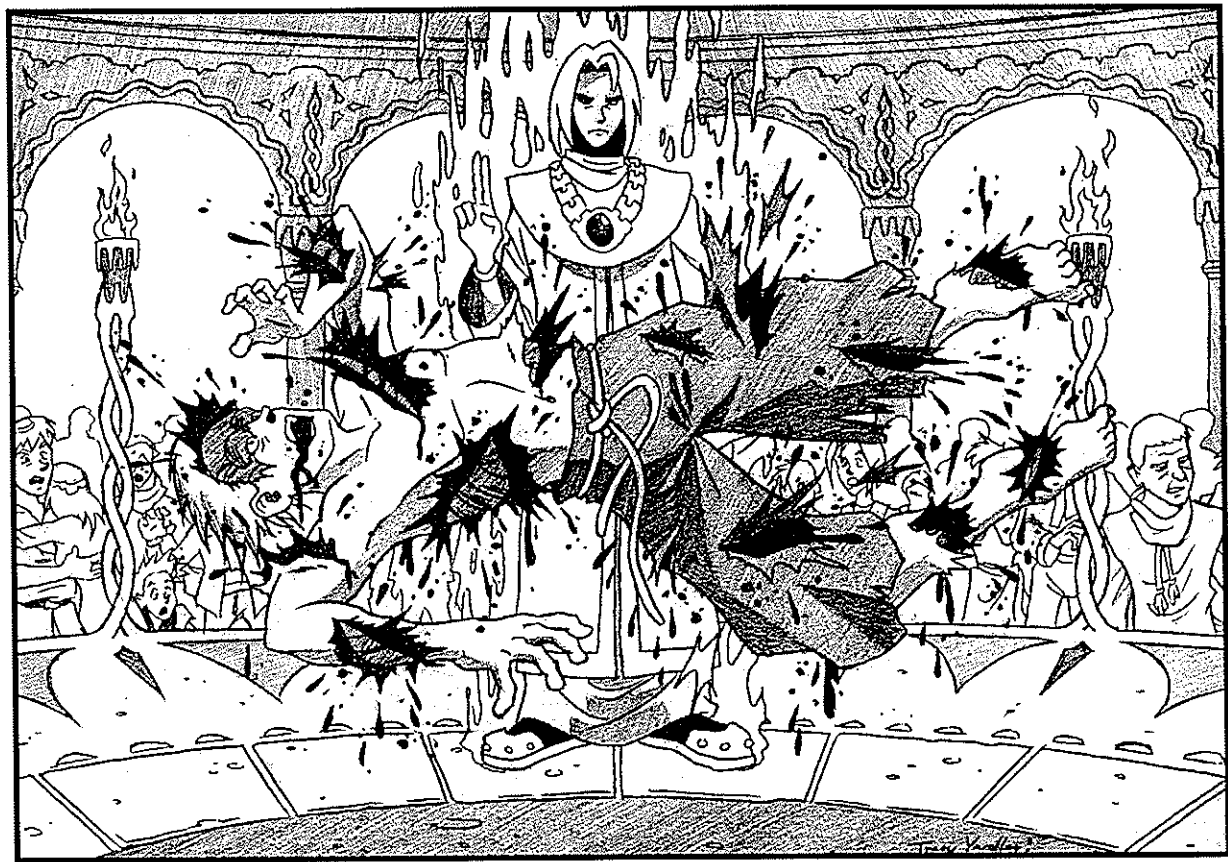
CRIME AND JUSTICE IN NEXUS

In the interests of keeping the peace, the Council of Entities employs mercenary companies to act as police when necessary. Nexus maintains neither a standing guard nor a standing army. Anyone who sees that fact as a challenge or as license to run amok, however, will soon learn differently.

The mercenary companies do not act as full-time police; it is far more cost-effective for the council to hire them as needed. While most companies are field-ready soldiers, a few focus on civic order and even urban warfare. The Cinnabar district houses a famous company, the Nightarrows, who typically strike after nightfall from a distance, firing bolts and arrows through open windows and doors.

Because Nexus has no formal law, murder is not technically illegal. This reality is important not from the standpoint of the thief or murderer, but from that of the council. Justice in Nexus is a two-step process. First, the council decides whether or not an individual is guilty of a certain offense. If the miscreant is judged guilty, the council decrees his death or banishment.

An offender's guilt rests solely with the councilor who decides it — accused parties have no venue in which to plead their case, and many never know that they are being



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judged. With no law, the city needs no legal system; decree alone determines life and death.

Mercenary companies usually handle proclamations of death. Some companies, such as the Hooded Executioners, specialize in more general peacekeeping, while others, like the Nighthammer Iron League, have no qualms about doing the council's dirty work. In rare cases, usually involving such high-profile matters as accusations of treason and the like, the council brings its own terrible power to bear on the condemned. These hideous torments are carried out as much for the people's edification as to punish the guilty. Councilors have transformed villains' muscles to scorpions, boiled the blood in their veins and turned their flesh inside-out.

The alternative to death is banishment, a punishment devised by the council to keep from seeming utterly brutal and tyrannical. Banishment is levied only against those who pose no conceivable threats to the order or health of Nexus. Outsiders find it curious to witness Nexus justice, in which a known murderer may be turned loose while an incensed insurrectionist is impaled on the barbed spears of the Bronze Pioneers merely for suggesting that the Midday Husband pleases the yeddim in the Little Market.

The absence of formal law also makes it easy for citizens to take matters into their own hands — which is how the citizens and the council prefer it. Victimized citizens make their own justice, while the council need not

bother to maintain a judicial arm. Any private citizen who wishes to may hire a mercenary to "right a wrong," or may grab the nearest pitchfork and do it himself. In theory, this vigilante justice deters abuse of individual rights; if a thief steals from a man, nothing prevents that man from killing the thief in retaliation. In practice, however, passion often prevails. Nexus is no stranger to escalating feuds and even states of near-war as entire districts clash over events blown far out of proportion and aggravated by parties on either side seeking to set things "right." If the bloodletting escalates too far, the council can and will step in with paid mercenaries to quell the crowds.

TAXES

In the ordered anarchy that is Nexus, the only two certainties of life are, of course, death and taxes.

Taxes themselves are few and far between. The council can take what it wants or needs, and can issue a decree after the fact if it feels bound to justify itself. However, the few taxes levied pay for much of the city's wellbeing. Council aides draw their pay from pools established by tax monies, and certain peacekeeping mercenaries are paid from the same budgets. Because so few civil servants exist apart from council aides, most of the city's needs are tended to privately. The docks, for example, are maintained by dockworkers who earn their salaries based on the "dock chop," or the fees ship captains pay to the Guild for

THE DECREE OF CESSATION

As delivered by the Doctor Udolph

"In these trying times, the citizenry of Nexus has chosen to express its dissatisfaction with itself. The summer sun makes us hot during the waking hours. The haze that falls at night chokes us as we drink and sleep. The defilement of Ruveldt's daughter was a moral wrong; that, we all know. But also wrong was Ruveldt's killing of the rapist Kineen and his wife. He acted not for justice, but for vengeance. Kineen's neighbors' lynching of Ruveldt, and Ruveldt's neighbors' stoning of their fellows, does not lead us to resolution of the first wrong, but rather threatens an increasing tide of hatred and bloodshed. Hereafter, according to my word as the will of Nexus, any disobedience committed in the names of Ruveldt and Kineen will be met with steel. The swords of the Silver Crucible have been retained to mete out justice in the districts of Firewander and Tellnaught; they act with the authority of the council in this matter.

"Calm yourselves. Act not with passion, but with the clarity afforded by your freedom. Let your sensibilities rise above those of aggrieved animals and greet your neighbor as your brother, your fellow as your friend. This will be the only proclamation made on this matter. Banishment befalls those who fail to heed it; death comes to those who question its wisdom."

the privilege of using the docks. Street sweepers, charnel carters, water- and street-taxis, and of course the majority of the mercenary "police" are all paid privately as well, meaning that those who don't pay simply do not take advantage of the service offered. Low taxes also attract the commerce that is the lifeblood of Nexus; were taxes assessed on business dealings, people would find other places to conduct their transactions.

The Council of Entities takes its share, but they do so in a manner that rests on the entire vast population of Nexus rather than by a more typical feudal arrangement. Homeowners in Nexus, for example, pay property taxes. If they cannot pay, the property is seized and sold to someone who can. The council also charges a citizens' tax on property used by its dwellers every day, where the levy cannot be handled privately because no single owner exists or too many individuals are affected. The use of streets and waterways falls under this citizens' tax — if Fishmarket Street suddenly became unusable between Stoic Avenue and Luna's Walk, the commerce on Fishmarket Street from below Luna's Walk would die, which is not in the city's best interests.

On average, a citizen of Nexus pays less than ten percent of her annual income in taxes — a low figure unheard of in other parts of the Threshold. However, the average Nexus citizen lacks the same guarantees and obligations that would be owed her in a more feudal environment, and she must pay for most of what she does receive out of her own pocket. The existing system favors the wealthy; those who can afford justice (or protection, or comfort, or whatever) can have it at their discretion. Of course, many Nexus citizens are wealthy compared to their counterparts in other lands (whether legitimately or otherwise), and so the city has little trouble supporting itself.

THE PROVIDERS

If the Council of Entities creates the order that governs the body of Nexus, the Guild governs the flow of its lifeblood, commerce. An odd blend of mercantilism with craft and merchant guild practices, the Guild ensures their own material comfort with the same flow of money that keeps Nexus vital and maintains the social order. Indeed, the most influential members of the Guild are rumored to enjoy opulence and excess beyond that of the Emissary himself.

The Guild is a savvy collective of individuals, and has no designs on the powers claimed by the council. Indeed, were the Guild to assume that authority, they would also have to take over the vast structures that support it. Doing so would place huge demands on their resources and their time, lessening the amount available for seeking profit. Power in Nexus thus functions as a sprawling symbiosis, with an intertwined social order and financial framework taking the place of a more traditional government.

Because its power is economic, however, the Guild is in some ways closer to a government than the Council of Entities. Although its edicts and policies affect less of the city's population, the Guild has a far more influence over those it does affect. The way the Guild sees it, everyone in Nexus must make money, whether to pay for their tenancy, purchase their daily bread or buy a ride on the pulley-cart. Toward that end, everyone must deal with the Guild sooner or later.

Naturally, with so much influence, the Guild has acquired more than its share of enemies over the years. While the average Nexus citizen or Threshold farmer has no choice but to deal with Guildsmen, he won't necessarily like or trust them. Profit is the Guild's stock in trade, literally; its members have fixed prices, withheld merchandise, sold wares and then stolen them back, and engaged in any number of other unsavory practices. Add the Guild's stranglehold on trade, and you get an organization with many enemies. The Guild also handles trade in slaves, drugs, contraband and other vices, including harlotry. As expressed in a cynical Nexus aphorism, "Dealing with the Guild requires an extra eye — one for your purse, one for the contract, and one on the Guildsman's knife-hand."

MEMBERS OF THE GUILD

The Guild nominally consists of four branches: a directorate, administration, merchants and craftsmen. Whether or not this division is accurate is a matter of speculation; while merchants and artisans make up a visible part of the organization, even some within the Guild are not sure whether the multiple membership tiers represent actual distinctions or simply extra duties assumed by prominent members. For example, the Merchant Prince Hembree sits on the directorate and is also obviously a member of the merchants' subdivision. The alchemist Beltesar, who staunchly favors centralizing the production of finished goods for the region in Nexus (making outside provinces simply the producers of raw resources), also heads the Alchemists' League within the Guild. If duties are redundant, or multiple levels of membership exist beyond the obvious apprentices, masters and journeymen, then that is an internal matter handled at the higher levels of the Guild.

A few Nexus residents suspect a connection between the Council of Entities and the Guild, making them a single faction in the most paranoid minds. This view is highly improbable, however; handling the affairs of both groups would be a vast burden for anyone.

In fact, the council and its members have a productive rivalry with the Guild. As council agents scurry back and forth between contacts and posts, so do merchant Guildsmen shuttle in-demand goods across the city, depending on which spices, fabrics, et cetera are popular on any day in a given district. As the Guild builds its wealth and claims more jurisdiction over Nexus life, the council improves its efficiency and its popular support, because almost no one trusts the Guild's motives.

Individual Guild members often do not deserve the reputation earned by their less savory peers. After all, if every Guildsman were an untrustworthy conniver, the organization could never have achieved its current prominence — people would simply refuse to deal with them. That said, even the more scrupulous Guildsmen aren't necessarily paragons of virtue all the time. Inside every Guild member lurks the seed of avarice that exists in all human beings. The fact that their work allows them to taste the fruits of wealth makes many want far more.

Guildsmen may satisfy this hunger in many ways. Artisans may charge more for "premium" works scarcely different from average merchandise. Merchants may double or even triple their prices for the same items based on location, such as a given Nexus District (a bottle of sepia in the wealthiest district may cost as much as five bottles purchased in Cinnabar). Likewise, far-flung settlements may pay more for refined implements than the cost of hauling the goods would normally account for — after all, where else can the customer go? The Guild is often its own

greatest enemy, the business sense of many of its members clouded over by greed.

THE RANKS OF THE GUILD

Nexus is home to Guildsmen of varying accomplishment, success and influence. Although stereotypes and mistrust are ubiquitous in Nexus, prejudging a member of the Guild is a certain way to pay inflated prices for one's sundries — or, in some cases, to have one's throat slit while those same goods find their way back into a merchant's stock.

MERCHANT PRINCES

This title is largely honorific, signifying a merchant-class Guildsman who has made his fortune marketing the goods of others. A merchant prince is almost always immensely wealthy, or else on his way back to being immensely wealthy. Merchant princes who suffer hardship and fail to reclaim their former prosperity are rarely referred to by that title, as their prior success was obviously a fluke.

Often possessed of ostentatious (if not jaded) tastes, many merchant princes lead hedonistic lives when not busy with their own or the Guild's affairs. Still, the wise merchant prince knows to confine his excesses to his own time, or he'll lose his wealth faster than a Nexus boy loses his natural charm. Even though wealthy merchant princes no longer concern themselves with the hardships of the yeddin caravans, they invariably did so at one point, and are no strangers to their bottom lines, whether in overall finance or the exact amount of fodder necessary to feed the laboring animals.

"Buy low, sell high" is the merchant prince's mantra. Merchant princes are traveling brokers, collectors of goods to sell elsewhere, procurers of the forbidden and the arcane, and harvesters of anything that might turn a profit... well, anywhere down the road. Some of the most affluent merchant princes are little more than junk peddlers, collecting broken detritus here and there and selling it as an amazing innovation somewhere else along the caravan route. Others are so successful that they never personally touch their wares; instead, they employ dozens or scores of lieutenants beneath them, while they simply provide the capital for the next big purchase. Even in Nexus, it takes money to make money.

Ah, my clever Rhandall — you've guessed the answer to my riddle! I am a woman of my word; I'll sell you those iron plowshares at the discount I promised. But enough business for now. Won't you share another bowl of hashish with me? Servant! More juniper wine...!

Mervizhya Coldwrought, Lady of the Iron Market

KEEPS AND MASTERS

Keeps own and operate individual shops and market stalls in Nexus. They maintain a constant stock of goods, which they make available for the public to purchase;



they rent storefronts, balance books, buy new goods from secondary distributors, and so on. A keep is the proprietor of a given establishment, whether the manager of an inn or the owner of the charcoal-seller's stall at the Big Market.

Masters are the caravan counterparts of the city-bound keeps. Their duties are more diverse—most maintain a greater variety of stock, and must also see to the upkeep of the caravan in addition to keeping its bushels full. Caravan masters tend to be the hardier of the two, having acclimated to the hardships of the traveling life.

Insult me again with an offer like that and I'll cut off your cock and sell it to a blind woman to flavor her seahorse stew. If you've come to buy, do it; if not, don't fuck with my time or attention.

Coarse Pobby, Master of the Vermilion Winter Train

REEVES, AIDES, ALDERS, CLERKS AND CHARS

The merchant princes certainly don't hawk their wares alone — all manner of assistants contribute to Nexus and caravan commerce. In only the smallest shop does the proprietor stand alone behind the counter; only the most meager wagon has a sole master stocking its tent. While daily commerce does not take place on a scale that requires an army of salesfolk, the smaller details of Guild life nonetheless require attention. Reeves who keep watch and ensure that stock isn't stolen, clerks who prepare receipts and tally bills, alders who see to operational needs, chars who sweep the floors, and a variety of other "little people" are also involved in larger Guild affairs on the merchants' side.

Although they may not hold high rank, these associates are still members of the Guild, which carries great weight in Nexus. Rare is the Guild tenant who gets cheated by a landlord's rent collector, and his chamber-slucie is always emptied on time.

Phoah! I've just come back from the spicemonger's! And now you want me to run back for a dry dram of salt? You must be crazed! Whoa, now, hold your anger... I'll go back. But is there anything else you need? It helps if I do it all in one trip.

Skizz Longshanks, "the fastest runner on two legs"

MASTER ARTISANS

Master artisans are the craft counterpart to merchant princes. Unlike merchant princes, however, master artisans actually create things: consumer goods, as the Threshold knows them. These can be any manner of item, and may include certain services, such as with the poet's guild. Master artisans can create anything, from *objets d'art* to rudimentary household tools, and everything in between.

Master artisans are members of the craft-making side of the Guild who have established a name for themselves, if not a shop or a school. Those who maintain shops or studios are the preeminent artisans of their crafts. They can command their own fees for work performed, such as

rugs woven by the sorcerer Charmizdes or copper cooking pots hammered out by hand in the studio of the Sentinels Hill Dinner Sommeliers. Others have been masters of their crafts for so long (or with such conscience) that they wish to train others in their arts. The Dinner Sommeliers train apprentices (see below) at their Sentinels Hill kitchens, and the majority of Guildsmen who have not achieved great wealth usually take on a student to whom they pass their trade secrets.

Of all the Guild ranks, the master artisans are probably the most diverse. Anyone named a master by the artisans of the Guild may hold the title; those who progress through the lower ranks will eventually become masters, if only through sheer persistence. Impoverished masters eke out hardscrabble lives in the Firewander District, while less talented but more popular masters may ply the same craft in Cinnabar; the only differences between them are social skills and unfair circumstances. A few itinerant masters travel in the wake of caravans or with bands of explorers or entertainers, offering their unique skills and knowledge as situations merit.

Most master artisans hover in the middle to upper echelons of Nexus society. Their very nature makes them creators, playing a vital role in the city's prosperity and identity. At the same time, the wealth of the merchant princes is often turned against the master artisans, at least in secret, for the merchant caste is loath to share its bounty with anyone not of its own ilk. For that reason, the master artisans occupy something of a shadow caste, "less equal" than those who occupy the same tier of a different order.


Yes, yes; I made this 'un with my own hands, jus' like that 'un yeh were lookin' at. Jus' because I'm not as good with words as you are doesn't mean I ain't got my own skill. And since yer bein' such a ponce about it, it's two thousan' instead of eighteen hunnert, paid up front.

Varn Dorno, Cutler of Dorno Avenue

JOURNEYMEN

The journeyman is a Guildsman between the rawness of an apprentice and the refinement of a master artisan. Upon release from his apprenticeship, a craftsman becomes a journeyman: a skilled and employable artisan, but not yet so esteemed by his peers that they give him the title of master. To use the *bakrat* cards so popular in taverns as an analogy, if the master artisan is an ace of his trade and the apprentice is a mere jack, the journeyman is a king of his particular calling — not yet able to "trump" other craftsmen with his skill, but certainly quite talented.

The journeyman class is a subjective thing in the Guild, even more so in Nexus. Before becoming a master, a journeyman must create a work in his field that an assembled group of masters deems to be the work of a fellow master. Obviously, the matter can become intensely political. More than one journeyman has crafted exemplary



work, only to be refused master status by envious elders. Many others are far more capable than the masters themselves, who refuse to grant the journeyman higher status in order to keep their own skills from being challenged.

A journeyman may not open his own shop or lead his own caravan, though he may work in the shop of an established master. The journeyman is also most likely to be hard at work in a given master's shop, doing the everyday work that is the master's bread and butter. The master likely keeps high-profile or sensitive projects for himself, while the apprentices clean and learn what they can at his feet. This leaves the "average" work — the repair of arms and armor, the forging of new horseshoes, the mending of torn sails — to the capable hands of the journeyman. His lot is not glamorous, but every journeyman must pay his dues before receiving the acknowledgment of his betters.

Journeymen often live with their masters, much like apprentices, though they are less subject to the rigorous curfews and rules. A significant proportion of journeymen live by themselves, making enough cash to start a small family and earning their fortunes before establishing themselves as masters. In many cases, the journeyman is the man to whom his fellows turn when they need specialty work done — the journeyman tanner may cure a rat-hide purse for a neighbor in exchange for that neighbor's help in tiling his own roof.

It'll be painted by the middle of next week, lord, and even quicker than that if Master Fokkard would rouse himself and inflict his expertise upon the walls along with us.

Teed, Houseman-in-Training

APPRENTICES

The apprentice's role in the Guild is to learn a trade from square one. Anyone can become an apprentice, so long as a master is willing to take him in. An apprentice's fees to the Guild are subsumed by every master artisan and journeyman, and the apprentice need only pay duties once his master releases him as a full-fledged journeyman. This goes for slaves as well; a work-slave typically becomes a journeyman upon purchase of their manumission.

In exchange for training, apprentices handle many of the chores at the master's shop, such as sweeping, mopping, cleaning, scrubbing, and minor smelting. This unpleasant scutwork is critical to the success of an artisan's enterprise. Stories of unscrupulous masters abound, including those who regularly take credit for their apprentices' work, or who never promote them to journeyman in order to keep them working for free. In most cases, however, an apprentice's lot is demanding, but eventually brings its reward.

Apprenticeship varies in length by the nature of the work being learned. A domestic maintenance apprentice may only spend a few years learning the ropes, while the more artistically or technically inclined trades may require

as much as 15 years of learning before the apprentice is ready. Indeed, some families with more mouths to feed than coin in the purse virtually sell off their children into indentured apprenticeship, eliminating their own problems while satisfying the needs of the Guild.

In general, apprenticeship is a mixed bag of experiences. The work is almost always long, hard, often unrewarding (at least in the short term), and physically and emotionally taxing. On the other hand, some masters dote on their apprentices, introducing them as prot+g+s or taking them from among their own children. It is impossible to sum up the apprentice's condition in one sweeping generality — there are as many different experiences as there are apprentices.

Fuck it — cut off my other ear. I'm not learning anything from you anyway, so what will it matter if I can't hear you yelling at me anymore, you daft slob?

Grudd Rabelerd, apprentice to the stonemason Tenzo

HARLOTRY

Nexus harlotry also falls under the purview of the Guild. Although it has no ranking system like the other two Guild branches (what would be the point, other than as an exercise in lewdness?), the harlotry is not without influence. Indeed, Guild whores often learn secrets as pillow talk (or in trade...) about prominent members of society who visit Guild rooms.

The typical Guild whore's life is hardly one of clever witticisms and favor-currying in the courts of the council, however. Quite the opposite, in fact. A whore's salvation may mean getting through the night without having her genitals slashed by a frustrated sailor, or swapping a secret for a cube of hashish. A harlot's life often begins uncomfortably early for males and females — many are put to work before they begin to show any secondary sexual characteristics. The adage holds that "once a harlot, always a harlot," and those who do make it anywhere close to old age have almost invariably lived exceedingly unpleasant lives.

A rare few harlots become courtesans, but this period of relative comfort lasts only so long as they can hold the fancy of their fascinated patrons. At the end of such trysts, death or the inevitable return to the brothels awaits the harlot, as few have the skills necessary to retain any acquired wealth after they retire.

On your back or on your knees, it's still an honest living. It may not be the happiest life, but it's a damned sight more respectable than slitting throats or stealing bread.

Cross-eyed Granice, harlot

THE OUTSIDERS

Nexus is a city of nearly a million residents, while the Guild numbers perhaps sixteen thousand at its times of greatest prosperity. Obviously, not every shopkeeper, prostitute or caravan master is part of the Guild — most Nexus



shops and trade tents are independent, lacking the desire, dues or need to become Guild members.

These outsiders often see the Guild as a liability. Whether business is splendid or wretched, the Guild demands its dues. For more specialized artisans, the Guild may be too big or too homogenous to suit their needs. Few ratcatchers, for example, stand to gain anything by joining, and probably not enough to offset the costs of membership. Likewise, the Guild is a large entity and prone to inertia — it still hasn't decided whether the butchers who petitioned for membership fourteen years ago are merchants or artisans.

In the end, the Guild is as much a social club as a commercial league. It serves its members much like organized crime serves criminals, in that it protects them from the actions of those outside its purview. The lack of formal governing power in Nexus makes the city and the Guild a near-perfect match. In a city whose people want commerce, but with no formal law, the Guild fulfills the need to protect mercantile interests. At its heart, the Guild remains devoted to this all-important task. Despite all the price-fixing, cheating and other petty scandals, the Guild is a valuable source of contacts and leverage in a city that would otherwise destroy its own livelihood out of ignorance, spite or sheer chaos.

I wouldn't share my bed with a Guildsman, but I'd take a contract with one any day of the week. So long as it's written, that is. I wouldn't trust a handshake any more than I'd trust an elder of Thorns.

Pluvin Ironmonger, Wright of Sentinels Hill

DISTRICTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

The internal geography of Nexus has acquired its own distinct personality over the decades since the city's rise from its chaotic roots. In certain places, the petty baronies and outlaw turfs from which Nexus arose have never completely lost the small-scale culture that made them distinct to begin with. Other portions of the city, such as Firewander, have proven remarkably resistant to becoming part of the city proper in the minds of the district residents. The city revels in its diversity, seeing it as one of many unique strengths. Entire districts and neighborhoods of Nexus can feel like small, self-contained cities of their own.

In most cases, district boundaries are more geographical than political. Even where distinctions were formally made in the assayers' offices of the Council of Entities, reality on the ground is sometimes different. The region of Sentinels Hill, for example, grew out of the domestic and commercial differences between the Nexus District and the still-to-be-settled Firewander ruins, with Sentinels Hill serving as a buffer between the two. Even today,

though Sentinels Hill has become a residential center, a few displaced merchants keep small stalls along its boundaries, away from the bustle of the Big and Small Markets, and a few public houses reminiscent of Firewander's squalor and anarchy stand just outside that district's accepted boundary. As the years progress, so does the blurring of the lines between districts. While no one foresees a day when the different districts will cease to exist, most Nexus residents accept that the exact street at which the Nexus District ends and the Cinnabar District begins doesn't really matter to anyone other than a tax collector.

Nonetheless, the districts have their uses, both abstract and concrete. When an individual plans to buy goods or contract a ship for transport, he knows to travel to the Nexus neighborhood. When he needs to deliver his porter's bill, he knows to take it to the Guildsman's home in Cinnabar. When he goes home for the night, he heads for Sentinels Hill, and when he needs affordable justice, he can hire a bravo in the streets of Nighthammer. The neighborhoods also provide a sense of belonging and community on a scale less overwhelming than the city at large. It is one thing to be a citizen among a million others, but to be a stalwart Firewanderer or own an opulent estate in Cinnabar offers a far better defined identity. At their worst, the neighborhoods foster a sense of class-consciousness and rivalry. At their best, they create comradeship and what passes for civic pride in hectic Nexus.


WHERE THE DISTRICTS OVERLAP

As might be expected, certain elements of Nexus life can take place anywhere, regardless of the arbitrary boundaries the districts represent. The city of Nexus has its own reputation known by those as far away as the death-heretics of Onyx or the laborers of Icehome. Foreigners know Nexus not as a collection of small neighborhoods, but for those things that apply to the city as a whole.

VIOLENCE

With no formal law to stem the tide of violence, conflict thrives and quick resolutions are the rule of the day. Even on those occasions when the Council of Entities steps in to render judgment, if that judgment involves punishment, the punishment takes place in public and often exceeds what might be considered equitable. Dwellers in other cities are only half-joking when they say that justice has no place in Nexus because vengeance has taken its place.

Violence in Nexus is ubiquitous. It stokes the fires of gossip and keeps the population in line for fear of bloody retribution. Hardly a day goes by without the tale of some Guildsman's bloody duel with a fellow reaching the dirty water-channels of Nighthammer, and the well-to-do know that their money is a prize to be taken by force in Firewander rather than a symbol of success and respect. Thieves in



Nexus markets may well have their hands cut off by angry merchants; loiterers in Cinnabar are as apt to find themselves riddled with mercenaries' bolts as they are to be prodded back to the beggars' lanes.

Despite the near-constant small-scale carnage, however, the city remains vital. Few in Nexus feel the need to look warily over their shoulders when they leave home in the morning. Rather, they know not to upset each other in the first place. Violence is ubiquitous, but it rarely occurs without provocation. Respect for one's neighbor may be tense and tenuous, but only in the roughest locales should a Nexus resident fear for his life without doing something to jeopardize it. On the other hand, no one save a fool wanders about the city without a care in the world. In some parts of Nexus, being suspected of having money is cause for robbery and a beating; any breach of the customs and habits practiced in a given neighborhood can likewise result in attack.

The best advice for those living in Nexus is to keep to their own areas and their own business. Another sensible policy is to keep one's knife sharp even in one's own district.

CRIME

Crime may seem like a misnomer, for in a city without laws, crime cannot technically exist. In Nexus, however, rampant crime is defined by the prevailing social contract instead of codified law. To raise one example, theft at the marketplace may not explicitly be illegal, but it is a sure way to earn a Guildsman's ire.

In a city like Nexus, where money rules and comfort exists for the taking, few people place themselves above cutting a corner (or a throat) here and there in pursuit of momentary gain. Even the Guild plies its trade as much through monopoly tactics and racketeering as with smiles, handshakes and affordable goods.

Much of what constitutes crime in Nexus, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. What one man considers his right, another considers a criminal offense; if the offended party is suitably aggrieved, the offender had best be wary. The irony of this reality is not lost on dwellers in Nexus — it forms the core of the prevailing "keep to your own" philosophy of survival. The rich know not to parade their affluence through the streets of the poorest districts. The poor know that poverty is punishable by cudgels in Cinnabar.

Of course, Nexus is also rife with what passes for crime in other regions. What a merchant offers for sale in the lowliest Big Market stall may be grounds for execution if even spoken of in another city. The Guild's routine trade in drugs, contraband, weapons and slaves could get them blacklisted practically anywhere else in the Threshold.

In the end, crime in Nexus is a balance between what an individual expects and the degree to which

she will go to make things right if those expectations are not met. Order here is lawless, and yet it works because of the bottom line.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK...

In Nexus as anywhere else, of course, exceptions to the rules exist. Any of the various social taboos, whether by neighborhood or by larger Nexus custom, may be sacrificed in the name of commerce. Because commerce is the lifeblood of the city, even the most incorrigible villains are apt to give a wide berth to those who seem to be just going about their business. Most residents of Nexus understand that if they threaten the pillars of the city's stability, they threaten their own tolerable existence.

In practice, this means that sometimes it is less expensive to hire a beggar than a full-time runner to let a customer know her order has arrived. Similarly, a yeddim-drawn cart laden with salted meats and spices from the South may pass unmolested through impoverished Nighthammer, not only out of fear of vengeance at the hands of the caravan master, but because that caravan's business helps make Nexus what it is. Without that business, Nexus is nothing more than a camp of hostile anarchists.

Like any other city custom, interpretation of this one is lax and subjective. When the aforementioned beggar delivers his message to the wealthy customer in Sentinels Hill, he had better look like he belongs there. A beggar visibly delivering the message at his leisure is more likely to be beaten back to his gutter; a beggar hustling through the streets to his unspoken destination looks like he wants to get in and get out, which probably means he is fulfilling some purpose of his social superiors.

... EXCEPT WHEN IT'S NOT

Of course, the beggar's unspoken purpose may be to inspect a residence for later robbery, or to collapse on someone's hearth and deliver a payload of lice and pestilence as part of the million-and-one vendettas that color business in Nexus. If a mercenary guard suspects any of these possibilities, he may choose to prevent them from occurring. Likewise, if a desperate black marketer (or unscrupulous Guildsman) decides that the rewards outweigh the risks, he may hijack a rich caravan and hope to make himself once again invisible by the time the merchant princes come looking for him.

THE NEXUS DISTRICT

At the heart of Nexus lies the Nexus District, which most people believe to be the center of old Hollow before the Contagion. The Nexus District is a wonder on many levels, not least for the bizarre combination of geography and architecture that makes it unlike anywhere else in the Threshold (or the Realm, for that matter). The buildings that predate the modern city stand impossibly tall by



WHAT THE HELL?

If all of this seems confusing, that's because it's supposed to be. Nexus is a bustling, thriving place with its own rules and ideas of propriety.

The Storyteller's job is to take all this apparent paradox and balance it for the sake of her story. Suppose the players' characters arrive in Nexus from elsewhere — as Storyteller, you can create a vivid atmosphere by playing on their ignorance of local custom. Will the visitors' actions merit them some unwanted attention? Will it garner them an accolade? Or both?

Likewise, consider a group of characters from Nexus visiting somewhere else. To the Nexus characters, the rest of the world may seem lazy, or simple-minded, or blessedly (or boringly) uncomplicated. The layers of intrigue and triple-crossing habits they take for granted may undo them in the outside world, or may give them an edge over their less scheming rivals.

Above and beyond that, consider the Circle of characters from different backgrounds. A Nexus character's savvy in his own city may come across as duplicity elsewhere, which may tarnish the other characters' efforts by association — except when they return to Nexus and need the native character's savvy again.

Players and Storytellers should both take heed of the story. Remember, storytelling games aren't about creating the "best" characters or acquiring the most of some in-game asset. They're about telling cool and compelling stories. Players, let the Nexus be a complication and a character builder, a liability and a source of conflict that adds greater depth to a story. Storytellers, let the chaos of Nexus be an asset, as well as the source of epic adventure.

today's standards, some as high as fourteen stories. At the same time, the city's existence at the top of a flood plain and at the confluence point of three rivers has sunken it over time. At some points, after even brief rains, part of the city lies submerged beneath floodwaters.

The main street of the Nexus District, Riverlaine, runs along the River of Tears, past the docks on one side and warehouses on the other, and then continues south beside the conjoined Gray River. The Gray River was once known as the Felv (which seems to have been a carryover from the Old Tongue), but years and years of absorbing Nexus's slag, human waste and other detritus earned the waterway its current appellation.

The Nexus District is where the vast majority of the city's commerce takes place, at least as far as everything

except entertainment is concerned. If it is bought, sold, or made in Nexus, all that activity probably happens in this neighborhood. Therefore, aside from a few council members' apartments, Guild flats, inns and artisans' shops with flats above them, the Nexus District is largely non-residential. The exception is the large contingent of beggars, most of whom see no need to spend their nights elsewhere, since they'll just come back to the district in the morning to shake their alms-cups.

With all the commercial activity going on, the Nexus District is heavily policed. Shopkeepers and Guildsmen alike understand the value of mercenary patrols; their district storefronts are their livelihoods, and all it takes is one ambitious looter to destroy the source of a merchant's income. Likewise, artisans with studios or homes in the Nexus District chip in for the mercenaries' fee, knowing that their creations can be stolen from their workspaces as easily as from a merchant's stall. The district patrol force is probably the most brutal in the city; the mercenaries know that their pay depends on the profits of those whose property they're protecting, and they set to this task with great enthusiasm. While Nighthammer and Firewelder may be more vicious as a whole, mercenary patrols like the Iron Brotherhood of the Nexus District don't believe in sparing the rod and spoiling the trespasser. Indeed, much of the illicit activity in the Nexus District occurs by day; once the merchant stalls close at night, so does any chance of easy theft taking place. After nightfall, the Nexus District is perhaps the most tranquil neighborhood in the city — at least as long as you don't count beggars knifing one-another for a blanket.

Of course, not every artisan or merchant keeps day hours. Bakers and other foodstuff sellers often open before dawn, so that Nexus residents can buy breakfast before their own workdays start, and also to keep the sun from bleaching their wares.

The district is also known for its nightlife, which the Council of Entities and Guild consider distinct from the "normal" daily commerce that takes place while the sun is up. The neighborhood has its share of night theaters, burlesques, and public houses for drinking and dining, as well as brothels and dens for gambling, dancing, or imbibing illicit substances. Residents throughout the city accept the after-hours excesses of the Nexus District. Local mercenaries rarely have trouble with nightlifers, who are more interested in entertainment than skullduggery. Still, wherever cash flows and pub patrons are drunk, criminals always lurk in the shadows, ready to separate fools from their money and heads from their shoulders.

POINTS OF INTEREST IN THE NEXUS DISTRICT

Just as the Nexus District is defined by commerce, so are most of its key locales. Money can change hands at any given point of day in this neighborhood, and the ruling

bodies' laissez-faire attitude contributes greatly to the constant availability of goods, services and whatever else certain parties may wish to transact.

The Big Market

Anyone with a large lot of goods to sell does it in the Big Market. With the exception of live lots, large-scale commerce is the Big Market's bailiwick. Most of this commerce happens at auctions, as many as fifty of which may take place at any time. Cured leather, fabrics, arms, armor, raw goods such as cotton and grain and the like are all common items up for bid on the Big Market's blocks. Property and other large unique goods, such as entire libraries, salvaged shipwrecks, and "distressed merchandise" (meaning anything a salesman has in his possession without knowing precisely what it is, a situation more common than one might think) come and go on the bidding list.

The Big Market, as its name suggests, involves the exchange of big money, and its sales sometimes spark grand and mysterious rumors. For example, a mercenary company not even registered with the Council of Entities once bought an entire day's lots of weaponry and armor, only to appear on the city's livery list the following week. Stories are still buzzing about the time Ephiselle the Midnight Queen purchased several hundred thousand dead scorpions, or the time the starving merchant Bamber bought a lot of thirty unmarked casks on an anonymous rumor,

which were found to contain an amazingly valuable quantity of Rubylak brandy.

The Big Market is open to the public from sunrise until sunset. After sundown, no transactions may take place until the next day, though lots may be retrieved or dropped off.

The Little Market

The Little Market is more like what foreigners typically consider a market — a collection of stalls whose vendors exhibit their wares, itinerant foodsellers hawking rancid poultry from shoulder-slung tubs, shifty-eyed pickpockets looking for marks, and oh, yes, average citizens looking to buy, sell and trade the items that make up the details of their days. In fact, on an average day the Little Market does as much business as the Big Market, if not more, although the days' takings are spread among many smaller transactions.

From sunrise to sunset, beneath its pavilion of wood, canvas and leather, the Little Market is home to almost any wares within reason, as well as quite a few beyond reason. Herein operate the spice-sellers, small-scale weapons dealers selling single weapons and suits of armor, alchemists, peddlers of various spiritual salvations-for-sale, makers of balms and charms and ointments to ward away disease, sellers of common First Age goods like lights and imperishable knives, merchants of household supplies such as cookware and mundane cutlery, vendors of dried



coca leaves, ink in wells, ox meat, glass lenses, jars, hashish, plums, and anything else anyone could ever want. From the arcane to the ordinary, from the common to the unique, from the shoddy to the masterful, if it exists in the Threshold, it has been sold, is for sale, or will one day be sold in the Nexus Little Market.

The Night Market

Certain goods, in the opinion of the Council of Entities, should not be purchased in the middle of the night. For example, the council has forbidden the sale of weaponry after daylight hours in the belief that passion-inspired violence occurs more often at night than during the day, and that someone unable to easily buy a weapon at night may calm himself enough by morning to seek an alternative resolution. Other sales, some for far more obscure reasons, have likewise been restricted. Tomatoes may not be purchased after nightfall because they belong to the nightshade family of plants, from which poisons may be distilled. Prepared food may not be purchased out of doors, owing to a prohibition against eating alone in darkness.

The Night Market is Nexus's response to the reality that no small number of the city's million citizens may sometimes reasonably need to procure something by night. The council has left the matter of the Night Market to the Guild, which in turn permits its members to sell only those items not prohibited by council decree. Even though the Night Market is perhaps one-quarter as large as the Little Market, that fraction is still sizable. To further distinguish the Night Market from the Little Market, the Night Market takes place in the westernmost marketgrounds of the Nexus District. It is open for business from two hours after sunset until two hours before sunrise.

The Guild determines just how strictly it enforces the council's decrees, but in general, it observes the council's will. In general. In many cases, if a given merchant knows or trusts an individual buyer, or the merchant desperately wants the sale, the Night Market makes a fine place to buy items not normally available during non-commercial hours. A greased palm here, a contact among the more avaricious merchants there, and nighttime shoppers have been known to acquire "night contraband." Of course, they conveniently forget who sold it to them or whether they did indeed buy it after dark.

The Coffleblock Market

Live goods require different considerations than inanimate ones, and Merchant Prince Tjinder Coffleblock designed the market that bears his name for just that kind of business shortly after Nexus arose. A combination of the Little and Big Markets, the Coffleblock Market is open for the two hours on either side of midday and exists exclusively to sell livestock, from single chickens to gross heads of cattle. Unlike other Nexus markets, the Coffleblock Market is crisscrossed by a massive sewer system. Waste, whether from live animals or the unused

blood and appendages of beasts butchered at the market, washes down immense sewer sluices into the Gray River.

The livestock at the Coffleblock Market sometimes includes slaves. Of course, slavery is mostly forbidden in Nexus, but the flesh-merchants have contrived a way to import slaves from other locales without blatantly breaching the Council of Entities' policy. When slave traders sell their wares in Nexus, they provide the purchaser with an article of indentured servitude, signed by the slave. Technically, the purchaser is buying a willing, contracted servant. Of course, these contracts are fabrications (some are even "signed" by slaves who cannot write), but this particular type of fraud is seemingly too costly for the council to seriously address for such negligible return. "Indenturing" natives of Nexus is a virtual invitation for the council to make an example of a slaver, so the practice rarely harms local residents.

The Harlotry

Located in the center of the Nexus District, just uphill from the Little Market, is the Nexus Harlotry. The Harlotry is almost a small sub-district made up of a variety of brothels, some unconnected with the Guild, who share staff and space.


In addition to the obvious sexual services openly presented for sale, the Harlotry can also provide a variety of peripheral vices, from extract of cannabis to smokable dried narcotics to cheap brews and delectable anisette. The Harlotry's sexual services run the gamut, offering patrons everything from a cheap, messy fuck to the most marginalized kink pleasure; someone is always desperate enough for money to degrade themselves or pleasure themselves with "new experiences" as they see fit.

Harlotry patrons can request shuttle skiffs or private cars to take them to the brothels, should they so wish. In times of flood, when the lowest levels of the Harlotry must seal their huge iron door-windows, some brothels are accessible only by water, as the roads to their foyers lie beneath yards of pooled rain.

By definition, the Harlotry is a luxury establishment, its opulence reflected by the prices at its shops. A single inexpensive cigarillo costs as much as four of its kind elsewhere. The rates charged by the harlots vary the most, from as little as an hour's wage to a merchant prince's daily profit. They're still in operation, so presumably the customers receive what they pay for.

BASTION

Carved into the hills above the Nexus District, upwind and upriver, lies the Bastion District. If Nexus is a district of commerce and toil, Bastion is a neighborhood of comfort, pleasure and delight. Here, the affluent merchant princes make their homes and the Council of Entities and their entourages claim their estates. Those fortunate enough to have seen Bastion but who do not live there know it as



a near-heaven, far from the stink and noise of the forges, free from pigshit and horseshit and cleaned by servants who are themselves a class above common workers. The streets are spangled with gold dust and lilac sprigs now and again, to preserve the district's beauty.

Bastion's homes and few shops are grand, sprawling affairs, bedecked with external walkways, fountains, solariums and breezy lounges. The manors almost always have more servants than residents, most of whom live in domestics' quarters in the estates. The streets mill with servants heading to or from markets and grand palanquins hoisted by slaves on their way to a social call at one house or the next.

Of all the districts of Nexus, Bastion is the one in which undesirables are most likely to be stopped. One of the city's more farcical episodes of civil unrest occurred when a mercenary patrol stopped a well-armed group of rabble stalking the streets of Bastion. The rabble turned out to be another mercenary patrol that, according to the first patrol's sergeant, "looked seedy enough to question."

POINTS OF INTEREST IN BASTION

Brindel

A "neighborhood within a neighborhood," Brindel is a subsection of the Bastion estates, all owned by marvelously wealthy people whom no one seems to know. Among them are merchant princes whose names rarely fall from others' lips, council administrators who avoid doing anything visible, and master artisans whose contributions never seem to make it to the common folk. Brindel is as highly guarded as the more prominent citizens' homes, but why? Are these people truly invisible (if successful) cogs in the Nexus machine? Or is Brindel an empty community of wealthy friends who keep each other rich through mutual bribes and commissions for work?

Brindel is a pleasant place, as its presence in Bastion suggests. Trees line its boulevards, muck-scrapers keep the cobbles clean, and its weekend nights are the settings for private parties. But for all the times anyone has run a message to a master's home or retrieved an accounting ledger from a merchant's offices, few have been to the Brindel enclave.

The School of Philosophy

Not every child of wealth follows in the footsteps of his successful parents. Being born to a merchant prince is no guarantee of growing up to become a wealthy Guildsman. The Nexus School of Philosophy exists for these favored sons and daughters, who may not make it in business but who nonetheless are entitled to some privileged position. Here, students are instructed in the ways of contemplation and softer arts, such as writing, poetry and calligraphy. Rather than extensive studies in these fields, however, the School of Philosophy encourages its students to be thinkers, making Renaissance men and women out

of them. In addition, students learn discourse, popular modes of thought and basic ideologies, mostly for the purpose of discussion. Part finishing school, part liberal arts college, the School of Philosophy is where truculent children go to learn manners and where elder sons and daughters attend classes that round them out socially.

The School of Philosophy is more than the "brat's den" that less fortunate people label it. Although its classes are private (and very expensive), it draws instructors and lecturers from the most prominent ranks of Nexus society. On some nights, the school offers open-to-the-public dissertations and debates. It is a valuable place to make contacts, for while its teachers are unlikely to be masters of any given field, they are broadly knowledgeable in a wide array of subjects. They can also frequently put people in touch with their own wealthy patrons.

THE CINNABAR DISTRICT

Cinnabar is the cultural district of Nexus. Here, one may visit various schools and monasteries, two vast public libraries (as well as an untold number of private ones), and numerous specialized boutiques. Cinnabar caters to the well-off and those who wish to be. Primarily civic in nature, Cinnabar also includes a few residential sections, which tend toward townhomes and smaller-scale luxury homes modeled after those in Bastion.

A few small shops and merchant stalls exist in the Cinnabar District, but most of it is devoted to the favored pursuits of those beyond such petty concerns as buying their own sundries. Cinnabar is home to art galleries, public ballroom palazzos (as long as one dresses for the occasion), theaters, small stadiums for athletic festivals, and even well-kept parks. Most of Cinnabar is open to the public, at least in theory. However, all guests of these various facilities are reminded to observe their manners, or they may have their heads softened by the batons of well-armed local mercenary patrols.

The Cinnabar District is also home to the studios of master artisans and their fellows who create nonessential goods. Here can be found a confectioner's school; the workshops of sculptors, fresco painters and fine furniture craftsmen; and even the private apartments of mistresses kept by affluent merchants.

POINTS OF INTEREST IN CINNABAR

While many of the Cinnabar District's amenities may seem luxuries to rural folk, even a poor lamplighter can usually scrounge enough to afford a ticket to the theater at least twice a year. Nexus takes great pride in its sense of culture and accomplishment, so despite social class, public events held in Cinnabar draw guests from all over the city.

The Players' Menagerie

A robust building remodeled from a Hollow-era edifice, the Players' Menagerie is an actor's school and



public theater. It is the most widely attended by students and audiences, mostly because of its ability to stage popular "first-run" plays, such as the bawdy comedies of Gasetar Nutula and the epic adventures of Dragon-Blooded heroes penned by Tatra Brice. The renowned actor Calvino studied his art here.

The Menagerie is very much a populist theater, with crowd-pleasing shows and sometimes vulgar humor. One can find better actors and more classic scripts elsewhere in Cinnabar, but rich and the poor alike enjoy the fare offered here.

Plaza of Rebirth

One of the first structures erected during the consolidation of Nexus, the Plaza of Rebirth is the largest public hall in the city. Used for all manner of events from musical performances to fabulous parties, the Plaza of Rebirth was built from the ground up rather than remodeled from existing architecture. On any given night, some public event takes place there, with larger affairs scheduled over both evenings of the two-day period that breaks up the regular work routine. While guests must often pay to attend these events (unless they are free to the public or the attendees manage to get themselves "invited" and placed on a list of veritable celebrities), the plaza is nonetheless the city's most vital social gathering place outside of the various markets.

Parko Llana

The Cinnabar District is home to Nexus's largest public park, the Parko Llana. Comprising almost 200 acres, the Parko Llana hosts various open-air festivals, mock combats and acrobatic displays during Nexus's days of festivities. Many other groups also meet in Parko Llana, including various musical groups, acting troupes and the loose confederation of beggars currently planning to petition the Guild for membership.

A wide swath of greenery, gazebos and hedges (paid for by the Council of Entities) dominates the park. Anyone may visit, though the park is open to the public only between one hour before dawn and one hour after dusk. Like other areas of Cinnabar, Parko Llana has a mercenary contingent responsible for its well-being. The Parko Llana guardians specialize in bows and other ranged weapons, bringing down miscreants quietly and from a distance, so as not to interrupt the reveries of citizens enjoying the park with the ugly sounds of combat.

NIGHTHAMMER

Nighthammer is the place where raw materials are refined into finished components for goods made, assembled and sold in the Nexus District. Indeed, the district is named for the hammering of ore, which occurs throughout the night and day. In Nighthammer, the smelters' furnaces work constantly, the weavers' looms turn cotton to cloth, and wood turns to charcoal in countless hot ovens. It is a nasty,

hot, wretched place, constantly deluged by ash from the fires and slag. It is also one of the most violent city districts, home to murderers and thieves who would stand out in other locales but who can safely avoid scrutiny amid the soot and shadows of this hard-labor neighborhood.

Second only to coarse manufacture, Nighthammer does its most active commerce in brew and spirits. Although not so fine as potables created elsewhere, brewers in Nighthammer create tremendous quantities of ales, porters, pilsners and lagers. These are consumed in almost equal quantity in the hundreds of public houses that line almost every street in the district. Nighthammer is a great place for a row, or for a drink to calm one's nerves after twelve hours stoking the forge-fires.

Nighthammer also contains Nightside, a stretch of tenement tract homes that command cheap rents because of significantly unpleasant conditions. Nightside is no stranger to floods — rental flats can be obtained for mere pennies a month, the closer one chooses to live to the flood-markers and bellows. It takes a harsh breed of man to make his home in Nighthammer, however; children cough up black phlegm every day, while even brief work stints make the stoutest man short of breath.

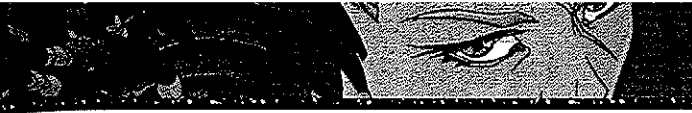
Nighthammer is seemingly engaged in an informal competition with Firewander for the dubious distinction of the city's most violent district. Fire-bleached bones routinely turn up in Nighthammer forges, and an untold number more burn to cinders before anyone finds them. The riverfront piers also serve as places to dispose of the dead, both in burial ceremonies and by corpse-dumpers. However, the riverfront is well patrolled for corpse-dumping to combat hungry ghosts, and so most killers try to find a forge or some better way of disposing of bodies. Running a close third in industry to the beer trade is armed robbery — notorious gangs of hoodlums prowl the streets after normal business hours. Some of these gangs are a match for the better armed and trained mercenaries who patrol the wealthier districts, let alone the cut-rate guards employed by Nighthammer residents who can spare the coin to hire them.

In short, Nighthammer is a towering urban wasteland, embodying everything bad that anyone has to say about Nexus. Those who work here could toil without complaint in the mines of Whitewall, and those who call it home could probably survive in the mouth of Hell itself.

POINTS OF INTEREST IN NIGHTHAMMER

Asenack's Brewery

The Merchant Prince Asenack made his fortune by brewing cheap beer in a cheap location and selling hogsheads by the tens of thousands at cheap prices to local beer halls. Now, decades after the death of the original Asenack, his grandson Asenack the Fair (a merchant prince in his own right) runs the endeavor and racks up record sales.



The brewery is also notorious for its armed gangs, many of whom work day shifts loading ships with casks of alcohol and then bully Nighthammer after darkness falls. The brewery makes no apologies for the actions of its men. When the public complains about their vicious ways, one of Asenack's administrators remarks that the brewery's employees turn to thuggery because their wages are so low — but a raise in wages would require a raise in the price of beer, and no one wants that.

The Nighthammer Docks

While the docks of the Nexus District sport more varied cargo, the Nighthammer docks are twice as large and twice as numerous. Aside from skiffs ferrying dispatchers and assayers around, nothing smaller than a barge pulls to port in Nighthammer. These ships carry the bulky raw materials that Nighthammer's industry refines. The materials are stored in enormous warehouses, and the neighborhood is the perfect place to find a no-questions-asked lugger's job.

FIREWANDER

Historians suspect that Firewander may once have been the center of old Hollow, and this district is the longest-settled section of Nexus. The Firewander neighborhood was the earliest inhabited of the ganglands and baronies that evolved into the modern-day city. Even after Nexus began to take shape, the inhabitants of Firewander resisted the change; Firewander was the last of the large districts to fully accept the yoke of Nexus's leadership.

This outlaw heritage lives on in Firewander today. A shanty district of cheap homes and shady storefronts, Firewander seems to exist only to badger the more upstanding residents of Nexus, and if it can't get their attention, it will gladly pick a fight with itself. Rife with gangs, fiends, urban primitives and citified barbarians, Firewander is a frontier district, good only for cheap homes and broad backs upon which to stack caravan supplies.

POINTS OF INTEREST IN FIREWANDER

Filth

In answer to the urbane-by-comparison Harlotry, Filth is a loose collection of drug dens, whorehouses and pleasure stores that occupies a six-block region at the center of the Firewander District. Cheap and dirty, the real attraction of Filth is its reputation as a place where anything goes. Despite its wanton reputation, the Nexus Harlotry draws the line at some point. Filth urinates on that line and forces its sister to lick it up. Any sort of vice can take place in Filth. Bestiality, necrophilia and murder sex might raise eyebrows and spark rumors at the Harlotry, but they're common enough at Filth to be entrees on a menu of unsavory services. No one will care unless you splash them with something foul — an experience they might just tip you for.

Lawless Front

A stretch of clapboard shacks and rotting leather lean-tos makes up the Lawless Front, a small neighborhood that stubbornly and violently insists it is not a part of Nexus. Populated by wild men and brutish barbarians, the Lawless Front resentfully pays its taxes, but not before a good drubbing at the hands of mercenaries called in by city assayers. A sinkhole of violence and joblessness, this neighborhood survives by stealing food from the sickly Firewander market stalls and killing off its own most virulent members in contests over territory.

THE MINOR DISTRICTS

Nexus neighborhood populations don't always fit into the neat divisions represented by the major districts. Clerks have recorded as many as two dozen distinct new neighborhoods, claiming to be out from under the shadow of the larger ones. New districts don't mean anything politically or with regard to taxes — they are simply collectives with their own identities that don't precisely mesh with others in the city. A few of the more notable minor districts are described below.

DUNG TOWN

On the riverbank of the lowest-lying Nighthammer inlet, all the detritus of the upriver city collects in a swirl of eddies. The noxious brew includes human waste, blood, the ubiquitous slag, and a flotilla of beggars who created their own neighborhood by lashing pallets and other freight castoffs together into a rude houseboat. Tents and crates make up the "houses" in Dungtown, and the whole thing floats on top of an ever-churning swamp of foam and muck. While Nexus proper is a functional model of organized anarchy, Dungtown is the opposite, a brutal chaos from which the only escape is death by murder, starvation or exposure. The destitute squabble over scraps, knife each other for the few coins in their shifts and hurl each other into the murky stew over whatever petty dispute rules their addled minds. No one with any choice wants to make this little hell his home.

TELLNAUGHT

On the other side of the coin, sometimes a neighborhood gentrifies, refusing to lease to scurrilous folk and elevating itself above its origins. Such is the case with the Tellnaught neighborhood. This district is a beacon of decency in the otherwise vile Firewander. Populated by families sick of the depravity and nastiness Firewander inflicts on itself, Tellnaught collected money from its residents and built a low wall separating the district from its erstwhile neighbors. Then the residents procured a short-term contract with a mercenary company to protect them while they erected the wall. Now Tellnaught pays token mercenary fees, relying on the wall and its own



citizens' watch to keep the neighborhood honest. For the most part, Firewander hasn't noticed, but in the past, resentment has flared up between the two communities. Tellnaught is far from a paradise, but its people are honest if poor, and choose to try to live above the licentiousness of the rest of Firewander.

BROOKSIDE

The Brookside community is noteworthy for its relative calm. The district itself is a small neighborhood, no

more than a collection of several houses suspended in a portion of Nexus accessible only by waterway. These waterways are small, impassable by boats larger than personal gondolas. By limiting access to the neighborhood, its residents have kept out troublesome foot traffic. Because Brookside is not on the way to anything much and hard to reach anyway, any prospective visitor must have a specific need to go there. Brookside is a bit more affluent than the average Nexus neighborhood, partly because its isolation allows it to pay less for mercenary guard patrols.

THE TOMBS OF NEXUS

Many Solar Exalted fleeing the Dragon-Blooded ambush lived in the city of Hollow, or made their final stands there. No less than six Anathema are buried in the city of Nexus, and their tombs are significant landmarks.

The Council of Entities has decreed that no attempts shall be made to open the tombs, lest some trap set on them cause widespread damage to the city or the hungry ghost of an entombed Anathema be released. This proscription is hardly necessary on one level, as each tomb has its own means of defense. Without the prohibition, however, scavenger lords would almost certainly be tampering with them and causing no end of trouble.

Three of the tombs are above ground, two are below ground, and one forms the foundation for a smelting furnace in the Nighthammer District. Each has a name, and they are often used as landmarks when directing people through the city. Unlike tombs in many other locations, these crypts are fairly similar in appearance. Including their defensive perimeters, each is about a block in length, which many savants believe may have been meant to aid in urban planning. All attempts to dig under their perimeters have so far resulted in the discovery of other defenses — sometimes fatally.

The Tomb of Candle-Eyed Skulls: This tomb, which lies in the Sentinels Hill district, is a three-story structure fifty yards long that appears to be made out of human skulls. As daylight fades, the skulls' eyes fill with what appear to be candle flames, brightly lighting the area around the tomb.

During the day, anyone who comes within fifty yards of the tomb dies. Most victims clutch their chests, others their heads; all then fall to the ground dead. Their corpses turn to dust within a minute of death, even if the body is pulled outside the tomb's defensive perimeter. Unliving beings simply crumble to dust. During the evening, the fires in the skulls' eyes leap out and consume intruders. Both defenses work on animals as well.

A wrought-iron fence marks the tomb's defensive radius. The tomb is clearly visible, as no living thing grows around it.

The Tomb of Red-Hot Iron: This pyramid-shaped tomb stands in the Nighthammer District. Despite its name, it is not actually made of iron; the substance of which it is built is quite a bit hotter than iron can get without melting. Tools touched to it, even those made from imperishable First Age materials, quickly melt to slag. Flesh or other combustible substances carbonize instantly.

In an example of typical Scavenger Lands ingenuity, the tomb has been covered in firebrick and used as the heat source for a smelting furnace. The council gave its permission for this, allegedly as the result of a rather large bribe.

The Tomb of Keening Spirits: This tomb, located in the Firewander District, is a bluff, ugly vault — a gray stone cube ten yards on a side, with no visible entrances. Closer inspection is prevented by the chanting, keening ghosts that constantly circle the tomb. The ghosts batten on trespassers, pulverizing them with spectral fists and sucking dry their Essence.

At one point, over a hundred ghosts were wandering around the tomb, and the racket they made could be heard throughout the district. Time has taken its toll, however, and today less than thirty ghosts orbit the structure.

The Tomb of Singing Blades: Another actively defended tomb, this faceted dome ten yards high stands in the Bastion District. The dome appears to be cut from a clear, flawless crystal, probably a diamond. It is fitted with a graceful orichalcum spire, which may be decorative or may be part of the tomb's defenses, but which draws lightning strikes with extraordinary frequency. The tomb also has a single orichalcum door, on the west side. Someone standing in it would have an excellent view of the sunset.

The tomb's defenses consist of thousands of whirling daggers, which constantly orbit the dome at high speed. They appear to be guided, and will arrow in on anyone who approaches too closely. The daggers are demonstrably effective even against heavy armor — as an outcaste in a warstrider learned when he attempted to breach the tomb several centuries ago. The tattered remains of the vehicle were pulled outside the defensive perimeter and salvaged, but some large cut-off chunks can still be seen today.

The keening sound of the whirling blades is quite disturbing, and the residents of the Bastion District have erected an extensive park around the site. The park's low wall and extensive landscaping help dissipate the sound, and maintain the neighborhood's air of peace and tranquillity.

The Tomb of Ice: This tomb and the other underground structure, the Tomb of Night, are both located in the Nexus District. Many savants believe that the tombs were placed underground so that the city need not be rebuilt to accommodate their upperworks.

The Tomb of Ice, or at least as much of it as has been uncovered, is an ornate structure of translucent blue ice. Its decoration centers on hexagonal motifs, giving the tomb an overall

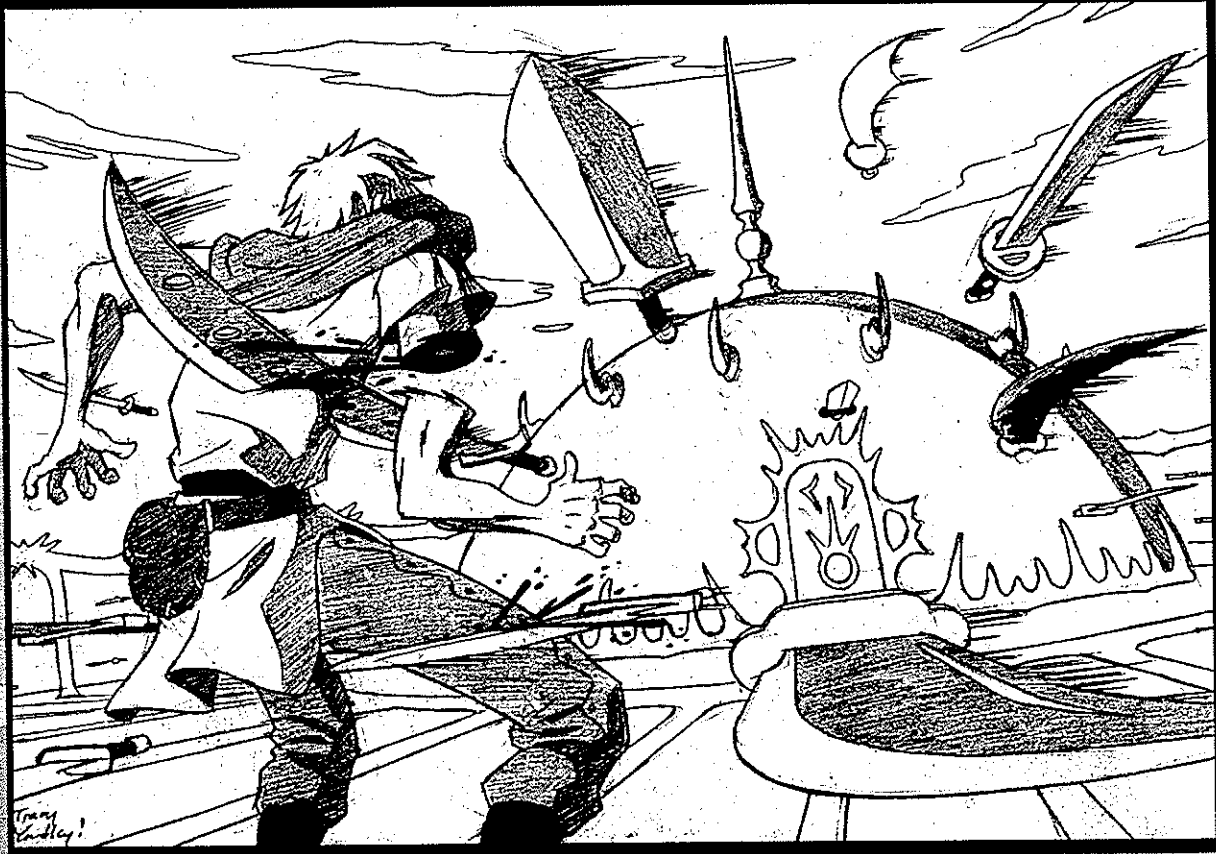
appearance of a cathedral built by giant bees. Tunnels that pass near the tomb have a definite chill. Anyone or anything that touches the ice is frozen instantly. Tools shatter with a single blow, and individuals are flash-frozen straight through.

The Guild and the Council of Entries are currently discussing plans to use the Tomb of Ice as part of a cooling project, either to make ice for commercial sale, or to establish a refrigerated warehouse for the merchants of Nexus as a whole.

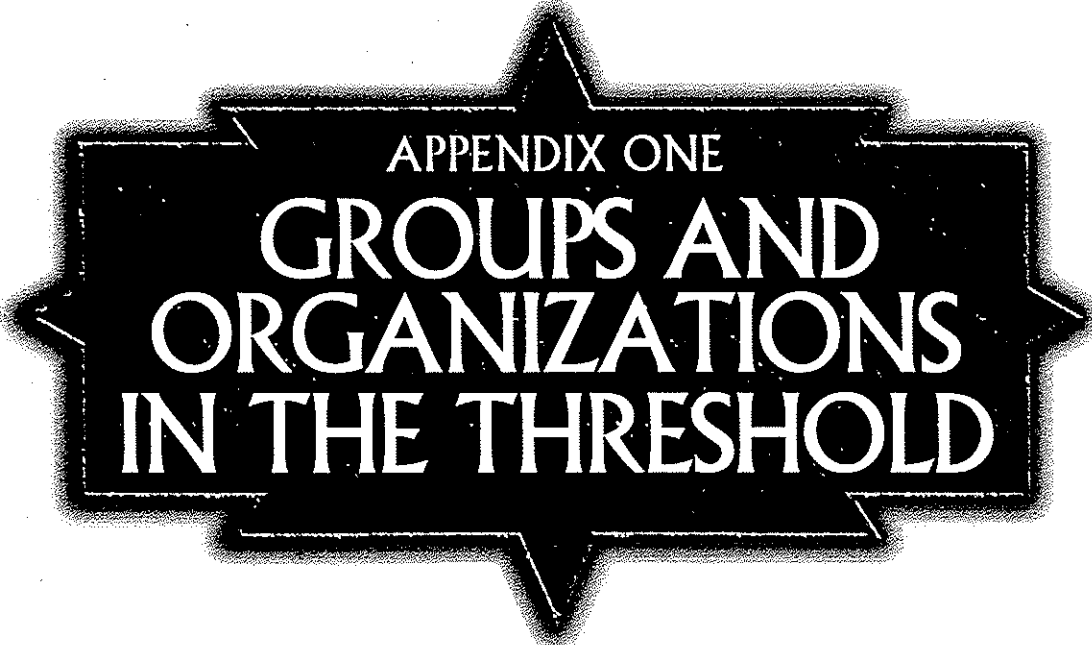
The Tomb of Night: The Tomb of Night's existence can be deduced from the fact that records seem to indicate two Anathema entombed beneath the Nexus District. Underground tunnels and excavations into an area beneath the district with a hundred-yard radius encounter a blackness that no light can pierce, and that emits no sound.

Those who touch the blackness report that it feels cool yet pleasant, like putting your hands in a mountain stream on a hot day. Anyone who fully enters the darkness never returns. Attempts to hold the hands of explorers or rope them together have all failed. Those holding the intrepid hands say they can feel the explorer slip effortlessly free; ropes come back with their knots untied, even if the roped individual enters the darkness for no longer than an eyeblink.

POSTER







APPENDIX ONE

GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN THE THRESHOLD



THE GUILD

Some claim that the most powerful force in the Threshold is not any of its various governments, but the Guild. The Guild dominates trade in all regions of the Threshold, and controls more wealth than many Threshold states together. Although never described as a military organization, the Guild maintains a large army of mercenaries in every Threshold principality. While these fierce and well-paid warriors exist primarily to protect Guild caravans from bandits, monsters, and similar threats, they also form one of the largest organized military forces in the known world. The Guild rarely has cause to use its armed might, but its hired army sometimes does see action other than local security. On the few occasions when Threshold states sought to increase their wealth by raiding Guild trading expeditions, the Guild retaliated and waged devastating war on their enemies. Few people discuss the matter — especially not Guild members — but the Guild has toppled several kingdoms in the South and overthrown the governments of a number of Eastern city-states, mostly in the Hundred Kingdoms region of the Scavenger Lands.

When not under direct attack, the Guild has other methods of enforcing its wishes on states that demand high tariffs or attempt to interfere too vigorously with trade. To deal with such cases, the Guild declares a trade embargo on the nation or principality in question. Neither Guild trading ventures nor any merchants who rely on Guild banks or

funding can do business with the sanctioned state, and Guild-registered guides will refuse to lead travelers to or from the place. The Guild makes up lost revenues out of its embargo war chest, and ruthlessly polices itself for potential sanction-breakers seeking extra profit. Cheating is allowed only when directed by the Guild, with the resulting revenues used to support everyone involved in the embargo.

Although local trade often continues with little hindrance, an embargoed nation suffers profound losses of goods, revenues, and contact with the outside world. Sixty years ago, the Western island nation of Driftloss came under sanction while attempting to build its own trading fleet. Driftloss charged Guild traders high tariffs and were lax in prosecuting crimes against Guild members. In response, the Guild placed Driftloss under a blanket embargo and blockaded the nation's ports. Foreign goods became exceedingly rare and the citizens came to resent their chief's decisions. Eventually, serious casualties caused by water elemental attacks on several outlying villages were blamed on a lack of imported weapons. Several weeks later, the island's army overthrew the government, and a military dictator emerged. It goes without saying that the dictator was quite friendly toward the Guild. This incident is hardly the only instance of Guild intervention, and few rulers dare actively resist the Guild's power. While many queens and princes resent the immense influence of the Guildsmen, most also recognize that many smaller nations would collapse without the free and easy trade the Guild provides.

THE EAST

Although the Guild trades with the Realm and all four quarters of the Threshold, the exact nature of its caravans varies from place to place. Outside of the vast and heavily urban Realm, the Eastern caravans are the largest, their yeddim-drawn wagons a common sight along the near East's well-paved roads. In less traveled regions, pack yeddim carry enormous loads. Such caravans sometimes contain more than five dozen yeddim and many hundreds of people. In the thick forests and jungles further eastward, head portage by local bearers is the established form of transport. Dozens of bearers carry large loads balanced on carefully wrapped turbans and head cloths as they tramp from one isolated settlement to the next.

Most Easterners openly welcome Guild traders, and their nightly markets often become raucous festivals where all manner of drugs and other intoxicants are sold and imbibed. As the music and carousing continue far into the night, caravan leaders can usually make an excellent profit selling more exotic entertainments and bargaining with customers whose faculties are impaired.

THE SOUTH

In the cooler portions of the South, the Guild sends large caravans between the various nations and city-states. These convoys consist primarily of trains of camels, horses, and yeddim. Further South, where the land becomes a mixture of sand and rock, even the hardy yeddim no longer serve. In these parts, swift dune-ships sailing on metal runners carry small but valuable cargoes of gemstones and firedust between the remote cities and mining camps and the cooler and more settled regions to the north.

The Guild is tolerated in the South only because they represent wealth and trade. A mixture of xenophobia and rigid customs guarantee that Guild caravans receive a somewhat reserved welcome. The traditionally clannish nature of Southern society is reflected in the fact that most festivals and parties are only open to the locals. Any celebrations that also include visiting traders are usually carefully scripted affairs full of ceremonial meaning. All Southern caravans must balance the difficulty of finding water for large companies with the dangers posed for smaller groups by raiders and desert cannibals. The most southerly-traveling caravans are relatively small, and the Guild is content to maintain its profits by sending frequent smaller caravans rather than the huge expeditions more common in the East and North.

All Guild members traveling through the South must remain constantly aware of the complex customs and superstitions common to this land. In the vast open-air bazaars of Chiaroscuro, pairs of large heavily armed guards prominently wave razor-sharp, rune-covered swords at everyone entering the market. These swords are designed to repel any malefic spirits who seek to disrupt the trading. Anyone who flinches away from the guards or otherwise displays fear when entering the market marks him or herself as possessed by evil spirits, and cannot enter until the spirit is exorcised. Similarly, in Paragon, a short blessing to the Perfect must be pronounced before any major transaction

is undertaken. Anyone who neglects the blessing is regarded as uncouth, dishonest and possibly subversive.

THE WEST

In the West, all trade is accomplished by ship. Swift Guild traders and their large merchant catamarans are common sights in all major Western ports. The largest of these ships are more than 130 feet long, with crews of almost 200 and as many as four masts. Paradoxically, the vast ocean and relative isolation of many islands means that the Guild faces the most local competition in the West. The Wavecrest, Coral, and Skullstone archipelagos all possess large fishing and trading fleets. While the smaller islands will trade with anyone who offers good prices, local merchants in the three largest states receive tax cuts for trading with their fellow Westerners. None dare restrict the activities of Guild, but its profit margins are usually lower in the West than elsewhere.

The Guild also must maintain a large fleet of catamaran warships equipped with catapults, ballistas, and firewands to repel pirates. Fortunately for the Guild, its members need not fear the Lintha Family. No one knows if the Guild pays off the Lintha, if the two groups have joined in some unwholesome alliance, or if the Lintha pirates merely fear Guild retribution. However, the Western oceans still hold plenty of independent pirates, and Coral privateers often sail against the Guild under false colors.

THE NORTH

In the cold, harsh North, the constant threats posed by packs of ravenous omen dogs, the Fair Folk and the ever-hungry dead all contribute to the Guild policy of sending large convoys to settlements in the interior of this frigid land. In the coastal regions, caravans use wagons drawn by yeddim or mammoths, while common methods of travel in the coldest lands include skis, mammoth-drawn sledges, iceships, and sleds pulled by half-wild dogs or huge hunting cats. Currently, iceships are the Guild's preferred method of transport in the far North, but sledges drawn by mammoths or yeddim frequently serve where the terrain is rougher. Trade in the North is usually restricted to the short, warm summer. Guild caravans depart the Northern coastal strip in the spring and return before the autumn ends, leaving the settlements of the North to their own resources for much of the year.

In the North, darkness and isolation breeds a ready camaraderie between most inhabitants. Any settlement that does not welcome traders is viewed with extreme suspicion as probably hiding a dark secret. The festivals that welcome Guild caravans often turn wild, drunken, and exceedingly debauched. Short-term casual marriages between traders and locals are common, and in some cases regular traders have spouses in several towns.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS FOR THE GUILD

Dawn:	Guard, Mercenary, Assassin
Zenith:	Spirit Emmissary, Salesman, Reformed Merchant Prince
Twilight:	Hired Sorcerer, Paid Diviner
Night:	Thief, Spy, Scout
Eclipse:	Trader, Negotiator

THE CHILDREN OF THE WYLD

These individuals give themselves a benign-sounding title, but others most often call them Ravagers, The Lost, or simply "vermin." Life in the Threshold is exceptionally difficult. In the face of such difficulties, a few seek paths beyond this weary reality of struggle and pain. Various mystery cults and mystical orders offer salvation to some; others seek power and protection in large groups like the Guild or criminal organizations. For those lost souls seeking respite from life's difficulties at any price, the Children of the Wyld offer yet another path.

ORIGINS

Throughout most of the Threshold, the Fair Folk prey on humans. Some hunt them through fields and stalk them in their beds, while others buy slaves, devour their dreams, and then sell the passionless husks to the Guild. However, a few desperate humans offer themselves as willing servants of the Fair Folk in return for various boons. The Ravagers serve as sustenance and as procurers for the Fair Folk, and as such are loathed and reviled by all those not among their number.

Although no one knows why, the Fair Folk call to some people in dreams and visions. Others, through weakness or fear, seek out the life of a Ravager. While most Fair Folk do not keep Ravagers, those who do treat them as something between pampered pets and valuable commodities. Ravagers live in or near the Wyld areas inhabited by the Fair Folk. First, many are mutants — though few start out deformed, over time most Ravagers are increasingly twisted by the Wyld and eventually become animalistic creatures of little interest to their masters. When they reach this point, the cripples among them are culled, and those who possess useful mutations are kept on as inhuman hounds to aid the Fair Folk in their hunts.

Also, the difference between new recruits and prey is often quite minor. Victims who can endure the ravishments of the fey almost invariably succumb to them and become Ravagers. Those who cannot burn out or go mad. Those who survive receive generous benefits. Kept in grand castles of silk, spun glass, and cold flame, they subsist on glorious but ethereal foods conjured by Fair Folk magic. The Ravagers live in luxury, disturbed only occasionally by the hungers of their masters. Within a year of joining the Fair Folk, the majority have forgotten why they ever wished to leave, and no longer desire anything but continued ease. Within a decade, all but the most resilient Ravagers have been reduced to will-less husks, which are then sold to the Guild or devoured by the Fair Folk's warrior servants. Despite the horrors in store, to the most desperate or dissolute residents of the Threshold, ten years of opulence more than outweighs the eventual cost.

TACTICS

Ravagers are specially prepared to serve as recruiters. After devouring a victim's compassion and dreams of freedom, the Fair Folk attire these twisted beings in gorgeous

luxury. Then the fey arm them with flashy glamour, minor magics and limited hypnotic powers, and send them out to recruit more victims. Ravagers typically seek out isolated towns and villages and the poorest sections of large cities, where they offer false salvation to those too helpless or downtrodden to resist. They also seek out children, promising them lives full of wonder and joy.

Regardless of what they are called, in most civilized kingdoms anyone known as an agent of the fey is killed on sight. Unfortunately, a few more remote communities know nothing of Ravagers, and others cannot defend themselves against these monsters' depredations. Ravagers have learned to avoid large and organized enemies, but isolated hamlets are prime targets. Towns located near Wyld areas are often visited by bands of a dozen or more Ravagers, who kill anyone who opposes them.

These bands live in the town for a week or two, served by the townspeople who refuse to join their number. After they take their drunken leisure, the bands move on, their ranks almost always increased by several adolescents or fools who want to emulate them and who salivate to hear that life among the Fair Folk makes such self-indulgence pale by comparison. On occasion, Ravager bands take in as many as several hundred new recruits, happily going from village to village and stripping them of their surplus stores as well as taking some of their outcasts and children.

While many who accompany the Ravager bands wish only to enjoy the pleasures of easy conquest, the Ravagers have powers that allow them to lull the new recruits' suspicions and cloud any escape plans. Eventually, the Ravagers return to the citadels of the Fair Folk, and the petty bullies among them soon learn the sweet and horrifying truth of the faerie.

POWERS

The gifts given to the Ravagers vary, but there are certain common themes. The bands seem able to communicate over long distances and to know when they are being hunted by large armies or other significant threats. Only spirits and Exalts, or troops led by such leaders, seem able to find and attack these bands. When passing through more remote portions of the Threshold, Dragon-Blooded travelers will occasionally be asked to rescue children stolen by or enticed to join Ravager bands. While the possibility of rescue is extremely remote once the children actually fall into the hands of the Fair Folk, liberating them from Ravager bands is generally possible. If the leaders of a band are killed, the band instantly disperses into groups of minor criminals seeking to flee harm and a number of dazed Ravagers who recall nothing except the orders of their masters and an overpowering desire to return to their pampered, soul-destroying lives.

While Ravagers can be found throughout the Threshold, they are especially common in the South and East. Ravagers are quite rare in the North, since the harshness of the landscape and the predatory nature of most Northern Fair Folk results in the early death of most Northerners mad enough to seek this way of life.







APPENDIX TWO

THE FAIR FOLK



The Fair Folk are creatures of the Wyld. They are born into an incomprehensible realm, where they dwell in ever-shifting castles built in trees made of seawater and hunt mantis-headed stags that flee across plains made of human hands. This endless chaos lies beyond the furthest reaches of the mortal world. The Deep Wyld is a realm of infinite potential, unlimited power, and immeasurable danger. The mercurial forces of this realm can slay even its most powerful native inhabitants in an instant. In addition to their unstable environment, the Fair Folk also face other dangers. Fey nobles spend much of their immortal lives enmeshed in endlessly complex games of power and status. Failure at these intrigues can easily result in disgrace, enslavement, death, or worse.

In the face of these many hazards, a small but significant number of Fair Folk choose to leave their uncanny homeland and enter the concrete world of reality. Others come because they find the immutable mortal world strangely compelling. Regardless of the reasons, some Fair Folk abandon the Wyld to dwell within Creation.

Fair Folk who journey to the mortal world often face trouble from their kin. When the Fair Folk put on flesh, they become better defined, more attached to the world, lesser than they once were because they have fixed their endless possibilities into a single concrete form. Fair Folk who choose to live in the cities and Demesnes of the

mortal world are looked down on by their formless cousins as dubious amalgams of infinite dreams and gross matter.

This contempt causes few problems for the fey while they dwell in mortal reality, but all fey remain tied to the Wyld. Fair Folk who lack free access to a powerful Demesne (••• or above) or to human dreams must periodically return to the Wyld in order to avoid withering beneath the unremitting reality of Creation. Here, beyond the edges of the world or in the deepest Wyld regions, their physical forms are encumbrances, and they can be mocked and attacked by their inchoate kindred.

LORDS OF THE WILDERNESS

The most common and most feared Fair Folk are those that dwell in Demesnes or on the fringes of Wyld regions, close enough to the edge between the worlds that they can easily ride out on raids, yet far enough away from both to be safe from the ill-will of either region's inhabitants. These beings are described in detail in the Exalted main rulebook, and so little more need be said of them here. They live as raiders and bandit-princes, scouring the land around their fortresses or underhills, and trading goods of gossamer and glamour to the Guild in exchange for shipments of slaves. They are universally feared and hated; those who live near them spare no expense to obtain charms against them and weapons of cold-wrought iron.

WALKERS AMONG MEN

Those Fair Folk who cannot gain access to a Demesne must interact with and feed upon humanity. A few such fey dwell in the remote wilderness, setting bizarre but deadly traps for travelers, but most wish to avoid such a mendicant existence. Also, many of the Fair Folk interact poorly with the spirits of the wilderness. Such spirits often consider the Fair Folk a threat to their power and sovereignty, to say nothing of any Demesne the spirit might claim. Instead, Fair Folk who cannot claim Demesnes as their own typically live in human cities and towns.

All but the most ignorant humans know that the Fair Folk prey upon humanity. Their wicked pranks and terrible tempers are legendary, and many mortals have seen the shambling husks and mind-damaged thralls that result from faerie ravishment. Consequently, the Fair Folk are often welcomed with appeasement ceremonies otherwise reserved for plagues and hungry ghosts.

Fair Folk who wish to live among mortals typically perform heroic deeds to convince their prospective neighbors of their good intentions, or else move to a large and cosmopolitan venue where they are only one potentially dangerous curiosity among many. Since quite a few Fair Folk already live in Nexus, Chiaroscuro and the Haltan tree cities, all of these are favorite locations to settle. However, except for a few places like Whitewall (which specifically forbids their presence), a small number of Fair Folk can be found in most large cities.

The Coral Archipelago has one of the Fair Folk on its Council of Plutocrats, and another faerie serves as a temple acolyte in Gethamane. Several faerie nobles hold high positions in the Guild, and three are known to belong to the Lintha Family. In these circles, the fey need only make clear their disinterest in politics and avoid abusing their powers. In places less used to outcastes, sorcerers, the god-blooded and other such magical figures, Fair Folk must approach more cautiously. Some ingratiate themselves through gifts and services, while others simply cast down the local bandit-queen and take her throne.

Those Fair Folk who wish to rule justly and without fear of assassins, or who wish to live among mortals as common citizens, must avoid transforming their neighbors into will-less husks. The fey can be endlessly inventive when it comes to solving this problem. In regions where slaves have no rights, the faerie may buy and feed off of them. Other Fair Folk work as assassins, turning the horrid fates of their victims into a selling point for their services.

However, most Fair Folk soon learn that they can feed carefully, stealing only a small portion of their victims' emotions and dreams. Such limited feeding rarely results in serious harm to the victim — at worst, he or she feels somewhat tired and listless the next day. Likewise, Fair Folk who spend time around groups of humans in the grip of exceptionally strong emotions may freely feed from

these ambient feelings. Such feeding causes no effect except to dampen the prevailing mood slightly.

Some Fair Folk work in brothels, selling their bodies for coin and the chance to harmlessly drain some of their customers' excess passions, or acting as pimps or madams and feeding from both their stable and their clients. Some work in taverns or gambling dens, feeding on the emotions of the house during especially raucous evenings. Those of darker bent work as torturers or secret policemen, feeding on their victims' pain, terror and sorrow. Many faerie nobles who flee the Wyld act as patrons for artists who supply them with the delicious fruits of mortal creativity. A fey's options are as unlimited as her imagination and appetites, as long as she gets regular exposure to strong human emotions.

VARIETIES OF FAIR FOLK

Fair Folk who enter the physical world are bound by two five-fold divisions: the five elements and the ranks of the fey. A faerie forms its body and sets its form in a land with some elemental association, from the four quarters of the Threshold to the Imperial Mountain. The fey remains tied to this element forever after, unless it journeys deep into the Wyld and performs complex and dangerous rituals to reshape itself. Thus, wood fey come from the East, water fey from the West, and earth fey from the Blessed Isle. A faerie's elemental association determines its appearance and some of its powers. Like all beings with strong elemental associations, Fair Folk can learn to control, communicate with, shape, and even summon their element. Noble fey are often closely tied to their element in its pure form, while Commoners are usually tied to an animal associated with that element.

The division of the fey into ranks is eternal and unchangeable, carried with them from the Wyld. The rulers of the fey are the tall, proud nobles. Beneath them and forever under their command are four types of commoners: warriors, workers, entertainers and diplomats. In addition to their other differences, each of these five types of fey are tied to a specific passion upon which they feed.

NOBLES AND COMMONERS

Few noble fey leave the Wyld willingly. Most of those who dwell in Demesnes or Wyld regions fled into exile after some grand political game collapsed at their feet. Most such exiles are constantly scheming to regain their power so that they can triumphantly return to the Wyld. However, because they are ageless and immortal, their plans often extend well beyond the lives of mortal men, and any move in their endless status games may take decades to execute. From the perspective of the mortals around them, it seems as if they have taken up permanent residence. Nobles who dwell among humankind have typically either abandoned their ambitions in the Wyld

and now seek power among mortals, or else were drawn to Creation by an inexplicable longing for the mortal world.

In contrast, commoners usually come into the finite world as part of some noble's retinue, or seeking their freedom. Those who come with a noble typically stay with him because they have little choice — it is in their nature to serve. However, the Second Age of Man is a hazardous place even for the Fair Folk, and many such servitors outlive their masters. Others were left behind in the Fair Folk's chaotic retreat at the end of the Contagion. Some even have fled their masters, either as an act of rebellion or because they have gained some measure of free will and seek to avoid having this traitorous feeling ripped from their minds by angry nobles. Many commoners do not survive the transition to free existence, but those that do often prosper.

TYPES OF FAERIES

Warriors: These are the soldiers, guards, hunters, and assassins of the fey. Some exist to protect nobles or special places, others hunt mortal prey, and most fight in the endless wars the nobles stage against their immortal rivals. Regardless, all warriors excel at martial feats and find joy in the thrill of a well-fought battle. Physically powerful and imposing by nature, some warriors are merely muscular, while others are looming giants seven or more feet tall. Many are also physically fitted to their craft in other ways — most bear horns, razor-sharp fangs, scaly armor, rending talons or other traits that make them excellent combatants. In most cases, such weaponry or armor is simply a natural exaggeration of typical bestial traits, but this does not always hold true — for example, looming lion-warriors can bear needle-sharp antlers as well as wicked talons.

In the mortal world, most warriors continue to serve their noble masters, and those without masters tend toward a martial existence as tribesmen or brigands. Some unique individuals become renowned mercenaries, legendary soldiers or even the ageless, self-appointed protectors of a region, single-handedly dispatching threats to their chosen town or district.

Warriors feed on the virtue of Valor. Whether facing a determined warrior in single combat, reveling in the chaos of a great battle, hunting terrified prey through the wilderness or merely watching gladiatorial combats and absorbing a fraction of the combatants' fervor, terror, the thrill of combat, and wild bravado are all meat and drink to these Fair Folk.

Workers: Workers are the servants and crafters of the nobility. They exist to fetch and carry for their betters, meeting every need from forging the nobles' shining armor and glassswords out of gossamer to moving heavy loads and keeping their dream palaces meticulously clean.

In the mortal world, workers are the penultimate craftsmen, creating weapons, jewelry, tools or even fancy



For
the
fey



meals with consummate skill. Items made by such workers are always in demand by wealthy mortals who know the value of fine work, and some workers gather fabulous riches serving mortal overlords. Others give away their labor far more cheaply, because they do not understand the meaning of wealth or because they value a sense of belonging and service far more than lumps of gold or silver. Though these fey are less widely renowned than their rich cousins, many towns are pleased to have a resident faerie who can prune an entire orchard in an afternoon or single-handedly harvest several acres of rice in a day. Like warriors, many workers are quite muscular. However, most are either of average height or even somewhat short. Also, while their arms and shoulders may be quite broad, their hands are always nimble and exceptionally dexterous. Many workers possess more than the normal complement of fingers.

Workers dine on Temperance. Some workers live at or regularly visit monasteries, where they drink in the determination and faith of monks and nuns praying and scourging themselves as they strive to purge their bodies of all worldly wants. Others run dens of illicit vice, where the weak-willed come to drown their unhappiness and give in to their inner temptations in an orgy of drugs, gambling and similar wild excesses. Still others feed on the focused creative fervor of master craftsmen, or the admiration that others lavish on the worker's own vast capacity for toil.

Entertainers: Entertainers serve the nobles as musicians, storytellers, jugglers, acrobats, and courtesans. Their songs, stories, jokes, wild capers and sensual delights save their masters and mistresses from the dullness of endless existence. In the mortal world, an entertainer's talents are greatly in demand. Few mortals can turn down a chance to hear a troubadour whose song can calm savage beasts, and fewer still can resist the opportunity to spend a night of passion with an inhumanly skilled lover. Most entertainers are quite attractive, in their own highly exotic fashion. Even those with pronounced animal-like features are of exceptional if unusual beauty.

Entertainers feed on Compassion. Some are sexual predators who dine off the twisted fruits of forced passion, while others are skilled courtesans who carefully cultivate love and desire among their clients. Although many entertainers feed on some form of love or sex, this is largely because lust is such a powerful urge in humans. Most entertainers can also feed on more rarefied feelings, drawing their sustenance from the joy and rapture humans feel in response to beautiful music, engrossing dramatic performances, or even side-splitting jokes.

Diplomats: Diplomats are the most mysterious and powerful of the commoners. Serving their masters as spies, messengers, ambassadors, heralds and record-keepers, diplomats typically excel at shapeshifting and at glimmers relating to communication and mental influence. In the mortal realm, the vast majority of diplomats

FAIR FOLK AND FEEDING

Outside a Demesne or Wyld Region, Fair Folk slowly dwindle away, losing 1 point of temporary Essence per day. They can only regain this Essence by feeding on mortal dreams and emotions, or by returning to a Demesne or the Wyld. When a faerie's temporary Essence reaches 0, the faerie begins to lose points of permanent Essence at the rate of 1 point per day, until the faerie reaches 0 permanent Essence and dies.

Fair Folk who are feeding off of ambient emotions roll the appropriate Virtue when exposed to strong feelings or emotion-arousing actions. For each success, the faerie gains 1 point of temporary Essence. A faerie can roll to gain Essence once per scene, provided the emotional circumstances permit feeding.


If a faerie wishes to ravish a target, the victim must either be beguiled or willing — the Fair Folk cannot ravish targets who do not willingly accept the act. To ravish a target, the faerie makes an appropriate Virtue roll. For every success, the target loses 1 point of permanent Willpower or 1 point of the appropriate permanent Virtue (whichever the faerie chooses), and the ravisher gains 10 points of temporary Essence. A ravishing Fair Folk need not use every success, but can choose to take one point at a time in order to make the victim last longer.

When a victim's permanent Virtue drops to 0, she becomes numb and may no longer serve as an energy source for faeries that batten on that Virtue. If a victim's Willpower drops to 0, he becomes a shuffling slave who does only what he is told. Most Fair Folk can choose what parts of the victim's Virtue to feed on when they steal permanent points. For example, a fey that wishes to turn its victim into a Ravager may eat away the victim's mercy from his Compassion and rip away his willingness to resist from his Valor.

The Fair Folk find feeding an inherently enjoyable act, much like sex or eating food for mortals. Fair Folk will often seek to feed even when doing so is not necessary to their sustenance.

live as independent beings, either serving a nation or cause for which they have developed an affection, or (more commonly) working as hired spies or couriers for any who can afford their high fees.

A few diplomats leave politics behind when they come to the mortal world and learn to love travel for its own sake. Such individuals often become famed explorers



or wandering mystics who awaken new wisdom in those they meet. Some retain ties to the Wyld and serve as ambassadors between the legions of the Fair Folk and various mortal powers. Many diplomats are extremely fluid in shape, adapting the form most convenient for their present circumstances. They generally appear attractive and non-threatening, a guise that suits their purposes well.

Diplomats feed on Conviction. Fanatics and their wildly ecstatic cults draw many diplomats. Others develop a love of torturing and eventually breaking the strongest wills, while some merely surround themselves with and work for idealists bent on remaking the world.

Nobles: Noble Fair Folk rule all the rest. These beings typically have a greater degree of control over glamour and the Wyld than other fey, and rule territories intimately tied to their being. In the eldritch domains of the most powerful nobles, not a single leaf on an ever-shifting plant can wilt or fall without the noble's knowledge. Like all the Fair Folk, nobles vary in form, depending on their origin and the particulars of their nature. All, however, are beautiful. Some may possess the harsh and inhuman beauty of a glacier glistening in the sun, others the feral beauty of a dangerous animal. However, not even the most outlandish noble can be called ugly or unimpressive. Almost all nobles are tall, and most bear obvious markings of their elemental association.

Those who have only heard stories of such beings claim they look much like the Dragon-Blooded, but those who have seen faerie nobles know the truth. A few similarities exist between the two — like Dragon-Blooded, many noble fey exhibit skin tones and hair colors connected to their element. However, the Dragon-Blooded always appear as what they ultimately are: humans with elemental features. The nobles of the Fair Folk are not human, and it shows. They are tall and perfect and symmetrical in ways no mortal can be, for mortals are living things while the Fair Folk merely play at being such. Even those without inhuman features are awesomely, obviously beyond mortality and mortal frailties.

In mortal lands, many nobles attempt to continue their previous ways and live as members of the regional elite. Some prefer the bustle and complexity of cosmopolitan cities, while others enjoy the sedate life of rural gentry or the predatory joy of being the capricious and absolute ruler of an isolated town or small city. Nobles exist to rule, and it is difficult for them to do otherwise.

A few relinquish this ambition, seeking to escape an eternity of intrigue with an interlude of something — anything — different. Some become savants, sharing the wisdom of their eternal existence with those who can uncover the meaning of their cryptic riddles. Others are unrestrained hedonists, seeking to embrace every new experience regardless of the cost to themselves or others. Some even enjoy the delicious irony of life as a heroic

crusader, using their intimate knowledge of political games and intrigue to topple corrupt governments.

Nobles have more choices in feeding than commoners, and may dine on two of the four Virtues. One is typically related to the facet of existence the noble finds most compelling; for example, a warrior-prince would feed on Valor while a diplomat would feed on Conviction. The other Virtue depends on the personality of the noble. The result is a much more flexible and nuanced character than that of the average commoner.

FAIR FOLK AND THE FIVE ELEMENTS

Like spirits and elementals, Fair Folk who enter the mortal world build their bodies out of the elemental Essence of the region from which they take their shape. Southern fey are innately linked to fire, while Northern fey are linked to air and cold. These elemental associations have two major effects. Most faeries possess at least a minimal degree of control over their associated element, and the bodies of the Fair Folk reflect their elemental ties.

While most nobles exhibit the raw majesty of their element, fey commoners instead bear the features of animals common to the region. The exact details vary from one breed of commoner to the next, but all show some visible sign of the animal to which they are connected. Most commoners can communicate with all animals of their type. Some commoners possess only a few of the features listed below, although entertainers often have more than most.

Water fey are connected to sea creatures. Many possess features similar to those of carp, frogs or dolphins. Warriors tend to resemble predator fish, like sharks and barracudas. Commoner water fey in general often have fish-like scales, webbed hands and feet, carp-like whiskers, or large lidless eyes. All excel at swimming, and those that cannot actually breathe water can usually hold their breath for 30 minutes or more.

Air fey are connected to birds and arctic animals like wolves, stoats, foxes, mammoths and polar bears. Entertainers look vixenish, while diplomats are birdlike and warriors resemble predators like badgers, wolves and polar bears. Some Northern workers are scrawny, dwarfish laborers, often with rodentine features, while others are huge, slow mammoth-like haulers.

Wood fey are connected to snakes and other woodland or meadow-dwelling animals. Eastern hobgoblins are produced in spawning pits, and are small, vile snake-headed monstrosities that delight in causing pain. Diplomats and entertainers often have deerlike features or resemble woodland birds; a few are snakes from the waist down, with fully human torsos, arms and heads. Workers typically have a beaverish cast, but some in the Southeast take their shape from ants or other colonial insects.



Fire fey are associated with all manner of desert and savanna animals. Warriors, who are held in little regard by the Southern faerie nobility, resemble jackals or hyenas, while diplomats and entertainers typically have a cat-like appearance. Slitted cat eyes are almost universal, as are short fangs. Fur is not uncommon, and many have cat-like ears, tails, or retractile claws. Commoners look like dark-skinned humans, but many exhibit mannerisms that mark them as kin to desert rodents.

Earth fey are associated with humankind. More commonly known as the Mountain Folk, earth faeries embody the stability of the Elemental Pole of Earth, and are found almost exclusively in the Imperial Mountain. These orderly beings are dramatically changed by their embodiment into such a naturally static shape.

Commoners among earth fey are universally shaped like short, broad-shouldered men — caricatures of miners, smiths and dockworkers. Those who distinguish themselves are made diplomats or entertainers, but all begin as laborers, harvesting and shaping the bounty of the vast Imperial Mountain. In contrast, earth nobles appear shockingly, astonishingly human. Unlike nobles linked to more active elements, who exaggerate the various beauties of the human form until the result is clearly inhuman, nobles of the earth personify the balance and shape that is the root of human beauty. These individuals often look like exquisite statues made of perfect, breathing flesh rather than marble.

FAIR FOLK POWERS

The greatest power of the Fair Folk is their inhuman perfection. Their flawless bodies perform better than any mortal's can, and they are likewise masters of the skills they pursue. For the unExalted to challenge the fey to a contest of ability is a pointless exercise — the most gifted human craftsman might have a chance to outperform a Fair Folk commoner, but would have no chance against a noble.

Yet this same strength is often a liability when the Fair Folk come to battle against the Exalted. While their capacities far outstrip the abilities of a natural human, the Fair Folk cannot increase their skills with Essence as the Exalted can. During a critical exchange of blows, even a Dragon-Blooded can often exceed a Fair Folk noble's performance.

In mechanical terms, Fair Folk nobles have Attribute spreads of 16/13/10, but no Attribute in any category can exceed 7, and the points are almost always split as evenly as possible between the Attributes in a given category. The number of Abilities a fey can possess varies, but no Ability score can exceed 6. Fey nobles are not particularly given to specialization, and those few that do possess Specialties never exceed +2.

Commoners vary somewhat between individuals, but generally have Attribute spreads in the area of 9/4/2. No

more than one Attribute in a given category can be rated 5 or higher. Abilities also vary between individuals, but the commoner typically has only one Ability at 5 or higher. However, unlike nobles, commoners can enjoy the full benefits of specialization, and many (especially workers) have Specialties at +3.

GLAMOUR

Glamour is the faerie art of making illusions so perfect as to be effectively real. The effects of this power are described in the Fair Folk Diplomat entry on page 286 of the Antagonists chapter in the Exalted rulebook.

Glamour has its origins in the nature of the Fair Folk. In the chaos outside Creation, glamour is their means of shaping reality to their desires. In those mad lands, where reality and illusion are one, glamour is an incredibly potent type of sorcery, and acts as shield and sword for the unshaped faerie nobility. The unshaped fey settle their differences with terrifying duels of shapeshifting and conjuration, and the gift of illusion they bring with them to Creation is the palest shadow of their might in the Wyld.

In the Wyld and areas of strong Wyld energy, glamour is a force of immense power. It can conjure up devastating weapons or drastically alter the environment on command. Exalted using Charms like Integrity Protecting Prana and Chaos-Repelling Pattern are immune to the direct effects of glamour in Wyld areas, because the effects of glamour are just another Wyld effect. An Exalt in a Wyld area who is not protected by these Charms and whose Wits + Essence score is not high enough to allow her to see through a glamour may be directly attacked and permanently altered by the glamour.

Indirect glamour effects can damage Exalted who are protected by Charms — glamour fire can burn them and animals of glamour can bite them, but their blood cannot be transmuted to perfume or their bodies twisted inside out. However, Exalts can answer faerie antagonists in kind. Solar Exalted in Wyld areas can destroy and reshape even the most powerful glamour effects with the Wyld-Shaping Technique Charm, bending and solidifying the glamour just as if it were a normal Wyld area.

Within the borders of Creation, glamour is less effective. The touch of cold-wrought iron dispels it, and it can be seen through by those quick-witted and powerful enough. It cannot be used to reshape sentient creatures, and the concrete nature of Creation wears away at glamour-based alterations, eventually reasserting itself over the faerie's illusions. The amount of time this takes depends on how drastic the alteration is. A subtle alteration might last for days, while something created from thin air will last a minute or less.

Very few commoners can create flexible glammers; this powerful magic is the province of the Fair Folk nobility, and a jealously guarded prerogative. Only very



old commoners know this skill; those who do have typically been isolated from any nobles for centuries and thereby forced to develop free will.

PERMANENT GLAMOUR

Permanent glamour is similar to regular glamour, save that instead of being conjured up by a single act of will and expenditure of Essence, these illusions are meticulously shaped over a long period out of gossamer, the substance of dreams. Gossamer occurs naturally in the Wyld, and can be drawn from Demenses and mortal dreamers as well. Permanent glamour cannot be reshaped by Wyld energies or by regular glamour. It is strong enough to withstand the closest scrutiny, and capable of extreme durability.

Permanent glamour is effectively real, and in many ways resembles the Solar Charm Wyld-Shaping Technique, except that it takes longer to create and requires the faerie craftsman to shape the new reality bit by bit over time. Permanent glammers can be quite powerful — fine faerie blades are almost equal to a daiklave, and fey plate armor is feather-light while providing the protection of superheavy plate.

However strong it may be, permanent glamour remains ultimately inferior to the concrete reality of Creation. If subjected to the harsh influences of reality for too long, permanent glamour will wither and perish.

Fragile items such as swords and gowns may take a year or two to wear away, while large items such as fortresses or war machines might persevere for several decades. However, some time before their final disintegration, these materials begin to look increasingly shabby and fragile. Careful handling can preserve them for a time, but they will eventually become so unreal that they blow apart at a breath of air or a harsh glance.

Permanent glamour is largely the province of commoners, particularly the worker class. Those nobles who have the skill rarely choose to spend their eternities hammering out drapes and armor. While permanent glamour is a formidable asset, mastery of it is neither fast nor flexible enough to endanger a noble in the Wyld. Most of the fabulous crafts produced by fey commoners living among humans incorporate permanent glamour to some extent, and most lose their luster after a decade or two, reverting to merely masterful handicrafts.

To create a permanent glamour, the faerie must have Craft (Glamour) 3 or higher, a proper workshop, and access to gossamer. This last requirement is the most challenging. Rulers who keep workers in their courts to provide them with finery often keep small “harems” of young men and women locked away, so that the resident faerie can harvest their dreams of freedom and accomplishment for use in its forging.

BEGUILEMENT

Glamour works on more than the material world. It can also confound and confuse the judgment and intellect. The glamour known as beguilement enables a faerie to invest her words and suggestions with an illusory good sense, making them impossible to resist. This power takes various forms depending on the personality of the faerie, but regardless of its origins, the results are the same.

Beguilement's mechanical effects are described on page 286 of the Antagonists chapter in the Exalted rulebook, under the Fair Folk Diplomat entry. Chaos-Repelling Pattern, Integrity Protecting Prana and similar Charms all protect Exalted from direct effects like beguilement. These forms of glamour all attempt to reshape the subject's mind, which is protected by these Charms as part of the wielder's being.

GLAMOUR SORCERY

Glamour sorcery is the noble equivalent of creating permanent glamour. Through this exquisitely fine craft, a faerie sorcerer can shape gossamer into powerful enchantments or fearsome magical items.

Items created by glamour sorcery take months or years of effort, and are comparable in power to enchanted devices created by Exalted sorcerers through use of the Five Magical Materials — see the Exalted Storytellers Companion and the Book of Three Circles for examples of such objects. The major limitation to using glamour sorcery is that Fair Folk almost never create devices that work beyond an individual level. They make weapons and armor, brass horses, and crystals for scrying, not war machines and flood control devices.

Magic performed by glamour sorcery focuses on enchantment, illusion, and conjuration. It is used to beguile, to curse, to create and to control. With this magic, the Fair Folk can bring down curses vast enough to make a kingdom sleep until a certain condition is met, or bring down rain in a region for forty days and forty nights. They can rout armies, confound destiny and create illusory sendings of themselves to appear in the farthest reaches of Creation. With this magic, the Fair Folk wrenched aside the wards that held them back from Creation, and it is said they will use their sorcery to break those wards asunder again in Creation's far-distant final days.

Fair Folk cannot summon or command spirits and elementals, for the faerie have no station in the Celestial Bureaucracy. Nor can they command demons and the dead, having no aptitude for the rituals involved. However, faeries can command behemoths, often ensorcelling these bizarre primordial creatures for use as tranic war machines. After a fashion, the fey can also command the great vortices of chaos that lurk beyond the edges of Creation. These storms cause havoc to mortals caught in

them, and more importantly, allow the unshaped Fair Folk to enter Creation without withering.

The high Essence cost and sheer power required to perform it makes most faerie reluctant to perform overmuch glamour sorcery. Though they live endless lives, any given period in that span may be very active. Few nobles can set aside much time to perform powerful but time-consuming acts of magic. When they do, however, the effects are extremely potent.

To perform glamour sorcery, a faerie must have Craft (Glamour) and Occult at 4 or higher. Most faerie sorcery can be undone with Sapphire Countermagic, though certain more powerful castings require Adamant Countermagic. Some fey magic, particularly that which has no mortal equivalent, cannot be undone with any form of standard countermagic.

SHAPESHIFTING

Shapeshift: 10 Motes, 1 Willpower. The faerie can shapeshift into the form of a natural animal. While in animal form, the faerie has the beast's Physical and Social Attributes and Health Levels, but its own Mental Attributes and Abilities. Faerie animals can talk, and can use the animal's natural Abilities such as flight, exceptional smell or the ability to breathe water. A faerie can remain in animal shape indefinitely, but the mercurial nature of the fey means most of them have a hard time maintaining the facade.


If a shapeshifted faerie touches cold-wrought iron, it is forced back into its natural shape, and anyone with a Perception + Essence higher than the faerie's Wits + Craft (Glamour) can tell the animal is a transformed faerie. Most commoners with this power can turn into only a single type of animal. All faeries with this power can speak with animals whose shape they can assume, regardless of their current form.

ELEMENTAL CONTROL

Control (Element): 5 Motes. The faerie can create and control the element with which it is affiliated. The exact effects of this power vary depending on the element in question. In combat, the faerie can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to its permanent Essence or make an attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice its permanent Essence. Such attacks can be dodged or parried.

Air — The faerie can cause strong winds to blow, hear conversations spoken outdoors over vast distances, predict the weather with near-perfect accuracy, and call or banish thunderstorms, blizzards, sleet, and hail, though these latter effects cost 10 motes. Air attacks cannot be dodged, only parried.

Wood — The faerie can shape wood by touch, rapidly molding it into complex and intricate shapes without tools. She can also animate any wooden object



within a number of yards equal to 10 x her Essence, causing it to move and bend at her command, or to leap through the air as a missile.

Fire — The faerie can cause any flammable object within 20 meters to ignite as if touched with a burning torch. Fey with this power can also instantly snuff out a fire of up to bonfire size, cause a fire to burn twice as hot as normal or sense the cause of a fire.

Water — The faerie can cause water to flow or cease flowing, part streams and small rivers, walk on water and cause water to actively attempt to drown a swimmer. Water attacks cannot be parried, only dodged.

Earth — The faerie can shape stone and metal just as a wood-oriented faerie can shape wood. The faerie can also cause the earth within 30 yards to shake hard enough to make horses stumble and panic. Anyone standing must make a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll or fall over, and flimsy structures may be damaged. Several of these faeries acting in concert can shake down even the sturdiest walls. Running characters make the above Athletics roll at difficulty 3 to keep their footing. The faerie can also touch the earth and feel travelers or invaders coming from miles away.

WYLD IMMUNITY

As beings of the Wyld, the Fair Folk are largely immune to the twisting and damage it inflicts on humans and other mortal creatures. Fair Folk can learn to alter and shape the Wyld and to protect others from its effects. They also often learn to command the Wyld's infinite possibilities and chaotic energies in more subtle ways. Even far from any Wyld area, some Fair Folk can produce glamours and illusions that alter the appearances of existing objects, give people and things new shapes, or create vast intangible mirages. Also, their ties to the timeless, eternally changing Wyld enable many Fair Folk to partially transcend time and space. Some of the fey can deliver potent prophecies of future events, detailed accounts of past happenings, and reports of events occurring in distant lands. A few say the Fair Folk shape the future, while others believe the fey can merely read its pre-written patterns.

The fact that they feed on thought, passion, and emotion grants all fey some measure of access to and control over the minds and perceptions of humans and animals. Many fey can send messages into the minds of distant mortals, most can communicate silently without language, and some can rip thoughts from another's mind, transform rage into joy, or even control mortals like puppets.

Many Fair Folk abuse these powers, surrounding themselves with will-less thralls, or filling the population of entire towns with undying loyalty and devotion. Others search deep within the minds of mortals, finding their darkest secrets and the keys with which these unfortunates can be broken and made to beg and grovel. However, while

most humans fear such powers, mental glamours need not always be used for ill. Some fey use their powers to entertain, to inspire their allies with sufficient bravery to defeat their enemies, or to identify traitors and criminals.

Their elemental nature allows fey to learn to control the various elements in a manner similar to that possessed by some spirits. While all fey are best at controlling their own element, with much work they can also learn to control any of the other four. Many fey learn to communicate with their own element, and with any elementals they encounter. More skilled members of the Fair Folk learn to summon elementals, more rapidly and freely through their element, and eventually to summon and shape their element on a whim.

Although nobles possess more and greater powers and can generally defeat any commoner in single combat, commoners are often considerably more adept at shifting form. Commoners can easily learn to transform themselves into their associated animal. Many wood fey can become deadly serpents, while air fey change into birds and ride the winds, and earth fey become monkeys or learn to duplicate the shape of any human from whom they have ever fed. Few nobles ever learn these arts of transformation. Instead, most nobles interested in transformations learn to become physical manifestations of their allied element.

EXAMPLE FEY

The following Fair Folk are examples of the sorts of faeries that live among mortals, and serve to supplement the examples provided in the Exalted main rulebook. Unlike the Fair Folk Diplomat and Fair Folk Cataphract, both of whom are inimical to most mortal life, these characters are better-suited to human interactions.

LION WARRIOR

In the southern city of Chiaroscuro dwell a trio of fey commoners — a warrior and two entertainers — with a thriving business. The entertainers, Selchin and Satreyla, sell all manner of pleasures, from clever feats of legerdemain to heart-wrenching ballads or nights of exotic passion with one or both. The warrior, Iflin, guards the pair and makes certain that no one attempts to cheat or kidnap them. Capable of controlling fire and transforming into a fierce desert lion, Iflin also works as a bodyguard. When possible, the trio sell their services to wealthy visitors as a package — they act as guides, guards, and entertainers for the duration of their patron's stay. Although they have often been asked to accompany a patron back to her homeland, they are unwilling to leave the cosmopolitan joys of Chiaroscuro.

Though they are much more discreet about it, these fey also use beguilement to rip secrets from the minds of their patrons' enemies. However, any patron who attempts to mistreat or betray these fey ends up similarly betrayed to



his enemies, or loses the capacity to feel joy after nights of being haunted by terrifying visions. The three fey are exceedingly rich, but they continue to work because they enjoy it, and because they tend to spend vast sums on baubles and frivolous diversions.

Name: Iftlin

Type: Warrior

Element: Fire

Physical Description: Iftlin looks like a tall, muscular human with slitted eyes, short claws on hands and feet, and a light coating of lion-like fur on his head and body.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 2, Temperance 1, Valor 5

Abilities: Martial Arts 4 (Claws +2), Melee 3, Archery 3, Thrown 3, Endurance 2, Resistance 2, Survival 3, Presence 3, Investigation 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Dodge 3, Stealth 4, Linguistics 2

Powers:

Fearsome Mien: 5 motes, 1 Willpower. Iftlin wreaths himself in terrifying illusions, similar to the battle mien of a Dawn Caste Solar Exalted. Targets whose Valor + Essence is lower than Iftlin's highest combat Ability suffer a -2 penalty to all dice pools while in combat with him.

Control Fire: 5 Motes. Iftlin can create and control fire. In combat, he can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to his permanent Essence or make an attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice his permanent Essence. Such attacks can be dodged or parried.

Shapeshift: 10 Motes, 1 Willpower. Iftlin can shapeshift into the form of a lion. While in animal form, he has the lion's Physical and Social Attributes and Health Levels, but his own Mental Attributes and Abilities. He can talk in lion form and can use the animal's exceptional sense of smell. He can remain in animal shape indefinitely, but has a typical fey's hard time maintaining the facade.

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 6L Defense 10

Bite: Speed 4 Accuracy 8 Damage 8L Defense 6

Chopping Sword: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 8L Defense 7

Composite Bow: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 8L*

*Iftlin usually uses frog crotch arrows, which double the target's lethal soak.

Dodge Pool: 10 Soak: 7L/10B (Reinforced Buff Jacket, 5L/6B, -2 mobility penalty)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 20

Other Notes: Iron does aggravated damage against the Fair Folk, and they cannot soak it with their Stamina. Against iron weapons, Iftlin has only the 5L/6B protection

of his reinforced buff jacket. Note that most weapons are forged from bronze or steel, not iron.

GUARDIAN NOBLE

The Noble Venthara rules Snowguard, a town of several thousand located on the trade road from the Inner Sea to Whitewall. Venthara fiercely protects Snowguard from all attackers — bandits, Wyld barbarians, undead hordes and huge northern beasts all fall prey to her potent illusions and her deadly command of air and earth. Even the wandering bands of icewalkers never seek to extract payments from the residents of Snowguard. Fearing Venthara's wrath, few merchants attempt to avoid the fee for using the town's toll bridge over the river that bisects the trade road. Venthara also hunts down and punishes criminals in the town, and none subjected to her powerful glamour has ever turned his hand to crime again.

Venthara does ask a price for her protection and patronage — all children in the town must spend one night with her when they first reach puberty. Delving deep into their young minds, she feeds deeply on their innocence and their pain. Though she makes certain never to permanently damage these youths, some are changed by the experience. Most inhabitants block all recall of this night; a few retain fleeting memories and frequently regard Venthara with twisted longing.

Venthara is a tall, pale creature with an angular face, oddly attenuated limbs, and exceptionally long and slender fingers. Her eyes are bright blue and her skin and flowing hair are stark white.

Name: Venthara

Type: Noble

Element: Air

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5, Charisma 7, Manipulation 6, Appearance 6, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 2, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Melee 5, Thrown 5, Endurance 3, Resistance 3, Survival 5, Presence 5, Craft (Glamour) 6, Occult 4, Investigation 2, Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Dodge 3, Bureaucracy 1, Linguistics 3, Socialize 4

Powers:

Control Air: 5 motes. Venthara can create and control air. In combat, she can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to her permanent Essence or make an attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice her permanent Essence. Such attacks can be dodged or parried.

Control Earth: 5 motes. Venthara can create and control earth. In combat, she can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to her permanent Essence or make an attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice her permanent Essence. Such attacks can be dodged or parried.

Fearsome Mien: 5 motes, 1 Willpower. Venthara wreaths herself in terrifying illusions, similar to the battle mien of a Dawn Caste Solar Exalted. Targets whose Valor + Essence is lower than Venthara's highest combat Ability suffer a -2 penalty to all dice pools while in combat with her.

Glamour: 5 motes. Venthara creates an illusion so perfect that it is effectively real. This illusion power cannot make genuine enchanted objects — it can create winged horses, glitteringly perfect sabers and priceless jewels, but not orichalcum weapons or Hearthstones. Roll Venthara's Intelligence + Craft (Glamour); the number of successes is the duration of the magic. The unit in which the duration is measured depends on the degree to which the glamour is illusory; the magic of the faerie works best when based on reality.

If Venthara creates something from nothing, duration is measured in turns. If she creates something from almost nothing, such as fire-eyed chargers from beetles or armor from old dry leaves, then duration is measured in scenes. If she improves something that already exists — for example, turning a rusty old sword into a glass faerie blade, or a battered hay-wain into a magnificent carriage — then duration is measured in days. In a Manse, Demesne, Wyld area or faerie abode, ignore duration; glamour can persist indefinitely in such an environment.

The deception behind this illusion is patently obvious to characters with a Wits + Essence higher than Venthara's Intelligence. A character who sees through a weapon takes damage from the reality, not the illusion, and a character who sees through armor treats it as what it is, not what it appears to be. This knowledge is a double-edged sword; the character cannot benefit from faerie illusions, either. The glamour used to forge the clothing, weapons and armor of the Fair Folk is of considerably better craft and durability and cannot be seen through. Items created with it are real for all intents and purposes.

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Fist: Speed 14 Accuracy 13 Damage 6B Defense 13

Kick: Speed 11 Accuracy 12 Damage 8B Defense 12

Faerie Blade: Speed 13 Accuracy 11 Damage 10L Defense 13

Fey Javelin (Hand-to-Hand): Speed 13 Accuracy 12
Damage 8L Defense 12

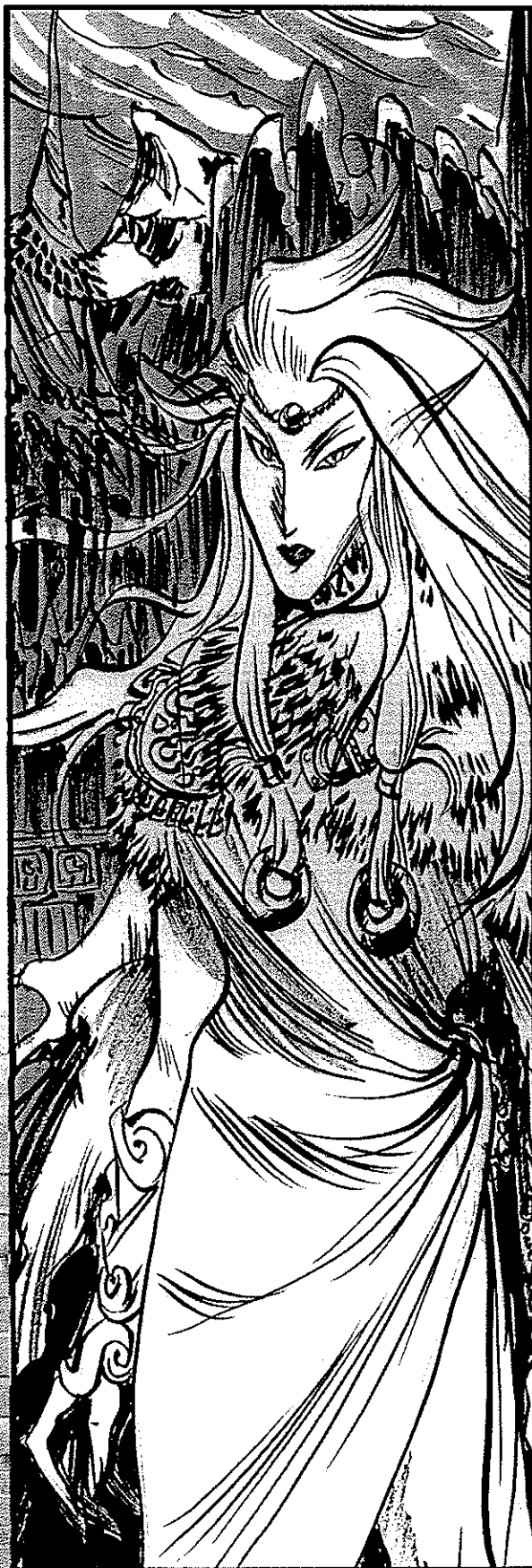
Fey Javelin (Thrown): Speed 10 Accuracy 12 Damage
8L (Rare 2, Range 50)

Dodge Pool: 9 Soak: 11L/14B (Gossamer Raiment,
9L/9B, -0 maneuver penalty)

Willpower: 8 Health Levels: 0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/
-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 4 Essence Pool: 40

Other Notes: Iron does aggravated damage against the Fair Folk, and they cannot soak it with their Stamina. Against iron weapons, Venthara has only the 9L/9B



protection of her gossamer raiment. Note that most weapons are forged from bronze or steel, not iron.

MASTER WOODWORKER

In Nexus, the wood faerie Kavinka is a brilliant inventor and an astoundingly skilled creator of fine woodwork. She is one of the premier furniture makers in Nexus, and provides tables, chairs, parquetry and occasionally coffins for those who can meet her price. Her woodwork invariably fits the owner and the decor. Kavinka is probably the most skillful crafter of wood in the Nexus, and the darling of the Bastion District.

Before making a client any sort of furnishing, Kavinka requests that she be allowed to watch him work and go about his business for several days. During this time, Kavinka feeds on the individual's creativity and passion for his work. As a result, she only makes wares for clients she deems highly skilled and deeply passionate — not usually a problem in a city like Nexus. Having a set of furnishings made by Kavinka is considered the mark of a truly self-made individual passionately devoted to success.

When not watching clients, Kavinka feeds off the apprentices in her shop. None can match her insight into her clients or her inhuman ability, and Kavinka teaches dedicated young woodworkers to perfect their craft in her studio. This practice enhances her reputation and sates her need for passion at the same time.

Kavinka is short and slender with lidless snake-like eyes, smooth greenish skin, and fine scales where humans have hair. She also has eleven extraordinarily long and sinuous fingers (she is missing one on her left hand) that seem almost boneless when in motion.

Name: Kavinka

Element: Wood

Type: Worker

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 1, Temperance 4, Valor 3

Abilities: Brawl 3, Craft (Woodworking) 5 (Personalized Goods +3), Melee 1, Endurance 3, Resistance 2, Survival 2, Presence 3, Lore 2, Medicine 2, Occult 1, Investigation 2, Awareness 4, Dodge 2, Larceny 1, Bureaucracy 4, Linguistics 3, Socialize 5

Powers:

Control Wood: Kavinka can create and control wood. In combat, she can grant a dice bonus or penalty equal to her permanent Essence or make an attack that does base lethal damage equal to twice her permanent Essence. Such attacks can be dodged or parried.

Work Glamour: Kavinka can create permanent glamour through crafting wooden objects.

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 4B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 7 Damage 6B Defense 7

Mallet: Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 8L Defense 7

Dodge Pool: 9 Soak: 5L/8B (Buff Jacket, 3L/4B, -1 maneuver penalty)

Willpower: 7 Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 2 Essence Pool: 20

Other Notes: Iron does aggravated damage against the Fair Folk, and they cannot soak it with their Stamina. Against iron weapons, Kavinka has only the 3L/4B protection of her buff jacket. Note that most weapons are forged from bronze or steel, not iron.

CARNIVAL BARKER

The city of Kriss in the Varang City-States hosts a powerful fey entertainer named Thenli. Thenli is the town's biggest celebrity; he entertains children and visitors while also helping to maintain the town's complex social order. Thenli is a fire faerie who appears to be a man about 20 years of age, inhumanly beautiful and catlike in his mannerisms, but otherwise not too different in appearance from the average Varang. He is the owner and master of a vast carnival pavilion known as the Atonement Fair, situated on a Demesne just outside the city.

In return for providing Kriss with talismans to ward off plague and bad luck, Thenli asks that all criminals be turned over to him to work in his fair. Minor offenses like petty theft and breaking lower-caste taboos require the offender to perform in the fair for a period of days or weeks. Individuals without any performance abilities nevertheless become skilled jugglers, singers, or fire-eaters for the duration of their stay, though these abilities vanish as soon as the individual's term of service is over. Thenli grants the performers some dignity — their identities are hidden behind ornate masks or humorous face paint. These masks are elaborate examples of permanent glamour, and are the source of the performers' skills.

For serious crimes like larger-scale theft, unjust murder of an outcaste or striking an elder, the offender must join the animal acts for awhile. Although they retain their intelligence and memories, these individuals possess the bodies of exotic breeds of savanna cat, trained penguins, and other similarly exotic beasts. These creatures jump through hoops, balance on balls, juggle with their paws and perform spectacular acrobatic feats for the audience's enjoyment. Offenders remain transformed for a period of weeks, months, or even years. While all temporary performers retain their minds and free will, they are physically unable to leave the fairgrounds or to harm patrons. Refusal to perform lengthens the offender's sentence, so few attempt to resist their punishment. Each beast wears a collar or ornament that allows unskilled individuals to perform the various acts.

Individuals who commit capital crimes like murder, kidnapping, arson or rape are given a permanent position at the fair. These individuals retain their human forms, but are altered into freaks for the carnival's sideshow. They spend the rest of their lives as geeks, bearded women, dog-faced boys and midgets. While they seem to retain their awareness, most profess to enjoy performing. No one knows if they simply live in terror and dare not speak out for fear of punishment, or if Thenli has somehow altered their minds.

Thenli does not apprehend or judge the guilt of law-breakers. Mortals perform all such functions in Kriss, as they do in most other cities. In Kriss, however, Thenli is solely responsible for dispensing punishment. He never punishes children with more than a short stay as a human performer, and also tends toward lenience with outcasts and with foreigners who commit minor offenses.

Except for capital crimes, offenders occasionally receive early release from their sentences. If a third party pleads for an offender's freedom and performs some impressive feat for Thenli or brings him some beautiful and exotic toy, the barker may grant the petition. However, Thenli has been running his fair for more than 300 years, and there are few acts or toys he has not already seen countless times.

The fair itself is primarily aimed at entertaining children and tourists. Most shows involve cute exotic animals performing complex acts and human entertainers executing flashy feats of skill while wearing elaborate costumes. In addition to the colorful accouterments, the acts demonstrate a great degree of skill and creativity, giving the fair an entirely justified reputation for excellence, rather than making it a curious sideshow visited only because of its supernatural origin.

Name: Thenli

Type: Entertainer

Element: Earth

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 5, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 2, Temperance 2, Valor 2

Abilities: Brawl 3, Melee 1, Thrown 4, Survival 4, Performance 5, Presence 5, Lore 2, Occult 2, Investigation 3, Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Dodge 2, Bureaucracy 2, Linguistics 3, Socialize 4

Powers:

Beguile: 10 motes, 1 Willpower. Thenli becomes utterly charming, to the point where resisting his suggestions is impossible. While those who interact with him may come to their senses later, at the time any reasonably phrased suggestion or request seems perfectly natural. Roll Thenli's Charisma + Socialize; the result is the number of scenes for which his suggestion seems perfectly reasonable. A target will not accept a direct request to kill herself, but can easily be manipulated into lethal situations; she will happily give the faerie all her warm clothing in the midst of a snowstorm or attack the faerie's enemies. This power cannot be used in the midst of combat or in situations where nobody is listening — for example, it cannot calm an angry mob. This power does not work on targets whose Willpower or Wits + Essence are greater than the faerie's Charisma.

Glamour: 5 motes. Per the Guardian Noble.

Work Glamour: Thenli can work permanent glamour through the creation of masks.

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 4B Defense 7

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 6 Damage 6B Defense 6

Axe: Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 8L Defense 7

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 2L/4B (Skin)

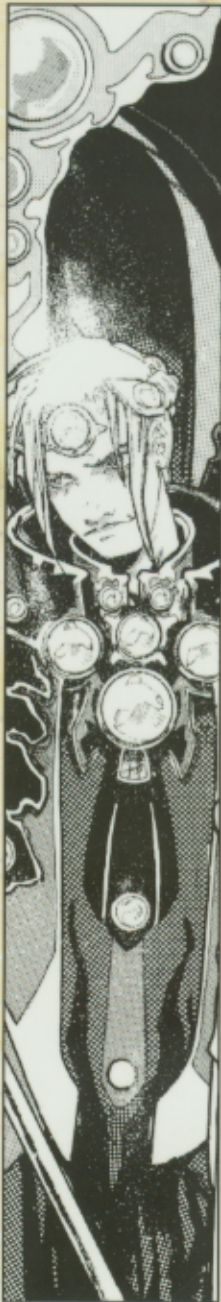
Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 30

Other Notes: Iron does aggravated damage against the Fair Folk, and they cannot soak it with their Stamina. Against iron weapons, Thenli has only the protection of any armor he may be wearing. Note that most weapons are forged from bronze or steel, not iron.



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