



CHAPTER ONE

THE NORTH

Apheliotrope • Ice Fisher • Shard Bat

APHELIOTROPE

Description: When the Usurpation came, only a handful of Solar Exalted survived the first Dragon-Blooded attacks. Among those remnants was Derat Khan, a mighty Dawn Caste general who managed to escape into the wilds of the frigid North just ahead of an expeditionary force of Terrestrial Exalted that had served under his command. After many weeks of pursuit, he was trapped by several dozen of them. Derat slew all of his attackers save one, but that last Dragon-Blood's blade found his heart. Derat killed his murderer and felt his life begin to slip quickly away.

Facing certain death, Derat mourned his failure to destroy his betrayers and began to hate the Unconquered Sun for turning his back on the Solar Exalted. Had he not

been a loyal servant? Had he not slain thousands in his god's name?

Derat was ancient, even by the reckoning of the Solar Exalted, and he was well versed in sorcery. With his last breaths, he uttered spells that brought a demon of the Second Circle to him, a fragment of a mighty Prince of Malfestas. Just as Derat was about to expire, the demon reached out and held the Solar's soul in place.

Haughty Derat was proud even on the knife's edge of death. He offered up his soul in exchange for a few more years of life. The demon laughed — Derat's soul was of no value to the Demon Princes. He was a Chosen of the Unconquered Sun, beyond their reach without the aid of ancient pacts found in texts yet to be written. Derat spat. The Unconquered Sun had turned his back on Derat Khan, and Derat despised him. The demon



grinned as Derat offered to renounce the Unconquered Sun, to deny everything he had done for the Realm and to turn on that which he had fought for his entire life.

The demon said that such a renunciation would do. The Yozi would appreciate a soul freely given and steeped in the power of a betrayal of the Unconquered Sun. And so, on the edge of the world, caught in the breath between life and death, Derat Khan cursed his god and his life's work and swore by ancient and evil powers to spend whatever time he purchased for himself working to destroy his enemies and the whole of Creation. And with a whisper, the bargain was sealed.

Newly reborn in darkness, Derat was strategist enough to know that that the handful of years allotted to him would not be enough to avenge himself upon the Dragon-Blooded. So, he plunged deeper into the wastes of the North, eventually finding a network of caves in a range of hills in which to hide himself. He began to work toward a greater plan, a legacy that would survive long past his own demise and one that, if ever completed, would destroy not just the Dragon-Blooded, but Creation itself.

The dark general began to summon neomah, demon-courtesans, and to breed with them, creating infernal offspring. By virtue of his Essence, these byblows were stronger than normal humans, manifesting the spiritual power of both parents and the physical prowess of their father. In addition, each of them bore the curse of Derat Khan — no sunlight would touch them, and they walked in shadow, no matter how great the light of the sun shone upon them. The strongest of these beings, which Derat named apheliotropes, were taught how to fight, while the rest gathered slaves in order to hollow out a city under the frozen mountains. Soon a small civilization prospered under the earth, in tunnels carved out by the Khan's lesser offspring. Every cornice, tile and arch was covered with sigils praising the Yozi and blaspheming the Celestial Bureaucracy and the Unconquered Sun. The apheliotropes called this refuge Kerzt Derat, the fortress of Derat Khan, and began to refer to themselves as the Shrouded Ones.

After his time was finished, Derat passed away into eternal torment at the hands of his new masters, perhaps content that his far-sighted plans had been set in mo-

tion. Without a human agency to guide them, Derat's more powerful offspring soon devoured their slaves and gave in to their infernal nature. There were enough of them — three dozen or more — to breed with one another and start a population beneath Kerzt Derat. They raided nearby human settlements, mainly those around the White Sea, although on a few infamous



occasions their war-parties took captives from as far away as Gethamane. Some of the more conservative Shrouded Ones still pursued Derat Khan's ancient plan, but to most of them, it was a mere legend, a prophecy speaking of a day that would never come.

All of that changed six centuries ago. After a dozen raids by the Shrouded Ones on the feathersteel mines of Bagrash Köl, the sorcerer raised a force to destroy the raiders. His magnificent army tracked a Shrouded One raiding party back to Kerzt Derat, deep within the bowels of the earth. Even the most powerful of the apheliotropes could not withstand his Dragon-Blooded and demon officers and the power of the Eye, and so, the few who survived the assault on Kerzt Derat fled their ancient home. To the elders of the apheliotropes who had pursued Derat Khan's plans as some kind of holy mission, this exodus was deemed a punishment from their long-dead patriarch. They vowed to return to Kerzt Derat one day, and that day would only come when they finally completed the ancient machinations of Derat Khan.

The faith of the apheliotropes had been tested and found wanting.

Now, the Shrouded Ones have spread throughout the North. Scattered as they are, the wisest among them realize that their race is dying out and has only decades left, perhaps a century at most. Some of the more cunning apheliotropes have used their powers and knowledge of ancient lore to become advisors to local rulers, while the strongest have formed war bands to raid settlements for slaves and trade goods. Others of their kind stalk the unwary as fodder with which to enact dark rites in which the Shrouded Ones conjure up demons and elementals for the purpose of furthering the enigmatic final revenge of Derat Khan. Their recent efforts have brought the renewed attention of their Haslanti persecutors and drawn the interest of the icewalker bands led by the

mysterious Bull of the North, but the apheliotropes are wise enough to avoid presenting as large a target as they did at Kerzt Derat. A few of the braver Shrouded Ones have even begun to attack isolated members of the icewalkers. No matter where the apheliotropes find themselves in the Age of Sorrows, they have cast themselves as the adversaries of all that is bound to the light.

The Shrouded Ones appear as normal humans wreathed in hazy shadow, an effect they refer to as the “ebon curtain.” Since this makes their true nature readily apparent during the daylight hours, they tend to limit their movements to the evening or to days when clouds create overcast conditions. Many of the apheliotropes still bear some sign of their demonic heritage, be it horns, strangely shaped eyes or animalistic extremities. Physically, they are stronger and more vital than the average man or woman and far more prone to emotional outbursts of savagery and vendettas. Perhaps due to their heritage, they are able to master the Terrestrial Circle of magic, and some of them are dedicated and potent sorcerers.

Survival of the fittest and the most cunning forms the basis for apheliotropic society and personal interaction. They share an upbringing in which abuse is common and discipline is essential, and their personalities are shaped by a religion in which the sun that brings life to the rest of the world is viewed as a horrific evil and a mortal enemy. They despise the masses of humanity and desire nothing more than to spend the remaining years before their species dies out bringing down human civilization. Even those who have hidden themselves in mortal governments work quietly to corrupt and destroy the societies around them.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

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

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Larceny 3, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; High Realm, Skytongue) 2, Lore 3, Medicine 1 (Torture +2), Melee 4, Occult 4, Presence 2, Socialize 3, Stealth 4

Backgrounds: Allies (Northern Personages) 2, Artifact 1, Contacts 3, Followers 3, Resources 3

Supernatural Powers: The Ebon Curtain

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 4B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 5 Damage 6B Defense 5

Chopping Sword: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 8L Defense 7

Dodge Pool: 7 **Soak:** 8L/11B (Chain hauberk, 6L/7B)

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

Essence: 1

Essence Pool: 22

Other Notes: Apheliotropes with sufficient training are capable of learning Terrestrial Circle Sorcery. Any sorcerer worth his salt among them knows how to summon a Demon of the First Circle, and most know the art of creating an Impenetrable Frost Barrier. Many will have additional spells at their disposal, gathered from captured lore or taught to them by others of their kind. Some apheliotropes may bear one or more signs of their demonic heritage. To simulate such Shrouded Ones, give them one or more Wyld mutations (see **Exalted**, p. 280-281 and **Exalted: The Lunars**, p. 208-222).



THE REVENGE OF DERAT KHAN

What is the revenge of Derat Khan? It is whatever the Storyteller needs it to be to fuel his plot. If there is an ancient artifact that needs adversaries to seek it out and wield it, or if the Storyteller needs a group of beings that seek nothing less than the death of the Unconquered Sun's servants, the apheliotropes make excellent foils.

The origin of the apheliotropes as offspring of a vengeful Solar Exalted can even make them perfect servants for Solar adversaries in your game — perhaps the apheliotropes believe the Solar in question to be a reincarnation of Derat Khan himself. An interesting plot possibility is that the apheliotropes see a player's character as the reincarnation of their ancient patriarch and seek to enlist him to their dark purpose.

THE EBON CURTAIN

Cost: 10 motes (see below)

The true sign of the apheliotropes' curse is the permanent pool of shadow that surrounds them during daylight hours, for sunlight will not touch their blighted skin. The Shrouded Ones can expand the curtain so that it truly envelops their features and actions, even during the evening hours when their skin will allow the touch of moon or torchlight. For a cost of 10 motes of Essence, the Shrouded Ones can gain bonus dice to their Stealth equal to twice their permanent Essence as a reflexive action. This effect lasts for one scene. This effect offers no protection against the Charms of the Solar Exalted.

ICE FISHER

Description: Ice fishing is a common practice in the frozen North. A fisher walks out onto a lake or sea, cuts a hole in the ice and drops his line into the water below. Sometimes, these ice fishermen sit for days, waiting for a fish or seal to bite. Other fishermen use spears instead, waiting by their holes for a seal or a walrus to pop through for a quick gulp of air. But whichever way they hunt, sometimes, the ice fishermen find themselves the ones hunted and caught.

Ice fishers look similar to rays, with wide flat bodies and long, barbed tails. Each of their “wings” end in a 10-yard-long tentacle with strong suckers for gripping. These creatures swim beneath the frozen rivers and lakes and oceans and are attracted to light shining through the ice.

When an ice fisher locates a likely spot, it attaches itself to the ice with its tentacles, flipping over in the process so that its belly, as well as its eyes and wide mouth, presses against the ice. Sometimes, it finds an existing hole, kept open by sea mammals or cut by a fisherman who either moved on to a new spot or simply has not yet arrived that day. The ice fisher can make its own hole, however — it stabs its barbed tail up through the ice, pulls it back out, then bites around the edges until the hole is large enough (usually a few feet across). Then, it waits.

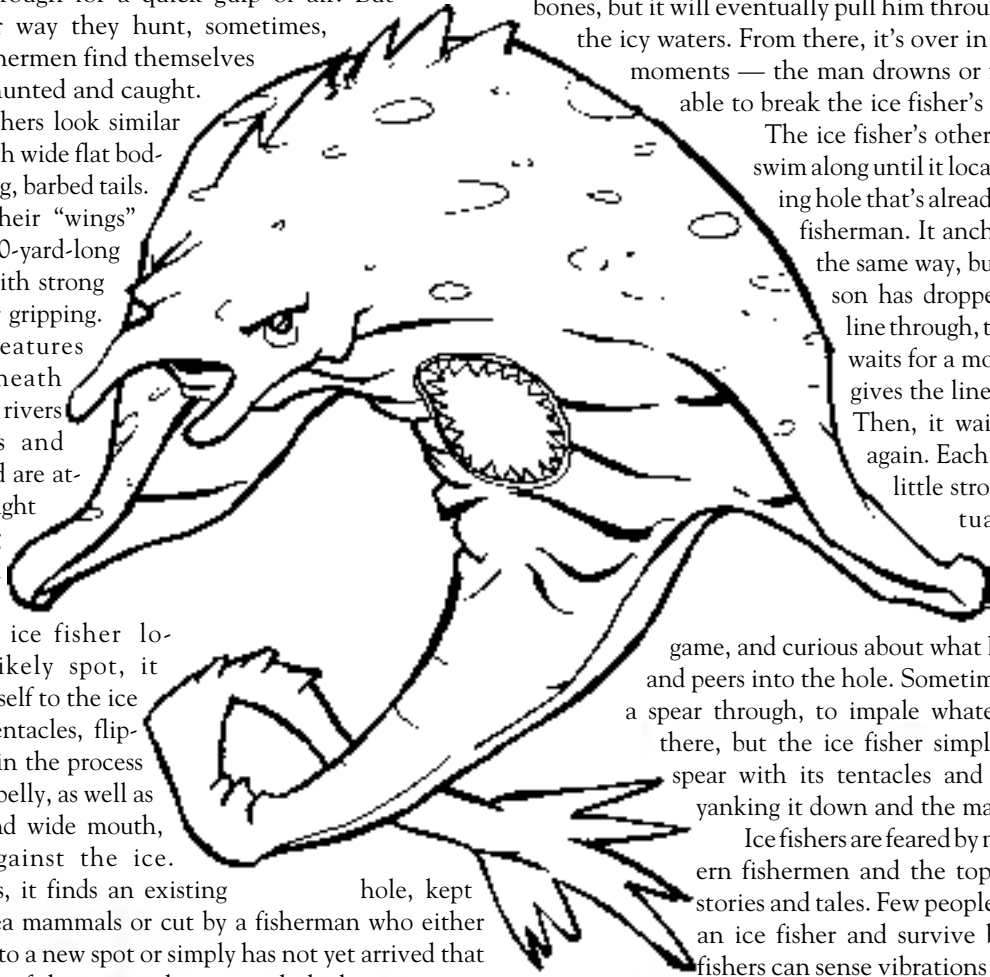
Sometimes the hole attracts a seal or walrus, and the ice fisher waits until the animal’s head breaks the surface before attacking. It releases its hold on the ice, wrapping its tentacles around its prey, and bites down hard with its mouth, while its tail stabs again and again, searching for a vital organ. Once the prey goes limp, the ice fisher drops into the depths with it and begins to feed.

But the ice fisher’s real prey aren’t the seals and walrus that approach from below. It favors creatures who approach from above, such as polar bears and foxes — and men. The ice fisher waits at its hole until a fisherman comes along. Most men are curious about the

ready-made hole in the ice and walk right up to the edge, peering in for any sign of fish or other food. That’s when the ice fisher strikes. It lashes up with one of its tentacles, wrapping around the man’s legs, and drags him down into the hole. Sometimes, the hole isn’t big enough, and the ice fisher must exert itself, but it’s well-anchored with the other three tentacles and its tail — it may splinter the ice around the hole and shatter the man’s bones, but it will eventually pull him through and into the icy waters. From there, it’s over in a matter of moments — the man drowns or freezes, unable to break the ice fisher’s grip.

The ice fisher’s other tactic is to swim along until it locates an existing hole that’s already in use by a fisherman. It anchors itself in the same way, but if the person has dropped a fishing line through, the ice fisher waits for a moment, then gives the line a light tug. Then, it waits and tugs again. Each tug grows a little stronger. Eventually, the fisherman gets tired of the game, and curious about what he’s caught, and peers into the hole. Sometimes, he stabs a spear through, to impale whatever’s down there, but the ice fisher simply grabs the spear with its tentacles and pulls hard, yanking it down and the man with it.

Ice fishers are feared by most Northern fishermen and the topic of many stories and tales. Few people encounter an ice fisher and survive because ice fishers can sense vibrations both in the water and on the ice above. (This requires an opposed roll, the ice fisher’s Perception + Awareness + specialty [12 dice] versus the fisherman’s Dexterity + Survival or Stealth. Note that, if more than one person is present, each individual player should roll, and the group uses the lowest roll — this is for the ice fisher to detect the entire group’s approach.) This method of detection only works on characters who touch the ice itself or enter the water below it. Because of this, the descriptions offered by the stories range widely, from angry intelligent seals with blood-red eyes to beings like men but blue and scaled who sit on the underside of the ice, upside down, in coats and hats and boots, exactly like the men up above. Others laugh and say that there’s no such thing as an ice fisher and that the men who died fishing got drunk and fell into the water or fell asleep and froze to death.



Of course, some men do escape ice fisher attacks. Their friends and neighbors quickly learn not to peer into precut fishing holes or to respond to tugs on the line. A few fishermen have even caught ice fishers instead of the other way around — they wait until the ice fisher tugs, then plunge their spears down through the ice next to the hole. If they've picked the right side, the spear impales the ice fisher. It flails wildly, trying to escape, but after a few minutes, it goes limp. Then, the fishermen cut a new hole around their spear and draw up their catch. Ice fishers are not particularly good food — their bodies are too rubbery — but their flesh does provide protein, and a hungry fisherman cannot afford to pass up a meal. Recently, a rumor has begun that eating the flesh, and particularly the barbed tail, of an ice fisher can grant the ability to breathe underwater. Whether this is true or not remains to be seen.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 5 (Swimming +3), Awareness 4 (Vibrations +4), Brawl 4 (Clinch +2, Stinger +3, Throw +2), Dodge 5, Endurance 4, Stealth 4 (Ambush +3), Survival 4

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Bite: Speed 3 Accuracy 9 Damage 8L Defense 3

Stinger: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 4L + clinch* Defense 5

Tentacle: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 2B + clinch** Defense 4

* The ice fisher's barbed tail grants it an automatic clinch every time the barb does damage. The rules for this are the same as those for the tentacle clinch above.

Note, however, that if the ice fisher has its victim clinched with tentacles it can still attack with its barb each turn.

** If a tentacle attack does damage, the ice fisher gains an automatic clinch attack. This clinch does an additional 4B damage. Every turn, the victim's player may attempt a Dexterity + Brawl or Martial Arts roll for his character to escape, versus the ice fisher's own Strength + Brawl + specialty (10 dice). Clinched victims *can* attack the ice fisher or try to escape, but they can only do one per turn.

Dodge Pool: 7

Soak: 3L/7B (Rubbery skin, 3L/3B)

Willpower: 6
Incap

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/

Essence: 1

Other Notes: The ice fisher's goal in an attack is to drag its prey under the water. This is a throw attack. Every turn the ice fisher maintains a successful clinch, it can attempt this throw. Roll the ice fisher's Dexterity + Brawl + specialty (10 dice) and subtract one success from its attack roll. If the attack succeeds, the ice fisher throws the victim up to three yards toward the hole. If the victim was less than that distance from the hole, he or she is dragged into the hole and under the water. Players of characters with no armor or light armor may attempt a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 3, for their characters to grab the lip of the hole and avoid being dragged under completely. Characters in medium and heavy armor will generally not fit through the hole, at least not until the ice fisher bludgeons them to death, breaking most of their bones in the process. Once in the water, characters must contend with drowning as well. Ice fishers can regrow their tentacles but not their barb, so they will normally attack only with the one tentacle until the victim is in the water or stuck on top of the hole.





SHARD BAT

Description: The North does not have many aerial predators, perhaps because the air is fiercer and colder and the snow and ice don't offer much concealment. But some creatures have adapted to these conditions and are all the more deadly because of them. Shard bats are such creatures. These bats are larger than most varieties, close to two feet from toe to crown and almost eight feet from wingtip to wingtip. Their thick, snow-white fur allows them to survive the harsh temperatures and to move almost unseen across the white sky and equally white plains. But the shard bats' truly unique trait is the reason behind their name. These bats secrete a viscous liquid onto their wings and claws. When the shard bats take flight, the liquid freezes into razor-sharp edges, turning their wings into lethal weapons. The shard bats are enormous blades of glittering ice that descend from the sky at tremendous speeds and slice through prey before wheeling and returning for a second attack. A shard bat can take a man's arm off in a single slash, so quickly and cleanly he doesn't even feel the pain until after the limb hits the ground.

Shard bats live in caves high in the mountains, hidden by swirls of snow and fog. The caves are warmer than the outside air, thanks to the protection from wind and the heat of the bats' own bodies, and the bats cluster together in tight groups of 20 or more, hanging upside down from rocky protrusions. Shard bats usually leave their caves only to hunt, flying in a pack and descending on targets as a unit, moving in perfect unison. They cut back and forth until nothing else moves, then settle onto the victims and tear flesh loose with sharp teeth and sharper claws. The bats carry meat back to their caves for the young.

Shard bats are unusual in that they are daytime creatures, whereas most bats are nocturnal. But their coloring makes them less visible and more dangerous by day, when the sun's glare helps to hide them from view. Their wings and claws also shine in the sunlight, dazzling victims as they descend like a shower of ice shards from the sky.

Shard bats rely on echolocation to reveal their surroundings. They can "see" general shapes all around them, which allows them to navigate narrow passageways and maneuver between boulders and other obstacles. It also helps them to estimate the mass of a potential target, and shard bats are extremely good at this game — they rarely target something too large for the current pack to handle,

such as a bull walrus. Interestingly enough, shard bats can somehow detect undercoats and always steer clear of the disguised creatures, avoiding an entire pack of prey animals even if only one member of the pack is infested.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 5 (Flying +3), Awareness 3 (Echolocation +3), Brawl 4, Dodge 5, Endurance 4, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Bite: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 2L

Claw: Speed 9 Accuracy 9 Damage 5L Defense 9

Wing: Speed 12 Accuracy 10

Damage 8L

Dodge Pool: 11
fur, 2L/3B)

Soak: 2L/6B (Tough

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/Incap

Essence: 1

Other Notes: The shards from a shard bat's wing can be crafted into arrowheads, darts and small knives. Such weapons gain +2 to damage, but will melt if they are exposed to temperatures above freezing.

The secretions of a shard bat, rubbed on a bladed weapon, will grant it a sharper edge and the ability to slice through snow and ice without effort. That fact has led some adventurous souls to seek out the bats' caves, in hopes of capturing a live shard bat and somehow bottling its secretions. The caves are difficult to reach, however, located high above the ground with only steep slopes below, and even when the pack hunts, a handful of shard bats remain behind to protect their home and their young.

The one drawback to the shard bats' ice is that it allows them to move more quickly through the air (it cuts down on the wind resistance) but creates a faint whistling sound, the same as a sharp sword swung rapidly. Quick-witted travelers have survived a shard bat attack because they heard that sound and immediately threw themselves behind a rock or tree, narrowly ducking the attack that follows. It is a Difficult (difficulty 2) Perception check to catch the sound, and a difficulty 2 Wits check to guess what it means (difficulty 1 if the character has encountered shard bats before). Succeeding at both gives the character one minute to find cover, and +2 dice to the first dodge attempt.



CHAPTER TWO

THE EAST

Bear-Killer • Niljake • Starlight Whistler

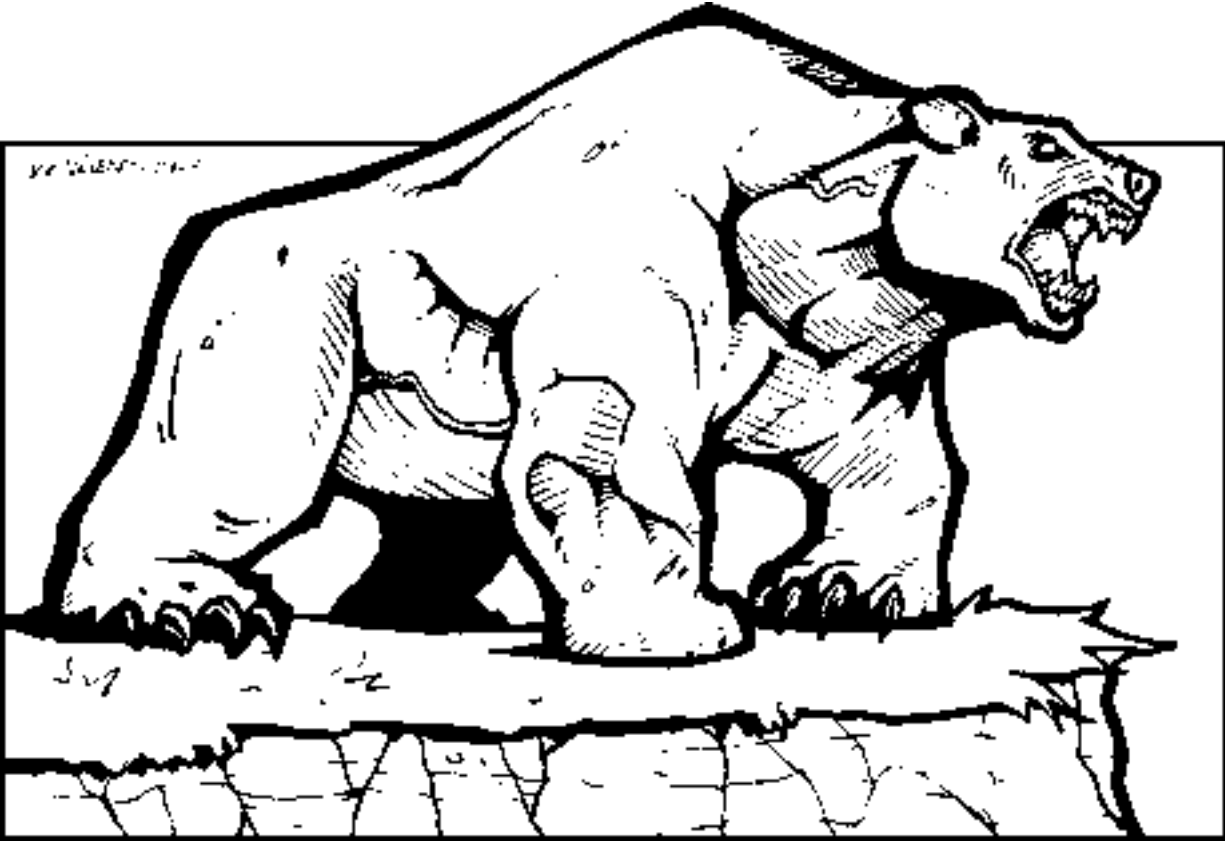
BEAR-KILLER

Description: Years ago, when the Contagion swept the earth and the great tides of the Wyld washed over civilization, the very land itself was transformed. Whole species of animals found themselves melting like wax in flame as glamour twisted them into the war machines of the Fair Folk. In the Northeast, few stories of such metamorphoses are more tragic than the tale of the bear-killers.

Once, the bear-killers were simple bears of the Northeast, massive specimens that hunted, fished and wandered the deep forests of that region. They were

proud, noble creatures. If they were not wholly intelligent, there was at least a spirituality to them that made all those who caught a glimpse of the bears in the deep woods catch their breath. Beneath the heavy black and brown pelts of the beasts, muscles that could fell a tree rippled, and in their deep black eyes, the wise could see a mirror of the night sky.

All of that nobility came to an end when the Wyld erupted from the corners of the world, and the great bears of the Northeast were transformed in its wake. The lords of the Wyld had no talent for dealing with or battling gods, many of whom had allied with one another and put aside ancient rivalries in order to halt



the advance of the fey. The marauding Fair Folk saw the potential of the bears as spirit warriors, so they used their strange sorcery to alter the beasts and bind them in chains of glamour.

The Fair Folk's magic sliced the fur from the bears' flesh and supernaturally toughened their naked hide. It transformed the claws of the bears into an arcane emerald metal that could slice through the veil that separated the immaterial from the material world. These potent weapons left the claws permanently sharp and able to cleave through steel with ease. Finally, they removed the eyes of the bears and replaced them with quicksilver devices capable of seeing into the realm where the little gods hid. No living thing could have withstood such a metamorphosis without being changed on a fundamental level, and the bear-killers found themselves cloven from their animal natures and possessed of a new kind of sentience.

The expense and investment in these alterations were great, so the Fair Folk created a mere hundred of these spirit warriors for use in their armies. Despite their small numbers, the bear-killers became a potent part of the Fair Folk arsenal against the spirits of the East.

When the Fair Folk were pushed back to the new edges of Creation by the weapons of the First Age, the bear-killers were driven with them, still slaves to their insane masters. For centuries, the bear-killers served the fey as soldiers until the day that the Lunar hero Crimson

Unity freed them. During her sojourns into the Wyld lands, the Lunar general had witnessed the cruel terms of the bear-killers' captivity. In a game of trickery and chance, Crimson Unity locked herself into a battle of wits with the Fair Folk who had mastered the bears, until finally she fooled the fey into releasing them. She then forced the fey to vow to never truck with their spirit warriors again.

Free at last, the faerie-twisted bears tried to return to the Northeast, but they found that their homes had been irrevocably altered by the invasion of the Wyld. Even more distressing, their mundane brethren found them alien and ugly aberrations. Where the spirit-warriors had once had fur, there was now naked hide — and while they had been creatures of an animal nature, they were now beings apart, able to see the invisible world of the spirits and to think and voice their thoughts in a crude language of their own.

The bear-killers vowed bloody revenge at the perceived slight visited upon them by the bears. Their wrath at this rejection was a thing of legend, and they began driving the normal bears from the woods. For the next few years, anytime one of the spirit-warriors encountered a normal bear, the bear-killer cut it down on the spot with claws of emerald-hued metal, then devoured its carcass. Still, the bears of the woods were more numerous than the bear-killers, and after a time, the spirit-warriors grew weary of the slaughter and were wracked with guilt.

The bears retreated from territory where a bear-killer was known to reside, and so, the bears' numbers began to slowly return to normal. It is from this period that the name "bear-killers" fell into common usage among the people and spirits of the woods.

Unable to look at one another with the knowledge of their crimes against their own kind but still too possessed of rage to suppress their hatred, the bear-killers parted ways and began to wander beneath the massive vaults of the great forests. The bears of the woods had been long-lived, and the bear-killers were nearly immortal, as long as they stayed in places rich in eldritch energy. When they found a Demesne or a Wyld place, they rested. The techniques the Fair Folk had used to create them had left the creatures sterile, and so, they eschewed even the company of the opposite sex.

Once every generation, the bear-killers repress their solitary nature and come together for a great meeting of their kind, to spread news of the goings-on in different parts of the Northeast and to praise Crimson Unity, who saved them from eternal servitude but wasn't merciful enough to slay them. Once in a great while, Crimson Unity will appear at these gatherings — rumor has it that she seeks to build an army of Wyld barbarians to subdue the Threshold, and if that is true, then the bear-killers would certainly aid her.

The bear-killers avoid human contact for the most part, although an adventurous hunter or sorcerer will often seek out a bear-killer and try to slay the beast for his claws, which can be crafted into weapons that are potent when used against spirits. Most of the bear-killers are total recluses, avoiding all contact except for the odd encounter with a Lunar Exalted, whom they hold in high regard because of the actions of Crimson Unity. Only a handful of the bear-killers actually seek out contact with other beings, and these aberrations typically work as warriors in feuds between renegade spirits. Bear-killers are not welcome in the spirit courts, though, for many of the small gods still bear scars from wounds that these warriors meted out.

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Charisma 3, Manipulation 1, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

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

Abilities: Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Dodge 2, Linguistics 1 (Native: Bear-Killer; Forest-tongue), Presence 1 (Intimidation +3), Stealth 2, Survival 3

Supernatural Powers: Emerald Metal Claws, Quicksilver Vision

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Bite: Speed 2 Accuracy 8 Damage 9L

Emerald Metal Claws: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 12L Defense 10

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 5L/6B (Tough hide, 2L/0B)

Willpower: 2 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 2

Other Notes: None



EMERALD METAL CLAWS

The mystic metal of the bear-killer's claws, crafted as it was from permanent glamour, allows the creature to attack even unmanifested spirits so long as the bear-killer is aware of them. Skilled craftsmen can craft daggers, arrow tips and spearheads from the metal of slain bear-killers, but due to the strength of the metal and the shape of it, it requires a successful Intelligence + Craft roll at difficulty 3.

Arrowheads and spear tips crafted from the claws of a bear-killer receive +1L damage, and a dozen of them may be created from a bear-killer's natural weapons. Daggers are Speed +3 Accuracy +0 Damage +3L Defense +0.

QUICKSILVER VISION

With a successful Perception + Awareness roll, the bear-killers, due to their artificial quicksilver eyes, may see unmanifested spirits.



NILJAKE

Description: Niljakes are large, lizard-like creatures that have been warped by the Wyld. What sets the niljakes apart from other such creatures is a singular ability to move through the forest in a way that defies mundane understanding.

Some savants say that the woods themselves are friendly to these creatures; others say that the trees want to get out of the niljakes' way and would uproot themselves and walk away if they only could. In reality, the nature of the creatures' Wyld mutation makes nature abhor niljakes, and the end result is that niljakes can simply run through the forest while tree trunks, bushes and other natural obstacles warp themselves out of their way without making a sound. The plants twist themselves back to their original forms when the creature has passed. The effect doesn't work on rocks, buildings or other non-plant obstacles, but it does allow a niljake to move extremely quickly and completely soundlessly through the thickest forests and ambush its prey without the slightest warning.

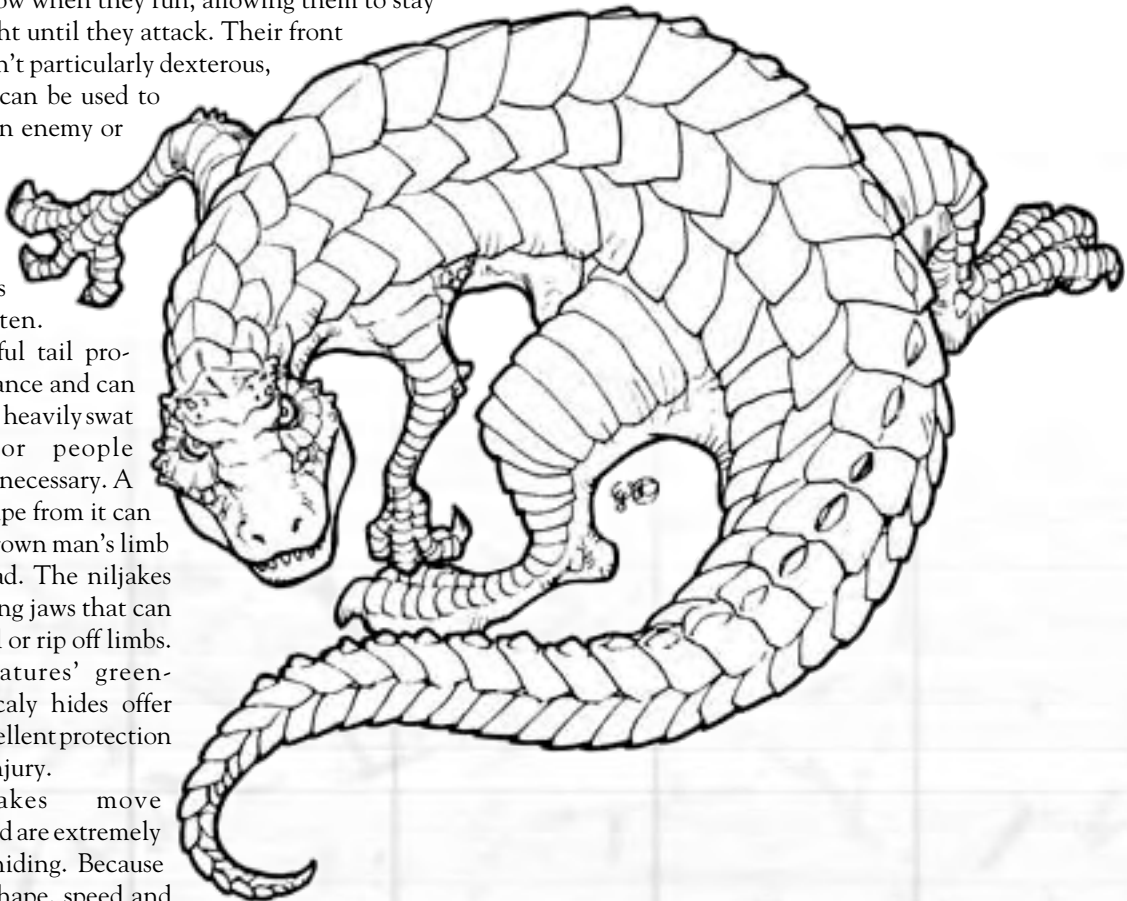
A niljake is about the size of a large dog, with small, clawed forelimbs and extremely powerful and disproportionately large back legs that propel it through the woods at tremendous speeds. Niljakes stay crouched extremely low when they run, allowing them to stay out of sight until they attack. Their front limbs aren't particularly dexterous, but they can be used to slash at an enemy or to hold something still while it is being eaten.

A powerful tail provides balance and can be used to heavily swat things or people around if necessary. A single swipe from it can break a grown man's limb — or head. The niljakes have strong jaws that can rend steel or rip off limbs. The creatures' green-tinted, scaly hides offer them excellent protection against injury.

Niljakes move swiftly and are extremely good at hiding. Because of their shape, speed and

the advantages granted by not having to worry about most obstacles found in forests, the niljakes can simply vanish into the jungle after an attack and ambush their opponents all over again a bit later. Putting your back against a tree won't be of much use, since a niljake can come at you right through the tree, which will obligingly and completely silently bend out of the way — not a single leaf will rustle when this happens. Most niljakes' favored tactic is to use their powerful leg muscles to propel the reptiles at their targets at an amazing speed, take a bite out of them and then disappear again, hopefully before the target have had a chance to counterattack effectively. The niljakes keep this up until their victims are too weak to escape and then settle down to wait for bleeding to finish the job. The niljakes particularly enjoy attacking travelers who have made camp for the night and, presumably, make easy prey for a creature that can move silently and not worry about the underbrush rustling or blocking its way.

Niljakes usually mate for life and thus travel in pairs, but their amazing speed can easily make travelers believe that they are surrounded by a large pack of the creatures. Despite their efficiency as hunters, niljakes avoid large groups of humans, preferring to go after easier targets such as other animals. Lone humans are fair game for them, however.



For all their ferocity, niljakes aren't particularly clever and have no understanding of Exalted or what they can do, and the creatures can thus end up attacking what look like one or two harmless humans but are, in reality, something quite a bit more dangerous.

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 1, Endurance 2, Resistance 1, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Supernatural Powers: Nature Warp

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Bite: Speed 9 Accuracy 8 Damage 8L

Claw: Speed 7 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L Defense 8

Tail: Speed 9 Accuracy 8 Damage 10B Defense 8*

* The tail allows an additional attack that can be executed without splitting the creature's dice pool.

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 3L/6B (Thick, scaly hide, 3L/3B)

Willpower: 4 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 2

Other Notes: Niljakes are very fast. They *run* at a speed of their Dexterity rating + 20 yards per turn and *sprint* at (Dexterity x 3) + 30 yards per turn.

NATURE WARP

This Wyld mutation causes plants to “bend” out of the Wyld creature’s way. While it looks as if the plants willfully get out of the way, in actuality, the space that contains them warps to avoid contact with the alien presence of the Wyld. This offers several advantages — a Wyld creature with this blight may simply run through a forest at full speed and never worry about slowing down, so long as he doesn’t come across a boulder or a ravine. Pursuers will find that even the creature’s footprints are quite difficult to locate, as the creature’s feet do touch the ground but not the grass or moss that grows on it. Even dead branches, leaves and other similar remains of plant life avoid the touch of this mutation. An equally useful effect is that wooden weapons will always miss the creature with this mutation, though for example a wooden spear with a steel tip will still do normal damage.

However, this seemingly positive effect also has its downsides, the most obvious ones of which are the social consequences. Most societies take a dim view of beings twisted by the Wyld, and this power is often viewed as a particularly vile one — nature’s abhorrence of the Wyld creature is taken as a clear sign of its evil. Eating fruits, vegetables or other plant matter of any kind also becomes impossible, as they cannot even be touched, much less swallowed. Climbing trees, crossing wooden bridges or trying to go upstairs in a wooden building is also impossible. A dead Wyld creature no longer causes this effect, so an armor made out of the hide of such a creature will not enable someone to run through a forest with his eyes closed.





STARLIGHT WHISTLER

Description: In the upper branches of the great Eastern forests live a race of gray-winged birdmen, distant descendants of a tribe who sought the favor of the spirits of the air. These birdmen hide from the light of the sun and the full moon, venturing out only in starlight or during eclipses, pained by light and yet drawn to it with a desperate hunger. When they hunt at night, they whistle to each other, communicating without words and coordinating their pursuit of prey in the clearings below. Local tribes call them the starlight whistlers and curse them as the misbegotten offspring of gods and the refuse of the heavens.

Thousands of years ago, during the First Age, the tribe had wings as glorious as moonsilver, as proud as eagles' and as mighty as the north wind. The starlight whistlers loyally served Star of Wormwood, a Dawn Caste who dwelt in the region, acted as their patron and found them useful as shock troops and spies. However, there came a day when he made war on another Exalt. His enemy offered the tribe gifts of diamonds, silk and coral as the price for treachery; the birdmen were to flee the battle at a crucial moment, leaving the Dawn Exalt's flank unguarded. In a moment of folly, they took the bribe, and in a moment of rashness, they betrayed their master, flying away into the depths of the forest. As he saw them depart and felt his enemy's spear in his side, the Dawn Caste Exalt cursed them in the name of the Unconquered Sun, that their beauty should be as fleeting as their loyalty and that they should crave the light but be



unable to endure it. As his curse rang in the air, the wings of the tribe molted and cracked, becoming scaly and raiton-like, where before they had been more beautiful than the eagles', and they screamed and hid themselves from the sunlight, feeling it burn their skin and eyes.

There are barely 50 of the starlight whistlers left now, and while they assault women from local tribes in an attempt to sire more children, very few of the women give birth to living offspring. When this does happen, the women expose the accursed babies outside their village, leaving them to their "demonic" fathers.

The whistlers have long since moved past the stage of deciding who to blame for their fate (it was definitely the Solars) and have settled into a dogged resignation and bitterness, pursuing a miserable life in the high branches of the trees. They cannot tolerate sunlight without pain, and even moonlight is uncomfortable (-2 to all rolls in sunlight, and -1 in moonlight), but due to Star of Wormwood's curse, they hate living in darkness, and they fly under the starlight in the dark of the moon. Their weaponry, bows and javelins, dates back to the First Age and is still in perfect condition, as they care for and tend to it meticulously; but they dress in loincloths and skins and wear bones braided in their hair. Their skins are ugly and blotched with gray markings, but their bone structure is still fine and graceful. They live, on average, for 80 years.

The starlight whistlers fly as well as raitons (see **Exalted**, p. 317) and like to harry their prey with arrows until they begin to drop from exhaustion, then swoop down to finish them off with javelins. Men have the higher rank in their culture, but women are accepted as equal hunters alongside them. The whistlers scorn mere humans but are not averse to terrorizing local tribes into paying tribute to be left alone and have, at times, leagued themselves with Fair Folk as hunters. While the whistlers will pay local spirits the minimum of respect where necessary, the birdmen are generally not fond of the little gods — in the past, the whistlers have made many appeals to spirits to heal their condition and have been refused or have had the attempts fail. The starlight

whistlers loathe and fear the Exalted: Many legends and tales of the First Age have been handed down through the tribe from generation to generation, and some of the information is even moderately accurate. While they would dearly love to take revenge on any Solars, they also fear possible retribution. A possible tactic might involve setting the Solars against any local Fair Folk and then trying to betray the Solars in the confusion.

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

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Endurance 3 (Jungles +2), Lore 4, Medicine 2, Melee 3 (Javelin +2), Presence 2, Resistance 3, Socialize 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2 (Jungles +1)

Backgrounds: Allies 3 (Local Fair Folk)

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Punch: Speed 4 Accuracy 4 Damage 3B Defense 4

Bow: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 6L Defense 6 (Rate 2, Range 150)

Javelin: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 7L Defense 7

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 3L/6B (Hardened, deformed skin, 2L/3B)

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

Essence: 2

Other Notes: None





CHAPTER THREE THE SOUTH

Cactus Snake • Serpent of Colorless Fire

CACTUS SNAKE

Description: Nature is clever, and sometimes, it creates beasts for a specific purpose or even to work in unison with other plants or animals. The cactus snake is one of this latter type. Small (between two and three feet long) and slender, the cactus snake is usually a pale gray-green, but its skin color alters to match its surroundings.

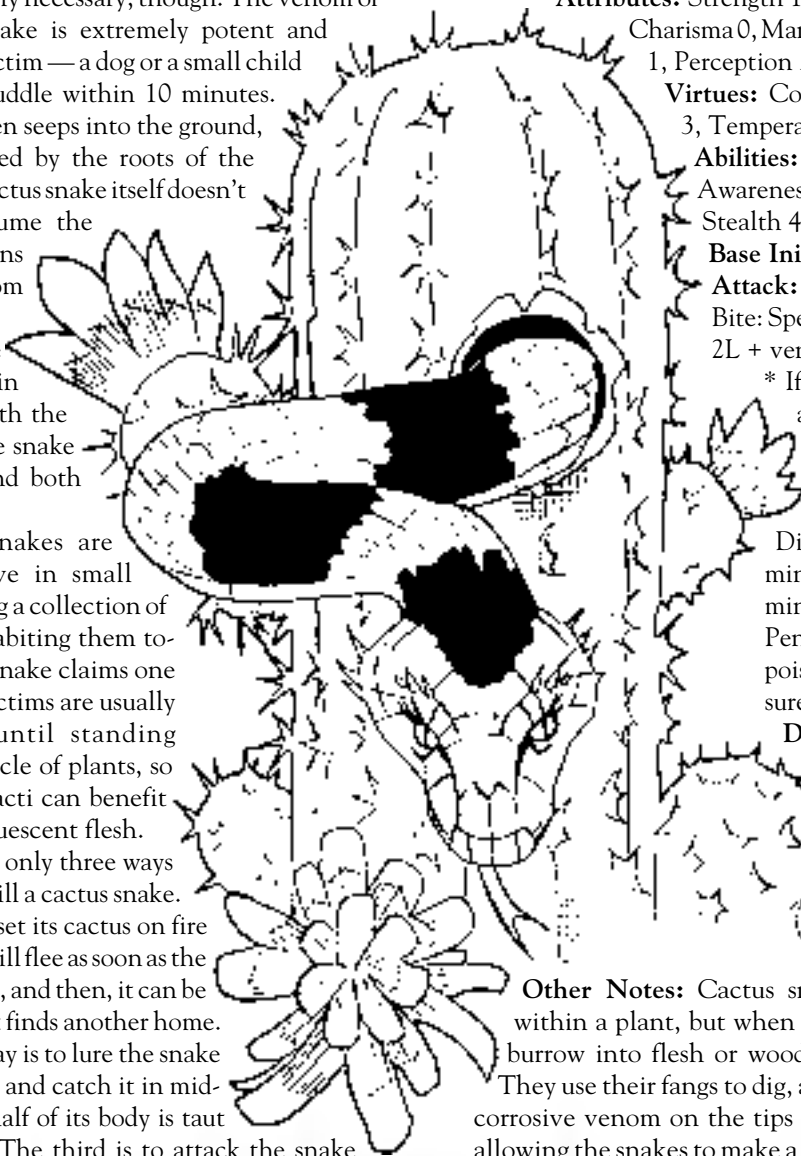
The snakes like moisture and coolness, and so they seek out cacti, then burrow deep within the desert

plants. Once inside, a cactus snake wriggles back around until its head is exposed again. Then it sleeps, cool and comfortable. Vibrations in the ground nearby travel up through the cactus and awaken the snake, which lies completely still. As soon as a person or animal is within a foot of the plant, the cactus snake strikes, launching itself forward so that half its length is still anchored within the plant and the other half is reaching for its victim. The cactus snake bites down on any exposed flesh, then coils back up, ready to attack again. A second

attempt is rarely necessary, though. The venom of the cactus snake is extremely potent and liquefies its victim — a dog or a small child would be a puddle within 10 minutes. The liquid then seeps into the ground, and is absorbed by the roots of the cactus. The cactus snake itself doesn't directly consume the victim — it gains its strength from the cactus, feeding on the soft pulp within the plant. With the cactus fed, the snake is also fed, and both are happy.

Cactus snakes are known to live in small groups, finding a collection of cacti and inhabiting them together. Each snake claims one cactus, and victims are usually not struck until standing within the circle of plants, so that all the cacti can benefit from their liquescent flesh.

There are only three ways to catch and kill a cactus snake. The first is to set its cactus on fire — the snake will flee as soon as the heat reaches it, and then, it can be killed before it finds another home. The second way is to lure the snake into attacking and catch it in mid-strike, when half of its body is taut and exposed. The third is to attack the snake right through its cactus home, slicing clean through both plant and creature. This last approach is difficult for two reasons. First, the cactus snakes are small and fast, and it's difficult to tell exactly where they are in the cactus — even if you can see the snake's head, it's hard to locate its body (-4 dice on attack rolls against the body). Second, cactus snakes only choose strong, healthy cacti as homes and fortify the plants even more by providing them with rich food and nutrients. A cactus snake's cactus has a natural armor rating of 4L/5B.



Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 3 (Burrow +1), Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 5, Stealth 4, Survival 4

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Bite: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 2L + venom*

* If a bite attack does damage, the cactus snake has broken skin and injected its venom. Cactus snake venom liquefies the body: Difficulty 4, Success 1L/minute(4L total), Failure 2L/minute(8L total). Duration/Penalty 4 hours/-3. Mortals poisoned in this fashion will surely perish in short order.

Dodge Pool: 7 **Soak:** 0L/4B (Tough scales, 0L/2B) / 4L/9B (Cactus, 4L/5B)

Willpower: 2

Health Levels: -0/-1/-2/Incap

Essence: 1

Other Notes: Cactus snakes can burrow deep within a plant, but when desperate, they can also burrow into flesh or wood — or even soft stone. They use their fangs to dig, and the trace amounts of corrosive venom on the tips dissolves most material, allowing the snakes to make a temporary retreat. However, a cactus snake cannot live away from a cactus for more than a week and will abandon its new refuge at the first opportunity.

Cactus snake venom is in high demand among thieves and assassins. It doesn't eat through glass or hard stone (such as granite), but can dissolve anything else, including soft metals. It is perfect for removing a lock or a hinge and excellent as a fast-acting poison. The Dune People have an antidote, which can save a victim's life if received within 10 minutes of first being bitten, but they keep the knowledge of its mixture secret.

Exalted



SERPENT OF COLORLESS FIRE (FIRESNAKE)

Description: Far to the South, the heat is neverending, and the winds shift the trackless desert as though searching for the jewels which lie beneath. Nomads and caravans of sand-miners from Gem, Chiaroscuro, Paragon and the Varang City-States dare the deadly wastes in search of the same.

The Wyld mixes with the element of fire to encroach upon the Southern edge of Creation, and it changes the world as surely as flame chars wood or sears sand into glass. One breed of creature reported frequently by those who brave the desert to gather firedust are the sinister beasts they call the serpents of colorless fire, or firesnakes. Clear as the purest of glass, these vipers move through the sand unseen and strike like lightning. A victim of firesnake venom feels its fiery effects not merely as painful poison, but literally burns to death from the inside.

As might be expected, firesnakes are immune to the ravages of the desert heat and that of elemental flame. Inexperienced gatherers are surprised to discover that the serpents of colorless fire follow the scent of firedust and that they feed upon it for sustenance. Caravans and military caches of the powder often attract the serpents, and it is not uncommon for their feeding to invoke fiery explosions that wreak havoc upon life and limb as well as destroying a king's ransom's worth of firedust. Given their form's natural invisibil-

ity, victims of such blasts often have only suspicions of what occurred as firesnakes remain near-invisible even should they be slain by the detonation.

The typical firesnake is about four to five feet in length and appears much as a normal snake of the desert, except that its flesh and scales are crystal clear. This makes it difficult to spot the deadly serpents and lends credence to the legends claiming that the deepest reaches of the South are naught by colorless fire.

Certain disreputable merchants in the cities of the South offer a bounty for living firesnakes, as they breed the serpents and sell these deadly creatures to assassins and collectors of exotic beasts. Others are more interested in the glassy skins the creatures leave behind when they molt. Some of the finest, and rarest, crystal in the South is crafted by melting firesnake molts, and it is so clear that a goblet, for example, might appear as nothing but wine floating in air.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 1, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 2, Temperance 1, Valor 4

Abilities: Awareness 1 (Scent Firedust +3), Brawl 3 (Bite +3), Dodge 1, Presence 1 (Intimidation +1), Stealth 3

Supernatural Powers: Endurance of the South, Skin of Colorless Fire, Venom of Liquid Fire

Base Initiative: 9



Attack:

Bite: Speed 9 Accuracy 11 Damage 1L* Defense 5

* Plus Venom of Liquid Fire.

Dodge Pool: 6/9 **Soak:** 1L/2B (Scales, 1L/1B)**Willpower:** 6**Health Levels:** -1/-3/Incap**Essence:** 1**Other Notes:** Unless the Storyteller is aiming for an epic serpent, firesnakes are almost always extras.**ENDURANCE OF THE SOUTH**

Firesnakes are completely immune to any attack based upon fire or heat, even those enhanced by the Essence of spirits or the Exalted. Additionally, they are not harmed by the fiery blasts sometimes accompanying feeding upon their favored diet of firedust, though debris and shrapnel from the explosion may affect the firesnake as a normal blow.

SKIN OF COLORLESS FIRE

The flesh and scales of a firesnake are as clear as the finest crystal. As the serpents slither across the sand or leap into lightning fast strikes, this unnatural transparency translates into near-invisibility. As such, any attempt to sense the presence of a firesnake via the sense of sight suffers a +3 penalty to the difficulty. It should never be assumed that the firesnakes are automatically visible; even a snake resting in open sight requires a Perception + Awareness check to spot it. Worse yet, in combat, this near-invisibility renders their venomous strikes almost impossible to block. Anyone attempting to parry the strike of a firesnake suffers a +3 penalty to the difficulty due to the fact it is nearly impossible to see the rapidly moving transparent creature.

VENOM OF LIQUID FIRE

Requires no motes of Essence, but a typical firesnake only generates enough venom for five successful strikes in a day's time. So long as even a single level of damage is caused by a firesnake's bite, the victim suffers the effects of its venom.

Venom Type	Difficulty	Success	Failure	Duration/Penalty
Firesnake	3	1L	4L	Until 3 separate resistance checks succeed/1L per turn

Firesnake venom courses through the veins, setting a victim on fire throughout her body. Initial damage is determined by the success or failure of a Stamina + Resistance roll to resist poison as normal, except that the resulting damage is fire damage. Additionally, the poison continues to burn the victim for 1L damage per turn (rolled) until her player succeeds at three difficulty 2 Stamina + Resistance rolls. The Resistance roll of exposure counts toward the total. During any turn that the poison causes damage, the victim suffers -4 to all actions as she suffers the terrible agony of being burned from the inside out. Luckily, firesnakes cannot spit their venom in the fashion of some tropical serpents.

Southern assassins often seek to utilize the venom for their own nefarious purposes. As it generally bursts into flame and burns away upon exposure to air, most contact will merely result in 3L/1L damage a single time at best. Industrious killers use special darts or arrows to keep the poison airtight until it is delivered to their victim's bloodstream.



CHAPTER FOUR THE WEST

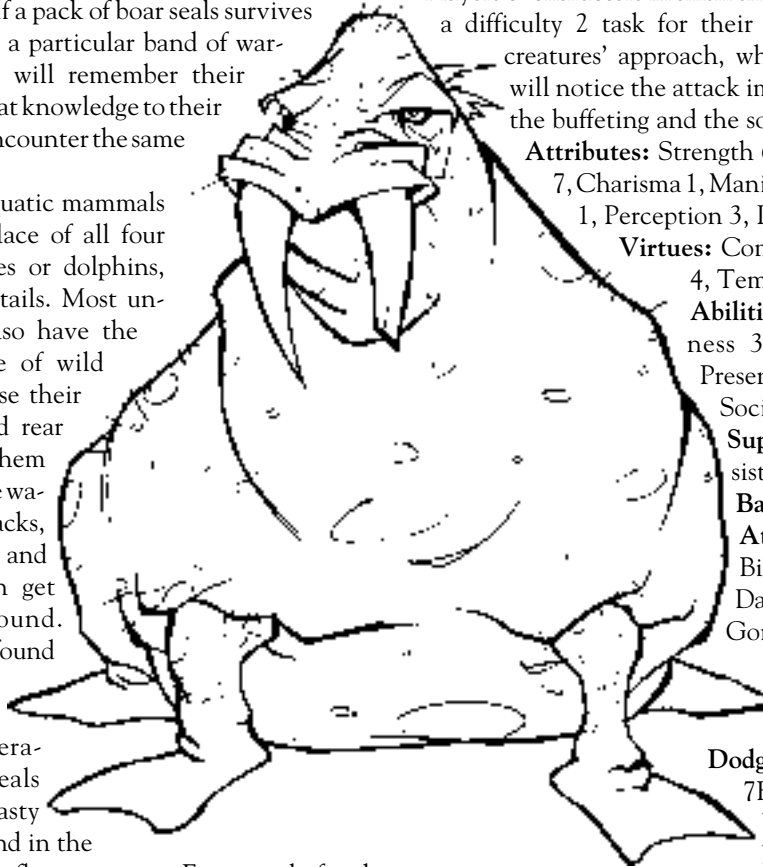
Boar Seal • Giant Flying Hagfish

BOAR SEAL

Description: Irritable and ravenous, boar seals plague the Northwest waters of Creation. They will stalk anything, attack anything and eat anything. They have an unnerving intelligence and learn from their encounters with men, passing the lessons they learn on to their young. If a pack of boar seals survives an encounter with a particular band of warriors, its members will remember their mistakes and use that knowledge to their advantage if they encounter the same warriors again.

These large aquatic mammals have flippers in place of all four legs. Unlike whales or dolphins, they do not have tails. Most unpleasantly, they also have the tusks and attitude of wild boars. Boar seals use their flexible bodies and rear flippers to propel them quickly through the water. They roam in packs, eating everything and anything they can get their mouths around. They are typically found in Northern waters and near shipping lanes. Some generations ago, boar seals discovered that tasty treats could be found in the wooden things that float on water. Fortunately for the boar seals and unfortunately for sailors, the creatures also discovered that their tusks are strong enough to rip holes in the bottoms of boats.

Now, boar seals search for their wooden prey in packs. When they find a tasty looking boat, they rip holes in the bottom of it and stalk it while it sinks. Once the boat capsizes, the creatures devour whatever they find inside, man, beast or foodstuff. These creatures are motivated by their voracious hunger and their surly nature. Some ships, when sailing through boar seal waters, attempt to distract or kill the creatures by dumping poisoned foodstuffs into the ocean. However, boar seals can digest almost anything, and attempts to poison them often fail.



Boar seals travel beneath the waves as a general rule, undetectable by the untrained eye. Even experienced seamen can be surprised by a pack of these creatures. (It is a difficulty 3 task to spot boar seals as they approach and stalk a ship. It is only a difficulty 2 task to notice them while they attack a large ship while under water. Players of characters in small ships need only succeed at a difficulty 2 task for their characters to spot the creatures' approach, while characters in boats will notice the attack immediately as a result of the buffeting and the sound of wood tearing.)

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

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 1, Valor 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Presence 1 (Intimidation +2), Socialize 2

Supernatural Powers: Resistance to Poisons

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Bite: Speed 7 Accuracy 7
Damage 4L Defense 6

Gore: Speed 3 Accuracy 4
Damage 7L Defense 5

Ram: Speed 6 Accuracy 8
Damage 6B Defense 5

Dodge Pool: 5/3 **Soak:** 4L/
7B

Willpower: 4

Heath Levels: -0/-0/-1/

-1/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 1

Other Notes: Swimming speed is 30 yards per turn.

RESISTANCE TO POISONS

Boar seals have a natural immunity to most poisons. They resist poison as do Exalted (see **Exalted**, p. 243). In addition, the difficulty of the Resistance + Stamina roll to any poison they are exposed to is reduced by 3. If the difficulty is reduced below 1, the boar seals automatically resist it. Regardless of the success or failure of resistance, the damage is automatically reduced by two levels, to a minimum of zero damage. Finally, the duration and penalty, if any, associated with the poison are halved, rounded in the boar seal's favor.



GIANT FLYING HAGFISH

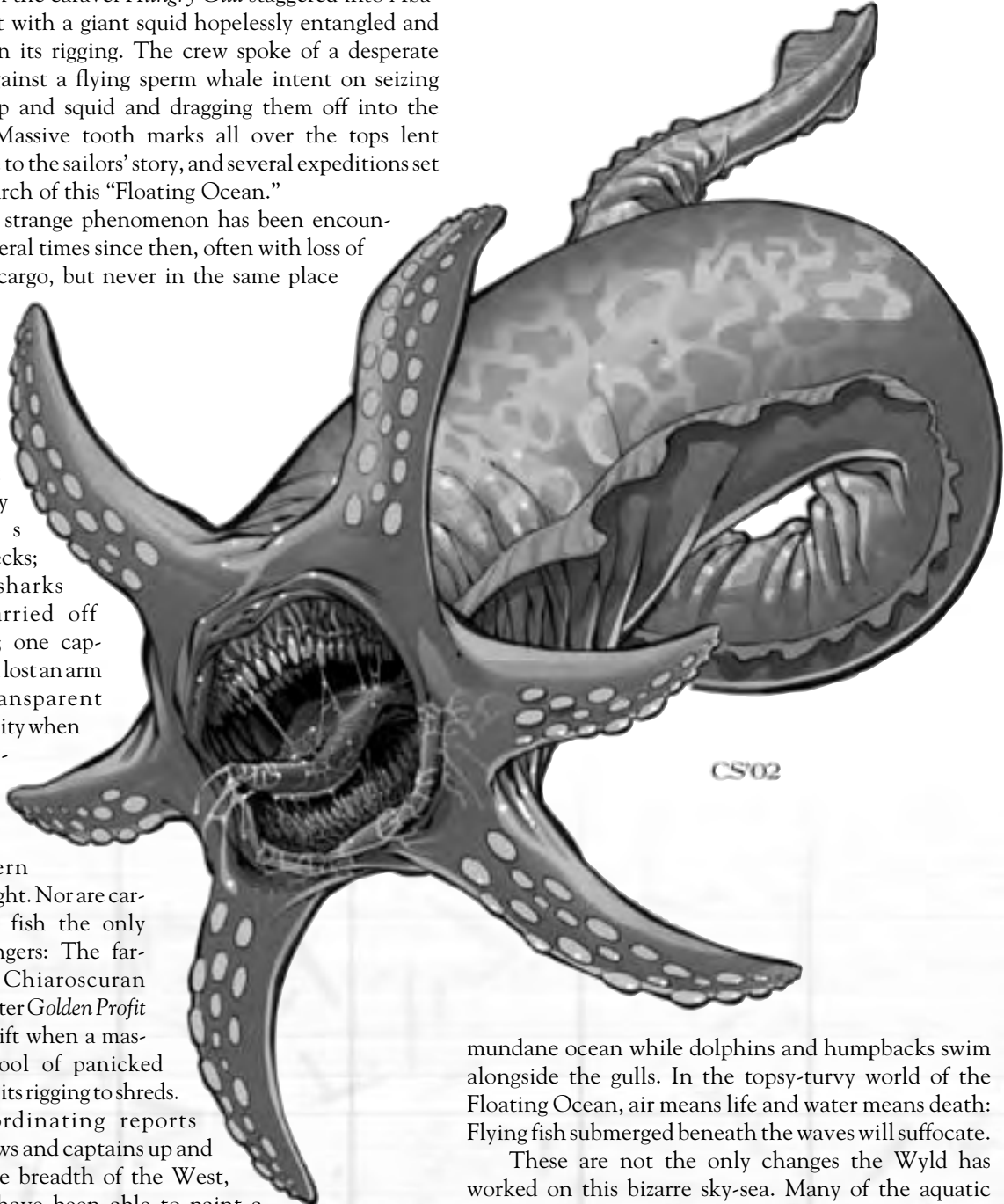
Description: The rumors began circulating throughout the ports of the Southwest about a decade ago: Sailors claimed to have seen fish of all kinds flying through the air like birds. Tavern wags attributed the wild yarns to excessive grog and insufficient shore leave, but wiser, more experienced listeners — men and women who had experienced the mysteries of the great Western deep — paid heed to the tales and kept a sharp eye out on their next voyage. Fiction became fact three years ago when the caravel *Hungry Gull* staggered into Abalone port with a giant squid hopelessly entangled and rotting in its rigging. The crew spoke of a desperate battle against a flying sperm whale intent on seizing both ship and squid and dragging them off into the clouds. Massive tooth marks all over the tops lent credence to the sailors' story, and several expeditions set off in search of this "Floating Ocean."

The strange phenomenon has been encountered several times since then, often with loss of life and cargo, but never in the same place twice.

Schools of aerial barracuda have swept bloody paths across decks; flying sharks have carried off topsmen; one captain even lost an arm to a transparent monstrosity when he mistook its glowing feeler for a lantern late at night. Nor are carnivorous fish the only such dangers: The far-trading Chiaroscuran merchanter *Golden Profit* went adrift when a massive school of panicked tuna tore its rigging to shreds.

Coordinating reports from crews and captains up and down the breadth of the West, savants have been able to paint a

speculative picture of the Floating Ocean. It is a rupture in Creation, a powerful Wyld area resting atop the waves, following the vagaries of the wind currents. It is also massive in scope, covering dozens of miles: Few ships can detect it in time to avoid it entirely. The event that created the Floating Ocean is not known, although Fair Folk meddling is the leading suspect. What is known is the effect of the Wyld energies that power the Floating Ocean: An entire aquatic ecosystem has been transposed vertically. Bottom-dwellers now inhabit a zone of air just above the surface of the



mundane ocean while dolphins and humpbacks swim alongside the gulls. In the topsy-turvy world of the Floating Ocean, air means life and water means death: Flying fish submerged beneath the waves will suffocate.

These are not the only changes the Wyld has worked on this bizarre sky-sea. Many of the aquatic species it has turned into fliers have been altered in

other ways. It would be impossible to catalog all of the mutations caused by the Wyld, nor could any logic be applied thereto. However, few of the Floating Ocean's denizens are as disgusting and feared as the giant hagfish. In its mundane version, the hagfish is one to two feet in length, and its body is coated with a viscous, disgusting slime that helps the wormlike creature to escape its predators. Small rasps and an ability to tie itself into knots allow it to feed on the carrion that falls to the ocean floor. It is a foul but largely benign (and indeed edible) beast.

But the hagfish of the Floating Ocean is a man-sized giant, capable of enveloping sailors within its slimy, loose-skinned folds and squeezing the breath from their lungs. If constriction isn't enough to kill the unfortunate victim, the giant hagfish's slime will finish the job. No longer a defense mechanism, this snot-like substance is a powerful corrosive. It leaves hideous welts and sores on human skin; given sufficient time, it will also eat its way through a sailor's leather jerkin, a ship's wooden hull or low-quality metals. These hideous creatures have even been seen to "sneeze" nasal slime plugs at their prey, coating the hapless souls in acidic goo. Once an individual so afflicted collapses to the deck, the giant hagfish will curl about his body and put its tugging mouth tentacles, greedy tongue and abrasive rasps to work on the shrieking sailor's flesh. This form of attack succeeds only infrequently; the giant hagfish still possesses the poor eyesight of its smaller cousin and must rely instead on its sense of smell. But even the giant hagfish of the Floating Ocean gets lucky once in a while and scores a bullseye.

Giant hagfish are sluggish animals: Possessed of a glacial metabolism, they only need to feed every several months. Sailors should be forewarned, however. A giant hagfish doesn't have to aggressively attack a person to

kill him. All it takes is one wrong tack into an otherwise quiescent school of these noisome giants, and one's sails are as tattered and rent as a beggar's cloak. The Floating Ocean no doubt contains far worse horrors, but those crews who have encountered the giant hagfish and survived have no desire to study the region's inhabitants any further.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

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

Abilities: Archery 1 (Spit +1), Athletics 3 (Swim +1), Awareness 1, Brawl 2 (Grab +1), Dodge 3, Endurance 1

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Bite: Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 3L Defense 6

Grab: Speed 5 Accuracy 6 Damage Clinch + acid

Slime Plug Spit: Speed 6 Accuracy 4 Damage Acid*

* See "Other Notes," below.

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 2L/4B

Willpower: 4 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/Incap

Essence: 1

Other Notes: Giant hagfish can spit their nostril slime plugs up to twice their body length in distance (four yards on average). However, they can only do this once per scene — it takes them a while to clog their nasal passages with mucus again. The slime itself functions as an environmental hazard (see p. 244 of *Exalted*): Diff. 3, Resisted Effect 2L, Failed Effect 8L, Interval 1 turn.

Once a giant hagfish's slime has struck its target, it's in his best interest to wash the slime off as quickly as possible. Wine or vinegar will do, but turpentine is the only sure remedy (difficulty 3 Wits + Medicine roll with wine or vinegar, difficulty 1 with turpentine).





CHAPTER FIVE

THE SCAVENGER LANDS

Clay Man • The Lookshy Rebel • Tomb Beast

CLAY MAN

Description: Usually seen only from a distance, this behemoth stands over 15 feet tall and is apparently constructed from rough brown clay, hence its name. Its shape is manlike, though its features are crude and ill-defined — the few who have been closer claim that its face shifts slightly, as if reforming itself from moment to moment, and say that its “skin” glistens as if it were still wet. The Clay Man has no finger- or toenails, no belly

button, none of the small details that mark a true man or even a well-made statue. The only elements that are not apparently clay are its eyes, which are wholly human and glitter blue, like sapphires.

In fact, the Clay Man is not a rough copy of man, but the original from which man was patterned — the Primordials created him as a template. His features still shift from being altered too many times during the process. Sadly, the Primordials never finalized his ap-

pearance, even after moving on to the creation of mankind itself. The Clay Man was forgotten, left behind but not returned to his original state, and so, he continues to this day. The Clay Man lacks many of the things that men consider a part of life. He does not eat or drink or breathe, does not sleep, does not wear clothes and cannot procreate. He can think and speak, but he rarely talks to strangers, and after eons alone, he has said everything to himself that he cares to say. Generally, the Clay Man just wanders Creation, moving from place to place, because he enjoys traveling and delights in the freedom to go anywhere without restriction. He is also the self-appointed custodian of earth and stone and monitors the world to ensure that no permanent damage is done by foolish and short-sighted mortals.

The Clay Man's bond with the earth remains strong, even after so many eons, and anyone watching him will discover that he does not so much walk as flow across and through the ground as a ship glides through water. The Clay Man can sink

down into the earth as well and instantly reemerge as much as a mile from the initial spot, or he may reach his hand into the ground and have it appear up to half a mile from the rest of his body — he can still control his hand at such a distance, though it takes some effort.

As the original creature grown from clay and earth, the Clay Man possesses an intimate knowledge of those substances. He knows the location of everything within the ground, anywhere within Creation. This includes many lost treasures of the First Age and quite a few powerful weapons. Many Exalted have approached the Clay Man, seeking his aid in locating and recovering these items. He has refused every request. Apparently, the Clay Man is a possessive owner and considers everything beneath the ground as his domain. He disapproves of the Exalted, for their violence and greed, and has chosen to safeguard all buried items until



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he deems humanity fit to receive them. Some Exalted have tired of petitioning and tried taking from the Clay Man by force. That has proven a mistake. Though not aggressive himself, the behemoth is capable of responding in kind and will not only defend himself, but launch an immediate counterattack. His preferred technique involves reaching through the ground and yanking the attacker down into the earth, then leaving the person to suffocate. Barring that, he tears chunks of earth and stone from the ground and hurls them at foes. The Clay Man

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will only fight personally if both of these methods fail, but he is far from helpless. In addition to his immense size and strength, the creature's ability to sink into the earth at will makes him extremely difficult to hit or to block. Weapons made from the bounty of the earth cannot harm him, and any such weapons that hit the Clay Man become lodged in his body and can only be retrieved through an opposed Strength roll, which he may reflexively resist. This includes weapons made of terrestrial stone or metal — only starmetal is exempt, as it did not come from this world.

If his opponents gain the upper hand, the Clay Man will reach into the earth and retrieve one of the very weapons the Exalts seek — and will then use that against them. His generic nature and Primordial power is such that he is always attuned with full material bonuses to any non-starmetal item that he touches. If even this fails, the Clay Man will eventually retreat, melting into the earth. Since he does not need to breathe, he will stay below ground for several days, walking in a random direction until safely away from his pursuers. Locating the Clay Man within the earth requires an opposed roll, the searcher's Perception + Awareness versus the Clay Man's Dexterity + Stealth + specialty (18).

The Clay Man rarely speaks, but he does know all human and Exalted tongues. He only speaks to those he considers worthy, and most of these "recreations and copies" do not impress him. He views men with amusement and a little condescension, mixed with just a touch of jealousy. He finds it sad that these creatures should live such short lives and fight over such foolish things, but at the same time, he envies them their passion and their ability to be together. Exalted anger him, however — these were the creatures based upon his own self, and they have twisted every aspect of his nature, turning his bond with the earth into a delight in power and his calm nature into an arrogant demeanor. They were given everything he never had and threw it all away over greed and hatred. He despises the Solar Exalted in particular, as the greatest offenders.

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 8, Stamina 18, Charisma 6, Manipulation 1, Appearance 6, Perception 8, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Awareness 4, Brawl 6 (Grab +5), Craft (Sculpture) 4 (Earthy Trinkets +3), Dodge 12, Endurance 10, Lore 14, Melee 10 (All Weapons of the Earth +3), Presence 8, Resistance 3, Stealth 5 (Underground +5), Survival 6

Elemental Powers: Coarse Skin, Element's Domain, Mobility, Rejuvenation

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Grab: Speed 10 Accuracy 8 Damage 5B +hold*

Punch: Speed 10 Accuracy 8 Damage 12B

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 5 Damage 14B

Boulder: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 10B

* If the Clay Man grabs a person and does damage, his hand clenches around the individual and drags her down into the earth. This is an opposed roll, the Clay Man's Strength + Brawl + specialty (21) versus the victim's Strength + Brawl or Martial Arts. If the Clay Man wins, the victim is yanked below ground and takes one automatic unsoakable level of bashing damage every turn from suffocation. Breaking free once underground requires the victim to win the opposed roll twice in a row.

Dodge Pool: 20 **Soak:** 20L/30B (Made of clay, 16L/24B)

Willpower: 10 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/-4/Incap

Essence: 8 **Essence Pool:** 120

Other Notes: For those he does consider worthy, the Clay Man is a literal treasure trove of both artifacts and knowledge. Aware and alert since the First Age, the Clay Man watched the creation of the world and its people and knows many valuable secrets, not the least of which are the locations of many hidden treasures. He can even teach Exalted better awareness of their bodies and how to reawaken the bond between flesh and earth, so that they can mimic his earth-melding to a lesser degree. This requires intense training, however, and is not something the Clay Man reveals often.

THE LOOKSHY REBEL

Description: The Lookshy Rebel is named after a group of former Lookshy citizens who didn't appreciate the well-ordered way of life Lookshy is famed for. Deciding a few years ago to form an underground organization to oppose the military regime they felt was too oppressive and restricting, these rebels found themselves a suitably remote cellar as a clandestine meeting place for their planning sessions.

When a few more people joined, the cellar became too small for their dozen members, and so, the plotters decided to expand their lair. Much to their surprise, they found that there was something hidden inside the earthen wall — something that had been there for quite a while, by the looks of it. It was a sphere about the size of a man's head, made of what appeared to be slightly rusted iron, yet strangely light, as if it were hollow.

There was an argument about who it belonged to — one of the conspirators said that it was in his cellar, so it was his, while another one said that it was his since he was the one who found it. The rest of those present divided more or less evenly, except for two of them who insisted that they were all brothers and it should belong to all of them. One of these dissenters left the cellar at that point, certain that yet another fight among equals was sure to follow.

Behind him, he could hear one of them announcing that he was tired of

argument and would split it open with a shovel to see what was inside.

It is not known how someone could capture Wyld energies inside an iron sphere. Those savants well-versed in the ways of Fair Folk have hazarded a shaky guess that perhaps their vulnerability to unalloyed iron might have had something to do with it.

Whatever the cause, the rebels emerged from the cellar quite different than they had been when they went in. Fused into a single, massive creature, the former freedom fighters staggered and stumbled their way into the city square, shouting out seditious political slogans and treasonous remarks about the General Staff.

It took the Dragon-Blooded a little over three minutes to slice the creature to pieces. It would have happened faster, but they were too bemused to swing straight and true. Even as they slew it, the huge creature continued to babble on, displaying incredible clumsiness, disregarding the terrible wounds it suffered and flailing ineffectually at its foes. Some of the warriors actually laughed at the monster rather than fight it.

That should have been the end of it. But for whatever reason, the Lookshy Rebel refused to stay dead. To date, it has appeared 15 times, in each instance making its clumsy way toward the citadel and shouting how the oppression should stop, and each time, it has been cut to pieces and the pieces burned. At this point, the Dragon-Blooded are no longer amused. In the course of its various appearances, the Lookshy Rebel has killed at least 30 people, all of them helots and citizens who have gone that extra mile to support the Terrestrials. Killing it is not really a prob-



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lem, but one can never know where it will turn up next and how much damage it will cause before the field force on garrison duty can deal with it.

When it appears, the Lookshy Rebel looks at first glance like an impossibly huge, terribly malformed man. Closer inspection reveals that while it has the right number of limbs and heads, the texture of its skin clearly shows the features of other men's bodies. There are patches of hair and beard in unlikely spots on its body. It only has a single mouth, but the political agenda the creature utters is spoken in a number of different voices and, more often than not, contradicts itself.

Despite its seemingly limitless clumsiness, the Lookshy Rebel is not an amusing sight. The Terrestrial Exalted might have been strong enough to laugh in its face when they first encountered it, but for the ordinary citizens of Lookshy, it is a terrible danger indeed, and it has no care for those who are caught its path. For his part, the surviving member of the original group has decided to leave politics and fervently hopes that no one ever finds out about his involvement.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 1, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 5, Temperance 1, Valor 2

Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Fist: Speed 5 Accuracy 4 Damage 5B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 3 Damage 7B Defense 5

Dodge Pool: 2 **Soak:** 5L/10B (Thick, leathery hide, 5L/5B)

Willpower: 2 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3

Other Notes: To truly destroy the Lookshy Rebel, the iron ball must be found and the crack on it welded together. The ball's current location is left up to the Storyteller — it could be in the basement still, it could be kept as a memento by the only surviving member of the original Lookshy rebels, or perhaps a Scavenger Lord has found it and sold it. Once the crack has been resealed, the Lookshy Rebel will never rise again.

TOMB BEAST

Description: Since ancient times, commoner and Exalt alike have endeavored to protect their final resting places from being despoiled by their fellow man. One of the greatest obstacles to this desire is the very vanity that causes them to want to be remembered, as the most difficult grave to plunder would be the one that lies forgotten. Given that many of the Exalted knew they would be reborn and even the commoner wished to keep her corpse inviolate, strong traditions of the sanctity of the dead arose, enforced by societal law and the best protections that tomb builders could devise. During the First Age, such defenses included powerful wards, intricate mechanisms, deadly spirit guardians and even bound demons. Later generations and those who were less fortunate than the dead of the First Age sought any method they could find.

One solution contrived by naturalists of the Shogunate was to adapt a certain species of reptile found upon the Southwestern island of Jade. Old writings refer to the white shades, but most modern savants call the creatures tomb beasts in reference to their current use. The tomb beast in the wild is a long-lived cave-dwelling reptile whose aggressively territorial females spend their entire lives within the same underground chamber where their egg hatched. Crafty planners realized that, combined with an unwillingness to eat anything other than fresh meat, this extreme attachment to a single den made the white-scaled females perfect for defending crypts from intruders. Though the black-scaled shade male is very quick, he is small, and therefore, it was



not terribly difficult for a specially trained hunter to capture unhatched eggs as males moved them from a female's lair to a new home. Nevertheless, such a specialized and expensive market was soon dominated by a single group of experts with the skills and connections necessary to harvest and sell the creatures. Nowadays, the patrician family Tasis controls virtually all of the trade in tomb-beast eggs, from the jungle caves of Jade to dreary Sijan to their home marketplaces in the Imperial City and Nexus.

Typically, a patron pays the Tasis family to place a tomb-beast egg that is ready to hatch within the burial chamber of the recently deceased. The voracious female instinctively bonds with her home upon birth and, within a year, has grown to about 50 pounds and, within a few more years, is easily 200 pounds or more. The guardian feeds predominantly upon the bounty of rats, worms and insects seeking to infest her lair, which of course further protects the dead body from harm.

In the wild, the male rarely exceeds 50 pounds but may range a territory up to 100 miles across, mating with numerous females, caring for their eggs and, ultimately, finding eggs a new lair in which to hatch. Males can smell unhatched male eggs and naturally deposit them in lairs on the edge of their territory and discourage trespass once the egg hatches. In practice, the Tasis keep a number of male and female tomb beasts in captivity for breeding purposes, though they renew the stock with newly captured wild specimens when possible. Typically, a tomb beast lives about 250 years unless slain by violence, and if a male is present he is likely to fill the open lair with a new egg. Of course, the Tasis family keeps the males for themselves when possible, so that it can sell new guardians.

The tomb beasts are quadrupedal reptiles with powerful hind legs allowing them to run mostly erect for short distances and strong forelegs capable of burrowing through earth — or flesh.

Most of the time, females rest in





near-hibernation, suddenly springing into lightning-quick movements to capture and devour insects, rats or other intruders into their lairs. Males are equally quick but roam large territories, squeezing in and out of the various cavernous lairs of their mates. Either sex can readily snatch flies from the air with their deadly talons, and slower victims such as tomb robbers are usually slain and consumed with ease. Determined despoilers of graves learn that even terribly wounded tomb beasts will not leave their lairs and fight to the death with a dangerous desperation and abandon. Both sexes exude strong paralytic venom on their claws and fangs, allowing them to feast upon incapacitated prey at will. Females' jaws are so strong they crush bones, ultimately leaving nothing of an enemy except well-bleached spoor.

Attributes: Strength 5/1, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5/2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 1/2, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 1, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 5/3

Abilities: Athletics 3/4, Awareness 5, Brawl 4/2, Dodge 2/4, Endurance 3/1, Presence 1 (Intimidation +2)/0, Resistance 3/1, Stealth 1/3, Survival 0/2

Supernatural Powers: Vigilance of the Ravenous Guardian

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Bite: Speed 9 Accuracy 10/8 Damage 6L*/2L* Defense 10/8

Claw: Speed 10 Accuracy 10/8 Damage 5L*/1L* Defense 10/8

* Venom Diff. 2 Success 1L Failure 3L Duration/Penalty 8 hours/-6

Dodge Pool: 8/10 **Soak:** 2L/5B//1L/2B (None)

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

Essence: 2

Other Notes: When two Traits are presented, the first represents that of a female tomb beast, while the second rating represents that of a male.

VIGILANCE OF THE RAVENOUS GUARDIAN

Female tomb beasts live their entire lives in a single cavern or small cluster of chambers, and their ability to gather food depends upon detecting every potential creature of prey and being able to seize and devour it even in the dark. Upon first hatching from the egg, a female tomb beast becomes attached to her subterranean environment, its signature in Creation imprinting upon her senses down to the magnetic fields and natural energy flow of the area. Darkness, odd smells, echoing noises and stealthy enemies alike fail to confound the guardians as they spring into action with lightning speed. As such, nothing short of Charms, sorcery or other magic can cause a female tomb beast to be surprised by an ambush, and even potent Charms must contest against the supernatural senses of a guardian.

Roll the tomb beast's Perception + Awareness against the Charm in question, and reduce its successes accordingly (do not reduce them at all in the face of mundane stealth). If any successes remain for the tomb beast, they are added directly to the base initiative of the tomb beast for the duration of the scene. Charms that make a character impossible to detect are difficulty 5 for the tomb lizard to penetrate. The tomb beast should always be considered "alert" or "alerted to the character's presence." A female tomb beast may also add her Perception + Awareness die pool directly to her own attempts at stealth (for a total of 16 dice) to represent her supernatural awareness of her own movements and their telltale signs.