

Call of the Illuminated



02-2005

Holy Protectors of the

EXALTED



Cult
of the
Illuminated

The title is rendered in a stylized, hand-drawn font. The word "Cult" is in a bold, blocky font, while "of the" is in a smaller, cursive script. "Illuminated" is in a large, flowing, cursive font. The letters are dark with a textured, almost metallic appearance. The background features a large, faint, light-colored outline of the letters 'C' and 'I'.

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To William O'Connor for his wonderful back cover strip on **Exalted: The Autochthonians**. Apologies for excluding his name from the credits.



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Cult of the Illuminated™

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER ONE: THE OUTER CIRCLE	8
CHAPTER TWO: THE INNER CIRCLE	32
CHAPTER THREE: THE TRAINING CAMPS	72
CHAPTER FOUR: THE WYLD HUNT	122





INTRODUCTION



You see many stars at night in the sky but find them not when the sun rises; can you say that there are no stars in the heaven of day? So, O man! because you behold not God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God.

—Voltaire

As the Time of Tumult begins, the beings who caused it, the Solar Exalted, seem isolated and alone, beings of great potential power trapped in a world of beings weaker than they but with far greater stores of wisdom and resources. Yet, looks are deceiving, for the Solars are far from alone.

Foremost among their allies, of course, are the Sidereal Exalted of the Gold Faction. These Sidereals believe the Usurpation was a mistake and the rise of the Dragon-Blooded a crude manipulation without due consideration of the alternatives. For many centuries, they were simply dissenters without purpose, an institutionalized minority in the Sidereal ranks. Now, with the return of the Solars, the Gold Faction is exploring the possibility of actually pursuing its historical mission. Even as an institutionalized minority, its members are still powerful celestial bureaucrats with a great deal

of pull in Heaven and the ability to manipulate the Loom of Fate.

But these rogue Exalted are not the Solars' only allies. Many spirits were ancient allies of the Solars, and those not destroyed in the conflicts following the Usurpation often remember their old allegiances. Other gods and elementals have been offended by the Immaculate Philosophy and its militant Dragon-Blooded monks, and these gods also favor the emergent Solars. Finally, some simply see the return of the Solars to power as inevitable. Perhaps it will take centuries, but they see the might of Creation as insufficient to restrain the Solars in the long term, and when the inevitable rise comes, these beings do not wish to be remembered as enemies by Creation's new masters.

Of these groups, many, perhaps the majority, are inactive participants, merely willing to stick a leg out

here or there to thwart the Immaculates or to forget to file timely reports on evidence of Solar activity. Others, however, are more proactive, aiding and protecting the Solars and preparing the way for the Solar Deliberative's return to power.

Perhaps the most influential cabal of these plotters is the Cult of the Illuminated. Led by Sidereals who absorbed a mortal religious cult to use as a front shortly after the Solar return, the Cult of the Illuminated seeks to find newly Exalted Solars, to spirit

them away from the Wyld Hunt and to train and protect them until they are powerful enough to make a serious impact on Creation.

This undertaking is a difficult one. All those who collaborated in the Usurpation Exalt, god and elemental — are leagued against the Solars. Even as the battles between the Gold and Bronze Factions and their supporters rise, the many external menaces to Creation — the Deathlords, the Fair Folk and the hordes of Malfear — gather their own

THE MORALITY OF ILLUMINATION

This book paints the Sidereal Exalted and the Cult of the Illuminated in terms that are most generously described as pragmatic and more realistically described as ruthless. Obviously, this will not fit with every possible Storyteller's vision of the Cult. It was done for two reasons.

First, this is true to the portrayal of the Cult and the Sidereal Exalted offered by supplements to this point. The Sidereals are ruthlessly practical beings. They are driven by the imperative that fate must continue to unwind, so that Creation can exist. The world currently faces terrible threats, hazards that will destroy all that is if they are allowed to triumph. As the Sidereals have been so far described, they could not possibly see their actions in seizing and manipulating the Cult of the Illuminated as anything except the way business is done. It might be somewhat regrettable that certain individuals had to suffer, but that is so beyond the concerns of anything but the most neophyte Sidereal that discussing it is beside the point. Yes, it is terrible. What else?

Perhaps this is not the wisest approach. Perhaps it provides roots for another attempt at the destruction of the Solars when matters go awry. Perhaps it will alienate the Cult's Solar Exalted minions. To some extent, this is a risk the Sidereals feel they have to take. They are creatures of carefully calculated risk, and they know they are taking chances.

The Chosen of the Maidens are also subject to the Great Curse, and by banding together to establish the Solar Exalted by founding a cult that venerates them as saviors, they throw themselves into the arms of its subtle effects. Of course their callous manipulations of the Cult are a terrible idea. Certainly, the Solars will never be able to fully trust the Chosen of the Maidens again when they inevitably realize the Cult is a sham. Indeed, even matters as they are now are terrible because the Sidereals are so blind to their own ruthlessness that they do not even bother to conceal it. They make uncompromising zealots of their students through methods that cannot possibly fail to draw Solar ire when their protégées gain self-awareness. And when the time of reckoning comes, surely the Great Curse will link hands with itself and drive the retribution through a series of Limit Breaks.

To what degree the decisions of the Sidereals are ruthless expediency — possibly wholly justified — and to what degree they are the insidious workings of the Great Curse are mostly determined by the moral message with which the Storyteller wants to imbue the series. Hard-thinking Sidereals murdered by the bestial Solars is much different than the honest Solars enslaved by their scheming ancient manipulators. Both are valid, but they require spinning the material in slightly different ways.

The other reason that the Cult is portrayed as so morally compromised is that this was felt to be the easier baseline for Storytellers to work from. A crusading religious organization drawn as an ideological success has no room for corruption, that's pretty much the point of the exercise. Yet, in one that is drawn as having flaws, these simply form yet another thing that can go right for the faith. Drawn together by their beliefs, the frail, human creatures of the Cult nevertheless create true righteousness. It's much harder to have a bunch of perfect individuals fall to pointless bickering.

Obviously, not everyone will be happy with the fact that the Cult evades obvious villainy only because of the vast gravity of its mission. Our apologies. It was our intention to make a book that both had a fairly consistent tone and maximum utility as a Storytelling instrument. Hopefully, this supplement achieves a satisfactory result.

forces, hoping to exploit these divides between the defenders of Creation.

Can the Solars and their supporters rise to prominence in time? Will an agreement be struck that allows the factions to put aside their hostility to defend Creation, without such epic betrayals of their followers and adherents that the matter falls to pieces before the gilt seals are dry on the agreement? Will Creation fall beneath the marching feet of invaders, torn asunder by its own disputes? Only the future can say, and such matters are beyond even the most insightful members of the Sidereals' planning committees to foresee. If the Maiden of Secrets knows the answers, she, as always, merely smiles and does not tell.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded and **Exalted: The Sidereals** largely detailed the defenders of Creation's status quo, the Gold Faction and its Terrestrial nominees. **Cult of the Illuminated**, as its name suggests, details the primary organization for the defense of the Solar Exalted, the mysterious Cult of the Illuminated. In its last chapter, it details the Cult's — and the Solars' — greatest enemy, the Wyld Hunt.

It is important to note that the nature of this book dictates that each chapter, to a certain extent, have its own self-contained worldview. From the perspective of the Outer Circle, the Cult is a tiny sect of rebels currying through the undergrowth of history, seeking to act without being seen. From the perspective of the Solars in the training camps, the Cult is a powerful edifice that fields strong squadrons of troops to meet its foes.

This is intentional and done for several reasons. At one level, it reflects the perspective of the Cult's various levels of operations. At another, it reflects the different sorts of play-style necessary for the different levels of the organization. If the characters are heroic mortals or Solars on the run from the Dragon-Blooded, the Cult needs to be skilled and furtive. When it

trains the Solars for war, the Cult needs to seem martial and effectual. When the Cult is a vehicle for Gold Faction conspiracies, it needs to be realistically positioned in Yu-Shan.

Where the different faces of the Cult clash — for example, for Solars who are first rescued by the Cult and then trained — it is up to the Storyteller to decide which of the Cult's appearance to favor. The decision to portray the Inner Circle and especially the training camps as powerful and organized was made because it is ultimately easier to trim away power that is not desired than it is to make up character sheets for Storyteller characters who don't exist. Storytellers who want to reduce the power of the Cult's inner cadre should just make them weaker and more vigorously hunted.

Chapter One: The Outer Circle details the Cult's mortal arm and the structure of its churches and missions around Creation. This segment of the Cult is relatively weak and composed almost entirely of mortals. It is the arm of the Cult that characters approaching the organization as recruits or hunters will most likely meet.


Chapter Two: The Inner Circle details the Sidereal and divine conspiracy that underpins the mortal front of the Cult. These individuals run and maintain the Cult, providing it with mortal resources.

Chapter Three: The Training Camps details the Cult's training organizations. Operated separately from the Cult itself, the Cult's training arm uses special methodologies to boost the power of the Solars under its charge. This chapter also contains detailed character-creation rules for playing Solars who have spent their time prior to the start of play under the influence of the Cult's training regimes.

Chapter Four: The Wyld Hunt describes the history and organization of the Immaculate Philosophy's primary defense against the Anathema, the Wyld Hunt, with particular emphasis on one centralized outpost of the Hunt provided as an example of the Hunt's overall capabilities and readiness.







CHAPTER ONE THE OUTER CIRCLE



For the Exalted, Creation is a place of limitless possibilities.

That's not how peasants and slaves see their world.

For the underclasses of Creation, life is a tight set of limits and a persistent *lack* of possibilities. A peasant is born with nothing, and he will likely die with nothing in the same village, or even the same hut, where he was born. A farmer or servant or laborer goes through life knowing that this is *all* she gets, day in and day out, and that she passes this empty legacy to her children and dooms them to live the same way. And the only alternative to drudgery and toil is death and horror. There are wonders and terrors in the world, gods and monsters and beings with the blood of the Dragons in their veins, and when their shadows pass over Creation, the common folk usually lie dead in their wake. The Immaculate Faith offers faith and the promise of elevation to Dragon-Blooded divinity many incarnations in the future — but in *this* life, it preaches acceptance of this small and pitiful lot, the *appropriateness* of the peasant's struggle and limits and small, pointless existence. And while heretical cults abound, all they offer are different parameters of worship, different beings to beg for aid and succor. Nothing changes, nothing moves, and life is still a dirt path to death and the Underworld or rebirth into another incarnation just like the last.

But the Cult of the Illuminated is *different*. It holds the promise of *change*, massive change in this lifetime, in the

next decade, *tomorrow*. The Cycle of Day is coming, the Cult says, when the Shining Ones will overthrow the tyranny of the Realm, of the Dragon-Blooded, of Heaven itself, and make everything different. Make a world where everyone has choices, everyone has options; make a world where those farmers and laborers and whores who fought for the Shining Ones will stand at their sides and be rewarded in both this world and a vastly different Heaven.

Of course, the Sidereals of the Gold Faction know that the doctrine, beliefs and myths of the Cult of the Illuminated are a sham — they know because they *created* those beliefs. But to those within the Cult's Outer Circle, the ordinary men and women who dedicate their lives and souls to the service of the Shining Ones and the belief in the coming Cycle of Day, those beliefs are the most important thing in the world. And if those beliefs are artificial — well, that doesn't mean that they're *wrong*. For a change *is* coming, a great cycle of Creation is ending, and some new eon will soon be born from the efforts of the Solar Exalted and their allies. What form that new Age will take is immaterial — what matters is that it will be different, that tomorrow will not be a repeat of yesterday. What matters is the promise of *possibility*.

This world is the one in which the members of the Outer Circle live, a world teetering on the brink of massive and fundamental change — a world where the old rules will not apply and where their loyalty and service may

bring them rewards they had never dared imagine before. For a people who are born tasting dirt and ashes and know they will never taste anything else, the Cult of the Illuminated is more than just another heresy, another way to placate the gods or wring some small joy from belief. It is *hope*, and that alien emotion is something worth working for, killing for, dying for. Worth *anything*.

The Outer Circle have no god-killing weapons, no earthshaking magics, no elementals and spirits to serve them. They fight and spy and labor for beings they may see only once or not at all, beings and promises they know only through rumor. They bring nothing to the war of gods and Exalts except devotion, courage, determination and hope.

And with these things, they will change the world.

It's easy for a series focusing on the Exalted and their powers to put aside the mundane concerns of Creation, to look instead to epic battles and fantastic monsters and the glorious powers of Solars and gods and their terrible enemies. But there is a whole world of ordinary mortals existing around and underneath those fantastic elements, and those mortals can make a difference if they have the chance. While the Cult of the Illuminated's Inner Circle is controlled by spirits and gods and Exalts, its Outer Circle is the quotidian, everyday face of the sect — and the face with which the players' characters will first interact. Its members are the innkeepers who hide the characters from the Dragon-Blooded, the sailors who smuggle them out of the Realm, the temple warriors who die protecting their escape from demonic assassins. The Outer Circle isn't as sexy or fantastic as the Inner Circle, but it's far more pervasive and widespread, and it's full of interesting story possibilities and complications for any series where the players' characters interact with the Cult and its hidden masters.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OUTER CIRCLE

The Outer Circle is an entity largely separate from the Inner Circle, just as the labor team that works to build a Manse is separate from the Exalted who own or employ them for that purpose. While the Outer Circle works in a support role, it works at a remove, with little interaction with the Inner Circle — some communication of orders or information, the occasional visitation from a god or Sidereal to direct an operation, but no more. The Outer Circle is not protected or bolstered by its secret chiefs and receives little actual guidance; the Inner Circle takes what is offered by the Cult's mortal wing and gives little in return.

But still, the Outer Circle endures, because of its apparent insignificance rather than despite of it. And while the Inner Circle has all the power, it's the Outer Circle that is the true heart of the Cult of the Illuminated, the foundation on which the entire enterprise is built. There was a time when the Cult was simply a collection of mundane seekers and peasants, before the Sidereal Exalted

discovered them and put them to use. The Outer Circle existed before the Inner Circle formed, before the Sidereals reshaped the Cult into something more to their liking — and should the Inner Circle be destroyed, the Outer Circle will persist and survive as it always has. Its members' faith is their strength, not some handout of power from a Sidereal redoubt, and if everything else is lost, then their faith will remain.

THE HISTORY OF THE CULT

The story of the Cult of the Illuminated begins decades ago, years before the disappearance of the Empress and the return of the Solar Exalted. It's a story that began in Realm Year 732, 36 years ago, with an astrologer, vagrant and substance abuser named Vax. A promising student in the thaumaturgical colleges of Chiaroscuro, Vax discovered in his 20s that getting high on mushrooms and qat was far more enjoyable than spending hours watching the stars and fiddling with divinatory tools. Losing his place in the schools of the Tri-Khan, he became a piss-poor savant of the streets, drawing up horoscopes and making weak talismans in exchange for petty cash and hallucinogenic drugs. For more than five years, Vax lived in a daze — and then, he was given a pouch of bright morning (see *Scavenger Sons*, p. 32), smoked the whole thing in one lung-burning drag and wandered raving into Chiaroscuro's vermilion-glass ruins.

When Vax returned, he had *changed*. A light blazed wild and semi-coherent inside his head, and he spoke incessantly of the vision he had received during his holy, drug-addled meditation. It was a vision of a world sick and corrupted, where the greedy and the debauched controlled the masses with savagery and fear. But rising up against this poisoned Creation came righteous warriors and heroes, the Illuminated Ones, who threw down the forces of decay and control and erected a holy kingdom of light, a kingdom where the common folk no longer toiled for corrupt masters but for their own future. His message was added, his delivery raving, his vision nonsensical — but yet, in the slums and plazas, a few listened, and a few believed. A small group of adherents accumulated around Vax, acolytes (and fellow drug users) caught by the conviction in his words, the passion that filled him. They supplied him with food and shelter and bright morning while he continued to pursue his visions and wrote down the few that were coherent enough to hang together as parables or sermons.

First and foremost among Vax's followers, among the group that came to be known as the Cult of the Illuminated, was a child named Shen Aru. His parents, farmers in servitude to a distant Dragon-Blooded master, had little love for their ungrateful and ever-questioning son. When they decided to sell him into slavery, Shen (still less than 10 years old) ran away from the farm into Chiaroscuro — and into the arms of Vax and his fledgling Cult of the Illuminated. Vax took the boy as his own son, raising him



on a diet of visions and raw faith. Shen grew up a true believer, Vax's chief acolyte, proselytizer and strong right arm. It was Shen Aru who guided the slowly growing Cult through the mountains of the South, Shen Aru who translated the ravings of Vax and taught his theology to the rest of the Cult, Shen Aru who buried the drug-addled and passionate old man when he died in RY 754.

Over the next decade, the Cult survived bandits and badlands, plagues and pogroms, while slowly accumulating adherents and hopefuls in every new mountain town and farming village. While never a huge sect, it became large enough to survive without roaming and settled near Yane in the village of Ratachul — a village renamed Vision of Light a year later, as the Cult became the official religion of the town and Vax's grave its sacred shrine. Now with more than 200 adherents, Shen moved to fulfill his master's vision, to prepare the world for the coming of the Illuminated Ones. He trained priests and missionaries in the confused and contradictory gospels of the Cult and sent them off to spread the word of Vax throughout Creation — or at least the nearby areas of the South and the Scavenger Lands that the missionaries could reach.

While the Cult of the Illuminated had survived for more than 20 years, nothing really differentiated it from a dozen other millennial cults or a thousand other minor sects. In the Threshold, the Immaculate Order held only partial sway, and heresies and backwater gnosticism were as common as cholera — and they became only more common when rumors of the Scarlet Empress' disappearance began to seep forth from the Blessed Isle. The Cult could have quietly existed on the fringe of reason and relevance for decades before finally dwindling into obscurity — if it had not attracted the attention of the Sidereal Gold Faction.

SIDEREAL SUBVERSION

In Realm Year 762, Creation was stable, bounded and controlled as far as the Sidereal Exalted were concerned. The Scarlet Empress managed the Realm and the Dragon-Blooded, the Solar Exalted were little more than a memory locked away in the Jade Prison, and the Bronze Faction had a comfortable grip on the reins of Heaven.

One year later, all of that was in ruins. The Empress was missing, the Jade Prison was torn asunder, and the Solar Exalted were returning in force. The Time of Tumult had begun, and in the chaos the Gold Faction of the Sidereal Exalted saw the opportunity to wrest power and influence from their Bronze rivals. The Solar Exalted were the key, the power that would reshape Creation and make a new (Gold Faction controlled) future — but only if they survived to assume their full power, survived the efforts of the Bronze Faction Sidereals and their Dragon-Blooded operatives to destroy them again. A safety net was required, a way in which the Gold Faction could protect fledgling Solars and bring them under its wing for training

Vax



TOO PERFECT

The obvious question, of course, is whether the Cult just *happened* to develop a revelatory faith than meshed with the needs of the Solar and Sidereal Exalted or whether it was deliberately created to fill a coming need. Did the Gold Faction know that the Solars would soon return and engineer an appropriate cover group for its activities? Was Vax's vision presented to him by a powerful spirit made visible by the powers of bright morning, maybe even by the Unconquered Sun himself? Is it all one big, incredibly convenient coincidence, perhaps woven into fate by unknown hands decades ago?

The only people who (probably) know the truth about the Cult's origins are the decision makers of the Golden Circle, perhaps some of their Bronze Faction counterparts, the Maiden of Secrets and a few very powerful and well-informed gods. And they're not forthcoming with answers, even to their subordinates and allies — because revealing *that* information would pose a whole series of further questions about the plots, intrigues and schemes intermeshing in this most confusing and dangerous of eras. Asking the head of your faction if she knew 30 years ago that the Deathlords were going to break open the Jade Prison and declare war on Creation is a *bad* idea if you want to see another tomorrow.

Questions are a mistake. Answers are a trap. Accept that the Cult exists, and move on. There is wisdom in this advice for any overly inquisitive Sidereal — and perhaps danger for any other Exalted that may press too hard for answers from their erstwhile mentors.

and indoctrination. And here was the Cult of the Illuminated, a scattered, minor sect of mortals with a belief system surprisingly close to what was actually going on in Creation. It was *perfect*.

In RY 764, during the time of Calibration, the Gold Faction came to Vision of Light — and *not* in a subtle or surreptitious way. They arrived in flying chariots and on the backs of garda birds, they arrived with retinues of gods and elementals, they arrived in majesty and terrible splendor, and they made an impact. Shen Aru emerged blinking and slightly high from his temple-home to find Ayesha Ura and half-a-dozen powerful gods kneeling before him and proclaiming him the Herald of the New Age (and with the forged paperwork from the Celestial Bureaucracy to prove it). Unsurprisingly, Shen accepted their declaration without question (once he stopped being terrified and hysterical), and his followers ran out into the Threshold to spread the news.

As the dignitaries of Heaven acclimated Shen Aru to his new role and escorted him to his new home alongside the gods, the Cult reeled in shock and awe — and the Sidereal Exalted and their allied gods moved in to take control. Fledgling Illuminated temples across the Threshold heard the word of their faith's validation, and the smooth-tongued messengers of that word organized the temple faithful into more efficient configurations as the news sank in. Training programs and lines of communication were developed, initial funding was distributed to temple priests, carefully rewritten and “clarified” gospels were disseminated, and the structure of the Cult of the Illuminated was rapidly overhauled in a matter of weeks. The Gold Faction had to work fast, lest the Bronze Faction realize just what it was doing or before it attracted attention from the Dragon-Blooded. Once the core elements of the reformed Cult were in place — once it was remade as the visible, mortal Outer Circle of the Illuminated program — the Sidereals and gods withdrew to concentrate on the workings of the Inner Circle, leaving the mortal believers to work the rest out for themselves. Operatives and agents of the Gold Faction and the Inner Circle still worked occasionally within the Outer Circle, but only when circumstances demanded it.

Leaving the Outer Circle to function for itself as a deniable, expendable resource had its risks but proved to be a decision that paid off. Over the last four years, the Cult has spread throughout Creation, fueled by its vision of a world where the ordinary faithful will be truly rewarded for their loyalty. The message resonates, even without the astrological tampering and invisible meddling of the Sidereals. The Solar Exalted emerged from the fog of myth, hunted and outcast from the world they thought they knew — and found an organization of mortals willing to do anything to help their Illuminated saviors. The project has been a resounding success, at least at the external level.

And Vision of Light? Razed down to the bedrock by the Immaculate Order in RY 767, its population either executed for heresy or spared (and enslaved) if they recanted their beliefs. Nothing remains of the town but rubble and ghosts, and the holy corpse of Vax was ritually burned and destroyed by the monks. Unfortunately for the Order, Shen Aru was long gone by then, and the destruction of the village has only served to inspire the cultists that much further into fanaticism and martyrdom.

THE OUTER CIRCLE TODAY

Some four years after the Celestial Visitation and the Ascendance of Shen Aru, the Cult of the Illuminated is stronger and more widespread than ever, thanks to the machinations of the Gold Faction. Temples have been established in the Scavenger Lands and the Realm and in every part of the Threshold except for the North — and

even there, a few missionaries and zealots seek to establish a toehold for the Illuminated.

The speed at which the Cult has spread is due to the intervention of the Sidereal Exalted and their allied gods in the Inner Circle. When the hidden leaders of the Cult decided that a temple needed to be established in Nexus or in Gem or on the Blessed Isle, they *made* it happen. Local heresies were visited by celestial lions preaching the real truth; potential converts were swayed by the appearance of charismatic Solars; troublemakers and local authorities were subverted with magic or conveniently torn into bloody rags by demons that were “defeated” by the valiant Illuminated cultists. The Gold Faction never openly showed its hand, never went *too* far in its efforts lest it attract attention, but operated just subtly enough to get the job done and get it done *fast*.

That’s not to say that the Cult of the Illuminated is omnipresent. Indeed, the opposite is true. There are only a handful of Illuminated temples in Creation, based out of major cities and significant locales, with a scattering of tiny outposts and cells of the faithful outside those areas. The Cult *could* be larger, but not while maintaining a low profile, and the near invisibility of the Cult is the reason it survives. While it stays too small and spread out to be significant, the Immaculate Order continues to overlook it, thinking it just another millennial movement or even a slew of unconnected groups. Overlooked and underground, the Outer Circle continues the holy work ordained by Heaven and the secret chiefs — to seek out, shelter and serve the Shining Ones, the Illuminated heroes who will remake the world and usher in an era of justice and righteousness.

With only mortal resources and members, without the direct aid of the Inner Circle and its miracles, the Outer Circle is isolated and inefficient, too spread out to find every new Solar and too impoverished to completely protect those its members do encounter. Solars have slipped through the safety net, murdered by the Wyld Hunt before reaching the protection of the Inner Circle. The Sidereal leaders of the Cult accept this. Solar Essences reincarnate quickly, and one’s next incarnation may be luckier and stronger. And there are always more hope-filled peasants and zealous converts available to replace the fallen cultists and build new temples.

CULT STRUCTURE

To keep the Outer Circle at a safe, deniable distance from the workings of the Inner Circle, the Gold Faction has organized the Cult less like a religion and more like a secret society. The basic unit of the Cult is the **cell** — a self-contained, independent body of worshipers with little connection to any other cell or to the Inner Circle. Based in a specific city or location, a cell has only intermittent communication with the Inner Circle — and mostly one-way communication at that. It only interacts with other

cells in unusual circumstances, such as all-out war or a concerted attempt to ferry Shining Ones from one cell to another (rather than directly to the Inner Circle).

The most important type of cell is the **temple**. These (hopefully) permanent Cult establishments serve as shrines, barracks, headquarters and fortresses for the cultists of the cell. Temples come in all sizes and types, from ruins outside the city limits to shrines hidden in the slums and secret cellars under brothels. A temple cell includes not just ordinary cultists, but also a number of priests and a leader hand-picked by the Inner Circle. Temples are the most important cells in the Cult network, and the Inner Circle’s plans rest on the ability of temple cultists to work hard and give their all for their faith.

The other type of cell is the **outpost**, a small, unfocused group of worshipers and cultists operating outside of a fixed temple. There are all kinds of outposts: farms worked by believer families, groups of converts meeting for discussions and prayers and plots, a single hermit priest wandering the mountains and watching the skies. Outposts are scattered and not particularly important in the Inner Circle’s schemes. If an outpost could become useful, resources and manpower are directed at it to upgrade it into a temple cell and recruit more members. Outposts mostly play the part of the network’s connective tissue, way stations where Solars can rest and hide as they’re smuggled to a major temple or to the training camps. Outposts consist of a number of believers, possibly a priest and whatever family and supporters they can suborn to their cause.

CULT MEMBERS


There are roughly a thousand active Illuminated cultists in Creation. Most of these members are based in temples in the Threshold and on the Blessed Isle, with the rest in small outposts across the world. Temples recruit on an ongoing basis (see below), but at the same time, cultists are killed or arrested for heresy and treason every week. The Outer Circle grows, but it grows slowly and cautiously, just as the Inner Circle wishes.

AVERAGE CULTISTS

The vast bulk of the Outer Circle is comprised of ordinary cultists — ordinary in every sense of the word. These are not elite soldiers or occult specialists. They are farmers and fishmongers and street urchins, peasants and commoners and (occasionally) the lower members of the citizenry. What unites them is their belief in the word of Vax and the coming Cycle of Day, the imminent change of Ages and their chance to be feted and uplifted in a new and better world.

Most cultists are part-time members of the Cult, if only because their temple can’t afford to look after them all. Cultists still need to eat, and that means working for a living and attending prayer meetings and planning sessions in





their spare time. A few cultists do devote themselves full-time to the Cult's cause, usually the most zealous and least socially encumbered followers. These cultists usually live in the temple, eat food donated by their fellows and spend their days fervently working to advance the Cult's local agenda. However, even part-time members are expected to drop everything when it's time to act, when the Shining Ones appear and call on the believers for aid.

An Illuminated cultist has the Traits of a standard heretic (see *Exalted*, p. 277), except that she has Conviction 3 and Willpower 5. Cultists are almost always extras, and most cultists in a particular temple will be armed and equipped identically (with cheap, easy-to-use weapons and minimal armor).

PRIESTS

The priests of the Cult are a motley and varied lot, preaching a patchwork and often incoherent doctrine half their own and half that of their masters. Priests were almost always average cultists first, who rose through the shallow ranks of their temple to catch the attention of the temple leader or an existing priest. However, a few are tapped for priestly duties as soon as they join the Cult, due to a background in religion, unusual abilities or a gift for mysticism and prayer.

Once a potential priest is chosen, she is taken aside for training by the temple leader and operatives of the Inner

Circle — experienced priests, loyalist savants and a number of minor gods. Training is not a simple, easy or painless affair. It's fast, stressful and designed to bond the cultist even more tightly to her faith. There are three pillars to the training process:

Indoctrination: The postulant's teachers run her through intensive daily learning sessions in which she learns the basic gospels, prayers and rites of the Cult's doctrine. These sessions normally go all day, with only a short break for water and food, and last for a week. While the postulant's teachers are earnest and not unkind, they're also inflexible and urgent. The student must learn these things if she is to fulfill her duties, and failure to learn is simply not an option. The learning process is often enhanced by the god that is part of the indoctrination team, who will use his Charms to improve the student's desire and ability to learn. It is this god that will be the new priest's celestial contact and the subject of her communique prayers (see p. 21).

Self-Flagellation: The Cult's doctrine teaches that Creation has been corrupted and weakened by the wickedness of this world and its evil masters. That weakness is why the Cycle of Night has continued so long and why the Shining Ones must intervene to bring the Cycle of Day. In order to be worthy of standing with the Shining Ones and playing handmaiden to the new eon, the postulant must scourge away her own weakness, her own wickedness. She

ORDINARY PEOPLE

The members of the Outer Circle are ordinary in almost every sense of the word. They're not Exalts or God-Blooded or beastmen; they're not master thieves or thaumaturges or elite soldiers; they don't have wealth and connections and arsenals of First Age weaponry. They're just men and women with courage and faith and dedication to a cause. Compared to the wonders and unusual beings of Creation, they're not very interesting, are they?

Well, no. On an individual basis, Illuminated cultists aren't that special, and they're not *meant* to be. They're extras, designed to flesh out the scenes and setting of a series. That's not very kind or egalitarian, but it's the truth. Cultists are background color, who die valiantly holding off the Wyld Hunt or escort the players' characters to the next interesting scene in the story. The Cult is interesting as a collective entity, as an example of how Creation reacts to the Solar demigods, as a demonstration of how ordinary people can make a difference in the world — and, again, as a way of moving stories forward.

Within that collective entity, there certainly can be more interesting individuals. A particular cultist may be a regular contact or assistant to the players' characters, becoming more than a background extra and warranting a name, a personality and a plot hook or two. Priests are more likely than average members to be interesting and fully fleshed out Storyteller characters, given their increased significance in the Cult and series. Temple leaders are almost always unusual and interesting individuals, with particular Abilities and Backgrounds that make them meaningful and moderately important Storyteller characters, just like the local potentate or the head of the beggar's guild. And it's worth noting that, even within the Outer Circle, there are a handful of exceptional and unusual characters: God-Bloods, savants, thaumaturges, veterans and heroic mortals. There aren't *many* such beings, and none of them are as powerful and exotic as the players' characters, but there are enough to add a bit of flavor to a Cult encounter if the Storyteller feels so inclined.

On the whole, though, the Outer Circle isn't interesting. It's *useful*. Being interesting is the job of the Inner Circle — and the job of the players' characters. The Outer Circle provides contrast and context, and it does it well.

must whip, cut or beat the corruption from her flesh and let her blood shine forth with virtue. By punishing herself, by enduring pain and scars and ritual self-abuse, the cultist passes into an ecstatic state (assisted by drugs). Once out of that state, she convinces herself that her new role must be worth the pain she has endured. She justifies the work she does and believes she holds *because* she has suffered so much to be allowed to hold them.

Hallucinogenic Drugs: Finally, after her daily lessons and in addition to self-flagellation sessions, the postulant is fed large quantities of psychoactive drugs — mostly bright morning but also mushrooms and even hallucinogenic woad. Under the influence of these drugs, the postulant is left to ponder the mysteries of the Cult, to whip herself into an ecstatic frenzy and to fill her brain with drugborn revelations and insights. This mirrors the visionary techniques of Vax, but that's not the real reason for the drugs. The point is to force the postulant to create her own visions and divine revelations, to put her own personal stamp on her belief system. The faith you create yourself is always stronger than the faith handed to you from another. Priests of the Cult believe with a burning passion because they have seen first hand their own truth and revelation.

After the week of training is over, the new priest is sent back to her temple, laden down with ritual materials, approved translations of the Cult's doctrine and gospels and enough drugs to cause cardiac arrest in a mule. If the trainers feel that the postulant is not up to the level of skill and belief required, she is still raised to the level of priest, but one of the trainers will stay with her and keep reinforcing the training until she meets the required level of competence and fervor.

Within the Cult, priests are the spiritual movers and motivators of the Outer Circle. They preach the doctrines, answer the questions of the cultists, encourage fervor and hand out drugs. On a pragmatic level, priests are also the communication and information system of the Cult network. They perform the communiqué prayers and encrypt messages into doctrine code (see p. 21). Priests normally stay out of organizational matters, leaving that for the temple leaders (assuming the priest isn't also the temple leader). Most temples have one priest for every 10 cultists, while outposts may have just one priest or none at all.

An Illuminated priest has the same profile as a standard heretic (see **Exalted**, p. 277), except that she has Conviction 3 and Willpower 5, two dots in Occult and Performance and one dot in Lore with a specialty in Illuminated Doctrine. Most priests are extras and possess the same equipment as the other cultists, plus a supply of gospel scrolls and hallucinogens. Some exceptional priests may be heroic mortals. These priests often possess additional traits and skills, such as knowledge of thaumaturgy or exceptional oratory prowess.



Exalted

TEMPLE LEADERS

Finally, each temple is headed up by a leader, hand-picked and validated by the secret chiefs of the Inner Circle. Leaders are not chosen because of their fervor (although that helps). They are chosen because they are *useful* for some reason. A person may have exceptional skills and abilities, wealth and social connections, a modicum of supernatural power or some other trait — whatever it is, the Inner Circle wants it, and so, it makes that person the temple's leader and its primary agent for that cell. Whether he wants the responsibility or not; in some cases, whether he's a member of the Cult or not. Forcible conversion is not a trivial process, but it's certainly doable for Sidereals with the right Charms, spells and spirit allies. If the Cult wants you bad enough, you either become a believer or suffer an unhappy accident.

Like Shen Aru, temple leaders are held up as spiritually important figures by the Cult — and like Aru, they get a celestial visitation to prove it. When the Inner Circle chooses a temple leader, it sends a team of gods and elementals, headed by a Sidereal advisor, to deliver the good news. The candidate suddenly finds himself facing a resplendent celestial lion, a retinue of inhuman elementals and a man shining with the light of the stars, all kowtowing to him and presenting him with the documents naming him Herald of the Coming Day and Heaven's Beloved Son. No candidate has *ever* said no (or indeed, has done much but gawp and piss himself in shock). The visitation team prefers to present itself to the candidate and the rest of the temple's cultists at the same time, to make the biggest impact. If this isn't possible (for example, if the chosen candidate isn't yet a member of the Cult), then the team will get the new leader to present himself to the temple as soon as possible and then go through the whole visitation process again. Once the cultists are suitably overawed, most of the team returns to the Inner Circle, leaving the Sidereal and perhaps a spirit guardian behind to arrange all the organizational changes and to brief the leader on his new duties.

The temple leader is responsible for two things: his cell's continued survival and, more importantly, his cell's continued *usefulness*. Spiritual matters are left to the temple's priests, while the leader concentrates on more mundane and pressing issues. It's his job to maintain the Cult's activities in the region, to generate income for the cell and spend it wisely, to keep the priests fed and the cultists armed and to organize his acolytes into a posse that can smuggle a confused young Solar out of the area and away from the Wyld Hunt. The leader must monitor the comings and goings in the area, assess reports and information from his cell and from the Inner Circle, keep a weather eye open for the Immaculate authorities and arrange punishment for those cultists who are lax in their efforts. This role is a managerial one, not a spiritual one, and while

leaders must also be fervent believers, they must concentrate on work over prayer.

Temple leaders are almost always heroic mortals rather than extras, with whatever Traits the Storyteller thinks are appropriate for the series. They should have at least two dots in Occult (with a specialty in the Illuminated Doctrine) and a dot in Lore. Most temple leaders are exceptional but still mundane, possessing only everyday capabilities. However, the Inner Circle has also appointed thaumaturges, God-Bloods and other unusual (but still mortal) beings to run the Cult's cells and temples. A given temple normally has only one leader, but a particularly large cell could conceivably have multiple leaders working as a management team.

SUPPORTERS

In addition to the actual believers of the Cult, most cells are surrounded by a layer of lay supporters — folks who don't believe the millennial ramblings of the Illuminated but are nonetheless prepared to help the Cult in some small way. These usually include the family and friends of cultists, as well as those who benefit from the Cult's local activities. Almost all cells attempt to follow the Cult's code of morality, to uphold righteousness in their town and neighborhood as well as in their personal lives. Such an attitude tends to win the approval of the locals, especially when it translates into works of charity or protection. Cult members help their neighbors, whether that means building houses or hunting down thieves, and in return, their neighbors help them, hiding them from the authorities or sheltering the temple in their midst. It's not much, but it helps.

LIVING FOR THE LIGHT: FAITH, BELIEF AND PRACTICE

On one level, the doctrines and beliefs of the Cult of the Illuminated are simple and straightforward. A new and better Age is coming, courtesy of the Shining Ones, and the Cult exists to shepherd that Age. Be righteous and upright, venerate and assist the Shining Ones, and you will sit at their right hand and forge your own destiny when the Cycle of Day begins.

Those are the basic tenets of the Cult. On top of that basis is a heady froth of fever dreams, hallucinations, contradictions and Sidereal embellishments. The Cult of the Illuminated is an artificial creation for the most part, and one created quickly at that. Corners were cut and shortcuts were taken by the Cult's Sidereal shapers, and what they made was a variable and occasionally haphazard religion. But for all that, the Outer Circle works because of the faith and devotion and hope of the cultists and their temples. If the Inner Circle ceased to exist overnight, the Illuminated network would fall apart, but the faith of the individual cells would persist and survive far longer.

The doctrine of the Cult is described in full in the next chapter, and that doctrine is observed and applied in both the Inner and Outer Circles. The Outer Circle also has a number of unique aspects, separate to the faith and practices of their more informed masters.

REVELATION AND LOCAL WISDOM

The fundamental basis of the Illuminated faith is mystic revelation, wisdom and truths received in visions and other transcendent experiences by priests (and occasionally by other cultists, but only rarely). These visions are born from dreams, meditations, ecstatic self-flagellation, hallucinogenic drugs (especially bright morning), epileptic seizures and other methods. Each new vision generates new knowledge to add to the Cult's gospels and collected wisdom — and as long as that vision doesn't *negate* what has already been added to the doctrinal scrolls, it's accepted. Contradictions, confused visions, "wisdom" completely out of left field, all of it is added to a cell's library and litany. Because each cell is isolated from its fellows, these additions do not travel through the Illuminated network. Some may be communicated by zealous and earnest priests to their Inner Circle contacts, who will nod appreciatively and toss the scrolls of transcribed ramblings on the fire after the priests have left the room. For the Sidereal heads of the Inner Circle, this confusion of practices and beliefs isn't seen as a problem. The secret chiefs care about *outcomes*, not *process*. They really don't care what an individual cultist believes on top of the core tenets of the faith, so long as that cultist does her job and fulfills her role.

Each Illuminated cell thus has two aspects to its faith and religious practices. Doctrinal practice is consistent throughout the Illuminated network. These are the tenets and truths handed down from the Inner Circle, enshrined in *The Golden Tome of Truth* and attendant gospel scrolls kept by priests. Around this doctrinal kernel is a layer of local practice — those beliefs, superstitions, spiritual attitudes and bans created by (or revealed to) the members of that particular cell. Because the core tenets of the Cult are kept deliberately straightforward and simple by the Inner Circle, local practice tends to be more elaborate and extensive than doctrinal practice. A temple may have 20 different rites for placating local spirits, 19 of which are their own invention and one of which is handed down from the secret chiefs. This is especially true for cells operating out of wilderness areas such as the Southern deserts or the Eastern forests. The Cult began as an urban religion in Chiaroscuro and is still primarily focused on urban temples and cells. Rural cells have to make up their own practices for things such as felling trees, fishing or the correct way to hunt an elk, since the doctrines are silent on such matters. Priests maintain two libraries in each temple: the *Tome* and doctrinal scrolls handed down from the

Inner Circle, which must remain unaltered, and the received wisdom and commandments of the cell in whatever format is convenient.

When fleshing out temples or cells for their series, Storytellers should feel free to include as much ornate ritual and as many nonstandard practices as they see fit. Each cell is different, each is influenced by local politics and conditions, and each has its own individual agenda and needs as well as those of its Sidereal overlords. Do they use dances and drumming in their prayer meetings? Do they sacrifice bulls or snakes or effigies of children made from flowers? Do they decorate their weapons with sigils and tattoo their bodies, or do they dedicate themselves to *erasing* symbols and writings, to make a blank slate on which the Shining Ones can freely inscribe? The Cult doctrine (outlined in Chapter Two) stays constant, but everything else is up for grabs.

SHINING THROUGH

The gospels and teachings of the Cult are short on some details, but they make one thing clear — the Shining Ones *shine*. This concept isn't a tricky one. Cultists know roughly what an anima banner is and understand that the elemental animas of the Dragon-Blooded are different. Shining Ones appear more-or-less mortal but can surround themselves with light and energy, and if a cultist meets someone of that description, he will give his life to aid and protect her.

Of course, many beings in Creation have anima banners — not just Solars, but *all* of the Celestial Exalted and the Abyssal Exalted. The Cult's teachings don't include ways to tell Solars from other Exalted, information on Caste Marks or specific abilities or other details that would focus the cultists exclusively on the Solars. One reason for this is to avoid making too tight a connection between the Shining Ones and the Solar Anathema. There's a lot of baggage attached to the Solar label, and fewer peasants are willing to sacrifice their lives for Creation-eating bogeymen than they are for the shining harbingers of the righteous future. A second, important reason is so that the Cult doesn't appear *too* well informed to outside observers, such as Immaculate monks or Bronze Faction Sidereals. A millennial cult that just happens to venerate shining demigods is one thing, while a cult obviously trained to protect and worship Solars is another and would be investigated and suppressed very quickly. And finally, the members of the Gold Faction are nothing if not cunning, and they made sure to leave a back door for their own protection. A Sidereal Exalt can present himself to the Cult in an emergency, let his anima banner flare and suddenly have a cadre of loyal warriors protecting him.

In practical terms, any human-seeming being who can show an aura of light and energy might be embraced by the Cult as one of the Shining Ones. This includes Solars,



Lunars, Abyssals (it's disturbing black and bleeding energy, but it still qualifies) and Sidereal Exalted. It also includes any being who can *fake* such a display, such as the Fair Folk or God-Blooded with the right Charms or powers. It *doesn't* include gods, demons and elementals (because those beings don't look like mortals), ghosts and the undead (again, obviously not mortal) or the Dragon-Blooded (cultists are *definitely* taught enough to distinguish an elemental anima from a Celestial one).

While this vague approach is in place for a reason, it does present some problems for the Gold Faction. The Outer Circle was created to protect Solar Exalted and direct them toward the training camps of the Inner Circle. Solar Exalted — not Lunars, not wily Fair Folk, and *certainly* not Abyssal Exalted. (Ronin Sidereals — well, it's a nice bonus, but hardly the point of the exercise.) While the Gold Faction may bring other Exalts into the fold on occasion, it does so carefully and only after much deliberation — the Inner Circle doesn't *want* such beings sent straight to the training camps. Unfortunately, there's no way to definitely prevent such an error, not without teaching the Outer Circle more than it should be allowed to know. All the Inner Circle can do is encourage its lesser operatives to communicate as much information as possible whenever a Shining One appears, so that the secret chiefs can hopefully determine what the being is and how to respond.

In practical terms, determining a being's mystical nature and brand of Exaltation is a difficulty 3 Intelligence + Occult task. The rank-and-file cultists are almost never going to make such a distinction and will wholeheartedly venerate anyone/thing with an anima banner that appears in their vicinity. Priests and temple leaders are better educated and informed, to the point where they may certainly suspect that the purple-auraed giant with the bleeding Caste Mark in his forehead isn't *quite* the kind of being the secret chiefs told them to protect. When in doubt, priests send word to their masters through the usual channels (see p. 20) asking for advice; the Inner Circle may send confirmation, warnings, or assassins depending on circumstances.

WORKING FOR ILLUMINATION: OUTER CIRCLE ACTIVITIES

The Cult of the Illuminated isn't a religion that just exists to worship and pray. It has a purpose, an agenda, and it works toward that agenda. Every Cult cell works toward a primary goal — to bring forth the Cycle of Day by assisting the Shining Ones and aiding them in their passage to the hidden mountain of the secret chiefs. In addition to that spiritual goal, each cell has to contend with many mundane and practical concerns and goals. Weapons must be obtained, prayer meetings must be held,

VENERATION VERSUS WORSHIP

One oddity of the Cult of the Illuminated is that its members don't actually *worship* the Shining Ones. Part of the Cult's doctrine is that the Shining Ones don't *need* to be worshiped — these are not corrupt gods who must be bribed with prayers, but heroic beings who perform great deeds out of righteous nobility. The Shining Ones are venerated and praised, of course, and cultists honor them with their prayers, but those prayers are not directed *at* the Shining Ones. If the Cult can be said to worship anything, it's the new order that the Shining Ones will bring, the Illuminated Kingdom itself. Prayers are made to the spirits and loyal gods who are helping to erect that kingdom and who need the assistance and sacrifices of the cultists.

(This isn't wholly dissimilar to the way in which the Immaculate Order venerates the gods but prohibits their direct worship. Prayers are directed to Heaven and the Celestial Hierarchy itself, rather than the spirits in that hierarchy. That similarity isn't entirely a coincidence. When the Gold Faction designed the doctrines and workings of the Cult, it wasn't afraid to steal the most useful ideas of its Bronze rivals.)

Among other things, this means that Solar Exalted characters can't take the Cult Background (as described in **Games of Divinity** and **Exalted: The Lunars**) to gain power from their Illuminated allies and followers. The Outer Circle is composed of the mundane allies of the Solars, and the veneration and resources they provide the Shining Ones are similarly mundane — but useful and delivered by overawed fanatics who will perform any task the Solars might demand without hesitation.

watches must be kept for the Shining Ones, and information must be sent to the Inner Circle. Being a member of the Cult isn't just a spiritual choice, it's a *responsibility* (especially for priests and temple leaders), and each cell must meet its responsibilities or know itself apostate and unworthy. That responsibility is not a burden, but a *blessing*. It is by their actions that the faithful will be will known to the Shining Ones, and by fulfilling their duties, they guarantee themselves a place of honor in the Illuminated Kingdom.

The following activities and tasks are things that each Illuminated cell must fulfill. Just as each cell has its own unique beliefs and practices, each has its own way of fulfilling its duties, as well as its own particular set of trials and obstacles set against those duties.

RECRUITMENT

The Cult is always looking for new members, but not necessarily for a *lot* of new members. As an underground heresy with great responsibilities, it must be careful as it grows so that it doesn't attract the wrong kind of attention. New believers are needed to carry on the work of the Shining Ones, but they must be the right kind of believers — fervent, trustworthy and able to contribute in a *useful* way. An aged basket weaver with no money or useful skills might be filled with Illuminated light, but her grandson, the shopkeep in the militia is a *much* better prospect for recruitment. It's also important to make sure that a potential convert doesn't get cold feet and run to the local Immaculate temple — or at least that she never makes it to the temple.

Because the Outer Circle is short on miracles, it bases its recruitment on its message, its belief in a world where hope and possibilities exist for everyone rather than just the elite. That's a powerful message for the average peasant, and if applied consistently and carefully to a potential convert, it often does the trick. Other inducements to join may include bribes, drugs or the sexual favors of Cult members, but only if the new recruit would be worth the expense.

In some cases, a cell may request aid in recruitment from the Inner Circle, or assistance in increasing the fervor and commitment of newly recruited members. If the Inner Circle can spare the manpower, it sends a visitation committee to the temple — a celestial lion, some lesser gods and elementals, and a Sidereal or even Solar Exalt. These entities reveal themselves to the candidates, and after blowing their minds with displays of power impart the wisdom of the Cult and the rightness of its doctrine. After that kind of confirmation, few recruits ever doubt the Cult's righteousness.

FUNDRAISING

Once a temple has recruits, it needs their support — not just spiritual but practical and financial. Food, weapons, the construction of a shrine, bribes to the militia — it all costs money, and an underground religious movement needs more than good intentions to make ends meet. Cultists tithe part of their incomes to the Cult, of course, but the average cultist is a peasant who makes a handful of obols a year, and that only goes so far. Maintaining a temple costs the equivalent of Resources ●●● each year. A temple leader with Resources ●●●● can manage that from petty cash, but such wealthy cultists are rare to the point of nonexistence. Instead, temple leaders must direct the cell's efforts into making money — while at the same time staying righteous and fulfilling all their other duties.

Each temple generates funds in its own way. Some sell the services of Cult members as prostitutes, servants or soldiers or put them to work farming and crafting and then sell the goods. While these methods can work for large

cells with many members, smaller temples must think outside the box. Theft is a popular option — not from the citizenry and peasants (which would be unrighteous behavior) but from the corrupt authorities. Illuminated bandits may raid caravans, traders or militia offices, keeping money and tools for themselves and selling the rest. Another way is to make money from the specialized skills of cultists, rather than simple labor or whoring. Priests may peddle their occult expertise by crafting talismans or reading the stars (or selling drugs and potions), but they must be careful not to reveal the spiritual basis of their skills to their employers.

And while it is shameful to admit it, a few temples support themselves through theft and banditry. They don't prey on the poor and downtrodden, of course (well, not often), but upon the ruling classes, the rich and corrupt, the servants of corruption and empire. Some especially aggressive and fanatical temples even sell their services as assassins, so long as they can define their victims as enemies of Illumination. Theft, smuggling, spying, murder — these are crimes not just against the laws of the Dragon-Blooded but against the teachings of the Cult itself. But in the battle to redeem Creation, the faithful must sometimes choose the lesser of two evils and must use the methods of the unrighteous to finance their holy work. Temples who resort to crime for income are always careful to target the Cult's enemies in their activities, rather than to hurt or steal from the populace, so that they may only harm those who deserve it (and avoid angering the very people they seek to convert).

No matter how a temple finances itself, it's never an easy process, even in the rare cells with rich leaders — the wealthy need to disguise their financial activities from imperial auditors and scheming rivals, after all. Money is always tight in the Outer Circle, and more than one temple has fallen apart simply because it couldn't afford to keep operating. Exalts who become affiliated with a temple or cell are not *expected* to finance it, of course — they're not expected to do anything but be perfect and heroic — but may find it necessary to prop up their loyal followers with jade, equipment and influence if they want their continued support.

SPYING AND INSURRECTION

The Shining Ones will remake Creation and bring about the Illuminated Kingdom. This is certain. But the forces of corruption — the unrighteous, the Scarlet Empire, the Immaculate Order and their god-pawns — stand against that kingdom, and while they cannot *stop* the turning of the Cycle of Day, they can slow the arrival of the new Age. It falls to the Cult of the Illuminated to prepare the way for the Shining Ones, to weaken corruption's hold on the world and to damage corruption's armies. The Cult is not just a religious movement. It's also a *revolutionary* movement



dedicated to a new social and spiritual order. It opposes the forces of the Realm and its tributaries and allies, as well as any other government that frowns upon its faith. (Which is most of them, considering how most Threshold nations view the Solar Anathema and their servants.)

Cultists pay attention to the workings of local government as they work their day jobs, noting things such as troop movements, political changes, economic upheavals and other events the Inner Circle may find interesting. This information is recorded by the priests, and reports are sent every season to the Inner Circle using doctrinal code (see p. 21). Major events, like the declaration of a war or the murder of the satrap, are sent off immediately so that the secret chiefs may react quickly.

While most temples do no more than spy and report, a few exist in more dangerous locales, cities and regions where the authorities and ruling powers actively seek to destroy the Cult or engage in activities too corrupt to be tolerated. The Inner Circle discourages direct confrontation with the Cult's enemies — it attracts far too much attention and uses up resources better spent elsewhere — but sometimes, a cell must act to defend itself and what is right.

Because the Cult's members are underequipped and less competent than professional soldiers, they fight with sabotage and assassinations, not frontal assaults. Cultists may poison the well of a legion barracks or set fire to an Immaculate shrine, or they may replace the staff of a

tavern just before an imperial bureaucrat arrives for a party and murder her during the festivities. Such activities are planned carefully, since retaliation by the authorities may uncover the entire temple. Civilian casualties are always a possibility, and while the Cult usually attempts to avoid such deaths, it will make the sacrifice if it must (and some militant cells see the deaths of unbelievers as entirely acceptable).

COMMUNICATIONS

Individual Cult cells do not communicate with each other. This is to ensure that if one is closed down by the Immaculate Order, no other cells can fall in its wake. Cells do communicate with the Inner Circle, however. Messages normally go *from* the cell *to* the secret chiefs, rather than vice versa. The Inner Circle only bothers to contact its temples when it has a specific mission that must be fulfilled by its least important agents. Temples, on the other hand, need to keep their masters abreast of important developments, such as the appearance of Shining Ones or the start of another Immaculate pogrom.

To prevent the secular or religious authorities (or the operatives of the Bronze Faction) from learning the location of the training camps or the full extent of the Cult's activities, communications must be made secretly. Outer Circle priests are trained in two different methods of contacting the Inner Circle, and only priests can make contact in these ways.



Codes: *The Golden Tome of Truth* and the scrolls and palimpsests containing the core Cult doctrines are not just religious teachings. They're also the basis of an intricate code system. Priests are taught to translate short, straightforward messages into allusions, parables, references to specific scrolls and passages and even substitution ciphers using specific words and key phrases. Once a message is encrypted, it can be delivered by messenger or even through the Imperial Post. Messages are not sent directly to the Inner Circle, but through a series of outposts or way stations. If a priest is captured, he can only reveal a single link in the chain of delivery. This process slows the delivery of the message, which may take months to reach the Inner Circle, but it preserves the safety of the Illuminated network.

In case a temple loses all its priests but is not actually wiped out, temple leaders are entrusted with an encrypted scroll when appointed, along with instructions. If this scroll is sent to the secret chiefs, they arrange for a visitation team to visit the temple and train new priests. This message is a simple alert, rather than a full message, which carries meaning in its sending rather than its contents. If the message is intercepted, it can't be deciphered (because it doesn't actually say anything), but the Inner Circle won't know to send out operatives if it never receives the intercepted scroll.

DOCTRINAL CODE

Encoding a message is an Intelligence + Lore task (specialties in the Cult of the Illuminated apply). If a message is intercepted, the reader's player must exceed the author's player's successes with his own Intelligence + Lore roll, which is difficulty 2 if the reader lacks the Illuminated specialty. An Intelligence + Linguistics roll could also be used but is difficulty 4 and must also exceed the writer's player's successes. (Codebreaking Charms use their own systems.)

Prayers: When communication channels with the Inner Circle must be opened quickly, a second option exists, but one that the cells do not use lightly. During an Illuminated priest's training, she is introduced to a minor god, who becomes a patron spirit to that priest and her cell. That god teaches her a special prayer that can be used to establish contact with the god, transmitting information that can then be forwarded to the Inner Circle.

Most of the gods involved with this practice are minor unemployed gods who sell their loyalty to the Gold Faction in exchange for bribes of Ambrosia. A few are more powerful gods who are personally allied with the Inner Circle rather than looking for a meal ticket. Because

bribing the gods is illegal, the Gold Faction and its messenger gods keep the communiqué-prayer system a secret. If a god is found to be abusing the natural order of prayer and respect in this way, it's only a Severity 1 offense — but since the auditors are probably Bronze Faction Sidereals or their allies, an investigation could seriously compromise the Inner Circle's activities. For this reason, Illuminated priests are discouraged from using such prayers frivolously.

COMMUNIQUÉ PRAYERS

The exact details of the prayer vary with each priest, each cell and each god, but each has the same effect. The priest writes out the message she wishes to send on a scroll, which is then ritually destroyed in some fashion during the prayer (burning is a common method, but it could be submerged in a stream until it falls apart or eaten by a swarm of sacred cockroaches). As the scroll is destroyed, the priest prays and makes appropriate sacrifices, petitioning for the god's attention and assistance, as described in the **Exalted** rulebook (p. 335). However, because the god has agreed to receive communiqué prayers whenever necessary and because the prayer asks simply for attention rather than assistance, the base difficulty of the Charisma + Performance roll is only 3 rather than 6.

If the prayer succeeds, a block of Ambrosia appears before the god (see **Exalted: The Sidereals**, pp. 26-27) with a Quintessence-forged copy of the message scroll around it. The god keeps the Ambrosia for itself, then passes the scroll along to its contact in the Inner Circle.

LOCATING AND AIDING SOLARS

The single most important thing a cell can do, the primary reason for the Outer Circle's existence, is to directly serve the Shining Ones and escort them to the waiting arms of the Inner Circle. Some cells may never encounter such beings, but most *will*. The Solars are rising across Creation, and the Cult is waiting to meet them in the most bustling and important cities of the Threshold. As soon as someone that might be a Shining One appears in a cell's vicinity (see p. 19), the temple immediately swings into action, the cultists ecstatic beyond words to finally be fulfilling their sacred duty.

If the Shining One is not currently being oppressed by the corrupters, a group of cultists will make contact with her and offer their services and loyalty. If she is in danger, the entire cell takes up arms and does everything in its power to assist, attacking her enemies and spiriting her off to the cell's hidden temple. Meanwhile, a priest sends word



to the Inner Circle via prayer, informing the secret chiefs that an Illuminated One has appeared and preparing them for her arrival.

With the Shining One safe (either in hiding or proudly visible, depending on circumstances), the bulk of the cultists devote themselves to her service. They do whatever they can to fulfill her demands, whether that be slaying her enemies, supplying her with equipment or just delivering messages. Particularly unusual demands (such as an Abyssal demanding blood and souls) will still be met (if possible), but the priests will inform the Inner Circle of the situation and ask for instructions. During this period, the temple leader and his priests arrange for the transport of the Exalt to an Inner Circle rendezvous. Plans for the trip are developed when the cell is first created, drawn up by the Inner Circle and entrusted to the temple leader. He merely has to put the plan into action or to modify it if the Inner Circle send new instructions. If the Shining One doesn't *want* to be transported to safety, the temple leader will do his damndest to persuade her, while the priests

send word that more enlightened members may be needed to aid in the process of Illumination.

CULT TACTICS

The Cult of the Illuminated has a fairly stock response to discovery, modeled after the tactics employed by Creation and Heaven's professional intelligence agencies. These tactics are relatively effective, but they are a considered compromise on the part of the Cult, as it is likely they will eventually have their professional character discerned and provide clues to the eventual unraveling of the Gold Faction's masquerade. This is considered acceptable, given that less effective responses are unlikely to save the Cult's comparatively precious cells and that there are many individuals who operate their own private espionage networks in Creation.

In a small community the Cult completely dominates, it is easy for the Cult to monitor its integrity, as the Cult's integration into the rhythm of community existence makes monitoring the integrity of the community easy. As in any other small community, the central authorities will be informed shortly after any individuals sight strangers, and the community will take whatever precautions are normal — in much of the world of **Exalted**, strangers are treated as bandit scouts or military outriders, so preparedness is hardly remarkable.

In larger communities, where the Cult operates in secret and more or less illegally, more subtle methods are employed. In these circumstances, standard procedure is that each member of a cell is expected to have some contact with at least two other members of a cell every day. This is not necessarily a meeting, but merely visual contact. Some members of the Cult — usually those who operate businesses or spend their time in the streets — act as what are called “shopkeepers.” Members of the Cult going about their daily business check in by means of their visibility in a certain place at a certain time when there is a shopkeeper watching.

The shopkeepers report directly to the head of the cell, but they generally only report negative information to minimize contacts. If individuals start to drop out of contact or bear certain prearranged distress signals on their person, a shopkeeper informs her superiors. Normally, the shopkeeper has a certain “tally” that prompts her to contact her superiors — each person missing for each day adds one to the tally, and when it reaches a certain score, usually three, the shopkeeper dispatches a report.

When a shopkeeper reports his tally is exceeded, the cell assumes it is the subject of witch-hunters or otherwise compromised, unless its leadership already knows of the absences — the shopkeepers are ideally in the dark about the plans of those they are monitoring, and the watched individuals ideally do not know who is watching them. Realistically, in those places where the Cult has enough

DYING FOR THE CAUSE

The cultists of the Outer Circle believe with all their hearts in the Illuminated cause and in the coming Illuminated Kingdom. Of course, they want to live to see that kingdom and to be rewarded for their part in its creation. But something worth living for is worth dying for, and almost all Illuminated cultists are fervent enough to lay down their lives for the Shining Ones without hesitation. Their powers are tiny compared to the Exalted, but a squad of cultists might be able to buy time or respite for a Solar with their lives.

Such power over the lives and deaths of mortals is not something a Solar should treat lightly. Whether he likes it or not, as soon as a Solar begins an association with the Cult of the Illuminated, he has near-total power over the local cell. If he asks them to literally commit suicide, some may balk, but most will fall upon their swords. Just by *existing*, the Solar has ultimate power over his new followers. Does that power carry a responsibility to use it wisely? Is it wrong to use the Cult, even if its members beg to be used? Should the Solar be protecting the cultists or making the best of this opportunity and getting the most out of his operatives?

More than just a tool or a source of plot hooks, the Cult can provide real roleplaying opportunities and chances for the players to explore the moral consequences of their characters' actions. Storytellers can ignore this aspect, abstract it away with Virtue checks or put it center stage in the series.

strength to be this tidy, it can operate openly, and so, it is more of a formal dedication to staying aware of everyone's location and status.

The central decision makers of the cell assess the situation and deploy what resources they have to clarify the situation without risking the cell. If it appears the cell has been detected, then certain public distress signs — chalk graffiti in prominent locations, changes of clothes among the shopkeepers — warn the individuals in the cell of danger, and the members flee individually to prearranged rally points. Each small group of cultists has one senior decision maker from the cell there.

What happens next depends on the assessment of the Cult leaders. These two responses are the only two normally practiced by the Cult at this time. There are plans for other responses, but no cells are currently capable of mounting more than a limited attack.

EVASION

The normal reaction of the Cult is to simply evade. Each rally point has whatever escape supplies the Cult cell can muster. The individual groups make their own ways to some other Cult cell — typically, all are intent on the same destination so that the multiple cells are not compromised by refugees. Each group arrives, reports in and is hopefully reassigned by the Cult. Members of the cell do not generally know they will never return to their homes, as it is felt that they will be more likely to flee to safety if they do not even realize until after a day or two of travel that they have begun a trip with no return.

MIRROR-CATCHES-MAGPIES

In this case, the cell believes that it cannot escape. One of the escape groups will have some arms set aside, and these are used to stage a diversionary attack on some preselected target, usually an Immaculate shrine without Dragon-Blooded in residence or a government building of some sort. The purpose of the attack is to distract pursuit. It is used if there is an Illuminated One who needs to be spirited away or if the cell otherwise has important information it must carry off. Normally, only one group launches the attack, but it is usually comprised of the most physically able individuals in the cell, so the fact that there are a number of small groups escaping is often well-concealed.

CULTS ACROSS CREATION

The Cult of the Illuminated is not omnipresent, with cells and chapters in every city of Creation. In fact, the Outer Circle has less than a dozen temples, and its presence is largely confined to major cities. Outposts are scattered more widely, but these are tiny and powerless cells that exist only to ferry messages and keep the Illuminated dream alive. Many Solars fall through the safety net of the Cult and go

unnoticed by the Inner Circle, but enough are located and assisted to keep the network worthwhile.

The following cells are some of the more active and important in Creation and are situated in some of the busiest cities. Storytellers can use the temples as detailed here or design their own replacements to better fit their series.

THE BLESSED ISLE

The Blessed Isle is tightly controlled by the Dynasty and the Immaculate Order, and operating an Illuminated temple there is dangerous work. But still, the Realm is enormous, the peasants are downtrodden and desperate for hope, and the forces of the Immaculate Order cannot be everywhere at once, and so, temples have been established there. In fact, the Inner Circle wants to establish more cells on the Blessed Isle if possible because Solars who Exalt in the midst of the Scarlet Empire are in far more danger than those who incarnate in the Threshold. The existing temples in Lord's Crossing and Eagle's Launch are encouraged to recruit, despite the danger, and Inner Circle assistance is much more forthcoming than for cells in the Threshold.

LORD'S CROSSING

For the cultists in Lord's Crossing, the recent devastation of the Tepet legions has been a blessing. Families have lost sons and daughters, husbands and wives, at the command of the Dragon-Blooded. The common folk are angry, hurt and desperate to find a reason for their loss, and that leaves them open to the teachings of the Illuminated. Cult recruiters are happy to explain how the Shining Ones will punish the Dynasts and reward the faithful and how no one will be sacrificed in foreign wars when the Illuminated Kingdom comes. Resentment and pain are leading to an influx of new converts, and local partisans and revolutionaries are joining forces with the Cult to harass the Realm's forces. While tourism and trade still flourishes in Lord's Crossing, it does so while being raided by Illuminated thieves and raiders and while agitators call for strikes in the marble and jade mines.

The Illuminated temple in Lord's Crossing is, in fact, an abandoned mine set in the foothills outside the city. While almost played out, it produces enough stone to help finance the temple's operations, as do the raids of the cultists and donations from grieving families. Most of the cultists are miners or former miners, and their rituals and beliefs are born from the superstitions and practices of their civilian lives. Cult members identify themselves with a pattern of ritual scars on their arms, which have specific colors of marble dust worked into the skin as it heals. To outsiders, such a scar appears as just a miner's injury. Rites and prayers take place underground and often involve eating small amounts of rock dust, while



the temple's priests send their communiqué prayers to the minor gemstone gods of the depths.

The Lord's Crossing cell is led by Solander Kaj, a mine overseer lamed in a rockfall six years ago. Thankfully, he'd made a nest egg by smuggling jade from the mine and selling it for years, and he parlayed that cash and his contacts into a new role as a fixer and arranger for local thieves. He regrets his past unrighteous behavior. As a leader of the Illuminated, he now steals and fences for a *purpose* and gathers information from the corrupt militiamen and merchants with whom he deals. He has overseen the passage of three Shining Ones to safety from the city, all without attracting undue imperial attention, and this has made him overconfident. Now, he has started thinking about the jade and treasures flowing into Sawyer Shadow's mansion and hopes to organize a raid to liberate those resources.

Kaj has the same Traits as a merchant prince (see *Exalted*, pp. 279 and 281), but with Larceny 4, Lore 1 and Occult 2. Due to his injuries, he cannot dodge attacks and only moves at half normal speed.

SION

The Cult does not have a temple in Sion, but it does have an ally — Oak, leader of the city's guardians. Oak is the son of one of the Inner Circle's Sidereal operatives. He cooperates with the Lord's Crossing cell to ferry Solars and other operatives off the Blessed Isle and over the sea to (relative) safety. Oak is not a cultist or a believer, although he sympathizes with the Cult. He works with the Cult because he wishes to aid in his father's work — and because he's rewarded for his efforts with the indescribable sexual favors of several minor gods allied with the Inner Circle.

When the Lord's Crossing temple needs to contact Oak or arrange passage for a Shining One, it sends him a message in doctrinal code disguised as a book of poetry. Oak can't decipher the message himself, but one of his troops is a Cult priest who can do so. If he can help, he has the priest send word to the Inner Circle via communiqué prayer and makes appropriate arrangements. If the Cult demands too much, such as a task that would jeopardize his position or life, he sends the book back and may send troops to kill the incoming cultists and their Solar cargo if they do not turn back.

THE EAST

The Scavenger Lands and the Eastern coastline are one of the Cult's main powerbases. Shen Aru led the early Cult out of the South and into this region decades ago, and some cells existed here for years before the Sidereal Exalted took control of the Cult's destiny. Temples exist in both Nexus and Great Forks. Another temple *was* active in Thorns, but it was lost when the

Mask of Winters took the city. The doctrine scrolls, the records and the resources of the cell are still hidden in the dead city, and the Inner Circle is debating sending operatives to recover them. If the Deathlord obtains the Cult doctrines, he may be able to decipher doctrinal code and act against the Illuminated.

NEXUS

The busiest city in the East and the teeming center of the Scavenger Lands, Nexus is also home to one of the busiest and most successful Cult temples in Creation. Here, of all places in the Threshold, the Cult can be visible rather than a secret organization; here the Shining Ones can exist openly, and so can their mortal servants. The Cult is an open and powerful religion in the city, with a large temple in Sentinel's Hill and a number of meeting halls and safe houses throughout the city. Nexus has more than 100 Illuminated cultists and nearly a dozen priests, and these numbers are growing steadily. Here in the midst of industry and wealth there is also crushing poverty and desperation; here the Cult can point to the Exalted who have openly walked the city streets and preach to listeners that that Shining One, that one *right there*, is going to usher in a Golden Age within a few years.

The success of the Illuminated in Nexus can be laid at the feet of Can Dance, a former Guild merchant turned mouthpiece of the Inner Circle. She treats the Cult not just as a religion but as a business, one that should expand and compete with its rivals. Her fellow cultists proselytize and preach, wear yellow hemp robes and distribute tracts, sell bright morning and defend the downtrodden from thieves. Can Dance has already co-opted a couple of small rival sects, converting some members and driving the others from Nexus, and she is also crafting alliances with the Liberating Ones, the leaders of Tellnaught and some of the smaller, more righteous mercenary companies of Cinnabar. The Guild want her dead, but fears to move against her just yet, as the Cult is powerful enough to fight back if attacked, and Can Dance is careful never to break any of the Council of Entities' laws (the Nexus temple spies on the city, but refrains from sedition or terrorist activities). That may not be enough to save Can Dance and her temple, though. The Council is capricious and jealous of power and is becoming increasingly unhappy with the growing influence of the Cult. Still, the Council suspects that the Cult has powerful backers and obvious allies in the Solar Exalted, so it holds back — but if the Cult continues to grow and the Guild continues to complain, blood will flow.

Can Dance has the same profile as a merchant prince (see *Exalted*, pp. 279 and 281), but with two dots in Occult (with a specialty in the Cult of the Illuminated) and two dots in Lore.

THE SCAVENGER LANDS

In addition to the city temples, Cult outposts are scattered across the Scavenger Lands, primarily in the southern half of the region and on the outskirts of the Eastern forests. Villages and minor cities often boast three or four cultists watching the skies for signs of the Shining Ones. This wide network of observers and loyalists is potentially useful for the Inner Circle, but only if their information can be recorded and sent back to the secret chiefs. To coordinate this swathe of outposts, the Outer Circle has a different structure in this region, an experiment that is proving moderately successful. A number of missionary priests travel the region in circuits, making contact with outposts and cultists in the Hundred Kingdoms and the Marukan Alliance. They collect information, bless the believers and move on to the next town. At the end of each circuit (which lasts a year or more), a missionary travels south, pushing three days into the jungles near Larjyn, to the village of Rhabdoman and the bright morning caches of Maariv the Outcast.

Maariv is the chief Illuminated missionary of the Scavenger Lands, but he does not travel the outpost circuit like his fellows — Maariv is a beastman and a former barbarian shaman of the Arczeckh horde. Deformed not just by his Lunar heritage, but also by the Wyld, Maariv was once loyal only to his tribe, but a vision quest 15 years ago convinced him that the Cult of the Illuminated trickling into the Scavenger Lands was on a greater path. Possessing both powerful spiritual gifts and a bright morning habit that could kill an entire village, Maariv is aware that other powers than the Shining Ones are at play within the Cult, but he is unshakable in the belief that a new Age is coming. It may not be the one that the secret chiefs expect, but it comes in its own shape, and that is as it should be. Maariv organizes the other missionaries, collates their information and sends it via prayers to the Inner Circle, while his wives, children and followers in Rhabdoman work the skullweed and herb plantations to make bright morning, which is then distributed to the missionaries.

Maariv has the Traits of a Wyld shaman (see **Exalted**, pp. 282-283), but with two dots in Lore, three dots in Occult (with a specialty in the Cult of the Illuminated) and Willpower 7. He has the poxes Sturdy and Enhanced Smell and Hearing and the afflictions Frog's Tongue and Toxin. Maariv believes that Lunars are just as important as Solar Exalted to the coming Age and will arrange for a Lunar to be sent to the training camps without questioning the wisdom of that act.

THE SOUTH

This region of Creation is the birthplace of the Cult of the Illuminated, and its influence remains strongest here. Temples exist in Gem, Chiaroscuro and An-Teng,

and the Inner Circle may soon establish cells in the Lap and Yane.

CHIAROSCURO

Of all cities, all places, Chiaroscuro is the most holy to the Cult of the Illuminated, for it was here that Holy Vax had his vision and began the great work of shepherding the Cycle of Day. (Vision of Light would be holier... if it still existed.) Despite this, the Cult's presence is surprisingly small in this city, thanks to the efforts of the Tri-Khan. The Cult was thrown out of the city decades ago, and its members are not welcome back — not while they decry the Tri-Khan and the Delzahn nobility as agents of corruption. A temple was erected here only after the Sidereal takeover of the religion, and it's still finding its feet. It does so in hiding, as the temple is located in the ruins of the Plaza, a warren of tunnels and spaces under sheets of broken vermilion glass.

The leader of the Chiaroscuro temple is Phee, an ex-soldier from Yane who was sold into slavery after being wounded in battle. She escaped from her owner in Chiaroscuro and was hiding in the Plaza ruins when she was visited by the tame gods of the Inner Circle. She runs her small temple like a military cadre, making ends meet by raiding Guild merchants. She has three advantages on her side: military discipline, a stockpile of glass weapons and the protection of Grandmother Bright. Whether the old god of the Plaza aids the Cult because she sympathizes with the scarred, bitter ex-slave or because the Inner Circle has paid for her cooperation is something Phee and the cultists are too ill-informed to wonder about. For the moment, Phee concentrates on rescuing any Shining Ones in the city before they are forced to swear loyalty to the Tri-Khan for protection, and her soldier-cultists are becoming quite skilled in moving through the glass ruins faster and more safely than the Delzahn soldiers pursuing them and their Exalt charges.

Phee has the Traits of an elite soldier (see **Exalted**, p. 278), but with a dot in Lore and two dots in Occult, and her glass weapons and armor are of exceptional quality. While her temple has only a dozen cultists and a single priest, she has trained them well. They have Valor 3 and Willpower 6 and are also armed with glass weapons.

THE REST OF CREATION

No organized Cult temples yet exist in the Northern regions of the Threshold. The Cult began in the South, and while it has spread quickly in the last few years, it still hasn't migrated that far. Similarly, no temples have been established in the West, although the temple at An-Teng is a step in that direction. The Inner Circle certainly wants to establish temples in these regions, but it has to tread carefully to avoid attracting attention. The Bronze Faction will notice if Charms and astrology are used to speed



up the spread of the Cult. It's better, the Gold Faction reasons, to let the Cult expand organically into new regions, then bolster each cell once it gets established.

Minor outposts can be found in Abalone and on the fringes of Bluehaven in the West, and others are scattered near Whitewall and Cherak. Missionaries travel in both regions, looking to gain converts, but the cold wastes and savage oceans have claimed more than a few starry-eyed cultists in their travels thus far.

CIRCUIT RIDERS AND WANDERING PROPHETS

The Cult of the Illuminated is, by design, a largely localized grassroots movement. With few funds and no supernatural protection, the Cult needs to stay small to survive, too minor and unimportant to attract attention from the Immaculate Order or the Bronze Faction. Cult cells keep their heads low, operate in their home cities and regions and don't send emissaries to the next village for recruitment drives. Communication with the Inner Circle is sporadic and controlled, and communication between temples is almost nonexistent.

But still, there is a need for some kind of interaction between cells and temples, between the Inner and Outer Circles, between the Cult and the rest of the world. Not every Cult member is attached to a specific temple or

town. Some move around Creation, preaching the word of Vax or watching for the appearance of the Shining Ones. Meanwhile, some Inner Circle operatives act as an interface between the disparate parts of the Cult — not truly part of either circle, but moving and working in the region between the two or between cells.

For Storytellers, these mobile characters are a great way to bring the Cult into a series or to introduce new complications into a series that already has an established Cult presence. Such characters tend to fall into broad roles and purposes, the better to serve the Inner Circle's purposes. The Storyteller characters that follow are good examples of each type.

SHINING MOUTHPIECES

Faith and prayer and drugs only take a worshiper so far. To get the full extent of zealous dedication the Inner Circle needs from the Cult, it needs to fire up belief with an eventual payoff, proof that the Shining Ones are really out there and will reward the faithful when the Cycle of Day begins. If faith begins to flag, if cultists start getting distracted with frivolities such as politics or putting food on the table, the Inner Circle sends out one of its tame Exalted to deliver a pep talk, flash her anima banner and tell the goggle-eyed faithful how *important* it is for them to work hard and keep the faith. Most of these Exalted ambassadors are Solars, but some are Lunars, Sidereals or



other beings, since the Outer Circle can't tell the difference. Only a few such Exalted spokespersons exist, and they are used sparingly lest they attracted Immaculate or Bronze Faction attention. Products of the Inner Circle's training camps, they are loyal to the Gold cause and are sent out because their masters know they'll return to the nest when they're done.

JNANI THE RADIANT

Description: Jnani was just a jade miner from Juche, an ordinary man with a winning smile and a lot of friends. Just why the Unconquered Sun chose to Exalt him is a question only the gods can answer, but one day, Jnani downed his tools and walked out of the mines with a crowd of striking workers marching behind him. By the time the Immaculate Order descended on the mines, he was gone, smuggled from the province by a pair of Illuminated believers, escorted to Sion and finally sent to the Sequestered Tabernacle and the Inner Circle. This whirlwind of danger and travel left Jnani confused and frightened, uncertain of his purpose and his newfound abilities. For the secret chiefs of the Inner Circle, he was orichalcum-permeated clay waiting to be molded.

A year after his escape, Jnani has returned to the Realm, where he works to prop up the efforts and beliefs of the local Outer Circle cultists. He wholeheartedly believes that the Solars have returned to redeem Creation and throw down the corrupt empire. The moral certainties of Cult training and indoctrination have replaced the uncertainties and confusion of his initial flight. Now, whenever a Cult chapter needs to have its faith bolstered, Jnani appears to give an impassioned speech about the glories to come. A glowing hero who heals wounds with a touch, fights monsters and fills hearts with zeal, he then moves on to the next temple or loyalist village. In his wake, he leaves cultists eager to become tiger warriors, to give their lives

for the cause or to neglect their families for their faith — and to fight off the Dragon-Blooded who come to investigate rumors of an Anathema's appearance.

Jnani is a young and handsome man with dark hair, copper skin and a broad and engaging smile. While not exactly stupid, he lacks wisdom and subtlety and has embraced the naïve morality preached by the Inner Circle without question. Recently, though, his convictions have been clouded by a chance meeting with Mistress Emerald (see **Caste Book: Twilight**, pp. 93-94), a secretive Solar who travels the Blessed Isle as a healer and fortuneteller. Like Jnani, she is the Chosen of the Unconquered Sun, a harbinger of tomorrow — but yet, despite having encountered the Cult of the Illuminated and learned of its teachings, she refuses to join its ranks. Such a position is hard for Jnani to understand, as is the fire he feels in his heart whenever he thinks of Emerald. The track of his circuit around the cells of the Blessed Isle is beginning to change shape, following the ruts of Mistress Emerald's caravan and following after the source of his confusion and his passion.

Caste: Eclipse

Nature: Gallant

Calling: Exemplar

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

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

Abilities: Archery 3, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Linguistics (Native: Low Realm; Old Realm, Riverspeak) 2, Lore 1, Martial Arts 4, Medicine 3, Performance 4, Presence 4, Ride 3, Sail 3, Socialize 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 2, Contacts 3, Illumination 1, Manse 1, Followers 2, Resources 3

Charms: Body-Mending Meditation, Deft Official's Way, Harmonious Presence Meditation, Indolent Official Charm, Masterful Performance Exercise, Mastery of Small Manners, Ox-Body Technique, Respect Commanding Attitude, Serpentine Evasion, Snake Form, Striking Cobra Technique, Touch of Blissful Release, Welcome Guest Method, Wise-Eyed Courtier Method

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 3B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 7 Damage 5B Defense 7

Orichalcum Serpent-Sting Staff (Swift Revelation): Speed 11 Accuracy 9 Damage 6L Defense 12

Exceptional Self Bow: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 (Rate 3, Range 150)

Dodge Pool: 7

Soak: 9L/9B (Orichalcum breastplate, 8L/6B)

Willpower: 6

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



Essence: 2

Personal Essence: 12 **Peripheral Essence:** 23 (30)

Committed Essence: 7

Other Notes: Jnani is armed with an orichalcum serpent-sting staff and an exceptional self bow, and he owns an orichalcum breastplate and possesses a gem of healing. He is accompanied on his travels by three cultists, one of them a priest who informs the Inner Circle should Jnani appear confused or rebellious. Jnani has been trained at the Sequestered Tabernacle and follows the path of the Exemplar, although he still has a long way to go before fulfilling his Calling.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 3B Defense 10 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 5 Rate 3

Orichalcum Serpent-Sting Staff (Swift Revelation): Speed 10 Accuracy 9 Damage 8L Defense 12 Rate 5

Dodge Pool: 9

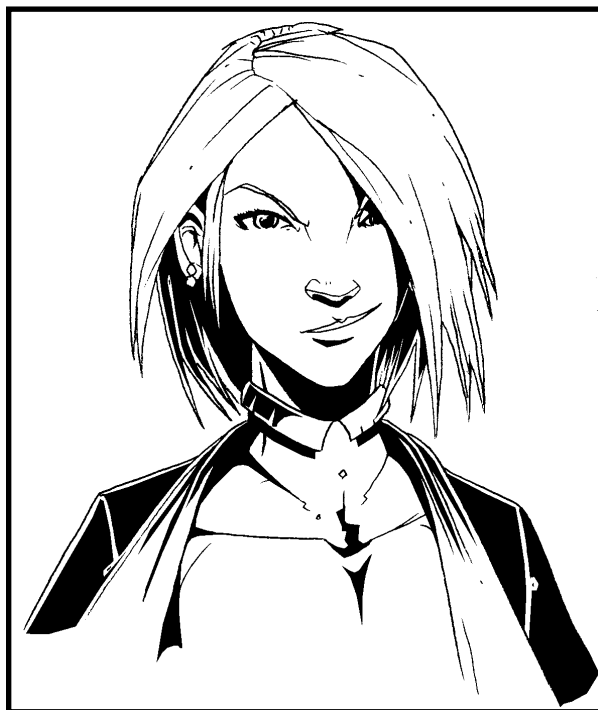
TROUBLESHOOTERS

The Outer Circle of the Cult receives very little protection and aid from the Inner Circle — little, but more than none. While every effort is made to keep the Outer Circle expendable and deniable, it's still a necessary part of the Inner Circle's plans, and without it, the whole project might grind to a halt. So, when major problems occur that endanger not just a single temple or cell but the network as a whole, the Inner Circle sends someone to investigate, to assist or to kill whoever is causing a ruckus. Troubleshooters may be Sidereal Exalted (usually younger ones), other Exalts (not Solars, but others loyal to the Cult), God-Blooded, spirits or even exceptionally skilled mortals. As long as the operative gets results, the Inner Circle doesn't really care about his abilities.

MATUTINE

Description: The Bronze Faction is intransigent, static, the domain of the conservative elder Sidereals. The Gold Faction, on the other hand, is a group open to change and development, a place where a young Sidereal can make a name for herself and obtain influence and political power while climbing the ranks of the Celestial Bureaucracy.

At least, that was Matutine's theory when she joined the Gold Faction 10 years ago. Now, she's starting to regret that line of thought. It turns out that the leaders of the Golden Circle are just as entrenched in their positions as their Bronze Faction counterparts, that being a member of the Gold Faction means getting passed over for promotions and positions in the Celestial Bureaucracy and that Gold Faction operatives are expected to constantly *work* for their faction, even when it's dangerous. Matutine had hoped for an interesting position in the Bureau, something



with a good salary and lots of opportunities to meddle in mortal affairs. Instead, she gets sent to clean up the Outer Circle's messes across the Scavenger Lands and in the East.

Frankly, she's getting sick of it. She hasn't sold out her bosses to the Bronze Faction yet, but that's mostly because she knows how dangerous such a betrayal would be. Traitors are not treated kindly in Heaven, and even if she survived to join the Bronze Faction — well, what if the Gold actually win this power struggle and ride to victory on the backs of the Solars? No, now is not the right time. Now is the time to keep her head down, do her job, fix the Cult's problems and wait for the future to fall into line.

Matutine is a young woman with a scout's physique and a sharp tongue. She wears unassuming clothing and rides an austere that also serves as her familiar.

Caste: Journeys

Nature: Critic

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Larceny 2, Linguistics (Native: Riverspeak; Forest-Tongue, Old Realm) 2, Lore 3, Martial Arts 2, Melee 4, Occult 2, Presence 2, Ride 3, Sail 2, Socialize 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Artifact 2, Backing 2, Celestial Manse 3, Connections (The Cult of the Illuminated) 2, Connections (The Golden Barque of the Heavens) 2, Connections

(Outlaws) 2, Connections (The Threshold) 2, Familiar 2, Salary 2

Colleges: Gull 2, Shield 2, Ship's Wheel 2, Sorcerer 2

Charms: Absence, Becoming the Wilderness, Burn Life, Duck Fate, Harmony of Blows, Hot-Eyed Snake Whispering, Impeding the Flow, Orchestration of Conflict, Shun the Smiling Lady, Soft Presence Practice, Unwavering Well-Being Meditation, Yellow Path

Combos:

The Three Perfectly Augured Blows (Cost: 14+ motes, 1 Willpower): Harmony of Blows, Orchestration of Conflict — *Matutine draws her sword parallel with her eyes, as blue symbols and diagrams of Essence coruscate along the blade, displaying exactly how to place her attacks. She then blurs into motion, lunging and parrying in perfect unison with the warp and weft of fate, the diagrams dissipating as she moves in splashes of liquid energy. Because of its high cost in Essence, Matutine only uses her Combo as a last resort, usually as a finishing move. Even then, she often reserves one of her three attacks as a parry, only attacking twice.*

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 5 Damage 3B Defense 5

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 4 Damage 5B Defense 4

Exceptional Straight Sword: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 7L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 5L/5B (Exceptional chain shirt, 4L/2B)

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

Essence: 2

Personal Essence: 10 **Peripheral Essence:** 27 (23)

Committed Essence: 4

Other Notes: As well as her mundane weapons and tools, Matutine wears starmetal Hearthstone bracers set with an ever-open eye (see **Savant and Sorcerer**, p. 68). Matutine maintains a resplendent destiny as Immum Coeli, a wandering Illuminated loyalist (Gull, 2 effect points).

As a Cult troubleshooter, Matutine is sent by her masters to temples and locales facing problems they cannot solve on their own — Immaculate persecution, political rivalries or an Abyssal Exalted masquerading as a Shining One. Matutine prefers to use persuasion, bribery and trickery to solve problems but is unafraid to simply remove obstacles with her sword if necessary.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 7 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 6B Defense 2 Rate 3

Exceptional Straight Sword: Speed 11 Accuracy 11 Damage 7L Defense 9 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 11

MISSIONARIES

The Cult spreads its influence slowly and carefully, but it does spread. It is a revelatory faith, and revelations must be revealed anew to potential converts. Missionary priests wander the Threshold, passing on the Word of Vax and whatever new revelations have come to them under the influence of drugs and self-flagellation. Traveling priests tend to concentrate on awakening a fire within a few converts and then moving on, rather than on establishing a temple and recruiting a full cadre of cultists. Once the initial contact is made and a handful of young men and women become interested, the priest contacts the Inner Circle with a communiqué prayer. If the secret chiefs decide that a temple would be useful in that region, they send more cultists and operatives to build a new cell while the missionary moves to the next village.

FISHER OF MEN

Description: Before he learned the Illuminated truth and flayed away his weakness and unworth, Fisher of Men had a different name, a different purpose, a different life. All of those things are forgotten now, left behind with the island and the village and the family he once had. All that matters now is the word of Vax, the truth that must be bought to the islands and sailors of the Western Ocean.

A scarred, ragged middle-aged islander in a weather-beaten coracle, Fisher of Men is an unimpressive figure at first. Then, he looks at you, and you see the fervor in his eyes. He moves closer, and you see the talismans and protective fishbone charms that hang from his clothes.



He speaks, and in his voice, you hear the power of his belief and the wisdom of the Illuminated way. He may seem like another wave tramp, but belief eddies and pools in his wake.

Fisher of Men has traveled the length of the Neck, moving from island to island with his message. Fear and caution are unknown to him, carried as he is by faith and the tide, and his missionary zeal now pushes him north — into the Skullstone Archipelago. He believes that the Shining Ones will protect him from the undead, that his faith will protect him in the shadowlands. In truth, what protects him is the will of the Bodhisattva Anointed by Dark Water, who is curious to learn more about this Solar-following cult. Fisher of Men will soon sail his coracle right into the Deathlord's palace and, in his naive fervor, give up everything he knows of the Cult's operations to the forces of Oblivion.

Nature: Visionary

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Linguistics (Native: Seatongue; Old Realm) 1, Lore 2, Medicine 2, Melee 2, Occult 3, Performance 3 (Prayer +1), Presence 2, Sail 2, Socialize 2, Survival 2, Thrown 2

Backgrounds: Backing 1, Contacts 3, Resources 1

Arts: Astrology, Summoning, Warding

Sciences: Enchantment 2

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Punch: Speed 4 Accuracy 3 Damage 2B Defense 3

Kick: Speed 1 Accuracy 2 Damage 4B Defense 2

Javelin (Melee): Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 4L Defense 4

Short Spear: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L Defense 4

Javelin (Thrown): Speed 4 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L (Rate 2, Range 30)

Dodge Pool: 4 **Soak:** 0L/2B

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

Essence: 1

Other Notes: A priest and not a warrior, Fisher of Men bears only a short spear and a pair of javelins for self-defense, and he generally uses them for fishing rather than combat.

He carries a number of talismans, for protection and for easing his way through Creation. These include charms that add one die to Survival and Resistance rolls, talismans that negate two botches each story and wards that inflict a one-die penalty to the dice pools of water spirits, water elementals and undead beings that attempt to affect him. He can make similar talismans for other

characters, but only for those who will accept the Illuminated truth he preaches.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 4 Accuracy 4 Damage 2B Defense 5 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 1 Accuracy 4 Damage 5B Defense 0 Rate 3

Javelin (Melee): Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L Defense 5 Rate 3

Short Spear: Speed 9 Accuracy 6 Damage 6L Defense 5 Rate 2

Javelin (Thrown): Speed 4 Accuracy 5 Damage 5L (P) (Rate 2, Range 30)

Dodge Pool: 5

ILLUMINATED MESSENGERS

The Cult of the Illuminated is a network, a conspiracy and a secret society where each Outer Circle cell is separate and isolated — but still, connections must be maintained to the Inner Circle. Communiqué prayers and coded signals keep some information flowing to the secret chiefs, but those are one-way transmissions. When the Inner Circle needs to send instructions or information to a specific temple or cell, it sends a messenger — someone who can be trusted with the information *and* who has the skills to survive the dangers of the journey. Such messengers must be expendable, though, so it is not a task for the Exalted. Instead, messengers are heroic mortals and God-Blooded, indoctrinated with loyalty to the Cult and trained to the Cult's specifications.

MESSINA TIGERBRIDE

Description: The best, strongest and most zealous of the Cult's followers are skimmed from the Outer Circle and transferred to the training camps, there to become loyal and dangerous tiger warriors. The best of *those* fighters are trained even further, brought to new levels of competence and potential by repeated use of Charms. And the best of those superior, almost superhuman warriors is Messina Tigerbride, Angel of the Spear, Hero of Khechari Pass. A Cult member since the days of Vision of Light, she witnessed the Celestial Visitation and the Ascendance of Shen Aru, and she trained under the tutelage of the Shining Ones and fought at their side against the Elemental Corruption. She is as loyal, as dedicated and as passionate a follower of the Illuminated as any mortal could be.

And frankly, that makes her a problem for the Inner Circle. Because if she found out that the Cult was based on deception and existed to cement the power of the Gold Faction, she would do everything in her power to destroy it. That wouldn't amount to anything, true, because one mortal soldier means little against the forces of the Inner Circle — but her death would be a waste at best, and a

catalyst for further problems and questions from her friends and Solar commanders at worst.

So, having pushed herself near to the pinnacle of mortal achievement within the Cult, Messina has been rewarded with a position as a messenger. It's not a role with which she feels altogether comfortable; she'd rather be fighting and dying for the Illuminated demigods she worships and loves. But her loyalty is stronger than her disappointment, and she goes where the secret chiefs direct her. Accompanied by her war party, the Marplot Cabal, she brings the will of the Inner Circle to the cells and temples — and shows the zealous, eager young cultists the incredible skill and power they too can aspire to reach. She serves in every way she may, fights whatever battles she must and delivers what news she is given.

And if she ever discovers the truth behind the Cult, someone will *pay*.

Nature: Paragon

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

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

Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Dodge 4, Endurance 4 (Marches +1), Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Old Realm, Riverspeak) 2, Martial Arts 4, Medicine 3, Melee 4, Presence 3, Resistance 2 (Disease +1), Socialize 2, Stealth 2, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Backing 2, Contacts 3, Followers 3, Mentor 2, Resources 2

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 4B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 6B Defense 7

Exceptional Spear: Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 8L Defense 9

Exceptional Self Bow: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 5L (Rate 2, Range 200)

Dodge Pool: 8/7 **Soak:** 6L/10B (Exceptional reinforced buff jacket, 6L/6B, mobility penalty -1)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 1

Other Notes: Messina Tigerbride is armed with a well-crafted spear and self bow. She wears a reinforced buff jacket and a buckler and carries a quiver of broadhead arrows. Her Marplot Cabal followers are elite troops with solid but unexceptional equipment. All ride horses and are skilled in mounted combat, and they have been indoctrinated to follow the orders of the Exalted without question.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 4B Defense 10 Rate 5


Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 9 Damage 7B Defense 5 Rate 3

Exceptional Spear: Speed 18 Accuracy 10 Damage 9L Defense 11 Rate 2

Dodge Pool: 9/8







CHAPTER TWO THE INNER CIRCLE



While the Outer Circle troubles itself with the cells of the Cult, new members and petty day-to-day issues, the Inner Circle has the real focus of the Cult as its priority. Unlike the Outer Circle, the Inner Circle is comprised of high-level Sidereals, God-Blooded, Solars and some low-level deities and spirits. These have much less contact with the actual cells of the Cult, but they do make appearances from time to time to reassure the mortals that the Cult's teachings are indeed grounded in truth.

The Inner Circle has had its hands full since it took over the Cult shortly after the Solars returned and the Scarlet Empress disappeared. In four short years, Gold Faction leader Ayesha Ura and her Sidereal allies had to co-opt the Cult, find sponsors to fund it, expand the Cult's reaches, start recruiting Solars and establish camps in which to train the Solars and other Exalted — not to mention keep them safe.

DOCTRINE

When the Sidereals took over the Cult of the Illuminated, they found most of the Cult doctrine to their liking. The Cult already worshiped beings they called the Illuminated or the Shining Ones. All the Sidereals had to do was assure the cultists that the Solar Exalted were their prophesied messiahs. With the proper impressive Charms and carefully placed sorcery, this was easy to accomplish.

The belief in the Illuminated Ones was easy to encourage, but to make it a strong, viable religion to one day rival the Immaculate Order, the Sidereals had to make some changes to the doctrine.

THE FIVE PROMISES

The first changes made to Cult doctrine — and still the most prevalent of the Cult's teachings — are the Five Promises. The Inner Circle wanted to distance the Cult from the Immaculate Order and the ruling Dragon-Blooded but not to associate themselves too closely with Solar Anathema symbols, so the symbols of the promises became the tools of the Five Maidens instead of the Five Elemental Dragons or the five castes of the Solar Exalted.

The Five Promises are said to be old prophesies, recently discovered, that predate the First Age. The Cult preaches that three of the Five Promises have been fulfilled and that the present day is seeing the fulfillment of the Fourth Promise.

The Promise of the Sword: The Glorious First Age Will Fall and Creation Will Become Corrupted

All things must end, but each ending heralds a new beginning. The riches and the glory of the First Age came crashing down. This event caused the deaths of hundreds of Exalted and millions of mortals. It caused the deaths of

leaders and merchants, knowledge and Charms. Saturn's sharp sword descended, and Creation shook under the mighty strike. But with the end of the First Age, the world began again.

The Promise of the Quill: Creation Will Struggle Onward

Creation was not destroyed by the ending of the First Age. Farmers still plowed their fields, and merchants still peddled their wares. Time and life flowed inexorably as Creation rebuilt. Mortals looked for guidance and found little as the Dragon-Blooded of the Realm concerned themselves with power struggles. The world continued, although lacking its former wonder and glory.

The Promise of the Key: The Gods Will Not Forsake Creation

The gods met and determined that a new Age must be ushered into the world. The mortals needed mentors and leaders, those who would guide them spiritually and politically. After much debate, the gods determined that they would send their children, the Shining Ones, to Creation to bring the world back to the glory of the First Age. These children of the gods would offer their knowledge and leadership to the mortals and scour Creation free of the Fair Folk and the Dragon-Blooded betrayers.

The Promise of the Gauntlet: The Gods Will Send New Champions, the Shining Ones

The Shining Ones will arrive in the dark of night, many of them alone and vulnerable from the hazardous journey from Heaven. Only when they can band together will they reach their potential. It is the purpose of the Cult of the Illuminated to find these Shining Ones and unite them, strengthening their power so that they may stand up to the corrupt Realm and the false leaders therein. A great war will follow, shaking Creation yet again, but the Shining Ones will prevail.

The Promise of the Ewer: Creation Will be Restored to its Former Glory

As the corrupt Dragon-Blooded lie in their graves or limp to the fringes of the Wyld, the Shining Ones will take their place on the thrones of Creation, lending their power and goodwill to lead mortals into a Second Great Age. Their faithful followers will lie at their feet and be among the favored of mortals, serving as their ambassadors, generals and courtesans. Only the Shining Ones can bring glory back to Creation, but they are unable to do so without the support of mortals.

BOOKS AND TEACHINGS

The Five Promises are printed within *The Golden Tome of Truth*, the book of the holy teachings of Shen Aru and Vax. In truth, the book consists only of a handful of the

writings the holy men managed to scribble down during their leadership of the Cult and has been heavily padded by Ayesha Ura and her Sidereal allies.

The teachings of the Cult indicate that one must be steadfast and strong in the face of this unenlightened Age and that only the strongest of holy warriors can make the world pure enough for the coming of the Shining Ones, the children of the gods sent to make the world right again.

Mortals are encouraged to purify their minds and bodies through study, a strict diet, martial arts practice and self-flagellation to enforce the idea of their complete and utter unworthiness next to the Illuminated Ones — even as they stand well above those mortals who do not follow the Cult. Their example will prepare the world for the coming of the holy warriors. When the Shining Ones are prepared, they will take Creation back from those who once stole it (the Dragon-Blooded, of course) and usher in an new Age to rival the First Age.

The additions by the Siderials have taken the heretical teachings of the Cult and pushed them into the outrageous, at least in the eyes of the Bronze Faction. It was an idea by Rol, Chosen of Mars and member of the Inner Circle, to claim that the coming of the Illuminated Ones knocked the Scarlet Empress off her throne in their first move against the Realm.

This outright lie — not to mention the subtle insult to the Bronze Faction who did not foresee the Empress' disappearance, nor the return of the Solars — has brought more Immaculate Order monks into towns where the Cult has presence. This is obviously not the best thing for the Cult, but the lie has encouraged several mortal recruits into the doors of the cells, which makes it all worthwhile.

PRAYERS AND OBSERVANCES

All members of the Cult, from the lowest mortal to the Exalted who train within the camps, attend prayers every day.

As the first of dawn's light touches the training yard, the mortal followers of the Illuminated are outside, giving homage. They pray to all of the gods who have brought the Shining Ones to them, including the Unconquered Sun. They are mere mortals and can only pray to the Unconquered Sun in the morning when the light is weak. Shen Aru or the local Cult cell leaders lead them in their prayers. If the local cell is being honored by the presence of an Exalt, he will lead the prayers.

For the first half-hour, the mortals kneel on the floor to symbolize their distance from Yu-Shan. They meditate in silence, the newest initiates standing behind their seasoned companions in martial-arts stances. Focusing on keeping the body still also manages to focus the mind on meditation and prayer, and they must pray in this manner for the first six months of their time in the Cult. For the second half-hour, they chant prayers to the gods, extolling



Exalted

them and the Illuminated Ones. The prayers are ended by the sipping of purified water, after which the local leader will preach, reminding the mortals of their spiritual tasks of spreading the word of the Cult, remaining pure of mind and body, and the promises the gods made to the followers of the Shining Ones.

At noon, when the Unconquered Sun is at his zenith and shines his full strength upon Creation, the Shining Ones gather for their prayers and assume the lotus position. They meditate on the glory of the gods who have bestowed upon them their gifts and their duty to the Cult.

New Exalted initiates are also required to hold martial-arts stances during prayer time — unlike the mortals, they are required to hold the stance for a full hour without movement — to train their bodies and minds. Within the training camps, the Sidereals and other Inner Circle members also attend this prayer session.

Evening prayers are short and simple. Both mortals and Exalted sit in the Unconquered Sun's waning light and reflect on the glory of their calling as they drink water, often laced with hallucinogens. If they are not currently going through initiation and have no other duties, they are permitted — even encouraged — to pray as long into the evening as they wish.

These rigorous prayer observances are only requirements to mortals praying at the cells and Exalted residing within the training camps. Some have chosen the Cult

lifestyle the way the Immaculate monks have chosen their lifestyle, however, and they adhere to the observances within and without the camps and cells. Others who do not prefer a monastic lifestyle or who are on Cult duty are not required to follow these rules. They are, however, required to report in to the cell or camps on a regular basis, as their duties allow, for group prayers.

Once a new Solar has served her month of initiation, an Inner Circle member will take her to a cell that also has new members to initiate. After the newly scrubbed and white-robed mortals are under the influence of hallucinogens, the Exalt appears in front of them, anima ablaze. She speaks words from a script, welcoming them to the Cult and demanding full obedience from this day to the day of the mortals' deaths. More often than not, the mortals will fall to their knees, screaming and crying in rapture. Some will faint or vomit with the epiphany. This cements the will of both the mortal and the Exalt: the mortal has seen his belief made real in front of his eyes, while the Exalt has seen how she will be worshiped instead of branded a demon while serving the Cult.

Although the Cult accepts all Exalted types, only Solars and Lunars are taken to the cells to initiate mortals. Abyssal animas would likely cause the mortals to soil themselves in fear (or run screaming from the Cult), and they will be familiar with Dragon-Blooded animas. Deathknights and Dragon-Bloods remain at the training

camps to continue the next stage of training once they are done with their initiation.

CODE OF MORALITY

The mortals and the Exalted of the Cult are holy warriors, dedicated to the downfall of the Realm and the protection of the people of Creation. To remain properly dedicated, they are required to respect all people. Each mortal must remain a good citizen within his town and give Cult leaders, the Illuminated Ones and visiting spirits full obedience.

Exalts must respect communities that support the Cult cells and training camps. They give their aid where needed, whether it's fighting off barbarian hordes, monstrous spirits or Immaculate oppression. This has a threefold effect: It keeps the Exalted focused on acting for the people of Creation and not solely for their own interests, the fighting hones the Exalt's skills and survival tactics, and it keeps the surrounding communities happy and willing to conceal the training camps from the prying eyes of the Immaculate Order. The frequent bribes don't hurt the community morale either.

This general rule of respect for both mortal and Exalted is forgotten when it comes to Dynasts from the Realm or believers in the Immaculate Order. Anyone who is dedicated to keeping the Threshold under the thumb of the Dragon-Blooded is worthy of contempt, in the case of the mortals, or possible violence, in the case of the Exalted. This is not to say that an Exalt should attack every Immaculate monk or Dragon-Blooded she sees, just that the rule of respect does not apply. Those who stand in the way of the Cult of the Illuminated's goal must be either convinced of the Cult's holy path or simply destroyed.

RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS

Aysha Ura certainly had the Immaculate Order and her former mentor, Chejop Kejak, in mind when she developed the dietary and dress covenants for the Cult of the Illuminated. Scoffing at the requirement of monks within the order to dress in plain white robes, to deprive themselves of more and more food and drink as they rise in the Order's ranks and to shave their heads, she mocks the stern requirements. Only her fellow Gold Faction members know her motivations; the covenants are taken very seriously within the Cult.

Mortal initiates are put on a strict diet of rice and water to purify their system as they enter the Cult. To be reborn within the Cult, one must purify her body to allow the spirit to purify as well. They are brought before the Shining Ones with their heads shaven and wearing a pure white robe. This is their rebirth. From this moment, they will not cut their hair.

As the body is purified by teachings, fruit and vegetables are slowly allowed into the diet. The mind begins

to understand and accept the leadership of the Shining Ones. This next phase is indicated by a brown robe to signify the cultist's time in Creation, toiling the earth to serve the gods.

The third phase is entered when a martial-arts instructor deems the initiate ready for the red robes of battle. Proteins such as legumes and white meat are introduced into the diet to feed the battle rage that must accompany further martial-arts training. The hair of the initiate continues to grow and, when long enough, should be worked into a tight braid down the back.

The fourth robe's color is blue to indicate that the cultist has left the earth and hovers between Creation and Yu-Shan. Only the most talented mortals, mostly those who gain leadership roles or priesthood within the Cult, will ever wear the blue robes. Those who wear the blue robes are permitted all food but no alcohol.

Excepting white-robed initiates, all cultists are permitted all food, alcohol and drugs during Calibration and Cult festivals.

When an Exalt joins the Cult, the rules are a bit different. Although much of the clothing and dietary rules are there to give the mortals posturing and purpose, not to mention making rank a key point, the Exalted do not need such things. However, the Sidereals find it does help with discipline if a high and mighty Exalt is forced to adhere to dress and dietary requirements during training within the camps.

During the first month of training, they too wear white robes and eat only rice and water laced with hallucinogens. When a month is up, if the instructors decide it is time, they are given golden robes with a colored sash to wear while in the training camps. Like the mortals' robes, the sash's colors differ, but only in regards to an Exalt's caste, and do not change during her progress in training. The Exalted's diet does change, allowing them to eat anything they like after their initial training.

The Sidereals argued at length concerning the requirements for their students. Although they felt they could impose restrictions on new recruits, and sifus often have their own rules regarding their apprentices, they knew they couldn't have the mighty Exalts under their total control for long, so they created the initial month of training to humble them, but allow them all perks once the month is over (or they deem fit, in the case of a troubled case).

BODILY PERFECTION

Although there are many roles to play in the Cult, from accountant to recruiter, the fact remains that the Threshold is a dangerous place. All Cult members are required to study the martial arts. This serves two purposes. Firstly, it will help keep them alive so that they may better serve the Cult. Secondly, it focuses their minds and forces their bodies toward perfection.

Beyond the practical reasoning, the concept of bodily perfection fits within the Cult doctrine. The Shining Ones are as near to perfection as one can be while residing in Creation, and they cannot be served by slovenly and sickly mortals. Mortals must strive for perfection, for the closer they are to perfection, the closer they are to the Shining Ones.

Mortals study the basic martial arts, each eager to gain their red robes. They study under mortal instructors, with an occasional, glorious visit from an Exalted martial artist who shows them what can be done with proper Essence control. Few mortals will ever achieve even the rudimentary levels of the Exalted martial arts, but these shows of force do more to drive them to greatness than the promise of elevation within the Cult.

Exalts are not required to study martial arts, so long as they work to master at least one battle art. However, within the Cult they are able to study a variety of martial arts. Currently there are four martial-arts styles taught by Sidereal masters within the Cult: Mantis, Tiger, Ebon Shadow and Prismatic Arrangement of Creation. The Sidereal martial-arts instructors are eager to find Exalted with martial-arts experience to add to their already impressive power set. Exalted may request to study any one of these five, but if a Sidereal believes that an Exalt will excel in one over the rest, she will steer that Exalt toward the correct way.

The Grand Master of Martial Arts for the Cult is Lupo, who teaches Tiger, Ebon Shadow and Prismatic Arrangement of Creation Styles in the Scavenger Lands camp. The Sidereal Kai will sometimes deign to teach Mantis while visiting Nexus. Although he is a master in the Citron Poxes of Contagion system, he has yet to find a student worthy of teaching it to, and he will not explain why, nor what it will take to convince him of worthiness. Exalts dedicated entirely to the martial arts will spend several months at one camp, then travel to another to serve under a different sifu.

HIGH HOLY DAYS

In accordance with the Five Promises, the Cult of the Illuminated considers that Creation is experiencing the Fourth Promise of the gods. Because of that, they consider the first five days of each Descending season as holy days. The first five days of Descending Wood, the fourth season, are considered the high holy days, the most holy days of the year. (If the Solars ever succeed in retaking the Realm and the rule of Creation, thus fulfilling the Fourth Promise, the high holy days would shift to Descending Fire.)

The holy days of each season are marked by fasting and meditating. Neither mortals nor Exalts eat anything but rice or drink anything but water during these days, and the days are marked by prayers at dawn, noon and sunset (even for mortal followers).

During these days, all Cult members have access to many different types of drugs, allowing them to force visions and exhilarations upon the mind. Some members opt to self-flagellate, whipping the perceived sins and impurities from their bodies.

Anyone in the Cult who has transgressed during the season, even if they had been punished at the time of the transgression, is punished anew during the holy days. Whether the transgression be eating food outside one's proper level or allowing a citizen of the surrounding community to perish under a fallen cart without helping them, the punishment is the same: caning. They are stripped naked to the waist and beaten, receiving one lash for minor offenses and up to ten for grave offenses. The cane does 1L damage per stroke. While the Exalts suffer their punishment in the privacy of the camps, any mortal transgressors must suffer their shame under the golden gaze of an Illuminated One sent to the cell for the express purpose of witnessing the season's punishments.


The high holy days in Descending Wood are a cause for great personal reflection, both on a personal level and a Cult level. More members, both Exalted and mortal, abandon the Cult during this time, but nearly all of them return after some time alone. It proves to be a time where people better themselves after a long, hard look at their souls.

During the high holy days, personal insults are to be forgotten, even those offered by imperial officials (although Cult members are, of course, allowed to defend their lives). The gods look down upon those who cannot forgive, and although the Cult will never forgive the Realm and the Dragon-Blooded, its members are expected to take the holy days and reflect on their mission and their goals and to treat the days with reverence instead of violence. This is the only time of year that punishments of the season are not repeated (although if a crime had been committed during Wood that was memorable enough, it will be remembered during the holy days of Fire).

Truth must be told during high holy days, and spies and assassins take the time off to meditate on their calling and the darkness in their souls. It is necessary to have such darkness, for the Unconquered Sun casts his shadows to allow his followers safe cover when needed, but an Exalt must meet her personal demons face to face during these times to question her motives and actions. The Exalted are encouraged to do a form of confession to their Sidereal sponsors, to discuss the demon within and their plans to defeat it in the next year. Defeating the demon within is, although no one realizes it yet, a possible way of dealing with the Great Curse. If one can counter that drive within her, she can truly rule Creation, and these practices may provide the key to the control of Limit.

Calibration is a very special time in the year for the Cult. Unlike the rest of Creation, they do not fear these days, but embrace them. During Calibration, the Sidereals





and the leaders of the Cult enter private talks and planning for the year. Within an Ivory Orchid Pavilion, Ayesha Ura and her Gold Faction brethren renew the sorceries on the mortal leaders of the Cult, meet to discuss the year's progress and plan for the upcoming year. They will go through reports from spies located in the Realm and around the Threshold and attempt to foil what they perceive as Bronze Faction plans.

After renewing the extensive sorceries and Charms on the mortals, the Sidereals release them for the remaining days of Calibration and perform sorceries to guide their actions, if needed. They also discuss their work as pertaining to Yu-Shan, as Celestial audits and punishments can hinder the work of the Gold Faction just as it hinders the audited Sidereal. There is some worry that Chejop Kejak is engineering frequent Celestial audits on Gold Faction members, and Ayesha Ura is currently investigating the possibility of this.

The meetings and spell weaving do stop for one night so that the Inner Circle and its favorite Exalts may attend the Carnival of Meeting in Yu-Shan, where they make much merriment as well as spy and make alliances with attending gods and Exalts. To be invited to the Carnival of Meeting by an Inner Circle member is considered the highest honor among the Cult's Exalts and is a source of great envy among the other members.

While the Inner Circle and mortal leaders are away during Calibration, the mortals and Exalts of the Cult are permitted to relax. They feast, imbibe forbidden foods and alcohol, take many hallucinogenic drugs and challenge others to duels and other games. Some Solars prefer to visit the cells instead of the camps during Calibration, which almost always causes the parties to get raucous and out of control. Among the mortals, it has become a mark of honor to be challenged to a friendly duel by an Illuminated One, although some Exalts forget to use control and easily slay their companions.

Still, death by the hands of a Shining One is still considered a great honor, and few mortals have attempted to leave the Cult after these incidents. The Exalt in question is reprimanded by the Sidereals when they learn of the incident, but little more comes of it.

OBEDIENCE AND PUNISHMENT

To keep the Cult in working order, the Inner Circle has developed a rigid code of obedience and punishment among the mortals and the Exalts. It is only when the Sidereals have complete control of all members of the Cult that they feel comfortable moving ahead with their agenda. Although they control powerful spells and Charms, even they cannot control every Exalt and mortal in the Cult.

Thus, they have a strict set of rules in place from which no one may deviate. At the top of the list is the rule that the Inner Circle is to be obeyed at all costs. No Exalt may question or disobey the Inner Circle. Within the

SACRIFICES

The Sidereals frown on human sacrifice as an unnecessary action. Though there are gods who require it, Sidereals have found other sacrifices that can placate them if need be. If absolutely necessary, they will find one of the disenfranchised to offer to the demanding god, but they do not make a practice of it.

Shen Aru did participate in the sacrifice of an unExalted imperial official once, before the Sidereals took over the Cult. He had discovered that the pompous man could be taken easily and offered to the gods, so he and his followers flayed the skin from the man's body and cut five arteries before stabbing the heart at the last. He sometimes believes that it was this sacrifice that brought the Emissary and her Shining Ones to him, but Ayesha Ura assures him that it was not. Human sacrifice is not practiced in the Cult as a ritual.

This is not to say that some members do not disappear in an unexplained way or that, behind the scenes, the Sidereals must not make difficult choices. Sometimes, mortals are assigned to take messages to places the Sidereals know are dangerous enough that they will not return. Life serving the Cult can be difficult, and sometimes, lives must be spent to serve the greater good.

Even on an Exalted level, some sacrifices must be made. Ayesha Ura was surprised when she had a Solar student of the occult chose to sever her connection with a mortal lover — killing him in the process — to complete her initiation into the Celestial Circle of sorcery.

On his master's command, Lupo takes one Solar to Yu-Shan every year during Calibration to allow her to meet privately with Nara-O. The Exalt comes out unharmed, but Lupo is watching these Exalts, three of them so far, to monitor any changes in their behavior or power. He is sure that the mysterious god takes something from the Exalts, but he can't figure out what is sacrificed. The Exalts themselves refuse to speak of their meeting with the head of the Division of Secrets.

So, though there is nothing as barbaric as ritualistic sacrifice practiced within the Cult, there are decisions made daily about whether the loss of one life is worth meeting the Cult's goals. And that answer is usually yes.

Inner Circle, Shen Aru (with Ayesha Ura behind him, of course) has the final word on public issues for mortals, and Ayesha Ura has the same when it comes to Exalts.

WHAT THE SOLARS KNOW...

AND DON'T KNOW

While the mortals who follow the Shining Ones are not privy to the information that they worship Anathema, the Solars know a bit more. Most of them know exactly what they are, as even Sidereal Charms cannot remove the memory of words spoken by the Unconquered Sun.

The Solars, and the other Exalted in the Cult, understand that there are Sidereals recruiting and running the Cult of the Illuminated and that these Chosen of the Maidens wish to see the Solars in power again. They also know that there are some Sidereals outside the Cult who do not wish to see them rule Creation. When it comes to knowledge of the past, Solars understand that the Dragon-Blooded held the swords during the Great Uprising and that they, and the Realm, must pay.

However, the Solars have not been told that the Sidereals foresaw the slaughter nor that the Bronze Faction guided the hands of the Dragon-Blooded. They also do not know about the differing factions of the Sidereals. The politics that are behind the Gold/Bronze struggles are hidden from them. Indeed, the other Exalted are blind to the full scope of Sidereal control in the Realm and Creation, not to mention Yu-Shan. While the Solars understand that the Sidereals run the Cult of the Illuminated, they believe that their control ends there.

The Exalted know that the First Age ended violently, but they only know it ended because of jealous Terrestrials. The Sidereals hide the Prophecy, and the betrayal, from the Solars, believing that the Solars will be more malleable with less information. Some Solars, especially those of the Twilight Caste, are sought for recruitment solely based on the fact that the Sidereals wish to control their intellectual growth. It is difficult to keep demigodlike beings ignorant, but the Sidereals do what they can.

Some of the older Solars have unearthed memories about the Sidereals and their role in Creation during the First Age, but they are watched carefully. If need be, the Sidereals use their Charms and spells on the Solars at the first sign of memory. The Gold Faction wishes to have the Solars in charge again, but only if the Sidereals are still the power behind the scenes. They can't afford to lose control of the Solars. Besides the damage this would do to Creation, it would also prove the Bronze Faction right, and the Gold Faction could not abide that.

Mortals must obey everyone: Inner Circle members, spirits or demons bound to the Exalted, any and all Exalted and other mortals who outrank them. A freshly shaved, white-robed mortal initiate is the lowest position in the Cult, but his eyes are often so shining with the power of the Illuminated Ones (as well as the drugs fueling his initiation) that he does not mind.

Branching off from the command of blind obedience are the other rules. All members are required to attend daily prayers, to participate in holy days rituals, to abide by the rules attached to their station and serve their community.

Penalties range from the moderate to the extreme, depending on the transgression. Missing daily prayers for both mortals and Exalts result in eating at a recruit's station (white rice and water) for a week, while new recruits who are already on white rice and water must fast without either for a full day and night (three days and nights for Exalts). Disobeying a direct order will result in caning. Failing to excel in martial arts training at a pace the sifu expects is punished by being made to train while wearing weights.

Greater transgressions, such as attacking an Inner Circle member, working with the Bronze Faction or attempting to leave the Cult will result in severe canings or even death. Luckily, the Inner Circle has had to perform these punishments fewer than five times in the four years since their control of the Cult began. The Sidereals enact these punishments in the public eye of the Cult, either within the cell or the camp, and it sends a powerful message to the other members.

Punishments for other offenses may vary from camp to camp and cell to cell, but the goal for all is to instill obedience into the ranks. If the Sidereals cannot count on widespread obedience, then the Cult, in their eyes, will fail.

CULT MENTALITY

The term "cult" does not have quite the connotation in the **Exalted** world as it does in ours. Otherwise, Shen Aru and Vax would have named the Cult something else and hotly denied its relationship to a cult (as all cults do in our world).

Truth be told, however, the Cult of the Illuminated does subscribe to many of the techniques that make an organization a cult. It engages in deception in order to pursue its agenda, it encourages its members to remove themselves from their families and friends, and it discourages expansive thought and the consideration of other religions. It offers a unique form of salvation, professes that the leaders have information and powers that the mere mortals do not (which, in this case, is quite true) and instills in its adherents a great fear of leaving.

Psychologically, the Cult leaders (both mortal and Exalted) use methods such as sleep deprivation, physical exhaustion (note the martial-arts stances performed during lengthy prayers) and drugs to bend a recruit's will to



their point of view. The Inner Circle has access to many Charms and spells to control the mind, but in most cases, it is enough to simply deprive a Cult member of sleep and nourishing food to make him open to Cult ideals.

There is no record of anyone ever having quit the Cult of the Illuminated for good. The Exalted who join are, after their initial time at the training camps, permitted to travel the Threshold — and in some cases, even the Realm — on missions and even on their own whims, but they have not left the Cult. The Sidereal Inner Circle always knows where to find them should they stray. If a mortal attempts to leave, he will be beaten with 10 lashes. If an Exalt attempts to leave, she will first be subjected to considerable Sidereal mind control. If that does not work, the Inner Circle must perform the regrettable action of removing the Exalted Essence from the traitorous mortal body. The Sidereals must then search for the Essence again as it seeks a new host. A rogue Cult member is a danger to the Inner Circle, as the Exalted will know far too much to be allowed their freedom.

SAINTHOOD AND MARTYRDOM

The concept of sainthood fulfills the Cult of the Illuminated's doctrine very well, although they have had few fallen Illuminated Ones to praise. This is not to say that the Exalted do not die within the Cult's care, because several have, but not always performing the glorious duties of the Cult in public. The Sidereals have had to handle this very carefully because they would like to honor the Solars fallen in the Usurpation (which, incidentally, would have been just about all of them) as martyrs, but that would inch too closely to the truth that the Shining Ones are, in fact, Anathema.

There have been some Exalted who've fallen while performing Cult duties in the past several years since the Cult's reimagining, and the Sidereal leaders have been quick to write their names in *The Book of the Fallen*, a new work in progress detailing the current events regarding the working of the Cult. These fallen Exalts are remembered during prayers, and the Cult has been selling amulets with symbols honoring these Exalted. They are crudely made to look less like graven images and more like simple jewelry, but when a Cult member sees another wearing a shining copper disk around her neck, he knows she's remembering the fallen Shining Ones.

On the Exalted side, where a bit more of the truth is told, Exalts are encouraged not to martyr themselves for a cause. They are highly valued members of the Cult and worth more alive than dead, the Sidereals caution. Besides, tracking the Exalted's Essence and re-recruiting it would be a distracting and annoying use of time (something they don't mention). Exalted are assured that if they die in duty to the Cult, they will be remembered and honored, but they are strongly encouraged not to let it get that far.

ANATHEMA!

The Shining Ones are portrayed to mortals as demigods, saviors sent by the gods of Yu-Shan to save Creation and bring back the glories of the First Age. Although the mortals of the Threshold are less likely to scream at the sight of an Anathema (compared to a resident of the Realm, anyway), many can recognize one when they see one.

This is where the power of the Cult comes in. The Cult of the Illuminated is not simply a gaggle of stupid mortals rounded up to worship at the Solars' feet. The organization would crumble if such were true. The strict diet, the long days, the persuasive prayers and subtle Sidereal magic prepare the mortals to see what they expect to see, which is not Anathema at all, but shining and glorious warriors who will release them from the thumb of the Realm and the Dragon-Blooded. When met with direct contradictions that these are, indeed, Anathema, the properly prepared cultist will blatantly refuse to believe it. The Cult has welcomed them, given them hope for the future and salvation, then proved to them that the Shining Ones do exist. Working within the Cult will allow them more exposure to these saviors, which will then put them in a better position once the Shining Ones are on the thrones of Creation yet again.

With promises such as this, the Cult's numbers are swelling. How could they not?

CELESTIAL INITIATION

The Cult training camps offer more than simply martial arts instruction and a hiding place from the Wyld Hunt. Ayesha Ura herself trains Solar sorcerers into the Terrestrial Circle, and some even into the Celestial Circle. From there, she will offer herself as a mentor as a Solar ventures into the Solar Circle but cannot do more than that.

Trained herself in the Salinan method, she sees no reason to deviate from that pattern. The best way to learn about Essence and sorcery, in her opinion, is to see the raw power of Creation. Yearly, in Ascending Wood (two months before the high holy days of Descending Wood), she takes hopefuls for sorcerous initiation into the wilderness to begin learning the workings of magic on a raw level.

As Sidereals are practical above all else, Ayesha Ura does not preach heavily concerning the personal and spiritual growth that must come with the mastery of sorcery. Her own initiation was brutal, her mentor was without compassion, and she emerged from her journeys as a stronger sorcerer. She, in turn, does not coddle her protégés. Personal growth is just that: personal. Each person must deal with it

on her own. The metaphorical parts of the initiation are over and done with quickly, the Chosen of Journeys waiting (sometime impatiently) as her students finish the Five Unavoidable Challenges. Many have already started the journey even before joining the Cult, but they must finish it under Ayesha Ura's watchful eye to be initiated into the Terrestrial and Celestial Circles. Once her students have completed their personal challenges, often leaving them bleeding, exhausted and, quite possibly, sobbing uncontrollably, their mentor turns to practical application and the understanding of Essence and the spirits and small gods that the Exalts encounter.

Even with a centuries-old Sidereal acting as mentor, some Exalts get over their head when studying sorcery, and accidents do happen. Ayesha Ura has only lost one student during sorcerous initiations since co-opting the Cult, but there have been several close calls. She does not count as lost one student, Perfect Ivy, one of her first Solar Exalted sorcery students. Perfect Ivy excelled quickly in the Terrestrial Circle and attempted to also learn the Celestial Circle in the same year, something Ayesha Ura forbade (and something nigh-impossible anyway). The two had been exploring the ruins of an academy of sorcery, and Perfect Ivy had attempting a summoning in a locked room without Ayesha Ura's permission. She was not able to enter the room after he had locked himself in. The Sidereal frequently attempts to use Charms and sorceries to find out what happened to the Solar, and as far as she knows, he is

still alive and still in that room, but she can determine nothing else of his fate. It is her plan to attend to him in several years when she has at least one Solar Circle sorcerer by her side to help open the room.

Sidereals have no access to the Solar Circle, so after mastering the Celestial Circle, Solars are on their own. However, if they already have experience with Ayesha Ura's tutelage in Salinan initiations, they should be on the right track for solo mastery of the third and most powerful circle of sorcery.

LOST SHEEP

The Gold Faction is not always successful in recruiting Solars (or other Exalted) to its cause. Some Solars are suspicious of the mysterious beings who knows perhaps too much about them, or they possess vague memories of the First Age Sidereals, or some are just rich in their own hubris and believe they need no guidance whatsoever. The Gold Faction has, of course, a set of plans to deal with these errant souls.

For the first few weeks after the rejected offer, the Sidereals will follow a Solar without her knowing it, helping to pull her out of danger if she needs it and revealing herself and offering the Cult's training all the while. If two months pass with constant rejections, the Sidereals pull out the more drastic measures.

The Inner Circle will begin setting traps for the Solar, actually creating danger for her to struggle through.



CROSSOVER CAPABILITIES

While there are five different Exalted you have available to play in a game of **Exalted**, it becomes a complicated game to play when more than one kind of Exalt is involved.

However, with the Cult of the Illuminated, crossover groups work quite well. When everyone in the Circle is working toward a common long-term goal, the series tends to go more smoothly.

What follows are possible motivations for various Exalted types to join the Cult, and what they might get out of it.

Sidereals: Sidereals run the Cult. They have their fingers in the pie, orchestrating the mortal involvement, the Solar recruitment and the missions the Cult. Series can include recruiting newly Exalted Sidereals to the Gold cause. Sidereals will receive power and, hopefully, the elevation of the Solars to their former glory, reestablishing the Gold Faction as the power behind the throne. Ultimate goals for players' characters will likely be to edge their way into the Inner Circle.

Solars: Solars are the second most important Exalted to serve the Cult. They are recruited as demigods to be worshiped by the mortals. When one is met on one side with the Wyld Hunt, on another with a group offering to worship one as a god, and on a third containing a life as a fugitive with no certainty in whether one will survive in the Threshold wilderness, the Cult is an attractive and obvious choice. Solars receive sanctuary from the Wyld Hunt, worship from mortals and training at the hand of the Sidereals. Ultimately, they will gain control of Creation (if all goes as the Gold Faction plans.)

Lunars: Lunars are the silver light to the gold of the Illuminated. They can join the Cult because of a rekindling love with a reincarnated Solar lover or if they remember ruling Creation at the side of the Solars and wish to be in that position of power again. Lunars will receive training and an order to their chaotic lives (whether they want it or not) and, as with the Solars, seek to gain the control of Creation.

Abyssals: The Cult is possibly the best place for Abyssals seeking redemption. They have enough Sidereal and Solar sorcerers to work toward the truth — and the subsequent cure — of the Abyssal Exaltation. Because Abyssals are corrupted Solars, some spark of their former self may be drawn to the Cult to worship that which they once were. But an Abyssal must always keep in mind his Deathlord. Even if he is a renegade, consorting with the living too much will take its toll. Abyssals may also join the Cult under the command of their Deathlord, either to aid the Cult in short-term goals (say, wiping out an Immaculate temple) or simply to spy. Abyssals can possibly gain the redemption they seek by serving the Cult, or at the least, they can be put in a position to sow much death and destruction in the name of the Cult.

Dragon-Blooded: Outcastes are the most likely Dragon-Blooded to join the Cult, as the demands of Realm, family and Immaculate Order are unlikely to place a Dynastic Terrestrial in the mindset to follow the Illuminated. The Cult offers direction to those who are powerful and have no sponsor, as it were, and many outcastes accept and welcome this guidance.

Of course, one can't overlook the obvious: People, Exalted and mortal alike, join the Cult because they believe in it. While it has nowhere near the reach and power of the Immaculate Order, the Cult of the Illuminated gives hope to the citizens of the Threshold, telling them that their rightful place is standing on the corpses of the usurpers of the Realm. The Immaculate Order only reassures these mortals that they are in their rightful place. In addition, the Cult offers safety, hope, martial training and jobs to members, which are all difficult to find on the Threshold.

The Storyteller will still need to keep up with the Charms of each character, but the chance of the group being fractured because of conflicting long-term goals is much less. Everyone in the Cult wants the same thing, and even if they disagree on how it should be done, they all should remain loyal and steadfast on the path.

Some pitfalls they force the Solar to fight her way out of, only rescuing her if death is immanent. Other times, the Sidereals will rescue the Solar immediately, showing her the benefits of working with the Cult. If the Solar doesn't accept the offer to join after these happenings, the Cult abandons her as a lost cause and hopes she will reincarnate into a more cooperative soul. These persuasive

measures have greatly increased the Cult's successful recruitment of Exalted over the past four years.

OPERATIONS AND RESOURCES

The Cult has transformed from a purely dues-and-donations institution attempting to bring mortals into its way of belief to a fully fledged religion with three hidden

BRONZE VERSUS GOLD

Previously, the Exalted world has painted the Bronze Faction as being the end-all of power. It runs the Realm, guides the Immaculate Order and has helped build the Dragon-Blooded into a powerful force. Add in the fact that it has placed all of the more powerful Exalted into a class of hated demons, not to mention that it has the power to find and destroy these beings before they discover their true power, and the Bronze Faction can be considered the most powerful group in Creation.

The Gold Faction, in contrast, is a younger organization just recently re-formed. It does not have the traditions, the firepower or the support in Heaven or in Creation, and it does not have the numbers to compare with the Bronze. It is true that the Gold Faction's numbers have dwindled as the centuries ground down its members' hopes, but its faith — and membership — has returned along with the Solars. Its members see the Bronze Faction as following the wrong path, and the fervent belief of the leaders has ignited a passion among the newcomers. They also believe in their strengths.

The Gold Faction has the Solars, which is a considerable advantage. It is also creating political power within the Threshold, much of which hates the Realm, the Dragon-Blooded and all they stand for. Perhaps its strongest asset is that the Bronze Faction can no longer move in secret as it did before the Usurpation. The Gold Faction knows that the Bronze wishes the Solars and the other Exalted dead. The Gold is preparing for a war, and it falls on the Bronze to decide where it is fought. If the Bronze Faction meets the Cult of the Illuminated's mortal and Exalted army with its Dragon-Blooded legions, Creation will likely buckle under the carnage. Therefore, the war must be waged in intrigue and bureaucracy, stopping the Gold in Yu-Shan and snuffing out the Exalted with the Wyld Hunt, not on the battlefields.

Thus, the Bronze Faction has not moved overtly against the Gold Faction, although it knows much of what the Gold is doing. It may not know numbers or locations, but it knows the plan, and it knows the plan is working. With all of the problems with which the Bronze Faction must currently deal, the danger posed by the Cult is actually small compared to that posed by the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress and the current state of the Realm. When the Bronze Faction can afford to, it sends a Wyld Hunt out to stop a Solar before he reaches the sanctuary of the Cult, but its resources are stretched thin.

Should a Storyteller wish to roleplay a cataclysmic war between the Bronze and Gold Factions, she must remember a number of other details. The gods, to name one group, do not want to see extreme violence take hold of Creation. The deaths of so many worshipers could throw Yu-Shan into economic turmoil. This action would also play right into the hands of the Deathlords, who would likely choose careful sides between the Gold and Bronze in order to help facilitate the largest loss of life. When all is said and done, the winning faction will rule Creation, but will have poverty, turmoil and angry deities within Yu-Shan with which to contend.

training camps. This transformation has happened in four short years and has put considerable strain on the Inner Circle minds behind it. The camps each require Resources •••• every month to maintain, and the organization behind the different missions and goals of the Sidereals, the other Exalts and mortal leaders must be tight and under control.

DEITIES

The Gold Faction Sidereals had personal resources enough to get the camps up and running four years ago. However, the constant strain on resources, as well as the extraneous costs (such as bribes within Yu-Shan), requires them to have external funding.


Ayesha Ura and her Gold Faction allies spread out, covering both Yu-Shan and Creation to petition Threshold spirits for support. They presented their case to those they knew disliked the Bronze Faction's dominance. Oth-

ers contacted the Ayesha Ura themselves when they discovered the Solars had returned.

Unsolicited, some gods approached the Gold Faction with similar designs. Many gods would prefer Solar rule but did not relish the thought of the war that would inevitably usher in the Solars' rise to power. They preferred the subversive and secret methods of the Cult of the Illuminated, and several gods Ayesha Ura never would have approached sent messengers to her, offering their support if she could assure their anonymity. It appeared to the gratified Sidereal that there were far more gods in Yu-Shan who wished the return of the Solars than she had believed.

The gods are, of course, not doing this altruistically. While they do assume they will benefit in some way when the rule of the Solars finally comes to pass, many need more instant gratification for their continued support. The Gold Faction has promised many favors within Yu-Shan and Creation to aid the gods in their goals, giving them





incentive to continue their support. These favors can come due at any time or place, and the Inner Circle has instructed the Exalted under them to fulfill the favors as commanded. Ayesha Ura keeps track of all debt and delegates tasks when they come due. Smaller gods merely welcome the worship that comes through the Cult, as they had lost most of their incoming Quintessence when the Immaculate Order crushed their followings.

Some gods need their support of the Gold Faction to remain anonymous in order to keep their business in Yu-Shan going smoothly. The Sidereal Lupo has worked up a discreet laundering process for each god to send resources to Creation through its servants. Each sends money through the markets of several cities to purchase goods. Then, the goods are carefully manipulated to find their way into the Cult's hands. Once the Cult has the goods, it resells them to gain hard currency. Other methods of allocating resources include using supposedly neutral parties to make the exchanges. Lupo has managed to convince a young Sidereal, called Emerald Thorn, not to throw in his lot with the Gold Faction as he desires to, but to remain rogue. Emerald Thorn, while publicly defaming both the Gold and the Bronze Factions and their quarrels, works as a messenger and spy for the Gold Faction, helping gods get resources from their hands into the hands of the Cult.

KEY PATRONS OF THE CULT

Lytek, Daimyo of the Division of Exaltation: Lytek (see **Exalted: The Sidereals**, pp. 42-43) is probably the most powerful open supporter of the Gold Faction, which is a surprise to no one. This god of Exaltation lost much of his power and prestige when the Solars were murdered and imprisoned, and only recently has he been able to do the job he loves, shaping the Essences of these powerful Exalts. He wishes to see them back in power, as that will increase his own power within Yu-Shan in turn. Lytek sees the Cult of the Illuminated as a tiny Solar Deliberative, as it contains Exalts working together for the best interests of Creation, and he supports it as best he can, with Resources •• every month. He visits the training camps frequently to work with the Sidereals and the Twilight Caste Solars to discover the warped nature of Abyssal Exalted. Although he hates their twisted cores, he grudgingly admits that having Abyssals associated with the Cult allows for first-hand study of their Solar Essences. The chance to openly study the Abyssals (and, more covertly, all of the Exalted within the Cult, in order to discover a cure for the Great Curse), is his payment for his support.

Nara-O of the Hundred Veils, Keeper of Secrets: Lupo was shocked to his core when his superior, Nara-O of the Hundred Veils (see **Exalted: The Sidereals**, pp. 58-59), sent a message summoning him to a private meeting within the Forbidding Manse of Ivy. He had had few encounters with the mysterious head of the Division of

Secrets, as Nara-O prefers to delegate. He met with Nara-O in a black room lit with one candle, and Nara-O whispered to him that he would receive Resources •••• per month for the Cult, to be delivered in a way he would recognize when he received it. In exchange, Nara-O stated, Lupo would bring one Solar, preferably Eclipse Caste, into the Forbidding Manse of Ivy every year on the third day of Calibration. Lupo did not question his master's command and does his duty every year. He was unsure of how to choose the Solar, so during the first year, he brought a recent recruit, a newly Exalted Eclipse. Feeling sure that he was sacrificing the young Exalt, Lupo was astonished to discover that the Solar returned from the meeting seemingly unscathed but unwilling to speak of the encounter. Lupo does not know what Nara-O does with the Solars, and he dares not ask. Every year during the first day of Ascending Air, caravans arrive at the training camps, sometimes carrying supplies, sometimes carrying goods to sell, sometimes just carrying lockboxes of jade. Lupo knows he could trace them if he wished, but has no desire to anger his master.

Shalrina, Daimyo of Faces: After supplying the Solar Mirror Flag (see **Caste Book: Eclipse**) with her unique mask, Shalrina (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 26-27) followed her progress with curiosity. When the Mirror Flag joined the Cult of the Illuminated, Shalrina became interested in the Sidereal cause. Although she has no quarrel with the Bronze Faction, she has a motherly affection for the Mirror Flag and would not like to see her cut down because of the Dragon-Blooded's lies concerning Anathema. Shalrina donates Resources ••• along with one requested magical mask per year. In return, she is free to visit and inspect the training camps, where she attempts to get a glimpse of her favorite Solar. She also has two Sidereal favors she has yet to collect.

Vanileth, Shogun of Artificial Flight: The Gold Faction kept a sharp eye out for gods who offered rewards for impossible feats, as they did not have to win support for the Gold Faction and the Solars to gain their allegiance, all they had to do was complete the feat. Ayesha Ura and the Solar Krinstet Orr worked together in his Manse to create a crude flying machine that could make it to Vanileth's secluded dwelling in the North, as one must reach his home by flying machine alone, or not at all. Once Ayesha Ura stepped foot from her strange propeller-powered glider, Vanileth (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 27-28) welcomed her. She spent a month with him, getting detailed plans on flying machines and piloting information. She charmed the old god with her plans for the Cult of the Illuminated, promising to induct him back into Yu-Shan when the Solars ruled the world again. He donated five level-5 artifacts for her use, binding her to her promise, and welcomed her back at any time. He openly supports the Cult and the Gold Faction, although no one in Yu-Shan

cares. Smaller gods from Creation such as Vanileth commonly give Resources •• per month and make their support of the Gold Faction blatant.

Wun-Ja, God of the Shining Metropolis: Another open supporter of the Gold Faction, Wun-Ja (see **Exalted: The Sidereals**, p. 46) is the desperately weakening god who serves as the Director of Humanity in the Divine Witnesses of Human Works and Deeds. In an odd turn of events, she actually wants more from the Cult of the Illuminated than it from her: She is negotiating with Ayesha Ura to have her Exalts serve as an army for Grandmother Bright of Chiaroscuro. After the Exalts do this, she promises she will begin supporting the placement of Solars as the leaders of cities, with the Cult and the Gold Faction behind them. Ayesha Ura is intrigued by this offer but worries that too much concentration on this venture could distract from the goal of overtaking the Realm and defeating the Bronze Faction. Still, the Gold Faction leader accepts Resources •• per month from the god and discusses Wun-Ja's desires with the Inner Circle.

Green Frowning Bear, Lesser Elemental Dragon of Air: Rol, Chosen of the Maiden of Battles, bestowed gifts of emerald and jade encrusted armor to this lesser elemental dragon of air (see **Games of Divinity**, p. 60), hoping to win an audience with the hermitlike spirit. Once admitted into his domain, Rol convinced the Great Bear that those who support the Solars' rise to power would be rewarded in the end, rewarded with support in their own causes for dominance, for instance. The greedy elemental dragon's interest was piqued, and he agreed to give Resources ••• per month to the Cult, as well as the use of his bee army if the Gold Faction needed its aid while in the East. His allegiance came at another price; the God-Blooded son of one of his huraka has joined the Cult of the Illuminated and serves as his representative and informant. This alliance has come at a price for the Gold Faction, however, as it has earned it the enmity of Red Stalking Bear who dwells in the nearby South.

Ghataru, The Shogun-Regent of the Seasons and Weather: The high-ranking official in the Celestial Monitors of the Seasons and Weather has been waiting patiently for the return of the Solars, his rightful masters in his eyes. Ghataru (see **Exalted: The Sidereals**, p. 45) sees the Cult of the Illuminated as an excellent organization where Sidereals can train Solars to one day take their rightful places in Heaven. He had supported the Gold Faction even in the days when it was fractured and lost, and he supported them when the Solars returned. When he became aware of the Gold Faction's co-opting of the Cult of the Illuminated, he contacted Ayesha Ura to ask her how he could help. Through his support, the Cult receives Resources ••• per month, as well as the aid of Nasri, Daimyo of Rainstorms and Daimyo of the Season of Air. She may, of course, refuse to aid it if she feels the request

is arbitrary, but she supports the Cult as well and has vowed to summon the Aerial Legion if the Bronze Faction moves directly against the Cult.

MORTAL FUNDING

On a basic level, local cells of the Cult are supported mostly by self-financing. If they experience financial trouble, Shen Aru (or, more precisely, his Sidereal masters) offers a one-time bailout, placing the temple leader of the Cult cell on probation. If the cell falls into arrears again, the Inner Circle appoints a new leader to lead the cell in a more fiscally responsible way. The old temple leader is whipped in front of the Cult members, then shunted to become apprentice to a more successful leader of another cell.

When the Cult was in its infancy, Shen Aru and Vax lived hand-to-mouth, and their only thought was to spread the word of the coming of the Shining Ones. Now, the Cult cells are more community-oriented, serving troubled people and offering help during disasters or a bowl of rice to the hungry. This has increased their donations considerably, as many communities see the Cult as a useful organization. It also doesn't hurt recruitment.

SAFEHOUSES

There are times when the Wyld Hunt, the Bronze Faction or merely a vengeful spirit gets too close to a rogue Exalt—or an Exalt is too injured to travel to a camp—and the Sidereals must act quickly lest they lose their recruit. This is where the Yu-Shan safehouses come in.

There are several areas of Yu-Shan where gods who have lost considerable power have been forced to abandon residences, and these uninhabited buildings tend to be grouped together as other gods move out into better (or worse) dwellings. When a ghost town of sorts springs up on the Sidereal radar, they make use of the buildings. If gods still dwell in the area, they purchase the houses to not arouse suspicions, but if it truly is an abandoned area, they merely take them for their brief usage. They use these abandoned buildings as safehouses, taking the Exalt through the nearest gateway and getting them to safety.

The problem arises in getting the Exalted through a gate safely. Celestial lions guard all gates, but while all of them are dedicated to their duty, not all agree on what their duty is. Like gods, spirits and Exalted, the celestial lions have a preference in who should eventually rule Creation (and, of course, who should rule behind them.) There are many lions who guard their gates carefully but will allow Gold Faction Sidereals and their rescued Anathema passage. Perfect Onyx at Gateway 17 near Lookshy, Shanks at Gateway 29 near Icehome and Pai Xanxi at Gateway 14 at Rathess are the strongest Gold supporters and will aid the Sidereals in their cause when they can do so without attracting attention.





Once the Exalt is healed, or once word comes through that there is now a safe passage to a training camp, the Sidereal and Exalt abandon the house, taking care to leave little or no sign of their habitation and leave Yu-Shan. The Bronze Faction remains unaware of this practice, but the Gold Faction remains as careful as it can to keep one step ahead of the Bronze, switching safehouses frequently before they can be detected.

On occasion, one of the gods who patronize the Cult of the Illuminated will arrange for a safehouse in one of its dwellings, but this is dangerous work, as taking a sought-after Solar into a populated area of Yu-Shan can draw considerable attention to her.

TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION

The Cult of the Illuminated has grown incredibly in the past four years, and since the Gold Faction has taken over, it is suddenly important to have a reliable means of transport between the three camps and to other cells within Creation. It is also vitally important for the camps (and, on a lesser level of importance, for the many cells dotting the map) to be able to communicate with each other.

Classic means of transportation can apply to most Exalted members. Horse, cart, boat and feet still carry a person across Creation quite well. However, these mundane methods do not always serve an Exalt on duty, and he must resort to other means of traveling.

If an Exalt has a Charm or spell that aids in traveling (and most of them are trained to have one), he is advised to only use it if he has little chance of attracting too much attention in dangerous cities. For more pressing issues, or when the Sidereals feel an impressive show is necessary (such as gaining the awe and support of a local community), they pull out a flying machine, the *Cry of the Illuminated*, that Ayesha Ura had built from Vanileth's gifted plans. The golden flying machine is capable of carrying 10 passengers.

Exalts who are able may summon a demon or spirit to serve as a mount. A demon of the First Circle will often serve quite well, and many Exalted sorcerers have summoned agatae to them just for this purpose. Sidereal Exalted may employ the Maiden of Journeys' Charms to travel, using the Ride or Sail Charms to travel swiftly.

When needing a system to get to a Heavenly gateway quickly, a Sidereal guardian will cast Summoning the Heavenly Portal if in dire need or place the rogue Exalt she's protecting alongside her on her mount and cast the needed Charms to reach the gateway in safety. Within Yu-Shan is where much of the Cult's resources are spent, as officials must be bribed with Ambrosia or one of the three Celestial Magical Materials in order to look the other way when a Sidereal's smuggling a Solar into Heaven.

For a system of communication, the Cult has several options. For private messages, the Exalted often use Charms or spells such as Infallible Messenger to get an important word to another distant ally. However, not all Exalts know these Charms, so the Inner Circle has developed a system of apprenticeship to Exalted who have Ride ••• or Sail •••. Those who prove adept at travel perform messenger duties. Ayesha Ura and her other Chosen of Mercury Gold Faction Sidereals choose apprentices that they train in the travel powers of both Sidereal and Solar Charms. These Exalts serve for a year as messengers all over Creation, including the Realm.

Although this seems to be a waste of Exalted powers (especially over using Charms and spells to communicate), it does give the Exalts experience in using quick travel, in outwitting pursuers and in diplomacy. Ayesha Ura has three Exalts as her personal apprentices currently, sending them through the Threshold, delivering messages and other small packages.

The third option the Cult has is using a captive (or indebted) spirit for errand duty. Anyone with the Charms or spells capable of binding a spirit or demon can summon and command one to perform his duties. This proves risky, however, as the Inner Circle may not wish the messenger to know anything about the message (including the fact that he sent it), and it is very difficult to force a demon or spirit to forget something.

The god Vanileth bestowed a gift of communication to the Cult when Ayesha Ura visited him; it came in the form of 10 small gilded birds. Powered by the god's Essence, the birds can find any target in Creation so long as the target is not within a magical territory (such as the Wyld or Heaven). Used mostly by the Inner Circle to contact the traveling Cult Exalts, other Exalts may use them with permission.

Lastly, there is always the use of another party, such as the Guild or even the Imperial Post to get a desired message to another. The use of this is risky, as these systems are corrupt and probably watched over by the Bronze Faction. The Inner Circle Sidereals use these methods either for heavily encoded messages or outright lies to fool the Bronze Faction. Very few real messages go through the official channels, only enough to throw the Bronze Faction off the scent. The Inner Circle is careful to spread only lies and codes, and sometimes coded lies, through the Imperial Post.

FUTURE PLANS OF THE INNER CIRCLE

The Gold Faction Sidereals have been working at a nearly fevered pace since the Solars returned and the Scarlet Empress disappeared, and their future plans are no less hectic. Besides their constant battle to find and recruit Solars, protect them from the Bronze Faction and train them into a fighting force to overtake the Realm, the Inner

Circle has plans to recruit more mortals to increase its resources and to increase the praying power of the Cult. There is also a new training camp to think about.

MEMBERS

Since the return of the Solars, Ayesha Ura and her Inner Circle have been working to increase the number of mortals within the Cult as well as recruiting and training newly Exalts. The more people who worship in the Cult, the more gods in Yu-Shan who will support it, as the people worship the gods who gave them the Illuminated Ones.

Since the disappearance of the Empress, the Immaculate Order has been forced to withdraw some of the tendrils it had sent into the Threshold to stamp out heretical cults. While in the past, mortals would have shunned the Cult out of fear of the Immaculate Order, many are now converting. Still, the Cult needs more. The Sidereals' dream is to have the Threshold rise up against the Realm with the Gold Faction and the Exalted at the helm, and they have a long way to go before they have that kind of support.

Still, they are diligent. Many Cult operatives are watching the movement of the Immaculate Order to see where its influence is strong and where it is waning. Often, the Inner Circle will send in some of its best mortal recruiters with one Sidereal to check out new areas for a Cult temple, and other times (although these are dangerous and rare), they will send in Exalted warriors to wipe out the Immaculate monks, if there are few enough and the populace is resistant to the Order.


The plan is simple: Saturate the Threshold with the Cult as the Realm has been saturated with the Immaculate Order. Once the Threshold cannot think of its daily life without incorporating the teachings of the Cult, then the Inner Circle should have enough trained Exalted to establish Solar-led kingdoms. Once the kingdoms are strong enough, luring more Exalted into their ranks and allying themselves with more powerful gods, then they plan to take the Realm.

CAMPS

While the three camps are working well for processing, hiding and training Solars and other Exalted, the Inner Circle is well aware that a fourth camp is needed. There are too many dangers that could put one or more of the camps out of commission: The hostilities with the Bronze Faction could turn violent if the rival faction discovers one of the camp and sends the Wyld Hunt against it, the local populace could become wise to the fact that Anathema are in their midst, or a Deathlord could attack. Although the Sidereals are confident (wrongly so) that they can foresee any problem, they still prefer having a backup plan.

Ayesha Ura has appointed her Inner Circle compatriots, Kai and Zhen Xue, to discover likely locations for a fourth





camp and to find more gods willing to supply resources. Zhen Xue has ruled out the Western islands, as the land available is too small to hide a major camp, not to mention difficult to move in and out of in a stealthy manner. Kai feels the South is already well-covered and is currently traveling in the West to see if any areas would fit. He fears the large urban areas would be dangerous places to keep several Exalted, but there may still be some good possibilities. There is also the North, which has a very small Cult presence. This is both bad and good: No presence means it will be difficult to get a surrounding community to support the Cult, but it is unlikely that the Immaculate Order has been preaching against the Cult, as there has been nothing to preach against.

Unbeknownst to Kai and the other Inner Circle members, Zhen Xue has made a dangerous deal regarding the resources for the new camp. She has petitioned Plentimon of the Dice, the God of Gambling, for a game. If she wins, the god will supply the resources for the new camp for one year. If he wins, she will owe him three favors. She is worried that the favors will take her away from Cult duties, but she realized belatedly that if Ayesha Ura discovered her bet, she would likely cast her out of the Cult anyway. The date for the game will be set by Zhen Xue after she and Kai decide on a location for the camp.

INNER CIRCLE PERSONALITIES

The Inner Circle is made of those people who, with the exception of the one mortal, are privy to more information than the others — mortal or Exalted — in the Cult. These individuals work out the policy and the missions of the Cult, planning out its next moves. The Inner Circle's core is made up mostly of Sidereal Exalted, those Gold Faction members that took the Cult over four years ago when the Solars returned.

Beyond the Gold Faction members, there are a couple of Solars and God-Blooded within the Inner Circle who mostly serve as close apprentices to the Sidereals. To reach the Inner Circle, each member must be sponsored by a Sidereal and approved by a majority vote, with Ayesha Ura having the ultimate veto power.

The Inner Circle is also made of low-level deities who have decided to throw in more than mere resources to the Cult. They believe in the Cult and know that the Gold Faction will need help within Heaven to achieve its goals.

And then, there is Shen Aru.

SIDEREALS

The Gold Faction Sidereal *are* the Inner Circle. They decide who gets in and who stays in the dark. Although most Gold Faction Sidereal have some connection to the Cult, not all are in the Inner Circle. Ayesha Ura has gathered a Circle of Sidereal that she feels she can trust and that she feels will best guide the Cult toward its goals. She holds the mantle of leader, with her longtime friend Lupo as her second.

AYESHA URA

Description: Ayesha Ura, or Chief Unseen Master, has many names and titles. To Shen Aru, she is the Emissary to the Illuminated Ones. To the Gold Faction, she is the leader. To the Bronze Faction, she is the betrayer. In her dreams, she is Tammiz Ushun. And to the Solars in the Cult of the Illuminated, she is their savior.

Tutored under the venerable and powerful Chejop Kejak, Ayesha Ura came into power as a Bronze Faction apprentice. Chejop was careful with her, knowing she held the Essence of the previous leader of the Gold Faction, Tammiz Ushun, who had died during the Usurpation alongside many Solars. He nevertheless spent a great deal of time schooling her in the occult and sorcery, bringing her to the level of the Celestial Circle. Chejop Kejak was unable to stifle her ancient memories, however, and as she excelled in sorcery, they began to resurface. As she was initiated into the Celestial Circle of sorcery, Ayesha Ura placed her admiration and affection for Chejop Kejak up for sacrifice. More powerful than ever, she left his side and began searching out her old allies.

The Solars had been missing for hundreds of years, and the previous members of the Gold Faction were hesitant to go against their former rivals when the war had already been lost. Ayesha Ura pointed out that the Bronze Faction, by letting the a mere Dragon-Blood rule all of Creation, were bringing Creation to its knees and must be stopped. Some followed, others chose to remain rogue, and the Gold Faction did little but watch the Bronze Faction's actions and keep its intentions hidden.

In recent years, Gold Faction Sidereals discovered a small cult in the South proclaiming the coming of the Shining, or Illuminated, Ones from Heaven. Ayesha Ura thought it would be a useful tool, if only the Solars still existed. Then, to the Sidereals, it seemed everything happened at once. The Jade Prison was sundered, the Empress disappeared, and Thorns fell to the Mask of Winters' undead army. While chaos befell the Bureau of Destiny, Ayesha Ura appeared to Shen Aru and took control of the Cult of the Illuminated. She immediately began scrying for newly born Solars to shuttle to the Cult's camps. Her old allies were much more amenable to following her with newly born and easily manipulated Solars suddenly at hand, and the Gold Faction experienced a renewal.

Ayesha had long been collecting favors from various gods who she knew would support Solar rule, and she began to call them in. Many were hesitant when faced with the power of Chejop Kejak and the Bronze Faction, but Ayesha was adamant, assuring them that she could keep some resource movement, at least, hidden from prying eyes.

Beyond her duties leading the Cult, controlling Shen Aru and searching for and recruiting new Solars, Ayesha does take some time to initiate Exalted in sorcery. Following the Salinan method of teaching, she leads one vision quest

into the Scavenger Lands per year during Ascending Wood. She is a matter-of-fact teacher who tolerates no failure in her students. She has left more than one Solar in the wilderness who could not fathom how the Essence flowed, but only one has never returned. Knowing the Solars must be at their most powerful when they finally challenge the Bronze Faction and the Realm, Ayesha Ura has no patience for those who will not live up to their full potential.

Although her work for the Gold Faction and the Cult of the Illuminated takes up a great deal of time, Ayesha Ura still has her duties to Heaven and the Maidens as her top priority. For the past several hundred years, she has had the difficult task of watching all possible entrances the Yozi could be using to invade Creation. As she is a servant of the Maiden of Journeys, she is charged to halt any and all journeys the Demon Princes wish to take into Creation. This promotion came soon after she left her mentor, Chejop Kejak, and she knows that the time-consuming reassignment was orchestrated by him. She figures he thought she wouldn't have time to reinvigorate the Gold Faction with such a job, but she has proven him wrong, and not for the first time.

Ayesha Ura keeps her longtime friend Lupo as her primary lover but will turn to others if it proves useful to her or the Gold Faction's objectives. Lupo understands and has been forced to do the same in the past. They assure each other, in secret, that they are each other's only affection. Lupo keeps Ayesha Ura focused on the reality of her goal instead of the loftiness of her vision. Without his guidance, she would not be as effective.

Caste: Journeys

Nature: Visionary

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 3, Craft (Fate) 5 (Weave Portal +2), Dodge 2, Endurance 5, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Forest-tongue, High Realm, Old Realm) 3, Lore 4, Martial Arts 3, Medicine 3, Occult 8, Performance 3, Presence 3, Resistance 2, Ride 5, Sail 5, Socialize 4, Stealth 2, Survival 5, Thrown 4

Backgrounds: Acquaintances 3, Allies 3, Artifact 4, Backing (Gold Faction) 5, Familiar 5, Followers 2, Salary 3

Colleges: The Captain 1, The Messenger 3, The Ship's Wheel 5

Charms: Adopting the Untamed Face, Auspicious Prospects for Journeys, Becoming the Wilderness, Breaking the Wild Mortal, Cash and Murder Games, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Destiny-Knitting Entanglement, Dreaming the Wild Lands, Elegant Patterns of Fate, Excellent Implementation of Objectives, Faultless Ceremony, Five Ordeals

Odyssey, Forward-Thinking Technique, Glory Path, Godly Companion, Heart-Brightening Presentation Style, Hot-Eyed Snake Whispering, Incite Decorum, Innocuous Maneuver, Life Gets Worse Approach, Life Without Compunction, Mark of Exaltation, Mending Warped Designs, Mirror Shattering Method, Ordained Bridle of Mercury, Ox-Body Technique (x5), Pain Amplification Stratagem, Perfection in Life, Riding the Dragon, Salt into Ash Sleight, Shun the Smiling Lady, Sky and Rain Mantra, Sky Spirit Demand, Someone Else's Destiny, Spirit-Shape Companion, Stern Essence Replenishment, Stone Skipping Spirit, Tell-Tale Symphony, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Unswerving Juggernaut Principle, Unweaving Method, Wilderness-Commanding Practice, Willful Weapon Method, World-Shaping Artistic Vision, Yellow Path, You and Yours Stance

Spells: Between the Minute and the Hour, Bone Lion, Cloud Trapeze, Conjuring the Azure Chariot, Demon of the First Circle, Demon of the Second Circle, Emerald Countermagic, Eternal Crystalline Encasement, Eye of Alliance, The Faithful Ally, Flight of Separation, Gift of Knowledge, The Horse That Travels Earth and Water, Infallible Messenger, Ivory Orchid Pavilion, Malediction of the Distorted Compass, Mercury's Deliverance, Open the Spirit Door, Outside Worlds Within, The Parting of the Seas, Rolling Earth Carpet, Sapphire Countermagic, Servant of Infallible Location, Sleep of Stony Safety, Sorcerer's Irresistible Puppetry, The Spy Who Walks in Darkness, Storm Rider Enchantment, Stormwind Rider, Summon Spirit Boat, Summoning the Heart of Darkness, Summoning the Heavenly Portal, Swift Journey, Swift Spirit of Winged Transportation, Theft of Memory, Three-fold Binding of the Heart, Tongue of the Element Spirit, Travel Without Distance, Voice of Distant Command, Voices of Distant Regard, Wheel of the Turning Heavens, Whirlwind of Fate

Combos:

The Healing Aura of Ownership (Cost: 7 motes, 1 Willpower): Destiny-Knitting Entanglement, Mending Warped Designs — *Ayesha Ura binds an object or creature to herself as in the Destiny-Knitting Entanglement. When it is time for the object to return to her hands, her target heals whatever damage it had suffered away from her hands inflicted by a creature or effect born of Malfeas, the Underworld or the Wyld. The amount of successes determines how much damage is healed.*

Lining the Road with Sugar and Wine (Cost: 1 mote, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per target reduction): Auspicious Prospects for Journeys, Hot-Eyed Snake Whispering — *Although Ayesha Ura is a Sidereal of immense power and influence, she still likes to have tools at her side when her advice is ignored. Lining the Road with Sugar and Wine allows her to convince her target that the path she has seen for them to travel is truly the best. As she maps out her target's path, she lowers the target number for the Socialize roll to convince him.*





Shen Aru's Leash (Cost: 10 motes, 2 Willpower + 2 motes per die + 1 mote per target reduction): Cash and Murder Games, Heart-Brightening Presentation Style, Hot-Eyed Snake Whispering — *Named for the figurehead leader of the Cult of the Illuminated, this Combo allows Ayesha Ura to effortlessly bind any mortal to herself and her goals. It is the Combo she uses the most when dealing with Shen Aru to make sure he is amenable to her suggestions. She greets him with a tight hug, spending the Essence, and Shen Aru becomes subservient, friendly and open to any suggestion she has to offer. This extreme dedication lasts long after he has left her side. If someone has managed to plant a countersuggestion in him before his next meeting with Ayesha Ura, this Combo makes it simply not have happened. If the suggestion is a strong one, such as a Bronze Faction-planted suggestion, Ayesha Ura's difficulty to use this Combo is 1.*

Base Initiative: 11

Attack:

Punch: Speed 11 Accuracy 9 Damage 4B Defense 9

Kick: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 6B Defense 8

Starmetal Bane Disc (The Whirling Mercury*) (Melee):

Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 13L Defense 10

Starmetal Bane Disc (The Whirling Mercury*) (Thrown):

Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 13L (Rate 2, Range 30)

* Ayesha Ura carries the Whirling Mercury with her at all times, either tucked discreetly in her robes or hanging obviously on her belt. It is a formidable weapon as is, but

in the rare case that Ayesha Ura wishes to remove herself from battle while her opponent lives, she can spend 2 motes of Essence to attack with this weapon. On a successful attack, she removes the enemy from battle, pushing him 100 feet directly behind his previous position. He will take the normal amount (13L) of damage from the weapon. If something obstructs his way, such as a wall or a cliff, he will hit it for 1B and cease his movement backward.

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 7L/7B (Starmetal chain shirt, 5L/3B)

Willpower: 9 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 8

Personal Essence: 25 **Peripheral Essence:** 64 (73)

Committed Essence: 9

Other Notes: Ayesha Ura had desired the companionship of a garda bird since before she Exalted. She'd heard of their strength and their glory and how they were impossible to kill. Later, as her memories returned to her from her former Exalted days, she realized that she was drawn to them because they represented the Solars and the Gold Faction's efforts to bring the back to power. The garda birds returned, and therefore, she should have faith that the Solars would as well.

It was, therefore, no surprise to her to discover two garda birds preparing to mate, which would immolate both of them and result in one offspring who retained few of either

birds' memories. She arranged to be present at the new garda bird's awakening and made an agreement with the newborn bird. She even named it Everpresent Dawn.

Although the garda bird is bound to her through promises, Charms and a genuine affection for the Sidereal, Everpresent Dawn is not always at Ayesha Ura's side. He serves as her ambassador to the Court of the Orderly Flame and has done well to win her many alliances with the fire elementals. He is also released during Calibration when she is ensconced with the Inner Circle doing secret Cult business — this freedom is granted in part because Ayesha Ura does not want her familiar to know all of her secrets, just as he has secrets from her (or so he believes).

He is devoted to her, however, and will do nearly anything she asks, including sacrificing himself, which he has done three times thus far. She is always present at his rebirth, showing him the same dedication he is expected to show her.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 4B Defense 11 Rate 5
Kick: Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 7B Defense 7 Rate 3
Starmetal Bane Disc (The Whirling Mercury*) (Melee):
Speed 11 Accuracy 11 Damage 13L Defense 10

Dodge Pool: 16

LUPO

Description: While the Ax Falls was a fellow Gold Faction member and companion of Tammiz Ushun during the First Age. The two friends died fighting side-by-side during the Usurpation for their cause and for the lives of the Solars they were sworn to protect. Unlike Ayesha Ura, when Lupo was reincarnated, he was raised in the hands of Gold Faction members who taught him to mourn the loss of their Solar leaders.

When Ayesha Ura left Chejop Kejak's side to join the Gold Faction, Lupo was the loudest dissenter, claiming that she was a spy and that she would betray them all. Ayesha met with Lupo behind closed doors — and away from prying Sidereal eyes — for three days, where they worked out their differences and rediscovered their former relationship. No record remains of that meeting, and neither Sidereal will discuss what happened. The only information is that Ayesha left the meeting with a slight limp and Lupo with cuts around his face and neck.

Lupo remains Ayesha's right-hand-man, serving as both her conscience and her advisor. Although they are the closest of friends, Lupo still stands against her decisions in meetings more often than not. Having been raised in the care of the Gold Faction and not newly (re)come to it, as Ayesha has been, Lupo retains the memories of the haughty and dangerous attitude of the Solars that brought the First Age to its knees. While supporting the actions of the Cult of the Illuminated, he disagrees strongly with the

EVERPRESENT DAWN

Nature: Follower

Attributes: Strength 3 (*Phoenix* 5), Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3 (*Phoenix* 2), Appearance 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 3 (*Phoenix* 2), Wits 3

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 5, Valor 4

Abilities: Awareness 3, Dodge 5, Linguistics 3, Lore 4, (*Phoenix* — Melee 4), Occult 4, Presence 4

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Artifact 3, Backing (Gold Faction) 2, Cult 2, Influence 2

Charms: Affinity Element Control, Hurry Home, Ignite, Landscape Travel, Portal, Sense Domain, Terrible Visage (*Phoenix Only*) Tracking, Will-o-Wisp

Elemental Powers: Coarse Skin, Dragon's Suspire, Enshroud, Immolation

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Claw Swoop: Speed 9 Accuracy 10 Damage 12L Defense 16

Sword (*Phoenix*): Speed 15 Accuracy 14 Damage 16L Defense 22

Arc of Flame: Speed 16 Accuracy 9 Damage 18L (Rate 1, Range 10*)

* No range increments. Ten yards is maximum range.

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 4L/3B

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 4 **Essence Pool:** 94

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Claw Swoop: Speed 12 Accuracy 12 Damage 12L Defense 16 Rate 3

Sword (*Phoenix*): Speed 16 Accuracy 14 Damage 16L Defense 18 Rate 6

Dodge Pool: 12

concept of putting the Solars on a pedestal as the illuminated and shining children of the gods. He feels that placing the Solars in this light will lead to the same problems that lead to the Usurpation in the first place.

Ayesha has listened to Lupo, keeping the Solars in the dark where it suits her to have them dependent on Sidereal knowledge. She is secure in her belief that they will be able to control the Solars this time, but Lupo continues to argue with her. When he has contact with the Solars, which isn't



very often, he does his best to humble them, focusing on the work they have yet to do and the Charms they have yet to learn. He will rarely praise a Solar for her abilities, trying instead to subtly turn the focus from their incredible power to the role they are destined to play as the servants of Creation. A good ruler, Lupo is known to often say, is ultimately a servant of her people.

Lupo is the foremost martial artist in the Gold Faction, a master of both the Solar Tiger and Ebon Shadow Styles and the Sidereal Prismatic Arrangement of Creation Style. He mainly instructs other Sidereals in martial arts so they can teach the Solars. He has a few Solar students, but Ayesha Ura attempts to keep him from influencing too many. She cannot keep a leash on the Chosen of the Maiden of Secrets, however, and he has managed to influence several of his students not only in martial arts, but also in their perceived role both in the Cult and in Creation.

Although he does not discuss his work within the Bureau of Destiny with anyone, even Ayesha Ura, Lupo faces the unique challenge of trying to discern the truths behind the Deathlords and the deathknights and their connection with the Solars. As such, he is one of the foremost proponents of recruiting deathknights into the Cult, hoping to gain some information on the Deathlords. In his time away from the Cult, he researches shadowlands, especially Thorns, and is currently petitioning for an audience with the Mask of Winters.

Although many have suggested that Lupo and Ayesha Ura are lovers, no one is sure. The truth is that they are, and their lovemaking sessions are as powerful as their arguments. Both know that they can use the affections others have for them to best suit the Cult, however, so they keep their own relationship secret. Both are allowed other lovers if it would ultimately serve the Cult.

Caste: Secrets

Nature: Architect

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 6, Wits 4

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

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 4, Endurance 3, Investigation 5, Larceny 3, Linguistics 2, Lore 4, Martial Arts 6, Medicine 3, Melee 3, Occult 2, Presence 5, Socialize 3, Stealth 6, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Artifact 2, Backing (Gold Faction) 3, Celestial Manse 3, Connections (The Cult of the Illuminated) 5, Salary 3

Colleges: The Guardians 1, The Key 3, The Mask 1, The Treasure Trove 2

Charms: Absence, Adopting the Untamed Face, Angry Predator Frenzy Style, Aspect of Air Dragon-Blooded Ways, Astrology Interruption Method, Auspicious Prospects for

Endings, Auspicious Prospects for Fate, Auspicious Prospects for Journeys, Avoidance Kata, Avoiding the Truth Technique, Becoming the Wilderness, Blade of the Battle Maiden, Blinding the Boar, Blow-Concealing Gesture Technique, Cash and Murder Games, Ceasing to Exist Approach, Celestial Tiger Hide, Changing Moon Lunar Exalt Ways, Charm Redirection Technique, Conclusion-Pursuing Approach, Creation Smuggling Procedure, Crimson Leaping Cat Technique, Dawn Solar Exalt Ways, Deadly Starmetal Offensive, Death-Parrying Stroke, Demesne and Manse Form, Demesne Emulation Practice, Demon-Blocking Battle Pattern, Distracting Finger-Gesture Attack, Duck Fate, Ebon Shadow Form, Efficient Secretary Technique, Elusive Flicker Evasion, Five Jade Fury, Flickering Moonsilver Approach, Flight of Mercury, Forgotten Earth, Four Magical Materials Form, Games of Divinity Form, God Ways, Icy Hand, Image of Death Technique, Joy in Adversity Stance, Leap From Cloaking Shadows Attack, Life-Severing Blow, Limb-Immobilizing Method, Mark of Exaltation, Marvelous Inclusion of Details, Metal Storm, The Methodology of Secrets, Night Solar Exalt Ways, No Moon Lunar Exalt Ways, Of Secrets Yet Untold, Of the Shape of the World, Of Things Desired and Feared, Of Truths Best Unspoken, Orichalcum Sheathing Stance, Ox-Body Technique (x3), Paralyzing Touch Attack, Predestined Triumph Practice, Presence in Absence Technique, Prior Warning, Prismatic Arrangement of Creation Form, Raging Tiger Pounce, Secrets of Future Strife, Sequential Charm Disruption, Seven Points of Weakness Strike, Shadow Body Style, Shadow-Stepping Motion, Shun the Smiling Lady, Sidereal Shell Games, Sky and Rain Mantra, Soft Presence Practice, Soul Fire Shaper Form, Spell-Shattering Palm, Spine Shattering Bite, Stalking Cat Movement Meditation, Striking Fury Claws Attack, Subordinate Inspiration Technique, Systematic Understanding of Everything, Terminate Illness, Tiger Form, Violet Bier of Sorrows Form, Walking Outside Fate, Wall Climbing Technique, You and Yours Stance, Zenith Solar Exalt Ways

Combos:

Powerless Enemy (Cost: 17 motes + mote cost of Charms, 2 Willpower): Sequential Charm Disruption, Spell-Shattering Palm — *Several centuries ago, Lupo shattered a Charm used by a Terrestrial sorcerer. The Dragon-Blooded then countered with a spell for which Lupo was not ready, and the sorcerer escaped. Determined not to let that happen again, Lupo developed Powerless Enemy, allowing him to disentangle the threads of fate. One strike from his hand halts both spells and Charms, leaving the target disoriented for one turn.*

Tiger's Ultimate Rage (Cost: 7 motes, 1 Willpower): Leap From Cloaking Shadows Attack, Striking Fury Claws Attack — *Like a cat, Lupo will sometimes stalk his prey, hiding in shadows until he wishes himself to be known. If he remains unknown to his target, his eyes begin to shine yellow, and he leaps forward, fingers outstretched and teeth bared. When he*

attacks with his anima-enhanced tiger claws, Lupo is completely taken by the tiger. His opponent is unprepared for this, and her lethal and bashing soak scores are halved before the raw damage is applied.

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 4B Defense 10

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 9

Starmetal Serpent-Sting Staff (Stern Sifu): Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 9L Defense 13

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 3L/6B

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 6

Personal Essence: 20 **Peripheral Essence:** 53 (58)

Committed Essence: 5

Other Notes: Lupo has no dots in Acquaintances, and most will forget him after meeting him. He does tend to leave a mark, however, and many Exalted, especially Solars, will have a vaguely disquieting feeling after speaking with him. His students have learned not to question their sifu on any matter and are among the most humble of all Solars in the Cult.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 11 Damage 4B Defense 12 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 11 Damage 7B Defense 7 Rate 3

Starmetal Serpent-Sting Staff (Stern Sifu): Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 11L Defense 13 Rate 4

Dodge Pool: 14

KAI

Description: Kai is an enigma, even to his sibling Sidereals. Chosen of the Maiden of Endings and only 350 years old, this young savant appears to have lost a good part of his sanity during his training. He wraps himself in yards of white silk and speaks in a high, sharp voice, and few can comprehend his prophesies.

When he was newly Exalted, Kai was given to the Second Smile, a servant of the Maiden of Endings, for introduction to the Violet Bier of Sorrows. Some say this exuberant young Exalt offended the millennia-old demigod, some say he was not informed fully of the dangers within the halls, but everyone agrees that Kai must have laid eyes upon some forbidden scrolls. Whether he meant to or not, the ramifications of this information overloaded the poor man's brain.

All his fellow Sidereals know for sure is that he was ensconced in the Violet Bier of Sorrows for longer than most newly Exalted Sidereals (they suspect some sort of punishment was given for his transgression) and that he emerged halfway to insanity and wholly dedicated to the Gold Faction's cause. Kai does not allow Bronze Faction Exalts to even speak of their cause to his ears. On good

days, he will simply walk away, while on bad days, he will begin screaming, high pitched and incessantly, until the offender leaves.

He does not speak of what happened to him within the Violet Bier of Sorrows. Many Sidereal burn with curiosity of what knowledge he attained, as he is more dedicated to the Solars' return to power than even Ayesha Ura. However, none of them are willing to sacrifice their sanity — or test the wrath of the Maiden of Endings — to find out if his zealousness comes from his madness or from some information he received during his transgression. Even other Chosen of Endings know nothing, or refuse to speak of it.

Kai is gentle and friendly to newly met people. Although he is young for a Sidereal, the trials he has already endured have changed his appearance to that of an old man. He reminds people of a kindly older grandfather when he manages to stick in their minds at all. Among friends, his mood swings are more violent, going from heartfelt thanks to offended rage and from hysterical tears to serious intelligence in the flash of a moment.

This Chosen of Endings maintains his job at the Violet Bier of Sorrows as one who monitors the necropoli of Creation. He watches to make sure the correct corpses are burned, buried or dropped at sea. He has his finger on which are to be looted for treasure and which must be buried with their secrets. He also works with Sidereals in the Forbidding Manse of Ivy to monitor that the proper grave goods are buried with the proper body. On a personal level, he despises graverobbers and others who cheat the dying and dead and has been known to personally attend to the tangles that involve shady funereal practices, regardless of necessity.

Kai has a humble apartment in Sijan, as he spends a good deal of time there. He gives all of his salary to the Cult of the Illuminated, keeping no dwelling or Manse in Yu-Shan and preferring a private room within the Cult headquarters in the Scavenger Lands when he is in the area. Although his Chosen of Serenity sisters have tried to provide him with amorous distraction, Kai remains chaste for reasons unknown. In truth, the man is terrified of the intimate touch of others, which is why he keeps himself swaddled in silk even in the heat of the South. His mood swings do seem to lessen when he returns from Yu-Shan, as if visiting his Maiden's House gives him a thimble of sanity back. This strikes some as odd, since it was in his Maiden's House that he lost his mind.

Kai remains on good terms with Yu-Shan and has never been convicted of any offenses toward Heaven. Some of his fellow Chosen of Endings have chastised him for his hands-on approach in some situations, but he has yet to make a glaring mistake requiring censure. He is looked upon with either awe or bewilderment, as he carries the mantle of Saturn more seriously than most of his fellow Chosen.



Even through his madness and his idiosyncrasies, Kai is a powerful tool of the Cult. When he is called upon to recruit a Solar, he achieves a focus that nearly seems sane. While some Solars have rejected the Cult's offers when others are used to approach them, Kai has never lost an Exalt. He manages to convince them of the rightness of the cause, the power of the Cult and the future glories they are sure to achieve if they connect themselves with it.

Caste: Endings

Nature: Survivor

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 1, Valor 4

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 2, Craft (Fate) 3, Dodge 3, Endurance 5, Linguistics (Native: Low Realm; Old Realm) 1, Lore 3, Martial Arts 5, Medicine 4, Occult 4, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Ride 4, Socialize 3, Stealth 4, Thrown 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Acquaintances 1, Backing (Gold Faction) 4, Connections 3, Contacts 1, Mentor 1, Salary 1, Savant 3

Colleges: The Corpse 3, The Haywain 2, The Rising Smoke 2

Charms: Absence, Avoiding the Truth Technique, Burn Life, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Citrine Poxes of Contagion Form, Conclusive Wisdom, Convulsive Displacement Infectious Atemi, Crushing Claw Technique, Disjointed Essence Infectious Atemi, Duck Fate, Essence-Disrupting Infectious Atemi, Expected Pain, Feverish Essence Discharge Atemi, Flare of Invulnerability Method, Flying Mantis Kick, Forgotten Earth, Grasping Claw Method, Grasping Mantis Defense, Heroic Essence Replenishment, Hungry Touch, Impose Nature, Inevitable Pursuit, Inexorable Advance, Inner Dragon Unbinding, Iron-Arm Block, Joint-Breaking Attack, Joint-Locking Technique, Leaping Mantis Technique, Mantis Form, Ox-Body Technique (x5), Peaceable Conclusion, Perfect Reconstruction Method, Predestined Triumph Practice, Prior Warning, Shield of Mars, Smooth Transition, Spirit and Body Purification Touch, Supernal Awareness, Terminate Illness, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Unfolding Retribution Stance, Wise Choice

Spells: Assassin's Fatal Touch, Demon of the First Circle, Flight of Separation, Lesser Golem, Malediction of the Distorted Compass, Silent Words of Dreams and Nightmares, Stormwind Rider, The Spy Who Walks in Darkness, Theft of Memory

Combos:

Flaming Meteor (Cost: 1 mote, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per target reduction): Forgotten Earth, Hungry Touch — Kai does not believe in doing something without doing it well, especially when it comes to the destruction of something. He

launches himself into the air, landing his flying punch on the object he intends to destroy. Falling toward his target subtracts an additional 2 from the target number of the Willpower roll to boost his Strength + Athletics.

Liquid Mantis Deception (Cost: 6 motes, 1 Willpower): Grasping Claw Method, Iron-Arm Block — Kai knows that many opponents are useless without their weapons. When an opponent moves to strike him, he parries with the Iron-Arm Block, but if his hands come into contact with the opponent's weapon, he snatches it out of her hands by adding his Martial Arts score to both efforts.

Refused Punishment (Cost: 9 motes, 1 Willpower): Expected Pain, Wise Choice — Kai performs this Combo frequently during his travels. As he walks, his feet leave traces of Essence behind him. These footprints sink into the Earth and travel to the Loom, looking at all of his expected paths and what kind of pain they will bring. He immediately knows the proper course to take to avoid the worst.

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 3B Defense 9

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 5B Defense 8

Seven-Section Staff: Speed 11 Accuracy 7 Damage 5L Defense 11

Dodge Pool: 7/6 **Soak:** 9L/14B (Starmetal reinforced buff jacket, 7L/10B)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 6

Personal Essence: 19 **Peripheral Essence:** 50 (53)

Committed Essence: 3

Other Notes: Kai is wholly devoted to the Gold Faction cause. If he is met with a dissenting argument, he will scream at a high pitch for a full minute, lowering the Awareness of everyone around him by one dot. He will not attack without provocation, but he will respond with violence if someone tries to physically silence him.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 3B Defense 11 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 10 Damage 6B Defense 6 Rate 3

Seven-Section Staff: Speed 10 Accuracy 7 Damage 6L Defense 12 Rate 2

Dodge Pool: 13/12

ROL

Description: Chosen of the Maiden of Battles, Rol monitors the movements of the Realm's forces — especially those of the Immaculate Order — in regards to Cult interests. He travels throughout the Realm and the Threshold but prefers to station himself in the Scavenger Lands when he can.

Trained extensively in all methods of battle, he leaves the martial arts and more subtle forms to other Sidereals,

preferring to meet his opponents on the battlefield instead of in a dark room. This is not to say he is not proficient in martial arts. He just doesn't study them as closely as many of his others. His talents lie elsewhere.

Rol's childhood was guided by the hand of a Bronze Faction Sidereal called Sadness in the Blade. She foresaw that he would be a great general, so she made sure he received war training early on. After his Exaltation, they followed legions at war and studied their movements and what instances turned the tide of battle. They became very close, and it has been forever her shame that he turned from the Bronze way to follow the Gold Faction.

Sadness in the Blade and Rol still keep in touch and even work together frequently in their duties for Heaven. Rol is in charge of monitoring — and sometimes guiding — the troop movements of the eastern part of the Realm. Sadness in the Blade is his superior, watching all armies of the Realm. Tepet's recent defeat was some of Rol's finest work. In his mind, the defeat of one of the 11 Great Houses works toward the Gold Faction's goal of ridding the Realm of the Dragon-Blooded, while the Bronze Faction was pleased that the legions' defeat would strengthen the other houses in their drive for the Scarlet Throne. His careful manipulation of the Tepet troops earned him a raise and commendation for his work within the Crimson Panoply of Victory.

Rol's Bureau of Destiny job has him spending a good deal of time in the Realm, which fits his responsibilities regarding the Cult of the Illuminated quite well. Rol watches the Realm for new Solars, knowing those who Exalt on the Immaculate Order's doorstep are in a great deal more danger than those who Exalt in the Threshold.

Rol feels the mantle of his many responsibilities weigh lightly on his shoulders, and he relishes more than anything the feel of his daiklave in battle. Some Solars have expressed interest in following him on his duties in the Realm and the Threshold, hoping to learn from him, and he has readily taken them on. The Inner Circle Solar Glimmering Horizon shows much promise in the martial arts, but her obsession with the healing arts is too strong for her to become a true warrior in Rol's eyes. Even he does not realize that he cares for her deeply and wishes her to love battle as much as he.

Caste: Battles

Nature: Bravo

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 1, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 5, Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 2, Craft (Fate) 4, Dodge 5, Endurance 5, Linguistics (Native: Skytongue; Old Realm) 1, Lore 3,

Martial Arts 4, Melee 5, Occult 2, Presence 5, Resistance 4, Ride 4, Socialize 1, Stealth 1, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Acquaintances 1, Artifact 5, Backing (Gold Faction) 2, Celestial Manse 2, Connections (Cult of Illuminated) 3, Familiar 4, Salary 4

Colleges: The Banner 2, The Gauntlet 3, The Shield 2

Charms: Absence, Adopting the Untamed Face, Any Direction Arrow, Avoidance Kata, Becoming the Wilderness, Blade of the Battle Maiden, Crimson Palm Counterstrike, Demon-Blocking Battle Pattern, Dreaming the Wild Lands, Duck Fate, Easily Accepted Proposition Stance, Every Direction Arrow, Flight of Mercury, Forgotten Earth, Forward-Thinking Technique, Generalized Ammunition Technique, Glory Path, Godly Companion, Harmony of Blows, Horrific Wreath, Impending the Flow, Inexorable Advance, Joy in Adversity Stance, Meditation on War, Neighborhood Relocation Scheme, Opportune Shot, Optimistic Security Practice, Orchestration of Conflict, Ordained Bridle of Mercury, Ox-Body Technique (x5), Perfection of the Visionary Warrior, Predestined Triumph Practice, Prior Warning, Red Haze, Secrets of Future Strife, Serenity in Blood, Shield of Mars, Sky and Rain Mantra, Sky Spirit Demand, Smiling at the Damned, Someone Else's Destiny, Spirit-Shape Companion, Storm's Eye Stance, Tolerant Strife, Trouble Reduction Strategy, Unobstructed Blow, Unswerving Juggernaut Principle, Violet Bier of Sorrows Form, Water and Fire Legion, Yellow Path

Combos:

Master of the Seventh Temple (Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower +1 mote per die + 1 mote per dice pool penalty cancelled): Meditation on War, Smiling at the Damned — *The Chosen of the Maiden of Battles understand that the passion that often aids them in battle can have repercussions. It is sometimes beneficial to remain calm and focused. Thus, Rol has developed the Master of the Seventh Temple. Once he has calmed his heart and mind, he is able to add dice to his pool to make his attack half raw damage, but the damage is aggravated.*

Perfect Strike (Cost 10 motes, 1 Willpower): Crimson Palm Counterstrike, Unobstructed Blow — *During battle, Rol can achieve a battle aura that is truly awe-inspiring for even other Sidereals to see. Sometimes, his battle rage will inspire him such that he will drop his daiklave, feeling his opponent not worthy enough to sully the fine blade. He will wait for the opponent to attack, and then, he will pour his Essence through his fist, making it glow with a red haze. He can then make a Brawl attack that cannot be blocked. This attack will knock the enemy out of position.*

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 10/9 Damage 5B Defense 10/9

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 9/8 Damage 7B Defense 9/8

Starmetal Grand Daiklave (Triumph): Speed 6 Accuracy 12 Damage 18L Defense 10

Starmetal Smashfist (Unconditional Surrender): Speed 12 Accuracy 11/10 Damage 8L Defense 11/10



Dodge Pool: 10 **Soak:** 14L/19B (Starmetal articulated plate, 12L/14B)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5

Personal Essence: 18 **Peripheral Essence:** 31 (50)

Committed Essence: 19

Other Notes: Rol's familiar is Ferocious Promise, a lion dog. He discovered the beast guarding a looted Solar grave, dying from the attacks of a Lunar and her barbarian horde. Rol commanded it to follow him, stating that its contract with the long-dead Solar was up since there was likely nothing left in the grave worth guarding. The lion dog growled and mustered up the energy to attack him. Rol laughed and slapped the beast aside with the flat of his daiklave. He nursed the lion dog back to health, and Ferocious Promise has been dedicated to protecting the Sidereal ever since. Ferocious Promise did not resent the test he had undergone, as he knew only a worthy lion dog could serve the mighty Chosen of the Maiden of Battles.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 11/10 Damage 5B Defense 12/11 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 11/10 Damage 8B Defense 7/6 Rate 3

Starmetal Grand Daiklave (Triumph): Speed 19 Accuracy 12 Damage 19L Defense 9 Rate 3

Starmetal Smashfist (Unconditional Surrender): Speed 6 Accuracy 11 Damage 10L Defense 13 Rate 7

Dodge Pool: 15

Hardness: 3

SAPPHIRE SPARROW

Description: Sapphire Sparrow is a woman who makes Lupo look like a loquacious courtier. Upon first glance, she looks as if she'd rather be knitting by a fireside rather than weaving the destinies of the world in the midst of a heated meeting with the most powerful beings in Creation. It her mission to gather, store and maintain the secrets of the Inner Circle.

Like Ayesha Ura, she spent her first centuries of life under the tutelage of Chejop Kejak and the Bronze Faction. She watched and learned, taking everything in that she could. She spoke up infrequently, preferring to be an observer in times of conflict. She processed information and gave no opinions.

After learning all she thought she could from the Bronze Faction, she declared herself rogue to the shock of all around her. She wished to see the Bronze and Gold Factions from a neutral point and would answer no further questions regarding her allegiance. This move hurt her political standing in Yu-Shan, but she felt it was what she

had to do. When the Solars began returning, she joined the Gold Faction to gain the third point of view.

Although the Bronze Faction calls her — and all defectors — traitor, Sapphire Sparrow is careful not to reveal any secrets she learned during her time with it, or her time as a rogue. She gives any new information she sees fit to Ayesha Ura, but the old secrets stay with her. This both irritates and gratifies Ayesha Ura because she knows Sapphire Sparrow will not give away the Gold Faction's secrets when she moves on. And she fully expects the Chosen of the Maiden of Secrets to move on at some point; there is still one point of view Sapphire Sparrow hasn't experienced yet: that of the ronin Sidereal.

During her time as a rogue, Sapphire Sparrow traveled the Realm and even studied the undead in the city of Thorns. There, she began learning necromancy, although she has only enough information to protect herself from necromantic attack. She prefers to use sorcery and Charms to free herself from a bad situation, only drawing her powerbow when there is no other choice.

FEROCIOUS PROMISE

Nature: Bravo

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Dodge 5, Endurance 3, Investigation 3, Linguistics 3, Lore 3, Occult 1, Resistance 3, Socialize 2, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing (Gold Faction) 3

Charms: Camouflage, Essence Bite, Materialize, Spirit-Cutting, Tracking, Words of Power

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Bite: Speed 11 Accuracy 13 Damage 14L

Dodge Pool: 9 **Soak:** 15L/20B (Jade hide, 12L/14B)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3

Essence Pool: 73

Other Notes: Ferocious Promise will not leave Rol's side at any time, except when commanded. Even then, he refuses to go farther than 100 feet. Unless Rol betrays the lion dog, he will remain faithful until death parts them.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Bite: Speed 10 Accuracy 12 Damage 14L Defense 10 Rate 4

Dodge Pool: 12



翡翠

This Chosen of Jupiter is found during most Inner Circle meetings sitting in the corner, weaving. Only Lupo can understand her intricate patterns as a code, and even he cannot fathom the key to breaking it. Sapphire Sparrow serves as the Cult of the Illuminated's librarian and scribe, keeping impeccable track of who within the Cult is controlled by Charms and sorcery and when it is time to renew said effects. She keeps the books as well, knowing which cell isn't producing as much as it should, which god's monthly or yearly payment is set to arrive and who in Yu-Shan is due a bribe.

Within Yu-Shan, Sapphire Sparrow tracks assassination squads and who hires them. She works alongside a young Bronze Faction Sidereal who is a Chosen of Saturn and who constantly reminds her that her betrayal of the Bronze was what caused her demotion to work alongside him. As always, she speaks little, rises to no bait and remembers everything.

Sapphire Sparrow is a virgin, even after all of these years. This secret is the one she guards most closely, as she is sure she would be a target of seduction if a Chosen of Venus colleague discovered this information. She carefully guards her emotions, and few have approached her for physical pleasures in her life.

Caste: Secrets

Nature: Traditionalist

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 4


Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 3, Temperance 5, Valor 2

Abilities: Archery 5, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 3, Craft (Fate) 5, Dodge 4, Endurance 3, Investigation 4, Larceny 3, Linguistics (Native: Seatongue: High Realm, Low Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 4, Lore 5, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 4, Occult 5, Performance 5, Presence 4, Ride 2, Socialize 5, Stealth 4, Survival 3, Thrown 1

Backgrounds: Artifact 2, Backing (Gold Faction) 3, Celestial Manse 3, Connections (The Bureau of Destiny) 3, Connections (The Cult of Illuminated) 3, Salary 3

Colleges: The Mask 2, The Treasure Trove 2

Charms: Absence, Adopting the Untamed Face, Any Direction Arrow, Auspicious Prospects for Secrets, Avoidance Kata, Avoiding the Truth Technique, Becoming the Wilderness, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Creation Smuggling Procedure, Destiny-Knitting Entanglement, Duck Fate, Efficient Secretary Technique, Elegant Patterns of Fate, Elemental Vision, Embracing Life Method, Every Direction Arrow, Excellent Implementation of Objectives, Favorable Inflection Procedure, Five Seasons Approach, Generalized Ammunition Technique, Ice and Fire Binding, Incite Decorum, Innocuous Maneuver, Invocation of the Storm-Following Silence, Many Missiles Bow Technique,



Mark of Exaltation, Marvelous Inclusion of Detail, Mending Warped Designs, The Methodology of Secrets, Name Pilfering Practices, Of Horrors Best Unknown, Of Secrets Yet Untold, Of the Shape of the World, Of Things Desired and Feared, Of Truths Best Unspoken, Opportune Shot, Ox-Body Technique (x3), Peaceable Conclusion, Prior Warning, Research Assistant Invocation, Shadowlands Circle Necromancy, Shun the Smiling Lady, Sidereal Shell Games, Slick Essence Replenishment, Smooth Transition, Soft Presence Practice, Stern Essence Replenishment, Systematic Understanding of Everything, Tell-Tale Symphony, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Trouble Reduction Strategy, Underling Invisibility Practice, Unweaving Method, Wise Choice, World-Shaping Artistic Vision

Spells: The Crumbling Walls, Demon of the First Circle, Demon of the Second Circle, Droning Suggestion, Emerald Countermagic, Hideous Confusion of Tongues, Holding the Gate, Infallible Messenger, Invulnerable Skin of Bronze, Iron Countermagic, Magma Kraken, Malediction of the Distorted Compass, Open the Spirit Door, The Sacred Tongue, Sapphire Countermagic, Shade Prison Amulet, Summon Spirit Boat, Summoning the Heavenly Portal, Theft of Memory, Threefold Binding of the Heart, Unity of Dreams, Venom of the Heart, Virtuous Guardian of Flame, Voice of Distant Command, Voices of Distant Regard, Wheel of the Turning Heavens, Written Upon the Water

Combos:

Hide a Lie Within the Truth (Cost: 8 motes, 2 Willpower): Avoiding the Truth Technique, Of Secrets Yet Untold — *Sapphire Sparrow doesn't like to give any secrets away, even when she seems to be forced to. She developed this Combo to hide a lie within the truth that she utters when using the Of Secrets Yet Untold Charm. The spirit she summons receives the truth Sapphire Sparrow intends to give, but with one small flaw built into it. The summoned spirit is still required to perform the favor for Sapphire Sparrow, but if her target discovers her lie, then the favor is nulled.*

Winter's Arrows (Cost: 1 mote, 1 Willpower + 2 motes per target number reduction): Five Seasons Approach, Generalized Ammunition Technique — *It took Sapphire Sparrow only one frightening time in her youth where she was caught with an empty quiver to convince her of the power of preparation. Still, when she escaped from the battle she had not anticipated, she developed Winter's Arrows. She is able to take anything remotely resembling ammunition and fire it, reducing the target number of the Archery roll.*

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 7 Damage 2B Defense 7
Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 4B Defense 6
Starmetal Short Powerbow (Hag's Tongue): Speed 9 Accuracy 12 Damage 8L (Rate 2, Range 250)

Dodge Pool: 9 **Soak:** 1L/3B

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5

Personal Essence: 17 **Peripheral Essence:** 49

Committed Essence: 4

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 8 Damage 2B Defense 9 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 5B Defense 4 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 14

ZHEN XUE

Description: Why raise a sword when one can manipulate the world through sorcery, Charms or just a shining smile? Such is the attitude of Zhen Xue, Chosen of the Maiden of Serenity, who enters the Inner Circle and calms others when tempers flare. Her main role with the Cult of the Illuminated is to maintain sorcerous control of the mortal priests. She leaves the control of Shen Aru to the more powerful Ayesha Ura. Zhen Xue's job is to travel between the Cult locations and assess the mortals and Solars she comes across. If there is dissent in the ranks of mortals, she manipulates things to her desires, if there is a problem with a Solar — such as memories of the First Age starting to emerge that paint the Sidereals in a bad light — she performs the Theft of Memory spell to contain things.

In Heaven, Zhen Xue follows the sexual paradoxes, casualty crises and unexpected births in high-ranking nobles in Creation, making sure the people who require early deflowering achieve it, while others remain chaste until married in order to suit destiny. Although others mock her division as “the Whorehouse of Heaven,” she considers making sure that the right nobles are born and the wrong seeds do not take hold as one of the most important jobs in Yu-Shan. In fact, she is secretly convinced that the Scarlet Empress was a seed who should not have taken hold, but she has no proof of this. She thinks that Bronze Faction Sidereals had her job in those days, making sure of the Empress' birth to suit their own needs. Granted, the Sidereals had no foreknowledge of the Great Contagion or the armies that would fight, but that didn't mean the Bronze Faction didn't try to bring a great general into Creation regardless.

In public, Zhen Xue is gracious to all, to a point where some younger Bronze Faction Sidereals think she could be turned to their side. She is happy to let them try to convince her, but she learned long ago that she can't get anything out of them using her skills. Most Sidereals are too wise to the weapons of Venus to fall for that, but it doesn't mean she doesn't enjoy the dance. Secretly, she despises the Bronze Faction and works against their measures — whether it conflicts with the Gold Faction or not — when she can.

Within the Inner Circle, Zhen Xue sponsors Summer's Gale, the God-Blood who also serves his mother's master, Green Frowning Bear. Zhen Xue shared his bed briefly, but she realized the love he had for Rising River before even he discovered it. The Sidereal encouraged the two to fulfill their love and keep the information from their powerful parents and sponsors. She hopes that any children that come from this union will also serve the Cult. Although Zhen Xue shares her bed with several Sidereals and Solars within the Cult, she has made it a personal crusade to break through the thick walls Kai has raised around him, but her frequent efforts to seduce him have been met with outright fear.

Zhen Xue has very pale skin and white hair and keeps her body covered in clinging silk and veils to protect her from the Southern sun. But while Kai swaddles himself thickly to disguise his shape and keep others away, Zhen Xue's masterful outfit does more to attract others than outright nudity would.

Caste: Serenity

Nature: Conniver

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

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

Abilities: Archery 5, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 2, Craft (Fate) 3, Dodge 4, Endurance 3, Investigation 1, Linguistics (Native: Skytongue; Forest-tongue, High Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 4, Lore 3, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 4, Occult 5, Performance 5, Presence 4, Ride 2, Socialize 5, Stealth 1

Backgrounds: Acquaintances 2, Artifact 3, Backing (Gold Faction) 3, Connections (Cult of Illuminated) 2, Familiar 3, Salary 3

Colleges: The Lovers 1, The Peacock 3, The Pillar 3

Charms: Absence, Any Direction Arrow, Avoiding the Truth Technique, Blue Vervain Binding, Cash and Murder Games, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Compassionate Essence Replenishment, Defense of Shining Joy, Destiny-Knitting Entanglement, Duck Fate, Efficient Secretary Technique, Every Direction Arrow, Faultless Ceremony, Favorable Inflection Procedure, Five Seasons Approach, Force Decision, Generalized Ammunition Technique, Harmonic Completion, Heart-Brightening Presentation Style, Heroic Essence Replenishment, Hot-Eyed Snake Whispering, Ice and Fire Binding, Impose Nature, Life Without Compunction, Lover's Oath, Many Missiles Bow Technique, Opportune Shot, Ox-Body Technique (x3), Perfection in Life, Prior Warning, Shun the Smiling Lady, Smooth Transition, Soft Presence Practice, Song of Spirit Persuasion, Stern Essence Replenishment, Terminate Illness, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Trouble Reduction Strategy, Wanting and Fearing Prayer, Wise Choice, World-Shaping Artistic Vision, You and Yours Stance

Spells: Burning Eyes of the Offender, Corrupted Words, Curse of Betrayal, Demon of the First Circle, Disguise of the New Face, Gift of Knowledge, Hideous Confusion of Tongues, Infallible Messenger, Ivory Orchid Pavilion, Summon Spirit Boat, Swift Spirit of Winged Transportation, Theft of Memory, Threefold Binding of the Heart, Unity of Dreams, Venus' Disfavor, Voice of Distant Command

Combos:

Heart's Rage (Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower + 3 motes per extra arrow + 2 motes per target number reduction): Every Direction Arrow, Five Seasons Approach, Opportune Shot — *Even someone as perfectly polite and inspiring of no hostility as the Chosen of Venus can require a hand-up in battle. When Zhen Xue focuses her Essence into her bow, she releases a flurry of arrows that can hit multiple targets before any of her enemies has had a chance to react.*

You Didn't Mean That (Cost: 10 motes, 2 Willpower + 1 mote per target number reduction): Cash and Murder Games, Hot-Eyed Snake Whispering — *Although Zhen Xue is better versed in societal etiquette than most, she can still find herself losing an audience if the pressure is high. When this happens, she straightens her back, lifts her chin and focuses her audience on the glory of her sexuality. They are unable to follow any coherent thought and can only think to please her.*

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 4B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 6B Defense 5

Starmetal Long Powerbow (Cupid's Dart): Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 11L (Rate 2, Range 350)

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 1L/3B

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5

Personal Essence: 18 **Peripheral Essence:** 43 (50)

Committed Essence: 7

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 7 Damage 4B Defense 9 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 7B Defense 3 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 13

SOLARS

The Solars in the Inner Circle are privy to much information. They see more of the true power of the Sidereals, they understand how far-reaching the Cult of the Illuminated is, and they know how far its ambitions mean to take it. They are each dedicated to their sponsor and mentor, knowing that allying themselves with a member of the Inner Circle is a path to powers they'd never achieve on their own.



Still, these Solars are still kept in the dark on many issues, the foremost being the truth of the Solar Purge, and only slightly behind that being how they are controlled by Sidereal magic when needed. Thus far, no Solar has broken the Sidereal control to discover their meddling.

KRINSTET ORR

Description: Krinstet Orr Exalted late in life. He is a massive, burly older man who had already done his tour for the Realm's forces, serving in the Third Legion and losing a hand at the battle of Mishaka in the East. After his maiming, he settled in Great Forks and set up a successful weapon smithy. He tried not to lose himself in the local hedonism of drugs, but as his misery deepened due to his handicap, he fell into a drunken stupor more often than not.

He stayed as true to his work as he was able, however, and managed to become well known for his skill. He Exalted when a customer, a traveling outcaste, refused to pay for his excellent work on an iron great sword for use against the Fair Folk. The Dragon-Blood had assumed Krinstet would be easily intimidated, as he was well known as a drunkard, but Krinstet had exhibited more bravery in battle than many Dragon-Blooded and knew his sword was the best mortal hands could make. When the outcaste swung the weapon in question at him, intending on severing his other arm, Krinstet slapped the blade aside, shattering the weapon. He leveled the outcaste with a punch and stumbled from his shop, anima blazing.

It was his luck that the Cult of the Illuminated was ahead of the Wyld Hunt because Krinstet decided to deal with this new phase of his life by getting drunk. The Sidereals smuggled him to Nexus for processing. He dealt with his induction into the Cult badly, finding the diet — mainly the prohibition of alcohol — did not agree with him. But once he managed to purify his body, he joined readily, seeing it as a new start for himself. Here were people that needed his weapons and could teach him Charms so he might make them even better.

Krinstet spent two years studying with the others of his caste, learning what ways of the First Age remained for the Cult to study on the creation of fine magical artifacts. He is a tireless worker, and after his second Calibration remaining clean of alcohol, the Gold Faction gifted him with a small Manse in which to set up his workshop. He has a Dragon-Blooded apprentice who aids him in the tasks that require two dexterous hands. He doesn't use the weapons he creates, however, still preferring his fist when it comes to fighting.

Krinstet would call himself past his prime, but he will grudgingly admit that the Unconquered Sun would disagree with him. He focuses entirely on the study of First Age technology and spends most of his time in his Manse. He ignores all in the Cult except for those of his caste, the Sidereals who come to check on his work and distribute his goods and his apprentice, Perfect Lotus. He has a crush on



the younger Terrestrial, but he feels she fancies another, and Krinstet Orr would rather lose his other hand than reveal his feelings.

Caste: Twilight

Nature: Bravo

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

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

Abilities: Brawl 5, Craft (Blacksmithing) 5 (Weapon Smithing +2), Endurance 3, Investigation 1, Lore 4, Medicine 3, Melee 3, Occult 3, Resistance 3, Ride 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 2, Backing 2, Mentor 3, Resources 2, Manse 1

Charms: Body-Forging Travail, Body Mending Meditation, Chaos-Resistance Preparation, Crack-Mending Technique, Craftsman Needs No Tools, Dragon Coil Technique, Durability-Enhancing Technique, Ferocious Jab, Fists of Iron Technique, Flawless Handiwork Method, Golden Essence Block, Hammer on Iron Technique, Impurity-Hammering Blow, Knockout Blow, Object-Strengthening Touch, Ox-Body Technique (x3), Ox-Stunning Blow, Shattering Grasp, Stability-Confering Establishment, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Thunderclap Rush Attack, World Within a Picture Style

Combos:

A Good Day's Work (Cost: 10 motes, 2 Willpower, 1 health level + 3 motes per success): Crack-Mending Technique, Flawless Handiwork Method — *Krinstet Orr is a weapon smith first and foremost. His pride is in his work, and one*

of the things he hates is seeing shoddy craftsmanship. With this Combo, he takes a broken item and rebuilds it. After being rebuilt, the object has the same excellent craftsmanship as if Krinstet had made it himself with the Flawless Handiwork Method.

Hammer and Anvil (Cost: 5 motes, 2 Willpower): Fist of Iron Technique, Hammer on Iron Technique — Krinstet Orr took his love for his tools and formed a Combo under their inspiration. For one action, his fist fills with Essence, becoming akin to his hammer. He will then do lethal damage for a number of attacks equal to his Essence.

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 5B Defense 7

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 6 Damage 7B Defense 6

Dodge Pool: 2 **Soak:** 8L/8B (Orichalcum chain shirt, 7L/5B)

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

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 15 **Peripheral Essence:** 33 (36)

Committed Essence: 3

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 5B Defense 9 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 8 Damage 8B Defense 4 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 5

GLIMMERING HORIZON

Description: Glimmering Horizon never wanted to be a fighter. Before her Exaltation, she was a medic who excelled in not only mending her patients' bodies, but also giving them the will to continue fighting. She was working as a healer in Thorns when the city fell to the Mask of Winters, and she opened her humble home to the mortals who had been injured by the undead.

As the gloom of the shadowland encompassed the city, Glimmering Horizon worked endless hours as mortals sought sleeping draughts to banish horrific nightmares as well as good luck charms and protection charms. She tried to tell them that she only healed, that she was no priestess, but found that it helped them and gave them hope to carry placebos. Against her will, she became rather wealthy in dealing in these false hopes, as her "patients" insisted on paying her for her blessings.

The Mask of Winters' deathknights devoured most of the Dragon-Blooded forces who had attempted to defend the city, but some survived. Glimmering Horizon received these and kept them as secret as possible as she attempted to heal them, but the damage received from some of the deathknights' healed slowly. On the dawn of the 40th day after the fall of Thorns, her door shattered from its hinges as the deathknight Weeping Jade entered, demanding the lives of the Dragon-Blooded. Glimmering Horizon faced



Weeping Jade

the deathknight and told her to leave, as her patients were under her protection, but Weeping Jade laughed. She advanced on one of the patients, and Glimmering Horizon Exalted, kicking the daiklave from the deathknight's hands and knocking her out of the door. She turned and laid her hands on the Dragon-Blooded, healing them. They cowered from her shining form, and she ran before they could reach for their weapons.

Knowing that the enmity of the deathknight and her lord would make life in Thorns difficult for her and likely deadly for her patients, Glimmering Horizon left the dead city. Hearing of the Cult of the Illuminated on her travels, she sought out a cell in the Scavenger Lands Cult as a Shining One.

Glimmering Horizon serves the Cult as its chief physician, keeping her hospital within the Scavenger Lands but traveling where she is needed. She toils tirelessly to heal anyone who comes to her for treatment, and she will not turn away any patient. She heals innocents she comes across on her journeys and preaches the mission of the Cult to any she touches. She cares deeply for her patients and feels the pain of every patient she loses. She mourns those that surely died in Thorns after her Exaltation and knows that the deathknight Weeping Jade still pursues her.

Caste: Zenith

Nature: Caregiver

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 5, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 3, Temperance 2, Valor 1



Abilities: Craft (Tailor) 3, Endurance 4, Linguistics (Native: Riverspeak; Forest-tongue, High Realm) 2, Lore 3, Martial Arts 5, Medicine 5, Presence 5, Resistance 3, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 2, Backing (The Cult of the Illuminated) 1, Familiar 3, Influence 1, Mentor 2, Resources 2

Charms: Alcohol-Resisting Prana, Body-Mending Meditation, Flawless Diagnosis Technique, Grievous Injury Recovery Method, Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit, Harmonious Presence Meditation, Hypnotic Tongue Technique, Illness-Resisting Meditation, Listener-Swaying Argument, Ox-Body Technique (x3), Salamander's Touch Technique, Serpentine Evasion, Snake Form, Striking Cobra Technique, Striking Serpent Speed, Touch of Blissful Release, Uncoiling Serpent Prana, Whirlwind Armor-Donning Prana, Wound-Mending Care Technique

Combos:

Snake in the Boot (Cost: 9 motes, 2 Willpower): Striking Serpent Speed, Uncoiling Serpent Prana — *Although Glimmering Horizon would prefer to heal, she knows firsthand that strong attacks are often necessary in this harsh world. In this Combo, her anima hardens and strikes at her opponent as she takes a second action, usually one to help a fallen comrade. She sees her anima strike as a diversion, even though it can do considerable damage.*

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 10 Damage 3B Defense 10

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 9 Damage 5B Defense 9

Seven-Section Staff: Speed 10 Accuracy 8 Damage 5L Defense 12

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 10L/15B (Orichalcum reinforced buff jacket, 9L/12B)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 16 **Peripheral Essence:** 35 (38)

Committed Essence: 3

Other Notes: Glimmering Horizon's familiar is Glint, a small, three-legged cat. Initially meant to be little more than a companion, this cat has stayed by her side since Glimmering Horizon healed its maimed limb. Glint is God-Blooded, a daughter of Nakko, a free-spirited — and indebted — wood elemental who often takes the shape of a cat. She had been injured while running from a demon who had intended to have her father's debt repaid in her black and white pelt. It took her right foreleg and would have taken more had Glimmering Horizon not fought it off.

Glint stays by her mistress' side night and day, watching over her patients as closely as she does. Glint keeps an eye on patients to watch whether they are close to death or not. If a patient is dying and Glimmering Horizon isn't there to attend, Glint alerts her to the situation.

The maimed little cat is dedicated to her mistress, as she knows she would have died had the demon been allowed

GLINT

Nature: Conniver

Heritage: God-Blooded

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Lore 2, Medicine 3, Occult 3, Stealth 5

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Inheritance 1

Merits: Awakened Essence

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Bite: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 1L Defense 8

Claw: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 1L Defense 7

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 1L/2B

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

Essence: 1

Essence Pool: 26

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Bite: Speed 8 Accuracy 7 Damage 1L Defense 4 Rate 1

Claw: Speed 9 Accuracy 8 Damage 1L Defense 6 Rate 4

Dodge Pool: 9

to continue. However, she holds a rather large grudge against it and is scheming for a way to lure it into the proximity of all of the Exalts that surround her, hoping the mighty warriors will take care of what she cannot. She also attempts to encourage her mistress to study the Occult. These are subtle attempts, as she is just a cat, but she shows favor to Exalted who are well-versed in demon-binding and attempts to push books of the Occult to Glimmering Horizon when she is studying medicine.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 11 Damage 3B Defense 12 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 11 Damage 6B Defense 7 Rate 3

Seven-Section Staff: Speed 9 Accuracy 8 Damage 6L Defense 13 Rate 2

Dodge Pool: 8

OTHER NOTABLE CHARACTERS

Although the Inner Circle's power lies in its Sidereal and Solar members, there are several other members without whom the Cult of the Illuminated would stumble. Interested and loyal beings such as God-Blooded and spirits round out the Inner Circle, serving the Gold

Faction while still nursing their own agendas. The figurehead of the entire Cult, the mortal Shen Aru, is also a member, but only in name. He is so tightly controlled by Sidereal magic that he is little more than a puppet.

RISING RIVER

Description: Rising River is the renegade daughter of Ogime (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 57-59). Fakharu, Ogime's rival, thought it would be good fun to trick the Frog Queen into lying with a mortal, so he drugged her and tricked her into bed with the hapless fool. When she awoke the next morning, she slew the man and attempted to find out who had tricked her. Although she suspects Fakharu, she has no proof as he covered his tracks well.

Rising River was born later, as strong and as willful as her mother. Being half human, she did not share her mother's disdain for mortals and grew bored with the spirit courts until a Sidereal Exalt, Kai, approached the court on official business one day. She was entranced by him and followed him as he left. They spoke briefly, and Kai said without preamble to send him a message if she wished to be free of her mother's control.

It was soon after that she sought refuge in the Cult of the Illuminated, desiring to do more with her life than argue within the spirit courts on her tempestuous mother's behalf. Ogime was furious at her daughter's betrayal, but Sidereal magic shielded Rising River's location from her mother's scouts.

Kai and Ayesha Ura found in Rising River a born diplomat, and they invited her to the Inner Circle with the caveat that she would be their liaison with the spirit courts, putting her back out into the world where her mother could find her. Rising River had become dedicated to the Cult's goal in this time, however, and took the risk without a second thought.

Rising River often travels with a Sidereal or Solar guard in case she catches her mother's attention. She has yet to run across Ogime's heketa or the Frog Queen herself, since she has stayed away from the spirit courts of the West, but she knows that, the more often she visits spirit courts, the more likely it is word will return to her mother.

Rising River has done one more thing to earn her mother's wrath: She has taken Summer's Gale for a lover. The uniting of a child of a lesser elemental dragon of water and one of a servant of a lesser elemental dragon of air — not to mention that they are two rather unfriendly lesser elemental dragons — could cause, at best, a slain God-Blood, and, at worst, a war between the elementals. But she loves Summer's Gale and relies on the protection of the Cult to keep her love secret and safe.

Rising River is a thick-bodied, strong woman with slightly blue-green skin and green eyes. She dresses like a wealthy noble but is always armed with several knives hidden on her person.

Heritage: God-Blooded

Nature: Bureaucrat

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 2, Bureaucracy 5, Dodge 3, Investigation 1, Larceny 1, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; High Realm, Riverspeak, Seatongue) 3, Melee 3, Presence 2, Sail 5, Socialize 4, Thrown 4

Backgrounds: Backing 2, Contacts 1, Inheritance 3, Influence 2, Mentor 1

Merits: Awakened Essence

Base Initiative: 6

Attack:

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 3 Damage 2B Defense 3

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 2 Damage 4B Defense 2

Throwing Knife (Melee): Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 3L Defense 4

Throwing Knife (Thrown): Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 4L (Rate 3, Range 15)

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 6L/9B (Reinforced buff jacket 5L/6B)

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

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 32

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 4 Damage 2B Defense 5 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 4 Damage 5B Defense 0 Rate 3

Throwing Knife (Melee): Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 4L Defense 4 Rate 4


Dodge Pool: 8

SUMMER'S GALE

Description: Summer's Gale is the son of Invincible Claw, one of Green Frowning Bear's huraka. Invincible Claw had discovered a mortal traveler, Swift Raiton, lost in the Eastern jungles and became enamored of him. She brought him back to Green Frowning Bear's hidden Manse. The man readily offered all of his belongings to the great wind elemental, impressing Green Frowning Bear with his polite generosity. Swift Raiton dined with the god while the huraka served them, and at the end of the evening, Invincible Claw took the man to her bed. The next morning, Swift Raiton awoke in the middle of the jungle again, wondering if the events had ever happened in the first place.

Soon, Summer's Gale was born to Invincible Claw. His mother gave him to Green Frowning Bear immediately as another loyal servant, and he was raised in the court of the mighty wind god.





When Rol approached Green Frowning Bear with his offer of an alliance, Green Frowning Bear sent Summer's Gale to join the Cult of the Illuminated both to serve the ends of the Sidereal and serve as the eyes and ears of Green Frowning Bear. This was soon after the Solars had returned and the training camps were in their infancy. The Sidereals used Summer's Gale's training as a basis for all the Exalts' training within the camps. He showed complete dedication to the Cult, and after two years, the Sidereals tested him with some preliminary Charms to discover if he was controlled by his other master, Green Frowning Bear. They discovered that Summer's Gale's connection to his master was only one of loyalty, not magic, and initiated him into the Inner Circle. When this happened, Green Frowning Bear was so pleased that he doubled his tribute to the Cult of the Illuminated.

The Inner Circle Sidereals do not fully trust Summer's Gale, however, as they feel his loyalty to his mother's master will divide him in the future. They have placed a geas on him to protect their best interests, so he is not permitted to reveal Inner Circle workings to Green Frowning Bear, although he may inform the elemental about general Cult news and plans.

The geas does provide Summer's Gale with an unexpected boon — it allows him to keep his affair with Rising River hidden from his mother and her master. This knowledge would undoubtedly enrage Green Frowning Bear, and he would likely turn this rage on the Cult. Still, Summer's Gale has found love with the companionship of his fellow God-Blooded and would not give her up for anything.

Summer's Gale is a tall, burly man with slightly green skin and yellow eyes. He has many of his mother's attributes: strength, stamina and a slower-than-normal intelligence. While not stupid, it takes Summer's Gale some time to process information. In some cases, this is a hindrance, as thinking on his feet is a near impossibility, but many consider him wise if he is allowed to think on a situation or an argument before responding. He has been known to sit through a heated Inner Circle discussion and respond with a solution that everyone realizes should have been obvious, had they been paying attention. Summer's Gale is slow to anger — it takes him too long to process that he's been offended — but he thinks a lot faster when it comes to an issue that requires physical solutions rather than a mental one.

Heritage: God-Blooded

Nature: Savant

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

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

Abilities: Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 3, Endurance 5, Melee 3, Occult 3, Presence 5, Resistance 2, Survival 5

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Artifact 2, Backing (The Cult of the Illuminated) 3, Inheritance 2, Mentor 3, Patron 3, Resources 3

Merits: Awakened Essence

Flaws: Elemental Archetype

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Punch: Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 4B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 1 Accuracy 5 Damage 6B Defense 5

Short Jade Daiklave (Cub's Claw): Speed 7 Accuracy 6 Damage 9L Defense 5

Dodge Pool: 1 **Soak:** 6L/6B (Breastplate, 4L/2B)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/

Incap

Essence: 2 **Essence Pool:** 31 (36)

Committed Essence: 5

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 4 Accuracy 7 Damage 4B Defense 8 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 1 Accuracy 7 Damage 7B Defense 3 Rate 3

Short Jade Daiklave (Cub's Claw): Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 8L Defense 5 Rate 6

Dodge Pool: 3

HIRU, LESSER ELEMENTAL DRAGON OF WOOD

Description: Hiru was active during the Usurpation, building extravagant and hidden safehouses in the Far Eastern lands for Solars to hide. When the Bronze Faction and the Dragon-Blooded found his cache of hidden Solars, Hiru fought on the front line with them, but he disappeared when the Solars started to lose the battle. Sidereals, of both the Gold and Bronze Factions, searched for him, but he had hidden himself quite well.

During the next several hundred years, Hiru took the form of a young male merchant with bright green eyes and black hair, selling baskets, furniture, even simple jewelry woven entirely of vines. His intricate weaves brought high prices although few people knew of their true purpose. Hiru had woven a bit of his Essence into each vine so that every piece of merchandise he sold was still attuned to it. Furniture counts as Artifact •••, allowing Hiru to spend 2 motes to listen to whatever is said in the vicinity of the item, jewelry is Artifact ••, allowing Hiru to spend 2 motes to know where the wearer is in all of Creation, and a basket is Artifact •, allowing Hiru to spend 1 mote to discover what is being held in the basket.

As he peddled his wares and sent his spies all over Creation, Hiru searched for signs of the Solar Exalted. After 1,500 years, he was ready to throw in his support with the Bronze Faction. There had been no solid leads on



surviving Solars, and even the Gold Faction was no longer active. Then, the whispers came that the Solars had returned. Knowing the Gold Faction would soon find them, Hiru contacted Kai, whom he had encountered on occasion and informed the Sidereal of his support.

Hiru does not support the Sidereal cause so much as he understands that the Solars are, by far, the strongest Exalted and will eventually rule again. He wants to be known as someone who supported their fight for their rightful place atop Creation. In a fight, he is a coward who will flee a battle if he feels he is losing. It does take some time, however, to convince him he is losing, and he is a strong fighter up to that point. He fights in human form with a bow strung with vine, using Charms. If forced, he will take his full dragon form, a 50-foot-long serpent with green scales and yellow eyes. Hiru will attempt to capture a foe in his coils and constrict them, all the while attacking her with his venomous bite.

Hiru's power lies in the artifacts he has scattered all over Creation, although it requires a successful Intelligence + Lore roll at difficulty 4 for him to discover where a certain piece is. Ayesha Ura knows of his cowardice and doesn't prize this ally for his fighting ability. However, he can aid in safe passage through the forests of the East, and his artifacts are useful. She is currently trying to get one of his creations into the office of Chejop Kejak.

Nature: Conniver

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 6, Stamina 9, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 6, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

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

Abilities: Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 5, Dodge 6, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Flametongue, Forest-tongue, High Realm, Riverspeak, Seatongue, Skytongue) 6, Lore 5, Melee 5, Occult 5, Performance 6, Presence 4, Socialize 4, Stealth 5 (Within Forest +3)

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Artifact 5, Backing (Cult of Illuminated) 2, Contacts 5, Manse 5, Resources 6

Charms: All listed spirit Charms

Elemental Powers: All elemental powers

Cost To Materialize: 50

Base Initiative: 11

Attack:

Bite: Speed 14 Accuracy 12 Damage 15L* Defense 10

Claw: Speed 17 Accuracy 14 Damage 12L Defense 14

Constrict: Speed 10 Accuracy 18 Damage 9B** Defense 9

* Hiru's bite can do venom damage of 20L three times per day, and that damage cannot be blocked or dodged.

** Every turn his enemy cannot free herself from Hiru's coils, she takes an additional 5B damage.

Dodge Pool: 12 **Soak:** 15L/30B (Dragon hide, 10L/20B)

Willpower: 9 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 7

Essence Pool: 132

Other Notes: A person who owns one of Hiru's artifacts can discover what she has with a successful Intelligence + Lore roll, difficulty 8.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Bite: Speed 14 Accuracy 12 Damage 15L* Defense 10 Rate 3

Claw: Speed 17 Accuracy 14 Damage 12L Defense 14 Rate 3

Constrict: Speed 10 Accuracy 18 Damage 10B** Defense 9 Rate 1

* Hiru's bite can do venom damage of 20L three times per day, and that damage cannot be blocked or dodged.

** Every turn his enemy cannot free himself from Hiru's coils, he takes an additional 5B damage.

Dodge Pool: 19

MARU

Description: Maru had one of the few celestial lion jobs in Creation. She was assigned to guard the ancient Sijanese tomb of a being so old that even she did not remember who or what was contained there. She petitioned for a better job, and when she received no answer, she resigned her position in disgust.

Lupo and Kai were in Sijan at that time when they heard the amazing tale of the celestial lion's absence, and



they investigated. They caught up with Maru outside of the city and suggested that, if she needed a job, she could join their cause in the Cult of the Illuminated. She had heard little of the Cult during her brief off-duty times in Yu-Shan and was eager to learn all she could. The Sidereals treated her respectfully and informed her of all they thought she should know.

Lupo gave Maru the duty of guarding the training camp located in the Scavenger Lands, and she takes great pleasure in guarding something with actual value to sentient beings. She sometimes accompanies him on his travels as his guard, although they both know he does not need it. After centuries guarding a forgotten tomb, Maru is desperate to see Creation. Lupo indulges this and frequently invites her to accompany him, unaware that he is fostering the lion's crush on him.

She did take a journey without Lupo to discover what, exactly, she had been guarding in Sijan. No other celestial lion had taken the post, and she entered the crumbled tomb unmolested. Nearly everything inside had long since crumbled to dust, and she got the distinct feeling that any ghosts had done as she had: given up and wandered elsewhere. It is beginning to burn at her to find out what it was she had been guarding, and she returns to the tomb when she can. She has only found one item intact so far: a very small crown made of orichalcum. She keeps it in the tomb and has not told her Sidereal allies of her find, feeling it is hers alone. She has been studying what Lore and Occult she can within the Cult to try and identify the object.

Maru believes in the worth of the Cult, and even if Lupo were not to return her love, she would still serve it. It is an honorable practice to make the world a better place, and from what she has seen of corruption in her brief journeys, she feels things need changing.

Nature: Thrillseeker

Attributes: Strength 12, Dexterity 6, Stamina 9, Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 6, Perception 4, Intelligence 6, Wits 5

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

Abilities: Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Dodge 5, Endurance 5, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; Eastern Tribal Tongues, Flametongue, Forest-tongue, High Realm, Riverspeak) 5, Lore 5, Martial Arts 5, Occult 5, Presence 5, Resistance 5, Socialize 3, Stealth 3, Survival 5

Backgrounds: Influence 2, Backing (The Cult of the Illuminated) 3

Charms: Camouflage, Essence Bite, Hoodwink, Instill Obedience, Materialize, Measure the Wind, Paralyze, Principle of Motion, Stillness, Tracking, Words of Power

Cost To Materialize: 55

Base Initiative: 11

Attack:

Bite: Speed 14 Accuracy 14 Damage 24L Defense 11

Claw: Speed 17 Accuracy 20 Damage 18L Defense 18

Dodge Pool: 11 **Soak:** 30L/30B (Orichalcum hide, 25L/20B)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5 **Essence Pool:** 102

Other Notes: When Maru's player achieves a successful Intelligence + Lore roll at difficulty 9, the celestial lion will discover she has found the Crown of the Lost King. This Artifact ••• wonder was worn by a Solar king, River Moth, even before the time of the Solar Deliberative. He was a cruel king and would need bonuses to his Manipulation and Presence to force his troops to do the heinous things he commanded, so he fashioned this crown. It gives a two-die bonus to all rolls requiring Manipulation or Presence. These effects do not stack, so if the wearer's player must make a Manipulation + Presence roll, he does not receive a bonus of four dice.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Bite: Speed 11 Accuracy 16 Damage 24L Defense 11 Rate 3

Claw: Speed 14 Accuracy 14 Damage 18L Defense 18 Rate 4

Dodge Pool: 16

WATER THE FIELDS WITH BLOOD

Description: Although he remembers nothing of his life, Water the Fields with Blood was once a young graverobber. He was discovered by Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers when he looted the corpses of ghosts loyal to her. She took a liking to the beautiful boy and defied her master, the First and Forsaken Lion, by creating an Abyssal servant as her own toy, Water the Fields with Blood, a Midnight Caste. In her desperate attempt to keep the new Abyssal secret from the First and Forsaken Lion, her hold on him slipped, and he escaped. The Sidereal Lupo found him outside of Thorns, fleeing the Mask of Winters' servants. Instead of slaying him where he stood, as his Solar companions bade him do, Lupo rescued the deathknight and took him to Ayesha Ura.

Although Ayesha Ura refused his entrance into the Cult of the Illuminated at first, Lupo convinced her that Abyssal members would lend power to the Cult, not to mention give them valuable insight into these previously mysterious beings. And knowing the deathknights will put them one step closer to knowing the Deathlords. Water the Fields with Blood was processed as a Cult Shining One, although few besides Lupo seek his somewhat darkly Illuminated company. He serves Lupo as faithfully as he is able. While not part of the decision-making center of the Inner Circle, Water the Fields with Blood is one of Lupo's close apprentices and has access to many Inner Circle meetings. Lupo controls him with Charms and sorcery — not to the level of Shen Aru, but he knows that the pull of the Deathlords is strong and that Water the Fields with Blood must be protected. And so must the Inner Circle.



Regardless of his origins, Water the Fields with Blood desires to have the evil scoured from his soul. His willingness to serve the Cult has given the leaders a way to do some of the more unsavory work they feel necessary, as he is keen to do any kind of task, no matter how distasteful. (Unbeknownst to all involved, his desire to perform these tasks for the Cult is a way he subconsciously diverts the Abyssal Curse).

Princess Magnificent with Lips of Coral and Robes of Black Feathers is furious about the loss of her deathknight, but she knows she cannot put forth too much of an effort to find him, else the First and Forsaken Lion will discover her transgression. But Water the Fields with Blood is not free from the Deathlords' eyes, as the Lover Clad in the Raiment of Tears has caught wind of his existence and is delighted that there is a deathknight sitting in the midst of Solars, many newly Exalted. She whispers to Water the Fields with Blood at night, tempting him to her side, seeing him as a way to help her subvert more Solar servants. She does not count only on Water the Fields with Blood, however, so she has also sent some of her own deathknights to investigate the Cult.

The Cult will send Water the Fields with Blood on missions to preach the word of the Illuminated to those who prove to be resistant to the cause. He has also proved efficient in removing Immaculate monks from an area that has a strong Cult following. His methods have been proven to win over whole towns with minimal, albeit inevitable, loss of life and sanity. Although his converts turn to the Cult out of fear rather than a heartfelt belief in the Cult's mission and doctrine, the Sidereal leaders have

full confidence in their ability to turn the frightened, skeptical minds once they belong. Water the Fields with Blood is the ultimate bad cop.

Water the Fields with Blood is smaller than the average deathknight, with gray, peeling skin and white eyes. He is bald, and although he prefers to wear nothing but breeches, the Cult found that he had little presence with his diminutive size. They garbed him in flowing robes and a full black mask to make others take notice. When he travels alone, he packs his robes and mask in a saddlebag and rides his horse, a massive light gray mare called Portents, at full speed under the light of the moon, allowing the wind to tear the dead flaps of skin from his body. He seeks no lovers, but some Solars are inexplicably drawn to him — and horrified at their own desire.

Caste: Midnight

Nature: Martyr

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

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

Abilities: Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Endurance 4, Larceny 1, Melee 4, Performance 3, Presence 4, Resistance 1, Ride 3, Survival 2, Thrown 4

Backgrounds: Artifact 1, Backing (The Cult of the Illuminated) 1, Mentor (Lupo) 1

Charms: Artful Maiming Onslaught, Blade-Summoning Gesture, Command the Dead, Elegant Tyrant's Majesty, Forceful Spirit Spur, Furious Blade, Ghost Armor Prana, Haunting Inflection Trick, Hungry Missile Technique, Incomparable Assassin Method, Morbid Fascination Style, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Resplendent Shadow Blade, Savage Shade Style, Skeleton Summoning Gesture, Soul Reins, Superior Predator Style, Thieving Raiton Claws, Void Sheath Technique

Base Initiative: 4

Attack:

Punch: Speed 4 Accuracy 3 Damage 4B Defense 3

Kick: Speed 1 Accuracy 2 Damage 6B Defense 2

Soulsteel Goremaul (Spring Thunder): Speed 4 Accuracy 8 Damage 10L Defense 7

Throwing Knife (Melee): Speed 6 Accuracy 6 Damage 5L Defense 4

Throwing Knife (Thrown): Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 6L (Rate 3, Range 15)

Dodge Pool: 2 **Soak:** 6L/6B (Breastplate, 4L/2B)

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

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 15 **Peripheral Essence:** 31 (36)

Committed Essence: 5

Other Notes: None



EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 4 Accuracy 4 Damage 4B Defense 5 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 1 Accuracy 4 Damage 7B Defense 0 Rate 3

Soulsteel Goremaul (Spring Thunder): Speed 11 Accuracy 8 Damage 10L Defense 7 Rate 4

Throwing Knife (Melee): Speed 4 Accuracy 7 Damage 6L Defense 3 Rate 4

Dodge Pool: 5

SHEN ARU

Description: Shen Aru is but a mortal within the Gold Faction-controlled Cult of the Illuminated, but he holds a vital role. He was the leader of the Cult before the Sidereals took it over, and considering that Sidereals are not fond of visibly ruling any Creation organization, Ayesha Ura kept him on as leader in order to keep up appearances.

He was slightly mad, only in the aspect of fully believing in the Cult doctrine well before the Solars returned. He does not make the connection between the Anathema and the Shining Ones, and his true belief makes him perfect for Sidereal control. Although they use sorcery and Charms on him frequently, it is likely that that he is so devoted to the cause that he would follow them without a drop of magic. The Sidereals do not take that chance, however, and Shen Aru is so deeply controlled that little of his own will remains.

The man retains his own personality, and his devotion to the Cult has not changed. The Sidereals merely replaced any will he had to question or discuss their decisions with their own. He follows Ayesha Ura's lead, all the while thinking that it was his own.



His mind is slowly deteriorating, however. It wasn't terribly stable to begin with, and growing up impoverished, orphaned and following a drug-addicted madman didn't do well to foster stability. The level of Sidereal magic that has penetrated his mind is considerable, and it is likely his days of retaining his sanity are numbered.

There are, of course, plans waiting to be put in motion for the day Shen Aru either dies or loses all control of his mind. Ayesha Ura has a replacement mortal already in mind, and she has been prepping her with sorceries for a couple of months now. Ling Chu is a young woman who had been born within the Cult a mere 20 years ago, but she is devoted and smart. Ayesha Ura feels her mind can handle the brunt of Sidereal magic better than Shen Aru's has. Still, the man is not disposable; he's been at the helm of the Cult for years, and it will cause an upheaval when he steps down. But as usual, the Sidereals are prepared for this eventuality.

Nature: Visionary**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2**Virtues:** Compassion 1, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 3**Abilities:** Athletics 2, Bureaucracy 1, Endurance 2, Investigation 2, Larceny 2, Linguistics (Native: Low Realm; Riverspeak) 1, Lore 2, Martial Arts 4, Medicine 1, Presence 3, Resistance 1, Ride 2, Socialize 4,**Backgrounds:** Allies 2, Backing (The Cult of Illuminated) 5, Followers 2, Influence 2, Mentor (Ayesha Ura) 2**Base Initiative:** 6**Attack:**

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 3B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 7 Damage 5B Defense 7

Staff: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 5L Defense 7

Dodge Pool: 4/3 **Soak:** 3L/7B (Buff jacket, 3L/4B, -1 mobility penalty)**Willpower:** 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap**Essence:** 1**Other Notes:** None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 3B Defense 10 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 5 Rate 3

Staff: Speed 14 Accuracy 11 Damage 10B Defense 10 Rate 2

Dodge Pool: 5/4

ARTIFACTS

The Cult of the Illuminated has possession of many artifacts, several being for general use (with permission, of course). Many Exalts have their own artifacts, but several enter the Cult just-Exalted and having just escaped the Wyld Hunt with only their lives and the clothes on their backs. The Cult has what amounts to a lending library of artifacts, with Sapphire Sparrow keeping track of all arti-

SHEN ARU'S LEASH

Shen Aru has been the somewhat mad leader of the Cult of the Illuminated since before the Solars returned. It would have been awkward for the Sidereals to simply co-opt the cult and displace him, but even though they have “proven” to him that the Shining Ones do exist, they can’t trust him to follow their subtle reining like a docile pet.

Sidereal Charms and sorcery control Shen, allowing him to keep the same eccentricities and personality as he had before, but he will never go against a suggestion by a Sidereal. Below are listed some of the charms and sorcery used to control him, and who performs them.

Shen Aru’s Leash: Ayesha Ura named her Combo of Sidereal Charms after her puppet figurehead. She uses this mixture of Charms to ensure that Shen Aru belongs to her and only her.

Threefold Binding of the Heart: Ayesha Ura uses this spell on Shen Aru during the first day of every Calibration. His mind is so saturated with Sidereal sorcery now that it is probably unnecessary, but Ayesha Ura is nothing if not thorough.

Subordinate Inspiration Technique: Any Sidereal who knows this Charm is permitted to use it on Shen Aru, or any Cult leader, to make absolutely sure that he is pacifically following along with the Sidereal plan.

Other useful Charms and spells to use on mortals within the Cult include: Breaking the Wild Mortal, Favorable Inflection Procedure, Compassionate Essence Replenishment, Cash and Murder Games, Theft of Memory and Wanting and Fearing Prayer.



facts and their users. No one knows the penalty for stealing an artifact from the Cult, as it has never been accomplished. Sapphire Sparrow did catch one hapless Solar trying to pilfer an item, and currently, this Solar is serving the Cult as a disguised white-robed mortal initiate within the Nexus cell while a stern Sidereal watches over him until his time of penance is done.

Artifacts with empty Hearthstone slots can be claimed and used by an Exalt who possesses a Hearthstone, with the permission of Ayesha Ura. The Inner Circle generally considers the Exalts in the Cult as its charges that it does wish to reward from time to time, but the Sidereals give out artifacts carefully and not without great cause.

GOLDEN BIRD OF SUNLIGHT (ARTIFACT ●●●)

One of Vanileth’s gifts, each of these small gilded birds is propelled by Vanileth’s magic. They are each small enough to sit in the palm of the hand and are easily concealed. An Exalt can hold one and whisper a message to it and to whom it needs to tell the message. The bird will then fly off at 100 miles per hour and, if the person can be found within Creation, will find her. It cannot follow people into shadowlands, the Wyld, Yu-Shan, the Underworld or a well-guarded Manse.

Once it has found its target, the bird will perch in the person’s hand and whisper its message to her. It will repeat it twice if asked and then wait for a return message. If there is none, it will wait for five minutes and then fly back to the person who sent it. The Inner Circle only uses the golden birds to carry messages to people whom they trust, as the possibility of theft is too high if they send the birds to people outside of the Cult. The Cult of the Illuminated owns 10 of these birds: Each Sidereal in the Inner Circle keeps one, and the other four are available by request.

THE HOLY WRIT OF TWILIGHT

(ARTIFACT ●●●)

This massive tome looks gold and gleaming as new, but it is centuries old. Pure orichalcum is weaved through the cover of this lost book from the First Age. It fell into the hands of a Twilight Caste Solar Exalt when she stole it from some Immaculate monks. Their pursuit of her alerted the Cult to her existence, and she and the book landed safely in the Cult’s training camps. The book is useless in the hands of any but those Solars of the Twilight Caste; it attunes to whoever is reading it with 3 motes and increases that Solar’s Occult Ability by 2 for the next hour (to a max of 7). If a non-Twilight Caste read it, they would discover the sorcery initiation diaries of 10 First Age Solars, a priceless historical account in itself.

THE TEARS OF THE HARVEST (ARTIFACT ●●●)

Some gold does not come from the hard shine of orichalcum, but instead, from the soft grains of wheat that feed the Realm. Although most First Age Exalts had no concern for the mortals who fed them, some held the farmers in high regard, knowing that, if they died, the Exalts would have to sully their own hands with the menial labor. One Exalt, Onyx, felt this keenly when he unwittingly led a battle through his own kingdom’s farmland. When the ground was soaked with mortal blood, he realized no one would be left to heal the land and work the farms. Out of respect for those who died in his battle, he crafted the Tears of the Harvest, orichalcum bracers. His feeling was that if the farmers had owned bows to defend themselves and had the endurance to last the battle, things might have been different. Once the

wearer has committed 5 motes of Essence, he becomes attuned to the bracers. The Tears of the Harvest have one empty Hearthstone setting and allow the wearer's player to subtract 4 from the difficulty of all Archery rolls (to a minimum difficulty of 1).

SHINING DAIKLAVE OF DARKNESS

(ARTIFACT ●●●●)

This short daiklave was forged with the thief in mind. It is a black blade forged of starmetal, the only one of its kind. The Celestial Bureau had decided that a thieving god needed to be destroyed, and a Sidereal took his Essence along with his crimes and managed to forge a black starmetal daiklave. Knowing no better use for black starmetal, the craftsman imbued the blade with the skills of those who must keep hidden. Exalted thieves and assassins talk about this blade in hushed tones, knowing that it exists but not where it resides. This daiklave takes 5 motes of Essence to attune it to a Sidereal user, whose player can then enjoy a

reduction of 3 to the difficulty of all rolls for both Larceny and Stealth. It has two Hearthstone settings. Speed +1 Accuracy +4 Damage +8L Defense +3 Minimums S • D •. In Exalted Power Combat, it has Rate 6.

CRY OF THE ILLUMINATED (ARTIFACT ●●●●●)

This flying machine is what Ayesha Ura and Krinstet Orr created from Vanileth's blueprints. The *Cry of the Illuminated* is a golden flying machine, capable of carrying 10 people and moving at speeds of 100 miles per hour. It is not a subtle machine, however, and creates considerable noise upon takeoff and landing if not silenced with a Charm or a spell. It is beautifully decorated with gold and gems, clearly the chariot of a queen and her retinue. It resembles an aerial rickshaw of Yu-Shan in its body's egglike design, but it has wings with propellers jutting from the sides. Ayesha Ura hides the *Cry of the Illuminated* in an underground building near the Scavenger Lands training camp and weaves Charms and spells to obscure its location from everyone but Lupo.

FROM THE PRIVATE JOURNALS OF SHEN ARU

I was born 37 years ago with my eyes clouded. My parents were poor, dirty servants to the Dragon-Blooded in the Realm. I was taught the Dynasts and those that served the Elemental Dragons were demigods and worthy of worship. But I saw otherwise. Although they told us with their Immaculate Order that all mortals could work in this life to be reincarnated as one of them, they did not treat us as likely to become Dragon-Blooded. When I learned I was to be sold to them for food money, I ran away.

Vax found me and tutored me. He showed me that my impressions of the Realm and the Dynasts were true and taught me that the Illuminated Ones would come soon to free us from the yoke of tyranny. I followed him eagerly, and one night, he showed me what he saw: The gods spoke to me as well, telling me I would be the herald of the Shining Ones when Vax could no longer carry the banner.

I saw a golden room, surrounded by five orbs. They spoke to me, telling me they were gods and that I was chosen, second only to Vax. They promised truths and power if I would but listen. I learned of the Shining Ones, beings the gods were to bring to Creation if only I could make sure Creation would welcome them. These were the children of the gods who would take the seat of power from the grasping Dragon-Blooded Dynasts and return the world to the glory of long-gone days.

I came back to myself burning with a new resolve. Vax sat beside me, staring into the fire, tears streaming down his face. I told him what I had seen, and together, we wept. They had asked me, lowly Shen Aru, to pave the way for the Shining Ones.

Although Vax had recruited several followers in those days, we still were very poor. Vax took every piece of jade that we begged for and used it for our travels to find more to welcome the Illuminated. We begged for food and hoarded our money to serve the Cult. We traveled to areas with little Immaculate Order influence so we could be heard without fearing for our lives.

Some thought us mad. But some stayed and listened. We all wanted a way to dislodge the Realm's influence from our lives, and Vax and I had been handed a way by the very gods of heaven. We took our small cache of money and purchased threadbare golden robes and wore our hair long in defiance of the Immaculate Order's monks. We walked the streets as holy men, and people listened.

I must admit, the first years were hard. For every one person who looked to us for guidance and freedom from hardship, twelve would throw shit at us, laugh at us or report us to the Immaculate Order. When the bald monks would come striding down the street at us, that became the time to run. The Immaculate Order would not listen about the coming of the Shining Ones; its job was to silence us, by force if necessary.

The darkest hour was when Vax died at the hands of an Immaculate monk who felt no compunction in breaking an old man's neck. I fled, damning myself for leaving him in the street, but desperate to save my own life. I wept in the shadows, praying for Shining Ones to arrive, to finally make their entrance, to avenge my friend and father, but they did not. I have learned since that Shining Ones are not to be summoned, even by tears.

I kept my resolve, for Vax. I had to. I took the mantle of leadership, although it fit me uncomfortably. We did find blessings in the oddest of places, however. When traveling through Nexus, an anonymous benefactor gifted us with a small, run-down building in which to say our prayers without persecution. Every once in a while, someone would toss us some jade. And we found more and more willing members to join us and, in turn, to go out and spread the word that the Shining Ones were coming.

Years passed. It was frightening, I must admit, taking the leadership after Vax's death. I had many questions, many nights where I stared into the blackness and doubted, yes, even I doubted. But I knew nothing but the Cult's work, and I found I did believe.

I fell in love once. It did nothing for me but to destroy the heart that beat beneath my breast and to throw me further into the arms of my true love, the Cult. Her name was Heli Inasulon, and she was from the South. She had fallen into the Cult's safety net while fleeing her family's debtors. We gave her sanctuary and trained her in the shadowy arts to give her tools with which to protect herself from her attackers. She taught me things as well, taught me to see the world outside the Cult and the people who needed us there, where I had been thinking that we, the Cult, needed the citizens of Threshold as members. They needed us, and I needed Heli.

She died, of course, having been sent on a mission to scout for Immaculate monks in the wilderness. I do not know if she died at the hands of the monks or at the claws of a wild beast, but she never returned. I mourned her, and the Cult suffered for my immature reaction. When I came to realize that, though people can die and hurt you, the Cult is forever, I finally became fully married to it. I believe that was when the Shining Ones decided I was worthy of their visitation. Heli was my sacrifice, and in retrospect, I gave her willingly.

Much has happened in the past four years. It has been so glorious and wrought with so many miracles that a lot of it is a blur. I have met many of the Illuminated demigods who are to free us from the Realm's control. I have made decisions to change the Cult, make it stronger, larger. Resources are pouring in at a rate I cannot keep up with, but that is all right. We have accountants to keep up with that. All I know is that I eat better than ever in my life. My companions are now strong, focused, righteous warriors, and it is an honor to guide them and the mortals who follow them.

The Cult is so large now, it is somewhat difficult to keep track of it all. The Emissary helps a great deal, advising where she sees fit. I don't know what I would have done without her. She knows how to determine when we are to receive another Shining One from Heaven, and we meet often to discuss the future of the Cult and the latest movements of the Realm.

The intricate workings of the Cult sometimes tire me, and I feel older than my 37 years. I will serve the Cult and lead it until I am unable, however, because that is how things should be. Vax left me with this charge, and I will take care of it.





CHAPTER THREE

THE TRAINING CAMPS



The Solars have fallen far since the glorious days of the Old Realm. No longer a mighty paragon drunk on towering pride, the modern Solar is a furtive creature, flitting from village to village as he dodges the jade daiklaves of the Wyld Hunt. In an era filled with the indoctrination of the Immaculate Order, many young and confused Solars lack any understanding of their true nature, even believing themselves the incarnations of devils, damned through some unknown sin of a bygone lifetime. Though sparks of glory still burn within their chests, they lack the support of a society and are forced to struggle for survival rather than assert the dominion that is their birthright. Kings though they may be, these Princes of the Earth dress in tattered rags while they seek to save a world that reviles them.


However, in recent days, old legend has been given new flesh in the form of the Illuminated Ones. Unlike the other modern Solars, they stand tall and proud, unafraid of what they are. They allow their animas to billow forth as they preach their holy word to the masses, offering an alternative to the stifling teachings of the Immaculate Order and the excesses of the Realm. They wield golden weapons and armies of fanatically loyal soldiers who attend to their every whim, eager to sacrifice themselves to serve these glorious lords. Monsters and rampaging warlords fall at their hands as they defend the weak and in return ask only for respect and reverence. Embodying the

best of the legends that came before them, these noble champions of virtue, these paragons of humanity, bring hope to the eyes of all who witness their glory.

These shining heroes are the messiahs long prophesied by Shen Aru. Gathered by the faithful guides of the Cult of the Illuminated, these young Solars learn of their heritage as kings and their destiny as saviors. Both gods descended from Heaven and demons bound from the pits of Malfeas offer wisdom and martial tutelage to these divine lords. Unlike their untrained counterparts, the Illuminated Ones have the resources, skills and sense of purpose to shape the world. However, behind the drawn curtains of the Cult, the Gold Faction quietly shapes Solars into perfect weapons, hoping to use them to advance its own agendas and to return the world to the glory of the bygone First Age. Despite all their greatness, propaganda and indoctrination blind these saintly warriors.

RECRUITMENT

The first moments of Exaltation are wonderfully traumatic. In a confluence of fate, skill and fortune, a human transforms from mortal to divine. His spiritual eyes open, his Essence unlocks, and for a single, miraculous instant, nothing is beyond his power. Above him, a star flares as the heavens mark the coming of a new champion. Then, the perfect moment fades, and the newly Exalted Solar stands alone and confused, barely aware of his true nature.



To a skilled astrologer, the signs of a new Exaltation are unmistakable. Both the Bronze and Gold Factions react within moments of the birth of a new Solar, each marshaling its forces to be the first to seize him. In this dreadfully important race, the efficient and deadly Wyld Hunt has the advantage of centuries of practice and tradition. The recruiters of the Cult are less skilled. To compensate for the disparity, the Gold Faction often unleashes a distraction, usually a brief attack on the Wyld Hunt, to provide cover for the recruiting agent. Traditionally, mortal cultists were sacrificed in the assault, but more recently, small strike teams of Cult-trained Solars have unleashed their power on unsuspecting Wyld Hunts, sometimes defeating them outright. Ideally, the distraction allows enough time for the recruiter to spirit away the bewildered young Exalt before the Wyld Hunt reaches him.

Most often, the Cult relies on mortal agents to guide newly Exalted Solars. No greater calling exists for these cultists, for though merely mortal, their hands touch the divine, rescuing him from forces that would slay him, and set his feet upon the path to enlightenment. Those who wish to serve as guides dedicate their lives to understanding the scripture of the Cult in hopes of better understanding Solars, though this training seldom fully prepares them for the tumultuous encounter with a panicked, newly Exalted Chosen of the Sun. When Exalt and guide first meet, the guide's first priority is gaining the trust of the Exalt. She has little time to bathe in the glory of the Solar, for the Wyld Hunt is hot on her heels. With reverence shining in her eyes, she approaches the Solar and speaks honestly, telling him who she is and whom she serves and offers him her aid in bringing him to his proper place among the Shining Ones of the Cult. She uses any resources she has to help the Solar, binding his wounds if he is injured, hiding him if the Wyld Hunt stalks the streets and whispering to him of the urgency of his situation. Ultimately, the decision to join the Cult lies in the hands of the Solar. Many Solars grow suspicious of the motives of the Cult or fear a trap and flee their guides. Should a Solar accept the guide's offer, he immediately receives her loyalty and aid. The intense hardships surrounding the encounter of guide and Exalt often form bonds between the two. Once she fulfills her duties to the Cult, a guide often offers personal loyalty to her Solar and serves as his closest companion and advisor for the remainder of her comparatively short life span.

At times, a mortal agent is insufficient. Perhaps the Solar is too powerful or too important to risk his loss at the hands of a bumbling mortal. Perhaps the situation is too dangerous and a mortal lacks the necessary skill and power to accomplish the task. In such rare cases, the Gold Faction dispatches a Sidereal. The Sidereal sent is usually as young and new to her powers as the Solar, for the elders can seldom spare the time to run such errands. The experience of Solars guided by Sidereals differs greatly from those

guided by mortals. Unless another Sidereal leads the Wyld Hunt against the Solar, it has little hope against an Exalted guide. Rather than working to gain the Solar's trust, the Sidereal insinuates herself into the Solar's confidence with social magics. Though some few Solars have the strength of will to resist a Sidereal recruiter, they seldom have reason to do so. Generally, the guide hides her true nature from the Solar, for such a revelation might trigger ancient memories of his death at the hands of a Sidereal, and a young Solar, if angered, is a danger to even an experienced Exalt. Some circumstances demand the release of that information, however, and a few Sidereals even take their Solar wards as acquaintances, but such situations are rare.

Once the Solar accepts the aid of the Cult, the guide has little time to bring him safely to a training camp. Though distracted, perhaps even wounded, by the ambush, the Wyld Hunt will quickly reorganize itself to hunt for the missing Anathema. The training camps arm each guide with some method of long-distance communication, often only a simple artifact or thaumaturgical ritual, to contact gods and Sidereals in the service of the Cult. After bringing the Solar to an isolated location, one temporarily safe from the murderous eyes of the Dragon-Blooded, she signals the Cult, who promptly dispatches someone to retrieve the young Exalt. After arriving, a sorcerer might make use of spells such as Stormwind Rider or Conjuring the Azure Chariot to quickly bring the Exalt to the training camp, while a god might make use of her own variation of Charms such as Capture, Transport or Portal. The Cult's resources are often tight, however, and the guide sometimes finds herself without support. During such cases, Solar and guide must make a harrowing journey across hostile lands, hiding from the Wyld Hunt wherever they can until the Cult can spare someone to fetch them. Sidereal guides have more options available to them. Often trained in sorcery, they seldom need to contact anyone else, and once in an isolated place, they can cast Stormwind Rider or Conjuring the Azure Chariot to quickly bring the Solar to his new home.

THE TRAINING CAMPS

Raised on exaggerated tales of the First Age, the Sidereals of the Gold Faction had long yearned to restore Creation to that glorious era. Without warning, the Solars resurfaced, and fate offered the Gold Faction its best chance ever for retaking the reins of Creation from the Bronze Faction. These secret masters of the Cult had supreme confidence in the Solars' unified strength, for they were created to be kings, and Creation naturally bows to them. However, these young and confused Solars needed training and guidance if they were to survive the might of the Dynastic Realm. Knowing this, the Sidereals moved quickly to create training camps for the Solars.

While all of the Gold Faction agreed upon the necessity of training the Solars, they did not agree upon the method of that training. Ayesha Ura backed Venerable Silk's bold plan, the method most consistent with her view of what the Illuminated Ones should be. Lupo, however, feared Venerable Silk's approach would inevitably result in a return to the corruption that felled the First Age and vocally backed Maduka Shin's strategy. Kai laughed quietly and denounced both Maduka Shin and Venerable Silk as unfit for leadership. He praised the efforts of a third, less known member of the Gold Faction, suggesting a third option for a training method. The debate raged until Zhen Hue finally suggested a compromise. Rather than focus all of the Gold Factions resources into a single training camp, they should construct three, each following a separate philosophy. Rol, eager to end what he saw as meaningless and unproductive chatter, backed her approach and eventually won the support of most of the Gold Faction. Thus, the Gold Faction crafted three training camps rather than one, but to this day, tensions remain between the three schools, and Solars from one camp often feel compelled to prove the supremacy of their school over the others. This rivalry complicated cooperation between the three schools, a weakness within the Gold Faction's approach.

The sudden return of the Solars took the Sidereals by surprise, and due to the time consumed by the debate, the Gold Faction had little time to construct its training camps. The three Sidereal masters took extreme measures to ensure that their respective camps were operational by the time the first Solars arrived for training. Venerable Silk summoned legions of demons to the mountains of the North to craft a beautiful Manse worthy of the Exalted. Maduka Shin seized an abandoned fortress in the South and rapidly refurbished it. The third master quietly constructed the final school away from the prying eyes of the other two masters. To create the proper atmosphere of venerable tradition, each Sidereal decorated his camp with artificially aged furnishings, made subtle and illegal alterations to Heavenly records or carefully constructed intriguing mythologies to explain the sudden "reappearance" of the camp. The evidence is illusory, however, and each camp appeared a mere handful of years ago, almost literally overnight.

The camps serve primarily to train Solar Exalted. Gods, bound demons, elementals and Sidereals fill each school, each instructor more powerful and wise than the last. However, only Solars can master Solar Charms and techniques, and for all the power the instructors wield, they lack the facilities to use even the simplest of the Charms that they must impart to their Solar charges. To overcome this problem, the camps have several techniques. First, the Sidereals have studied the underlying principles of Solar magic by understanding sorceries and martial arts based on Solar Essence. Though the knowl-

edge this gives them is rough, it allows the Sidereals to construct lessons that, when supplemented with appropriate katas and mantras, instruct each Solar in the rudiments of his Essence. Rather than teach Charms directly to the Solars, most of the lessons serve to inspire epiphanies and ease and guide the Solar's self-instruction. Secondly, each camp employs two or three former students in the role of tutors, and these more experienced Solars teach their Charms directly to younger Exalts. Finally, the Gold Faction employs one of its greatest secrets to increase the speed at which its pupils learn. Lytek, God of Exaltation, overjoyed to see the return of the Solars, readily agreed to aid the Gold Faction. When Lytek prunes the memories from returned Solar shards, he saves his clippings. Mixing these fragments of ancient personalities with tears shed by the Unconquered Sun, Lytek creates a potent and dangerous tincture. The Gold Faction secretly dilutes small portions of the mixture in the purified water Illuminated Solars drink during their noon prayers. The influence of the tincture invigorates the Illuminated Ones, brings them closer to their Essence and heightens their pride and the natural effects of their mood swings. Despite the dangers of this untested elixir, the Gold Faction feels that the importance of their task justifies the risk involved.

Instruction alone is insufficient if the schools lack security. The most important task of any training camp is the safety of its students. Each camp is isolated from the rest of the world, whether it hides within remote jungles or cloaks itself in deceptive sorcery. Should an enemy discover the location of a camp, hundreds of tiger warriors support the school, prepared to die in the defense of their messiahs. Further, in addition to the gods, demons and Sidereals that tend to the camp, each school contains roughly 20 Solar students and a handful of more experienced Solars, an unprecedented collection of Celestial Exalted. To have any chance of success, an assault on a camp would require a large army supported by a host of Exalted, at the very least.

Without the loyalty and dedication of the Illuminated Ones, the Gold Faction's project would crumble. To this end, the training camps pepper their students with propaganda. Each Solar is expected to memorize important passages of Cult scripture, and teachers subtly inject indoctrination into the very structure of their lessons. Surrounded by faithful mortals, instructed by gods and served by demons, most Solars have no difficulty believing that their predestined role is that of divine savior.

Finally, the camps serve as nerve centers for Gold Faction operations. No other locations benefit from as much of the faction's investment as the training camps. Already well suited to support Solars, they serve as natural resting points and homes for Solar operatives. With so much power collected in a single place, the Cult has little reason to create command centers elsewhere. Instead, Solars and



their allies remain, constantly training and improving themselves until the day they are called upon to serve the needs of the Cult and, by extension, the Gold Faction.

THE SEQUESTERED TABERNACLE

Heavenly glory, in the form of the Illuminated Ones, has descended upon the cities of the North from their home within the elusive peaks of the Dehennen Mountains. Like paragons of humanity, these black robed men and women have breathtaking, serene countenances, and their eyes glow with faith. When they speak, power throbs in their words and fills those who listen with understanding and fulfillment. Their message makes all the world seem so clear. Despite their apparent tranquility, only a fool underestimates them, for their fists are lightning quick and their mastery of Essence unparalleled. Immaculates who confront them find their theology ripped to tatters and their bodies broken. The Realm's greatest nightmare, these Illuminated Ones elegantly shred the long-held beliefs that chain humanity, freeing them to see the glory of Heaven with their own naked eyes.

Tales of the Shining Ones inspire whispers of their home: the legendary temple known as the Sequestered Tabernacle. Hidden away in the mists of the Dehennen Mountains, at the heart of a valley paradise, the glorious

holy site rises up in ivory and golden spires. Within its beautiful gardens and hallowed halls, the Illuminated Ones study fundamental truths of the world and reflect upon their own inner perfection. Those who seek them out receive miraculous healings and epiphanic revelation — if they are worthy. Those who offend these divine paragons suffer wounds and humiliation as the Shining Ones drive them out with righteous fury. The Sequestered Tabernacle is the sacred home to the most sacred of living beings.

Venerable Silk, the founder of the Sequestered Tabernacle, understands the fundamental nature of Solars. Their power, he believes, stems from their towering sense of self. Any attempt to reform Solars by restraining their pride is doomed to failure, for it is as innate to their nature as heat is to flame. Rather than attempt to defeat their ego, Venerable Silk accepts it, encourages it, feeds it. A Solar is perfection and the culmination of all that is good, he whispers to them, and then, he humbly asks to guide them. By accepting their flaws as their strengths, he seeks to redirect their hubris from the decadence of the First Age to his personal vision of a glorious new era.

THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

To enact his philosophy, Venerable Silk needed an edifice worthy of the Solars he wished to train. After the destruction of the majority of Solar Manses at the end of the First Age, few such places remained in Creation. He needed



to build one, and quickly. First, he chose a location, one isolated and beautiful enough to suit his purposes. He approached Defiant Eminence, the jealous god of the Dehennen, who, flattered, agreed to allow the temple to be built within the misty confines of his mountains. There, Venerable Silk and other Gold Faction Sidereals spent a year summoning packs of demons to construct the Manse and further packs to haunt the outlying stretches of the mountain and dissuade unwanted visitors. The Sequestered Tabernacle rises three stories above the brilliant green of the valley. Each floor is symbolic and important, illustrating the levels of enlightenment a Solar must achieve before he receives true Illumination. Stones of pure white marble covered with Old Realm inscriptions depicting texts from the doctrines of the Cult make up the structure. A tall and massive door, plated in gold, bars entrance to the unworthy. Balconies with gilded railings dot each floor, so that the Cult's divine saints may step through flowing white veils to behold the worshipful masses. Five spires rise from each corner of the temple, their engraved surfaces covered in gold to reflect the glory of the sun. No windows adorn the outside of the structure, for mortals are unworthy of looking in upon the world of the Illuminated Ones, and the Illuminated have no reason to behold the outside world while meditating upon their inner perfection. A dome of exquisite blue glass caps the top of the large, beautiful structure, a palace worthy of the emissaries of the gods.

The inner architecture of the Sequestered Tabernacle is as metaphorical and divine as the design of its façade. The first floor is the simplest of the three, representing terrestrial elements, the newly Exalted, the Root of the Perfected Lotus, the Emerald Circle of Sorcery and the lowest level of enlightenment. The hallways are narrow, made of simple white walls and hard marble floors. This level contains the training chambers of the newly initiated Solars as well as their living quarters. Each Solar student resides in a small and simple room, containing enough space for a pallet and a table with a candle. Five such rooms cluster around a central dining and living chamber, and each cluster rests in a corner of the temple, housing a separate Circle of Solar students that train together. At the heart of this floor is a garden, representing all the beauty of earthly Creation. High above, the blue-glass dome casts the rays of the sun down upon the garden, and all lighting within the dim halls is radiated from this central garden by an array of mirrors.

The next floor represents the celestial elements of Yu-Shan, the experienced Exalted, the Bulb of the Perfected Lotus, the Sapphire Circle of Sorcery and the second level of ascendancy. Here, wider halls allow greater freedom of movement and internal windows of adamant allow better illumination. Lines of gilded text decorate the white marble walls, illustrating fundamental precepts of the Cult to those who walk its halls. This floor is home to the adepts of the Sequestered Tabernacle, those few who have al-

ready graduated from their lessons but continue their studies while ministering to the Cult. Because adepts occupy a greater tier of ascendancy than students, they're allowed larger rooms filled with personal property, often Cult texts and pieces of art. At the center, above the garden, lies a small maze of balconies and walkways, all delicate and white, decorated with crystal chimes that flutter on a magically generated breeze that flows through.


The third and highest floor represents the divine elements of the Unconquered Sun himself, the elder Exalted, the Blossom of the Perfected Lotus, the Adamant Circle of Sorcery and the pinnacle of ascendancy that all Solars seek. No hallways exist here, only pillars and openings that allow complete freedom of movement and soft breezes that caress the faces of those who walk this glorious floor. This level contains the palatial quarters of the masters and instructors of the Tabernacle, massive rooms filled with elegant art, expensive furnishings and personal artifacts, all testament to the glory of their position. Venerable Silk himself resides here. Libraries of sorcerous lore and storerooms of powerful artifacts lie on this level, carefully locked and guarded unless a Solar student has need of them. At its heart lies the glorious blue dome, source of illumination for the entirety of the Sequestered Tabernacle.



THE SEQUESTERED TABERNACLE (MANSE ●●●)

The Sequestered Tabernacle rests on the thickest nexus of dragon lines in the Dehennen, making it the largest Manse in the area. Though a level-4 Demesne, Venerable Silk lacked the time and resources to make full use of the Demesne's power. As a result, the Sequestered Tabernacle is merely a level-3 Manse.

An oval gem of pure, glowing white named the Devotion Stone is the Sequestered Tabernacle's Hearthstone, resting within the central gardens of the first floor. Aspected to Solar Essence, the Devotion Stone draws upon the power of the wielder's faith, both strengthening him in times of crisis and blinding him with his own internal dogma. Anytime the wielder's player rolls his character's Conviction, whether he does so because the Exalt channeled Conviction, because he confronts a limit condition for a Conviction-based Virtue Flaw or for any other reason, all dice stemming from his Conviction are converted to automatic successes. Venerable Silk allows all Solars within the Manse to attune to it, but he carefully arranges who holds the Devotion Stone so that the extreme behaviors it often induces won't damage any of the Gold Faction's objectives.



For all their glory and perfection, the Solar Exalted still need to eat, and the Tabernacle doesn't clean itself. The lowest level of the Tabernacle lies beneath the ground, filled with everything necessary to meet the student's base requirements. It represents the lowest tier of Essence, that of the mortality from which the Exalted spring. Unworthy of the light of the sun, this floor is dark and shadowy, lit only by artificial light created with tiny, diverted flows of Essence from the Manse. Boilers hiss as they heat the baths of the Exalted, pots bang within kitchens as cooks prepare daily meals and mortal workers whisper fervently as they haul supplies into storerooms. Those who serve within the Tabernacle itself, usually petty gods or specially sanctified mortals, make their homes in small chambers on this floor. The entrance to the basement lies behind the Tabernacle, away from the eyes of the worshipful masses, in the form of stairs that descend directly to the lower floor: servants entering the lowest level never actually enter the Tabernacle itself so as not to contaminate it with their unworthiness.

THE ROLE OF THE SEQUESTERED TABERNACLE

The foremost purpose of the Shining Ones of the Tabernacle is the spread of the Cult's influence through evangelization. They are the Illuminated face of the Cult, living proof of the truth of its teachings. Circles of Illuminated Solars go forth into the world, dazzling the masses with miracles, saving them from danger or oppression and then handing down persuasive arguments and compelling theology. They also assault bastions of other faiths. Because it represents the greatest danger to the Cult, most of their aggressive attention focuses on the Immaculate Order. Cloisters are challenged and burned, their monks either forcefully converted or physically defeated. While they have thus far made little impact upon Realm satrapies, a few of the more peripheral Northern states that follow the Immaculate Order suffer greatly from the Sequestered Tabernacle's campaign.

In addition to spreading faith, the Shining Ones must also reinforce and sustain the faith of the scattered and besieged sects of the Cult. Illuminated Solars descend upon the ranks of the Cult, showering them with healings and blessings, allowing them to witness firsthand the power of those they worship. The Shining Ones lift up those cultists deemed most worthy, recruiting them to serve the glory of the Illuminated at the Tabernacle itself. Dangers threaten the Cult from within and without, and the Solars work daily to uncover these threats and defeat them. While the Illuminated are too important to tend to the day-to-day concerns of local parishes, they do oversee the management of the Cult, if only to root out corruption and inefficiency.

To serve and protect the Illuminated, the Sequestered Tabernacle has its own breed of tiger warriors. They lack

the numbers and militant overtones of Kether Rock's soldiers but make up for it in martial discipline and fanatical devotion. Rather than learn the sword and shield, most tiger warriors of the Sequestered Tabernacle practice martial arts, due to the spiritual symbolism associated with the techniques. Each and every tiger warrior within the Tabernacle looks forward to the day they may die in the service of an Illuminated One and pass on peacefully to his next, more glorious life. The culmination of this philosophy is found in the Falling Blossom Style, a Terrestrial martial art taught to the most enlightened of mortal warriors who make up the elite bodyguards of the Illuminated and their finest religious assassins.

GEOGRAPHY

Venerable Silk chose the location of the Tabernacle for symbolic reasons. Rather than use sorcery and Charms to bring newly recruited Solars directly to the school, he leaves them instead in the tundra that surrounds the Dehennen, and with the help of their guides, they must unravel the secrets of the Tabernacle's location. As a Solar searches for the training camp, every step on his journey is laden with meaning. Even before he sets foot into the Sequestered Tabernacle, he has experienced the sacrifices necessary to find the dominion of self that he seeks, and pride fills him at his success. With this task already accomplished, Venerable Silk is free to begin more advanced lessons with the Solar.

First, a petitioner must show willingness to step beyond the boundaries of his safe life to enter a dangerous and strange world, not knowing what lies beyond the horizon of his ignorance. Frozen tundra surrounds the Dehennen Mountains, a land filled with monsters and wandering barbarians. In addition to braving the frosty dangers of the North, those who enter these frozen lands to find the Sequestered Tabernacle can trust no map, for Defiant Eminence and the gods of the tundra work together to shift the location of the Dehennen. Only those worthy of the next trial ever witness their mist-covered slopes.

Finding ascendancy is not enough. Next, the petitioner must struggle for self-mastery, and the Dehennen Mountains present him with physical hardships, filled with pitfalls of deception and winding paths of self-indulgence. Because Defiant Eminence continually pushes his fingers higher into the sky, the crags that make up the Dehennen are sharp. Avalanches and landslides constantly threaten the unwary. A cloak of mist shrouds the mountain range, for Defiant Eminence refuses to show his face until his height and his glory are greater than that of the Imperial Mountain. This mist hides dangers such as treacherous ravines and sudden dead falls. Only those determined to master the Dehennen discover its final reward.

At last, the chilling mist breaks, and sunlight falls upon the face of the victorious petitioner. His struggles

have rewarded him with rudimentary self-mastery, and he now stands at the threshold of the magnificent Valley of the Elect. The constantly temperate climate, maintained by bound elementals, allows lush, green grass and waving fields of golden grain to exist between the bare slopes of the Dehennen. A road winds from the valley entrance, leading the petitioner through a collection of quaint cottages filled with reverential villagers to the Tabernacle itself, at the heart of the valley. Once he stands before the golden doors of the temple, they open before him, allowing him to enter and take his proper place as an Illuminated One.

TRAINING

When a Solar first enters the Sequestered Tabernacle, he is showered with honors, for he has overcome great obstacles. His entire journey culminates in this moment. As the glorious temple doors open, a vision of the beautiful, marble interior greets him. Standing in a circle, golden robed masters await him, their heads bowed solemnly as he steps in. The doors close behind him, and the circle welcomes the young Exalt, ushering him into the central gardens to partake in a grand feast, the last he shall receive for some time. After he has enjoyed the feast and the company of his fellow Solars, the gardens grow quiet, the crowds parting to reveal Venerable Silk himself. The boyishly beautiful and humble Sidereal elder steps forward, his silk robes swirling about his bare feet, to kneel before the newly arrived Solar and kiss the ground upon which he stands. Looking up with large, handsome eyes, the Sidereal pleads for the honor of guiding and instructing the Illuminated One, squashing any remaining doubts with subtle Social Charms. After the Solar agrees, he is formally accepted into the Sequestered Tabernacle.

A newly accepted Solar is stripped of his worldly possessions so they do not distract him from his quest for sainthood. These treasures are stored away, mementos of his old life, until he should request them again, long after his graduation. Beyond a set of Cult scriptures, a cleansed and sacred bowl for his ceremonial water and a candle, the training Illuminated Solar has nothing. For dress, all petitioners receive black robes that are wide across the shoulder with long, loose sleeves, a tight fitted waist and flowing skirts. Those who graduate are allowed to clothe themselves as they choose, but most prefer to remain in the robes, marking their collar in some fashion to differentiate themselves from petitioners. The masters assign each new student to train with the Circle deemed most auspicious for him. Each Circle takes quarters in its own cluster, so that each student's Circlemates are always nearby.

THE FIRST YEAR

An initiate's day begins early, for those seeking ascendancy have no time to rest. Everyone in the Tabernacle awakes at dawn just as the peasants outside the

walls offer up their morning prayer. Servants bring a meal of unleavened bread and steamed vegetables to the central chamber of each cluster. The initiates receive an hour to dine and converse with one another before the training begins in earnest.

Morning lessons begin with exercises and martial training. After witnessing the successes of Immaculate training methods, Venerable Silk chose to use similar techniques in the training of Solars. Martial arts center the mind and the soul, balancing internal Essence with a mixture of movement and discipline. In addition to enhancing and focusing the Essence of the Solar, it also grants him the martial prowess necessary to defend himself in the chaotic world of the Second Age. While early lessons are general in nature, the trainers expect Solars to quickly identify with a style that suits them, and all further lessons focus on that technique. Because the primary focus of the Tabernacle is upon sainthood, not martial prowess, the enlightening sutras and katas of martial arts receive emphasis beyond all else. However, masters do not actively discourage combat techniques other than martial arts. Many Illuminated of the Tabernacle practice archery or train in the use of melee weapons, particularly those weapons used by their styles.

Afternoon lessons consist of more general education. Mathematics, arts and sciences, logic and history, particularly of the Cult's version of what occurred during the First Age, are all important aspects of the curriculum. Further, the Sequestered Tabernacle schools all of its Solars thoroughly in the disciplines of forensics, philosophy and theology. Venerable Silk expects each of his pupils to be able to quote any passage from Cult doctrine, as well as to have complete mastery of the flaws of the Immaculate philosophy. Debate is exceptionally important, and verbal sparring matches between initiates are often more heated and entertaining than their martial contests. A fully trained Illuminated One can best an Immaculate in both the fields of martial arts and of theology, gaining converts as well as battlefield victories.

Because of the philosophy the masters use to instruct their students, discipline in the Tabernacle requires a unique approach. Solars who join the temple come from all parts of the world and bring a great variety of social mores and cultural differences. Conflicts between these varied and egotistical beings are inevitable. Traditional punishment would humiliate Solars in violation of the tenets of the Tabernacle, so Venerable Silk must ensure that each Solar learns his lesson of his own volition. Teachers assign an erring Solar a koan to contemplate or a physical challenge to accomplish and then dismiss him from his lessons until he has mastered the task at hand. The nature of his assignment requires him to reflect upon his lack of judgment, and he seldom repeats his error. Not all Solars are so reasonable, however, and some deliberately



cause difficulties and defy the compassionate and humble teachings of the Tabernacle. For these problematic cases, the servants retreat and allow an older Solar to handle the situation. The older Solar usually exposes the weakness of the undisciplined Solar in a private duel, and while often humiliating, this punishment comes from the hands of a peer. This maintains the illusion of Solar supremacy, setting the students apart from the “lesser” teachers, while maintaining strict discipline.

THE ARTS OF THE TEMPLE

Martial-art instruction at the Sequestered Tabernacle focuses primarily on the four Celestial arts best suited to Solars: Snake Style, Tiger Style, Ebon Shadow Style and Praying Mantis Style. Though familiar with them, the Gold Faction Sidereals avoid teaching the Elemental Dragon Styles. They are less skilled in the styles than the Bronze Faction, and they wish to avoid confusing their pupils by teaching them these “blasphemous” styles. The Sequestered Tabernacle generally doesn’t teach the more esoteric styles, such as Hungry Ghost or Dreaming Pearl Courtesan, primarily because the Sidereal instructors are unfamiliar with them. Solars receive no training in Terrestrial-level styles, as they’re seen by the Tabernacle as beneath Solars. Due to its dangerous nature, the sifus of the Tabernacle specifically reserve Falling Blossom Style for Dragon-Blooded or enlightened mortals, never instructing Solars in its use. Finally, the Gold Faction wishes to retain some secrets from its Solar charges, and so, thus far, it has withheld the secrets of Sidereal-level styles from the Solars.

THE SECOND YEAR

Second-year students have learned the basics of what the Tabernacle teaches. The second year for students includes more advanced lessons than what they learned in the previous year, particularly in the fields of martial arts, theology and debate. In addition to their general curriculum, students find themselves in increasingly specialized courses. Venerable Silk has observed each student’s strengths and weaknesses during his first year, and he chooses a path for her to follow. Nothing official occurs, and no pronouncements are made. The student simply finds the lessons subtly veering into one of the Callings of the Tabernacle. As this Calling generally suits the temperament of the student, few complain. These specialized lessons begin to instruct the Solar in the basics of his role within the Cult of the Illuminated. While some of the lessons are practical, most take place within the safe confines of the Tabernacle.

Representing the very ideal of the Cult, **Exemplars** are expected to achieve complete self-mastery and enlightenment. Their path is a self-centered one, focused entirely on the advancement of their own being and then serving as examples to others. Those who take this course are either the most selfish of the initiates or the most selfless. Regardless, they are those who excel beyond all others. Their training intensifies everything from the first year as each Exemplar pushes herself beyond the limits most other initiates experience. The Exemplars perfect their bodies, and their understanding of the body, through the study of martial arts and medicine. They perfect their mind, studying the greatest depths of theology and philosophy, even going so far as to unlock the secrets of Essence and the practice of sorcery. Finally, they perfect their souls by sharing their talents with others. Their words of wisdom resonate in the spirits of those who hear them, and they perform miracles of Essence for the faithful.

Serving a more functional role for the Cult of the Illuminated, **Inquisitors** travel among the faithful, rooting out heresy and overcoming dangers to the Cult. Their path is a selfless one, and many lose their identities behind the mask of service. Both feared and respected, those who follow this path generally have confrontational personalities. Yet, they often possess a deeply compassionate streak, for they must confront crises on behalf of the weak. Inquisitors must find what troubles the community, often by exposing that which is hidden. Thus, the Inquisitor is taught investigative techniques and learns how to discern truth from lies. Inquisitors must confront that which threatens the community, so in addition to his martial techniques, he learns to battle with spirits and demons. Inquisitors often travel into the Dehennen to battle the demons that haunt the mountains, remnants of the massive task force that was summoned to construct the Tabernacle. Finally, Inquisitors monitor the more mundane well-being of a community, seeking out fiscal corruption and criminal wrong doing.

The last and rarest of the three, **Itinerants** are those Solars who travel the wilds of the world, seeking new lands for Cult settlements and guiding those cultists who travel the dangerous wilds of Creation. The Cult spreads thinly across Creation with small communities often clumped far from one another. Itinerants maintain communication between these communities. Where an Inquisitor oversees the general health of individual communities, it is the Itinerant’s task to protect the Cult as a whole. Their path takes the Itinerants far from the Tabernacle, requiring them to be self-reliant and totally dedicated to the cause, lest absence weaken their faith. Those who choose this Calling have a strong desire for independence and wither within the confines of narrow Tabernacle halls, but at the same time, they chain themselves with a greater dedication to the Cult than either of the other two Callings.

Because they travel so often, learning the ways of the land is vital. Itinerants, donning heavy coats and scarves, journey forth into the Dehennen and into the tundra beyond. They learn to survive the worst of conditions and to walk even the Wyld lands. To deal with the stranger things in the world, such as gods and ghosts, Itinerants also learn the occult, allowing them to find dragon lines and to protect themselves from spirits. The primacy of their purpose, however, is to protect and interact with members of the Cult. They learn to guide others, keeping them safe in dire circumstances, and how to make others feel at ease in dark times. Itinerants often make fine storytellers.

THE FINAL YEAR

Most within the Tabernacle see the final year of training as a formality, a polishing of the skills they have already learned. A thin line divides such advanced students and the graduates, often only a marked collar and the floor of their residence differentiates them. By the third year, an initiate is mature enough to choose his own courses and regimens, and guidance from his instructors diminishes. In fact, the Solar no longer truly needs their aid, for the final steps to ascendancy can only be taken on his own.

During the final year, initiates go out among the people, practicing their future roles in the field. Through fate manipulation, godly magics and old-fashioned subterfuge, the instructors of the Tabernacle carefully engineer encounters meant to guide the Illuminated in the field. Perhaps on his journey, the Solar may encounter a mortal Immaculate preaching to a Cult village, or he may find a monster assaulting a caravan. Regardless of its nature, each experience enlightens the Solar in some small way through either failure or defeat. These secret trials also test the mettle of the Solar, gauging his loyalty to the Cult.

Only the initiate knows when his training is complete. Eventually, during this final year, returning to the Tabernacle will seem tiresome, the old koans too simple. The Solar realizes that he has outgrown his old, worldly things and that the lessons of the Tabernacle no longer suit him. He is above their teachings, ready for the hard lessons only the struggles of life can offer. When he feels he is ready, he steps before Venerable Silk and informs him of his readiness to serve. In those rare cases where the initiate truly is unready, Venerable Silk employs skillful and subtle psychology, allowing the Solar to discover for himself his own unreadiness. For the remainder, Venerable Silk only bows his head, and the Solar is thereafter referred to as adept, his quarters and personal belongings moved to the second floor.

Though his formal training is complete, ascendancy is a process, not a goal, and Solars must constantly practice self-perfection. The Tabernacle offers its services to adepts as instructors, helping to guide them to greater heights of skill and power. Greater rank results in greater freedom of curriculum. While Solar students always had, in theory, a

modicum of control, in practice, their instructors determined their training. Now, adepts truly may choose what subjects to study, and they often gain instruction in more esoteric subjects such as unusual martial arts or more personalized Charms. Those Solars who find the Tabernacle particularly appealing work to become instructors in their own right. While only a handful of Solars, those who were first recruited, have achieved the rank of master, the Tabernacle encourages Solars to take this course, for Solar students respond better to the tutelage of other Solars.

KETHER ROCK

Divine warriors of an era long past have returned to the battlegrounds of the South. Rising from the sands of the most inhospitable regions, these robe-swathed heavenly champions strike without warning. Armed with blades cast of the finest orichalcum, battling like the fiercest of desert lions, they carve their way through entire regiments, wield devastating, sorcerous fires and blaze with holy beauty. Witnesses claim they wear ornate, glittering armor and move as though they were born in it. Often, long, flowing scarves hide their lower faces and billowing white or black robes, sometimes emblazoned with a sunburst or marked with flowing texts, swath their bodies, and square-toed boots protect their feet. Inspired by their godlike commanders, the soldiers who follow them display fanatic loyalty, inhuman precision and righteous fury. Their wrath is almost always leveled against the forces of the Realm and those allied with them, and even dedicated legionnaires fall before their blades to the uncertain cheers of the enemies of the Dynasty. And just as quickly as they appear, the desert winds rise, and the forces of a vengeful Heaven vanish. With their true nature and intentions a mystery, Southerners weave colorful and dreadful tales around these divine warriors, while knowing only that their appearance marks a clear shift in the South's destiny, for good or for ill.

Deep in the badlands of the Central South, amongst broken mesas and imposing cliffs, lies Kether Rock, heart of the Southern Cult and home to these divine warriors. It looms over its surroundings, its earthy, impenetrable bulwarks carved from the living stone of a massive, granite mountain. The black and gold banner of Maduka Shin, marked with symbols sacred to the Cult, flies over the thick walls of the commanding fortress. With imperial ambitions, Kether Rock houses the beginning of a celestial army, one led by the Solar Exalted, intent on restoring the glory of the Old Realm. Shen Aru prophesied a coming golden age, and Kether Rock intends to see that prophecy come true — by force, if necessary.

Maduka Shin knows that the decadence and corruption of the Solars brought the First Age to its final, bloody close. Any attempt to reinstate the Old Realm that refuses to take this truth into account is doomed to failure. Intent



on avoiding the errors of the past, Maduka Shin has studied the history of the Solars, particularly their glorious heroism during the Primordial War. Convinced that their decadence came from boredom, Maduka Shin is determined to constantly challenge the Solars of this Age, molding them through hardship and adversity. She believes that a Solar's strength lies in his ability to overcome obstacles and that, so long as there is a crisis for them to defeat, they shall always shine. Only when a Solar is denied adversity does his luster fade. As a result, Kether Rock is the most brutal of the training camps, one that forges the mettle of these newly Exalted between the hammer of the sun and anvil of the sands, quenching the fiery heat of the desert in the blood of battle.

THE SCHOOL OF WAR

Like Venerable Silk, Maduka Shin required an immediate site for her school, but unlike Venerable Silk, she refused to create hell on earth to get it. Instead, she sought out a suitable location in the form of a long-abandoned fortress. Two hundred years earlier, a people known as the Munashe feared a tremendous raid by the Dune People and built a fortress in the desert to protect the vital city of Amadi. When the barbarians attacked, however, they flowed around the immobile bulwark, and the commander of the Rock's soldiers cowered rather than engage the enemy as they sacked Amadi. Within a generation of their

defeat, the Munashe fractured as a people, and their useless fortress was abandoned. Built in brutal badlands, few other nations saw any use to supplying a fortress that protected nothing, and for decades, only the desert winds inhabited the place while the sands preserved it. Isolated and forgotten, the fortress served Maduka Shin's purposes perfectly. Within a year, the forgotten citadel had been refurbished and refitted, ready to become home to one of the fiercest armies in Creation.

Carved from the living stone of a mountain, Kether Rock fades into the scattered crags of the rocky desert, nearly undetectable from a distance. The walls surrounding the entrance take the form of tall, sheer cliff faces, and the massive gates are constructed of ponderous stone shod with metal, opening only with enormous effort and vast, grinding groans. The courtyard within is large, an open-air plaza wide enough to accommodate the barracks and houses of mortal soldiers and their families. Beyond the gates of the fortress, the awe-inspiring mountain vaults into the sky, its slopes carved with fortifications, doors hidden in its rough exterior. The edifice is impressively solid, and Kether Rock is amongst the largest and most defensible fortresses in Creation, rivaling even Lookshy.

Like the Sequestered Tabernacle, Kether Rock's inner levels are symbolic, representing the layers of the human heart. Kether Rock's surface embodies the stony, impenetrable face most warriors present to the world. Just



beyond the thick fortifications rest the barracks and quarters of the soldiers and their Solar masters. Each room is small and square, with enough room for a simple pallet, a table with a candle and a small chest for the storage of weaponry and a few personal possessions. Kether Rock provides such Spartan accommodations not out of some ascetic desire, but due to space constraints and with an eye to proper defense. No strictures disallow personalization, however, and Solar students often decorate their sparse chambers with a few personal mementos and trophies won in battle. Passageways within the fortress are equally narrow, their walls smooth and seamless. The efficient layout of the rooms and corridors allows for rapid deployment of soldiers, further bolstering the defenses of Kether Rock. Narrow shafts set in the mountainside replenishes the stale air within the fortress, as well as allowing light to enter the dark recesses of Kether Rock. Polished, curved mirrors cast illumination throughout the inside of the fortress by day, and by night, candles provide feeble lighting.

Past the surly exterior of a soldier lies a friendlier, more relaxed persona. Similarly, beyond the barracks that make up the outer layer of Kether Rock are the kitchens, training rooms and facilities that allow the fortress to function. The passageways into this portion are wide enough to allow several soldiers to walk abreast. A wide-domed chamber contains the mess hall filled with the echoes of relaxed laughter and rustling conversation as the soldiers enjoy their meal. Elsewhere, the red glow of forges lights the surrounding passageways, and the clash of metal on metal fills the air as smiths and Architects craft and maintain weaponry and equipment. Kept far from the surface where an assault could damage them, large caverns hold the fortress' stores of supplies and materials. Some chambers have been set aside for the instruction of students in areas where the courtyard or the surrounding desert will not suffice. Officers and instructors of Kether Rock make their rooms at this level. Their quarters are spacious chambers, roomy enough to contain their superior equipment, collections of books and tactical equipment such as maps.

Deep within the heart of a warrior lies secrets that he speaks to no one. Vast, hollowed out caverns fill the bowels of Kether Rock, deeper than anyone travels without special purpose. The corridors leading to this level are confusing, filled with secret passageways, side exits and sudden dead ends. Navigation of these winding corridors is impossible for anyone not guided by a native of Kether Rock. Within the vast chambers lie the secrets of Kether Rock. Some are filled with the graves of fallen soldiers. While the corpses of the honored dead are burned so that their souls may go to Heaven, placards depicting their glorious deeds line these solemn, empty halls. Other chambers hold tomes of sorcerous lore, or secret texts that only specially authorized personnel can read. Some few chambers house the secret rites of the various Callings within the fortress. Away from

the prying eyes of others, each order unveils the sins and heroism of its members to one another, reinforcing each Illuminated Solar's resolve to continue. Maduka Shin herself, commander and general of Kether Rock, isolates herself in this low level in a small room where she contemplates the future of the fortress and the Exalted within it.


At the core of every soldier lies his greatest vulnerability, for no matter how powerful a warrior becomes, he is human — he began life as a squalling baby, and he shall die a lonely old man if he isn't cut down in battle. So, too, at the core of Kether Rock lies its greatest vulnerability. Past impossible passageways, in a serene, natural cavern, an ancient and beautiful spring rests. All water within Kether Rock flows from this point, pressed upward by the pressures of the earth, and should any discover this point and poison the well, the fortress would be lost. A beautiful goddess resides within the well, guarding her spring. Shimmering White Eyes appears to be a Southerner, wide featured with thick curls, except that her flesh, her eyes and her robes are all colored the purest white, the hue of flesh that has never seen the sun. Sweet-tasting whispers trickle from her tongue to anyone who keeps her company deep beneath the stones of the fortress. Just as Kether Rock keeps Shimmering White Eyes' spring a secret, so too does the goddess keep a secret: She has fallen in love with one of the Solars at the fortress. She will not speak his name, she will not tell him of her heart, for her nature requires secrecy. But as she pines for her love, her spring gives up less and less water, and should her heart break, the water will grow bitter.

THE ROLE OF KETHER ROCK

While the Sequestered Tabernacle fulfills the Cult of the Illuminated's need for saints and semi-divine messiahs, Kether Rock focuses instead on the defense of the Cult. The Illuminated Ones who learn within the imposing fortress exhibit humility that contrasts with the supreme self-confidence of the Solars who attend the glorious temple of the North. Instead of stepping forward expecting worship, the Illuminated Ones of Kether Rock defend the Cult like guardian angels, just out of sight, never around to hear the praise of those they've rescued. This is not to say they receive no worship. Far from it. Cultists pray daily to these war-messiahs for deliverance, and they quietly make offerings to their glory. Rather, cultists see the Illuminated Ones of Kether Rock as more aloof than those of the Tabernacle, as far-off hero-saints rather than highly visible priests.

To better defend the Cult and the interests of the Gold Faction, Kether Rock houses the largest number of Solar-trained tiger warriors in Creation. As a result, the skill and coordination of Kether Rock's military is unparalleled in the world. Commanders hand-pick their soldiers from amongst the scattered mortal members of the Cult, personally overseeing their training to ensure fanatical devotion. However, Kether Rock lacks the resources to maintain a





large standing army. Because it relies on outside sources for its supplies and because space is limited, Kether Rock never supports more than 2,000 tiger warriors. Though this massive force represents the bulk of the Cult's military assets, it pales before the strength of even one of the Realm's legions. Thus, Maduka Shin makes use of her soldiers as seeds of armies, rather than armies themselves. Whenever she wishes to engage in battle, she first deposits cells of tiger warriors led by an Illuminated One to recruit, train and arm a force strong enough to accomplish the task at hand. When pressed for time, the forces of Kether Rock resort to guerilla tactics, hit-and-run attacks and subtle sabotage to achieve victory. Through these strategies, Maduka Shin remains confident of her ability to exert military pressure despite the comparatively small size of her forces.

Solars, even those who have just recently begun their training at Kether Rock, always serve as officers for its soldiers. Solars are born to lead, and Maduka acknowledges this fact. However, in contrast to the training techniques of the Sequestered Tabernacle, she expects her Solars to respect the sacrifices of those beneath their command and to spend their lives dearly. Each officer knows the names of every soldier beneath him and performs the funeral for each of his lost warriors. Whenever a tiger warrior performs exceptionally well, her Solar commander personally rewards her. In addition to reinforcing the bonds of loyalty between commander and soldier, this method of command teaches the Solar to care for each of his warriors individually, that he must protect his followers in addition to guiding and leading them. Beyond the compassion it encourages, this approach has a more practical reason behind it. While tiger warrior training techniques create new soldiers at an astonishing pace, neither Kether Rock nor the Cult can afford to supply endless hordes of fanatical warriors to serve the Illuminated Ones, and thus, the Cult can ill afford to needlessly throw away its finely honed soldiers.

Maduka Shin's choice of a Southern fortress was no accident. The South is filled both with harsh terrain and multiple wars, a combination that makes the perfect training ground for her Solars. Kether Rock dispatches units of no more than 25 warriors to participate in the peripheral battles of some local brush fire wars, usually those involving allies of the Realm. In addition to advancing the interests of the Cult, this provides valuable battle experience for both soldier and Solar. After assessing the situation and applying his strength in the best manner possible, the Solar returns to Kether rock, where his trainer critiques him according to his performance. At times, Maduka Shin or one of her allies covertly approaches one side and offers services as anonymous mercenaries. The wealth gained from these ventures allows for the trade necessary to keep Kether Rock alive.

GEOGRAPHY

Deep in the South, the badlands that surround Kether Rock are fire blackened and broken. Jagged peaks rise up out of the rough landscape, and sloping dunes are made of ashen sand. Few routes safely cross the treacherous region, most of which are guarded by soldiers from Kether Rock. Caves and dens riddle the largest rocky outcroppings where bowmen watch from hiding, ready to strike if any enemies come too close to their hidden fortress. Making the region even more inhospitable, savage windstorms lift biting clouds of sand to scour stone and flesh alike, slowly reforming stones into strange, bent shapes. In the distance, barely dormant volcanoes grumble quietly, belching forth smoke as they occasionally threaten to reshape the land.

The earth around Kether Rock is infertile, unable to support any farms. For supplies, the fortress relies on local villages and cities that lie just beyond the edges of the badlands. Though no longer a unified and powerful people, the remnants of the Munashe linger in these lands. Though they do not prosper as they once did, their cities and towns produce more than enough to trade, and Kether Rock survives by exchanging gold and protection for food and material. Maduka Shin deliberately chose to weaken Kether Rock with this forced reliance on outsiders as an opportunity to train her Solars in the arts of diplomacy and negotiation, for war requires more than just force. Whenever a crisis evolves in one of the local supply towns, Kether Rock dispatches one of its younger Solars to tend to the dilemma, renegotiating trade if necessary. If Illuminated Solars-in-training cannot learn to maintain supply lines and allies under such simple conditions, they will never be able to run an empire on any scale, so they must learn the practice here.

Though their nation was once great, the Munashe are now a beaten, fractured people. Without large armies or powerful protectors, they spent the past several centuries living at the whims of outside forces. Many are fervently religious, hoping to avert the next disaster by bowing before their tormentors in supplication. As a result, ancestor worship is common, and infernal cults spring up with frightening, desperate regularity. The Munashe are tall and willowy, with olive skin and silky black hair. The women commonly wear their hair long, employ vibrant cosmetics to make themselves more attractive and wear long wraps of white, tan or black linen, belted with rope or, for richer women, chains of silver. Men keep their hair short, wearing loose, billowing pants and prefer to wear long vests or keep their chests bare. Tattoos are common among men, and jewelry is popular among both genders, particularly during more prosperous times. Most Munashe are farmers or simple craftsman, governed by local, hereditary rulers, though priests commonly wield more power than political leaders if they can produce genuine protection for the community. Some Munashe are born with pale

skin, a legacy left by the Dune People's raids, and the Munashe consider such beings dangerous and unpredictable by nature. In recent days, hope and ambition has begun to spring up in the hearts of the Munashe. The Cult of the Illuminated preaches among the Munashe, their words strengthened by the appearance of golden, divine warriors who arrive to defend local villages from rampaging monsters. Finding a chance at hope, at safety, the Munashe convert in droves, a willing populace that Kether Rock can secretly and quietly draw from. To the north, however, some Immaculates have achieved similar results by using similar tactics: offering safety in return for conversion. The two factions are destined to meet in the center, and what happens that day will go a long way to determining the fate of Kether Rock.

TRAINING REGIMEN

Maduka Shin's methods contrast with those of Venerable Silk — some even call them dangerous. Rather than lift her Illuminated up before all others as an example of glory and divinity, she grinds them into the ground beneath her heel and demands that they rise despite her. Every training exercise she gives them, every mission she assigns them, challenges them, and as they struggle for victory, as they rise bloody and beaten from defeat, they find inner strength and relentless resolve. The harder she strains to contain their glory, the more humility she enforces upon her Solars, the fiercer their souls burn for release, and in this manner, she stokes their inner brilliance and power. More importantly, her constant challenges give her Solars direction, something to turn their efforts to so that they do not descend into decadence.

Thus, the first moments of a Solar's arrival at Kether Rock are not glorious and triumphant, but rather, brutal and humiliating. A newly arrived Exalt first encounters the massive stone gates of the fortress, and within moments of stepping past them, the Solars dream of grandeur lie broken at his feet. The gates open only at dusk, and in the gray of twilight, only gods and Exalts stand, resplendently decorated in armor and artifacts, to witness the entrance of the young Exalt with hardened eyes. As he enters and announces his intention to take his place in Kether Rock, the god or Exalt chosen to be the young Solar's personal drill instructor steps forward and wordlessly acknowledges his presence. Then, the trainer offers the Solar the beating of his life, artfully demonstrating the superiority of his technique upon the inexperienced and hapless Exalt until he lies broken upon the ground. Kneeling beside the student, the instructor explains the brutality of the world, that only the strong survive and that not even the spark of Exaltation is enough to ensure victory. He unveils Maduka Shin's philosophy of adversity, that only those who rise after each defeat and overcome will become truly great and that glory is earned, never demanded.

Finished with his student, the trainer summons mortals who lift the young hero and carry him off to have his wounds tended. Far above, Maduka Shin watches all from a small balcony, and as the new student departs, she sends instructions detailing the plan of this new Solar's training.

The more experienced Solars of Kether Rock refer to a new Exalt's first week in the fortress as "sweet bliss." After his wounds have healed, servants bring him before his trainer, who strips him of his worldly possessions, for a student needs nothing but his desire to overcome obstacles, deserves nothing except that which he earns. He may select any weapon he wishes to be schooled in, and those who choose no weapon but their bare fists earn great respect from both their peers and their trainers. Once he is issued his weapon, he receives a uniform consisting of long, pale flowing robes and scarves that ward off the worst of the desert heat. Then, servants bring him to his Spartan, nearly empty chambers. For the first week, he is free to tour the fortress at his leisure and is treated to normal, daily meals as he mingles with his (often amused) fellow Solars.


Then, one week after his arrival, hell begins.

THE FIRST YEAR

Trainers kick their students awake when the first sliver of the sun crests the horizon. Dragged out into the badlands, their training begins in earnest. Dressed in heavy armor and laden down with equipment, young Solars run barefoot for miles in the rocky, treacherous desert. Exhaustion is no escape, for the Solar is merely whisked back to the Rock for medical attention, and then, he immediately returns to his training. Mortals beat the Exalt bloody with sticks to toughen his frame while the trainer stalks around him, reciting passages from Cult doctrine. Finally, the Exalt is allowed to wield his weapon in nonlethal gladiatorial exercises, grand brawls against tiger warriors and lesser demons bound expressly to train the Exalt. Then, lunch is served. After the Exalt has finished his meal, the abusive training resumes.

Unexpected tests punctuate a Solar's first year. The Exalt's trainers expect him to learn more than just combat skills. After intense survival lessons, the Solar's instructors abandon him in the depths of the desert, where immaterial gods watch as he struggles to survive with only a knife and a length of rope. To prepare the Exalt for surprise assaults, tiger warriors wielding sticks sometimes ambush the Exalt in his sleep or in the middle of a lesson. The Solar only has two respites. After dinner, the Solar retires to his quarters for a few hours of peace, reading his well-worn Cult scripture. And upon the seventh day of each week, Kether Rock suspends all training as the Unseen Masters and the eldest Solar gathers all the Exalts of the Rock together for the worship of the Unconquered Sun and to honor their own place as his warriors. This is the closest moment that a first-year Solar has to glory.





Duty is as equally important to Maduka Shin as adversity. Religious instruction within Kether Rock glosses over the concept of Solars as incarnations of divinity to place emphasis on their role as messiahs and saviors, teaching them that the fate of the world lies in their hands. The trainers routinely test the Solars in secret, placing them in situations that test their integrity and pride. Success or failure are rewarded or punished with equal subtlety. Though a Solar exists above mortals, he learns not to abuse his position, for the Unconquered Sun Exalted his Chosen to defend the weak, not to exploit them. A Solar's place is one of service through leadership. Maduka Shin stops short of preaching true self-sacrifice, but only because she cannot afford to lose precious Solars. The regimen results in a strict, self-enforced form of ethics, no less rigid or demanding than the code taught to the Solars of the Sequestered Tabernacle. Indeed, the Solars of Kether Rock often have a certain smug pride at their selfless honor and their achievements in conquering the training program of Kether Rock, secretly feeling themselves superior to other, weaker Solars.

No mortal man could survive such an intense regimen, but the training isn't meant for mortals. The training is designed to hammer out the last of the Solar's human weaknesses, forging him into a divine warrior. Within a year, the training has done just that. Solar warriors of Kether Rock are exemplary fighters, as tough as the stones that make up the fortress. While the intensity of the training subsides, they have not yet finished learning. At the end of the first year, Maduka Shin summons each student to her chambers for an intense interview. His trainers attend to comment on his progress, offering withering criticisms and grudging praise. At the end of the interview, Maduka Shin poses the young Solar a series of questions, assessing which Calling would suit him best. Finally, she dismisses him. While the experience is unfriendly and overly formal, most Solars walk away feeling a sense of elation and accomplishment. The memory of the criticisms fade, as the Solar remembers only the first words of serious praise heard from his instructors. Second-year students generally feel that their status and prowess have grown — that his hard struggles have won him the respect of his peers.

THE SECOND YEAR

The second year for the Solar is easier. While physical training continues, it isn't as taxing. His trainers treat him with a modicum more respect, though he is expected to know his place. In addition to physical training, the Solar receives continued mental exercises in the form of tactics, basic education in history from the Cult perspective and theological doctrine. For the first time since his arrival, the Solar participates in the daily worship of the Unconquered Sun, sipping from his bowl of purified water and whispering prayers to the Unconquered Sun. Rather than simply

witnessing the weekly rituals, he partakes in it in a lesser form. Afternoon training sessions take the form of specialized lessons based on his Calling, and for the first time, the Solar trains with other Exalts.

Indoctrination takes a new form during the second year. Each Calling has secret rites and rituals, designed by Maduka Shin when she first built the school, that they perform in the hidden chambers that clutter the bowels of Kether Rock. Though they vary from Calling to Calling, the ceremonies serve the same basic purpose. By extolling the virtues and sins of the Solar, the brothers of his Calling reinforce his indoctrination. The secrecy of the meetings allows the Solar to receive praise without violating the ideal of humility. Finally, the oaths and rites of passage inflicted upon the young Solar enforce a sense of loyalty and comradery with the brothers of his Calling, for no one but he and his brothers have endured the same trials. While these meetings are secret, others in Kether Rock are vaguely aware that something takes place deep within the Rock. Outsiders, however, hear nothing of what goes on within the bowels of the fortress.

Paladins receive instruction in all forms of war. Their training extends the battle experience of the first year with yet more brutal combat exercises and battles under even more impossible odds. Tactical lessons take extreme importance, and every Paladin sleeps with a copy of *The Thousand Correct Actions of the Upright Soldier* and should be able to quote it as readily as they can quote Cult doctrines. Those who show talent at sorcery receive intense drilling in the occult, departing to the deep desert to practice devastating battle magics far from where it might harm Kether Rock. By the end of their second year, these Solars have been forged into ultimate weapons.

The rites and rituals of the Paladins always take place at dawn, the time of battle, during the first morning of the month that the sun and moon can be seen together in the sky. The ceremonies begin with thunderous prayers led by the Ritemaster, wherein the Solars recite their pledges to defend Creation from the enemies of the Unconquered Sun. Each Solar wounds his palm during the ceremony, recompense for the blood their battles shed. When this ceremony ends, each Solar steps forward, stripped to the waist, and speaks of his greatest failing over the past month. Perhaps the Solar had a moment of cowardice or lacked judgment in a crucial moment. Each Solar has some failing to reveal, some moment of weakness, some flawed decision. When the confession is complete, the penitent receives a strip of white cloth. If judged harshly, the strip contains flowing flame-tongue letters depicting the Solar's failing. The words are always vague, never enough for an outsider to discern their true meaning, but they daily remind the Solar of his faltering moments. Those judged kindly receive a strip of pure, untouched cloth, a symbol of his purity of purpose. Paladins adorn their armor with

these strips, fluttering ribbons and scarves that represent their humility and dedication. Michael, Warmaster of Kether Rock, recently received the reins of Ritemaster from Innana, Bound Swordmistress of Kether Rock, an ifrit. Paladins sometimes secretly refer to themselves as the Order of the Stained Hand.

Deacons received the least conventional training. These master scouts and spies travel into the wilderness surrounding the Rock for weeks at a time. They learn to navigate the depths of the badlands, each nook and cranny, and the nature of the desert. They enter nearby Munashe villages where they learn to hide their divinity, to gather information and to fit seamlessly into the population. Deacons receive more testing than anyone else. Often, they are assigned to bring back some prey or to steal some talisman from a local shaman. Each test is a measure of the Deacon's skill as warrior and scout. The Deacon's combat training continues, but it takes a more stealthy turn, instructing him in the arts of the silent kill, of assassination.

On the night of the new moon, Deacons are blindfolded and led from their rooms into their secret chamber by way of hidden passages. Darkness and silence isolate the Deacons from one another as they wait, lost in self-reflection. When the Ritemaster calls out the name of a Deacon, he remains silent as his Calling brothers recite his sins and deeds, their voices echoing throughout the chamber in a cacophony of condemnation and praise. For his sins, the Ritemaster gives the Deacon a scourge to flagellate himself as penance. For his heroism, the Ritemaster offers the Deacon a knife and a strip of black cloth. With the knife, the Deacon may mark his flesh with a symbol representing his heroic deed. Few choose to do so, for such marks would make their roles as spies more difficult. Other Deacons see the marks as a challenge, and eagerly wear their secret badges of honor despite the danger they present to their more secretive missions. After the ceremony is ended, each Deacon decorates his armor and clothing with the black strips to hide the marks on his skin. The greatest of the Deacons wear so much black that their very identities are obscured. The Ritemaster of the Deacons is the god Mamuneh, Keeper of the Secrets Beneath the Sand. Deacons occasionally refer to themselves in secret as the Order of the Blinded Eye.

Architects learn matters of engineering and civic leadership. Their afternoon lessons contain dry discussions of mathematics, architecture and natural sciences. Physical exercise, particularly strength and stamina training, take precedence over more brutal combat training. When the day turns to night, lessons continue in the form of logistics and proper management techniques, and Architects spend more time learning than anyone else. Their combat training isn't neglected, and though Deacons and Paladins sneer at their prowess, Architects are still soldiers

trained at Kether Rock, more than capable of going to battle with any other Exalted.

The Architects of Kether Rock gather upon the solstices and equinoxes of the Unconquered Sun's path across the heavens. Though they meet less often than the other Callings, their ceremonies last far longer, filled with archaic ritual and esoteric symbology. Dressed in ceremonially significant robes reminiscent of those worn by the Solar Deliberative in days long past, the Architects form a circle in their secret chamber, the largest and most ornate in the bowels of Kether Rock. The Ritemaster, obscured in veils and robes, begins the ceremony by calling forth three Architects and challenging their faith. Usually, these tests take the form of verbal interrogation, but at times, the tests are physical and dangerous in nature, such as shoving bare fists into glowing coals. Those who pass their examination may continue their attendance, and those who fail must leave the meeting to contemplate upon their faith. After the tests, all the Architects renew their oaths of loyalty to Kether Rock. The Ritemaster conducts the baroque ceremonies that follow entirely in the tongue of the Old Realm, as the gathered Architects discuss the recent events in the world and conspire to better Creation. While the other Callings focus on personal adversity and progress, the Architects concern themselves with the adversity that troubles the world and the progress they can offer it. After the last gong has rung and the last candle is snuffed, signaling the end of the ceremony, the Ritemaster quietly gathers together those Architects she tested at the beginning of the rites and issues them special tasks to accomplish by the next ceremony. These secret tasks advance the Gold Faction's agenda in subtle ways, and clever Architects understand the nature of the Cult and the Unseen Masters behind it better than the members of any other Calling in Kether Rock. The Ritemaster of the Architects, behind her robes and veils, is Maduka Shin herself. The Architects have no secret name for themselves, for they are proud of their status of Architects of the Third Realm.

THE FINAL YEAR

As with the beginning of the second year at Kether Rock, a student's final year of training begins with an interview with Maduka Shin. This time, his trainers do not attend. Rather, five kneeling mortals, robed and veiled, surround her. Once more, Maduka questions the student's progress and critiques his development with brutal honesty. Finally, she invites the Solar to unveil each of the soldiers one by one. As the Solar does so, each tiger warrior confides a personal secret to the Solar: a girl he wishes to marry, a young brother at home, a personal hero he admires. The tiger warriors have waited and trained their whole careers for this moment, and after the last has bared his secret, each swears undying loyalty to the Solar. Maduka



Shin informs the Solar that the lives of these tiger warriors are in his hands, that they are his to command.

The final year consists almost entirely of leadership and tactical training. While the Solar continues his combat drills and the specialized training he received in the previous years, their role in his schooling diminishes. Solar learn to use their soldiers in a manner that best suits their Calling. Architects guide their soldiers in the defense of local villages, protecting and serving in the form of military police and aiding him in engineering projects. Deacons use their soldiers for covert operations, anything from information gathering to directed raids. Paladins, of course, learn to engage directly in battle and often command larger numbers of soldiers than members of other

Callings, their dedicated five serving as officers or as a front-line unit.

Kether Rock regularly tests a Solar's ability to command under stressful circumstances. Instructors "accidentally" give the Solar inaccurate directions that lead him into the thick of battle or a dangerous band of savages. Targets of a raid receive mysterious tips about the incoming assault, giving them more than enough time to prepare adequate defenses. These unexpected situations push the Solar's ability to fight and command to the limits, revealing his true mettle and his true flaws. While a Solar certainly has the strength and training to survive these encounters, his less-than-divine troops risk death, their survival becoming the true test. The instructors judge the Solar by the dual

THE THIRD TRAINING CAMP

This book details only two of the three training Cult training camps, intentionally leaving the third camp blank. Individual Storytellers are invited to flesh out the third camp, tailoring it to the unique needs of their series. Representing the third facet to the Gold Factions agenda for Solars, the final training camp likely has a unique philosophy, one challenged by the other two camps. Like Kether Rock and the Sequestered Tabernacle, the third school should offer accelerated training as well as specialized roles in the form of unique Callings. While the two schools detailed in this book can provide inspiration, Storytellers shouldn't feel constrained to follow the examples too closely.

For inspiration, three sample camps are detailed below.

The Purified Ziggurat of Unconquered Dedication: Despite all the power and trappings of civilization, the Solars fell haplessly before the treacherous Dragon-Blooded. Yet, the Lunars, lesser beings, survived due to their willingness to forsake civilization. Bloody-Lipped Cassandra, Chosen of the Maiden of Secrets, believes that, as the Lunars lived in the world of the Solars during the First Age, now the Solars must emulate their Lunar cousins in the Second. The Purified Ziggurat rests deep in the savage jungles of the Southeast, where Bloody-Lipped Cassandra seeks to resurrect the primal worship of the Unconquered Sun that existed in the dawn of Creation. Tutored by a gathering of jungle elementals, three Lunars who defy the Silver Pact and even a handful of Dragon Kings, Solars of the Ziggurat learn survivalism, brutal combat techniques and thunderous oratory. Disturbingly, rumors of human sacrifice and other, darker practices have surfaced, though Gold Faction Sidereals who have investigated found little to support these claims.

The Underground Sanctuary: The era of the glorious, lordly Solar is past. The other training camps foolishly cling to the past, attempting to resurrect former glories that can never return. The modern Solar is a hunted being, and Joseph One-Shoe, Chosen of the Maiden of Journeys, Master of the Underground Sanctuary, offers them haven deep in the underbelly of Nexus. Acknowledging the realities of the modern day, Joseph One-Shoe teaches his Solars to hide their divinity and to work their miracles out of sight. Resembling a loosely organized crime syndicate crossed with a charitable soup kitchen, the Underground Sanctuary uses its array of contacts and subtle influence to provide material gain and secret support to the Cult of the Illuminated. Far from irreligious, the Solars of the Underground Sanctuary lack the pretentiousness of the priests of the Tabernacle or the aloofness of Kether Rock's soldiers. They are street messiahs and heroes of the common man. The heated spice of revolution scents the air, and when it breaks, the Underground Sanctuary will be ready.

The Tea Gardens of Yu-Shan: Both Heaven and Earth are corrupt, and neither can be saved alone. Pugu-mian, Understudy of the Subsecretary of the God of Imperial Law, secretly pursues an agenda that he hopes will heal the wounds of both Creation and Yu-Shan. Hidden away in the vast, forested tea gardens of Chien, former lover of Emma-O, he gathers Solars to study with the gods themselves. Teaching them the secrets of sorcery, the dealings of spirits and the ideals of justice, Pugu-mian hopes to supplant the Realm, rather than destroy it, with Solars who act as intermediaries between Heaven and Earth, cleansing both of corruption. Having secretly gathered together what scraps of Solar sorcerous lore it could, the Tea Gardens of Yu-Shan alone can instruct Solars in the Adamant Circle of Sorcery, though the instructors' knowledge is flawed and tattered at best.

standards of victory and losses, condemning a Solar who withholds his soldiers and losses the battle as quickly as they condemn a Solar who frivolously throws away his troops.

When the final year ends, the Solar returns to Maduka Shin's chambers for his final interview with the Master of Kether Rock. His soldiers attend him, once more veiled and robed. Rather than question the Solar himself, Maduka Shin questions his soldiers, listening to their experiences serving beneath him and seeing his strengths and weaknesses through their eyes. Thus, the final judgment of the Solar comes not from Maduka Shin, his instructors or even himself, but from those whom he has led and protected. Once the Solar has taken in this final lesson, Maduka Shin descends to anoint his forehead, pronouncing him Illuminated. In the following celebrations, tradition dictates that the soldiers and instructors of the Solar present him with a gift, usually an artifact he held in a past life or a talisman crafted by the hands of his own soldiers.

Graduation does not banish the Solars from Kether Rock. The few Solars who have already graduated from Kether Rock have taken up residence in the more spacious chambers deeper in the fortress. These Solars lend their talents to Kether Rock's military exploits where they can, serving as leaders and tacticians. More experienced Solars take part in the training of younger Solars where they can. Even those Solars who have no wish to participate in Kether Rock's imperialistic adventures often remain for the excellent training program. Many Solars thrive upon the challenges posed by their instructors. Far from civilization, close to the sun, Kether Rock serves as an ideal place for meditation upon Essence and the expansion of Charms. Despite their staggering skill, the Solars of Kether Rock realize that adversity never ends and that training can never truly be complete.

CHARACTER CREATION

The Solar Exalted of the Cult of the Illuminated are exposed to a significantly different initiation into the ranks of power than those Exalted elsewhere in Creation. Storytellers desiring to run Solar Cult games should use these character-creation rules where applicable. Keep in mind that Solars initiated into the Cult are, by and large, simply better than those who are not, and Storytellers should not introduce Cult characters among normal Solars unless those Solars have significant experience or the Storyteller and players are aware of the disparity of power and everyone finds the prospect acceptable.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

As with any character, concept is an important step in the development process, but special attention should be paid in the case of an Illuminated Solar. The experience of a Solar recruited by the Cult of the Illuminated differs greatly from one who loses herself in the Threshold. In

addition to the usual details such as her mortal life and the nature of Exaltation, players should consider why the Solar accepted the invitations of her guide (or if she refused, how she was tricked or coerced by the Gold Faction Sidereals into joining) and what her experience with him was. How does she feel about the Cult? Does she fervently buy into the propaganda that surrounds her, or is she a defiant rebel who causes no end of trouble to her trainers? How does she feel about her fellow Illuminated Ones, and how does she treat those Solars who remain outside the influence and enlightenment of the Cult? Though Illuminated Solars have more in common with one another due to shared backgrounds than unIlluminated Solars, they deserve as much thought and variation as their untrained counterparts.

Illuminated Solars select caste and Nature as normal. While no limitations apply to an Illuminated Solar's choice of Nature, the idealism of Illuminated Solars makes Paragon a particularly common Nature amongst them. In addition to the usual selections of caste and Nature, Illuminated Solars must choose which training camp they attended. The refined and metaphysical methods taught by the Sequestered Tabernacle create a different sort of Solar than the brutal and militant techniques of Kether Rock. Further, all Solars at each school must select a specialization, referred to as a Calling, representing the Solar's role within the Cult. Each school has three, and these Callings are detailed below.

STEP TWO: CHOOSING ATTRIBUTES

Illuminated Solars are as talented and innately capable as untrained Solars and, like them, have eight (8) dots to divide among their primary Attributes, six (6) to divide among their secondary Attributes and four (4) to divide among their tertiary Attributes.

STEP THREE: CHOOSING ABILITIES

Due to their extensive training, Illuminated Solars receive 30 dots to spread among their Abilities, rather than 25. As usual, the Solar must spend at least 10 of these dots on his Favored and Caste Abilities. In addition to this requirement, Illuminated Solars from specific training camps are *required* to take certain Abilities at minimum levels, the result of the intensity of their respective training regimens.

The Sequestered Tabernacle: Endurance •, Linguistics • (Old Realm), Lore •, Martial Arts ••, Occult •, Presence •••, Socialize •.

Kether Rock: Either Archery • or Brawl •, Endurance •, Medicine •, Melee ••, Presence •, Resistance •, Survival •••.

STEP FOUR: ADVANTAGES

Though the Cult of the Illuminated lacks the resources of the Realm, Yu-Shan or the Deathlords, it remains a large and considerable organization that makes



its resources fully available to its Solar saints. As a result, all Illuminated Solars gain nine (9), rather than seven, Background dots. In addition, all Illuminated Solars begin with Illumination • for free. Modified and alternate Backgrounds are detailed below.

Illuminated Solars receive eight (8) Charms, four (4) of which must be chosen from Caste or Favored Abilities. In addition, all Illuminated Solars begin with four (4) free Charms determined by their training camp. Those who train in the Sequestered Tabernacle gain Ox-Body Technique, Harmonious Presence Meditation and two Charms from one of the following four martial arts: Ebon Shadow Style, Praying Mantis Style, Snake Style or Tiger Style. Those who train at Kether Rock receive Ox-Body Technique, Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit and one of the following pairs of Charms: Golden Essence Block and Dipping Swallow Defense; Reed in the Wind and Shadow Over Water; Durability of Oak Meditation and Iron Skin Concentration (Spirit Strengthens the Skin replaces Iron Skin Concentration for those using Exalted Power Combat); or Whirlwind Armor-Donning Prana and Armored Scout's Invigoration. As usual, the Solar must meet the minimum requirements to gain these Charms.

An Illuminated Solar receives five (5) dots of Virtues just as a normal Solar does. Due to the indoctrination of the Cult of the Illuminated, many Cult Solars have a Conviction of 3 or higher, but there are no actual requirements for a Solar's Virtue selections. The Illuminated Solar must select one of his Virtues rated at three or higher and choose an appropriate Virtue Flaw for it.

In addition to the effects of the Great Curse, Illuminated Solars also suffer from Indoctrination. Almost every aspect of their training, from the mantras they chant to the names of the combat techniques they use, contains an element of propaganda within them, safety measures included to ensure the Sidereals' control over their Solar pupils. Surrounded by worshipful demons and admiring gods, the Illuminated Ones have little reason to question their beliefs and usually reject any truths that contradict their strict world-view. To defy any Cult responsibilities or violate any Cult tenets requires the Solar's player to fail a Conviction roll, or if successful, he must spend a point of Willpower and mark a box of Limit to repress the character's Conviction. A Solar could conceivably overcome this weakness through lengthy therapy and absence from the Gold Faction's manipulative techniques, but most Illuminated fail to even recognize the need for such an undertaking.

CALLINGS

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Illuminated Solars calculate their Willpower as normal. An Illuminated Solar begins with an Essence of *three* (3), rather than two. Both Traits may be raised with bonus

points, but under no circumstances may an Illuminated Solar begin with an Essence of six (6) or higher.

An Illuminated Solar receives 15 bonus points to spend as he sees fit. Except for specific Charms and Abilities determined by the Illuminated One's Calling, all bonus point costs are as for standard Solars. For these specified Abilities and Charms, the cost is discounted by one freebie point. **This discount stacks with the discount granted by purchasing a Caste or Favored Ability or Charm.** Thus, purchasing a Calling Charm costs 4 freebies, 3 if Favored or Caste, and a Calling Ability costs 1 point per dot, or 1 point per 2 dots if Caste or Favored. This bonus does not apply to specialties chosen from Calling Abilities (the training the Solar receives is general, not uniquely specialized). The Callings and their Abilities and Charms can be found below. For Terrestrial Circle Sorcery or Celestial Circle Sorcery, the discount applies only to the purchase of the actual Charms, not to the spells of corresponding circles. For Ox-Body Technique or any Charms that, like Ox-Body, can be purchased multiple times, the discount applies only to the first purchase of that Charm. Charms taken from the Caste Books have been reprinted on page 100.

THE SEQUESTERED TABERNACLE

- **Exemplar:** All Solars are considered living, semi-divine saints by the Cult of the Illuminated, but Exemplars embody sainthood. These faithful Exalts dedicate their existences to strengthening the divinity within themselves through careful regimens that enhance their bodies, minds and souls. Each resulting Solar has near complete mastery over his own body and the bodies of others, unparalleled command of Essence and can whisper platitudes that break the hearts of listeners. Masters of theology and martial arts, Exemplars often engage Immaculates in duels of both wits and fists.

Calling Abilities: Endurance, Lore, Martial Arts, Medicine and Performance

Calling Charms: Body-Mending Meditation, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Essence-Lending Method, Heart-Compelling Method, Listener-Swaying Argument, Majestic Radiant Presence, Masterful Performance Exercise, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Touch of Blissful Release, Will-Bolstering Method

- **Inquisitor:** The fabric of the Cult must be maintained, and this all-important task falls to the Inquisitors of the Sequestered Tabernacle. These Exalts learn techniques meant to aid them in excising weakness and heresy from within their ranks and in hunting down any infernal infiltration. Far from dreaded, the sight of an Inquisitor is often a relief to demon-haunted cultists. When not slaying monsters or tormenting heretics and Immaculate spies, Inquisitors aid in the management of Cult groups.

Calling Abilities: Awareness, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Martial Arts

Calling Charms: Deft Official's Way, Judge's Ear Technique, Prey-Freezing Gaze, Seasoned Criminal Method, Sensory Acuity Prana, Speed the Wheels, Spirit-Cutting Attack, Spirit-Detecting Glance, Surprise Anticipation Method, Ten Magistrate Eyes

- **Itinerant:** Unlike with the Immaculate faith, cultists are spread wide and thin and forced to hide in secret. Itinerants serve as the ears and eyes of the Cult, bringing messages to far-flung Cult groups as well as tending to the needs of those isolated communities. Closer to the land than most Solars, Itinerants also guide pioneering cultists when they must establish new communities, as well as selecting the next promised land for settlement.

Calling Abilities: Linguistics, Martial Arts, Occult, Presence and Survival

Calling Charms: All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight, Chaos-Repelling Pattern, Excellent Emissary's Tongue, Food-Gathering Exercise, Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit, Integrity-Protecting Prana, Spirit-Detecting Glance, Tireless Traveler's Stamina, Trackless Region Navigation Charm

KETHER ROCK

- **Architect:** To properly conduct war, trenches must be dug, engines of war must be built, supply lines must be maintained, and once new territory has been conquered, it must be rebuilt and properly managed. Architects operate as a mixture of combat engineer and civil servant. As master craftsmen, they can build anything necessary for the cause with their own, mighty hands. As charismatic leaders, they can begin the process of integration for the newly conquered populace while they rebuild both their cities and their governments in their own image.

Calling Abilities: Bureaucracy, Craft, Lore, Melee and Socialize

Calling Charms: Increasing Strength Exercise, Flawless Handiwork Method, Graceful Courtier Attitude, Harmonious Presence Meditation, Masterful Performance Exercise, Mastery of Small Manners, Object-Strengthening Touch, Respect Commanding Attitude, Thunder's Might, Wise-Eyed Courtier Method

- **Deacon:** Information and covert operations are vital to any military action, and Deacons provide both. These Exalts serve as front line scouts, master spies and commandos when necessary. Like any graduate of the Rock, Deacons are consummate warriors, but they can sheath their weapons if a silver tongue or cunning better serves the situation.

Calling Abilities: Investigation, Larceny, Melee, Stealth and Survival

Calling Charms: Crafty Observation Method, Easily Overlooked Presence Method, Game-Snaring Huntsman's Method, Graceful Crane Stance, Mental Invisibility Technique, Sensory Acuity Prana, Surprise Anticipation Method, Ten Magistrate Eyes, Traceless Passage, Unshakable Bloodhound Technique



CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

• STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

Choose concept, caste, Nature and Calling.
Note the caste's anima power.

• STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Note that all Attributes start with one dot before you add any.

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (8/6/4)

Choose Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina
Choose Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Choose Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES

Note Caste Abilities.

Select Favored Abilities (5; may not be the same as Caste Abilities).

Choose Abilities (30 — at least 10 must be spent on Caste or Favored Abilities; at least one must be in each Favored Ability; none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points. Students of the Sequestered Tabernacle must have a minimum of Endurance •, Linguistics [Old Realm] •, Lore •, Martial Arts ••, Occult •, Presence •••, Socialize •. Students of Kether Rock must have a minimum of either Archery • or Brawl •, Endurance •, Medicine •, Melee ••, Presence •, Resistance •, Survival •••.)

• STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES

Choose Backgrounds (9 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points; Illuminated Solars begin with Illumination • for free), Charms (8 — at least 4 must be taken from Caste or Favored Abilities. Additionally, students of the Sequestered Tabernacle gain, at no cost, Ox-Body Technique, Harmonious Presence Meditation, and two Charms from one of the following four martial arts: Ebon Shadow Style, Praying Mantis Style, Snake Style or Tiger Style. Students of Kether Rock gain, at no cost, Ox-Body Technique, Hardship Surviving Mendicant Spirit and one of the following pairs of Charms: Golden Essence Block and Dipping Swallow Defense; Reed in the Wind and Shadow Over Water; Durability of Oak Meditation and Iron Skin Concentration [Spirit Strengthens the Skin for those using Exalted Power Combat]; or Whirlwind Armor-Donning Prana and Armored Scout's Invigoration.), Virtues (5; none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points, and all begin with one dot before spending points).

• STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Record Essence (3), Willpower (sum of two highest Virtues; Willpower cannot start above 8 unless two Virtues are rated at 4 or higher), Personal Essence pool ([Essence x 3] + Willpower), Peripheral Essence pool ([Essence x 7] + Willpower + [the sum of your Virtues]) and health levels (7 + any gained from Charms).

• BONUS POINTS

Bonus points (15) may be spent at any time during character creation.

CASTES

• Dawn:

Caste Abilities: Archery, Brawl, Martial Arts, Melee and Thrown

Anima Powers: May use their animas to appear awesome and terrifying for a scene.

• Zenith:

Caste Abilities: Endurance, Performance, Presence, Resistance and Survival

Anima Powers: May use their animas to burn the bodies of the dead and to do aggravated damage to the undead and demons.

• Twilight:

Caste Abilities: Craft, Investigation, Lore, Medicine and Occult

Anima Powers: May use their animas as protective shields.

• Night:

Caste Abilities: Athletics, Awareness, Dodge, Larceny and Stealth

Anima Powers: May use their animas as cloaks against detection, and may mute their anima display when using Essence.

• Eclipse:

Caste Abilities: Bureaucracy, Linguistics, Ride, Sail and Socialize

Anima Powers: May use their animas to sanctify oaths and contracts and to provide diplomatic immunity when dealing with spirits, demons and the Fair Folk.

CALLINGS OF THE SEQUESTERED TABERNACLE:

• **Exemplar:** Living embodiments of perfection and sainthood.

Calling Abilities: Endurance, Lore, Martial Arts, Medicine and Performance

Calling Charms: Body-Mending Meditation, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Essence-Lending Method, Heart-Compelling Method, Listener-Swaying Argument, Majestic Radiant Presence, Masterful Performance Exercise, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Touch of Blissful Release, Will-Bolstering Method

• **Inquisitor:** Investigator of corruption and safeguard of communities.

Calling Abilities: Awareness, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Martial Arts

Calling Charms: Deft Official's Way, Judge's Ear Technique, Prey-Freezing Gaze, Seasoned Criminal Method, Sensory Acuity Prana, Speed the Wheels, Spirit-Cutting Attack, Spirit-Detecting Glance, Surprise Anticipation Method, Ten Magistrate Eyes

• **Itinerant:** Wandering holy man and defender of pilgrims.

Calling Abilities: Linguistics, Martial Arts, Occult, Presence and Survival

Calling Charms: All-Encompassing Sorcerer's Sight, Chaos-Repelling Pattern, Excellent Emissary's Tongue, Food-Gathering Exercise, Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit, Integrity-Protecting Prana, Spirit-Detecting Glance, Tireless Traveler's Stride, Trackless Region Navigation Charm

CALLINGS OF KETHER ROCK:

• **Architect:** Civic engineer and community leader.

Calling Abilities: Bureaucracy, Craft, Lore, Melee and Socialize

Calling Charms: Increasing Strength Exercise, Flawless Handiwork Method, Graceful Courtier Attitude, Harmonious Presence Meditation, Masterful Performance Exercise, Mastery of Small Manners, Object-Strengthening Touch, Respect Commanding Attitude, Thunder's Might, Wise-Eyed Courtier Method

• **Deacon:** Spy, assassin and commando.

Calling Abilities: Investigation, Larceny, Melee, Stealth and Survival

Calling Charms: Crafty Observation Method, Easily Overlooked Presence Method, Game-Snaring Huntsman's Method, Graceful Crane Stance, Mental Invisibility Technique, Sensory Acuity Prana, Surprise

Anticipation Method, Ten Magistrate Eyes, Traceless Passage, Unshakable Bloodhound Technique

• **Paladin:** Commander of soldiers and living weapon.

Calling Abilities: Craft (War), Endurance, Melee, Performance and Presence

Calling Charms: Celestial Circle Sorcery, Essence-Gathering Temper, Fury Inciting Presence, Heroism-Encouraging Presence, Ox-Body Technique, Respect Commanding Attitude, Rout-Stemming Gesture, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Unruly Mob Dispersing Rebuke, Willpower-Enhancing Spirit

VIRTUES

- **Compassion** — Pure love for humanity.
- **Conviction** — Burning faith in the cause.
- **Temperance** — Moral fiber and self-discipline.
- **Valor** — Courage and righteous fury.

BACKGROUNDS

- **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- **Artifact** — Wondrous tools and weapons of the First Age.
- **Contacts** — Information sources and friends in useful places.
- **Familiar** — An animal companion.
- **Followers** — Mortal cultists who look to you for leadership.
- **Illumination** — Rank and prestige within the Cult of the Illuminated.
- **Influence** — Your pull in the earthly world around you.
- **Manse** — A place of power and Essence.
- **Mentor** — A patron and instructor.
- **Resources** — Material goods and wealth.
- **Sorcery** — Advanced knowledge of the First and Second Circles of Sorcery.
- **Tiger Warriors** — Fanatical soldiers willing to fight and die for the Illuminated Ones.

BONUS POINTS

Trait	Cost
Attribute	4
Ability	2 (1 if Favored or Caste or Calling Ability, 1 for 2 if both a Calling Ability and a Favored or Caste Ability)
Background	1 (2 if the Background is being raised above 3)
Specialty	1 (2 per 1 if in a Favored or Caste Ability)
Virtue	3
Willpower	2
Essence	10
Charms	5 (4 if in a Favored or Caste Ability or if a Calling Charm, 3 if both in a Favored of Caste Ability and a Calling Charm)

• **Paladin:** These incarnate warriors are trained in all methods of battle. They serve as the generals of the armies of Kether Rock, as front-line warriors of supreme skill and as masters of arcane magics powerful enough to shatter cities. Every other Calling within the Kether Rock serves to support the Paladins in their efforts to reconquer the world in the name of the Unconquered Sun.

Calling Abilities: Craft (War), Endurance, Melee, Performance and Presence

Calling Charms: Celestial Circle Sorcery, Essence-Gathering Temper, Fury Inciting Presence, Heroism-Encouraging Presence, Ox-Body Technique, Respect Commanding Attitude, Rout-Stemming Gesture, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Unruly Mob Dispersing Rebuke, Willpower-Enhancing Spirit

I KILL THE GOLD FACTION!

The point of playing a game featuring the Cult of the Illuminated is to deal with the issues raised by the Cult — the morality of power, the degree to which good intentions trump good acts, the moral burden of education. This means two things.

First, the Storyteller should tell the players generally in advance what kind of story they're going to be in. If the Cult is going to be villainous, heroic or whatever, make sure the players are not left grasping randomly for compatible character concepts because, out of four or five players left to grab randomly for direction, one of them is sure to fuck up your game.

The other key is that, as players, you have to show some restraint. It is not good enough to wait until you are sure that your character could have figured out the Gold Faction doesn't precisely have his best interests in mind before starting to murder Sidereals. The game is not about how you can find the quickest path between the starting session and your first multiple murder. If the game is about the process of uncovering the Gold Faction, don't play the character whose response to the first hint of betrayal is to start pressuring the Storyteller to have you whip out your daiklave. Play the character who sees their point of view, at least somewhat. Play the character who makes the game interesting and engaging. Play the character who will at least give the Sidereals the benefit of the doubt. In short, play the kind of character who does for the Storyteller what you in turn want the Storyteller to do with your character — follow the subplots and advance the nuances. Yes, the Cult of the Illuminated are shifty and crooked. It says that in the main book, and you knew that coming in to the game. Stop trying to kill them, and play along.

EXPERIENCE

An Exalt's graduation from a training camp marks only the end to his formal instruction. A Solar's training is never truly complete, and each camp offers continued schooling at the Illuminated One's own pace. The constant access to mentors allows the Solar to avoid the penalty of untutored training times. Further, Solars receive additional attention in the specialties of their Calling. Any purchase of a Calling Ability after character creation receives a 1 experience point discount. This bonus stacks with the benefit of Favored or Caste Abilities. Thus, a character who purchases the fourth dot of a Calling Ability, normally 6 experience points, spends only 5, or 4 if the Ability was also Favored or Caste. Calling Charms purchased after Character Creation receive a discount of 2 experience points. Thus, a Calling Charm costs 8 experience points, or 6 if Favored or Caste.

Not every Solar who joins the training camps does so moments after his Exaltation. Many wander aimlessly for years or rebuff the advances of the Cult at first only to change their mind later. If a player wishes to join the Cult of the Illuminated after character creation, he immediately receives Illumination • as he is whisked away to the camp. Over the next year, the player must spend all of his experience to ensure that his Abilities meet the minimum requirements of the school. Afterward, he receives the experience discounts of his Calling (which the player may choose). Upon graduation, the Solar receives two (2) free dots of Backgrounds, which may be chosen from any Cult-appropriate Background, though the Solar must also forsake any inappropriate pre-Cult Backgrounds such as Backing or excessive followers that are incompatible with his new role in the Cult of the Illuminated. Finally, joining the Cult subjects the Solar to penalties of indoctrination, as detailed above.

THE OTHER EXALTED

While the Cult of the Illuminated preaches that the Solars are their prophesied Illuminated messiahs, the Gold Faction isn't so foolish as to dismiss the idea of making use of other Exalted. While the training camps were specifically designed to aid Solars, training regimens for other Exalted already exist to indoctrinate and mold them into the preconceived ideals of the Cult. In short, in a game centered on the Cult of the Illuminated, any sort of Exalt is playable, so long as the Storyteller permits it. Details of how each Exalted type fits into the machinations of the Gold Faction are below.

LUNARS

Though the Silver Pact finds most Lunars after they Exalt, a few slip through the cracks, sometimes making their way into the hands of the Cult of the Illuminated. No less than five Lunars currently train under the Cult methodology. Lacking any specific use for these barbaric warriors, the Sidereals attempt to return them to their old roles as servants



and companions of the Solars. Thus, these tamed Lunars lay placidly before the feet of the worshiped Illuminated, something the Silver Pact, needless to say, finds disgusting.

Illuminated Lunars are designed like standard Lunars with the following exceptions. First, Illuminated Lunars are Casteless. Any Lunar who receives his tattoos also receives mentoring from another Lunar about his proper place in the world and likely wouldn't be fooled by the honeyed words of a Gold Faction Sidereal into groveling before a Solar. They receive 30 dots for Abilities and have the same requirements as Illuminated Solars from the same school. As the devoted servant of a Solar, a Lunar begins play with Ally •, representing her Solar companion, and nine (9) additional dots to spend on Backgrounds. Illuminated Lunars begin with an Essence of 2, not 3. Because the Cult is inexperienced in instructing Luna's Beloved, Illuminated Lunars receive no bonuses to learning Charms or Abilities and begin with the usual six (6) Charms.

The indoctrination of the Lunars by the Cult tames them, teaching them that their proper place is at the feet of their Solar masters. Follower is an exceptionally common nature among the Lunars of the Cult of the Illuminated. In addition, their service to the Solars provides them with joy and allows them to defy their instincts, but the beast within recoils from this highly unnatural state. Whenever an Illuminated Lunar must violate his Virtues in the service of a Solar, he spends no Willpower. Instead, he marks two boxes on his Limit, rather than one. This is not optional: If the Lunar will submit to the insults of his mistress in violation of his Valor or to her carnal passions in violation of his Temperance, he never spends a Willpower and always gains two limit.

SIDEREALS

Sidereals are not trained by the Cult of the Illuminated, but by the Gold Faction. The standard character creation for Sidereals already represents the most streamlined process possible for Sidereals, and thus, Sidereals would gain no benefits from an alternate training technique. Sidereals found in the employ of the training camps, usually referred to as "Unseen Masters," typically serve as tutors, recruiting agents or advisors for Solar strike forces.

DRAGON-BLOODED

Next to Solars, the most common Exalt found within the training camps are Dragon-Blooded outcastes. While far from plentiful, the Cult has managed to recruit a few handfuls of these powerful, elemental warriors. Rather than disdaining the usurpers of rightful Solar rulers, the Cult chose to train Dragon-Blooded to fill their ancient, First Age role of squires, retainers and shield bearers. These Illuminated



Dragon-Blooded generally adore their Solar masters, and take pride in their service. They are among the fiercest opponents of the Immaculate Order, and present themselves as living proof of its erroneous teachings.

Illuminated Dragon-Blooded are generated as standard outcastes (as found in **Exalted: The Outcaste**, pp. 159-160) with the following exceptions: They gain 30 dots of Abilities and have the normal requirements for their training camp. They receive seven (7) Background dots and may select Cult Backgrounds. Dragon-Blooded trained at Kether Rock select seven (7) standard Dragon-Blooded Charms. Venerable Silk, however, chose to borrow techniques from the Bronze Faction and trains Dragon-Blooded in Celestial martial arts. As a result, Dragon-Blooded trained in the Sequestered Tabernacle gain Walker-Among-Iris Perception and Iris-Bulb Discourse, found on page 236 of **Exalted: the Players Guide**, and three (3) Charms from Ebon Shadow Style, Falling Blossom Style, Praying Mantis Style, Snake Style, Tiger Style or Ox-Body Technique. Falling Blossom Style is a Terrestrial art, and thus, it is cheaper to purchase with bonus points.

ABYSSALS

Abyssals are exceptionally rare within the Cult. The Gold Faction discovered a single Abyssal, completely by chance, moments after his Exaltation and before his Deathlord could retrieve him. Thus far, this Abyssal is the lone representative of his kind within the Cult. Unsure of what to do with him, the Gold Faction has chosen to train him, under supervision, within the Sequestered Tabernacle. The Abyssal has proven responsive to the training but difficult to control.

While rare, Cult Abyssals are possible. Cult Abyssals are generated exactly as Cult Solars with only a few exceptions. Obviously, their Calling Charms and required Charms are replaced with the closest Abyssal equivalent. Further, as they receive less trust than Solars, they receive seven (7) Background dots rather than nine. Finally, Cult Abyssals react strangely to the indoctrination methods of the Cult. They chuckle at the mantras, they avoid the sunlight, and their prayers are eerily silent. Thus, Cult Abyssals suffer none of the Indoctrination flaws associated with Solars.

NEW AND MODIFIED BACKGROUNDS

The Cult of the Illuminated offers extensive resources generally unavailable to other Solars. Believing the Illuminated Ones to be divine messiahs, members of the Cult eagerly give up their possessions, time and even lives in the service of their enlightened Solars. In addition, individual gods of Yu-Shan have secretly offered aid to the Gold Faction, and the Sidereals themselves have lent their considerable resources to help the Solars. As a result, Solars trained by and working for the Cult of the Illuminated benefit from new and improved Backgrounds to

represent this greater level of available resources. These Backgrounds are detailed below:

ARTIFACT

The chosen messiahs of Heaven deserve the finest weapons and tools available, and the Cult of the Illuminated provides them. When a new Solar is found, the Gold Faction examines his past lives in detail via astrology, then dispatches elite teams of scavenger lords or Solar tomb raiders to find and retrieve the young Solar's artifacts. Cult-loyal gods work quietly at their Heavenly forges, crafting tools worthy of the returning Solars and offering them as gifts to the Cult. As a result, the powerful weapons of the First Age are easily available to Cult Solars, and collectively, the Cult's collection is impressive.

But the Cult's resources aren't endless. Despite the size of its arsenal, it pales before the wealth of the Realm or any individual Deathlord. While Cult Solars have more artifacts than unIlluminated Solars, they certainly do not drip with orichalcum the way Dynasts drip with jade. The Cult focuses on quality over quantity, ensuring that the best is available to its Solar champions, and it's common to see them each with a single, powerful artifact and a few small trinkets, such as talismans, amulets or bracers, supplementing their power.

Orichalcum artifacts make up the bulk of the Cult collection, followed by jade. As the Cult seeks to arm and aid Solars first and foremost, it focuses its efforts on their tools. The extensive collection of jade comes simply from its high availability. If a Solar character wishes, he may take jade artifacts rather than orichalcum ones with this Background. For other Cult Exalted, orichalcum is reserved exclusively for Solars. They may take jade with this Background and nothing else. If they wish to acquire moonsilver, starmetal or soulsteel, they must purchase the standard Artifact Background from the **Exalted** main rulebook.

- x A single talisman or minor, thaumaturgical trinket.
- Artifacts with a combined rating of no higher than 2.
- Artifacts with a combined rating of no higher than 3.
- Artifacts with a combined rating of no higher than 4.
- Artifacts with a combined rating of no higher than 6.
- Artifacts with a combined rating of no higher than 8.

BACKING

The Cult of the Illuminated does not demand loyalty from the Solars any more than peasants demand loyalty from their ruler. The Cult serves the Solars, not the other

way around. Despite this, the Sidereals aren't about to lose their precious charges. A fully trained Solar represents a major investment as well as a powerful asset to the Gold Faction. As a result, everything within the Cult, from the training programs to the rituals of the tiger warriors who serve them, is engineered to ensure the continued service of the Solars on the behalf of the Gold Faction. Few Solars abandon the ethos they learn from the Cult, and fewer still abandon the cause they are given. One cannot serve two masters, and Cult Solars serve the interests of the Cult almost exclusively. As a result, a Solar cannot belong to another organization without unusual circumstances and Storyteller permission and, thus, cannot take the Backing Background.

FOLLOWERS

Thousands of reverent, loyal mortals make up the ranks of the cultists, and their dedication to the Solars is complete. As a result, a Solar can call upon them for nearly anything, and small retinues of cultist servants are common sights in the training camps. However, the Follower Background represents civilian cultists. For militarily trained cultists, see the Tiger Warrior Background.

ILLUMINATION

Even among the Princes of the Earth, there are differences in rank and status. A youthful, untrained Solar, despite his divinity, is treated as barely more capable than a legendary mortal. Until he has proved himself as skilled and worthy, the greatest secrets of the Cult are hidden from him, and he is expected to learn rather than lead. As for those Solars who prove their dedication and leadership, the Cult lifts them up as examples both to the younger Solars and to the Cult as a whole. These greater Solars are expected to teach their younger counterparts and to lead the Cult. Because of their preeminence among the ranks of the Shining Ones, their names are more well known by the cultists, and they received a greater portion of their prayers. Indeed, some cultists may even see a particularly well-known Solar as a patron saint, praying to him specifically. The Cult is still young, and its leadership is newly forming, and a character with a high rank of Illumination is among the most famous of Solars.

As the prophesied Illuminated Ones, the Solars receive the greatest consideration within the Cult. As a result, all Illuminated Solars begin with Illumination •. Other Exalted serve the Cult, and though they may purchase Illumination, they do not reach the heights of status that Solars do. Dragon-Blooded may not exceed Illumination •••. Lunars, as the valued companions of the Solars, may reach Illumination ••••. Sidereals do not normally take Illumination, serving from behind the scenes as they do, taking Connections (The Cult of the Illuminated) instead (which is found in *Exalted: the Sidereals*, pp. 106-107 and 108). Abyssal members of the Cult are exceedingly

rare, and while they might hypothetically reach Illumination •••••, the Gold Faction examines each case independently, and an Abyssal may only take Illumination if the Storyteller approves.

- x The Exalt has no rank or trust within the Cult. Either he is an outsider, or he is considered a lesser, dedicated servant of the Illuminated. The Exalt is considered no better than the rank-and-file members of the Cult.
- Initiate. The Exalt has achieved the trust and dedication of the Cult, and its resources are at his disposal. Despite this, he is still considered unproven. He is expected to learn at the feet of his instructors, and while cultists are required to obey his word, the Exalt is expected to listen to the advice of wiser cultists, such as his guide. This rank is the one of a Solar training in the camps, and all Illuminated Solars begin at this rank.
- Adept. The Exalt has proven himself to the Cult and now acts as an independent agent. He is free to come and go as he pleases, and he can expect mortals to listen to his commands as well as tend to his needs. Adepts primarily serve as the agents of the Cult, leaving the camps to perform tasks upon their behalf. This is the rank of those Solars who have graduated from their training.
- Illuminated. The Exalt has experience in serving the Cult and is considered a leader. Adepts look to him for leadership, and he often leads Cult missions and endeavors. Illuminated Exalts also serve as instructors of less capable Solars, and all the instructors of the camps stand at this rank. Illuminated Exalts receive a portion of the Cult's worship, and every dawn, the hour of worship for mortals, regain a free point of Willpower.
- Saint. The Exalt has proven himself beyond the rest of the Solars and is a hero among the Cult. His name is spoken amongst cultists, and he is held up as an example to other Solars. Saints are the incarnations of the teachings of the Cult, living embodiments of the Illuminated Ones, and they serve as the high priests of the Cult. They make appearances at gatherings and perform miracles for the believers. Their greater status affords them even more worship, and in addition to gaining a point of Willpower at every dawn, their hourly Essence regeneration rates is increased by 2.





- Prophet. The Exalt leads and guides the whole of the Cult with his words. Training camps are ostensibly headed by prophets, as is the Cult itself. These Solars are the voice of the Cult, speaking for Heaven above, and their word is divine mandate to the cultists below them. While they have great power, however, they are still just spokesmen for Heaven, and Heaven is run by the Sidereals. No matter how powerful the Solars get, the Gold Faction intends to always be there, pulling the strings. Because of their immense status within the Cult, prayers pour into their souls. In addition to their daily point of Willpower, their hourly Essence regeneration rate is increased by 3.

SORCERY

Solars stand upon the apex of sorcery, and the fundamental magic of Creation flows easily to their lordly fingertips. Naturally, they excel at the occult aspects of their training regimens, and once taught the basic principles of sorcery, the rest comes easily to them. While certain Callings specialize in sorcery, such as the battle-casting Paladins of Kether Rock or the surreal, superhuman Exemplars of the Sequestered Tabernacle, any Illuminated Exalt training in the camps can learn sorcery if she has the required dedication.

This Background represents a thorough education in the arts of sorcery and grants free spells. This Background provides only the knowledge of spells, not the actual Charms associated with sorcery. Thus, to take full advantage of this Background, the character must acquire the appropriate Sorcery Charms through normal Charm selection. The spells gained from this Background must be selected from those listed in the sidebar on this page.

- x The character has no special training in sorcery. Far from a deficit, the character has simply chosen to focus on other aspects of her training.
- The character has learned the basic principles of the art of sorcery and gains a single spell from the Terrestrial Circle.
- The character benefits from extensive training in the occult and gains two spells from the Terrestrial Circle.
- The character has mastered the fundamentals of sorcery and gains three spells from the Terrestrial Circle.
- The character has extensively studied sorcery, expanding upon the principles taught to her at her training camp, and gains four spells from either the Terrestrial or the Celestial Circles.

- The character's knowledge and understanding of sorcery is almost unparalleled. Characters this dedicated to sorcery are destined to shake the world and begin play with five spells from the Terrestrial or the Celestial Circles.

TIGER WARRIORS

In addition to the Solars, the Cult trains elite cadres of mortal soldiers. Their dedication to the cause is complete, and they would gladly sacrifice themselves for the Illuminated Ones. The greatest and most fortunate are trained by the Solars themselves, their skills augmented by the use of the Charm Tiger-Warrior Training Technique, and these finest of soldiers are called tiger warriors. In the Sequestered Tabernacle, these soldiers are trained in martial arts by Golden Splendor, a Dawn Caste Exemplar who studied beneath Lupo. In Kether Rock, a somber Paladin known as Tobias lends his magical talents to the training of tiger warriors.

Lacking the abundant resources of the Realm or the Deathlords, the Gold Faction cannot field nearly as many soldiers. Tiger warriors are a valuable resource not to be thrown away frivolously. Despite this, a mortal's life is nothing when compared to the importance of a Solar's, and so, each tiger warrior looks forward to the day when he can become a martyr, assured a place in Heaven beside his beloved Solar.

What the Cult lacks in numbers, it makes up for with zeal. Unlike the faceless legionnaires of the Realm or the sullen and sickly shadowlanders who make up an Abyssal's army, these warriors each know their leader personally and adore him. Because of their association with greatness and their willingness to sacrifice all to accomplish their goals, many tiger warriors exceed the normal constraints of mortality, becoming legends themselves. While nothing compared to the Exalted, these heroic mortals still provide the Solars with a valuable resource, serving as their squires and shield bearers.

More rarely, Dragon-Blooded trained by the Cult serve as tiger warriors, but as Cult Dragon-Blooded are exceedingly rare, few are ever assigned to a single Solar. It isn't unheard of for a Lunar to end up in the service of the Cult, trained to be the companions of the Solars. In such rare instances, a Solar might find a Lunar in his service, serving as a strangely feral yet devoted lieutenant.

Tiger warriors are always considered elite extras.

- x Your Solar works alone. Perhaps his training didn't involve leadership, or perhaps the tasks the Cult puts him to would only be hampered by the presence of others. For whatever reason, the Cult has chosen not to bestow your Solar with mortal servants.
- A dedicated guard. Your Solar is attended by a personal bodyguard consisting of no more

SORCEROUS LORE

Sorcery is a powerful tool, especially in the hands of a mighty Solar sorcerer. Though the Sidereals of the Gold Faction have access to nearly every published spell of the First and Second Circles of sorcery, they exercise caution in what they teach to the Solars. A single, rogue Illuminated filled with occult power is the secret nightmare of every cautious Gold Faction member. As a result, while students of the Cult gain exceptional access to occult training, the spells they may learn is limited. The Gold Faction focuses the training on spells that will be immediately useful for the Solar and spells that emphasize his divine nature. Many of the more controversial spells, or those spells the Sidereals wish to keep to themselves, are quietly kept away from students. The Gold Faction has almost no access to spells of the Adamant Circle and even if it did, it would never teach such mighty magic to its students. Of course, the Storyteller is free to disregard these limitations—a Sidereal might impart normally forbidden secrets to a truly trusted or needful student.

The following spells are available to students of the Cult's training camps.

From the Exalted main rule book:

Spells of the First Circle
 Death of Obsidian Butterflies
 Emerald Countermagic
 Infallible Messenger
 Invulnerable Skin of Bronze
 Stormwind Rider
 Summon Elemental
Spells of the Second Circle
 Sapphire Countermagic

From Savant and Sorcerer:

Spells of the First Circle
 Burning Eyes of the Offender
 Calling the Wind's Kiss
 Commanding the Beasts

Conjuring the Azure Chariot
 Emerald Circle Banishment
 Flight of Separation
 Flight of the Brilliant Raptor
 Flying Guillotine
 Food from the Aerial Table
 Internal Flame
 Mists of Eventide
 Paralyzing Contradiction
 Plague of Bronze Snakes
 Ravenous Fire
 Ritual of Elemental Empowerment
 River of Blood
 The Sacred Tongue
 Silent Words of Dreams and Nightmares
 Spirit of Might
 Spirit Sword
 Sting of the Ice Hornet
 Unbreakable Bones of Stone
 Unconquerable Self
 Unstoppable Fountain of the Depths
 Virtuous Guardian of Flame
Spells of the Second Circle
 The Battle's End
 Cloud Trapeze
 The Faithful Ally
 Hideous Confusion of Tongues
 Imbue Amalgam
 Ivory Orchid Pavilion
 Mercury's Deliverance
 Rolling Earth Carpet
 Sapphire Circle Banishment
 Torrential Cascade
 Unity of Dreams
 Whirlwind of Fate

From Exalted: The Sidereals:

Spells of the First Circle
 Open the Spirit Door



- than five tiger warriors and one heroic mortal that sees to his protection and needs.
- A crack unit. The Solar has command of a sizable force of tiger warriors, no more than 15, that can act independently of the Solar if necessary. These warriors are led by up to two heroic mortals.
- A personal strike force. Up to 25 tiger warriors serve the Solar, acting as an elite strike force ready to carry out his commands. Up to three

- heroic mortals aid the Solar in the command of this unit or, optionally, a single Dragon-Blood who serves the Solar personally.
- A dedicated brigade. The Solar commands a considerable force of tiger warriors, up to 100, enough to intimidate small towns and to fend off a small Wyld Hunt. Alternately, the Solar may lead 50 especially well-trained and -equipped tiger warriors considered superior in quality (see **Exalted: The Outcaste**,



•••••

p. 39). In addition, up to four heroic mortals or a single Dragon-Blood attend the Solar. A small army. Up to 250 tiger warriors of elite quality or 100 tiger warriors of superior quality follow the Solar's every command, a mighty force ready to sacrifice their lives for him. Additionally, up to five heroic mortals, each of whom have proven themselves time and again to their beloved master, serve the Solar. Alternatively, he may be served instead by an experienced Dragon-Blooded outcaste, or alternately, a lone Casteless Lunar, acquired and trained before the Silver Pact could reach him, may serve the Solar as a personal attendant, champion and commander of his troops. Such an ally is undeniably great, but these feral servants, though tame, can be dangerously unpredictable.

CHARMS

A number of Charms common to the cult's training regimens are included below. In addition, four Charms (Excellent Emissary's Tongue, Game-Snaring Huntsman's Method, Graceful Courtier Attitude and Prey-Freezing Gaze) have been reprinted here for ease of reference, and two (Prey-Freezing Glance and Game-Snaring Huntsman Method) have been altered for better clarity and game balance.

BRAWL

INEVITABLE VICTORY MEDITATION

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Until used

Type: Simple

Minimum Brawl: 5

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Fist of Iron Technique

A master warrior must have complete knowledge of his own skills and prowess. With a moment of focus, the Solar centers himself and secures his knowledge of victory. When the perfect opportunity to strike comes, the Solar will know and make full use of the opening. Unlike the meditative nature of martial arts, this technique is trance-like, similar to the perfect, blood-tinted awareness of victory that cold-eyed berserkers receive.

The Solar takes a moment to focus himself into his trance, letting his skill reach an instinctive level, and then, his player rolls the character's Wits + Brawl, adding a number of successes equal to the Solar's Essence. The Solar may spend a Willpower point on the roll for an automatic success, augment it with any appropriate Charms or use any other appropriate, normal method for improving the success of this roll. The Solar's player

notes the number of successes he received on the roll. At any time for the remainder of the scene, the Solar may reflexively replace the results of any single Brawl roll with the successes rolled during the activation of Inevitable Victory Meditation. Inevitable Victory Meditation replaces the previous roll in its entirety, and any bonuses that applied to the previous roll, including dice or successes gained from Charms, Virtues or Willpower points, are lost. After Inevitable Victory Meditation has replaced a Brawl roll, the Charm expires, and the character must activate it again if he wishes to reap its benefits once more. A Solar may freely end the Charm prematurely if, for example, his player rolls poorly upon activation and wishes to try again for a better result. While activating Inevitable Victory Meditation counts as the Solar's Charm use for the turn, replacing the successes of a roll does not. A Solar may wait for his opponent to roll for his defense before replacing the successes of his attack roll. A Solar may not have more than one instance of this Charm active at any given time.

IRREPRESSIBLE BRAVERY TACTIC

Cost: 3 motes per success

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Brawl: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Thunderclap Rush Attack

A master warrior must have complete knowledge of his surroundings and the progression of the fight. For a Solar who has mastered this technique, the battle flows around him, and he makes instinctive use of everything that surrounds him and the constant, shifting nature of the fight to his advantage. Brawlers with this Charm have a reputation for foolhardy bravery and dumb luck, for they make use of surprising and spectacular aspects of the fight, turning seemingly hopeless situations to their advantage.

Any time a Solar gains bonus dice from a stunt, the Solar may spend 3 motes per stunt die to convert each die into an automatic success. The die isn't rolled and is simply counted as a success. To use this Charm, the stunt must make use of the Solar's surroundings or some ongoing aspect of the fight (such as his opponent's last attack), or the Solar must perform a surprisingly brave or foolhardy act. For the purposes of this Charm, the bonus dice gained from the Daredevil or Signature Style Merits count as stunt dice.

DANCING WITH STRIFE TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Brawl: 3

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Irrepressible Bravery Tactic

A master warrior must have complete knowledge of his opponent, understanding the true extent of the danger he faces. The greatness of Solars can only manifest when faced with foes of equal greatness, and those who have mastered Dancing with Strife Technique understand this principle, throwing themselves at greater and greater foes to feel the joy of battle. Anytime the Solar successfully defends himself from an attack that received no less than (the Solar's Essence or 5, whichever is higher) successes, he may activate this Charm and gain a temporary point of Willpower. This Charm does not allow the Solar to gain more temporary Willpower than his permanent rating.

SUPREMACY OF WAR METHOD

Cost: 1 mote per die

Duration: One scene or until used

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Brawl: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Inevitable Victory Meditation, Dancing with Strife Technique

A true warrior has mastered himself, his battlefield and his foes. Every movement, every attack, every action of his foes only increases the mastery of the Solar's combat technique as he is driven to prove his supremacy upon the field of battle. Anytime an enemy takes an action against the Solar, either an attack or a defense, the Solar may reflexively activate Supremacy of War Method in response. The Solar may commit 1 mote per success his opponent made on his roll. At any time during the following scene, the Solar may add a number of dice to any Brawl roll up to the number of motes committed to Supremacy of War Method. Each die added reduces the Essence committed by 1 mote. A Solar must choose to add dice to his roll before, not after, he makes his roll.

Activating Supremacy of War Method counts as a

Charm use for the turn, but gaining bonus dice does not. For example: Michael is attacked by an Immaculate who scores seven successes on his attack roll. Michael spends 7 motes on Supremacy of War Method. On the following turn, he makes an attack, adds seven dice to his dice pool and chooses to activate Ferocious Jab.

A Solar may activate Supremacy of War Method multiple times in a scene to increase his total committed motes, but he may never have more motes committed to Supremacy of War Method than his Wits + Brawl. Dice added through Supremacy of War Method are derived from a Charm and, thus, are subject to all associated limitations.



ASCENDANT BATTLE VISAGE

Cost: 10 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One turn

Type: Simple

Minimum Brawl: 5

Minimum Endurance: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Supremacy of War Method, Bloodthirsty Sword-Dancer Spirit

By combining his pure, instinctive awareness of combat mastered through Supremacy of War Method with the raging fury mastered through Bloodthirsty Sword-Dancer Spirit, the Solar unlocks a deadly secret of his anima. In a fantastic display of power, the Solar's anima flares to full totemic glory, and within that pillar of divine light, the Solar is reshaped, his body marked by his totem and the colors of his anima. A Night Caste with the totem of the wolf might gain a long, thick mane of grey hair, sharpened teeth and violet or golden eyes, and a Dawn Caste with the totem of the snake might gain a long, sinuous tattoo of a serpent upon his body and eyes of violent crimson. In this temporary state of power, the Solar's player adds his character's Essence in automatic successes to any combat rolls made, excluding damage rolls, though the number of successes he adds may not exceed the number of dice rolled, excluding bonus dice gained from Charms. This Charm lasts only a short time and threatens to enrage the character if sustained for too long. Once Ascendant Battle Visage has expired, the character may reflexively renew it. Doing so costs him no Essence or Willpower. Instead, for each turn he extends Ascendant Battle Visage, roll his highest Virtue. Each success increases his Limit by 1. Should the Solar suffer Limit Break during the use of this Charm, he frenzies as per Bloodthirsty Sword-Dancer Spirit, and Ascendant Battle Visage's bonuses remain for the rest of the scene. The actual effects of the Limit Break itself, including the bonus to Willpower, begin after the scene ends.

ENDURANCE

TIRELESS TRAVELER'S STAMINA

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Endurance: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

The character using this Charm infuses his body with Essence, allowing him to travel for an entire day without needing rest, provided he maintains a reasonably steady pace (the character cannot run, as that requires the Tireless Runner's Stride Charm from **Caste Book: Zenith**, p. 72). A character using this Charm could walk or ride at a

steady pace for an entire day without becoming fatigued, footsore or saddlesore. The character must still eat and drink and is subject to the effects of the environment (such as extreme heat or cold), and the Charm does not prevent an Exalt's mount from tiring. Still, characters using this Charm can cover considerable distance in fairly short time and arrive at their destination as fresh as when they left.

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

LINGUISTICS

EXCELLENT EMISSARY'S TONGUE

Cost: 4 motes per language, 1 Willpower

Duration: Special

Type: Simple

Minimum Linguistics: 3

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

With this Charm, the Solar Exalted may acquire the ability to speak and understand a language merely by hearing it spoken. The Charm requires at least an hour of exposure to the language. So long as the Essence is committed, the Chosen is completely fluent in that language, without a trace of accent, but cannot read or write in it. A character can master a total number of languages equal to her dots of Linguistics by using this Charm. Once the Essence is no longer committed, the knowledge of the language fades immediately.

MARTIAL ARTS

FALLING BLOSSOM STYLE

Falling Blossom Style centers on the ideal of the expendable warrior. Followers of this martial art believe strongly in something greater than themselves. Willing to sacrifice their lives for their ideal, their utter disregard for personal survival allows for astonishing feats of combat. Because of the high mortality rate, few practitioners of this style achieve mastery. Paradoxically, those who master the path of self-sacrifice are too rare to be thrown away. Thus, Falling Blossom martial artists learn to sell their lives dearly, withholding the fullness of their technique until the most dire of circumstances. Generally, this technique is taught to outcaste Dragon-Blooded, but occasionally, a mortal cultist will achieve a great enough mastery of his own Essence to learn it. Dragon-Blooded and mortals who serve at Kether Rock disdain the technique, for they believe that a Solar protects his warriors, his people, not the other way around.

Falling Blossom Style is a Terrestrial Style, and thus, Dragon-Blooded may learn it at no penalty, and mortals with the Essence Mastery Merit (see the **Exalted Players Guide**, p. 121) may also learn it. Falling Blossom Style

practitioners may use swords and knives with their Martial Arts Ability, and attacks with those weapons count as unarmed attacks for the purpose of the style. Falling Blossom Style is incompatible with the use of armor.

LIVING SHIELD TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1 mote

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Martial Arts: 2

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: None

The life of an Illuminated One is paramount. This truth is the first principle of the Falling Blossom Style, and its lessons are hammered into the practitioner with every mantra and sutra. The first technique Falling Blossom practitioners must master is that of defending the body of their Shining One, taking arrows and sword blows that were meant for him or knocking him away from such attacks.

The martial artist may spend 1 mote to reflexively make himself the target of any attack aimed at his lord so long as he is within leaping distance (usually five yards, though this distance can be increased with Charms that increase leaping or sprinting distances). Use of this Charm does not require an action, and so, the martial artist may dodge or parry the attack that now targets him using normal rules. This Charm can only be used to protect a single person. The martial artist must declare whom he will defend at the beginning of combat, and he can defend only that person for the remainder of the scene.

UNDEFENDED ASSAULT METHOD

Cost: 4 motes

Duration: One turn

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Martial Arts: 3

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Living Shield Technique

A warrior uncaring for his safety can make attacks far more effectively than those who restrain themselves with an eye to their defense. By adopting an aggressive and indefensible posture, the martial artist can make devastatingly quick and accurate attacks, using offense as his only defense. Upon the activation of this Charm, the martial artist increases his initiative by his Martial Arts. In addition, all attacks made during this turn gain an automatic success. However, the martial artist may not make an active defense with any part of his action, and all attacks made against him gain an automatic success for the remainder of the turn. He may still benefit from defenses purchased from Charms or persistent effects such as Five-Dragon Blocking Technique or Fivefold Bulwark Stance, but without them, the martial artist is vulnerable. This Charm must be activated before initiative is rolled.

DUAL SCARLET BLOSSOM TECHNIQUE

Cost: 1 mote and 1 health level per die, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Martial Arts: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Living Shield Technique

Except where it serves the Illuminated Ones, the life of a Falling Blossom master means nothing. By learning to tap into his own life force, the martial artist can enhance the deadliness of his blows. When activating this Charm, the martial artist pays 1 mote and one health level for every die of damage he wishes to convert into an automatic health level of damage inflicted upon his target. The health levels sacrificed by the martial artist are taken as levels of lethal damage. This damage is an effect of the Charm and cannot be bypassed or neutralized by Charms or other effects that reduce damage without negating the effect. This Charm must be activated after the martial artist's player has rolled for his attack but before he has rolled for damage.

FALLING BLOSSOM FORM

Cost: 5 motes

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Martial Arts: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Undefended Assault Method, Dual Scarlet Blossom Technique

The character adopts an aggressive, dedicated stance as he focuses his entire mind upon the defense and desires of his divine lord, giving himself over completely to the ideal of victory. For the remainder of the scene, the character inflicts lethal damage with his unarmed attacks, and any successful attacks made with a knife convert one health level of damage to an automatic success. This bonus does not apply to attacks made with swords or fists. The form Charm is as much a state of mind as it is a state of Essence and body, and as a result, the character's burning faith shields him from terror and fear of death. For the remainder of the scene, the character may substitute his Conviction for his Valor for any rolls made to resist effects based on fear or intimidation. Further, the brightness of the martial artist's dedication powers his body when it fails him, allowing him to continue to act after he has been incapacitated. If bashing damage caused the incapacitation, the martial artist simply ignores his incapacitated state and may continue to act. If lethal damage caused the incapacitation, the character will die in a number of turns equal to his Stamina, as usual, but may continue to act until then. However, the character suffers from the normal wound penalties the damage has caused (-4 for Incapacitated). Finally, because of the fervor of the martial artist's



faith, any character killed while in this form goes instantly to his next incarnation. He leaves behind no ghost, and no hungry ghost inhabits his corpse. This effect offers only some protection against necromancy: If any necromantic effect would create a ghost, the martial artist's player rolls a resisted Essence roll against the necromancer's Essence, and should the roll be successful, the martial artist's soul is reborn immediately. Otherwise, he becomes a ghost as dictated by the necromantic effect.

A character cannot use more than one Form-type Charm at a time. Using a Form-type Charm ends the effects of another Form-type Charm the character was utilizing.

PURITY OF PURPOSE ATTACK

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 experience point

Duration: Instant

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Martial Arts: 5

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Falling Blossom Form

Once the martial artist has achieved mastery of the basics of Falling Blossom Style, he learns to dedicate his very soul to battle. With a willingness to sacrifice anything to achieve victory for his master, the character can achieve perfection in combat. After activating the Charm, the character makes an unarmed attack (or an attack with a sword or knife), his player rolling to attack as normal. So long as the character achieves a single success, his attack will strike its target, regardless of the difficulty of the attack. Should the difficulty of the attack, or the targets parry or dodge successes, reduce the successes to zero, the attack still does its base damage. Only a perfect defense can stop this attack.

The use of this Charm slowly aligns the soul of the martial artist closer and closer to the destiny of his master. The Storyteller should note every experience point spent on the activation of this Charm. Every 3 experience points spent purchases a point of the Destiny Merit (see the *Exalted Players Guide*, pp. 25-26) for the martial artist, though the nature of that destiny is up to the Storyteller. As a general guide, the destiny is seldom pleasant, though it usually provides an opportunity for the martial artist to die in a manner that proves his dedication and faith.

STRENGTH OF FAITH MEDITATION

Cost: 1 mote per die, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Martial Arts: 4

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Falling Blossom Form

The faith that drives the martial artist exceeds the limitations of his mortal frame. By channeling that power through focused meditations and quick exercises, the character can overcome the weaknesses of his body. Each

mote spent in the activation of this Charm negates one point of penalty caused by pain or disability of his body, such as wound penalties or the effects of Charms such as Crippling Pressure-Point Strike. This Charm will not negate penalties that stem from outside factors, such as environmental penalties.

VERSE OF THE MARTYR

Cost: 15 motes

Duration: One day

Type: Simple

Minimum Martial Arts: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Purity of Purpose Attack, Strength of Faith Meditation

All warriors die, but a master of Falling Blossom Style chooses how and where he shall die, rather than trusting to the unpredictability of fate. Dedicating himself utterly to his goal, the master meditates upon his purpose and writes a 17-syllable poem that captures the essence of his life, his dedication and his purpose. He leaves the poem behind as he journeys to his fate, a final message to his loved ones and friends. For the remainder of the day, his focus is sharpened to divine proportions, and any time the character channels a Virtue for any roll that aids his goal, even remotely, his player gains a number of automatic successes to his roll equal to the channeled Virtue, rather than adding dice. Further, the Loom of Fate accepts the dying martial artists proposition and realigns events so that his death is honorable, giving him a chance at success. This has no mechanical benefits except to encourage the Storyteller to plan events around the character's death that suit his sacrifice. However, this supreme clarity comes at an ultimate price. Fate ensures the death of the character before the rise of the sun on the next day. Often, this death occurs just as he predicted within his poem. Should the character manage to cheat death in some manner, he is broken, a spent and useless weapon without purpose. For the remainder of his sad life, the failed master may not regain Essence or Willpower.

PRESENCE

PREY-FREEZING GAZE

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: One scene or special

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 3

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Harmonious Presence Meditation

When the character uses this Charm, she impresses a single target with the overwhelming power of her commanding nature. Targets whose players fail a Valor roll at a difficulty of 3 are frozen in place, unable to move

for the next scene. This paralysis is emotional rather than physical, but cannot be broken as long as the attacking character continues to gaze intently at the target. While keeping this eye contact, the character can be no more than five yards from the target. She also cannot move faster than a walk or perform any complex or difficult actions (such as combat). The target's player receives additional Valor rolls whenever anyone harms or obviously attempts to harm him. If the character ceases to gaze at the target, the paralysis continues for the next three full turns, but the target instantly breaks free if anyone harms or obviously attempts to harm him. This Charm has no effect on targets whose Essence is higher than the character using the Charm.

SOUL-SHAPING WORDS TECHNIQUE

Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 5

Minimum Essence: 3

Prerequisite Charms: Listener-Swaying Argument

The words of an Illuminated Solar are as forceful as his fists, allowing him to assert dominion over a social conflict. The saintly Solar turns to his target and speaks profound words, a deep insight fueled with Essence. The effect is immediate and powerful. As the target of his words contemplates their meaning, and either he accepts the fundamental truth of the words and the inherent sainthood of the Solar, finding his spirit uplifted, or he rejects them and the Solar, the words ripping through his soul like spurs. The Solar selects the target of his words and reveals his sagacious truth, his player rolling the Solar's Charisma + Presence at a difficulty of his opponent's Essence.

If the roll is successful, the target has a choice: submission or defiance. For one who submits to the Solar, accepting him as divine, everything in the world makes sense, and her place in the world is reaffirmed, and the target gains a temporary point of Willpower. For one who defies the inherent lordship of the Solar, she suffers beneath the weight of her own, false world view, unable to reconcile the truth of the Solar's statement with her own ideology, losing a number of temporary points of Willpower equal to the number of successes the Solar's player rolled beyond the requisite difficulty, to a maximum number of Willpower points equal to the Solar's own Essence. The Solar cannot reduce a target below 0 Willpower points, and those who have no Willpower left as a result of this Charm can no longer bear the sight of the Solar and immediately flee his presence. This technique is as useful as a weapon against unbelievers as it is a way of strengthening the righteous. However, the Charm can only be used upon beings who truly are beneath the Solar and is not effective against anyone with an Essence equal to or higher than the Solar.

TRUE HARMONY REVELATION

Cost: 15 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Simple

Minimum Presence: 5

Minimum Essence: 4

Prerequisite Charms: Soul-Shaping Words Technique

The desperate, the downtrodden and the weak can find new hope and new joy in the words of the saintly Illuminated. With a gentle whisper and uncommon insight, a Solar may reveal someone's true nature to herself, so that she may find the sense of purpose she longs for. This Charm only affects characters who have no remaining temporary Willpower points. The Solar makes a Manipulation + Presence roll at a difficulty of his target's Conviction. If successful, the Solar molds the spent will of the target into a new form, and the Solar may select a new Nature to replace the target's old one. For each success beyond the required difficulty, the Solar may rearrange one point of Virtue, making a cowardly man brave or a loving man cold and hard. The effects normally last a month. However, the Solar may spend 1 experience point to make the Nature change permanent, and 1 experience point per Virtue dot shifted during the target's change to make that permanent. Some characters of strong will may overcome even these permanent changes with time. After a minimum number of months equal to (11 - the character's Willpower), at the Storyteller's discretion, even the permanent effects of this Charm subside. This Charm will not affect beings whose Essence exceeds the Solar's.

HORIZON-TO-HORIZON PRESENCE METHOD

Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower

Duration: Instant

Type: Reflexive

Minimum Presence: 5

Minimum Essence: 5

Prerequisite Charms: Hypnotic Tongue Technique, Terrifying Apparition of Glory

While any Solar who masters the Charms of Presence has a weighty aura of charisma and influence, those who master Horizon-to-Horizon Presence Method have vast auras that insinuate themselves into all aspects of life. Such an Exalt impacts people whom she has never met. Assassins abandon their quest for her destruction after seeing a painting of her. Hopeless young men devote their entire lives to her upon hearing mere stories of her deeds. The character may influence the world without raising a finger through the power of her charisma alone.

Upon activating this Charm, the Solar may make a single use of her Presence Ability, usually rolled with either Charisma or Manipulation, against any single character irregardless of distance. The difficulty rating of the Presence roll is increased by an amount equal to the





target's Essence. The Solar need not speak or interact with the target in anyway. Indeed, the Charm may be activated unconsciously as the character's charismatic aura affects people and events completely outside of her knowledge. However, the Charm requires *some* interaction, even if only distant rumor. The target must hear of her deeds or witness the impact the character has made upon the world. Further, when the character fails to impress someone through the use of this Charm, it diminishes in usefulness. Anytime the Charm is activated but fails to achieve a number of successes equal to the target's Essence, the Charm may not be activated again for a full day, and the target of the Charm is rendered immune to its use for a month (or longer at the Storyteller's discretion). Finally, the Charm only creates emotional impressions and vague ideas, not specific messages. While Horizon-to-Horizon Presence Method could persuade a king to seek the Solar's amorous affections, it could not, for example, convey a secret password to him or convince him to perform a very specific task.

While the primary use of this Charm is long-ranged interactions, the strength of the character's aura does not diminish in close proximity. The Charm may be activated to affect someone in the character's presence, allowing for powerful nonverbal interaction.

SURVIVAL

GAME-SNARING HUNTSMAN'S METHOD

Cost: 1 mote per die

Duration: One day

Type: Supplemental

Minimum Survival: 4

Minimum Essence: 1

Prerequisite Charms: Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit

When invoking this Charm, the Exalted names a single breed of animal, which may include "human." He then crafts a snare appropriate for trapping the species of interest. For each mote invested in the Charm, the Survival roll to create the snare is increased by one die. In addition, for each mote invested, the targeted breed suffers a one-die penalty to detect or escape the trap. The trap will not be triggered by any species other than the one named. This trap cannot be used to snare a specific specimen, but instead, affects the first member of the species that encounters it.

Game-Snaring Huntsman's Method cannot be used to create a trap that will innately do damage, such as spike-pits or deadfalls. It can only be used to enhance snares, pit traps and other such traps that hinder or ensnare, rather than wound or kill. However, traps empowered by Game-Snaring Huntsman's Method may inflict incidental damage upon a target while it attempts to escape (a cage, for

example, could be spiked to discourage meddling with the bars), so long as the primary purpose of the trap isn't the wounding of its intended prey.

SOCIALIZE

GRACEFUL COURTIER ATTITUDE

Cost: 2 motes per difficulty penalty

Duration: One scene

Type: Simple

Minimum Socialize: 4

Minimum Essence: 2

Prerequisite Charms: Mastery of Small Manners

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

CHARACTERS OF THE SEQUESTERED TABERNACLE

VENERABLE SILK, MASTER ATTENDANT OF THE LORDS OF THE SEQUESTERED TABERNACLE

Description: Posing as a mere servant, an advisor, many Solars dismiss the true master of the Tabernacle, unable to see past his youthful beauty and humble demeanor. His frame is small and delicate, clothed in fine, silken robes. His feet are always bare. Fine threads of sandy blonde hair surround his rounded, attractive face, and his lips are soft. Wisdom fills his large, handsome, brilliantly blue eyes. No matter how difficult the circumstances, his countenance always remains serene. Venerable Silk seldom enters battle, but when he does so, he prefers to engage his foes unarmed, disabling them with his supreme martial prowess. If necessary, he will reluctantly arm himself with Unregretful Past, his starmetal powerbow. The elder Sidereal vastly prefers to engage his foes socially or circumspectly, however, manipulating them as subtly as he can. In all situations, Venerable Silk's touch is a gentle one, as he carefully guides the world to meet his ideals for it.

Venerable Silk was born in a world of suffering and death and as his mother screamed in the throes of his birth,



the Contagion stood outside her door, scything down her family and community. Stalking gangs of bandits slew his mother when he was young, taking the beautiful boy as a pet and plaything. His ordeal at their hands did not end until his Exaltation on his 16th birthday, after which Vanis Grey, a Sidereal of the Bronze Faction, brought the boy to Yu-Shan. Despite his sufferings, the young Exalt did not blame the people of Creation for his misery, for he was keenly aware that they were not responsible for the world's state of decay. During his long centuries of aiding the Bronze Faction, he slowly came to understand the flaws within their logic and the shape of their hubris. If the Sidereals had been mighty enough to defeat the Primordials, surely they could have performed the small task of reforming the Solars. His research led him to strong conclusions about the nature of Solars and Creation's need for them. Shortly thereafter, he defected to the Gold Faction. There, he grew obsessed with unearthing evidence of the First Age, piecing together for himself what had really happened, free of Bronze Faction propaganda. Slowly, he began to devise a theory about the restoration of the First Age. All he needed were the glorious Solars themselves.

When the news of the returning Solars reached Heaven, Venerable Silk was amongst the eldest of the Gold Faction, already in a position of leadership. He immediately saw his opportunity to cast out the suffering that had stained Creation and to rebuild the paradisiacal world that had existed in the First Age.

Almost immediately, however, problems began to erode his plans. Other Sidereals disagreed with him, feeling the pride of Solars was their weakness, not their strength. Despite this fragmentation of ideology, the Gold Faction remained united in its purpose, and many doubting Sidereals fell into line with him. When it came time to build the Sequestered Tabernacle, Venerable Silk had the lion's share of the Gold Faction's resources and made full use of them when he built his magnificent Manse in the Dehennen Mountains.

Within the Sequestered Tabernacle, Venerable Silk poses as advisor and councilor. He carefully conceals any role of leadership by hiding himself behind a mask of Solar saints who ostensibly rule the temple. Instead, he meets with students within the cushioned, comfortable confines of his room, listening to their problems and needs and advising them. Occasionally, he meanders the training rooms, watching as the students learn their skills, offering tidbits of advice just as any other instructor would. With this subtle approach, Venerable Silk can continue to manipulate the Solars of his temple while allowing them to believe that they, in fact, have true power, thus resurrecting the ancient role of Sidereal as advisor, not (obvious) master.

Caste: Serenity

Nature: Conniver

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

Virtues: Compassion 5, Conviction 4, Temperance 4, Valor 3

Abilities: Archery 5, Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Bureaucracy 4, Craft (Fate) 3, Dodge 6, Endurance 3, Investigation 3, Larceny 4, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Old Realm, Low Realm, Riverspeak, Forest Tongue, Skytongue) 5, Lore 5, Martial Arts 7 (Fighting Those Who Love Him +3), Medicine 4, Occult 5, Performance 5, Presence 4, Resistance 3, Ride 5, Socialize 6, Stealth 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Artifact 5, Backing (The Gold Faction) 4, Backing (The Sequestered Tabernacle) 4, Connections (The Cult of the Illuminated) 5, Connections (The Guild) 2, Connections (The Threshold) 3, Manse 4, Salary 4, Savant 4

Colleges: Corpse 2, Ewer 3, Gull 1, Lovers 5, Mask 1, Musician 4, Peacock 3, Pillar 4, Treasure Trove 2

Charms: Absence, Armor-Penetrating Fang Strike, Auspicious Prospects for Serenity, Avoidance Kata, Avoiding the Truth Technique, Breaking the Wild Mortal, Blade of the Battle Maiden, Blue Vervain Binding, Cash and Murder Games, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Charm Redirection Technique, Citrine Poxes of Contagion Form, Compassionate Essence Replenishment, Conclusion-Pursuing Approach, Convulsive Displacement Infectious Atemi, Crippling Pressure Point Strike, Dawn Solar Ways, Death-

Parrying Stroke, Death-Pattern Sensing Attitude, Defense of Shining Joy, Destiny-Knitting Entanglement, Disjointed Essence Infectious Atemi, Dream Confiscation Approach, Duck Fate, Eclipse Solar Ways, Efficient Secretary Technique, Elegant Patterns of Fate, Enthralling Blow Attack, Essence-Disrupting Infectious Atemi, Essence Fangs and Scales Technique, Essence-Shattering Typhoon, Essence Venom Strike, Expected Pain, Eyes of the Wood Dragon, Faultless Ceremony, Favorable Inflection Procedure, Feverish Essence Discharge Atemi, Flare of Invulnerability Method, Flight of Mercury, Games of Divinity Form, Gentle Touch of the Wicked Hand, Glorious Sidereal Protection, Glory Path, God Ways, Godly Companion, Harmonic Completion, Heart-Brightening Presentation Style, Honorable Thief Spirit, Hot-Eyed Snake Whispering, Ice and Fire Binding, Incite Decorum, Inner Dragon Unbinding, Joy in Adversity Stance, Life-Severing Blow, Life Without Compunction, Lover's Oath, Mark of Exaltation, Metal Storm, The Methodology of Secrets, Mind-Over-Body Meditation, Name Pilfering Practices, Neighborhood Relocation Scheme, Of Horrors Best Unknown, Of the Shape of the World, Optimistic Security Practice, Ordained Bridle of Mercury, Perfect Reconstruction Method, Perfection in Life, Presence in Absence Technique, Prior Warning, Riding the Dragon, Secrets of Future Strife, Sequential Charm Disruption, Serpentine Evasion, Shun the Smiling Lady, Snake Form, Snake Strikes the Heel, Song of Spirit Persuasion, Soul-Marking Strike, Soul Mastery, Spirit and Body Purification Touch, Spirit-Rending Technique, Spirit-Shape Companion, Spirit-Wracking Method, Spiritual Perfection, Stern Essence Replenishment, Striking Cobra Technique, Striking Serpent Speed, Supernal Awareness, Systematic Understanding of Everything, Tell-Tale Symphony, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Trouble Reduction Strategy, Twilight Solar Ways, Unbreakable Fascination Kata, Uncoiling Serpent Prana, Underling Invisibility Practice, Unwavering Well-Being Meditation, Violet Bier of Sorrows Form, Wanting and Fearing Prayer, Wise Choice, Wood Dragon Form, Wood Dragon Succor, Wood Dragon Vitality, World-Shaping Artistic Vision (Ending Conflicts x 3), Yellow Path, You and Yours Stance

Spells: The Battle's End, Demon of the First Circle, Demon of the Second Circle, Emerald Circle Banishment, Emerald Countermagic, Fugue of Truth, Incantation of Spiritual Discretion, Insidious Tendrils of Hate, Paralyzing Contradiction, Private Plaza of Downcast Eyes, Sapphire Countermagic, Summon Elemental, Travel Without Distance, Voices of Distant Regard

Combos:

Defense of the Humble Servant (Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per target number reduction): Hot-Eyed Snake Whispering, Life Without Compunction — *Venerable Silk's role often requires him to perform questionable*

deeds with questionable people. Whenever he activates this technique, the world stills as though holding its breath before laughing at the horror or embarrassment of those around Venerable Silk or his target. A blanket of normalcy descends upon his actions, and those who witnessed them dismiss his error. Upon activating this Combo, Venerable Silk rolls his Manipulation + Socialize dice pool and reduces the target number of the roll by 1 per additional mote he spends. Venerable Silk must spend at least 1 mote lowering the target number when using this Combo. Venerable Silk may target others with this Combo, but its effects are always tinged with humility, and the proud do not often enjoy falling beneath its protective cover.

Essence Unbinding Touch (Cost: 8 motes, 2 Willpower + 2 motes per health level): Armor-Penetrating Fang Strike, Crippling Pressure-Point Strike, Life-Severing Blow — Venerable Silk learned this technique long ago as he prepared to study Wood Dragon Style and, eventually, Citrine Poxes of Contagion Style. By examining how flows of Essence through a body interact with the threads of fate that control it, he found a pulsing nexus between the two that he could sooth with his martial arts, bringing peace to his foe. When Venerable Silk strikes with this technique, the world goes still as the earth sighs contentedly and the target's heart flutters mournfully, awaiting Venerable Silk's delicate touch. With a feather-light touch, the Sidereal tames the Essence within the target. After the attack strikes, calculate damage normally except that armor cannot soak damage inflicted by Essence Unbinding Strike. However, instead of inflicting damage, Essence Unbinding Touch inflicts a one-die penalty to all the target's dice pools per health level of damage that normally would have been inflicted. Venerable Silk may buy additional penalties at a cost of 2 additional motes each, to a maximum of his Essence. The penalties last seven turns (a number of turns equal to Venerable Silk's Martial Arts Ability).

Truth Defending Blessing (Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower): Avoiding the Truth Technique, Presence in Absence Technique — Venerable Silk sometimes finds his trust in others is misplaced. To safeguard precious truths and wisdoms he has imparted to students and allies, he sometimes offers a solemn blessing to ensure their confidentiality. This technique requires Venerable Silk to touch his target, and as he does so, the world stills in sorrow and tears form on nearby surfaces of glass and metal. Once blessed, any time the target reveals some truth that Venerable Silk wishes concealed, Venerable Silk's player reflexively and unconsciously rolls his Manipulation + Presence and adds (his Essence) in automatic successes to convince those the target speaks to that his words are lies. This Charm does not provide Venerable Silk with any knowledge of the betrayal, however.

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Punch: Speed 11 Accuracy 13 Damage 2B Defense 13*

Kick: Speed 8 Accuracy 12 Damage 4B Defense 12*

Starmetal Short Powerbow (Unregretful Past): Speed 11 Accuracy 13 Damage 8L (Rate 2, Range 250)**

* All attacks include a bonus from starmetal Hearthstone bracers

** Attacks from Unregretful Past gain +2 automatic successes against targets that Venerable Silk loves.

Dodge Pool: 11 **Soak:** 2L/4B (Silken robes)

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

Essence: 7

Personal Essence: 24 **Peripheral Essence:** 60 (68)

Committed Essence: 8

Other Notes: Within the Sequestered Tabernacle, Venerable Silk generally dons the resplendent destiny of the Pillar, serving as a benign friend to most of the inhabitants. This destiny has a duration of 20 years and 3 remaining effect points. Outside of the Sequestered Tabernacle, Venerable Silk must sometimes assume a less pleasant mantle to manipulate events and gather information. He usually travels to Great Forks where he dons the resplendent destiny of the Lovers, acting as a pimp. This destiny has a duration of two years and 6 remaining effect points. Finally, he occasionally, in private, assumes the Resplendent Destiny of the Corpse as he relieves his earliest memories of life. He also used this destiny when he stole a newly Exalting Abyssal out from under his Deathlord's nose. This destiny has a duration of one year and 4 remaining effect points.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 11 Accuracy 14 Damage 2B Defense 15 Rate 5*

Kick: Speed 8 Accuracy 14 Damage 5B Defense 10 Rate 3*

* All attacks include a bonus from starmetal Hearthstone bracers

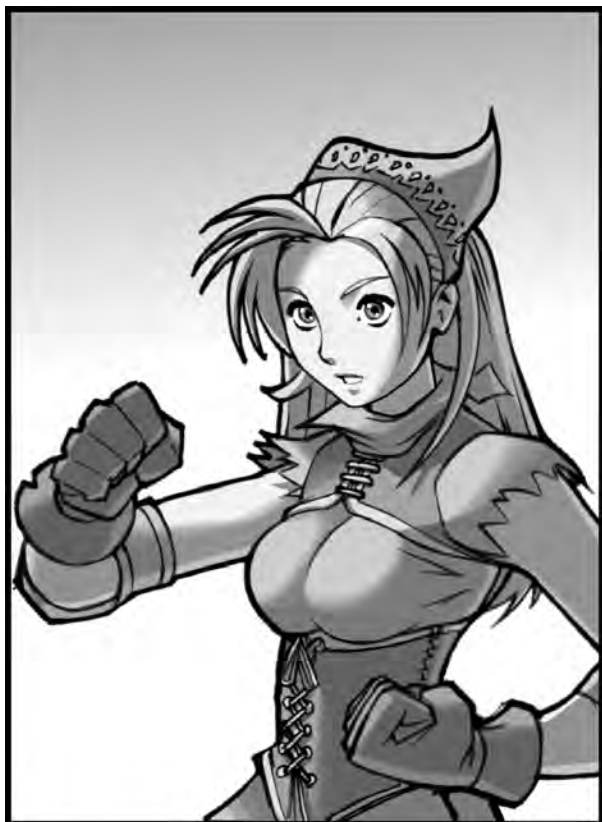
Dodge Pool: 21

AMAYA, PATRON SAINT OF THE

SEQUESTERED TABERNACLE

Description: Of all the Shining Ones in the Cult, none are so beloved as the sweet-eyed patron of the Sequestered Tabernacle. In the First Age, Amaya's Exaltation was embodied in a Solar called "the Mother of the Realm," and ancient diaries forbidden by the Immaculate Order claim that the Dragon-Blooded who slew her wept after the deed, horrified by what they had done. Modern assassins tremble and fall at her feet, begging for her forgiveness and pleading to join her cause. Amaya is a lovely young woman with olive skin and silken hair of the palest gold. Surprisingly humble, she wears the rough clothes of a peasant and helps in the field as often as she wears fine silks and resides within the Tabernacle. Her face shines, her smile is bright, and she always has a





pleasant and comforting word ready for those seeking her miraculous presence.

Born a wealthy heiress in a small kingdom in the Scavenger Lands, young Amaya quickly grew jaded and bored with the gilded cage that surrounded her. Wild fantasies of the adventures commoners endured filled her imagination, and she often crept from the safety of her parents' mansion to wander the streets that surrounded it. Outside of the protected world her mother and father had crafted for her, Amaya witnessed the suffering and pain of the world. She struggled to help her fellow man, to relieve their suffering, but her small deeds did little to stem the tides of pain. As her travels lengthened, she wept daily in frustration until, one day, as she sat beneath the protective branches of a willow tree contemplating the misery that surrounded her, enlightenment and Exaltation both flew upon the same wings and lifted her up as a Shining One of the Cult of the Illuminated. Guides quickly gathered her up, explaining her nature. Seeing her opportunity to more greatly aid the world by bringing about a new era of peace and prosperity, Amaya quickly swallowed the Cult's philosophy and worked furiously to improve her skills. With her superb talent and determination, she quickly rose high in the ranks of the Illuminated Ones.

As Patron Saint of the Sequestered Tabernacle, most administrative and representative tasks fall to her. She is, in theory if not in practice, the ultimate leader of the temple. Venerable Silk usually accompanies her as her

advisor, carefully manipulating her like a beautiful puppet, presenting her as the true face of the Sequestered Tabernacle to its Solars and to the Cult beyond. While she is vaguely aware of his personal power, she is naïve about the true extent of his control over the Tabernacle and the Solars within it.

When she isn't aiding the peasants in the field, greeting pilgrims or tending to the Tabernacle's needs, Amaya pursues a personal project. During her secret travels as a mortal, she lacked the protection her father tried to provide her, and she was often at the mercy of the cruel world around her. Yet, nothing untoward ever happened to her. A dark haired, crimson-eyed young man shadowed her, and when danger reared its unpleasant head, he cut it down before fading away once more. She has sought all information about him she can, discovering only that his name is "Lathe." Venerable Silk carefully guides her investigations away from the truth, for he does not wish her to discover the young man's Sidereal nature or the delicate game that is played over her head. To evade his machinations, she secrets herself from the Tabernacle to search for herself, but a confrontation between Venerable Silk and Amaya looms on the horizon if the Unseen Master cannot defuse her interests.

Caste: Twilight

Nature: Caregiver

Calling: Exemplar

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

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

Abilities: Awareness 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 1, Linguistics (Native: Riverspeak; Low Realm, Old Realm, Skytongue) 3, Lore 4, Martial Arts 4, Medicine 5 (Alleviating Suffering +3), Occult 4, Performance 3 (Parables +1), Presence 5 (Saintly Beauty +2), Socialize 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts (Lowly Cult Friends) 3, Illumination 4, Influence 4, Sorcery 5

Charms: Body-Mending Meditation, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Flawless Diagnosis Technique, Harmonious Presence Meditation, Horizon-to-Horizon Presence Method, Hypnotic Tongue Technique, Iron-Arm Block, Leaping Mantis Technique, Listener-Swaying Argument, Majestic Radiant Presence, Mantis Form, Ox-Body Technique, Soul-Shaping Words Technique, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Terrifying Apparition of Glory, Touch of Blissful Release, True Harmony Revelation

Spells: The Battle's End, Flight of Separation, Food from the Aerial Table, Mercury's Deliverance, Paralyzing Contradiction

Combos:

Heart-Breaking Revelation Meditation (Cost: 5 motes, 3 Willpower + 2 motes per die): Horizon-to-Horizon

Presence Method, Listener-Swaying Argument — *When confronted with truly powerful foes or problems, Amaya's aura of influence sometimes grows to nearly divine proportions, influencing even the most stubborn of antagonists to respect, or even love, her. When the Combo is activated, the world around the target changes in profound and beautiful ways. Storms quiet for a moment's time, the songs of birds can be heard, and a pillar of sunlight descends upon the target, outlining him with the illumination he will shortly receive. Amaya's player may make a Charisma + Presence or Manipulation + Presence roll to influence the target, increasing her dice pool at an additional cost of 2 motes per die. Amaya must spend at least 2 additional motes when activating this Combo.*

Base Initiative: 5

Attack:

Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 2B Defense 7

Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 6 Damage 4B Defense 6

Dodge Pool: 5 **Soak:** 1L/2B (Silken robes)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/ Incap

Essence: 5

Personal Essence: 23 **Peripheral Essence:** 57

Committed Essence : 0

Other Notes: Amaya is affected by an Ascending Destiny of the Ewer, specifically a Hound-Chases-Rabbit Blessing with a duration of 10 years that manifests once per day. Anytime she discovers new and significant information on the mysterious individual she knows only as "Lathe," she regains a temporary point of Willpower. The Gold Faction has no knowledge of how this destiny came to be attached to her, though a bureaucrat is busily searching records in Yu-Shan. Venerable Silk, though opposed to her interest in this figure from her past, has neither said nor done anything about this blessing.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 2B Defense 9 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 2 Accuracy 8 Damage 5B Defense 4 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 10

GABRIEL, ADEPT INQUISITOR

Description: Gabriel is the greatest of the Sequestered Tabernacle's Inquisitors, its foremost student in the field of demon hunting and a dreaded warrior. The Inquisitor is tall and slim in build, his movement graceful and deadly. His dark eyes burn with fervor, and his face is carefully composed, almost expressionless. Long, silken black hair flows on the wind, dancing with his movements. He wears the robes of an adept, wide-shouldered with loose skirts, his hands covered with short, black leather gloves. Behind his hips, his carefully wrapped serpent-sting staff hangs from a complicated harness that allows for an extremely rapid draw.

Gabriel began life as a foundling on the doorstep of a cultist. Raised within the Cult of the Illuminated his entire life, he accepted all of its precepts fully, for he could see the world no other way. His adopted family greeted his Exaltation with the greatest joy and sent him to the Sequestered Tabernacle immediately. Caught up completely in the propaganda surrounding him, Gabriel devoted himself entirely to his training, forging himself in the Cult's ultimate weapon against demons and heretics. Because of his superb devotion, Venerable Silk saw fit to train the young Exalt personally in the art of the Snake Style.

Gabriel serves primarily as a demon hunter. When creatures of darkness threaten the Cult, the Tabernacle dispatches him to eliminate the problem. His dealings have led to confrontations with the soldiers of Kether Rock. He smells heresy in their footsteps and suspects dark, secretive ceremonies take place deep in the bowels of the fortress. He despises Michael and trains in combat techniques daily, hoping for the opportunity to defeat the Warmaster in a duel. In missions involving many Illuminated, the Tabernacle often chooses Gabriel to lead for his experience in the field and, more importantly, for his fanatical loyalty to the Cult. Despite his lack of social skills, his efficiency makes him an adequate leader.

Even the truest heart falters, however, and even the greatest faith can be tested. Gabriel recently encountered a Solar street rat who defied him and forced him to re-examine his beliefs. His simple and direct world-view



cannot conceive of a Solar refusing to join the Cult, preferring ignorance to understanding. Struggling internally with the truths this street rat imparted to him, his certainty has faded somewhat, and he melancholically wanders the Tabernacle at times, lost in thought.

Caste: Zenith

Nature: Paragon

Calling: Inquisitor

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

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

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1 (Planning Missions +1), Dodge 4, Endurance 2, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Native: Skytongue; Old Realm) 1, Lore 3, Martial Arts 5 (Against Demons +2), Melee 2, Occult 4 (Demon Lore +1), Presence 3, Resistance 1, Socialize 1, Survival 1

Backgrounds: Artifact 4, Illumination 3, Mentor 3

Charms: Crippling Pressure-Point Strike, Graceful Crane Stance, Harmonious Presence Meditation, Ox-Body Technique, Prey-Freezing Gaze, Reed in the Wind, Serpentine Evasion, Shadow Over Water, Snake Form, Snake Strikes the Heel, Spirit-Cutting Attack, Spirit-Detecting Glance, Striking Cobra Technique, Ten Magistrate Eyes

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 10 Damage 5B Defense 10*

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 7B Defense 9*

Orichalcum Serpent-Sting Staff (Lash of the Faithless): Speed 13 Accuracy 11 Damage 8L Defense 14*

* All attacks include bonuses for orichalcum Hearthstone bracers

Dodge Pool: 9 **Soak:** 2L/4B (Tabernacle robes)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/ Incap

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 16 **Peripheral Essence:** 31 (40)

Committed Essence: 9

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 11 Damage 5B Defense 12 Rate 5*

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 11 Damage 8B Defense 7 Rate 3*

Orichalcum Serpent-Sting Staff (Lash of the Faithless): Speed 13 Accuracy 11 Damage 10L Defense 14 Rate 5*

* All attacks include bonuses for orichalcum Hearthstone bracers

Dodge Pool: 15

OUTCASTE TORANU, THE PROFANE DRAGON

Description: While the Solars are the most glorious of the Exalted at the Sequestered Tabernacle, they are not

its only, or even its most loyal, Chosen. Once a servant of the Immaculate Order, Toranu's devotion to the Sequestered Tabernacle and his personal loyalty to Amaya are unquestionable. He sees himself as a living example of the flaw of the Immaculate faith, and he eagerly defies its tenants as he crushes its followers. In defiance of his old faith, Toranu wears his hair long, in brilliant, shifting spikes of scarlet and gray, and his face is unshaven. At his side, he carries a flask of potent liquor, which he swigs to gain strength. His dark eyes glitter with faith when he is amongst fellow cultists — and with deadly malice when he is among Immaculates or their followers. His manner is direct, though not impolite, and his humor is grim. Over two centuries old, he is a treasure trove of advice and old stories, which he is quick to offer.

When Amaya first made herself known to Creation, she performed many miracles and converted hundreds. Her popularity and charisma forced the Realm to act, and a Wyld Hunt was unleashed, lead by Toranu (who called himself Cathak Devon at the time). As he traveled, he encountered overwhelming evidence of her virtue and compassion. Sunrises revealed to him the beauty in her soul, and the brightness in the eye of a child she had healed unveiled the wisdom in her heart. When he and his soldiers finally faced her, she did not raise her hand to defend herself. Instead, she gazed sadly at Toranu and whispered to him the truth that had burned in his soul. His defenses crumbled, and he could no longer deny her divinity, her righteousness, and he surrendered his heart



to her. As he feel to his knees weeping, he felt as though a weight lifted from his shoulders, as though he could do anything. As his first show of faith, he slew his own soldiers to save Amaya's precious life. He has loyally served her ever since.

Toranu is old. He had already passed his second century when he first met Amaya, and his mortality looms before him. Having long ago finished the path of the Fire Dragon, he now walks the path of the Falling Blossom, hoping to someday die a martyr's death in the service of Amaya. However, he meets with resistance to his training, for he's already extremely valuable to the Tabernacle as a finely honed warrior, and his death would cost the temple a potent asset. Toranu also suspects Amaya's overly compassionate hand lies behind his instructor's refusal to teach him more, as she struggles to save him from himself. While he respects her judgment, his inability to achieve martyrdom frustrates him endlessly, for he has no other way to atone for the sins of his past.

Aspect: Fire

Nature: Follower

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 1, Athletics 5, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Dodge 5, Endurance 3, Investigation 2, Larceny 1, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Skytongue) 1, Lore 5 (Cult Doctrine +1, Immaculate Doctrine +1), Martial Arts 5 (Defending Amaya +3), Medicine 1, Melee 1, Occult 1, Performance 1, Presence 4 (Intimidation +1), Resistance 1 (Drinking +2), Ride 1, Socialize 3, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Breeding 2, Illumination 1, Resources 2, Tiger Warriors 3

Charms: Aura of Invulnerability, Breath of the Fire Dragon, Consuming Might of the Fire Dragon, Dragon Vortex Attack, Dual Scarlet Blossom Technique, Effortlessly Rising Flame, Element Bolt Attack, Elemental Burst Technique, Elemental Concentration Trance, Elemental Empowerment Meditation, Elemental Succor Method, Essence-Igniting Nerve Strike, Falling Blossom Form, Falling Star Maneuver, Fiery Hand Attack, Fiery Prowess, Fire Dragon Form, Flame-Flicker Stance, Flash-Fire Technique, Flickering Candle Meditation, Glowing Coal Radiance, Living Shield Technique, Overwhelming Fire Majesty Stance, Ox-Body Technique (x 2), Perfect Blazing Blow, Purity of Purpose Attack, Searing Fist Attack, Smoldering Wound Attack, Unbearable Taunt Technique, Undefended Assault Method

Combos:

Flaring Ember Devotion Strike (Cost: 8 motes, 3 Willpower, 1 experience point): Essence-Igniting Nerve Strike, Purity of Purpose Attack — *Toranu's experiments with*

combining his devotion through Falling Blossom Style with his fiery prowess with Fire Dragon Style resulted in this Combo. When activating the attack, white-hot flames wreath Toranu's hands as he focuses his will and devotion, and his eyes burn with fanatical intensity. Then, he launches himself forward, and when he touches his target, for he inevitably does, the righteous flames erupt within her, scouring away her impure soul. Toranu's player rolls as normal to attack, but so long as he rolls a single success on Toranu's attack, it will hit, regardless of the difficulty or his opponents defenses. Only a perfect defense will defend against this attack. Once struck, rather than taking normal damage, the target takes one health level of lethal damage for every mote currently in her Personal Essence pool, to a maximum of twice Toranu's Essence. This damage ignores armor but may be soaked by Stamina. Due to its weighty cost, Toranu seldom unleashes this dire technique, and because it has limited usefulness late in the fight, he prefers to attack with it on the first turn of the battle, usually increasing his initiative with Flash-Fire Technique and Undefended Assault Method.

Fueling the Dragon's Fire (Cost: 4 motes, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per Essence lethal damage): Breath of the Fire Dragon, Fiery Hand Attack — *Toranu takes a quick swig from his jug of liquor, unlocking the fiery potential of the liquid within his mouth, before spitting forth furious, elemental flames colored a brilliant blue. When activating the attack, Toranu's player rolls the Dragon-Blood's Perception + Martial Arts, adding a number of successes equal to his Essence, as an attack. If he hits, Toranu inflicts a base damage equal to (each additional mote spent x his Essence + his Martial Arts Ability). He must spend at least 1 additional mote in addition to the base cost of the Combo. Once struck by the attack, however, the burning alcohol clings to the target and may cause further damage. Roll the target's Stamina + Resistance in a resisted contest against Toranu's Strength + Martial Arts. Add two dice to the roll for water-based beings. If the target fails, she bursts into flames and takes environmental damage equivalent to a bonfire (see **Exalted**, p. 244). The fire lasts for a number of turns equal to Toranu's Essence.*

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Punch: Speed 10 Accuracy 10 Damage 4B Defense 10

Kick: Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 10 **Soak:** 1L/2B (Simple garments)

Willpower: 9 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/ Incap

Essence: 6

Personal Essence: 17 **Peripheral Essence:** 45

Committed Essence : 0

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 10 Accuracy 11 Damage 4B Defense 12 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 7 Accuracy 11 Damage 7B Defense 7 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 16



DEFIANT EMINENCE, GOD OF THE DEHENNEN MOUNTAINS

Description: There are no greater mountains in Creation than the Imperial Mountain and the range that surrounds it. While most mountain divinities accept their place beneath this most majestic of peaks, Defiant Eminence does not. Jealous of the Imperial Mountain's lofty status, he strains to reach higher into the sky. His ambition grinds within the heart of the Dehennen, lifting the sharp, craggy features, causing avalanches and giving his mountain range its unstable reputation. His pride demands nothing less than a legend as great as the Imperial Mountain's, and he will not rest until his name is spoken on the lips of all within Creation. His constant efforts incense the courts of the air elementals as he pushes back their domain, and the courts of the mountain kings have dismissed him as a rogue among their kind.

When asked if he would shelter the Sequestered Tabernacle within his realm, he readily agreed. Hiding away the Solars amused Defiant Eminence, for the rise of Solars would diminish the importance of the Dragon-Blooded and their Realm — and, by extension, the Imperial Mountain itself. His mists shroud the Solars from the world, and his avalanches slay those who grow too curious. His winding paths guide the Solars to the Sequestered Tabernacle and lead away those that would harm it. His protection comes at a price, however: He demands that the

resurgent Solars never again rebuild their capital at the feet of the Imperial Mountain. Venerable Silk carefully tiptoes around this promise, however, often implying that Defiant Eminence will get his way while never actually saying it. Should Meru be rebuilt, however, Defiant Eminence's wrath will be boundless.

Like all mountain gods, Defiant Eminence is tall and vast. His features are cracked, rough and broken and a deep, dark gray. His flashing eyes are obsidian, and his, long white beard and hair are rumpled, wind-blown drifts of snow. Like his mountains, he is robed in thick, obscuring mists that ripple with his passage. When he speaks, the giant's voice grinds and cracks like falling stone or freezing ice. He laughs often, his features smug and arrogant. When he grows angry, the ground trembles, and his voice takes on the thunder of a mountain face falling. He does not fear the Solars he guards, respecting them only because they will bring him great status some day. At times, he enters the Tabernacle to have tea with the Silken Master and quietly discusses the status of his mountain realm. While a great asset to the Sequestered Tabernacle, his reputation within it is dubious, and most advanced Solars within the temple see him as a practical ally rather than a true friend.

Sanctum: Defiant Eminence dwells in an ice castle that appears to be on the summit of the tallest mountain in the Dehennen Mountains. Everything about this sanctum is as vast and grand as Defiant Eminence's dreams of himself, but compared to Yu-Shan, it is merely an elegant townhome. Though its architecture is gorgeous, his sanctum is little-decorated and very hostile to mortal visitors — it is a place where Defiant Eminence can imagine himself a mighty autocrat, not an audience hall for meeting with the Exalted or a pleasure dome for mortal pets.

Nature: Architect

Attributes: Strength 20, Dexterity 3, Stamina 15, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 7, Intelligence 5, Wits 2

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 3, Temperance 4, Valor 5

Abilities: Athletics 6 (Lifting Mountains +3), Awareness 7, Brawl 5 (Implacable Grasp +2), Endurance 7, Investigation 4, Linguistics (Native: Old Realm; High Realm, Tribal Tongues) 2, Lore 3, Occult 2, Presence 5, Resistance 7, Socialize 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Influence 1, Resources 4

Charms: Affinity Element Control (Mountains), Banish, Benefaction, Hurry Home, Imprecation, Instill Obedience, Landscape Hide, Lend Authority, Malediction, Measure the Wind, Natural Prognostication, Paralyze, Scourge, Sense Domain, Stillness, Tiny Damnation, Tiny Gift, Tracking, Weather Control, Words of Power

Cost To Materialize: 85

Base Initiative: 5



Attack:

Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 20B Defense 8

Avalanche Fist: Speed 3 Accuracy 7 Damage 27B Defense 5*

* To perform Avalanche Fist, Defiant Eminence raises both fists and brings them down upon his foe with his full fury. This attack costs 3 motes per use and counts as Defiant Eminence's Charm use for the turn.

Dodge Pool: 3 **Soak:** 25L/30B (Cloak of Frozen Mist, 18L/15B, +2 difficulty to hit)

Willpower: 9 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 6 **Essence Pool:** 115

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT**Attack:**

Punch: Speed 5 Accuracy 9 Damage 20B Defense 10 Rate 5

Avalanche Fist: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 30B Defense 5 Rate 1*

Clinch: Speed 1 Accuracy 8 Damage 20B Defense 8 Rate 1

Snowy Grasp: Speed 1 Accuracy 12 Damage 20L Defense 7 Rate 1**

* To perform Avalanche Fist, Defiant Eminence raises both fists and brings them down upon his foe with his full fury. This attack costs 3 motes per use and counts as Defiant Eminence's Charm use for the turn.

** Snowy Grasp inflicts the full force of Defiant Eminence's frozen mists upon his enemy. This is a clinch attack, and costs 1 mote per turn to perform and counts as Defiant Eminence's Charm use for the turn.

Dodge Pool: 9

CHARACTERS OF KETHER ROCK

MADUKA SHIN, MASTER OF KETHER ROCK

Description: As powerful, firm and uncompromising as the mountain that makes up her fortress, Maduka Shin rules Kether Rock with an iron fist. She is an imposing woman, tall and strong, her muscles lean and honed from centuries of exercise. A mane of gray hair surrounds her handsome, sun-hardened face, and a scar runs like a snowy crevasse across one of her eyes, a gift from Venerable Silk during their last philosophical discussion. Rather than the fluttery finery most Southern women wear, Maduka Shin prefers hard, functional plates of polished armor. On her back, she straps a thick, heavy-bladed two-handed sword. Maduka Shin disdains emotional displays, maintaining a careful, aloof demeanor of cold practicality and withering logic. When she enters a room, surveying all within with her cold eyes, her soldiers come to stiff attention, ready to hear the orders of their honored, if not beloved, general.

Maduka Shin was born 500 years ago to a whore who could ill afford a daughter. Her mother passed her off onto

a company of friendly Eastern mercenaries, who taught the girl strength and ferocity out of contempt for Southern sexism. While other girls learned to dance, she learned to kill; while they learned the craft of homemaking, Maduka learned the arts of war. When she reached marrying age, instead of wearing a bridesgown, Maduka girded herself for battle, and her company took part in the Laris-Velen conflict, the last of the great conflicts using the technology of the First Age. War was her life, and she knew nothing else.

She achieved her Exaltation in the arms of a lover. In a moment of uncharacteristic emotion, tears flooded her eyes as memories of a glorious Age long lost overwhelmed her. Lost in confusion, she was rescued by Autumn, a Sidereal dancer from the Gold Faction. Further trained in the arts of war in Yu-Shan, she became a consummate general and was instrumental in the repulsion of the Arceckhi raids over 100 years after her Exaltation. Her memories haunted her, however, and she focused her efforts on finding a way to restore the world to its proper order. Blaming the fall of the Old Realm on Solar decadence rather than Dragon-Blooded ambition, she felt an even greater need to ensure that once the Gold Faction restored the Old Realm, it would remain pure for as long as possible. As she aged, she gained a reputation for logic and became a voice of reason within the Gold Faction.

The moment of the Solar's return heralded discord within the ranks of the Gold Faction. The foremost Sidereal chosen for their training, Venerable Silk, failed to see



that decadence, caused by overweening pride, resulted in the fall of the Old Realm. She raised her voice to coldly slice away elements of his arguments, winning many supporters to her logic of challenge and adversity to train the Solars, not clever manipulation and sycophantic praise. When the debate concluded, Maduka Shin had gained both her scar and her fortress, and she set out immediately to build an army of Celestial Exalted of which Heaven could be proud.

The Master of Kether Rock maintains seclusion. She seldom inspects her troops and remains unseen by almost all but her advisors and her direct subordinates. She does so not out of some ideal of restraint, but because she has come to fear Kether Rock. Her world, her plans, slowly crumble around her, the precision of her intellect defeated by the vagaries of her heart. Solars are more powerful than Maduka Shin remembers, more glorious than she thought. Her training techniques work better than she could have possibly expected, and the Solars of Kether Rock surge with power and confidence. Though she tightens her grip on the soldiers of the fortress, this only encourages the Solars to grow further. Michael, the Warmaster of Kether Rock, is the worst among them. His adoration for Maduka Shin knows no bounds, and he refuses to accept defeat in his courtship of her. His charisma is irresistible, and Maduka Shin's heart trembles whenever he speaks to her, his voice throbbing with Essence. She fears the day she will succumb to the aching in her heart, losing herself in his glorious embrace. Despite her apparent power within the fortress, in truth, Maduka Shin feels as though she can barely direct the flood of Celestial power she commands. She daily questions her own decisions, faced with the possibility of a monumental failure. As the cracks in her hubris widen, she faces the possibility she will become a figurehead within her own fortress, a puppet for the mighty Solars who truly rule there.

Caste: Battles

Nature: Martyr

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

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 4, Temperance 3, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 5, Athletics 5, Awareness 3, Brawl 5 (Steadfast Purpose +1), Bureaucracy 5 (Logistics +2), Craft (Fate) 2, Craft (War) 5, Dodge 4, Endurance 5, Investigation 2, Linguistics (Native: Riverspeak; Flametongue, High Realm, Low Realm, Old Realm) 4, Lore 4, Martial Arts 4, Medicine 2 (Field Medicine +1), Melee 5, Occult 4, Performance 3, Presence 5, Resistance 3, Ride 3, Socialize 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Acquaintances 1, Artifact 2, Backing (The Gold Faction) 3, Backing (Kether Rock) 5, Connections

(The Cult of the Illuminated) 4, Connections (The Guild) 3, Connections (The Threshold) 1, Salary 3, Savant 4

Colleges: Banner 3, Gauntlet 3, Haywain 1, Messenger 1, Pillar 2, Quiver 4, Shield 3, Spear 5, Sword 3

Charms: Absence, Auspicious Prospects for Battles, Burn Life, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Crimson Palm Counterstrike, Demon-Blocking Battle Pattern, Easily Accepted Proposition Stance, Elemental Vision, Essence-Draining Battle Pattern, Expected Pain, Faultless Ceremony, Force Decision, Forgotten Earth, Harmony of Blows, Heart-Brightening Presentation Style, Heroic Essence Replenishment, Horrific Wreath, Hungry Touch, Icy Hand, Impeding the Flow, Impose Nature, Inexorable Advance, Invisible Motion, Meditation on War, Orchestration of Conflict, Ox-Body Technique (x 5), Perfection of the Visionary Warrior, Predestined Triumph Practice, Presence in Absence Technique, Prior Warning, Red Haze, Serenity in Blood, Smiling at the Damned, Smooth Transition, Spirit-Binding Battle Pattern, Terminal Sanction, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Tolerant Strife, Unobstructed Blow, Wise Choice, World-Shaping Artistic Vision (In Service of the Solars x 3)

Spells: Emerald Countermagic, The Faithful Ally, The Horse that Travels Earth and Water, Infallible Messenger, Mercury's Deliverance, Rolling Earth Carpet, Sapphire Countermagic, Spirit Sword, Summon Elemental, Unconquerable Self, Virtuous Guardian of Flame, Whirlwind of Fate

Combos:

Furious Desert Rain Assault (Cost: 16 motes, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per die): Crimson Palm Counterstrike, Harmony of Blows, Tolerant Strife — *Maduka Shin unleashes this technique when in desperate circumstances, for it drains her greatly. When she activates the Combo, her eyes film over with the pure crimson of battle, she bears her teeth in defiance, and her edges blur, her motions running together as she moves forward as though in slow motion, cutting down all who dare to attack her, her blows sliding through darkness and shields with equal ease and accuracy. Once this Combo is activated, Maduka Shin may, in addition to her normal action, make two additional Brawl actions. These actions ignore all environmental and circumstantial penalties, and she may add up to her Essence in dice to these attacks at a cost of 1 additional mote per die. Additionally, if she is attacked, Maduka Shin may make a full parry with her Dexterity + Brawl. Any successes beyond those necessary to parry the attack convert into successes on a counterattack.*

Instant Tactical Analysis (Cost: 9 motes, 1 Willpower): Expected Pain, Wise Choice — *This Combo gives Maduka Shin her reputation for coolness in the face of sudden danger. When surprised by a sudden turn of events, Maduka Shin's eyes gleam with faint lines of red as she reads the strands of fate around her, and within seconds, she's in motion, already aware of what needs to be done. Anytime*

Expected Pain activates in response to an ambush or a surprise, Maduka Shin may spend an additional Willpower point and 6 motes to instantly receive insight into the best, immediate course of action. This Combo offers no advice, however, on the long-term consequences of her actions.

Precision Iron-Edge Attack (Cost: 3+ motes, 1 Willpower): Impeding the Flow, Meditation on War, Orchestration of Conflict — *When circumstances demand a successful strike, almost nothing can dissuade Maduka Shin's blows from reaching their target, thanks to this Combo. When she activates this Combo, a ripple of soundlessness spreads from around her, and for just a second, everyone's perceptions are slowed, and everything is tinted the crimson hue of battle. As she strikes, sparks of scarlet fate slide from her blade, ensuring its accuracy. Maduka Shin may increase the dice pool of her attacks at a cost of 1 mote per die up to a maximum of her Essence, and she may reduce any penalties applied to her Melee attack at a cost of 1 mote per die as well as reducing the target number of her attacks at a cost of 2 motes per reduction. She must spend a minimum of 1 mote increasing her dice pool and 2 motes reducing her target number for every attack she makes that turn. Further, no normal attacks can dissuade her blow. Maduka Shin may spend 3 motes to parry any blockable attacks that she is aware of without rolling. This is not a perfect defense.*

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 10 Damage 4B Defense 10

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 9

Great Sword: Speed 9 Accuracy 12 Damage 10L Defense 9

Starmetal Smashfist (Steadfast Purpose): Speed 12 Accuracy 12 Damage 9L Defense 12

Longbow: Speed 9 Accuracy 11 Damage 6L (Rate 3, Range 200)

Dodge Pool: 9/6 **Soak:** 11L/14B (Articulated plate, 9L/9B, -3 mobility penalty)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-0/-0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5

Personal Essence: 18 **Peripheral Essence:** 48 (53)

Committed Essence: 5

Other Notes: Within Kether Rock, Maduka Shin generally adopts the resplendent destiny of the Quiver, acting as a brilliant but cold general. This destiny has a duration of 20 years and 3 remaining effect points. Outside of Kether Rock, when she needs to gather information or simply escape the confines of her fortress for a time, she dons the resplendent destiny of the Spear, becoming a mere soldier amongst local mercenaries. This destiny has a duration of one year and has 5 remaining effect points. Michael is adept at piercing her disguises and can generally identify her regardless of what destiny she wears.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 11 Damage 4B Defense 12 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 11 Damage 7B Defense 7 Rate 3

Great Sword: Speed 16 Accuracy 12 Damage 10L Defense 9 Rate 2

Starmetal Smashfist (Steadfast Purpose): Speed 6 Accuracy 12 Damage 11L Defense 14 Rate 7

Dodge Pool: 14/11

MICHAEL, WARMASTER OF KETHER ROCK

Description: As Kether Rock is the cornerstone of the Cult of the Illuminated's military, so is Michael the cornerstone of Kether Rock. His charismatic presence and powerful combat skill inspire both the soldiers of the fortress to battle and whispery, worshipful tales from cultists. He is tall and handsome, his long, unruly black hair spilling down past his thick, muscled shoulders. He wears a long, open vest that hangs past his knees, and his pants are loose and flowing except where they are tucked into his square-toed boots. Marking him a Paladin of Kether Rock, he wears a long, billowing white scarf, the end of which marked with curved and elegant Flametongue letters, the secret sign of his sin and a reference to his feelings for Maduka Shin: "One Above Heaven." A master of war in all its forms, Michael is perhaps the most powerful Solar fighter in Creation. Despite his strengths, despite the support he offers Kether Rock, he may also be its greatest weakness, for in his heart, he hides a powerful love that threatens the underpinnings of all Maduka Shin has established.

Born in the West, Michael lived his mortal life as a fisherman, working the seas to feed himself and his ailing mother. Pirates demanded yearly sacrifice from his island, and when his turn came, their shaman rejected him. They ravaged his island, and in the furious struggle to save his friends and family, he Exalted. Michael was amongst the first Solars of the current Age, and his Exaltation caught the Gold Faction by surprise. Unable to gather resources quickly enough, the situation forced Maduka Shin herself to go to him as his recruit. She found him morose, filled with the guilt of his village's loss and the failure of his sacrifice. As she gathered him up, she opened her heart to him, offering him a shoulder to lean upon and weep. Then, she offered him a new vision of the future, the training he would receive to craft a world where pirates never again slaughtered villages. She gained his trust, and Michael became her first student at Kether Rock.

Once there, he trained passionately, determined to make up for his failure by protecting the world. The former fisherman hardened into a consummate warrior, the first and foremost of her paladins. While his genius in battle paled before Maduka Shin's, none in the fortress could match his charisma and the power of





his thunderous speeches. As a master orator and warrior, he naturally assumed a role of leadership within Kether Rock, serving as figurehead while Maduka Shin governed the fortress from within the shadows of its inner confines.

Michael is a highly visible figure within Kether Rock. Almost no operations begin without his stamp of approval. He knows everyone within the fortress by name, and he is quick with both praise and fierce reprimands. His passion for Kether Rock stems from his secret passion for Maduka Shin. When she saved him from himself in those early days after his Exaltation, she restored meaning to his life and took central stage in his heart. He drives Kether Rock to greater heights to show her his devotion. Mistaking her aloofness for rejection, he pushes the forces of Kether Rock harder and harder, doing whatever it takes to win even her slightest approval. His hatred for Venerable Silk stands in stark contrast to his love for Maduka Shin. He sees the scar on her face as a mark of embarrassment and trains daily in the hope that, one day, he can mark Venerable Silk in return, restoring her honor. He is proud of Kether Rock and disdains the Sequestered Tabernacle. He sees its students as pampered and overly haughty. Believing that Kether Rock is the future of the Cult, he requires the temple to shape up and follow Kether Rock's example.

Caste: Dawn
Nature: Leader
Calling: Paladin
Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3
Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 4
Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 1, Craft (War) 3 (Desert Tactics +2), Dodge 3, Endurance 4, Linguistics (Native: Seatongue; Flametongue) 1, Lore 3, Medicine 2 (Battlefield Medicine +1), Melee 3, Performance 4 (Demagoguery +3), Presence 4 (With Soldiers +1), Resistance 3, Ride 1, Sail 2 (Fishing +1), Survival 3
Backgrounds: Artifact 1, Illumination 4, Mentor 4, Tiger Warriors 5
Charms: Body-Mending Meditation, Durability of Oak Meditation, Essence-Gathering Temper, Ferocious Jab, Fists of Iron Technique, Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit, Increasing Strength Exercise, Inevitable Victory Meditation, Iron Skin Concentration, Masterful Performance Exercise, Ox-Body Technique (x3), Reed in the Wind, Respect Commanding Attitude, Shadow Over Water, Spirit Strengthens the Skin, Thunderclap Rush Attack, Thunder's Might, Unruly Mob Dispersing Rebuke, Willpower-Enhancing Spirit
Combos:
Flashing Heavenly Fist (Cost: 5 motes, 1 Willpower): Ferocious Jab, Fists of Iron Technique, Thunderclap Rush Attack — *When Michael activates this devastating technique, his pale white anima flares, winglike, and he vanishes. The air around where he stood implodes with a crash, and then, he slams into his foe, and where his fist strikes, white-gold ribbons of power explode forth. When Michael uses this attack, he automatically gains initiative on one foe and he may not split his dice pool during the turn. His attack gains +1 accuracy and +2L damage, and successes count double for the purposes of determining damage. Michael generally keeps Inevitable Victory Meditation active when he makes this attack, just in case he rolls poorly.*
Base Initiative: 6
Attack:
 Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 8 Damage 6B Defense 8*
 Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 7 Damage 8B Defense 7*
 * All attacks include the bonus provided by orichalcum Hearthstone bracers
Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 2L/4B (Long vest)
Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap
Essence: 4
Personal Essence: 20 **Peripheral Essence:** 45 (49)
Committed Essence: 4
Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 10 Rate 5*

Kick: Speed 3 Accuracy 9 Damage 9B Defense 5 Rate 3*

* All attacks include the bonus provided by orichalcum
Hearthstone bracers**Dodge Pool:** 13

JAK THE OUTRIDER, ADEPT DEACON

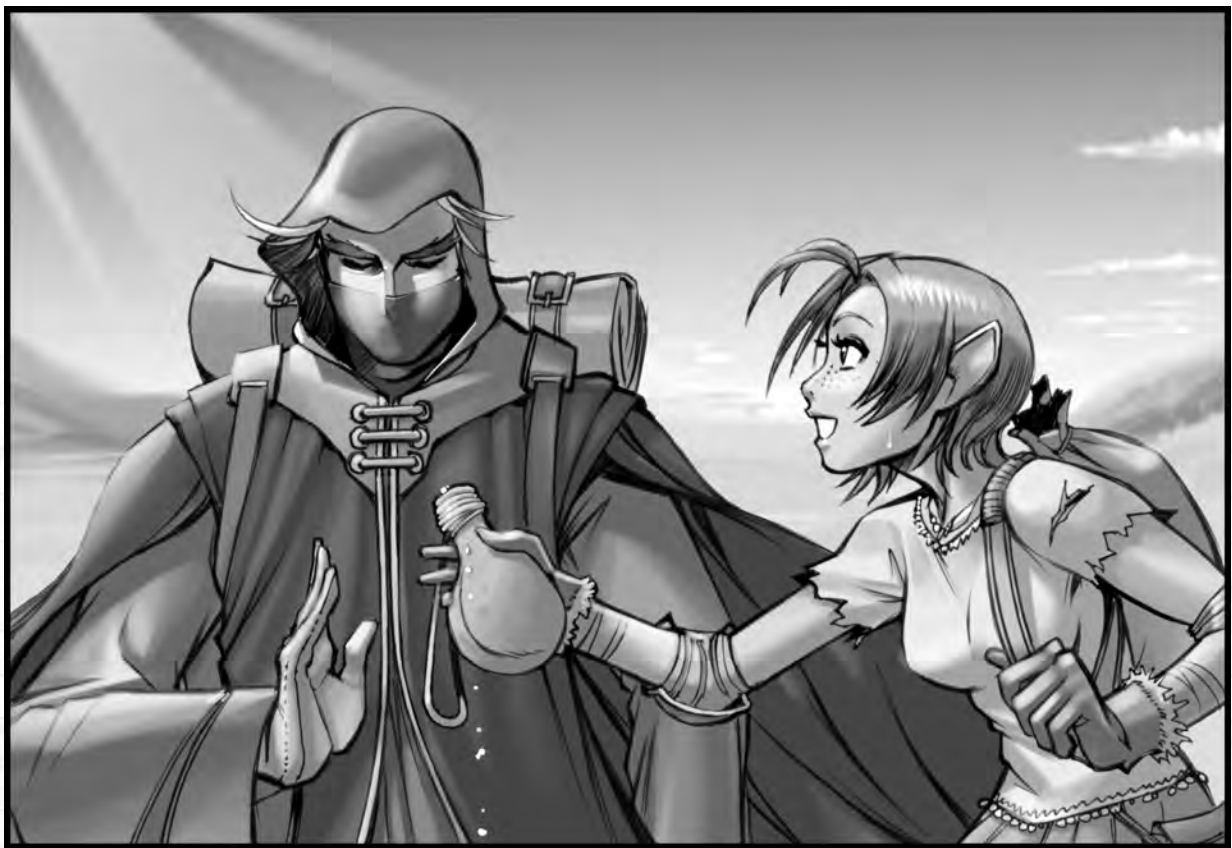
Description: Under the cover of night, a lone scout travels the treacherous badlands that surround Kether Rock, bringing information and warning to all who are loyal to it. His dark robes flutter over his small, slim frame. Beneath his dark hood, his hair is white and wild. His blue eyes, bright and surprisingly passionate, flash in the night. Alone except for his horse and his Lunar companion, Jak the Outrider travels the desert, seeking a way to purge his own self-doubt and find a place for himself in Kether Rock.

Jak grew up the son of an independent merchant, and when he was old enough, his parents sent him out into the world to make his living by contributing to the family business. Like so many youths, Jak sacrificed his childhood dreams of greatness for the betterment of his family, but he could never surrender them completely. As he trudged across the hot sands of the desert, struggling beneath his burdens, the spark of greatness lurked within his heart.

One night, he took refuge in a lone cave high on a mountain top. There, as he rested, he received a vision. For three days and two nights, he lost all sense of the world. When he stepped out in the night, the mark of Exaltation shone upon his brown, and a cultist awaited him, prepared to travel with him to Kether Rock.

Greatness did not attend Jak in Kether Rock. He never graduated at the head of his class, and he commanded troops poorly, though he fought well enough when left to his own devices. Rather than achieve glory, Jak only dreamed of it, struggled for it. He met defeat often, but he rose up on each occasion, always reaching for victory. Though he saw himself as a failure, Maduka Shin disagreed, seeing within him the essence of the spark that made Solar's great. After he completed his training, she used him as a scout. He quickly became a common sight for the soldiers of Kether Rock, a dark rider appearing from nowhere, offering quick warning or tactical advice before departing again, riding from Cult holding to holding, carrying messages.

Between his missions, Jak pursues a personal goal. One small and dwindling Munashe village to the south of the badlands suffers from the twin perils of plague and Dune People raids. Kether Rock long ago dismissed the strategically unimportant village, willing to let it perish. Jak fell in love with the wide-eyed children of the village and its dour, frightened elders. He struggles, on his own, to



find some way to save its people, and he sees his endeavor as a personal test, one he cannot fail like he has so often before. With real lives in danger, his timid heart pounds, and the spark of Exaltation burns within him.

Caste: Night

Nature: Explorer

Calling: Deacon

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

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

Abilities: Archery 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 1, Dodge 4, Endurance 1, Investigation 2, Larceny 2, Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Riverspeak) 1, Lore 2, Medicine 2, Melee 3, Presence 3 (Gaining Trust +1), Resistance 1, Ride 5, Stealth 3, Survival 5

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Familiar 3, Illumination 2, Influence 1, Resources 2

Charms: Flawless Partnership Meditation, Food-Gathering Exercise, Game-Snaring Huntsman's Method, Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit, Horse-Summoning Whistle, Master Horseman's Eye, Ox-Body Technique, Reed in the Wind, Sensory Acuity Prana, Shadow Over Water, Sight Without Eyes, Spirit-Steadying Assurances, There Is No Wind, Trackless Region Navigation Charm, Wise Arrow

Base Initiative: 10

Attack:

Punch: Speed 10 Accuracy 5 Damage 2B Defense 5

Kick: Speed 7 Accuracy 4 Damage 4B Defense 4

Short Sword: Speed 10 Accuracy 9 Damage 4L Defense 9

Composite Bow: Speed 10 Accuracy 9 Damage 4L (Rate 3, Range 250)

Dodge Pool: 9 **Soak:** 4L/4B (Chain shirt, 3L/1B)

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

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 15 **Peripheral Essence:** 39

Committed Essence: 0

Other Notes: None

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 10 Accuracy 6 Damage 2B Defense 7 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 7 Accuracy 6 Damage 5B Defense 2 Rate 3

Short Sword: Speed 12 Accuracy 9 Damage 5L Defense 8 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 12

FAITHFUL PIA, LUNAR COMPANION

Description: Sweet, cute and desperate to be harmless, Faithful Pia is the loyal pet and companion to Jak. Her body is small, her motions quick. Large, expressive

gold-brown eyes peak from behind stray strands of her chin-length auburn hair. Her smiles are broad, and freckles lightly dust her nose and cheeks. As is only proper for an Illuminated Lunar, she struggles to please Jak in whatever way she can, often smothering him with her clumsy devotion. Her eyes sparkle with delight when she is praised, and she hunches her shoulders and bows her head regretfully when she is corrected. Despite her feigned innocence, however, the heart of a killer lurks within her bosom. Whenever Jak is threatened or when her seemingly endless patience is tested to its limits, her entire visage changes. Her hair spikes and raises, and her eyes flash and turn a burnished gold. Long claws curl from her fingertips, and her mouth fills with long fangs. A tail-lashing monster replaces the adorable girl, ready to protect her companion or trounce whomever has gravely offended her. She struggles to contain that monster within, fearing the inevitable day it shall get loose and rule her heart forever.

As a girl, her parents traveled with Guild caravans throughout the Southern deserts. Her earliest memories are of the colorful veils of dancers and the wobbling and creaking of yeddim-drawn caravans. A bandit raid destroyed her childhood. The bandits slaughtered her family, burned their wagons and dragged her off into the desert where they used and abused her young body and left her in the hot sands to die. But she wouldn't. She couldn't. Day after day, she dragged her wounded body through the desert, sleeping fitfully by day and struggling by night to return to her caravan and find any survivors that remained. She fended off scavengers with bloody fingers, and as the heat made her delusional, she began to chat with the silver-haired boy who ran with her, who teased her and told her strange stories. At last, a horseman rescued her from the desert and brought the girl to Kether Rock for treatment. When the instructors there discovered she had Exalted, they began to train her.

Because he had rescued her, Pia adored Jak. She mistook the white of his hair for the silver of Luna's, and often spoke to him of the strange stories she believed he had told her. Whenever she had a free moment from her training, she followed him around like a teenager with a crush. Her heart soared when the instructors advised her she would be allowed to serve Jak himself, her favorite among the glorious warrior-saints of Kether Rock.

Today, Faithful Pia accompanies Jak everywhere he rides, sleeping on the back of his horse in the form of a cat or watching him while he sleeps. She protects him in subtle ways he most likely wouldn't understand or acknowledge, seeking out and eliminating unpleasant gossip or bandits hiding in ambush. However, her girlish worship of him frustrates him, and he seldom knows how to deal with her, wavering between amusement and embarrassment. Despite the reprimands she receives for her

over-familiarity with him, she continues, unable to help herself. He is her world, her god, and she would do anything for him.

But her nature defies her. Shortly after she began traveling with Jak, a fierce Lunar attacked her, trying to kidnap her and drag her off to the Silver Pact. Without Jak's intervention, he might have succeeded. She hates the Silver Pact now, believing them all to be cannibalistic monsters. But before he retreated, the Lunar told her that she could not contain her feral nature forever, that without proper training, she was a dangerous chimera that threatened all she loved. His words torment her to this day, for one day they came true. By the light of the full moon, Pia lost control of her bestial side. She doesn't remember the events of that night, but Jak has treated her differently ever since, growing quiet in her presence, sometimes watching her, perhaps thoughtfully, perhaps fearfully. She remains desperately afraid she did something horrible that night and, worse, that her lapse will happen again. Filled with doubt, she is torn between staying by Jak's side and leaving for the Silver Pact, if only to protect him from herself.

Caste: Casteless

Nature: Follower

Tell: Cat's Irises*

* Noticeable. Noticing the tell in Pia's true forms requires a successful Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 3. Those seeing her need not regard her suspiciously. The Wits + Awareness roll to spot her tell if she is regarded suspiciously while shapechanged is 5.

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

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

Abilities: Athletics 4 (Falling +1), Awareness 3, Brawl 4 (Protecting Jak +2), Dodge 4, Endurance 1, Larceny 1, Linguistics (Native: Flametongue; Guild Cant) 1, Medicine 1 (Tending Jak +1), Melee 2, Performance 1, Presence 4 (Cute +2), Resistance 1, Socialize 1 (Getting out of trouble +1), Stealth 3, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Artifact 2, Contacts 3, Resources 1
Charms: Beast Instinct Method, Bending Before the Storm, Bowing Reed Technique, Deadly Beastman Transformation (*Gifts: Bestial Reflexes, Terrible Beast Claws*), Finding the Spirit's Shape, Infection Resisting Method, Lick Wound, Predator Grace Method, Sense-Sharpening Change, Shaping the Ideal Form

Base Initiative: 8 (13)

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 (13) Accuracy 8 (10) Damage 2B (3B) Defense 8 (10)

Kick: Speed 5 (10) Accuracy 7 (9) Damage 4B (5B) Defense 7 (9)

Bite (Hybrid Form): Speed 13 Accuracy 12 Damage 8L Defense 10

Claws (Hybrid Form): Speed 16 Accuracy 11 Damage 6L Defense 11

Dodge Pool: 8/7 (10/9) **Soak:** 8L/12B /9L/14B (Red Tiger-Stripe Coat: red jade reinforced buff jacket, 7L/10B, -1 mobility penalty)

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

Personal Essence: 14 **Peripheral Essence:** 29

Committed Essence: 3

Other Notes: Traits in parentheses reflect Pia when using Deadly Beastman Transformation.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 (13) Accuracy 9 (11) Damage 2B (3B) Defense 10 (12) Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 (10) Accuracy 9 (11) Damage 5B (6B) Defense 5 (7) Rate 3

Bite (Hybrid Form): Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 11L Defense 9 Rate 2

Claws (Hybrid Form): Speed 15 Accuracy 11 Damage 8L Defense 11 Rate 4

Dodge Pool: 10/9 (12/11)







CHAPTER FOUR

THE WYLD HUNT



Everything in Creation has its opposite. The Cult of the Immaculate exists (at least in part) to aid the Solar and Celestial Exalted, to offer them shelter and service in the hopes that they will change the world for the better. Its opposite number is the Wyld Hunt.

Like the Cult of the Illuminated, the Wyld Hunt is a widespread and heterogeneous organization, each cell organized under different principles and approaching threats in different ways. Also like the Cult, the Hunt is a (mostly) religious organization, sponsored and controlled by the Immaculate Order (with some input and assistance from the Scarlet Empire and the Great Houses). And the Hunt exists to serve a similar purpose, to protect and aid the ordinary citizens and inhabitants of Creation.

...of course, the differences outweigh the similarities.

AGAINST THE ANATHEMA: THE WYLD HUNT

The Wyld Hunt is one of the great and lasting institutions of the Realm, a tradition of heroism and courage (and of zealotry and excess) born from the wreckage of the First Age. Even before the coming of the Scarlet Empress, the Hunt stood fast against the enemies of Creation — the Solar and Lunar Anathema, the hungry chaos of the Fair

Folk and the Wyld and the inhuman powers of demons, gods and monsters. For more than 700 years, the Wyld Hunt has defended the Realm, defended Creation. Its members, called shikari, have battled on their own and at the heads of armies and have fought reborn gods in forgotten temples and defied legions of beastmen and monsters on the mad battlefields of the Wyld. It bore the banner of the Immaculate Order with pride and honor, and every child of the Realm, mortal or Exalt, dreamed of becoming worthy to stand alongside their heroes.

This chapter details the Wyld Hunt in all its fading glory. No longer the unbeatable force it once was, the Hunt still operates as a threat to the Anathema and their plans to overthrow the natural order. Part religious inquisition, part information-gathering bureaucracy, part coordinated network of death squads, the Wyld Hunt has never stopped being a danger to the Exalted or heroes to the Dragon-Blooded. Solars, Lunars and other Anathema may be hunted down by the holy assassins or may, in turn, hunt down their stalkers to eliminate the pawns of the Sidereals. Dragon-Blooded characters, on the other hand, might join the Hunt's ranks and become the heroes that turn the tide against the darkness once again. Whether as enemy, ally or patron, the Wyld Hunt can play a role in almost any **Exalted** series.

A LEGACY BORN IN BLOOD: THE HISTORY OF THE WYLD HUNT

The first version of the Wyld Hunt was created early in the history of the Second Age, in the chaos and turmoil of the Usurpation. The Solar Exalted had been destroyed, thrown down by the revolt of the Dragon-Blooded and the machinations of the Sidereal Bronze Faction. Chejop Kejak and his compatriots knew, however, that the Solars were not completely removed from the picture. Almost all of the Solar Essences were locked in the Jade Prison at the bottom of the Inland Sea, but a few had escaped the magic of the Sidereals, and other Solars remained abroad as fugitives. Their hubris was strong, but the members of the Bronze Faction were not fools; Kejak knew that even one Solar, left to reincarnate and reclaim the power of the Unconquered Sun, could threaten what he had wrought — could even attempt to free the trapped Essences from their tomb. But the Sidereals could not act openly to seek out and combat the few loose Essences, for the plans of the Bronze Faction hinged on its members own anonymity, their own dismissal from history and retreat into myth.

The solution was clear. Just as the Sidereals has used the Dragon-Blooded as instruments of regicide and revo-

lution to cast down the Solars, so too would they use them to mop up the last remnants of the First Age. As the Shogunate rose from the wreckage of the Usurpation, the Bronze Faction approached some of the greatest warriors, sorcerers and adventurers of the Dragon-Blooded, those who had distinguished themselves in the battles against the Solars. The Sidereals brought a simple message to these heroes, a message powerful because it was true — *the battle is not yet over, and all may be lost if you do not continue to fight.* With the atrocities of Solar misrule still fresh in their memories, these Terrestrial nobles and warlords had no desire to see their victory dashed by the return of their enemies. They threw in their lot with the Sidereals — or rather, with the savants and seers of the Immaculate Order, the mask behind which the Bronze Faction Sidereals hid their true faces. Even at this early time, the Sidereals worked to keep their existence a secret, and none of their Terrestrial pawns realized who were pulling their strings.

BASTION OF FAITH

At first, the Wyld Hunt was a disorganized and little-controlled force, more a creation of the Dragon-Blooded themselves than the Sidereal Exalted. Each Dragon-Blooded hero in league with the young Immaculate Order



took it upon herself to battle the darkness as she saw fit — independent of leadership, allying herself with other heroes or leading mortal troops, answerable only to her own instincts and her existing loyalties. While the newly formed Immaculate Order advised individual heroes, the Dragon-Blooded then made their own plans on how to use that advice, even ignoring it in some cases. Just a few decades after the Sidereals had decided to make use of the Dragon-Blooded to neutralize the Solars, some of their Terrestrial inquisitors were turning their attentions to other threats: vengeful Lunars raising armies of beastmen, the growing presence of the Fair Folk or the wars and battles to control the newly forming Shogunate. Control was ebbing away, and that was not acceptable.

The first step the Bronze Faction took to cement control over its operatives was to give them a name, an *identity*, a sense that each hero belonged to something that was greater than herself (and thus worth elevating over other concerns). After much deliberation, the Bronze named its inquisition the Wyld Hunt, for the Wyld was the source of so many of Creation's dangers and the hiding place of the Lunars and the Fair Folk. It was a name that spoke of the need to defend Creation's borders from the powers of chaos — and carried a subtle suggestion that attention should be turned to external dangers and horrors, rather than the internal tensions of politics and war.

The second (and far more important) step was to enmesh the Wyld Hunt firmly within the Immaculate Order, to remake it as a wholly religious organization. First created to shore up Sidereal influence within the Shogunate, the Order proved to be one of the most powerful and useful tools of the Bronze Faction — one that won the hearts and minds of not just mortals but also the Terrestrial Exalted, who were not immune to the charms of a religion preaching their own perfection. While the Order had already acted as an advising body to the proto-Hunt, handing down astrological predictions and information on the Solars, the two groups were still separate entities. Kejak and the Bronze Faction decided to change that, so that the Wyld Hunt became an arm of the Order — to cement the loyalty of the Hunt through religious zealotry and faith.

Over a period of years, the Order assimilated the Wyld Hunt. The texts that formed the basis of the Order were subtly rewritten to incorporate the presence — the perfect and holy *necessity* — of the Wyld Hunt, the Immaculate warriors who would hold back the Anathema (who were, in turn, further demonized by the Order's teachings). New members were recruited from those Dragon-Blooded who had bought into the Immaculate Order (and more joined every day), rather than secular Terrestrials. Established members of the Hunt were targeted for religious conversion through a mixture of Sidereal brainwashing and plain old-fashioned preaching. Most eventually bought into the

Order's faith, and those few who refused to believe were ejected from the Wyld Hunt (and, in some cases, assassinated by the Sidereals lest they turn against their former allies). Soon, the Wyld Hunt was entirely part of the Immaculate Order and populated wholly by monks and believers, held up as the defenders and exemplars of the Immaculate teachings. The Hunt had more focus than before, dedicated first and foremost to fighting the last of the Solar Anathema, rather than those threats the Sidereals thought unimportant.


That narrow focus proved to be a mistake. Unforeseen by the Sidereals, the Great Contagion swept across Creation, and the armies of the Fair Folk teemed after it. The Wyld Hunt was still focused on tracking and hunting Solars, and it was unprepared for the entirely different dangers and powers of the Fair Folk and their hordes of Wyld mutants. For a time, the Bronze Faction dithered over whether to pit the Hunt against the Fair Folk, and when it *did* commit the Wyld Hunt to the war, it found itself outmatched. Tactics and strategies that suited a direct confrontation with a single being (even one of immense power) didn't work against a horde of hobgoblins or the sanity-shredding powers of the Fair Folk. The members of the Wyld Hunt were powerful but inexperienced in this kind of fighting, and the group's loose, decentralized system of administration was no help in coordinating simultaneous battles across Creation. Individual heroes won victories, but more fell in battle, and the Wyld Hunt dwindled and weakened.

PILLAR OF EMPIRE

In the end, the invasion of the Fair Folk was thrown back not by the Sidereals or the armies of the Dragon-Blooded, but by the woman who would become the Scarlet Empress. When Chejop Kejak negotiated with the Empress, he offered her the services and support of the Immaculate Order to lend authority to her reign (and to allow him some influence over the empire to come). That agreement saw the Immaculate Order become strongly integrated with the political structure of the Scarlet Empire, a government that was now strongly spiritual rather than secular — and in turn, the Order's structure changed to better suit the evolving bureaucratic systems of the Realm.

Of all the elements of the Immaculate Order, the Wyld Hunt was among the most changed by the marriage of Realm and Order. The Hunt had failed during the Great Contagion because it was too disorganized and too focused — too concerned with the Solars above all things and too slow to fix its sights on other targets. That had to change, for while the Solars were still the most dangerous of Creation's (and the Sidereals') enemies, other threats existed and had to be opposed. The religious emphasis of the Wyld Hunt was a strength, but it needed more — it needed the structure and direction of bureaucracy, to be an *army* rather than a collection of monks.





Over the course of a century, the Wyld Hunt changed shape once again. The Immaculate Order began accepting members from outside its own ranks — cautiously, yes, and after their beliefs were measured and approved, but it was no longer a solely religious group. Many of these new recruits were former soldiers and commanders of legions, who brought a military discipline and viewpoint to their new role. Others were sorcerers (an area in which the Immaculate Order had always fallen short), savants or strategists from the Realm's new information gathering arm, the All-Seeing Eye. The Wyld Hunt was still a religious group, still wholly and solely part of the Immaculate Order, but now, it was bolstered by secular powers as well and could act with the support of the Realm and its bureaucracy.

As the structure of Realm overhauled the Order, so too did it reshape the Wyld Hunt, installing a chain of command and a hierarchy of responsibility. Before the Contagion, the mission of the Wyld Hunt was one carried out more with zeal than with strategy. Monks would leap to action and set off after suspected Anathema whenever they could, unmindful of the bigger picture. Now, when threats were reported by the Order or the Eye, there were processes for dealing with the danger — assessments, strategy meetings and decisions made by the Hunt's leaders as to which members should combat the monster. The Wyld Hunt's effectiveness grew enormously — and so did the esteem and prestige the group gathered for its efforts.

Over more than seven centuries, the Wyld Hunt established itself as one of the greatest and noblest callings to which the Dragon-Blooded of the Realm could aspire and one of the bravest and most important protectors of the Scarlet Empire. Although the Fair Folk had been repelled by the power of the Realm's Defense Grid, they still lurked in the Wyld, which was no longer confined to the outer rim of Creation. So too did the savage Lunar Anathema and their armies of mutants and beastmen dwell there, not to mention the dangers of demons, renegade gods and the terrible monsters born from the Wyld and the hidden places of the world. And above all else, there were the Solar Anathema, the burning destroyers of everything sacred, the bogeymen every child of the Realm learned to fear from his first breath. Legions and armies were some defense against these dangers, but not enough. They were too mortal, too vulnerable and too unwieldy to use against subtle, smaller (but incredibly powerful) threats.

No, responsibility for the Realm's protection fell to the shikari of the Wyld Hunt, the greatest heroes of the Scarlet Empire and the chosen of the Immaculate Order. Children (mortal and Exalted) fought mock battles in the dirt, squabbling over who would have the right to pretend to be the brave harrier and who would be the pitiful Anathema. Monks who mastered the Immaculate martial arts petitioned for the right to take up holy arms against the darkness of the Wyld. And the Great Houses channeled their strongest (but still expendable) sons and daughters

into the ranks of the Wyld Hunt, along with money, artifacts and resources to finance its work.

All of that changed when the Scarlet Empress disappeared.

VICTIM OF UPHEAVAL

Just five years after the Empress vanished from the Realm, the Wyld Hunt is a poor mockery of its former strength. Its ranks have been thinned, its support and resources have been slashed, and it has become subject to the whims and politics of the rapidly decaying empire and the Immaculate Order.

In this time of crisis, the Great Houses no longer see the Wyld Hunt as an important institution, a bastion of Realm defense or a noble calling for their scions. They see it as a waste of valuable resources. Money donated to the Order for the Hunt's funding could be better spent on equipping house legions and soldiers, and skilled Exalts would be better placed at the head of those legions than in a monastery training to fight monsters. The unspoken wisdom is that civil war is coming, an all-out battle to seize the throne of empire. Against that immediate threat, the danger of the Solars can be willfully ignored. The members of the Wyld Hunt are not immune to this attitude either, especially those who joined the Hunt for reasons other than zealousness and piety. Many have left to return to their Great Houses and their political maneuvering, leaving the ranks of the Hunt slashed and populated by neophytes and unworldly monks. Ten years ago, the Wyld Hunt was upheld by almost 500 Dragon-Blooded heroes, with more petitioning to join. Today, there are less than 100 shikari to protect all of Creation.

The Wyld Hunt still functions, but with vastly reduced numbers and resources — a poor situation, but one that could be eventually weathered and reversed. But at the same time as this reduction in strength, the threat of the Solar Anathema has exploded beyond all comprehension. While the Wyld Hunt normally encountered reborn Solars every few decades, suddenly Creation is overrun by the beings and by the lesser horrors (Fair Folk, Lunars, demons and more) that follow in their ruined wake. The much-diminished Wyld Hunt finds itself spread thinner than it thought possible, battling on all fronts to hold back the tide while ever shrinking from within. Like a old and dying tiger beset by jackals, it fights a battle it seems unlikely to win.

But an old tiger still has teeth. And with an infusion of new blood and new resources, the Wyld Hunt may still prevail over the horrors it has fought for nearly 1,000 years.

A NETWORK OF HOLY MURDERERS: ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

The Wyld Hunt is not an army or a religious order or a police force or a fraternal organization, but it has certain similarities to all of these groups. The Immaculate Order has

had close to 1,000 years to perfect the structure and operations of the Wyld Hunt, and it has not been afraid to draw on the wisdom of the Imperial Bureaucracy (or the Sidereal Bureau of Destiny). The Hunt manages pious discipline and fervor with a strong secular bureaucracy; it allows its individual members to make on-the-spot decisions on how to fight their holy war, while still remaining accountable to wiser and more enlightened advisors. It has astrologers and soldiers at its command, the blessing of Heaven, the mandate of the Empress and the secret assistance of the Sidereal Bronze Faction. The pinnacle of the Realm's defenses against the Anathema, nothing should stand against it.

That, at least, is the theory. In practice, the Wyld Hunt is hamstrung by the same problems that always plague any organization: politics, personal agendas, treachery and lack of vision. These issues have always existed, but their impact mattered much less in the Hunt's heyday. Since the disappearance of the Empress, these organizational hurdles have become major problems, impeding the Hunt's ability to respond to the Anathema threat or to protect its own existence. It will take more than simple manpower and money to bring the Wyld Hunt back to its former glory; any reform-minded Exalts would have to completely overhaul, audit and reorganize the Hunt.

SECULAR AND IMMACULATE BUREAUCRACIES

The Wyld Hunt is a religious organization, a militant arm of the Immaculate Order. But in an empire that claims the mandate of Heaven, religion does not exist in a vacuum. The Immaculate Order stays aloof from politics (for the most part), but it is still embedded in the bureaucratic structure of the Realm. Monasteries and temples need not pay rent on their lands, but the fact that they do not pay must still be recorded; Immaculate monks can battle evil with the authority of the Order, but that authority must also be recognized by the Imperial Bureaucracy. The Order exists outside the mechanism of the empire, but not completely outside of it — and one of the places where church and state overlap is in the operation of the Wyld Hunt.

The primary influence of the Imperial Bureaucracy on the Hunt is indirect — the Hunt is run and organized more like a ministry of the Thousand Scales (or a division of the legions) than a religious foundation. There is a structure of accountability, a reporting hierarchy with the Mouth of Peace at the top. Beneath her is a panel of correctors, experienced and highly respected Dragon-Blooded monks and priests, who act as her intermediaries and advisors to the Hunt. These correctors monitor the workings of the Wyld Hunt, order reports on campaigns against the Anathema (both successes and failures) and perform occasional internal audits on the Hunt's expenses and finances. Reporting to the correctors are the exarchs, the highest ranking Immaculate members of the Wyld Hunt. Each chapter of the Hunt (see below) is managed by an exarch,

who makes decisions on where to direct that chapter's efforts and maintain its operations. Finally, responsibility for the day to day running of each chapter falls to the ostiaries, the field commanders and on-site managers of the Wyld Hunt. Ostiaries are almost always shikari who have worked their way through the ranks to achieve positions of trust and responsibility, and they include both Immaculate and secular members.

While this system of reportage and command resembles that of a secular bureaucracy, it is still an entirely religious operation, not answerable to any temporal authority. However, there is a degree of Imperial Bureaucratic involvement in the Wyld Hunt, and it comes from the All-Seeing Eye. The imperial secret police supplies the Wyld Hunt with information and with soothsayers and diviners to track the appearances of the Anathema, and to bolster that information, it also lends a level of administrative assistance to the Order. The Committee on Matters of Venerly is the body within the All-Seeing Eye that concerns itself with the Wyld Hunt. It supplies and pays personnel to maintain the Hunt's activities, organizes the transfer of soldiers from the legions, keeps track of donations and gifts made from the Great Houses and numerous other bureaucratic tasks. The Committee operates separately but in parallel with the Order's own bureaucracy, and each keep tabs on the other — and considers the other group an inferior, secondary body that should really be subsumed into its own administrative structure.


CHAPTER AND CADRE

The bureaucracy and administration of the Wyld Hunt is not a matter that most members of the Hunt spend much (if any) time thinking about; it works in the background, and only becomes visible when it fails to operate properly. For the harriers of the Order, the primary sign of the Wyld Hunt's structure is organizational rather than administrative — the allocation of individual shikari to specific divisions and locations within the Hunt.

The Wyld Hunt is broken up into several chapters, divisions of the Hunt charged with monitoring and patrolling specific regions of Creation. Chapters are large, expensive sub-organizations, sometimes controlling dozens of Dragon-Blooded harriers and hundreds of mundane staff. Each chapter is housed in a powerful and well-protected Manse (chapter house), chosen for both its strategic location and its supernatural significance. Ten years ago, the Wyld Hunt had 11 chapters scattered across the Realm and the Threshold. Today, only six remain. The others have been closed down due to lack of operating funds and insufficient numbers of shikari. The other chapters have taken up the workload, but this has left them strained, charged with protecting ever-larger regions of the Realm with ever-smaller budgets and manpower.

Within each chapter, the shikari are formed into cadres, hunting parties that take on the task of tracking and





engaging the Anathema. Different chapters have different approaches to the creation of cadres, depending on the demands of their particular region of Creation or the strategies of the exarch and the ostiaries. Most cadres are assembled on an ad hoc basis, assigning specific shikari to a team on a mission-by-mission basis. When the task is done, the cadre dissolves (assuming it survives). This approach has the advantage of flexibility, but it means that cadremates rarely get the opportunity to become familiar with each others abilities and develop complex tactics. Other cadres are set groups, harriers who always work together as a team. These parties have the advantage of experience and smooth teamwork but are less flexible and adaptable. Most chapters use a mix of ad hoc and established cadres. Often, the established cadres work a circuit or patrol around the chapter's area of command (a trip that may take several years), while ad hoc groups are created for specific missions and then dispatched from the chapter house.

Cadre size is also highly variable. The smallest cadre is, of course, the lone hunter, but this is rarely seen in the Wyld Hunt. The Anathema are too dangerous and the work of the Hunt too important to risk harriers traipsing off on their own without backup and support. Much more common is a group of two to five Dragon-Blooded, with a variety of Abilities and Charms that complement each other. Larger cadres are rare and are usually assembled to deal with exceptionally powerful or dangerous Anathema. In addition to Dragon-Blooded harriers, cadres may also include units of mortal soldiers to provide support (especially when facing beastmen or fae hordes) and, possibly, savants and astrologers to provide guidance during a mission.

HUNTERS AND HARRIERS

At its height, the Wyld Hunt was manned solely by the greatest and bravest of the Dragon-Blooded, pious Immaculates and noble Dynasts bound together to protect Creation at any cost. Such is no longer the case. The Hunt has not just diminished in quantity, but also in quality. The strongest of its secular members have almost all left the Hunt in order to pursue political agendas in this time of tumult. While the monks of the Wyld Hunt are theoretically immune to such machinations, the truth is that monks have families and temporal responsibilities as well, and many have been forcibly recalled by the Great Houses (or by the Immaculate Order itself) in preparation for the inevitable civil war. While some of those remaining in the Wyld Hunt are both strong and courageous, too many are inexperienced or undertrained — or worst, the castoffs of the Great Houses, wastrels looking for adventure or family embarrassments shunted away from the political arena.

Those outside the Wyld Hunt talk of its members as shikari, or sacred hunters, and this is the title given to all who join the group. Within the Order, though, further differentiations are made between members on a number of different grounds.

Full-Time or Part-Time: Some members of the Wyld Hunt are so devoted to the cause that they dedicate themselves to it full-time, holding down no other position or role in society. Most of the Immaculate monks in the Order fall under this division, as do a few of the more fervent (or desperate) secular shikari. These full-time hunters are called hosted shikari, for they survive on the Immaculate Order's largesse. Many donate all their additional wealth (if any) back to the Order and live on a small remittance from their chapter's funds. Most shikari are part-time members, or errant shikari. They donate a portion of their time and courage to the Wyld Hunt, then return to other pursuits and endeavors between missions. The Wyld Hunt would generally prefer hosted over errant shikari, if only because it's easier to rely on a hunter who's on call every day and sleeps within the chapter house. But beggars can't be choosers, and in this dark time, most shikari come and go between their duties and the demands of their private lives.

Status and Seniority: Once a shikari has proven herself in the field several times, the Wyld Hunt typically promotes her to the rank of amercer, a rank that usually confers command over a cadre of less experienced shikari. Above amercers are venerers, hunters who have not just proven themselves capable in battle, but possessed of vision and wisdom. Venerers act as commanding officers in the field and advisors in the chapter house. Their experience and insight is used on both a strategic and tactical level. Finally, there are the ostiaries of each chapter, the generals and managers who organize and coordinate all of the chapter's cadres and report to the exarch. It takes decades of dedicated service and achievement to rise to the rank of ostiary, and it's a rank few secular hunters ever achieve (not a conscious bias on the Wyld Hunt's part, perhaps, but one that certainly exists). At the very least, ostiaries must dedicate their lives to the Hunt; only hosted shikari can be elevated to this position.

Specialization: In order to effectively battle the Anathema, the Wyld Hunt needs skilled and powerful hunters, and it needs to bring a variety of Abilities and Charms to bear against the enemy. The ostiaries of each chapter designate shikari by their strongest and most useful Abilities, so as to assemble cadres with complementary strengths and few weaknesses. Harriers are shikari with strong combat Abilities and Charms, whether using weapons or martial arts, swords or bows. Inquisitors are those who specialize in information gathering — not the prognostication of astrology or research, but detective work, spycraft and battlefield intelligence. Finally, castigators are those Exalts who have studied sorcery and who can work magic to directly or indirectly weaken the Anathema in the field. It's expected that many shikari will have strengths in two or all three of these areas — at the very least, every member of the Wyld Hunt must be able to join battle and fight when it is necessary — but the designation is made to point out a hunter's primary specialization.

PLAYERS' CHARACTERS IN THE WYLD HUNT

In series about Dragon-Blooded characters, joining the Wyld Hunt is an event that can give rise to dozens of interesting stories. At this low ebb in its history, the Hunt is crying out for new members — and while it has certain minimum standards of competence, any Dynastic character will fulfill those criteria from the moment of his creation. (There are also standards of loyalty and piety, but that's up to the players to portray.) Gaining rank and influence within the Wyld Hunt is not automatic, however, and a character must prove her worth before gaining rank.

In game terms, there are certain achievements and Trait minimums that must be met before a character can gain a higher rank in the Wyld Hunt (and the benefits that come with it).

Shikari: All characters who join the Wyld Hunt gain this rank. Shikari have a minimum of Backing (Wyld Hunt) 1 and Connections (The Immaculate Order) 1; if characters do not already have those Backgrounds, they gain that minimum amount. Shikari are also entitled to attune to any Manse controlled by the Wyld Hunt.

Amercercer: To become an amercercer, a shikari must have been on at least three successful missions against the Anathema (not necessarily Solar Anathema). He must also possess at least four dots in his primary Virtue. Amercercers gain minimum Background

ratings of Backing (Wyld Hunt) 2, Connections (Immaculate Order) 2 and Command 1.

Venerer: Venerers must possess experience, insight, the ability to lead and sheer Exalted power. A character wishing to rise to this rank must have at least four dots in Presence and at least three dots in two different combat Abilities (Archery, Brawl, Martial Arts, Melee or Thrown). He must also have at least Willpower 7 and Essence 3. Venerers gain minimum Background ratings of Backing (Wyld Hunt) 3, Connections (Immaculate Order) 3, Connections (All-Seeing Eye) 1 and Command 2.

Ostiary: To achieve the rank of ostiary, a character must have gained the admiration of his fellows and proven himself worthy of the highest responsibility. To become an ostiary, a character must have at least Reputation 3 and Backing 4, four dots in his primary Virtue and four dots in Presence. In addition, characters who are not Immaculate monks must have at least four dots in Connections (Immaculate Order). Ostiaries gain minimum Background ratings of Backing (Wyld Hunt) 5, Connections (Immaculate Order) 4, Connections (All-Seeing Eye) 2 and Command 3.

Exarch: Exarchs are primarily administrative and religious officers, not hunters, and they are appointed by the correctors of the Order. A character wishing to become an exarch

would have to be an Immaculate monk or priest and would require at least four dots in Connections (Immaculate Order). Exarchs possess Backing (Wyld Hunt) 5 and a minimum of three dots in Connections (All-Seeing Eye).



ANCILLARY STAFF

Even at its height, the Wyld Hunt was never a solely Dragon-Blooded enterprise. The Realm runs on the sweat of mortal labor, and the holy work of the Order is no different. Every chapter house make use of ancillary mortal staff, normally provided and paid by the All-Seeing Eye's Committee on Matters of Venery, although some chapters also make use of mortal monks and priests supplied by the Immaculate Order. There are four main groups of ancillary staff used by the Wyld Hunt.

Soldiers

The authority of the All-Seeing Eye allows the Hunt to requisition troops from the imperial legions — usually from those legions affiliated with pious houses such as Mnemon and Ledaal. Most chapters have a full talon on secondment at any time, stationed in the town or compound nearest the chapter house. A tour of duty with the Wyld Hunt lasts for two years, at which point soldiers are rotated back to their original legion. Hunters may also requisition troops from local legions during a mission if necessary, again thanks to the authority of the All-Seeing Eye — however, such requisitions must be fully recorded and reported to the exarchs and the Committee on Matters of Venery.

Ancillary soldiers are elite troops (see **Exalted**, p. 278) and operate in five-man fangs. Most cadres are accompanied by a single scale of soldiers — more if the cadre contains multiple amercers.

Savants

The single most vital resource of the Wyld Hunt is *information* — information on the appearance of the Anathema across Creation. Without knowledge that a given Anathema even exists, the Hunt cannot target it, and without information on the monster's powers, methods and activities, the Hunt cannot fight it effectively. Most of the Wyld Hunt's information comes from the diviners, seers and oracles of the All-Seeing Eye, who auger the stars and question the spirits for information on the coming of the Anathema. The Hunt maintains groups of seers and astrologers at each chapter house, while additional information is regularly dispatched by the Eye from the Imperial City. These groups of savants are heavily infiltrated by the Sidereal Exalted, who use them to filter information about the Solars through to their Terrestrial protectors.

In addition to supernatural sources of information, the Wyld Hunt enjoys the use of parts of the All-Seeing Eye's network of spies across the Threshold. These informants keep a careful eye out for unusual events, rumors of miraculous beings and creatures, the forming of heretical cults and other such happenings. Reports from these individuals can be irregular, but the Hunt receives enough information from them to gain a broad picture of events.

Administrators

The average citizen or Dynast of the Realm imagines the Wyld Hunt as a straightforward entity — it looks for

the Anathema, finds them and battles them. No one ever thinks about the paperwork. But for an organization the size of the Wyld Hunt, even in its reduced state, paperwork and bureaucracy is an inevitable byproduct of its work. Reports must be filed with the Immaculate Order about the Hunt's activities, its successes and (more importantly) its failures. Expenses must be tallied to justify budgets, pay records must be maintained, funds must be managed as efficiently as possible, and donated artifacts and equipment (see below) must be catalogued.

Hundreds of mortal bureaucrats and administrators work for the Wyld Hunt. Most are citizens, but a few are actually unExalted Dynasts from minor families, career bureaucrats who have found a safe niche in the mechanisms of the Realm. The majority of administrators live on-site near a particular chapter house. The higher level bureaucrats are in the Imperial City, processing reports before sending them to both the Committee on Matters of Venery and the correctors of the Immaculate Order.

Servants

Finally, the Wyld Hunt employs thousands of mundane servants, simply to aid in its day-to-day operations. Cooks and cleaners, stableboys and sailors, farmers and carpenters — all are needed to manage the chapter houses and to serve the needs of the shikari. The Order pays these servants slightly better than the average wage, since even the lowest operatives of the Hunt still bear the risk of retaliation at the hands of the Anathema. Not only that, but loyalty matters for an organization such as this, and the All-Seeing Eye tries to ensure that its servants never feel any inclination to sell or give away information about the Wyld Hunt to some smooth-voiced stranger with a hidden Caste Mark in the local beer hall.

RESOURCES AND EXPENDITURES

Defending Creation is an expensive process. The Wyld Hunt requires constant upkeep and financing, and that need has proved a greater danger to its existence than any Anathema it has faced in the past. Fundamentally, the Hunt is run by charity, as are many other of the Immaculate Order's operations. The Great Houses donate resources and equipment directly to the Hunt or, occasionally, to the Immaculate Order (which then spends a measure of that money on the Hunt). In this increasingly unstable time, however, the Great Houses have cut their funding of the Wyld Hunt to the bone, and the Immaculate Order's own finances are stretched thin. The Hunt has already been forced to shut down nearly half of its chapter houses, and more may follow if the financial strain continues.

It requires a Resources ●●● expenditure every month to maintain and operate each chapter house of the Wyld Hunt. In the past, the Great Houses gave that money (or at least the lion's share of it) directly to the Mouth of Peace and the Hunt's correctors, who then distributed it to the chapter houses. Additional funding came from the Order

SIDEREAL EXALTED IN THE WYLD HUNT

The Wyld Hunt is the primary weapon the Bronze Faction has to use against the Solar Exalted. But this doesn't mean the Sidereals *respect* their Terrestrial foot soldiers. Most Bronze operatives see the Wyld Hunt as something akin to a host of fanatic killers that can be sacrificed without qualm — or even as a pack of attack dogs.

For all this disdain for the Wyld Hunt's *members*, though, the Bronze Faction treasures it as a *weapon*, and its Sidereals work hard to keep the Hunt effective. Every chapter house has a Sidereal advisor posted to it, who bolsters the vague astrological insights of its savants with her more powerful Charms and readings straight from the Loom of Fate. The Exalt usually works incognito, often disguised with a resplendent destiny; while a very few ostiaries know a little of the truth about the Sidereal Exalted, the existence of the Chosen is unknown to the vast majority of the Wyld Hunt that fights and dies on their behalf.

It's an important role, but it's not a *prestigious* one, and few Sidereals look forward to being assigned to the Wyld Hunt. Often, it's a task handed down as a punishment, for capable operatives who have made mistakes and need a few years of nursemaid duty.

itself, while the All-Seeing Eye funded the Hunt indirectly by supplying ancillary staff and information (which, in turn, was financed by the Imperial Treasury with the Empress' blessing). At the moment, the Hunt and its backers can continue to run at their current strength for another six to eight months (longer if more chapter houses close). But even that gloomy forecast appears dubious, since the upsurge in Anathema activity requires greater and greater expenditure in outfitting and dispatching cadres. The exarchs and the correctors of the Hunt are meeting regularly with the Committee on Matters of Venerly, hoping that somehow they can find alternative sources of funds or convince the Great Houses to commit more resources to the Hunt.

For all this looming financial doom, though, the Hunt still retains access to a vast wealth of resources — it's cash poor, but has plenty of assets. Over the centuries of its operation, the Wyld Hunt has received more than just financing from the Great Houses; it's also received mountains of mundane equipment and minor (but useful) items such as weapons, armor, tools, ships and so on. Even items of exceptional quality are readily available in most chapter houses — a sword, no matter how finely crafted, is a minor

expense next to a month's worth of food for a small army of Dragon-Blooded. This mundane equipment is, for all intents and purposes, the property of the Hunt. While the Great Houses donated the equipment and could conceivably ask for it back, it's not worth enough for the houses to bother. For all their current cost-cutting, the Great Houses still want the Wyld Hunt to keep operating — they just want someone (anyone) else to pay for it — and won't work to *actively* damage its effectiveness.

More complicated is the Wyld Hunt's treasury of donated magical artifacts. These items are kept under heavy guard at every chapter house, meticulously recorded and catalogued by administrative staff, then apportioned out to cadres when needed. Unfortunately for the Hunt, almost all of these artifacts are not gifts, but *loans*. The most valuable and useful artifacts are given over to the Order only on a short-term basis — and when the Great House in question wants it back, it must be returned. Some minor items (one-dot and some two-dot artifacts) are outright gifts, often directly from the coffers of the Empress or wealthy and pious individuals. More powerful and valuable items, on the other hand, could be reclaimed at any time by the house than loaned them.

The correctors of the Order disseminate artifacts and equipment to specific chapters, each of which maintains a separate arsenal. Shikari operating from a particular chapter house only have access to that chapter's arsenal; while they can request items known to be held by another chapter, such a transfer involves a lot of paperwork and a significant amount of time.

A SWORD AGAINST THE DAMNED: TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES

In the end, the logistics and administration, the intrigues and politics, the preparation and the training, all comes down to one thing — war. War against the forces of destruction, the evils that lurk under the torn skin of Creation; the walking dead, the dream-eaters, the burning demigods of a bygone Age. But this is not a battle fought in haste or anger. Impulsive action has no place in the Wyld Hunt. When the time comes to wage war against one or more of the Anathema, the Hunt does so only after weeks or even months of planning and deliberation. Primary and secondary plans of attack are developed, battle strategies are mapped out, and all possible sources of information are utilized to get as complete a picture as possible. When the Wyld Hunt finally goes on the offensive, it fights to *win*.

INITIAL INFORMATION

Before the Wyld Hunt can act against an Anathema, of course, it must first learn that the creature exists. The diviners and seers of both the All-Seeing Eye and the Immaculate Order constantly channel information to the



EQUIPPING FOR THE HUNT

While the Wyld Hunt still retains a wealth of equipment and artifacts, it can't afford to devote all those resources to each and every sortie against the Anathema. Priorities must be decided upon, and only a small number of items and artifacts are released from a chapter house's arsenal at any time.

Individual shikari have their own, personal collection of equipment, as determined by their dots in Artifacts and Resources. This is generally considered the character's own property, rather than equipment on loan from the Hunt. In addition to these items, characters can also requisition (or be assigned) mundane items and even artifacts when setting out to hunt down the Anathema.

When a cadre embarks on a mission, the Backing dots of each character involved determines how many resources the chapter house can spare for the mission. A single shikari can requisition as many dots in available artifacts as her dots in Backing. Multiple operatives add their dots in Backing together, but cannot possess any artifact or item worth more than their highest Backing rating.

Example: With Backing 4, Iselsi Osuja could requisition one four-dot artifact, four one-dot artifacts or any combination in between while on a mission. If she is partnered with Nellens Avida on a hunt (who has Backing 2), the two Exalts could requisition six dots worth of artifacts, but no one artifact could be worth more than four dots.

Mundane equipment is more plentiful, even in these harsh times. When requisitioning normal equipment such as weaponry, use the shikari's Backing rating as if it were the Resources Background, allowing her to "buy" equipment as normal. Of course, she can only obtain items her chapter house has available, and she must return them when the mission is over (if possible).

Wyld Hunt, watching for signs and portents regarding the coming of Solars, Lunars and other threats to Creation. In addition, mortal informants in the major cities of the Threshold report on unusual happenings and Anathema appearances. And of course, there is the information provided by the Sidereal Exalted, data gleaned from the Loom of Fate and Bronze Faction spies in the Bureau of Heaven who monitor the activities of Lytek, God of Exaltation.

This constant flood of information means that new reports reach the panel of correctors and their counterparts of the Committee on Matters of Venerly almost every day. These reports are then assessed and initially priori-

tized by levels of likelihood and importance — how likely the report is to be true, and how urgently action should be taken. Once a month the correctors meet with the Mouth of Peace to discuss the current situation. The information and the panel's recommendations are then disseminated to the various chapters of the Wyld Hunt, usually by the Imperial Post. If time is of the essence, special messengers may be dispatched, or Hunt sorcerers may convey information using spells.

Once the information filters down to the chapter level, the ostiaries of each chapter draw up plans to handle the caseload of missions and investigations and assign cadres to the tasks. The chapter's exarch is consulted in this, as are the more experienced and insightful venerers, but the final decisions rest with the ostiaries, who bear the final responsibility for the successes and failures of the Wyld Hunt.

FURTHER INVESTIGATION

Only in rare, very urgent cases will action be taken against an Anathema based on initial information. There are simply too many unacceptable risks involved in striking without full knowledge of the target. Instead, the Hunt does further research against those Anathema that seem most threatening in the wake of the monthly meetings.

Most investigations are conducted by mortal agents and spies within the All-Seeing Eye, who are directed by their superiors to look further into events in their area. Such investigations are risky because the mortal agents are vulnerable to the sorcery and Charms of the Anathema — but then again, if captured, those spies can reveal none of the Hunt's plans to the enemy.

In particularly troubling instances of Anathema appearances, such as two or more arising in one region or a cult already forming around the creatures, the Wyld Hunt may investigate directly. This is the role of the Hunt's inquisitors, those shikari skilled in intelligence and information gathering. Inquisitors are gifted savants and spies, with high levels of Investigation, Awareness, Larceny and/or Stealth, plus Charms to further improve those Abilities. Disguise, stealth and subtle investigation is the order of the day, not violence. The Exalts will normally travel to their destination by mundane means (if time permits) and never reveal themselves as Dragon-Blooded while gathering information. Only if they absolutely must use their Charms and Artifacts in self-defense will the inquisitors reveal their power, and if they survive, they immediately vacate the area and return to their chapter for debriefing.

Another means of gathering additional data is through sorcery. Anathema tend to make a visible splash in Creation, and almost all chapters have one or more members adept at seeking out spirits and elementals that know pertinent details. These sorcerers may also summon elementals and demons to gather information directly.

In certain cases, particularly when dealing with well-armed or experienced Anathema, the Wyld Hunt may test the creature's defenses with an exploratory attack. Such a thing is not done lightly, since it may alert the enemy that the Hunt is watching. For some Anathema, the Hunt might arrange for the creature to be attacked by some lesser threat — bandits, soldiers, wild animals or the like — and watch from afar to gauge the battle. Demons and elementals could be sent to harass the Anathema, but this is riskier should the spirits be captured and questioned. The Hunt may even send one of its own to perform an initial attack, a harrier or small cadre skilled in ranged combat or with exceptional mobility. Such a sortie is always a quick, rushing affair — go in, attack on the defensive for a few exchanges, then pull out while ancillary soldiers slow the Anathema down. The point of such attacks is not to kill the creature (although such an outcome would be a welcome accident), but to watch its actions *after* the attack and measure its performance.

Once a sizeable amount of information has been gathered on an enemy, the Wyld Hunt can take one of two tacks: a surgical strike or an all-out offensive.


SURGICAL STRIKES

If it's possible to neutralize an Anathema with a minimum of danger and damage, the Wyld Hunt prefers to do so. Most of the Hunt's forays are of this nature: A cadre of Exalts makes a devastating sneak attack on a single Anathema, cutting it down before it can react. These cadres usually comprise harriers and castigators with powerful combat spells, backed up with multiple fangs of troops.

Such battles are quick, decisive affairs, launched from surprise before the enemy can raise its supernatural defenses or sever the cadre's escape routes. If the battle goes badly for the shikari, they will make a tactical withdrawal rather than go down fighting, then return to their chapter house to reconsider their options.

The Wyld Hunt may also make a covert strike rather than an overt attack; assassination is only a crime when it targets the Dragon-Blooded, after all. Instead of engaging the Anathema in combat, specialist shikari seek to murder it through indirect means — sabotage, poison, turning its allies against it or whatever else might work. The Hunt is prepared to be brutal in the name of the greater good and to suffer the loss of some innocent lives to protect the Realm. Thus, an Anathema secure in a fortress, surrounded by guards, might wake only when the entire edifice collapses on her and her followers. A Solar monstrosity sailing across the Great Inland Sea may drown when a Water-aspected inquisitor, having patiently waited in disguise as a sailor for weeks, finally rips a hole in the bottom of the





monster's ship and swims to his prearranged pickup point as it sinks. These tactics are not the norm because there are too many variables and uncertainties; direct attacks are more dangerous, but fewer external complications intrude onto the battlefield once the fight begins. However, as the membership of the Wyld Hunt withers, covert strikes and sabotage are becoming more common as tactics, rather than risking multiple hunters in combat against the vastly more powerful Anathema.

ALL-OUT OFFENSIVE

Only rarely does the Wyld Hunt resort to an all-out offensive: the commitment of multiple cadres (or even multiple chapters) and large numbers of shikari to taking down a group of Anathema. These major military actions are never considered lightly and usually require the approval of the Mouth of Peace — or at least her panel of correctors. Shikari assigned to a massive offensive take up arms knowing that their lives may be forfeit, and that victory may come (if at all) after a battle that wreaks terrible destruction upon the very Realm they fight to protect. So be it. No price is too great to pay to protect Creation, including the lives of innocents and heroes. “We had to burn the village in order to save it” is the logic of the battlefield, and it is irrefutable.

If the Wyld Hunt enters into an all-out assault upon the Anathema, the attack is carefully thought through ahead of time, like a military campaign rather than a commando raid. The Hunt harries and hounds the Anathema from a distance over hours or even days, wearing down resistance and resources, before luring the enemy into a battlefield of the Hunt's choosing, laden with traps and surrounded by archers.

At least, that's always the *ideal*, but plans rarely survive intact once the enemy is encountered.

THE OFFICE OF HARMONY AND STABILITY IN UNCERTAIN CLIMES

The following section describes one of the Hunt's larger and more powerful chapters, the Office of Harmony and Stability in Uncertain Climes (generally just referred to as the Office of Harmony). While it counts a number of extremely powerful and experienced Dragon-Blooded amongst its shikari, it has been hit hard by the shrinking wealth and power of the Wyld Hunt and must also contend with its own internal rivalries and intrigues. The Office of Harmony is designed to work well as an antagonist group in series focusing on Solars or other Celestial Exalted, but it's also an excellent patron or ally for Dragon-Blooded series.

HISTORY

The Office of Harmony has a history stretching back some 400 years. In the period of relative calm following the barbarian incursions of the northern Inland Sea of RY 364, the Wyld Hunt underwent a time of expansion — Dragon-Blooded warriors and heroes, wanting new opportunities for glory and adventure, were joining the Hunt in large numbers. This was a boon to the Hunt in some ways, but the swelling numbers of shikari began to overwhelm the existing infrastructure of the Hunt, which, at that time, had only seven chapters. After consultation between the Mouth of Peace and the exarchs of the existing chapters, the correctors of that period decided to establish another chapter, located in a central position on the Blessed Isle, which could support a large group of shikari and monitor possible Anathema incursions into the western regions of the Realm. Over a period of two years, the administrators of the Wyld Hunt assembled the new chapter. Most of this time was spent assessing Manses as potential chapter houses and negotiating with the Great Houses over funding and resources. In the end, a very suitable Manse was leased from House Ledaal, not least because the pious house asked a far more reasonable price than the controllers of other potential sites. A staff of monks, postulants and imperial servants erected a compound around this Manse, the Azimuth Spire, and built a sizable village from scratch, called Yarrowstalk, to house themselves and the shikari who would follow. Finally, the exarchs of the other chapters assigned those hunters willing to relocate to the new chapter, and the Office of Harmony was born.

The next four centuries saw the rise of the Office of Harmony as one of the most effective and busy chapters of the Wyld Hunt. The Threshold remained the primary focus of the Hunt at that time, plagued as it was by Lunar warlords and incursions from the Fair Folk. The Blessed Isle was removed from those dangers but still not a place of absolute safety, particular as one traveled further from the Imperial City. The Solar Anathema could spring from anywhere, chaotic pockets of the Wyld could be found even on the Blessed Isle, and the villages of the Realm were often threatened by renegade spirits, unbound demons or monsters spawned by unnatural energies. Furthermore, the chapter's central location made it possible for it to send cadres all over Creation if necessary, and it undertook many missions outside the Blessed Isle, particularly in the southern and western regions of the Threshold. Nearly 70 shikari operated out of the Office of Harmony in the chapter's prime, and few of them had much time for leisure between sorties and missions. The village of Yarrowstalk swelled to become a small city, a pious trading center prospering on the Order's finances, traffic between the nearby cities and the fruits of the local olive plantations.

That height of activity and prestige was a long time ago, even for the long-lived Dragon-Blooded, and the

Office of Harmony has dwindled from its former glory. Now, only 31 shikari answer the call of the Office of Harmony, and most of those are inexperienced errant hunters who serve only when the mood takes them. The resources of the Office of Harmony have been stripped away to prop up other chapters, and the Azimuth Spire's treasury of artifacts is at an all-time low. This poverty has hit Yarrowstalk as well, along with a drop in passing trade and a poor olive crop, and a feeling of resentment is growing among the populous toward the Dynasts. But for all this, the Office of Harmony remains a bastion of the Wyld Hunt and a powerful bulwark against the power of the Anathema. Should the Wyld Hunt survive its current woes, the Office of Harmony may yet resume its place as one of the preeminent defenders of the Scarlet Empire.

HEADQUARTERS

The Office of Harmony is located in the northernmost regions of Arjuf Dominion, in the mountain range that spills down the eastern side of the Caracal River. The chapter house lies about 15 miles east of the river itself and is just a few dozen miles from the border of the Lord's Crossing Dominion (although nearly 500 miles away from the city of Lord's Crossing itself). The region is warm and fertile, with rolling hills surrounding flat, broad valleys perfect for farming. Olives are the most common local crop, grown on hillside plantations, while rice is harvested in some of the wetter valleys. There are few local predators on the land other than some particularly venomous breeds of snake. The Caracal River occasionally boasts river dragons or crocodiles, but the shikari quickly hunt down and slay any creature that might threaten the area.

YARROWSTALK

Located on the banks of the Caracal, Yarrowstalk is a river-port town with a population of roughly 8,000 people. Its main function is as a supply station for boats traveling up and down the river, moving between Lord's Crossing and the city of Arjuf. As well as the river traffic, Yarrowstalk sees traders, caravans and tourists traveling around Juche, Tuchara and Lord's Crossing, allowing for a constant turnover of customers for provisions and equipment. Yarrowstalk is governed by the minor Dynast Ledaal Deled Zavel, who answers to the Prefect of Arjuf, Ledaal Maris.

While Yarrowstalk is used to prosperity and high levels of trade, the last five years have seen its fortunes diminish. As tensions mount around the Realm, tourism decreases in turn, and travelers are becoming less common in the region. The losses of the Tepet Legions in the North has badly shaken the inhabitants of Lord's Crossing, leading to a drop in river-trade and a corresponding loss of income for the bargemen, boatwrights and outfitters of the city. And to cap everything off, the last three years have

had very poor olive crops, and the hillside farmers living near the city are starving.

In times past, the Office of Harmony might have shored up the city's wealth or at least put money into the pockets of the traders and whorehouses that served the shikari. But the Office of Harmony is poorer now as well, and the shikari are few in number and mostly too pious to waste money on sex and alcohol. The locals don't see the accounting books of the Wyld Hunt, though. All they know is that the monster-fighting Dynasts refuse to alleviate Yarrowstalk's financial woes, but still insist on the loyalty and service of the citizens. It doesn't help that the Office of Harmony keeps a constant presence of monks, soldiers and administrators in the city, housed in the best neighborhoods but paying little or no rent. Resentment against the Office of Harmony is still something confined to grumblings in the teahouses, but it grows a little bit louder every passing day.

THE AZIMUTH SPIRE

Rising out of the hills 15 miles east of Yarrowstalk is the Azimuth Spire, a tall stepped pyramid of black glass and iron. Control of this powerful Manse, built during the last days of the First Age, was bequeathed to House Ledaal by the Empress for its efforts in crushing the Iselsi coup attempt in RY 303. While the Manse was an incredibly valuable and prestigious holding, the Ledaal found it expensive to maintain and protect. When the Immaculate Order approached them about using the Manse as a chapter house for the Wyld Hunt, the elders of the house discussed the matter at great length. Eventually, the Manse was sublet to the Order for both religious and financial reasons: It would aid the protection of the empire and would also turn a potential liability into a source of income. House Ledaal still hold the Azimuth Spire's original lease, and could conceivably evict the Office of Harmony if it desired, but the pious house has shown no sign of being dissatisfied with its tenants. This largesse may not continue if the Immaculate Order cannot maintain its lease payments on the Spire, though, and the administrators of the Wyld Hunt are not at all sure that the payments can be maintained for more than another year or two.

The area around the Azimuth Spire is a windy and turbulent space. High winds rattle through the hills and converge on this exact point, pushed into place by the geomantic tensions of the countryside. The Manse is riddled with vents and lined with jade-edged baffles, channeling the Essence of the winds into its Hearthroom. The Spire is a level-5 Air-aspected Manse, to which all of the Office of Harmony's shikari have attuned, and its Hearthstone is a gem of sapphire and emerald, worn by ostiary Cathak Setod (see below).

The Immaculate Order did not base the Office of Harmony in the Azimuth Spire simply for its Essence, of



course, or for its affordability. The Manse also has several practical and strategic advantages. Six stories tall and dozens of yards wide, it's large enough to house the Dragon-Blooded, their servants and their retainues and still have room enough to contain the equipment, libraries and prisoners of the Office of Harmony. The Manse is also in a central position in the Realm, allowing its shikari to patrol the heart of the Blessed Isle while also being able to reach the Threshold when necessary.

The levels of the Azimuth Spire are as follows:

Oubliette Level: Located below ground level, these cells and rooms were used by the Ledaal owners to hold supplies. The Office of Harmony uses them partially as locked storehouses for its artifacts and equipment, partially as archival space for records and files and partially as cells for prisoners. The Wyld Hunt are executioners, not jailers, but they recognize the need for interrogation upon occasion.

Ceremony Levels: The ground and second floors of the Manse contains interview rooms, offices, antechambers and other areas where the various arms of the Office of Harmony can interact. These levels are also where the servants of the Dragon-Blooded prepare meals, repair armor and provide other services for their masters.

Tenementary Levels: The third and fourth floor of the Manse contain the living quarters of the shikari. At its peak, the Office of Harmony hosted more than 50 Dragon-Blooded. Today, fewer than half of its shikari actually live in the Spire and devote themselves full time to the calling of the Hunt. The rooms of these levels are not huge, but they are large enough to allow the shikari to live in moderate comfort. Most are now empty, left for visitors to the Spire or shared by the servants of the Dragon-Blooded.

Lyceum Level: The fifth floor of the Manse is centered around the Hearthroom, which takes up much of the level. The rest of this floor is devoted to the Office of Harmony's planning and operations — discussion rooms for drawing up campaign plans, libraries of records and information, well-locked storerooms of jade and money for paying wages and expenses.

Sortilege Level: At the very apex of the Manse are rooms dedicated to the workings of sorcery and astrology. These chambers are primarily the province of Mnemon Kehav (the Office of Harmony's most powerful castigator, who studies sorcery and lore here, as well as summoning elementals and working rituals). It also houses the expensive and delicate astrological tools used by the Office of Harmony's seers and their Sidereal controller Pymander Seven (see below). He and his assistants can often be found here drawing up the horoscope of one Anathema or another.

All of the levels are linked by a triad of central staircases, with ceilings 20 feet high. Winds and breezes constantly blow through the Manse, but its design ensures that the winds always play above the 15-foot mark of each level, leaving papers and torches undisturbed. Doors allow

access to the outside of the Manse on every level, but climbing up and down from the outside is difficult.

The Azimuth Spire has a demon cage (see **Savant and Sorcerer**, p. 72) located *below* the Oubliette Level, in a ritual chamber guarded at all times by four ancillary soldiers, forbidden to enter on pain of their deaths and the deaths of their families. The cage is constructed from high-quality materials, but it does not give any bonuses to summoning efforts. A similar chamber on the Sortilege Level houses an elemental snare (see **Savant and Sorcerer**, p. 76) of equal quality. This is less heavily guarded, and the two soldiers before its door sacrifice only their own lives if they should enter.

The Office of Harmony is not fully contained within the Azimuth Spire. Outbuildings and houses are arrayed around the Manse for a mile and contained by a 12-foot-high wooden fence. These buildings include barracks and homes for the administrators, soldiers and ancillary staff, as well as workshops, offices, training grounds, storehouses, stables and other locations. A set of pagodas at the easternmost side of the compound is reserved for the astrologers and thaumaturges, and the mortal staff give this area a wide berth. On the southern side of the compound is a temple for the Immaculate Order, the largest structure in the reserve (other than the Manse itself). Services and ceremonies are conducted here regularly by both Immaculate shikari and the mortal monks who assist in the Office of Harmony's operations.

Outside of the compound walls, the staff and monks maintain a number of small farms and herds of pigs to feed the shikari. Just to the north of the compound, Cathak Setod maintains a small olive plantation as his only hobby. Monks tend to the olive vines and press high-quality oil from their fruit, which is then distributed privately to the other chapters of the Wyld Hunt. The Office of Harmony's plantation has had a better harvest than other local farms of late, thanks to the hard work of the monks and the Essence-rich soil around the Manse. This good fortune is just another reason why the local farmers are coming to resent the Office of Harmony's presence in the area.

SECURITY

While it's considered unlikely that the Anathema would ever strike at the Office of Harmony on their home soil, such an event is not impossible, and so, the Wyld Hunt treats the security of the Azimuth and the Office of Harmony very seriously.

A full talon of soldiers is seconded to the Office of Harmony's service. Five fangs patrol the Azimuth Spire itself at any one time, and patrol groups are swapped around every five hours, staggered so one fresh patrol comes on duty every hour. Another five fangs patrol the compound grounds, while three more guard the gate that is the only way in and out of the compound. Four fangs are

stationed at Yarrowstalk, and the remaining eight fangs patrol both the lands between the city and the Manse and a 10-mile radius around the compound. Every patrol group is rotated into a new role every two weeks.

The gate to the Office of Harmony compound is flanked by two guard towers, 15 feet high and reinforced with stone, each housing a heavy ballista. Eight more heavy ballistae are stationed on the outside of the Azimuth Spire, one at each corner on the Tenementary Levels. At the very top of the Spire, on a turret atop the Sortilege Level, is a large Essence cannon (see **Exalted: The Outcaste**, p. 52), which can be manned by any of the Dragon-Blooded in a crisis. (Pymander Seven knows how to use it but would only do so in the most outlandishly dire of circumstances.)

Finally, the Azimuth Spire boasts supernatural defenders. Six lion dogs (see **Games of Divinity**, pp. 45-46) patrol the Manse at all times, stationed there by an agreement brokered by the Immaculate Order and the Sidereal Exalted with the Celestial Bureaucracy. Only the Dragon-Blooded (and Pymander Seven) are aware of these spirit guardians, which do not reveal themselves to the mortal staff of the Office of Harmony. Four patrol the Manse in spirit forms at all times, while two others stand materialized and motionless as statues at the entrance to the lower Ceremony Level. The pairs swap over each week, and some soldiers have found themselves wondering if a statue was in the *exact* same place yesterday or not. The lion dogs are bound to stay silent about the existence of the Sidereal Exalted and Pymander Seven in particular — a loathsome burden, since they despise the odious Sidereal and hold greater respect for the brave shikari of the Wyld Hunt.

The Wyld Hunt also has its own division of seers quartered at the Azimuth Spire, led by the accomplished Immaculate priest and astrologer Pymander Seven. This savant is, in fact, a member of the Sidereal Exalted, assigned to the Office of Harmony by the Bronze Faction in order to guide and direct it to where its efforts are most useful.

RESOURCES

In happier — well, busier — times, the Office of Harmony maintained an arsenal of artifacts, weapons and treasures that the gods themselves might have envied. Those days are long past, though, and the demon-slaying weapons of the Dragon-Blooded are in short supply. The Office of Harmony still has a worthy collection of artifacts and equipment, but it's a shadow of its former size, and the chapter's exarch and ostiaries are regularly forced to return items to the correctors for use elsewhere — or even back to the Great Houses that have reneged on their donations.

In addition to the magical treasures held by the Office of Harmony, almost every shikari in the chapter



bears a satrap's ransom in artifact weapons, armor and tools. These items are generally the personal property of the shikari, owned by herself or her property — or in the case of Immaculate monks, often possessed directly by the Order and the Mouth of Peace. These items are also tracked and catalogued but, for the most part, are not indirectly owned by the Great Houses. These are the most basic tools of the Wyld Hunt, and the shikari will not leave themselves *utterly* defenseless.

MUNDANE EQUIPMENT

For all their usefulness, non-magical tools are too common for the Immaculate Order and the Great Houses to reclaim, even in these dark times. All of the Office of Harmony's mundane equipment — from the weapons and armor of its soldiers to the ploughs pulled by its farmers — are the property of the Order and the houses, but no one cares about such minor things.

Among the mundane items that are kept administratively separate are a number of exceptionally crafted weapons (primarily slashing swords and self bows), which may be distributed to the Office of Harmony's soldiers in the event of a crisis. Also separate are the expensive ships supplied to the Office of Harmony for its transport needs: two coastal traders (see *Savage Seas*, pp. 55-56) and two large yachts (see *Savage Seas*, p. 54) docked at Yarrowstalk. Should the Office of Harmony have to move large numbers of troops and staff en masse, it also has two large merchant ships (see *Savage Seas*, pp. 57-58) maintained by the Immaculate Order in Arjuf. These ships are too large to travel up the Caracal, but troops and shikari can be sent to the coastal city and take control of the ships there.

ONE-DOT ARTIFACTS

Only one step above mundane equipment, the Immaculate Order still has storehouses full of these minor relics. For the most part, the Office of Harmony keeps few such items, simply because their uses are so limited. Currently, the arsenal holds:

- Two jade collars of dawn's cleansing light (see *Savant and Sorcerer*, p. 40)
- Two cords of winds (see *Savage Seas*, pp. 125-126)
- A Hearthstone compass (see *Aspect Book: Earth*, p. 79)
- Two mundane boxes (see *Aspect Book: Air*, p. 76)
- A veil of privacy (see *Aspect Book: Air*, p. 76)
- Three windslave disks (see *Aspect Book: Air*, p. 76)

Other one-dot artifacts can often be obtained with a few weeks of waiting for paperwork to be processed; these are just the items currently held at the Azimuth Spire.

TWO-DOT ARTIFACTS

Though these miracles are more scarce than the most basic artifacts, the Hunt still holds many such items. However, these artifacts are some of the most useful, and so, they are constantly in demand.

- A compass of immanent strife (see *Exalted: The Outcaste*, p. 92)
- Two fuel bolt launchers (see the *Exalted Players Guide*, p. 254)
- Two plasma tongue repeaters (see the *Exalted Players Guide*, p. 254)
- A shock pike (see *Exalted: The Outcaste*, p. 51)
- A set of spider grippers (see *Caste Book: Night*, p. 79)
- A set of steelsilk sails (see *Savage Seas*, p. 124)
- A whistle of ghost summoning (see *Caste Book: Twilight*, p. 79)
- A windwall terminal (see *Aspect Book: Air*, p. 77)

THREE-DOT ARTIFACTS

Mighty but still fairly common, the Hunt used to have many such devices. They are the class of gear whose return was most readily demanded by the Great Houses. Now, the Hunt has only a handful, and they are not deployed if they will not almost certainly return to the Hunt.

- Two sets of arrows of distant death (see *Caste Book: Dawn*, p. 81)
- A belt of shadow walking (see *Caste Book: Night*, p. 80)
- A jade Circlet of Spirits (see *Caste Book: Night*, p. 80)
- A jade dark rider (see *The Book of Three Circles*, p. 94)
- An eye of the living earth (see *Caste Book: Twilight*, p. 80)
- A fire lance (see *Exalted: The Outcaste*, p. 53)
- The Mirrors of Illusion-Shattering (see *Caste Book: Twilight*, p. 80)
- An emerald sorcery-capturing cord (see *Caste Book: Twilight*, p. 81)

FOUR-DOT ARTIFACTS

The Office of Harmony has only a scant handful of these precious and expensive artifacts, and these items are only used when absolutely necessary.

- A jade ring of being (see *Savant and Sorcerer*, pp. 41-42)
- The Most Terrifying Armor of the Air Dragon (see *Exalted: The Outcaste*, pp. 54-56)
- A chariot of the infinite heavens (see *Exalted: The Outcaste*, pp. 62-63)
- A large Essence cannon, part of the Azimuth Spire's defenses (see *Exalted: The Outcaste*, p. 52)
- A reaver dragonfly (see *Aspect Book: Air*, p. 81)
- A set of wings of the raptor (see *Savant and Sorcerer*, pp. 42-43)

FIVE-DOT ARTIFACTS

These powerful artifacts are the prized possessions of the Great Houses and far too powerful to leave in the hands of the Immaculate Order at this time. The Office of Harmony *might* be able to borrow some five-dot artifacts for a short time under dire circumstances, but such loans carry a price in obligations (and often come with conditions and custodians).

The Office of Harmony does have one five-dot artifact on “permanent loan” — a chariot of aerial conquest (see **Caste Book: Dawn**, p. 78, and **Exalted: The Outcaste**, p. 63), which is kept secured and guarded in one of the outbuildings of the Azimuth compound (a lion dog checks on it once every hour). Because the Office of Harmony’s duties carry it far and wide across Creation, it needs constant ready access to such a fantastic vehicle, which can transport Exalts and soldiers to a crisis within hours. The chariot is the property of Mnemon herself and could be recalled by her at a moment’s notice. The fact that she has not yet done so may mean that she is happy for it to be used for such holy work — or, more likely, that she wants to keep it as leverage for some future occasion.

EXALTED OF THE OFFICE OF HARMONY

The following Storyteller characters are some of the major operatives and shikari of the Office of Harmony. Each description notes the character’s rank and position within the Wyld Hunt, as well as her particular fieldwork specialization. The five elder, hosted Dragon-Blooded are exceptionally powerful characters, each built on 300-400

(or more) experience points. Storytellers can use these characters as effective antagonists and enemies for experienced groups of Celestial Exalted or as mentors and guardians for Dragon-Blooded characters. This also applies to the powerful Sidereal Exalt Pymander Seven, who can make an excellent villain or a powerful (if petulant) mentor for other Sidereals. The five errant shikari are competent but not overwhelmingly skilled characters, built on around 150 experience points each. These hunters can be effective opponents for inexperienced Solar Circles, and they would also suit as friends, rivals and allies for Dragon-Blooded characters joining the Wyld Hunt.

CATHAK SETOD

Description: For more than 200 years, Cathak Setod has been a legendary hero of the Realm, a soldier, adventurer and crusader. He was among those who fought the Anathema Jochim in Realm Year 585, and he led troops during the Bloodied Scythe Uprising. When he retired from the 26th Legion in RY 722 he joined the Office of Harmony, and the stories of his battles against the Lunar Anathema and their degenerate beastman hordes are widespread throughout the East even now. Over the last



SIDEREAL ASTROLOGY EFFECTS

Unbeknownst to the Dragon-Blooded members of the Office of Harmony, their Immaculate astrologer Pymander Seven is one of the Sidereal Exalted, and his astrology is far more powerful than that of any mortal savant. As well as keeping them informed of the Exaltation of new Solars, Seven has devised astrological blessings and effects for many of the shikari.

The following effects are standard blessings that Pymander Seven might bestow on a given member of the Wyld Hunt, depending on the shikari’s strengths and Abilities. These blessings are normally designed to last for up to a decade before expiring.

Blissful Idiot Blessing of the Mask: +1 success in an opposed test involving lies, trickery or deception, given to inquisitors who gather firsthand information on the Anathema.

Blissful Idiot Blessing of the Quiver: +1 success in an opposed test involving tactics and strategy, bestowed on field commanders and venerers in charge of cadres.

Blissful Idiot Blessing of the Sorcerer: +1 success in the opposed Willpower + Essence test made when summoning demons and elementals, bestowed on any castigator who summons such beings.

Fortified Spirit Blessing of the Sword: +1 to effective Valor in the first Valor test a wounded shikari makes in a scene. This blessing is given to those harriers tough enough to survive an Anathema’s attack and keep fighting.

Hound-Chases-Rabbit Blessing of the Quiver: This restores a point of temporary Willpower the first time the recipient successfully attacks an Anathema target using a bow. It is bestowed on harriers who make heavy use of Archery Charms.

Hound-Chases-Rabbit Blessing of the Sorcerer: This effect restores a point of the recipient’s Willpower the first time she cast a spell in a scene. Pymander Seven bestows this blessing on every castigator in the Office of Harmony (and on himself).

Because it is much easier to effect mortals with Sidereal astrology than other Exalts, the ancillary soldiers of the Office of Harmony are affected by a single effect, a Fortified Spirit Blessing of the Spear. They gain a +1 to their effective Valor the first time in a scene that they are forced to make a Valor check due to the powers of one of the Anathema (such as the Dawn Caste’s anima power or the Terrifying Apparition of Glory Charm).

In addition to these general effects, specific blessings and effects are listed for many of the Storyteller characters described in this chapter.



four decades, he has worked tirelessly in the Office of Harmony's service, rising through the ranks of the Hunt until being named one of the Office of Harmony's three ostiaries, despite the fact that he was a secular soldier rather than an Immaculate monk, for no one could match his experience or dedication to the cause of the Realm.

In truth, Setod would as soon see the entire rotting cancer of the Scarlet Empire flushed away like so much sewage. He looks at the Realm and sees a corrupt, decadent waste of resources, ruled first by a dictatorial Empress and now by the greedy spasms of the Deliberative, all hemmed in by a religion that preaches servitude and the adoration of beings blessed with power only by an accident of birth. But his duty is to defend the Realm no matter how he feels about it, and to Cathak Setod, duty is his life, his mission, his *god*. For duty, he would march through lava, throw himself headlong from a mountain or wrestle unarmed with Lunars in the chaos of the Wyld — and he *has* done these things, and 100 more, over the course of his career.

Cathak Setod is now 276 years old and approaching the end of his Exalted lifespan. And every day, he swallows his regrets, pushes his anger aside and concentrates on fulfilling his duty — to wage war against beings he no longer feels any kind of animosity toward, beings he sometimes *hopes* will tear down the Realm. Such feelings never cause him a moment's hesitation in the field or the warroom, however. He will support the Office of Harmony to the best of his ability and carry on the campaign against the Anathema until his heart finally stops beating.

Cathak Setod is a powerfully built Exalt, his earth-dark skin showing little sign of his age. He dresses simply, like a soldier rather than a Dynast, and his personal quarters are equally utilitarian. Only when preparing for combat will he don armor and weapons, but that act

transforms him into an unstoppable juggernaut, able to withstand the mightiest attacks of the Anathema.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Hosted ostiary, harrier.

Aspect: Earth

Nature: Survivor

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 3, Conviction 5, Temperance 3, Valor 4

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 5, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Forest-Tongue, Low Realm, Riverspeak) 3, Lore 2, Martial Arts 5 (Clinches +2), Medicine 3, Melee 3, Occult 2 (Lunar Exalted +2, the Wyld +1), Performance 2, Presence 4, Resistance 5, Ride 3, Sail 2, Socialize 2, Survival 4 (Tracking +1)

Backgrounds: Artifact 5, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 5, Breeding 2, Command 3, Connections (The All-Seeing Eye) 2, Connections (House Cathak) 3, Connections (The Legions) 4, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 4, Connections (The Magistrates) 2, Connections (The Threshold) 3, Manse 5, Reputation 4, Resources 4

Charms: Boulder-Crushing Grasp, Chaos-Warding Prana, Defense-From-Anathema Method, Earth Protection Form, Falling Rockslide Onslaught, Fortress of One, Hostile Environment Preparation Method, Impervious Skin of Stone Meditation, Jade Mountain Form, Ox-Body Technique (x5), Pasiap Still Stands, Pillar of Marble Stance, Sliding Glacier Grip, Strength of Stone Technique, Unbreathing Earth Meditation, Uneating Earth Meditation, Unfeeling Earth Meditation, Unsleping Earth Meditation, Wild-Wandering Forester Charm, Wood Protection Form

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 4B Defense 9

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 6B Defense 8

Jade Goremaul (Hundredweight): Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 10L Defense 10

Dodge Pool: 6/4 **Soak:** 17L/20B (Jade superheavy plate, 15L/15B, -2 mobility penalty)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5

Personal Essence: 15 **Peripheral Essence:** 21 (40)

Committed Essence: 19

Other Notes: Setod's goremaul, Hundredweight, possesses a number of special qualities. Whenever an opponent parries a blow from the goremaul, it can deliver a burst of force to tear the enemy's weapon from her grasp. To use this ability, Setod spends 2 motes (after the strike is partially or fully parried), and his player makes a reflexive attack roll at difficulty 3. His opponent's player must make

a reflexive Strength + Melee or Martial Arts roll and gain at least as many successes as Setod's player, or her character drops her weapon. An opponent hit by the goremaul resists stun, knockdown and knockback at +1 difficulty. Hundredweight is designed to complement Setod's martial-arts style; not only can he make clinches and grabs while wielding it, but it provides an additional two dice to such maneuvers. The goremaul is an Artifact ••• weapon and requires 8 motes for attunement.

In addition to Hundredweight, Setod wears a suit of jade superheavy plate and a shield bracer (see **Caste Book: Dawn**, p. 78). He bears numerous Hearthstones, the greatest of them the gemstone of sapphire and emerald produced by the Azimuth Spire, which is mounted on his goremaul. He also carries a precision of form gemstone (see **Aspect Book: Earth**, p. 79) in his shield bracer and a stone of the earthweb (see **Caste Book: Night**, p. 79) on his armor. Thanks to Sidereal astrology, he gains +1 success on his first opposed test to track an Exalt (using Survival) in a scene and regains a point of temporary Willpower the first time he is injured by an Exalt in a scene.

Cathak Setod's approach to combat is straightforward — take whatever his enemy can throw at him, and then strike the Anathema down when it is exhausted. When he enters combat, he bolsters his defenses beforehand, using (in order) Jade Mountain Form, Strength of Stone Technique and Impervious Skin of Stone Meditation (spending 3 motes). This takes three turns and 10 motes of Essence, lowers his Dexterity to 3 (affecting his attack rolls and Initiative) and halves his movement speed, but it increases his Strength to 10, his Stamina to 11 and his soak to an immense 31 for both bashing *and* lethal damage. Depending on circumstances, he may then activate Defense-From-Anathema Method and possibly Wood Protection Form (if facing Lunars, archers or Solar martial artists) or Earth Protection Form (if facing Anathema using artifact weapons). Once in melee range of his foe, his primary tactic is to lock the Anathema into a clinch, then to rend it with Boulder-Crushing Grasp and Falling Rockslide Onslaught or to restrain it with Sliding Glacier Grip while his teammates attack it mercilessly. If he needs to fight in a more traditional style, he rarely parries or dodges, instead making multiple attacks with Hundredweight and trusting in his ability to weather the assault.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 4B Defense 11 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 10 Damage 7B Defense 6 Rate 3

Jade Goremaul (Hundredweight): Speed 18 Accuracy 10 Damage 10L (P) Defense 10 Rate 4

Dodge Pool: 11/9

Hardness: 4

MNEMON KEHAV

Description: When she was younger, Mnemon Kehav would have scoffed at the notion that she would one day join the Wyld Hunt, would have laughed aloud at the idea of living in a compound on some hillside far from the social whirl of the empire, would have become violently furious at the suggestion she would fall in love with a Cathak soldier of lower birth that was 100 years her senior.

Time changes everyone, however, mortal and Exalt alike. For Kehav, that change came after she graduated from the Heptagram with honors, after she grew tired of the social games and affairs, after she looked back at 100 years of her life and realized that she had done nothing *meaningful*. Years of study had given her the ability to rewrite Creation at her whim — and she had never put that power to good use. A moderately devout follower of the Immaculate faith, Kehav decided after some soul-searching to work for a few years with the Wyld Hunt, to do something useful for the Realm while searching for a grander purpose.

In the end, the Wyld Hunt, meant as a way of filling time while she found a new direction, was the purpose for which she was looking. Kehav saw the horrors that Creation could spawn and decided that defending humanity was a greater purpose than she had ever realized. Her attitude was a long way from idealism; it came from seeing the worst of Creation, not the best, and feeling that the Realm (for all its flaws) was better than the alternative. She reserves a special anger for the excesses of sorcerers, especially those who summon demons without proper care



and unleash the poisons of Malfeas upon the world. If not for the discipline and direction of the Wyld Hunt, she suspects she might have been one of those arrogant and doomed fools herself.

Mnemon Kehav has worked for the Office of Harmony for 20 years but only devoted herself to it full-time eight years ago (partially to escape the pressure from her house to marry again and have children). She lends the Office of Harmony a rare intellect and a pragmatic view of Creation, always looking for the ulterior motives behind an Anathema's activities or a house's gift of artifacts. Her fellow shikari are her family now — and then, there is Cathak Setod, her immediate superior, with whom she has slowly and reluctantly fallen in love. She knows such a match is doomed to end in tragedy, that her family would not allow it, that Setod is married to his duty and will not allow himself to love — so she swallows her feelings and throws herself into her work all the harder.

Mnemon Kehav is a middle-aged Exalt with the refined manners of a socialite and the pessimistic nature of a hardened soldier. Despite her devotion to the hard work of the Office of Harmony, she has never lost her taste for opulence and creature comforts. She dresses extremely well and outfits her personal quarters with luxuries.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Hosted venerated, castigating

Aspect: Air

Nature: Savant

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

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

Abilities: Archery 2, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 2 (Wyld Hunt +1), Dodge 3, Endurance 2, Investigation 2, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Flametongue, Forest-tongue, Low Realm, Riverspeak, Skytongue) 5, Lore 4 (Realm History +1), Martial Arts 2, Melee 3 (Swords +1), Occult 5 (Demons +1, Spirits +2), Performance 2, Presence 4, Ride 2, Sail 1, Socialize 3 (Realm Politics +1), Thrown 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 3, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 4, Breeding 3, Command 2, Connections (The All-Seeing Eye) 3, Connections (The Deliberative) 2, Connections (The Heptagram) 4, Connections (House Mnemon) 4, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 3, Connections (The Thousand Scales) 2, Connections (The Threshold) 2, Manse 3, Reputation 2, Resources 4

Charms: Cipher Missive, Dragon-Graced Weapon, Five-fold Resonance Sense, Language-Learning Ritual, Loquacious Courtier Technique, Minding the Dragon's Eggs, Ox-Body Technique, Precision Observation Method, Sight-Riding Technique, Speech Without Words, Spirit-Chaining Strike, Spirit-Detecting Mirror Technique, Spirit-Grounding Shout, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Thou-

sand Tongues Meditation, Voices on the Wind, Whirlwind Shield Form, Wind-Carried Words Technique

Spells: Demon of the First Circle, Emerald Circle Banishment, Emerald Countermagic, Flying Guillotine, Hound of the Five Winds, Paralyzing Contradiction, Ritual of Elemental Empowerment, The Spy Who Walks in Darkness, Summon Elemental, Virtuous Guardian of Flame

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 5B Defense 5

Spirit Sword: Speed 12 Accuracy 11 Damage 7L Defense 10

Dodge Pool: 9 **Soak:** 7L/7B (Jade breastplate, 6L/4B)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 15 **Peripheral Essence:** 30 (42)

Committed Essence: 12

Other Notes: Mnemon Kehav wields a spirit sword (see **Caste Book: Dawn**, p. 80), although she rarely fights on the front lines. Set into the sword is a jewel of the flying heart (see **Caste Book: Zenith**, p. 79), while a gemstone of surface thoughts (see **Savant and Sorcerer**, p. 68) is socketed into her jade breastplate. Implanted into her left bicep is a skin-mount amulet (see **Aspect Book: Earth**, p. 80) bearing a key of mastery (see **Aspect Book: Air**, p. 75). This amulet increases her Peripheral Essence pool by 6 motes (already included above). She normally attunes the key of mastery to Summon Elemental or Demon of the First Circle when summoning and to Virtuous Guardian of Flame when planning for combat. Due to Pymander Seven she regains a point of temporary Willpower the first time she casts a spell in a scene, and her effective Valor increases by 1 the first time each scene that she channels it in an attack or spell cast against a demon.

Before entering combat, Mnemon Kehav first protects herself and her cadre (if possible) with Whirlwind Shield Form, then enhances battlefield communications with Speech Without Words. She next casts Virtuous Guardian of Flame, its Essence cost reduced by 8 motes due to her Key of Mastery. This takes a total of four turns, 1 Willpower and at least 22 motes (+2 for each ally affected by her two Charms), allows for speechless communication between Kehav and her comrades, subtracts four successes from any ranged attack made against her (and any ally affected) and grants her a free nine-dice parry against up to four melee attacks each turn. Once in combat, she fights defensively, dodging if her mystical defenses are not enough, while working to neutralize opponents using Emerald Countermagic, Paralyzing Contradiction or (if fighting spirits) Spirit-Grounding Shout and Spirit-Chaining Strike. She picks off powerful opponents at long range using Flying Guillotine, resorting to melee combat only if forced.

Kehav's most significant contribution to the Hunt's efforts are the demons and elementals she summons. These fall into two categories: spirits that aid the Office of Harmony in locating the Anathema or predatory spirits to fight in battle. When summoning elementals, Kehav usually summons cloud people, huruka, jokun, need fires, thunderbirds and, occasionally, brine curs. For demonic servitors, she uses amphelisiae, anuhles, erymanthoi, luminita and tomescu, though she may occasionally summon an agata to ride. She rarely summons elementals (and never demons) with significant powers over the minds of mortals, as she feels that the risks of those abilities outweigh the benefits. Cautious to a fault, Kehav *never* summons a demon or elemental without developing a specific summoning ritual first (see **Exalted**, p. 249). Attuning her key of mastery to whichever spell she uses, she then spends all her remaining motes of Essence on reducing the Willpower + Essence roll of the summoned creature (40 motes and -8 dice for elementals, 30 motes and -6 dice for demons). Kehav only binds demons and elementals for specific tasks and Hunts, rather than indefinite servitude, and banishes them as soon as their duty is fulfilled.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 7 Damage 3B Defense 8 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 6B Defense 3 Rate 3

Spirit Sword: Speed 15 Accuracy 12 Damage 9L Defense 9 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 13

PELEPS NAJAH, THE NONPAREIL

Description: The magistrates of the Scarlet Empire have always been a motley lot, even before the disappearance of the Empress. Many have been scoundrels and extortionists, worse than the criminals they theoretically hunted. Certainly some were worthy Exalts, doing their best to serve the Realm, but even they have had their flaws and weaknesses, their little corruptions. Common wisdom has it that even the best magistrates are dishonorable loose cannons, not to be fully trusted no matter the circumstances.

Well, except for Peleps Najah of course. Every child of the Realm knows the stories of the Nonpareil, the incorruptible monster slayer who held honor and the service of the Realm above all other concerns. But she must have retired by now — if she ever really existed out of tavern tales and children's games, that is.

Peasants and citizens may doubt, but the stories are true. Peleps Najah is perhaps the most famed magistrate of all time, an itinerant Immaculate monk who entered the Empress' service rather than see any more wickedness loosed upon Creation. For nearly 100 years, she walked the Realm, slaying monsters and bandits and accepting no more reward than lodging and a chance to preach the word



of the Immaculate Dragons. During that time, she also worked with the Wyld Hunt whenever the opportunity arose, the better to serve the empire. She only retired from her magistrate role when the Empress vanished, and then, it was only to (fruitlessly and rather clumsily) investigate her disappearance. Her membership in the Office of Harmony was something of a foregone conclusion. Few other Exalts in Creation are as resolute, as fearless and as driven as the Nonpareil in the defense of the Realm.

(Some unkind members of the Dragon-Blooded might comment that Peleps Najah's fearlessness and incorruptibility are as much due to a lack of imagination and wit as they are to moral fiber. There's something in that, but only a fool would ever say such a thing to her face — or to anyone who has ever met her and seen the flame of courage and pious certitude that burns around her. Some people are legends for a *reason*.)

Knowing neither fear nor doubt, Peleps Najah is one of the greatest monster-slayers and Anathema-killers ever to wear the robes of an imperial magistrate. She does not relish combat and the threat of death, but nor will she ever retreat from the duties of her position and the safety of the Realm. On the battlefield, she is a burning comet of destruction, unleashing fire and death in every direction. Her personal code of honor is strong, and she believes wholeheartedly in the right to honorable and single combat — but not, of course, with the Anathema, who are soulless monsters that must be cut down like dogs. A particularly honey-tongued Exalt might be able to persuade her otherwise, in the right circumstances — in which case she would demand that her comrades stand down while she faced the Anathema alone. Whether or

not they would *obey* her is a question that has yet to be asked, let alone answered.

The Nonpareil is a direct, plain-spoken Immaculate monk, dressed in traditional and unassuming robes. Her words are often simple and direct, unlikely to inspire — until she speaks of the Immaculate Order, the divine mandate of the Empress and the need for all inhabitants of the Realm to stand against the darkness each and every day.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Hosted venerated, harrier

Aspect: Fire

Nature: Paragon

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Virtues: Compassion 4, Conviction 4, Temperance 4, Valor 5

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 5 (Acrobatics +2), Dodge 5 (Melee Attacks +3), Endurance 2, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Flametongue, Low Realm, Seatongue) 3, Lore 2 (Realm Law +2), Martial Arts 5 (Multiple Opponents +2), Melee 3, Performance 3, Presence 4 (Righteous Passion +2), Resistance 2 (Ignore Pain +1), Ride 2, Sail 2, Socialize 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 3, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 4, Breeding 4, Command 2, Connections (The All-Seeing Eye) 1, Connections (House Peleps) 4, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 4, Connections (The Magistrates) 5, Connections (The Threshold) 2, Familiar 5, Manse 4, Reputation 4

Charms: Aura of Invulnerability, Bellows-Pumping Stride, Breath of the Fire Dragon, Consuming Might of the Fire Dragon, Dancing Ember Stride, Effortlessly Rising Flame, Essence-Igniting Nerve Strike, Falling Star Maneuver, Fiery Hand Attack, Fire Dragon Form, Flame-Flicker Stance, Flash-Fire Technique, Flickering Candle Meditation, Glowing Coal Radiance, Incense Smoke Ladder, Overwhelming Fire Majesty Stance, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Perfect Blazing Blow, Safety Among Enemies, Searing Fist Attack, Smoke Obscuring Effect, Smoldering Wound Attack, Spirit Sight, Spirit Walking, Threshold Warding Stance

Combos:

Righteous Purity Conflagration (Cost: 4 motes, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per two dice of damage): Falling Star Maneuver, Smoldering Wound Attack — *Najah launches into a somersaulting leap toward her enemy, spiraling tightly into the air as her weapons glow with intense white heat. The devastating blow she lands burns so fiercely that the wound then blackens and melts, bleeding ashes and Essence. Najah uses this as her opening move in combat against powerful opponents, sometimes enhanced by Perfect Blazing Blow.*

Base Initiative: 11

Attack:

Punch: Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 4B Defense 10

Kick: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 9

Paired Jade Short Daiklaves (Honor and Responsibility):

Speed 14 Accuracy 12 Damage 9L Defense 13

Dodge Pool: 10 **Soak:** 7L/7B (Silken armor, 5L/3B, counts as natural soak)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 15 **Peripheral Essence:** 39 (23)

Committed Essence: 16

Other Notes: The Nonpareil knows the ways of all weapons, but prefers to fight with her two short dailies. She wears silken armor (see **Caste Book: Eclipse**, pp. 80-81) and jade Hearthstone bracers set with a gem of adamant skin. One daiklave bears a jewel of youthful suppleness (see **Caste Book: Twilight**, p. 79), the other a kata-sculpting gem (see **Aspect Book: Earth**, p. 78). Sidereal blessings let her regain a point of temporary Willpower the first time in a scene that an enemy attempts to hit her in melee and fails.

When preparing for combat, Peleps Najah uses (in order) Fire Dragon Form, Aura of Invulnerability, Bellows-Pumping Stride and, finally, Smoke Obscuring Effect (using 2 motes to add up to four dice to each chosen ally). This takes three turns and costs at least 9 motes, plus one additional mote for each ally benefiting from Smoke Obscuring Effect. This gives Najah five automatic successes on all her Dodge rolls, lets her move at double her normal speed, increases her soak to 8L/8B and gives her three additional -0 health levels. Once combat is joined, Najah takes full advantage of her mobility, moving through to avoid danger and focus her attacks where they are most needed. She begins her onslaught with her Righteous Purity Conflagration Combo, then each turn, makes two attacks (enhanced with Perfect Blazing Blow or Falling Star Maneuver) and two dodges (enhanced with Flickering Candle Meditation or Safety Among Enemies). If her opponents prove exceptionally powerful, she uses Consuming Might of the Fire Dragon to make them pay dearly for defying the Immaculate Order. Najah will only retreat from the field if the Hunt is clearly and undeniably losing, and only then because the protection of her cadre demands her presence. If necessary, she uses Dancing Ember Stride to escape, moving at high speed while defending her retreat with Flame-Flicker Stance.

Pelep's Najah's familiar is Blood of Tyrants, a claw strider (see **Creatures of the Wyld**, p. 31). This reptile stands six feet at the shoulder and is nearly 20 feet long, a smaller (but still massive) version of a tyrant lizard. Because claw striders are tough, fast and strong, Najah occasionally rides Blood of Tyrants into battle, although she rarely stays mounted for long, preferring to fight on her feet. While she does so, Blood of Tyrants rampages through enemy lines, harassing the Anathema and slaughtering their cultists.

The claw strider can communicate with Najah and share its senses with her, allowing her to gain a fuller image of battlefield events. It also has a special Essence reserve of 5 motes that Najah can draw from with a touch; for this reason, the beast stays close to its mistress while she prepares for battle, so that she can absorb its Essence after using her scene-long Charms (see above).

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 11 Accuracy 11 Damage 4B Defense 12 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 8 Accuracy 11 Damage 7B Defense 7 Rate 3

Paired Jade Short Daiklaves (Honor and Responsibility):
Speed 17 Accuracy 14 Damage 8L Defense 11 Rate 6

Dodge Pool: 17

ISELSI OSUJA

Description: The legend of Peleps Najah is a widespread and enduring one. But almost no one recalls the Nonpareil's partner in her wandering century, the fellow magistrate who directed her passion where it would do the most good. That suits Iselsi Osuja just fine and gives her no little amusement. The quiet, quick-witted and earthy counterpart to her friend's fiery energy, Osuja was never the monster-hunting type. Instead, her career as a magistrate was a rarity. She actually *solved* the crimes she investigated, rather than pocketing bribes and pointing the finger at the most convenient suspects. She and Peleps Najah have been the best of friends for over a century, since they first met in the Palace Sublime as postulants. And though she is not as legendary (or honest) as her friend, she is just as dedicated to the Realm and to the battle against the Anathema.

While Iselsi Osuja is an Immaculate monk, and a devout one at that, she also possesses a streak of common sense a mile wide and can mask or deny her religious beliefs as necessary. Such a combination of intelligence, subterfuge and relentless combat skill is rare, and the Office of Harmony puts it to good use. Iselsi Osuja is likely to be found in disguise in the field, masquerading as an itinerant beggar or a naïve mortal monk, asking innocent questions about the Anathema and their operations. When she finally shucks her façade, she usually returns to the Office to correlate the data with her superiors — but if circumstances dictate, she may take up her razor claws and face the Anathema in person rather than let it escape from sight.

Iselsi Osuja is a short, muscular woman with broad features, nothing like the image most people have of an Immaculate monk. That's just the way she (and the Office of Harmony) like it, and more fool anyone who underestimates her because of it.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Hosted venerer, inquisitor

Aspect: Water

Nature: Explorer



Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

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

Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3 (Fair Folk +2), Bureaucracy 4 (Uncovering Corruption +1), Dodge 3, Endurance 2, Investigation 5 (Deduction +1), Larceny 5 (Disguise +2), Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Low Realm, Riverspeak) 2, Lore 3 (Realm Law +1), Martial Arts 5, Melee 1, Occult 2, Performance 2, Presence 4, Ride 2, Sail 2, Socialize 3, Stealth 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 3, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 4, Breeding 2, Command 2, Connections (The All-Seeing Eye) 2, Connections (House Iselsi) 2, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 3, Connections (The Magistrates) 3, Connections (Outlaw) 2, Connections (The Thousand Scales) 2, Connections (The Threshold) 2, Manse 3, Reputation 2

Charms: All-Encompassing Earth Sense, Bloodhound's Nose Technique, Crashing Wave Style, Distracting Breeze Meditation, Drowning-in-Blood Technique, Ears of the Snowy Owl, Elemental Bolt Attack, Falsehood Unearthing Attitude, Flow Reversal Strike, Flowing Water Defense, Hurricane-Predicting Glance, Indisputable Physical Analysis Technique, Loquacious Courtier Technique, Observer Awareness Method, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Precision Observation Method, Revelation of Associates Hunch, Rippling Water Strike, Scent-of-Crime Method, Shrugging Water Dragon Escape, Spirit Sight, Spirit Walking,



Theft-of-Essence Method, Trackless Passage Style, Water Dragon Form, Window-in-the-Door Technique

Combos:

Tsunami of Retribution (Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower): Crashing Wave Style, Drowning-in-Blood Technique — *Osuja's hands blur as she relentlessly slashes at her opponent, hitting him over and over again with the strength of a tidal wave. Blood-tinged water gushes from the target's mouth with each strike, his lungs exploding under the pressure. Osuja uses this Combo as her initial attack upon a powerful target, who may be weakened or killed outright by its debilitating effects — however, particularly powerful Anathema may resist the attack and suffer no damage.*

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 4B Defense 9

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 6B Defense 8

Jade Razor Claws (Tideclaws): Speed 12 Accuracy 10 Damage 8L Defense 11

Dodge Pool: 7/6 **Soak:** 9L/14B (Jade reinforced buff jacket, 7L/10B, -1 mobility penalty)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 13 **Peripheral Essence:** 28 (33)

Committed Essence: 5

Other Notes: Iselsi Osuja fights with jade razor claws (see **Caste Book: Dawn**, pp. 78-79), one of which houses a gem of wise discernment (see **Caste Book: Eclipse**, p. 79), and wears a jade reinforced buff jacket inset with a mind-cleansing gem (see **Caste Book: Twilight**, p. 77). On her left hand she wears a death shield ring (see **Caste Book: Zenith**, p. 80), set with a stone of the spider's eye (see **Aspect Book: Air**, p. 75). Sidereal astrology increases her effective Conviction by 1 the first time she channels it in an attack against one of the Fair Folk. She also gains +1 success on her first opposed test against an effect generated by an artifact in a scene.

Few of Osuja's Charms are long lasting, so her preparation for combat is limited to using Water Dragon Form. This normally takes one turn (if she succeeds in her Dexterity + Martial Arts roll to assume the Form) and costs 5 motes. It increases her soak to 16L/20B for the rest of the scene and allows her to spend Essence to increase her soak when attacked (1 mote for every +2 soak). It also increases the accuracy of her strikes by five dice, which is the maximum increase she can gain from Charms — this removes the need to use further dice-adding Charms and frees her Essence pool for other effects. In the first turn of combat, she uses Flowing Water Defense for additional protection, then opens up with her Tsunami of Retribution Combo. If an opponent is exceptionally powerful, she softens him up with Theft-of-Essence Method before using Flow Reversal Strike or Element Bolt Attack. Because Osuja has a large

supply of free Essence (and can gain more using Theft-of-Essence Method), she uses her Charms freely in combat.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 4B Defense 11 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 10 Damage 7B Defense 6 Rate 3

Jade Razor Claws (Tideclaws): Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 9L Defense 10 Rate 6

Dodge Pool: 11/10

LEDAAL IDIKO

Description: Ledaal Idiko is barely 100 years old and has spent almost his whole life in the service of the Immaculate Order. A quiet, likeable student, Idiko spent decades in peaceful contemplation of the world, occasionally joining other monks to aid in the Wyld Hunt before returning to the harmony of the monastery. He might have spent his entire life there in quiet worship, training horses and respecting the Immaculate Dragons.

Unfortunately, the monastery where Idiko lived was in Thorns.

The battle-hardened Immaculate warrior who dragged himself from the shadowlands was a far cry from the naïve monk who watched the undead overtake his city. The softness has been flensed from his soul — and with it, too much of the compassion and idealism he once held. He misses that compassion, that freedom to be gentle, but the world has moved on, and he must move with it. In the year after his escape from Thorns Idiko consulted at length with the savants of his house about the Deathlords and the undead, learning much about his new enemy (and further perfecting his martial skills on the side) before finally enlisting full-time with the Wyld Hunt.

Three years later, the iron in Idiko's soul is still there but not as hard and as sharp as it once was. The compassion he thought he had choked still lurks inside, weakening him by making him less than perfect. More and more, he wonders about the souls of the Anathema, the damnation that surely awaits them in Heaven and whether they might be redeemed rather than destroyed — yes, even the Abyssal Exalted and the servants of the Deathlords. The conflict between caring and conviction, between heart and head and soul, causes the young Exalt no little anguish, anguish he feels too weak and ashamed to confess. Instead, he forces himself to be strong, preaches the word of the Immaculate Order to the townsfolk of Yarrowstalk and sheds silent tears when alone in the stables of the Azimuth Spire.

Ledaal Idiko is a young Immaculate monk with green dappled patterns faintly visible on his skin, reminiscent of leaves or the scales of a dragon. He breeds horses as a hobby and a way of contributing to the resources of the Office of Harmony, and he can often be found taming a



horse — or some far stranger creature — within the Azimuth compound.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Hosted amercer, harrier

Aspect: Wood

Nature: Architect

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

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

Abilities: Archery 5 (Against the Undead +1, Mounted +1), Athletics 4, Dodge 4, Endurance 2, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Low Realm, Riverspeak) 2, Lore 2, Martial Arts 5, Medicine 5 (Treating Disease +1), Melee 3, Occult 2 (The Undead +2), Performance 3 (Flute +1), Presence 2, Resistance 2, Ride 5 (Training +1), Socialize 2, Survival 3 (Shadowlands +2)

Backgrounds: Artifact 3, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 4, Breeding 3, Command 1, Connections (Finance) 2, Connections (House Ledaal) 4, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 3, Connections (The Legions) 2, Connections (The Magistrates) 2, Connections (The Threshold) 2, Henchmen 2, Manse 3, Reputation 2

Charms: Dance of the Jade Bridle, Death-Pattern Sensing Attitude, Disease-Banishing Technique, Dragon-Graced Weapon, Dragonfly Finds Mate, Eyes of the Wood Dragon, Flickering Candle Meditation, Great Heart Companion, Grievous Wound Alteration Energy, Harvest of the Hunter, Heaven-Gracing Leap, Infection-Banishing Prana, Life-Swelling Sap Strike, Mind-Over-Body Meditation, Ox-Body Technique, Scattered Pearl Hoof Falls, Seven-

Year Swarm Volley, Soul-Marking Strike, Sparrow Dives at Hawk, Spirit-Rending Technique, Spirit Sight, Spirit Walking, Spirit-Wracking Method, Spring Follows Winter, Swallows Defend the Nest, Unbreakable Fascination Kata, Wood Dragon Form, Wood Dragon Succor, Wood Dragon Vitality, Wound-Closing Touch

Combos:

Upon the Thorns of Life (Cost: 3 motes, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per arrow): Life-Swelling Sap Strike, Swallows Defend the Nest — *Idiko's arms blur like branches in a windstorm, as he draws and fires arrow after arrow. Liquid green Essence bursts from each arrow as it flies, transforming into vines and thorns that then explode outward when they strike dead flesh. Idiko uses this Combo against undead opponents but has learned the hard way not to bother attempting to attack Abyssal Exalted in this fashion.*

Base Initiative: 11

Attack:

Punch: Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 4B Defense 10

Kick: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 9

Exceptional Slashing Sword: Speed 15 Accuracy 10 Damage 6L Defense 10

Jade Long Powerbow (Thornflight): Speed 11 Accuracy 11 Damage 7L + arrow type (Rate 3, Range 400)

Dodge Pool: 9

Soak: 7L/7B (Jade breastplate, 6L/4B)

Willpower: 7

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

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 14

Peripheral Essence: 35 (22)

Committed Essence: 13

Other Notes: Ledaal Idiko carries the powerbow Thornflight, set with a precision of form gemstone (see **Aspect Book: Earth**, p. 79), a jade breastplate bearing a scintillating gem of ally's embrace (see **Aspect Book: Air**, p. 75) and jade Hearthstone bracers socketed with a stone of the emerald rooster (see **Caste Book: Zenith**, p. 79). A quiver at his thigh carries target arrows, while a second quiver of target arrows and a quiver of frog crotch arrows are bound to the saddle of whatever mount he rides. When pressed into melee, he uses a sword that has been imbued with the essence of air through the Ritual of Elemental Empowerment (see **Savant and Sorcerer**, p. 114). If he commits a mote of Essence to the sword, it becomes rimed with frost, and its damage increases by +2L for the scene. He regains a point of temporary Willpower the first time he hits an Exalt target with an archery attack in a scene, thanks to a Sidereal blessing.

Before entering combat, Idiko uses (in order) Wood Dragon Form, Death-Pattern Sensing Attitude, Eyes of the Wood Dragon and (if mounted, which he usually is) Great Heart Companion. This takes three turns and costs 11 motes and 1 Willpower, after which Idiko regenerates damage (one bashing level per turn and one lethal level every two turns), may have his player make up to four free dodge rolls



with his full pool each turn (at a cost of one mote per roll), does four dice of extra damage on his first Martial Arts attack (if made within the first five turns of combat) and rides a mount that will not bolt or panic even when damaged by his anima flare. To prevent damaging his mount early, Idiko uses motes from his Personal Essence pool before entering combat, only spending Peripheral motes when he must.

Once combat is joined, Idiko splits his attention between sniping at opponents and defending his cadre while moving around the battlefield on his mount. When attacking, he uses Eyes of the Wood Dragon, Spring Follows Winter and Swallows Defend the Nest to make multiple accurate, powerful attacks; he uses target arrows for preference and frog crotch arrows against unarmored martial artists. Idiko assists his teammates by warding off ranged attacks with Seven-Years Swarm Volley or mitigating their wounds with Grievous Wound Alteration Energy and Wood Dragon Succor, which he can use at a range of four yards thanks to his scintillating gem of ally's embrace. For defense, he relies upon the free dodges of Death-Pattern Sensing Attitude and, if hit, pulls back to snipe while his wounds regenerate.

Idiko has a talent for animal training and riding, made even stronger by his Charms. He prefers to fight while mounted, but rather than transport horses from the Azimuth Spire to the lair of the Anathema, he instead tames a local creature to ride before battle is joined. He works his tracking skills to locate a suitable beast, then uses Dance of the Jade Bridle to rapidly bond with it. In the past, Idiko has ridden river dragons, tigers, hybrocs and even bizarre creatures such as furnace rhinos and komodo rats.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 11 Accuracy 11 Damage 4B Defense 12 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 8 Accuracy 11 Damage 7B Defense 7 Rate 3

Exceptional Slashing Sword: Speed 18 Accuracy 10 Damage 8L Defense 9 Rate 2

Dodge Pool: 16

SESUS LOZON

Description: It is not right, not *proper*, that a low-bred secular soldier should command something as holy as the Office of Harmony. Sesus Lozon will tell this to nearly anybody that will listen, after first swearing them to secrecy. Such oaths have little weight, and everybody in the Office of Harmony knows Lozon's feelings by now. Such dissent is tolerated because Lozon is young and useful and not actually agitating to control the Office of Harmony himself. No, what he wants, what he *dreams* of, is a Hunt commanded by Peleps Najah, an Immaculate monk of perfect breeding and incomparable piety, while he acts as her strong right arm, a Hill-Crushing Hero fighting by her side against the Anathema. He has other



dreams of the Nonpareil, does Sesus Lozon, but those are never to be admitted to another soul, even within the Order. *Especially* within the Order.

Unfortunately for Lozon, piety and fervor do not automatically make one fit to command. That's true of Peleps Najah, and she knows it; she has no interest in becoming an ostiary and has patiently explained this to her young admirer a dozen times. It's also true of Sesus Lozon himself, who compensates for his lack of wit with dedication but has never realized that dedication alone is not enough. His family did, which is why he was firmly directed into the Immaculate Order from an early age. Now that he has risen to the role of an Immaculate monk, he has been gently pushed into the Wyld Hunt as a way of channeling his martial skills and unsubtle directness to the best possible use.

It would be a mistake to dismiss Lozon as no more than a love-struck pup, though, and that is a mistake Cathak Setod is in danger of making. Lozon may be brash and foolish, but he is an experienced monk with exceptional martial skills — and a powerful and politically influential family. Already, strings are being pulled and questions being asked about the appropriateness of Setod's command. As yet, those questions have had no effect, but in the future, the Office of Harmony may find itself unsupported by House Sesus, perhaps even forced to elevate Peleps Najah to unwilling command. All to assuage the hero worship and unrequited, unspoken

worship of a wide-eyed monk with more muscle and infatuation than brains.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Errant shikari, harrier

Aspect: Earth

Nature: Follower

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

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

Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 3 (Lifting +1), Awareness 4, Craft (Stonework) 4, Dodge 2, Endurance 3, Lore 3, Martial Arts 4, Melee 2, Performance 2, Presence 2, Resistance 3 (Ignore Pain +1), Ride 3, Socialize 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 4, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 3, Breeding 3, Connections (High Society) 2, Connections (House Sesus) 4, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 3, Manse 3

Charms: All-Encompassing Earth Sense, Earth Dragon Form, Flaw-Finding Examination, Force of the Mountain, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Precision Observation Method, Ramparts of Obedient Earth, Shaping Hand Style, Shattering Fist Strike, Sight-Destroying Method, Sight-Riding Technique, Spirit Sight, Spirit Walking, Stone-Carving Fingers Form, Stone Dragon's Skin, Strength of Stone Technique, Unmoving Mountain Stance, Weapon-Breaking Defense Technique

Base Initiative: 9

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 8 Damage 4B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 7 Damage 6B Defense 7

Jade Grand Goremaul (Pillar of Judgment): Speed 12 Accuracy 10 Damage 18L Defense 7

Dodge Pool: 6/5 **Soak:** 12L/13B (Jade reinforced breastplate, 10L/9B, -1 mobility penalty)

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

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 12 **Peripheral Essence:** 17 (29)

Committed Essence: 12

Other Notes: Sesus Lozon carries Pillar of Judgment, a grand goremaul set with an eye of the first goat (see **Caste Book: Zenith**, p. 79). He also wears a jade reinforced breastplate inlaid with a jewel of stability (see **Caste Book: Dawn**, p. 77) and jade Hearthstone bracers bearing a blood-purifying gem (see **Caste Book: Twilight**, p. 78). A Sidereal blessing increases his effective Valor by +1 the first time he channels it in an attack against a target that has already injured him in a scene.

Before entering combat, Lozon first uses Earth Dragon Form, then Strength of Stone Technique. This takes two turns (more if he fails to assume his Form immediately), costs 6 motes, increases his Strength and Stamina to 5 each and gives him a total soak of 17L/18B. Once Lozon reaches

the battlefield, he targets buildings and encampments with Shattering Fist Strike in order to drive the Anathema out of hiding and force them to face judgment, while erecting temporary cover from archers with Ramparts of Obedient Earth. If he closes with one of the Anathema, he attempts to neutralize its offenses using Sight-Destroying Method or Weapon-Breaking Defense Technique, while defending himself with Stone Dragon's Skin. Once the Anathema is blind and weaponless, he may strike it down or hold it in a clinch and slowly drag it to the feet of the Nonpareil, begging her to honor him by killing the foul thing herself.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 9 Accuracy 9 Damage 4B Defense 10 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 6 Accuracy 9 Damage 7B Defense 5 Rate 3

Jade Grand Goremaul (Pillar of Judgment): Speed 22 Accuracy 9 Damage 13L (P) Defense 9 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 12/11

Hardness: 3

NELLENS AVIDA

Description: Nellens Avida never wanted to be an assassin, or an Immaculate monk for that matter. But fate ignores the desires of mortals or Exalts, and the needs of her family override any plans she had for her own future. Exaltation made her useful to her embattled house, and her family sent her to the Immaculate Order to better develop her fighting skills. Never the most devout or pious of students, Avida nonetheless enjoyed her time in the monastery, enjoyed the discipline and the focus. And then, her family interjected again, calling a halt to her studies and recalling her to a secular life. House Nellens had no need for monks and priests; what it needed was an assassin, one empowered by the subtle and dangerous martial powers of the Air Dragon. Disagreement was not an option.

For 20 years, Avida was her house's dagger in the darkness, its garrote across the sleeping throat of its enemies. Not only has she murdered the house's own targets, she has been its killer for hire, lent out to other houses and organizations as a tool for gaining further political favor. None of this has been to her liking, but her house, her family, is all she has known — that and the Immaculate teachings, unreadable in her memory's eye under a thick layer of blood.

Now, a new commandment has come down from the Nellens elders, that Avida should join the Wyld Hunt to increase the prestige and visible piety of the house. The Office of Harmony has benefited greatly from her skills and her subtlety, and she is often called upon to cut down a fledgling Anathema in its sleep before it can become a major threat. For Avida, her new position has had an unexpected benefit — exposure to the viewpoints of other





Exalts, of Dragon-Blooded who care about more than immediate political and economic gain. In the unwavering courage of Peleps Najah, the silent dedication of Cathak Setod and the bruised idealism (and brooding attractiveness) of Ledaal Idiko, Avida sees the potential to be something greater than a half-holy assassin.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Errant shikari, inquisitor

Aspect: Air

Nature: Architect

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

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

Abilities: Archery 1, Athletics 4 (Climbing +1), Dodge 4, Endurance 2, Larceny 2, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Low Realm, Riverspeak) 2, Lore 3, Martial Arts 4, Melee 4, Occult 1, Performance 2, Presence 1, Ride 2, Sail 2, Socialize 2, Stealth 4 (Ambushes +2), Thrown 4

Backgrounds: Artifact 2, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 2, Breeding 1, Connections (The All-Seeing Eye) 2, Connections (House Nellens) 3, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 2, Connections (The Thousand Scales) 3, Connections (The Threshold) 2, Manse 2, Resources 3

Charms: Air Dragon Form, Air Dragon's Sight, Breath-Seizing Technique, Deliberate Insignificance Method, Distracting Breeze Meditation, Ox-Body Technique, Seeking Throw Technique, Shrouding the Body and Mind, Spirit Sight, Spirit Walking, Stoking Bonfire Style, Threshold Warding Stance, Tornado Offense Technique, Trackless Passage Style, Vengeful Gust Counterattack,

Whirlwind Shield Form, Wind Dragon Speed, Wind-Walking Technique

Combos:

Hurricane of Razors (Cost: 4 motes per attack, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per two dice): Seeking Throw Technique, Tornado Offense Technique — *Avida's weapon flies from her hand and back once, twice, a thousand times within but a few seconds, contrails of lightning and bloody mist twisting into a roaring vortex between her and her enemies. In order to ensure every strike counts, Avida normally attacks with this Combo from hiding at the start of combat, only emerging to fight or flee if her enemy survives.*

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 3B Defense 8

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 5B Defense 7

Exceptional Chopping Sword: Speed 9 Accuracy 10 Damage 7L Defense 9

Infinite Jade Chakram (Eye of the Storm): Speed 8 Accuracy 8 Damage 4L (Rate 5, Range 30)

Dodge Pool: 8 **Soak:** 7L/7B (Jade breastplate, 6L/4B)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-

4/Incap

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 11 **Peripheral Essence:** 21 (28)

Committed Essence: 7

Other Notes: Nellens Avida's weapon is an infinite jade chakram, which allows her to throw razor-sharp phantoms over and over again at her targets. She is also armed with a heavy chopping sword, her weapon of last resort; the sword is imbued with the element of water, and Avida can change its shape and appearance by committing a mote of Essence to it. She wears a jade breastplate set with a labyrinthine eye (see **Savant and Sorcerer**, p. 67) and a Hearthstone amulet bearing a jewel of youthful suppleness (see **Caste Book: Twilight**, p. 79). The pockets of her robes hide packages of blinding powder, distracting whistles and alchemical smoke bombs. Astrology grants her +1 success in her first opposed test to bypass a guard, sentinel or anyone actively looking for her (even if Exalted) in a scene.

The righteous murderer of the Office of Harmony, Nellens Avida is rarely called upon to battle the Anathema face-to-face. Instead, her task is to neutralize them (or their agents) at a distance. This normally calls for stealth and surprise attacks, but even an assassin must sometimes fight in the open. In such situations, Avida uses first Air Dragon Form and then Whirlwind Shield Form. This takes two turns (assuming she activates her Martial Arts Form successfully) and costs 8 motes. Then, she adds four dice to any ranged attack or dodge she makes for the rest of the scene, she can reflexively dodge with a four-die pool, and ranged attacks against her lose three successes. She fights from cover if possible, picking off targets with

her infinite jade chakram and using her Hurricane of Razors Combo, dodging or using Vengeful Gust Counter-attack against ranged attacks. If dragged into melee, she uses Stoking Bonfire Style for accurate strikes, then attempts to disappear from view with Shrouding the Body and Mind and return to cover.

When undertaking an infiltration or assassination mission, Avida uses Air Dragon's Sight and either Distracting Breeze Meditation (spending 3 motes) or Deliberate Insignificance Method (2 motes), depending on whether her task requires stealth or subterfuge. Once she finds her target, she strikes from hiding with the Hurricane of Razors, and if that isn't enough to kill her target, she uses her sword and Stoking Bonfire Style to make multiple, powerful attacks (and at least one parry). With her victim dead (or too powerful for her to fight), she makes a getaway with Trackless Passage Style and Wind-Walking Technique, spending enough Essence to get at least three miles from the scene of the assassination before stopping.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 3B Defense 10 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 9 Damage 6B Defense 5 Rate 3

Exceptional Chopping Sword: Speed 12 Accuracy 11 Damage 7L Defense 8 Rate 3

Infinite Jade Chakram (Eye of the Storm): Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 7L (Rate 4, Range 50)

Dodge Pool: 11

CATHAK NOLAN

Description: As the Great Houses struggle for control of the Realm in the wake of the Scarlet Empress' disappearance, some of the Exalted emerge as natural leaders, charismatic young Dynasts who could become major figures within their houses during this time of tumult. That's good news for the young, and very bad news for their older, greedier relatives, who live in fear of being supplanted by their descendents. One solution is to have the upstarts assassinated; another is to divert them, subtly or not, into activities that pose less threat to their elders. Such is the case with Cathak Nolan, an impeccably bred scion of his house and a famed officer of the 26th Legion.

After spending two years increasing his fame and standing within and outside the house, Nolan was taken aside by his father, who explained sadly that any push for influence would have to wait until *after* House Cathak had determined who should take the Scarlet Throne. Nolan could either cool his heels for a few more years and divert his energies into less politically troubling activities, or he could be the victim of an unhappy accident. And so, Nolan — no fool, even if infuriated by the glass ceiling erected by his elders — has taken up the cause of the Wyld Hunt.

Having registered with the Office of Harmony, Cathak Nolan finds his arrogance somewhat shaken. He has seen



the power of the Anathema firsthand now and knows that his efforts to fight that power are more important than he had originally believed. He also has mixed feelings about his erstwhile commander, Cathak Setod, a legend of both his house and his legion — but also a cousin from a minor family and inferior bloodline, an old warhorse well past his prime. Torn between arrogance and respect, Nolan turns more and more to resentment — toward his house for sidelining him in this era of opportunity and toward Cathak Setod as a symbol of the power of the older Exalted over the young. That resentment may die away when faced with more important concerns — or it may lead the impulsive Exalt to betray the Office of Harmony in return for political or temporal favors.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Errant amercer, harrier

Aspect: Fire

Nature: Critic

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

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

Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 2, Craft (War) 3, Dodge 3, Endurance 1, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Low Realm) 1, Lore 2 (Gateway +1), Martial Arts 2, Melee 5 (Mounted +1), Performance 3, Presence 5 (Leading Troops +2), Ride 5 (Riding in Battle +1), Socialize 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Artifact 3, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 3, Breeding 5, Command 2, Connections (The Deliberative) 2, Connections (High Society) 2, Connections



(House Cathak) 3, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 2, Connections (The Legions) 3, Manse 3, Reputation 3, Resources 3

Charms: Aura of Invulnerability, Deadly Wildfire Legion, Dragon-Graced Weapon, Ebony Spur Technique, Effortlessly Rising Flame, Ghost-Fire Blade, Glowing Coal Radiance, Loquacious Courtier Technique, Ox-Body Technique, Phantom Fire-Warrior Horde, Portentous Comet Deflecting Mode, Ringing Anvil Onslaught, Scattered Pearl Hoof Falls, Seizing-the-Tongue Technique, Spring Follows Winter, Stoking Bonfire Style, Threshing Floor Technique, Unbearable Taunt Technique

Combos:

Infinite Burning Cavalcade (Cost: 8 motes, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per two dice): Ringing Anvil Onslaught, Stoking Bonfire Style — *Nolan drags his spear through the air and around his body as it glows red-hot along its length. It then explodes into flame, the afterimages coalescing into phantom spears of solid fire. Nolan screams in triumph and bursts forward, attacking with killing precision as the flaming spears rip into the body of his opponent. This is Nolan's finishing move, reserved for powerful opponents, and it leaves him greatly vulnerable to counterattack.*

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 6 Damage 4B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 5 Damage 6B Defense 5

Jade Dire Lance (Blackneedle): Speed 16 Accuracy 11 Damage 9L Defense 9

Jade Short Powerbow (Killing Song): Speed 7 Accuracy 9 Damage 8L (Rate 3, Range 300)

Dodge Pool: 7/6 **Soak:** 9L/14B (Jade reinforced buff jacket, 7L/10B, -1 mobility penalty)

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

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 14 **Peripheral Essence:** 22 (34)

Committed Essence: 12

Other Notes: Cathak Nolan bears no artifacts that are not directly useful in battle. He leaves the subtler powers to his cadremates. His melee weapon is the dire lance Blackneedle, which he uses to devastating effect whether on foot or mounted; socketed in the haft is a jewel of hungry fire. He also carries the jade powerbow Killing Song, socketed with a windhands gemstone. Finally, Nolan is protected by a jade reinforced buff jacket, which bears a memory stone (see **Caste Book: Night**, p. 78).

Cathak Nolan usually enters battle on horseback, with his soldiers marching behind him. Before leading the charge, Nolan uses Aura of Invulnerability and then Deadly Wildfire Legion on his cadre or troops. This takes two turns and 7 motes, after which Nolan's soak increases to 10L/15B and he gains three additional -0 health levels, while three of his allies gain two dice to their Melee Ability for the

scene. Once in combat, he stays mounted as long as possible, making charging attacks with Ebony Spur Technique or a powerful series of strikes with Ringing Anvil Onslaught. If a particular enemy is very strong he distracts it with Unbearable Taunt Technique, forcing it to focus on him while his allies attack it from all sides (and while he fires arrows at it from horseback). Only when his enemy is beaten down will he dismount and perform the Infinite Burning Cavalcade. He may be forced to stop riding should his horse be killed or injured, which is a common occurrence — if the animal is not targeted by his enemies, it's likely to burn in the heat of his anima banner. Nolan accepts this as inevitable and sheds no tears for his mounts; he factors the inevitable loss of his horse into his battle plans and is always prepared to leap from the saddle and fight on foot.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 4B Defense 8 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 7 Damage 7B Defense 3 Rate 3

Jade Dire Lance (Blackneedle): Speed 22 Accuracy 11 Damage 13L Defense 12 Rate 3

Dodge Pool: 10/9

RAGARA VAKIM

Description: Ragara Vakim could give two shits about the Wyld Hunt. The Anathema are dangerous, yes, but not so dangerous that the legions of the Realm could not hold them back. And if they failed, if monsters like the Bull of the North took control of the Realm — well, monsters still need money and slaves and goods. There will always be merchants, and there will always be a Guild, and so, there will always be a place for her in Creation.

And yet, Ragara Vakim is a member of the Office of Harmony and has risked her life fighting the Anathema on four occasions. The reason why is simple — *money*. No, not the meaningless stipend she once received from the Office of Harmony for her efforts, but the fortune in resources and artifacts channeled to the Office by the Immaculate Order and the Great Houses. There is opportunity and vast wealth in the chapter's arsenal, and Vakim wants a piece of that action.

Of course, Vakim's mercenary viewpoint is hardly something she shares with her erstwhile allies. She presents herself as a believer in the cause of the Wyld Hunt — pragmatic and cynical, but willing to bend her considerable intellect and skills as a spy to the Office of Harmony's efforts. The fact that she is willing to shoulder some of the Office of Harmony's bureaucratic burden endears her even further to the overworked ostiaries. No one realizes that she keeps her own records of the funds and relics moving through the Office of Harmony's storehouses or that she reads confidential invoices and reports before they reach their intended destination. She hasn't embezzled anything



from the Office of Harmony yet, but she has plans to do exactly that when the opportunity presents itself. In the interim, she masks her contempt for the Hunt's goals and works as hard as possible to further those goals — for if the Office of Harmony grows stronger, its stockpiles of jade and artifacts will grow as well.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Errant shikari, inquisitor

Aspect: Water

Nature: Conniver

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

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

Abilities: Archery 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 4 (Grappling +1), Bureaucracy 4 (Embezzlement +1), Dodge 3, Endurance 2, Investigation 3, Larceny 4 (Sleight of Hand +2), Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Guild Cant, Low Realm, Riverspeak) 3, Lore 2, Medicine 2, Melee 2, Performance 3, Presence 2, Ride 2, Sail 3, Stealth 2, Socialize 2

Backgrounds: Artifact 2, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 2, Breeding 2, Connections (The All-Seeing Eye) 2, Connections (The Guild) 4, Connections (House Ragara) 2, Connections (The Merchant Marine) 3, Connections (Outlaw) 2, Connections (The Thousand Scales) 3, Henchmen 3, Manse 2, Resources 3

Charms: Benevolent Master's Blessing, Bonds of Unbreakable Ice Technique, Confluence of Savant Thought, Deck-Walking Prana, Drowning Embrace, Ears of the Snowy Owl, Feeling-the-Air Technique, Finding the Water's Depths, Fist-Spinning Maelstrom,

Indisputable Physical Analysis Technique, Observer Awareness Method, Ox-Body Technique, Pounding Surf Style, Precise Ink Technique, Resetting Tumblers Technique, Riptide Method, Spring Follows Winter, Trackless Walk Style

Combos:

Bloodtide Kraken Stance (Cost: 1 mote, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per attack/foe): Drowning Embrace, Riptide Method — *Vakim dives into the middle of her foes, wrapping each of her arms and legs around a throat or chest, blood and water gushing from her limbs. Writhing and twisting, she crushes her opponents even as they choke and drown in her Essence-laden effluence. Vakim only uses this Combo when fighting multiple opponents and maintains the effect until at least two opponents are dead or her Essence reserves run low.*

Base Initiative: 7

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 Damage 3B Defense 7

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 6 Damage 5B Defense 6

Jade Smashfist (Nighthammer): Speed 13 Accuracy 8 Damage 6L Defense 8

Exceptional Self Bow: Speed 7 Accuracy 7 (Rate 2, Range 200)

Dodge Pool: 6

Soak: 7L/7B (Jade breastplate, 6L/4B)

Willpower: 8

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

Essence: 2

Personal Essence: 12

Peripheral Essence: 13 (25)

Committed Essence: 12

Other Notes: Ragara Vakim is a bureaucrat and spy, not a warrior. Therefore, the artifacts she carries are more for self-defense than Anathema-killing. She fights with her jade smashfist Nighthammer, which bears a gemstone of surface thoughts (see **Savant and Sorcerer**, p. 68). She also wears a jade breastplate inlaid with a memory stone (see **Caste Book: Night**, p. 78). Unbeknownst to the Office of Harmony, Vakim has another artifact — a stamp of ultimate authority (see **Aspect Book: Water**, p. XX), which she uses to reseal the confidential reports and invoices she peruses.

Ragara Vakim is a gatherer of information, not an Immaculate hero or back-alley brawler, and she has little desire to risk death at the hands of the Anathema. But for all that, she is still a Dynast, still a power with which to be reckoned, and if she must fight, she does so without hesitation or mercy. She has no long-duration combat Charms, so she can go straight to the business of killing without powering up first. When fighting more powerful opponents, Vakim uses clinches and holds, bolstered by Drowning Embrace or Bonds of Unbreakable Ice Technique, trying to pin the enemy so that her allies can then attack it with impunity. Against mortals or less powerful creatures such as the Fair Folk, she simply beats them to death with Nighthammer and Fist-Spinning Maelstrom.



If faced with multiple opponents, Vakim uses her Bloodtide Kraken Stance or pulls back to snipe with her bow and Spring Follows Winter (and readies herself to escape the battle before she risks further danger).

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 3B Defense 9 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 4 Accuracy 8 Damage 6B Defense 4 Rate 3

Jade Smashfist (Nighthammer): Speed 7 Accuracy 8 Damage 8L Defense 10 Rate 7

Dodge Pool: 8

CYNIS IMAZA, CHALCEDONY MASK

Description: The Exalted do not scar or bear the marks of old injury; the Cynis are always beautiful to behold, never twisted or ugly. Everyone knows these things to be true. Everyone but Cynis Imaza, the spellburnt, the outcast, the man behind the Chalcedony Mask.

Sixty years ago, Cynis Imaza was a beautiful teenager ripe with sexual promise. His wealthy family put on a celebration for his 14th birthday, complete with a display of sorcery by his uncle Cynis Ebor Damen. But Damen's sorcerous skills were less polished than he had promised, and he lost control of a summoned courtesan demon. As the demon approached Imaza, Damen dismissed it with Emerald Circle Banishment, never thinking of the consequences. Magic shattered like glass and fire, and Imaza was consumed by the play of broken energies. The stress caused him to Exalt there and then, which saved his life — and left him with permanent, hideous scars and burns all over his face and upper body, permeated with magical residue that prevented healing.

From being the golden child, Imaza suddenly became an ugly embarrassment to his house, and he was shunted into seclusion while his elders tried to forget he existed. With no company but blind and mute servants, Imaza became twisted and ugly inside and out, hating his family for abandoning him and hating his own twisted body. The one thing he didn't blame was sorcery itself; it was a tool his uncle has used foolishly, but a tool a wiser Exalt could use properly. When his family finally acknowledged his existence, he asked them to let him join the Heptagram and study sorcery, and they agreed simply to get rid of him.

Fifty years later, Imaza emerged from the Heptagram a master of the most violent spells of Terrestrial Sorcery, his scars hidden behind a mask of petrified wood and crystal bearing a scowling, demonic face. The first thing he did was challenge, defeat and kill his uncle in a duel of sorcery, after which he struck out as a mercenary, developing a reputation as the brutal and deadly Chalcedony Mask. Two years ago, he registered with the Office of Harmony — not because he wants to protect the empire, but because he wants an excuse to kill. His scars still bleed and itch behind his mask, and the hate he feels for the



world has never died away. Only flexing his magic to destroy beauty eases his pain and hate for a moment — and to wipe away the breathtaking and forbidden beauty of the Anathema is the closest he can ever come to real pleasure.

Rank in the Wyld Hunt: Errant shikari, castigator

Aspect: Wood

Nature: Bravo

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

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

Abilities: Archery 2, Dodge 3, Endurance 3, Linguistics (Native: High Realm; Low Realm, Riverspeak, Skytongue) 3, Lore 4, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 3 (Poisons +1), Melee 4, Occult 4, Performance 2, Presence 3 (Intimidation +1), Resistance 3, Ride 3, Sail 2, Socialize 2, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Artifact 3, Backing (The Wyld Hunt) 2, Breeding 3, Command 1, Connections (The Heptagram) 2, Connections (House Cynis) 2, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 1, Connections (Outlaw) 2, Connections (The Threshold) 2, Manse 3, Reputation 2, Resources 3

Charms: Dragon-Graced Weapon, Dread Infection Strike, Elemental Bolt Attack, Elemental Burst Technique, Five-Dragon Fortitude, Infection-Banishing Prana, Ox-Body Technique (x2), Spirit-Detecting Mirror Technique, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery

Spells: Burning Eyes of the Offender, Death of Obsidian Butterflies, Internal Flame, Invulnerable Skin of

Bronze, Spirit Sword, Sprouting Shackles of Doom, Stormwind Rider

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 6 Damage 3B Defense 6

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 5 Damage 5B Defense 5

Exceptional Axe: Speed 9 Accuracy 9 Damage 9L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 7 **Soak:** 8L/8B (Exceptional breastplate, 6L/4B)

Willpower: 8 **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 3

Personal Essence: 14 **Peripheral Essence:** 29 (36)

Committed Essence: 7

Other Notes: Cynis Imaza bears no artifact weapons or armor and relies on mundane armaments. He does this in order to save his Essence for casting spells and for activating the artifacts he does possess. His gear is exceptional and has been further enhanced with the Ritual of Elemental Empowerment: His axe is faster due to the essence of air, and his armor gives more protection thanks to the element of earth. His most precious artifact is an elemental lens (see **Aspect Book: Air**, pp. 78-79), which he uses to enhance his aggressive Lore Charms. He is not able to maintain the lens' systems himself, however, and must periodically return it to the Imperial City for repairs. In addition, Imaza wears his trademark Chalcedony Mask, its fearsome visage carved from black jade and fossilized wood. The mask functions like a dragon tear tiara, and in its forehead is a key of mastery (see **Aspect Book: Air**, p. 75) attuned to the spell Internal Flame. Melded directly into the flesh of Imaza's throat, stark against the spellburnt scars, is a skin-mount amulet (see **Aspect Book: Earth**, p. 80) bearing a mind-cleansing gem (see **Caste Book: Twilight**, p. 77). This amulet adds 4 motes to his Peripheral Essence pool (already included above). Pymander Seven's blessing let Imaza regain a point of temporary Willpower the first time he casts a spell in a scene.

Most sorcerers summon demons and elementals to fight their battles, but Cynis Imaza is not like other sorcerers. His magic is his way of taking revenge on the world, and that revenge must be taken in person. He relishes combat and the chance to inflict pain on others and has more skill in battle than most expect of a savant or a Wood-aspected Exalt. When on a mission for the Office of Harmony, Imaza casts Invulnerable Skin of Bronze each morning. This costs 20 motes (which he recovers in full after an hour or less) and 1 Willpower and gives him a total soak of 14L/20B. Once combat is joined, Imaza casts Death of Obsidian Butterflies (if fighting multiple opponents) or Internal Flame (if facing a single, powerful enemy). When facing spirits or enemies with mundane weaponry, Imaza casts Spirit Sword and wades into melee. Because spell-casting requires so much Essence, Imaza rarely casts more than one

or two spells per engagement. Otherwise, he relies on his melee skills or attacks at range with Elemental Bolt Attack or Elemental Burst Technique.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 7 Damage 3B Defense 8 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 7 Damage 6B Defense 3 Rate 3

Exceptional Axe: Speed 11 Accuracy 10 Damage 9L Defense 7 Rate 2

Dodge Pool: 10

PYMANDER SEVEN

Description: There are two rules that every entity in Creation should obey: Don't fuck the wrong people, and don't fuck *with* the wrong people. Pymander Seven broke both of these rules when he conducted an affair with the goddess Yaksha Incandescent, who was simultaneously having an equally illicit affair with Pymander's superior in the Bureau of Destiny. When his forbidden dalliance with a spirit was discovered, that was bad enough; when he found that he was to be judged by the fellow Sidereal that he had cuckolded, Pymander realized that he had pushed his luck too damn far. Such was always his greatest flaw — in Pymander Seven the Great Curse of Hubris manifests as a degree of short-sightedness and casual arrogance more suited to the boy he was 800 years ago, not the experienced Exalt he is now.

Seven's punishment was better than he feared and worse than he might have hoped — he was to be sent to Creation as the pet astrologer of the Office of Harmony, there to direct the efforts of the Dragon-Blooded against the returning Solar Exalted. For a Sidereal who preferred the adventure of active field duties to the slow work of astrology, the punishment was frustration and boredom; for a Sidereal who considered the Terrestrial Exalted little better than attack dogs, the punishment was humiliation. Then again, at least he got to keep his head...

For three years, Pymander Seven has masqueraded as himself — or rather, as a middle-aged Immaculate savant and astrologer of the same name. It's a steady, dull position, channeling information back and forth between the Bronze Faction and the Office of Harmony, disguising himself as a mortal and not revealing his innate superiority to his alleged employers. Recently, Pymander has started straining at the leash of responsibility, sneaking from the Azimuth compound in search of distractions and adventure and accompanying Office of Harmony missions in disguise using one of his resplendent destinies. Meanwhile, he neglects to scour every last nuance and excess of data from the information he receives from the Bureau of Destiny. Cathak Setod is becoming increasingly unhappy with his astrologer's frequent leaves of absence, while Mnemon Kehav wonders how the mortal astrologer can cast more accurate horoscopes than she can manage to draw. Soon,





Pymander Seven may face a reckoning, from both his Sidereal superiors and the Dragon-Blooded he so badly underestimates — and when that reckoning comes, all his skill in combat and deceit may not save him from a bloody comeuppance.

When in disguise, Pymander Seven appears as a slightly tubby middle-aged mortal with an impressive moustache. His true appearance is as a more youthful but notably plumper man, still with the same moustache.

Caste: Secrets

Nature: Conniver

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

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

Abilities: Archery 2, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 3, Craft (Fate) 3, Dodge 2, Endurance 2, Investigation 3, Larceny 4, Linguistics (Native: Low Realm; High Realm, Old Realm, Riverspeak) 3, Lore 4, Martial Arts 5, Occult 4, Performance 3 (Prayers +1), Socialize 3, Stealth 5, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Acquaintances 3, Artifact 5, Backing (Gold Faction) 3, Celestial Manse 3, Connections (The Bureau of Destiny) 3, Connections (The Dragon-Blooded) 2, Connections (The Forbidding Manse of Ivy) 3, Connections (The Immaculate Order) 2, Salary 3, Savant 3

Colleges: Mask 3, Quiver 2, Sorcerer 3, Spear 3, Sword 3

Charms: Blade of the Battle Maiden, Celestial Circle Sorcery, Conclusion-Pursuing Approach, Creation Smuggling Procedures, Death-Parrying Stroke, Efficient Secretary Technique, Flight of Mercury, Incite Decorum, Innocuous Maneuver, Joy in Adversity Stance, Life-Severing Blow, Mark of Exaltation, Metal Storm, Of the Shape of the World, Ox-Body Technique, Secrets of Future Strife, Sidereal Shell Games, Soft Presence Prac-

tice, Stern Essence Replenishment, Subordinate Inspiration Technique, Systematic Understanding of Everything, Terrestrial Circle Sorcery, Unweaving Method, Violet Bier of Sorrows Form, Walking Outside Fate

Spells: Cantata of Empty Voices, Emerald Countermagic, Infallible Messenger, Sorcerer's Irresistible Puppetry, Summoning the Heavenly Portal, Travel Without Distance

Combos:

Three Score Foretold Cuts (Cost: 2 motes per health level reduction + 2 motes per additional health level of damage + 3 motes per attack, 1 Willpower): Death-Parrying Stroke, Life-Severing Blow, Metal Storm — *Pymander Seven's sword throws off dozens of ghosts and shadows of gray-green Essence, each attacking from a different direction, each flickering and curving past defenses and armor to finally solidify within his opponent's flesh, each withdrawing to hover and defend against an attacker's stroke. Seven uses this Combo only if pressed. Once a blow does land, he will spend as much Essence as he can spare in the hopes of finishing his enemy with a single strike.*

Base Initiative: 8

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 9 Damage 3B Defense 9

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 8 Damage 5B Defense 8

Starmetal Reaver Daiklave (Faterazor): Speed 8 Accuracy 11 Damage 13L Defense 9

Dodge Pool: 6 **Soak:** 6L/6B (Silken armor, 5L/3B, counts as natural soak)

Willpower: 7 **Health Levels:** -0/-0/-1/-1/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 4

Personal Essence: 15 **Peripheral Essence:** 30 (41)

Committed Essence: 11

Other Notes: Pymander Seven wields Faterazor, a starmetal reaver daiklave set with a jewel of the rabbit's sword (see **Caste Book: Zenith**, p. 79). For protection, Seven wears silken armor (see **Caste Book: Eclipse**, pp. 80-81) richly adorned with astrological imagery and symbols, that nonetheless fades instantly from the memory of any who see him. A case carried under his robe contains four prayer strips for use with Sidereal astrology and Charms. He bears a blessing that lets him regain a point of temporary Willpower the first time he casts a spell in a scene.

Before entering combat, Pymander Seven uses (in order) Blade of the Battle Maiden (to gain four extra dice) and Joy in Adversity Stance. This takes two turns, costs 13 motes and 2 Willpower, adds four dice to his attacks and parries and gives him the chance to gain Essence every time he dodges or parries an attack. He then uses Sidereal Shell Games on his opponent (or the toughest member of a group of enemies) to steal +4 soak. Once combat is underway, Pymander fights defensively for the first few turns to gauge his opponent (and recover more Essence through Joy in Adversity Stance), using Death-Parrying

Stroke if he must. During this time, his base initiative is doubled, thanks to Secrets of Future Strife. Once his Essence pool is partially replenished, he goes on the offensive with Metal Storm or Life-Severing Blow, until finally unleashing his Three Score Foretold Cuts Combo. He only uses Violet Bier of Sorrows Form when fighting spirits, since most Exalts will continue to fight even with damaged Virtues. While he has mastered the Conclusion-Pursuing Approach, he uses it only when faced with a truly dangerous opponent, when combat is only about *survival* and not entertainment. In such a situation, he fixes a prayer strip to Faterazor, hoping to wear his enemy's will away and make her flee — or to gain enough time and energy to cast Travel Without Distance and escape with his life.

Pymander Seven is a Celestial Circle sorcerer, but his primary skill (other than swordplay) is as an astrologer. His influence over the Loom of Fate is his major contribution to the Office of Harmony (not to mention one of the reasons he was relegated to his position by his superiors). Over the years, he has cast horoscopes for himself and many of the Office of Harmony's shikari, as detailed in the "Sidereal Astrology Effects" sidebar on

p. 139. While creating effects to weaken the Office of Harmony's Exalted targets is difficult, he may make the attempt if he can gain enough information about the Exalts in question.

Pymander Seven has three resplendent destinies that he can assume at any time by spending a point of Willpower. He may appear as Ettin, a low-ranking soldier in the Office of Harmony's service (Spear, 2 effect points); as Sagan Vale, a mortal thaumaturge and Pymander Seven's current assistant (Sorcerer, 3 effect points); or as Watching the Horizon, an itinerant priest in the Cult of the Illuminated (Mask, 3 effect points). He uses these identities to gather information, to monitor the activities of the Office of Harmony or to make contact with an Exalted target to impose a Sidereal astrology effect.

EXALTED POWER COMBAT

Attack:

Punch: Speed 8 Accuracy 10 Damage 3B Defense 11 Rate 5

Kick: Speed 5 Accuracy 10 Damage 6B Defense 6 Rate 3

Starmetal Reaver Daiklave (Faterazor): Speed 15 Accuracy 12 Damage 14L Defense 9 Rate 4

Dodge Pool: 10



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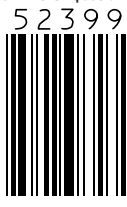
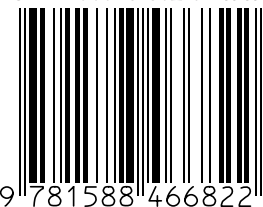
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