

Mind's Eye Theatre

LAW S

of the

Wild

CHANGING BREEDS: 4



A Supplement for Playing Nagah and Rokea

WEREWOLF  
IN APOCALYPSE

Mind's Eye Theatre  
LAWS  
of the  
Wild  
CHANGING BREEDS: 4<sup>th</sup>

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PRINTED IN THE USA.

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## By Way of Introduction

If you've already seen this because you own **Changing Breeds Book 1, 2** or **3**, you can head on over to what you're looking for. If this is your first outing with the Changing Breeds books, you'll want to pause and look at this.

Welcome to **Changing Breeds Book 4**, the fourth and final **Mind's Eye Theatre** supplement covering shapeshifters other than werewolves. Here are the secretive and cunning Nagah, whose mysteries alienate and strike fear in all the other changers. Here are the ferocious Rokea, who stalk the ocean depths — and the land — for prey. Here you'll also find notes that refer you to **Laws of the Wild**.

It's inevitable when putting together a supplemental book that something gets dropped along the way due to space or other considerations. In this case, a number of Nagah and Rokea effects are identical to Garou Gifts and systems. We figured it would be a bigger bang for your buck to offer new material rather than a rehash of material from a book you already have.

If you want to get the most out of this book, you'll need **Laws of the Wild** to assist with basic character creation, definitions of some Gifts, and to provide a framework for the inhabitants' cosmology.

# CHAPTER ONE: NAGAH

## *The Hidden Judges*

Come, my handsome little Opening Eye, arise! There is much work to be done today. There we are... go on, take a moment to shake the sleep from your mind. Welcome, young one, to my home. How did you get here? You were delivered to me by the ones that found you. Do not worry. Just like you and just like them, I am Nagah. In fact, I have been chosen for the honor of being your sponsor. You might as well get used to my presence, since I will be the most important woman in your life for the next year or so.

Of course, you already know what you are, since you were told by the others before they delivered you to me in restful slumber. You are a Nagah, one of the wereserpent breed. But you do not yet *understand* what it is you are, and it is my duty to relieve you of your ignorance. Ours is a noble race, one with a long and, I am very sad to say, at times sordid history. All you need to know will be revealed to you, young one, as it must be.

For now, you may take some time to rest and eat before we begin. You will find refreshment here in my Ananta if you but take the time to look. I imagine you are disoriented by the long trip you have taken in your sleep, so there is no need for us to rush into your tutelage just yet.

Hmm? You wish to begin now? My handsome little Opening Eye, you make me smile. Such dedication will serve you well as one of the Judges of Devi.

## *The Tale of Creation*

First of all, we should get introductions out of the way. I am Lengthening-Knife, a vasuki kamakshi, and on the occasions that I walk among humans I

go by the name of Tesya. These words mean little to you as yet, I understand, and I will more fully explain their meaning to you later. For now, know that being a vasuki means that I entered this world thinking myself an ordinary serpent, much as you thought yourself an ordinary young human male up until a few days ago. For me, of course, that was many, many years ago, and now I have grown accustomed to all the different forms that we Nagah have been gifted by the Three Mothers.

I do not look so old, do I? Perhaps eight or nine years older than you, if you were to judge with your eyes. I assure you, however, that I was born well before the middle of the last century. The ability to defy aging, at least for a time, is one of the many boons given to the most experienced of our kind. It is a blessing that has served me well, as you can no doubt see. But that can wait until later as well.

My title is Silver Coil, just as yours is Opening Eye. This means that I have lived long enough and performed my duties with sufficient diligence to earn the honor of being counted among the most elder and respected of the Nagah. Of course, it is little more than a title. You will find soon enough that we Nagah are much less concerned with such niceties than are the other shapeshifters. We are more interested in matters of expertise and experience. But again, that can wait until later.

What's that? Ah, yes, there are other shapeshifters aside from the Nagah, young one. There are many different Changing Breeds that populate the world. Not as many as there used to be, mind you, but enough to make our jobs difficult. Be patient and I will explain the Khurah — our name for the other Changing Breeds — and our role among them momentarily.

No doubt, you are very curious about how our race came to be. I will have to ask you to keep an open mind as I relate the tale of the world's beginnings, for it will seem to be nonsense to you, thanks to the thorough and painstaking efforts made to brainwash you by your human schools. The nonsense is actually found in what you have already learned. Your greatest task in the next few months will be to unlearn the lies you presently believe.

Before the world's birth, existence was as a great Nothing. No, it was less than nothing. It was a primal void that cannot be described as even emptiness, since emptiness at least insinuates space and that, too, was lacking. Human words are not sufficient to provide description for such a thing. Eventually, Chaos found its way into this great Nothing, and for a time Chaos was all there was. Just like the great Nothing, she defied definition, but unlike the great Nothing she could at least be described as something. She filled the void through her primal undefinition, and suddenly the universe knew creation.

Chaos forged with her very unpredictable and erratic nature, but her creations never lasted. Chaos could not preserve, even if she wanted to. But after a time that may have been minutes and may have been millennia (for time was not yet properly shaped into the thing we have come to understand it to

be), Chaos created something that stayed, and could provide stability to her other creations. This thing was the Preserver.

The Preserver went about spinning the creations of Chaos into things of Order, as was his nature. He did so for quite some time. Reality as we know it is vast, but it is still very finite. Eventually it was filled through the combined efforts of Chaos and the Preserver. There was nothing left to preserve, and no room left in which Chaos could create without conflict. At first, that didn't bother the Preserver at all, for he felt he had finally completed his task.

But then, Chaos created again, for it was in her nature to do so. Reality had been filled, so in the act of creating, Chaos caused something that already was to cease being. This event was a first; it had never happened before. The very act caused Chaos to create something that was completely unforeseen: destruction.

Just as the Preserver before it, the Destroyer had been born. It provided badly needed balance between creation and order by destroying the things the Preserver gave stability to when their time had come to move on. Unfortunately, the very act that gave the forces balance caused the first signs of the great future conflict to appear. While the Preserver enjoyed the extra space with which to preserve more creations, he also hated losing patterns of which he had grown fond.

At first the Preserver ignored his new sibling, content to simply continue working to save the patterns that Chaos brought into being. He tried to create patterns that could not be destroyed, finding more durable and longer lasting things to weave. This was an exercise in futility, since it was given to the Destroyer the power to destroy anything it came across. Some forms and patterns the Preserver favored over others, so that when the Destroyer removed them from existence he was greatly angered and frustrated. He grew bitter in his resentment toward his sibling.

It should be noted that it was during this time in prehistory that Devi, what most Khurah refer to as Gaia or the Emerald Mother, was established in her part of the universe. The very spirit of the world we live in, Devi arguably remains the greatest and most powerful of the creations of Chaos. In my mind, she is by far the most beautiful.

If the Preserver could not stop the Destroyer, he began to reason that perhaps he could at least direct the Destroyer and control its acts. After all, the Preserver had, for time beyond comprehension, redesigned the creations of Chaos to his will, thereby controlling all that was. He had to be able to maintain this absolute control. It became a goal as driving as it was maddening.

So it was that, armed with this plan produced from flawed reason and errant logic, the Preserver attempted to force his order upon the Destroyer. Fulfilling its nature, the Destroyer instinctively attempted to obliterate the Preserver's control over it so that it could be free again. For the first time in the existence of the universe, there was true, direct conflict of equals. It was a battle of the most terrible kind. Simple minds like ours cannot understand the full,



cosmic scope of it, nor of the impossibility inherent in its very nature. The Preserver had absolute control over order, while the Destroyer had absolute mastery of annihilation. For such a terrible struggle, there could be no simple resolution — no matter how badly the universe needed one.

It took quite some time for the primal forces to admit a mutual defeat, realize that there could be no victor and that the struggle itself was futile. They ripped themselves apart, and in doing so inadvertently created two new forces.

The first was the Corrupter. Birthed from a wounded fragment of the Destroyer, the Corrupter was a dark reflection of its parent. It did not destroy things properly and wholly as the Destroyer could, but eroded and twisted them, granting an unwholesome state of death-in-life. The Corrupter's overall goal was then, and still remains, the ultimate degradation of the universe. It is the Corrupter's influence that is the greatest contributor to the woes and misfortunes of the Kali Yuga, the dark age of destruction in which the world currently resides.

The second force that was formed from the “resolution” of the cataclysmic struggle was the dark reflection of the Preserver, which we call the Trapper. While the Preserver provided healthy duration, his dark, unwanted offspring instead provided an unnatural stasis that prevented any sort of change. The Trapper ultimately sought — and seeks — to bring the cycle of the universe to a halt so that the things to which it provides stasis can never be destroyed.

It is this cosmic conflict that drives reality, young one, though it is a conflict so vast that we can only begin to comprehend it. The names we give these great beings are simply labels that are far too small to truly reflect the scope of the powers and natures in question. While we can attempt to describe them in terms of either primal forces or independent beings, they are in fact both of these things and neither. But do not worry yourself with this, young one. As long as you can understand as much of the matter as your mind will allow, that will be enough for us to continue.

Should we stop and take a break for a moment? No?

Good. You continue to please me, my studious little serpent. Now the stage is set to speak of our creation.

### *From Inauspicious Beginnings*

When Devi first formed the interconnected pattern of life that makes up what we generally consider the most important parts of the universe, she created beings to act as stewards to oversee and guide the life forms that showed the greatest potential. Of these stewards, she first formed the Mokolé to help her remember her later creations, as well as to remember those that worked and those that did not. So it was that the Memory of Devi was made, the first of those creatures that have come to be known as the Changing Breeds.

Understand that this was a much different time, young one, and it was a much different world. The realms of matter and spirit were not separate as they

are now. One was very nearly identical to the other, and in those few places where they were separate, it was but the flimsiest barrier imaginable. The mighty Dragon Kings ruled as the greatest spirits over all, a personified mixture of primal forces and animal spirits. Their subjects trembled at their approach, and those who angered them were turned to ash before their fiery might or crushed beneath their powerful limbs.

Then it came to pass that the natural order was sadly wiped out by the great conflict between the Preserver and the Destroyer. The Dragon Kings disappeared from this world to another, no longer able to guide the creatures they formerly ruled. The Scaled Courts fell in prominence as the Furred and Feathered Courts grew more powerful to fill the void. Times were fast changing, and Devi realized that they demanded new races to continue her work. After memory, she would need enforcers, strong older brothers to ensure that their younger siblings could be kept in check. These guardians were granted the power and duty to punish those younger brothers and sisters who were foolish enough to stray from the path they were rightly given.

Of course, Sun wanted the Mokolé for this task, but the Mokolé felt burdened enough already with the vast memory they had to bear, and their separation from the world was undeniable. So, Devi looked to other species of beast to take up the task, but few among them were suitable. Every creature she thought might be fitting, she would present to Sun for his blessing. Without exception, those creatures she presented met with his disapproval — they were either too much like his favored Mokolé or not nearly enough like them. I would not be exaggerating were I to say that he was most stubborn about the entire matter. I can only imagine Devi's frustration with him.

In her wisdom, Devi eventually came to choose snake as her bringers of punishment, regardless of Sun's objections. Sadly, however, she knew that without the blessings of powerful spirits such as Sun, snake would lack the strength necessary to perform what would undoubtedly be a very daunting and demanding task. It was at this point, while Sun was off sulking at having been ignored, that Moon first saw this strange creature that was snake. Moon knew Devi wished to make snake's brood into her chosen judges, so she spoke to Devi, offering to bless the creature herself. Devi sensibly accepted.

Unfortunately, at the time Moon saw snake, snake was resting in a river. It looked quite natural there, so Moon had no idea that snake was actually a land creature. Because of this, the Nagah's granted ability to enter the world of spirits would only function when it was in its water realm, its Ananta.

River, too, was watching, and she wished to offer her blessing to this new creature. She knew more of snake than Moon did, understanding that although snake enjoyed the water, it was not completely at home there. She touched snake and promised that snake's brood would never drown. In this way, Earth, Moon and River became our three mothers.

Though these blessings of our beloved Three Mothers were great, even they would not be enough. Ours was a job as difficult as it was important, and as yet we were not suited for the task even with the blessings of Moon and River. It was most fortunate for us that Typhon, the great Dragon King of Storms, spoke to Devi, saying that he would grant snake his blessing as well. Devi knew that with mighty Typhon's patronage we would be in good hands. It was enough, and at last the Nagah came into being, ready to perform their duties to the Three Mothers and their spirit patrons among the Dragon Kings.

The Nagah first went to the mighty Wani in their realm of Xi Wang Chi, so that they could be properly instructed. The Wani were mighty beings of storm and chaos, but also of terrifying intellectual focus. They taught the Nagah to be venomous and deadly and fierce.

To this day, we always remember that our venom is a badge of honor, a sign of the sacred trust that was shown to us by the Wani in those first days. This does not mean it is our primary tool, for the Wani also taught us that only the most foolish or unskilled killer relies entirely on his poison to do his work for him. The most skilled and cunning among us, in fact, are capable of performing our duties without this great gift should we need to. In the coming year while I am your sponsor, I expect you to make great effort in learning the lessons of subtlety and stealth that I teach you. Do you understand? It is on these skills that we rely, young one, not our venom.

Once we Nagah had learned what the Wani wished us to learn, our kind settled in the part of the world that is now known as India. From there, we spread out over the rest of the face of Devi, as was required of us by our duties. In order to properly watch over and punish our brothers among the Khurah, we had to be wherever they chose to be. But the seat of Nagah power nevertheless remained always in India. Even today, we are more powerful there than anywhere else.

### *The Impergium*

It came to pass that the Garou, our wolf brothers among the Khurah, decided to take it upon themselves to cull the human herd. They claimed it was to keep the humans in check, but this was in truth the duty rightfully given to the Ratkin, and only the Ratkin were blessed with the necessary wisdom to perform such a task properly. The Garou looked to the other Khurah for approval, but found none, for the other Khurah knew well that it was not the Garou's place to usurp another's role. The result was that the Garou grew quite sullen and snide at their disapproval.

Ever since his creation, brother wolf has always been the problem child among the shapeshifters. It is said that for every life of another Changing Breed we took as part of our duty to Devi, we would take the lives of three Garou. And despite this number, some today say that we were too lenient with the wayward Fangs of Devi, that perhaps had we been just a little harsher and more thorough

in our work we could have averted later disasters. But a wise Nagah must also remember that this was a time long before we had the laws of the Sessa set down to guide our judgment. Besides, it is not truly my place to say for certain what might have happened had we as a race done other than we did, and attempting such suppositions is futile. Our role is to act, young one, not to spend our time contemplating possibilities that never came to pass.

We Nagah numbered among the Changing Breeds that objected most to this self-appointed mission to cull the human herd. Not only because it had nothing to do with the appointed duty given to the Garou, but also because we had grown to greatly enjoy our interactions with humans. In India, especially, we had come to be known as wise advisors and mystics. The humans in power in those lands respected us and valued our advice above all others. We helped develop the arts of music and dance, sharing these precious gifts with those whom we chose to befriend, and by doing so helped direct human culture.

Even in those days, our role as Devi's judges and punishers was not entirely understood by our brothers and sisters among the Khurah. We were often called the "Dancers of Devi," viewed as hedonists and dandies. We didn't mind the derision, since the ignorance it fostered helped us perform our duties all the better. Indeed, in these modern times, not only is our role as mysterious as it ever was, but our very existence is unknown to all but the shapeshifters of the Beast Courts: the Hengeyokai of the Far East, which is called the Middle Kingdom.

Still, despite our objections, we knew that our place as the subtle judges of Devi did not allow us to overtly interfere in the others doings. When a Garou overstepped his bounds and committed great atrocities against the human populace, especially if any of our kinfolk were harmed, we would punish him. Otherwise, we would leave them alone. It could not be any other way, my studious little serpent. We would not allow the favor we felt toward humankind to deter our properly ordained duty.

## *The Age of the Serpent Kings*

Our interactions with humanity and the deep respect they held for us allowed us to help guide their path to some extent. That was especially true in our homeland India, where we could be so bold as to live openly with our closest associates. Even in those days, most of the Changing Breeds hid their true natures from the humans they lived among. In our case, it was entirely unnecessary. It wasn't long before we assumed the two highest castes of Indian culture, the Brahmin priests and the Kshatriya warriors, and after a time we became the rulers of that great, ancient nation. But I will speak more of how that came to pass in a moment.

Many among the Khurah, most notably the Garou who had their Impergium well under way, disapproved of our deep involvement with humanity. They wagged their wolfish fingers at us, saying that the role we took among the humans interfered with our duty to Devi. And in saying that, they suddenly

realized that they in fact had no idea what exactly it was we were ordained by Devi to do. We knew that our hearts were true, and we would not let the Garou or others among the Khurah set Nagah policy, especially in something we found so rewarding. The Garou grumbled, but let us be. As for wondering about our duties, we were content to let the Khurah remain ignorant.

### *Kala, the First King*

When the first Nagah went to Xi Wang Chi to learn from the Wani, there was one among them called Kala who was most favored by the great Dragon Kings. The other Nagah looked to Kala as their unofficial leader, for he was the wisest and most skilled of his time. He still remains one of the greatest Nagah to ever spend time on this world. He did not wish to be a leader. He would give his advice freely to those who sought it, of course, but he did everything he could to avoid being looked upon as a ruler.

That, in fact, may have been the deciding factor when his peers declared him the first king of the Nagah. It was a role he had to be dragged into almost by force, but he remains one of the wisest leaders of our history, a potent mystic and skilled assassin. His coronation also served to establish a precedent among our kind that would last for many generations: naming one among us as our ruler. Kala accomplished a great number of heroic tasks, the tales surrounding which Nagah still find inspirational despite their... *fantastic* elements. But of all the feats Kala accomplished, the one he will likely be most remembered for was leading us to the Indus valley. It is believed that Kala led a very long life before eventually performing the *Sanyassin* and becoming a recluse, disappearing from Nagah society forever. He was the first of us to embrace such a fate.

### *Silapidakaram*

Kala's successor, while not as legendary as his predecessor, was nevertheless a skilled leader in his own right. Silapidakaram had a reputation as a sensualist, a dancer and a masterful manipulator. Unlike Kala, Silapidakaram enjoyed his role and did his best to live up to the image of a Serpent King. One thing that can definitely be said for Silapidakaram is that of all the Nagah monarchs, he had the greatest vision for us as a race. He was instrumental in shaping Indian culture, and it was under his guidance that the Nagah reigned there. He ordered us to attain temporal power, and we did, by first charming our way into the bedrooms of the influential, then moving to the staterooms and finally into the halls of power themselves. It took a mere three generations for us to succeed in this task, becoming thoroughly insinuated into the ruling class.

Our actions frequently angered the Ratkin, however, whose duty as the Fires that Cleanse was to keep humans in check by any means necessary. They would often act against the same humans we diligently aided. According to our tales, such conflict led to clashes on many occasions, and it is no exaggeration that the resentment between our two people grew quite deep. There is no proof that we outright abused our position as the judges and punishers of Devi by putting the

Ratkin in their place, but it is undeniable that for a time we judged them somewhat more *harshly* than we judged other Khurah. Still, even in those times we refused to punish a Khurah, Ratkin or not, who was completely free of blame.

### *The Departure from the Homelands*

Our King Silapidakaram ordered us to flourish in the Indus valley, and so we did. India became a kingdom teeming with our kind; too many Nagah for one place by anyone's reckoning. To properly perform our duties, we had to be where the Khurah were. We had to watch over them as their stewards. It was clear that we were becoming too concentrated, too numerous in one place, and Silapidakaram decided that we needed to go abroad once again. He ordered a mass exodus, telling much of our race to find new homes.

Those of us so ordered left our homeland on the trails we knew the Khurah to use. We settled in lands as varied as the Middle East, Egypt, Crete, Australia, England and Ireland, and even took part in long, arduous journeys to the Pure Lands. Wherever the Khurah were found, there we made our homes. It was during this age that we truly became a race that called the entire world our home.

This decision would have been a very wise one for Silapidakaram to make. I say, "would have been." Unfortunately for us all, his decision was fated to be ill-timed, to the eternal sorrow of us all.

### *The War of Rage*

We now come to the tale of the greatest shame of the Nagah, my handsome Opening Eye. Failure and pain are both great teachers, and during this age we learned many a terrible lesson. Heed well what I am about to tell you, and know that it is no easy thing to speak of.

When brother wolf turned his fangs against his brothers and sisters during his war of arrogance and revenge, we were not exempt from his terrible wrath. Even with our numbers reduced, we were able to repel the Garou with few casualties in India, but Nagah in other parts of the world were not so lucky. Having spread ourselves out across the world under the guidance of Silapidakaram, we were ravaged, hunted down and torn to pieces as if we were the "Wyrms things" the Garou always howled about. Nagah are highly skilled assassins, but we are not inclined to open warfare as the Garou are. We value time and preparation to properly perform our duties. In fact, none of the others are inclined to open warfare as the Garou are. This was a hard lesson for us all to learn.

Many of the other Khurah eagerly leapt to fight the hated Garou under the banner of the suffering Gurahl, the werebears, and they made brave and dedicated warriors. Many Ratkin, Gurahl and Bastet claimed more than their fair share of Garou lives in that war. But they made armies of individuals, while the Garou were armies of packs. The losses suffered by the other Khurah far outnumbered those of the Garou. The Apis, Grondr, Gurahl and Ratkin probably suffered the greatest, with the Camazotz not far behind. Indeed, the Apis and Grondr would prove to be unable to save themselves from complete

extinction. The Camazotz would survive as a race for a while longer, until the discovery of the new world, before the last of them would fall before the claws and fangs of brother wolf.... But that is a story for another time.

During this terrible war, Nagah were among the most favored targets of the Garou. Whether it was because of our serpent-like forms, or because they thought we were too soft from our high living and artistic ways to put up much of a fight, I cannot say. When they came to seek our blood, however, we proved that a single Nagah is more than a match for a single Garou. If the Nagah is skilled and cunning enough, he can defeat many more.

The Garou swore that they would wipe all our kind off the face of the Earth, and they nearly made good on their promise. They used every cunning trick, every resource (including those both potent and modest), every ounce of strength they had. Spirit allies were sent after us. They crafted Fetishes designed specifically to help seek us out and bring us low. And, of course, there was their advantage of numbers. That was by far their most effective weapon.

Wherever we coexisted with the Garou, we were wiped out along with all our kin. Ireland is a good example. Even today, you won't find any of our kind there, so thorough were the Garou. Europe and Central Asia were hit extremely hard, since those were the centers of Garou power. Only the most remote islands, places that the Garou could not reach, were safe from their wrath.

It was a horrible time, young one, one of the darkest in the history of any shifting race. It served to embitter the Khurah against brother wolf, to divide the shifting races and, more often than not, to make them fear they would never recover. Even though the Garou were ostensibly the victors of this war, even the most prideful today would admit that it was a victory of the most hollow kind.

I spoke of pain and shame in this age, and now you know the pain of which I spoke. But, you ask, where lies the shame that Nagah feel in the outcome of this war? Were we not another victim of the terrible bloodlust of our brother wolf?

No, young one. We were not.

You see, our greatest shame is that the true blame for the war lies not with the Storms of the Apocalypse. Instead, it lies squarely on our shoulders. Listen, now, as you hear this terrible secret, one that is known only to the Nagah.

### *The Shame of the Serpent Kings*

The Serpent King Takshaka ruled many generations after our exodus, and according to the best of our accounts he served us well. Among the most favored and trusted lieutenants of Takshaka's court was a youthful Nagah of the Kshatriya auspice by the name of Vinata.

There is no doubt that Vinata was extremely good at what she did, possibly the most skilled assassin of her time. She had accumulated a number of kills, dwarfing those of even the most skilled of the Silver Coils of her time, despite her relatively young age. Those who knew her feared her greatly. Alas, she also hungered for power and suffered greatly from the vice of vanity.

Prior to the war, Vinata had been sent by the Serpent King Takshaka to consult with the Yamilka Crown — that is to say, the Nagah governors — of the Middle East. The king wished to know whether the Yamilka had enough Nagah to properly deal with their Khurah charges in that region, or whether they needed help with the Garou. Although the war had not begun and the very idea of it seemed almost alien to the children of Devi at the time, tensions nevertheless mounted.

It was a short meeting. After its conclusion, Vinata carried a message back to the Serpent King that yes, they did need help to act as was necessary. Unfortunately, the Corrupter had slowly worked at seducing Vinata for years, whispering sweet, honeyed promises of greatness and power should she merely do it a single task. The promises preyed upon Vinata's powerful pride. The Corrupter even vowed to give Vinata unequalled power, so great that she could enforce a lasting peace among the Khurah through fear alone. The Corrupter was relentless, and with every vision and assurance Vinata grew hungrier.

Then came the Corrupter's request.

When Vinata learned what it was this single, small favor would involve, it seemed to her like no great affair. She was told to hunt down and kill a lone Garou. Had she not taken the lives of countless Garou in the performance of her duties? What could so wrong about another? As she and her retinue reached the southern edge of the Caspian Sea, she took her leave of them and began a very long swim, promising to be back when she was able. Although she did not tell them why she left, they trusted her and did not question her motives. Her retinue could not know it at the time, but her destination was the opposite side of the sea.

The Garou she had been commanded to kill was a young member of the Silver Fangs tribe, an Ahroun warrior who went by the name of Petros the Unyielding. Petros was everything his tribe pretended to be, everything the Garou thought they were: noble, honorable, wise and courageous in battle. A prince, the son of one of that tribe's Russian rulers, he would have been a great ruler someday if he were given a chance. Indeed, he had been observed by the Nagah for signs of neglecting his duty, and was found to be beyond reproach. Truly a rare specimen for his race.

Ironically, Petros was in the midst of a mission to consult with another Garou on behalf of his father, much like the mission on which Vinata had been sent by Takshaka to consult with the Yamilka Crown, when Vinata caught him. She took the message he was to deliver and left his remains a mile from his intended destination — a barbarian camp led by a Silver Fang named Kostantos. The body was found not long after.

Kostantos was not on good terms with the prince's father. He knew that for Petros to die in his country would have been unforgivable. Kostantos was understandably afraid. Panicking, he quickly looked for a scapegoat for the crime. His eyes fell to the other Khurah. He laid the blame for the murder on



a young Bubasti Bastet who was unfortunate enough to live in the area. She was quickly slain, and yet Kostantos was unsure if it would be enough for the prince's father.

The barbarian general had heard rumors of the skills of the mysterious Gurahl. The chosen healers of Devi supposedly had the power to bring the dead back to life. Kostantos held no love for the other breeds, but he gathered his pack and sought out a group of Gurahl. He desperately held onto the hope that they would bring the noble prince back to this world.

Unfortunately, the ways of culture and diplomacy were not exactly Kostantos' strong suit. The Gurahl were as patient with him as they could manage, but his request quickly turned into a demand, which then turned into a threat. Still, the Gurahl rightly refused. It was not their place to hold the power of life and death over their brothers and sisters of the Khurah. Indeed, they were not about to share such a powerful rite with as wayward and foolish a race as the Garou.

I'm sure you're intelligent enough to guess what happened next, young one. After the encounter was over, only one of the Gurahl survived, the youngest of the group. Kostantos and his pack were all slain, too. It would only be a matter of time before other Garou would hear of the death of Kostantos. Though he was a fool and a savage, he was loved by his peers. They would no doubt seek revenge for his loss. Fearing for her safety, the lone survivor sought safety with a Grondr — a wereboar — whom she had previously befriended, and passed on her tale.

That Grondr told his fellows, and a meeting was called to discuss the Garou crime. The Grondr were furious, and demanded vengeance for their fallen allies. They allied themselves with other Gurahl and launched a counterstrike against the Garou. As is the way of such things, matters escalated.

By the time Vinata returned to Takshaka's court in Benares, the terrible War of Rage had begun in full. Thanks to Vinata's foolishness and betrayal, the world we lived in was forever altered.

Vinata was quite clever, of course, but even she made mistakes that other Nagah noticed. Her entire retinue could sense something was wrong with her, and when they returned they told Takshaka of their concerns. He, too, sensed something was wrong with his trusted lieutenant. She had become sullen and reclusive. The Corrupter had not made good on all of its promises. As is the Corrupter's wont, it lied. True, it had now come to value Vinata as its most favored servant and gifted her accordingly. It also told her, however, that she would have to perform yet another task if she wanted the rest of its promises made good.

Suspicious, Takshaka sent Vinata off on a mission of no consequence. While she was gone he searched her chambers. In her arrogance, she had neglected to cover her tracks. Takshaka found the letter she stole from the fallen Petros. The letter damned her and, in a way, the rest of the Nagah as well. It read:

*Kostantos,*

*You exceed your bounds. We have real foes, dangerous foes who deserve your rage far more than the other breeds. Unless you are unfairly attacked, cease hostilities.*

*— A.*

Had the message reached its destination, the war could have been averted and tensions in the area would have been relieved. Kostantos would have been bound to follow the orders of his liege. In this single, seemingly tiny act, Vinata had condemned the entire world to ruin.

Remember the name Vinata, but never again say it unless in telling this tale as a sponsor, as I do now. It is important that we learn of Vinata during this tale to avoid repeating her mistakes, but otherwise she is to be referred to only as, “She Whose Name Is Remembered But Never Spoken.” Such is the punishment of our greatest traitor, young one, that even her name is considered unclean.

### *The Fate of the Betrayer*

Takshaka was at a loss. His discovery was obviously unsettling, but he needed to know more of the matter. He sought out the Wani in Xi Wang Chi for much-needed advice on what he feared was a grave matter. The great Dragon Kings examined the letter and, quite concerned, summoned many of their wind- and cloud-spirit servants. Luckily these spirits had been witness to all of Vinata’s deeds and spoke of them in great detail. The realm of Xi Wang Chi boomed with the angry thunder of the Wani, the likes of which had not been heard for many ages.

When Vinata returned from her mission of no consequence, Takshaka welcomed her with open arms, as he would have a close friend. The physical manifestations of her corruption had become quite obvious by that time. She was darker and sharper in her features, practically radiating malice. Takshaka knew right away that, thanks to the Corrupter’s rewards, she had become much too powerful for him to confront alone.

The two walked the grounds of Takshaka’s palace for a time, talking of gossip and mundane matters as they often would in the past. But when they reached Takshaka’s grand hall, Vinata found that the Kaliya, the many-headed spirit of the Wani’s Vengeance, awaited her. She was unwise, but not stupid; she was immediately able to deduce what was happening.

Angered at what she perceived as a betrayal of the worst kind, Vinata turned to slay her ruler. Before she could strike, however, the Kaliya struck like lightning, spiriting her away to his cave in Xi Wang Chi to inflict unimaginable torment upon the traitor. A normal Nagah would have died within moments of suffering from such torture, but Vinata had become so powerful that it is said her screams could be heard echoing throughout the realm for decades before she finally died.

The Kaliya did not exactly save Takshaka's life, however. His inevitable death was merely prolonged by a handful of hours. The Garou were coming, and Takshaka knew it. He did what he could to prepare himself and his people. The Nagah King died the very next morning at the hands of the Garou when they entered Benares, the latest target in their war.

Nagah across the world grew afraid of the relentless, powerful and blood-thirsty foe that the Garou had suddenly become. For a time, we stopped communicating with one another, too intent on hiding and saving ourselves to manage anything else. There are many tales that we keep from that age, but all of them speak of the terror and death we saw and suffered. We became so scarce that our brothers and sisters among the Khurah — all save those among the Beast Courts of the Middle Kingdom — assumed we had become extinct. It was and still is an assumption we did our best to encourage. As far as the Garou were concerned, they had fulfilled their oath to wipe us from the face of Devi.

Our people divided and fearful, the dark age of the once-great Nagah race began. It was a terrible and humiliating time... and we had only ourselves to blame.

Take a moment to think about that, my handsome little Opening Eye.

### *The Founding of the Sessa*

There was a very old and very wise Nagah known to us by the name of Mandrorari Ma, who had been fortunate enough to survive the War of Rage. In the aftermath, she left her island of Sri Lanka to seek out others of her people. When she found them, she grew ashamed of what she saw.

We had become too scattered and afraid to perform the duties assigned to us by the Three. Some of our eldest and most respected members lived as scavengers, barely existing in the streets or in the wilderness. Things had reached such a shameful state that there were many Nagah who wouldn't even change from their Vasuki form for fear of being caught by the wolves. Mandrorari Ma knew something needed to be done.

She made a long journey to seek out the Wani in Xi Wang Chi; she was the first Nagah to do so in many years. She came to them hoping to receive aid in returning the Nagah to their former pride and glory, so that we could once again fulfill our charge. The Wani were tired, though. They had lost spirit over the actions of their favored children and simply wanted to be done with it all. They looked inside Mandrorari Ma's soul in hopes of finding a flaw that they could use as an excuse to destroy her utterly and end the matter then and there. All they found, though, was her legendary purity of spirit.

So, the Dragon Kings agreed to help us help ourselves, to provide us with the organization we needed so that we could better recover from the tragedy of our own doing. More importantly, they did all this so we could better police ourselves to avoid any other such tragedies. Should ever another like She Whose Name Is Remembered But Never Spoken be allowed to betray the Three again, I fear it would be too much for the world to bear. Pray that such a thing never comes to pass in your lifetime, young one.

The Wani set aside the great ocean waters of Xi Wang Chi to form what is now the Nandana. They sent spirits to gather nine great Nagah Silver Coils — three each from among the Balaram, Ahi and Vasuki breeds. Of course, Mandrorari Ma was included among them, the first to be chosen. These Nagah formed the first Sesha. To these nine was given the vast responsibility of guiding and governing our race, which would be their only function. Even today, as long as a Nagah holds a position within the Sesha, he remains in the Nandana and does not follow any callings beyond its borders. The Wani made certain to remind the Sesha of the sacred laws that the Nagah were always meant to uphold, many of which had been forgotten during our dark age. To better make that age past, the torment of She Whose Name Is Remembered But Never Spoken was finally ended, allowing her to die.

All this was done, and two new laws were added to this list the Wani gave us. The first was that we must never hunt alone. By having us organize into nests, we would be better able to watch for signs of corruption or injustice within our ranks. This first law was vital to our well being, as you can imagine. She Whose Name Is Remembered But Never Spoken was a painful example of just how easy it is for even as noble a race as ours to fall. But besides that, our numbers had diminished to so few that we needed to band together if we were to have any chance of fulfilling our Devi-given duties. Mind you, it still took some significant adjusting on our part.

The second of the new laws was arguably even more important: to preserve the secret of our survival. We had a duty to uphold, but we still had many enemies, all of whom outnumbered us. It was decided that the Nagah would have to act in secret, with even more subtlety and silence than we had prior to the war, so that our duties could be performed without the cost of our final extinction. Only in the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother in the Far East do we relax this law in the slightest. While all our laws are important, when operating in the western world this law is now first and most sacrosanct. You are expected to observe it always... under pain of death.

### *The War of Shame*

It should be pointed out that there were some places in the world that the War of Rage never touched — the lands of the Beast Courts of the Far East, for example. There, many of our kind had never even heard of the War of Rage, let alone suffered its consequences. The Nagah in those lands have their own tale of shame to bear, however, and some say it is even worse than ours.

The lands of the Orient are home to a breed of cunning hungry dead called the Wan Xian. The Nagah there fell prey to their manipulation. We are the most subtle of the changing breeds, but the Wan Xian showed a unique cunning that no Nagah could match. It is impossible to know exactly what it was that the Wan Xian said or did that caused our distant kind to judge our brothers and sisters among the Khurah improperly. That lore has been lost to time. The fact remains, however, that we did just that. None of the Khurah, save the Zhong Lung, were safe from our venom. The slightest flaw, the tiniest mistake was enough for us to condemn a victim to death; we became very good at finding such flaws. As time went on, we grew more bold. The concept of justice became of less and less importance. We killed to serve our own ends, not Devi.

We were hardest on the Nezumi, the Rat People of the Far East. After a time, they fought back; we entered into a conflict that left scores upon scores of corpses. This continued until, at long last, both sides simply grew too sick with the killing to continue. And all the while, the Wan Xian looked on their clever works and laughed. When we finally realized what had happened, it was too late. The damage had been done. We learned a hard lesson: Do not to trust the hungry dead. It is a shame that we could not have learned it sooner.

### *Brother Wolf Repeats His Crime*

I find it some small consolation, young one, to know that our brother wolf is capable of committing atrocities totally independent of our aid. This was proven when the Garou repeated their terrible mistake against their siblings among the Khurah.

The other shifting races, the ones that had survived at least, no longer dealt with the Garou out of fear of extinction. All of us knew that lacking the cooperation that Devi intended us to share, the world itself was in danger. When the New World was discovered, it provided all of us with another chance. New possibilities arose. The Garou could attempt to correct their mistakes by making peace rather than war with the Khurah that already lived there. We could, it was hoped, find harmony once again.

But the Garou made war once again, this time even against their own kind in the Pure Lands. They resumed their war against the other shifters, too, bringing some breeds such as the Camazotz into extinction. They worked very hard to finish the jobs that were left half-finished after the last war. It was a sad time, during which our influence was sorely needed.

We traveled to the Pure Lands and, in the course of performing our duties by punishing the Garou, we discovered we were already there. It seemed that many Nagah had traveled to the New World during our exodus from India in Silapidakaram's time and had fallen out of contact with us during our dark age. We had forgotten them, but they had not forgotten their duties. It was a comfort in this second awful war that we were able to renew ties with our relatives, and in doing so formed the youngest of our crowns, the Zuzeka.

## The Industrial Revolution

It is not our place to judge humanity, young one. We judge the Khurah and only the Khurah. For us to do anything else would be an affront to our responsibility. We resolved to remain firm in our convictions. Of course, that does not mean we did not waver now and again during such periods as the Industrial Revolution.

It was in this time that the Corrupter gained much of the strength it possesses today. For the Khurah, it seemed that the world was being brought to the very brink of destruction by the massive polluting machines that marred the once beautiful landscape. We had more perspective, but it nevertheless caused our anger to rise in our normally cool veins when factories polluted our sacred rivers. Our rivers! The very lifeblood of Devi, young one. I know of no human language that possesses the words to adequately describe how we felt upon discovering such a crime. Additionally, we witnessed the creation of new and dangerous servants of the Corrupter.

It was during this age that the latest of our sacred laws was founded, one that was as unprecedented as it was necessary: Strike against the Corrupter if the opportunity is true. To battle the Corrupter is a duty that more properly belongs to the Storms of the Apocalypse — the Garou — but the Industrial Revolution was the beginning of another dark age that continues to this day. The Sessa felt that things had reached a point that the Corrupter had become so strong, our indirect aid was required to rectify matters. They were correct. Striking at the Corrupter is not our primary function, and it is not an attempt to usurp the rightly given duty of the Garou. It is merely essential.

## World War One

Although this was a very important conflict for humanity and even for many shapeshifters, the “Great War” was merely a footnote in our own history. After all, this conflict was waged in Europe. We had a relatively small presence there. The conflict may have drawn others into it, but it left us mostly unscathed. I would not be surprised in the least if the war had come and gone before most Nagah had even heard of it.

## World War Two

The Second World War was a very different matter for us. It was much truer to its claim of being a global conflict, and the war spilled over into Nagah lands.

Again, it is not our place to deliver judgment upon humanity, but we were sorely tempted when we witnessed the thousands of innocents slain by humanity’s newest machines. I’ve learned that mankind doesn’t often need others’ help to commit great evils. May the Three forgive me for my disrespect, but sometimes I have to wonder what Devi was thinking when she made them with such a terribly destructive ingenuity.

Staying out of harm’s way wasn’t a problem for our kind. We had our Ananta, after all, so we could hide whenever necessary. No, the problem rested

solely in the temptation to intercede, which we resisted. Yet, it is obvious to me that those Khurah who did take part did so of their own accord, and often for very base motivations such as pleasure or glory. Unlike the humans of this conflict, we did judge those Khurah who took part in the war. Ruthlessly.

Then humanity's latest and most terrible weapon fell — the atomic bomb. I remember the time well, as well as the horror I felt at seeing the effect it had on both the physical and spirits worlds. The death and corruption it left in its wake... it seemed like the Apocalypse had finally come. I was still too young a Vasuki at the time, too ignorant of the ways of humanity to properly understand how such a thing could come to pass. When the second bomb fell, it only deepened my confusion and made me numb with horror. How a thinking being could be the cause of such ruin was nothing less than incomprehensible.

I am a much older and wiser Nagah now, young one. I have experienced much more of the world, and have spent many, many years among the humans. I would like to think that I understand their ways. But I still cannot understand those days, even after all these years. Truthfully, I don't think I ever will.

### *Vietnam*

This conflict involved far fewer Khurah than did the Second World War. In fact, had it not taken place in lands where Nagah are common, we likely would have passed it by without notice.

But it did take place in our lands, and more than that, it needed no help from the Khurah to make it a terrible war. It seemed humanity had learned lessons from its previous wars that caused the race to leap wholly into the bosom of the Corrupter. Napalm and shrapnel ravaged the landscape. The defenseless suffered horrible deaths. Children were raped and murdered. Things worse still became commonplace, and neither side was free of the blame.

No, it is not our place to judge humanity. But we *are* to strike against the Corrupter when the opportunity is true, and in this case so many of the humans on both sides worked as its agents — some knowingly, some not — that our hand might as well have been forced. We judged many humans at the time, and in doing so learned more of the Corrupter's tactics than we had in all the rest of our history combined.

### *The Fall of the Dark Lion*

After a time, the Sesha in their wisdom decided to compile a list of those among the Khurah who deserved judgment the most, those great villains of the Changing Breeds who required our priority and attention. It was a sensible thing to do, and many nests waited for this litany expecting that it would be filled with the names of terrible and powerful Garou.

Brother wolf did, indeed, take up more than his fair share. Of that there is no denying. But something that took many of us by surprise was the name at the top of the list, the first priority for our attention and judgment, was not a Garou but a Bastet, one of the werecats, Devi's eyes and keepers of secrets.

Black Tooth was a great Bastet warlord of the Simba tribe, a werelion. He had a lust for power to rival that of the greatest of tyrants, and quested for strength as an end in and of itself. The very storms were his to command, and few could stand against his might. He could have been a great servant of Devi, but instead he chose to turn against his fellow Khurah in conducting his own War of Rage against the Ajabas, the werehyenas. He held no formal allegiance with the Corrupter (nor, for that matter, to anyone but himself), but nevertheless served him in a less direct way.

Only a foolish assassin attempts a kill that is beyond her capabilities. Many nests wished very much to be the one to punish Black Tooth, but he was far too powerful for any but the most experienced among us. In the end, not one but two nests of our most renowned Silver Coils took it upon themselves to coordinate their efforts in bringing about his end.

For many weeks they planned and practiced, trying to come up with ways to nullify Black Tooth's many powers and to develop plans for every possible circumstance. In the end, just as they had finally finished and felt themselves ready, Black Tooth fell without the involvement of any Nagah. We unfortunately lack any reliable details, but it is believed that an alliance of African Khurah called the Ahadi were finally able to bring the dreaded killer low.

### *The Rakshasa King Awakens*

The most recent event to draw our collective attention was the strange storms that ravaged Bangladesh a few years ago. Even the Wani themselves took notice. You may remember hearing reports of great storms wreaking havoc on the area. Hear now the truth of what happened, a truth that you cannot find on any news broadcast.

An ancient Rakshasa king awoke from his slumber, the greatest and most terrible enemy of life to walk the Earth in ages. Some even thought it was Ravana himself, the first of the terrible undead devils. His awakening was preordained, however, as was his eventual defeat.

Three enlightened demon-warriors from the Far East arose to challenge the Rakshasa and stop his rampage. The battle was awe-inspiring. The storms the world saw were but the least of the phenomena that this clash of titans raised. The champions from the East used mighty dragons and great maelstroms to battle the powerful illusions the Rakshasa created. Whether the doing of these champions or a result of the battle, four suns shone above the battlefield as the barrier between the worlds of flesh and spirit was sundered.

Destiny foretold that the Rakshasa king would defeat two of the three demon warriors in the days-long battle, sundering their souls from this world, but the third, called the Dancing Dragon, would triumph. This was what the natural order intended, and it would have been this way but for the interference of a third party.

This intruder unleashed devastating explosions in the Penumbra, comparable to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which served to slay all three of the demon



warriors. The Rakshasa king was more durable and withstood the blasts, but not even he could withstand the gaze of the four suns, revealed when the explosions parted the cloud cover above. So, the Rakshasa king fell, and this third party stole the destiny that rightfully belonged to another.

We do not yet know the identity of this intruder, but the chance it took with the fate of the world is unforgivable. What if its efforts had failed? What if the Rakshasa king was left to devastate the world? Yes, we are investigating, and when we find the party responsible they can expect to be judged.

## The Life of a Serpent King

Now that you know something of what paths our race has taken in the past, it is time for you to learn where these paths have lead us. More than that, you must learn how you are expected to navigate your way within our society. Some of this I expect you already know at least somewhat, of course, but I am nothing if not thorough. I shall begin with a Nagah's youth, prior to the shedding of the First Skin.

Every Nagah has, to at least some degree, a troubled childhood. This is regardless of her breed. So it was with me, those many years ago when I was still slithering ignorantly across the landscape, and I imagine so it was with you among your human guardians. Balaram such as yourself find it quite difficult to relate to other children, and therefore suffer from a life filled with great loneliness. As a vasuki, I was constantly plagued with strong impulses that were too complex and too abstract for my still simple mind to wrap around. Those born as Ahi find themselves confused by their strange confines within the Ananta of their birth, and often have a hard time fully understanding, or for that matter even accepting, the lessons they are taught by their parents.

This all changes for us when we finally shed our First Skin, that enlightening, frightful moment in which we finally change forms for the first time. Even though we don't understand it until much later, the First Skin weighs on us in our early life like a great burden. It is also a necessary one, though.

Most of the supernatural world believes us dead. Nevertheless, we have more than our fair share of powerful enemies, even if most of them don't entirely understand our true nature. The First Skin protects our young Nagah against detection by those who would harm them. For as long as we wear it, we are indistinguishable in any way from an ordinary human or snake, even to supernatural powers of detection. Admittedly, this can make it somewhat difficult to keep track of our young, but we manage as we must.

When at last we escape from our First Skin, it is a frightening experience but also a refreshing one. For the Khurah, the first change is more often than not a violent occasion, full of blood and pain. Not so with us. To the Nagah, it is more of an awakening. The reality we had taken for granted expands before our eyes; we do not truly understand what is happening, and that scares us as

much as it captivates us. When we finally finish our transformation and the previously unnoticed choking burden of the First Skin has left us, we feel as if we have been born into a new, more vibrant and promising life. And with good reason, for that is exactly what has happened to us; our previous life seems as a sick state that we have finally healed from. More than anything else, it is a relief... a true rebirth, with everything that word suggests.

## Breeds

Like many of the Changing Breeds, there are three breeds from which a Nagah can be born. I find this very appropriate, as three is a very sacred number to us. Humans come to think of balance in terms of pairs. Yin and yang. White and black. Good and evil. But this is not the way of things, young one. In truth, balance comes in threes — humans so often neglect the center in assessing the world around them. I think it is this inherent flaw in their logic, one that seems so ingrained in their thinking processes, that causes of much of their troubles. But once again, I digress; let me return to the topic at hand.

## The Balaram

The human-born Nagah are called balaram. You are no doubt quite familiar with the life of a balaram; do not think yours was so unique, my studious little serpent. That is a human conceit, and though you were born as one, you are human no longer; you are now Nagah. As hard as it may be, you must learn to think as a Nagah.

During our Golden Age, our balaram stock was drawn from the ranks of nobility and grace. Alas, those days are with us no longer, and now our balaram stock can come from any social footing found in human culture. Of course, old habits sometimes die hard, so while we do not hold it against those Nagah who were born of lower standing, our strongest balaram bloodlines are still found within the borders of India and the Middle Kingdom.

Until the shedding of the First Skin, a balaram's life is a very lonely one. You may recall that your peers in school, and indeed even your teachers, were not entirely... shall we say... *comfortable* around you? This is because even though they did not understand it, they could somehow unconsciously sense the developing lethality of the serpent within you. Although this can be difficult, it is also a blessing in disguise. Outside of a Nagah's sponsor and nest, life is very lonely. Best to prepare for that loneliness early; it makes the transition from human to Nagah that much easier. And, of course, strong ties to anything can make an assassin's life most difficult....

It must be admitted that by anyone's standards, Nagah make less than ideal parents. Alas, even if our natures were different, it would still remain this way out of practical necessity. We do not involve ourselves in the lives of our balaram children, save to observe from afar as we wait the shedding of the First Skin. This is as much for the child's safety as for any other reason; the First Skin

protects the child from detection, but were we to be found constantly around what seemed to be a human, it would not take a cunning mind long to put two and two together. Secrecy is a fact of life among the Nagah, young one. Do not believe it made you any less wanted.

### Ahi

If the balaram were considered to make up the left hand of the Nagah and Vasuki the right, the ahi would be the center that provides balance to the other two breeds. An ahi is a Nagah born from a mating between two other Nagah. Other changing breeds call the child of such a mating a Metis, and such children are always sterile, in addition to having to bear obvious physical or mental deformities. For these and other reasons, being born a Metis is a mark of shame with most such changing breeds. For the ahi of the Nagah, it is quite different indeed.

An ahi is not predestined to bear deformities of any kind, nor are they sterile; an ahi is just as able to produce offspring as any other breed. We do not force our ahi to bear any mark of shame, as we see them as a vital part of our race. The ahi help draw together the balaram and vasuki breeds, providing a bridge between our often conflicting viewpoints so that we may exist in a more unified, balanced state.

It is as common for nestmates to be lovers as it is uncommon for Nagah from two different nests to be particularly close. Because of this, the vast majority of Ahi are the product of pairings between two Nagah of the same nest. The mother of an ahi always knows when she is expecting, a blessing from the Three Mothers to allow her to prepare for the considerable changes an ahi's birth brings. If the child is not destined to be an ahi, then the Rite of Bearing — one of our mystic Samskara — allows the mother to choose which race she wishes her child to be born into.

The birth of an ahi is no small matter. Unlike the balaram, an ahi cannot be left in the care of kinfolk, nor can it be left to fend for itself as a vasuki can. An ahi requires a great deal of investment on the part of the mother and, more often than not, her nestmates. In the age of the Kali Yuga, no Nagah has a great deal of time on her hands, so the six month gestation period is a considerable while.

When an ahi is finally born, the blessed event takes place within the Serpent Waters, the mother's Ananta. It is also here that the ahi can expect to be raised, in seclusion far away from the prying eyes of our enemies; the Sacred Secret requires no less. Of course, prolonged, uninterrupted stays in the Umbra results in a physical being's form turning completely into spirit — an Ananta is no exception to this, so an ahi is brought to the physical world by her mother once each year, usually on her birthday, to keep her flesh alive. An ahi will reach maturity in about eight years, at which point she will shed her First Skin. At long last, she will be introduced to the one chosen to be her sponsor and begin her proper training. Such training is always much easier for

an ahi, and it is often little more than a formality, because the ahi are taught of the ways of the Nagah since their birth.

Though necessary, being raised in the world of spirit does not come without a significant price; having had no exposure to such things during their life, all ahi are quite sensitive to the toxins and pollutants of the physical world. It is a shame, but it is nevertheless the way things are. When compared to the Metis of other Changing Breeds, the ahi are still quite blessed.

### *Vasuki*

The vasuki are those Nagah who lived their first years as a venomous snake, no different to any natural or supernatural tests from other snakes, though perhaps just a bit smarter. As I mentioned, I am a vasuki myself, and like most of my peers I was born of the cobra stock. Those born of other types of snakes, such as vipers, adders and the like, were once considered to be among a lesser caste of Nagah, just as those Nagah who were born from those not of a royal bloodline were considered to be of a lesser caste than those who were born from among the royalty of India. This is no longer the case today, obviously, as we no longer have the numbers for such prejudices. I, for one, think we're better off for it.

Vasuki often have a very difficult time adapting to life as a Nagah, especially in this modern age. The obvious obstacles are coping with the social mores of humanity and the strange technology it has produced over the years. Computers are my particular weakness, I fear, and may never be within my grasp, though I have forced myself over the years to learn how to drive a car adequately enough — still a daunting task that required many years of effort, I can assure you. Technology is not, however, the only obstacle to our adaptation. There are other challenges that may seem immediately obvious to you, young one, such walking on two legs. It was many years before I trusted my ability to travel in such a way, and it still occasionally feels precarious to me.

As you can no doubt imagine, young one, properly training a vasuki to make her able to operate in the modern world can be quite an investment, but such investments are worth it. We vasuki are the most spiritually potent of all the breeds, and are very practical — even by Nagah standards. We are far more snake than human. Most of us prefer the solitude we knew in our prior life to the sociable life so many humans, and even human-born balaram, seem to need. Of course, vasuki are no more or less important than either of the other two breeds; all three are needed for our race to have the proper balance.

### *Auspices*

All of the shifting races have auspices or their equivalent. Which auspice a shapeshifter becomes usually depends on the circumstances surrounding her birth. An auspice influences everything a shapeshifter does throughout her life. Nagah are not much different in this regard; we are all given to certain

impulses and philosophies depending upon our auspice. The auspices of the Nagah, however, are determined not by the phase of the moon during our birth, as it is with our Garou brothers and sisters. Instead, it is the season of our birth that gives us our birthrights.

Most Khurah see each of their auspices as having different roles in society. This is another point where we differ from the Khurah; all Nagah have the same duties, the same role to fulfill. Our auspice simply influences how we go about fulfilling that role.

Nagah almost always shed their First Skin during the season of their birth, and it is considered to be unlucky for it to happen at any other time. I have heard many tragic tales of Nagah who shed their First Skin in another season, tales that involve madness and sometimes even worse. To be fair, however, in my many years in this life, of the Nagah I have encountered who were so unfortunate as to have shed their First Skin outside of their proper season, never have I met one who so suffered. As a result, I remain skeptical as to the truth behind such tales, though I recognize that their anecdotal power is no less potent because of it.

### *The Birthing Seasons*

#### **Kamakshi**

Ah, the warming of the world, the rebirth of what was once old and tired, the arrival of the young: beautiful, vibrant Spring, the season of my own birth and first change. We are called the Kamakshi, and it is of the Kamakshi that I shall speak first.

A typical Kamakshi tends to be very active and full of energy, at least by Nagah standards. You may think me a bit outgoing for one of the serpent-born, and this is true; this tendency can be attributed to my auspice's influence. It is no question that had your sponsor been Kamsa, you would have been greeted in a much different manner than the way I greeted you. Perhaps this would have been more to your liking, my handsome little Opening Eye? Ah, but now I tease you again....

Like most Nagah of my auspice, I tend to enjoy being in the presence of the young of any race; even though you are no longer a child by human standards, young one, you may have noticed that I still cannot help but find your youth and naiveté refreshing. We have powers of life as well as the powers of killing, and often take pleasure in the healing of the ill. Truly, we are quite generous and kind, especially when compared to other Nagah. Of the four elements, the Kamakshi are considered to have an association with earth. The virtue we are blessed with is generosity, much like the bounty of the soil itself.

#### **Kartikeya**

As I have said before, as a whole Nagah are far from being a very emotional race; we tend to be cold-blooded by inclination as well as by nature. Among

all of the auspices, however, the Kartikeya tend to be the most impassioned; they are those Nagah born in the months of Summer.

Because of the passion they feel, the Kartikeya perhaps understand the ways of human emotion best of all Nagah. The powerful ebb and flow of passion and sentiment is theirs to bear, and their temper can be as hot as a desert in the season of their birth. A Kartikeya who has been brought to anger is a truly terrible thing to behold, as they have been gifted with great Rage to help them perform their duties. Vigor is their virtue.

No Nagah wears her heart on her sleeve, as the human saying goes, but the Kartikeya are able to come closer than any other auspice. At the very least, a Kartikeya will often say openly what other Nagah would keep to themselves; at times an unpleasant tendency, but such unsparing honesty is also a necessary quality for a people who wish to continue growing. Unsurprisingly, Kartikeya are associated with the element of fire, which at once purifies and returns things to the cycle even as it consumes.

### **Kamsa**

It is during Autumn that the world cools down in preparation for the coming slumber; the Kamsa born during that season are likewise reserved by nature. Kamsa are possessed of sharp fangs and even sharper minds, and they use these gifts well in fulfilling their duties to the Three Mothers.

A Kamsa is driven in her duties by logic and introspection. While most Nagah are quite private to begin with, Kamsa can be downright reclusive at times. Of all the auspices, the Kamsa perhaps value what little solitude they are able to find more than anything. Matters of the mind have always fascinated Kamsa; they are always thirsting to know the hows and whys of things, especially involving the minds of their targets. Many will study their target's habits and motivations in such detail that they will come to know their targets better than their targets know themselves. When involving such matters, a Kamsa's nestmates would do well to heed her advice — it is seldom ill-considered and never offered hastily.

Of the four elements, Kamsa are considered to have an association with air, most particularly the chill breezes that herald the demise of summer and the approach of winter. It should come as no surprise to so astute a student as you, young one, that their virtue is insight.

### **Kali**

While the Kamsa of Autumn are cool and aloof, the Kali of Winter are downright icy, and view everything through the prism of this same chill. Of all the auspices, they are the furthest separated from the passionate emotions of humanity; even some human-born Nagah find their hearts and minds too alien and remote to truly understand. Cold is the only real word to describe them, and it applies to everything they do as well as how they do it.

It is a focused cold, however, one with a purpose. A Kali demands nothing less than excellence from herself. Where the other auspices might congratulate

themselves on a job well done, a Kali will instead seek to find all the errors that she and her nest made, so as to avoid those same mistakes in any future missions. A Kali is completely dedicated to her duties, and only a fool would question that devotion. I can tell that you, my studious little serpent, are a Kali; your drive to excellence, your desire to excel and learn everything you can even on this very first day of your studies marks you as one born of the Winter auspice.

Obviously, there are very few vasuki born of the Kali auspice. Winter is not a very ideal time for snakes to give birth, and it would be unfair to expect our kinfolk to do otherwise simply for our benefit. The element of the Kali is water, be it frozen in contemplation or flowing in pursuit of its goal. Their virtue is the clarity that so often comes with such cold hearts.

### *From Fangs to Tail*

More than any of our brothers and sisters among the Khurah, we Nagah are a society of strident individualists. Snakes are not social creatures, like wolves or ravens. Snakes live most of their lives alone, and prefer it that way. The urge for privacy and solitude remains strong in the most social among us. Violating this privacy is one sure way to anger even our most even-tempered members. Still, the blood of the serpent mixes with the blood of mankind to make Nagah. Unlike snakes, humans are extremely social creatures, thus we are not entirely reclusive and antisocial. This is a good thing, since I do not think that we would be capable of working together and organizing ourselves as is necessary in this age were it otherwise.

At any point in time, there are 27 Nagah throughout the world of flesh and the spirit world bordering it whose primary function is to govern the rest of us. Our sacred number is three, as I have already said, so it seems quite fitting to me that our rulers would number three, times three, times three. This may seem like a small number to you, and it is; other Changing Breeds could never manage to achieve the quality of organization we have with so few leaders. Each nest is self-sufficient, however, and given a great deal of autonomy in performing its tasks.

In most cases, the Crowns and the Sesha above them merely provide us with information, guidance and perspective. Only on rare occasions will they feel the need to intrude upon a nest's tasks and methods by giving orders, let alone directly interceding. You can be assured that on those occasions something very important is happening, even though it may seem otherwise innocuous. The perspective of the Sesha is much higher than that of you or me, my handsome little Opening Eye.

### *The Wani*

The first in our hierarchy are the Wani, sometimes called the Dragon Kings, other times the Lu Long or the Great Storms. The Wani do not presume to rule over us, though they could easily do so if they wished; instead, they take

it upon themselves to instruct and advise us as our patrons. Theirs is a wisdom great and ancient, and we never fail to heed that insight whenever they see fit to share it with us. On the very rare occasions in our history where they actually felt it necessary to directly intervene, circumstances were quite dire indeed. We serve them above all others save the Three Mothers, even though they are more lawgivers than governors to us.

Xi Wang Chi is the home of the Wani, a vast realm of great and terrible storms and oceans. This is a powerful realm in which even the strongest Nagah can survive only for short periods of time; prolonged stays are out of the question. There the Wani hold their courts with storm and wind spirits, and teach us our Gifts. Only the most suicidal would dare question their authority within that realm; if any have done it in our living memory, none lived to tell of it.

The Wani and their brood are the only spirits with whom we hold pacts. Originally, this was to keep us focused on our duties, to prevent us from becoming involved in the politics and power struggles of the spirits as the other Changing Breeds do. Now, however, it is to ensure the sanctity of our Sacred Secret. While a race as few in number as our own could always use more allies, if we have to limit ourselves, I cannot think of any ally I would rather have above the Wani. Their number is impossible to say for certain; some say there are but three Wani, others say there are a full 108. Their names are almost as mysterious as their number, and only the wisest sages among us might know of even a handful of the true names of the Wani. Even then, as beings of primal, focused chaos, who's to say that they still keep the names they once used many ages ago?

### *The Sesha*

Among the many titles the Sesha bear, first is the Voice of the Wani; this simple title says much in explaining their function and the way they conduct themselves. They are an almost-unworldly connection between the common Nagah such as myself and the Wani that we proudly serve. When the Wani choose to speak to us, it is to the Sesha and the Sesha alone. They are entrusted to guard the entrance into Xi Wang Chi, so that any who wish an audience with the Wani must first receive the permission of the Sesha. They are able to open gateways leading between Nandana and any Ananta they desire.

The Sesha number three threes: three balaram, three ahi and three vasuki, all of whom are chosen from among the greatest and wisest Silver Coils of their breed. Together they are able to achieve a balanced perspective on any problem at hand. Their seat of power is the Nandana, the great Ananta that was gifted to them upon the formation of the first Sesha by the Wani themselves. From there, they keep our sacred laws, decree punishments to both Khurah and Nagah who have earned their attention, and ensure that the different Crowns share important information by coordinating messenger spirits in service of the Wani.



The Sesha do not take part in any missions; being a Sesha requires a Nagah's complete attention and dedication. They do not even leave the Nandana during their terms. Before they can travel to either the physical world or into the Umbra proper, they must find a replacement to take their seat among the Sesha and then formally resign from their post. Of course, it is likely that the Sesha may sometimes make periodic, brief visits to the physical world for the same reasons a growing ahi does, but perhaps they have found another way to prevent their forms from becoming purely spirit. I am not so arrogant as to claim to know for certain.

### *The Crowns*

You asked of the Crowns earlier, my studious little serpent, and now it is time to enlighten you. The Crowns are our regional governing bodies, whose job it is to help coordinate and address the concerns of all the nests in a given region. In practice, they function much like the Sesha, save that they do so on a regional scale, watching over the material realm even as the Sesha watch over the spirit. Each Crown consists of a council of three wise and experienced Nagah.

The Sesha are based in the Nandana in the world of spirit, while the Crowns are based in the physical world. Like the Sesha above them, who can open gateways to any nest in the world, the Crowns also possess the power to open gateways to the Ananta of all the nests based within their region. The Crowns answer to the Sesha and, in a way, to one another other since they are obligated to keep one another informed of pertinent matters. It is always wise to consult with the Crown of a region you have just entered, especially if you are on a mission; you will find they frequently have information that could be vital to the task at hand. If nothing else, it is polite to announce yourself in this fashion. As I am sure you have seen, such graces go a long way in our society.

The Vritra Crown governs over the region of India and Asia, and is without a doubt the most powerful of the Crowns. The Yamilka Crown is quite powerful in its own right as well, and oversees the Middle East. Nemontana watches over Europe, and Jurlungur is the Crown of Australia and the South Pacific. The youngest Crown, the Zuzeka, is charged with overseeing the often-volatile region of the Americas.

### *Nests*

Originally, Nagah were granted the power to hunt and judge entirely on our own; many of us preferred it that way. That simpler time is gone, though. If there is one thing that the tale of She Whose Name Is Remembered But Never Spoken teaches, it is that even the most noble Nagah are not immune to corruption. We are not able to deal with all threats on our own. Now we must organize ourselves into nests, as much for the sake of policing ourselves as for our own safety. In truth, we have become accustomed to the practice over time in such a way that I think those who first instituted the practice out of desperation and necessity would be shocked.

It is our Nests that form the foundation, upon which the rest of Nagah society is based. A Nagah's nest becomes the most important thing in her life; so it will be with you as well, young one. While we still value our privacy when it is appropriate, our nests are otherwise constant companions. A Nagah's nestmates are at once her closest friends, family, comrades-in-arms and, as often as not, lovers.

Of course, an outsider could never tell that such closeness is shared between a nest. Our blood is cold, and it is rare for us to make overt gestures of fondness or even love; most of us don't even try. But deep inside we all know, young one. That unspoken bond can carry us through great hardship indeed. Every member of a nest knows with a complete certainty that her nestmates love her as they love themselves, if not more so; to lose a nestmate is to lose a vital part of yourself. It is a loss that at first you fear you can never fully recover from, and that even later leaves a tear in what was once a beautiful tapestry. Such a thing sometimes takes years of mourning to get over. Some Nagah are never quite able to manage it; pray that such a tragedy never befalls you.

Nests are very different in theme and spirit from the packs of the Garou or the other Changing Breeds. The primary idea behind our nests is for nestmates to help one another maintain a personal balance as we go about our duties. It is a sacred duty and a vital one, for each of us strive to maintain such a sacred balance. The shame is shared by the entire nest should one of us fall short. In essence, we are given the task of watching over our fellow Nagah for signs of imbalance, and trust our nestmates to do the same for us. It is this sacred obligation that allows us to perform the many and often terrible actions we must in our service to the Three Mothers, for we know that should we begin to stray toward the path of evil and injustice, our nestmates will be there to pull us back in time... or if we have gone too far, to put us out of our misery.

Some nests number a mere two, however the vast majority of nests consist of a full three Nagah; there are no nests that number greater than three, as we simply don't have enough Nagah to allow for such an extravagance. Additional Nagah moving into one nest's territory simply means that the newcomers must negotiate with the nest already in residence over the length of their visit or how the territory will be divided among them. Though we must report to the Crown and the Sesha above us, this is usually just a formality, albeit an important one. Nests are given a great deal of autonomy with which to judge and perform their duties, and only if a nest abuses this privilege will our governors interfere. We are the elder siblings among the Changing Breeds; it is not proper for us to be watched constantly like some foolish young. Rather, we are expected to show the responsibility required to be the ones doing the watching.

A nest is not usually tied to any specific location; we are nomadic, traveling wherever we must in order to perform our duties. Most nests will only settle in an area for such as necessary time to do what they can must before moving on, whether it be years or merely days. This freedom of movement is

often necessary to hunt particularly wily or paranoid targets; believe me, young one, I have been led on many a worldwide chase in my long days. Of course, all our moving around makes secure, reliable communication between our nests crucial; to this end, most nests communicate with each other through coded messages sent with spirits in service of the Wani.

### Sannyasin

There are those Nagah who choose to live alone rather than as part of a nest. These are mostly Nagah who have been crippled somehow, either physically or emotionally, to the point where it interferes with the proper performance of their duties. These Nagah we call Sannyasin. To become Sannyasin is to symbolically die, never to take part in Nagah society again. In fact, to declare herself Sannyasin, a Nagah must perform her own funeral rites. Such a Nagah is, of course, forbidden by our sacred laws to continue doing our work judging the Khurah; in these dark times, we can permit no Nagah to hunt alone.

Almost without exception, Sannyasin are hermits and ascetics, living in the wilderness dressed in rags, ashes, or scales. Most Nagah who choose this path, even many Balaram, will remain in their Vasuki form for the remainder of their existence on this world. It is always sad to see a Nagah choose the path of Sannyasin — we need every Nagah available to us, and most of those who have gone this way still possess wisdom that can benefit the rest of us.

It is their decision, however, and I for one will not hold it against them. We must always respect our elders, young one, even when we disagree with them. After all, there but for the grace of the Three Mothers and the Wani go any of us.

### Nagah Kinfolk

All our kinfolk, both of human and serpent blood, are very important to us, for they help ensure our very survival as a race. They are our eyes in places where we would otherwise be blind, our ears where we would otherwise be deaf. They look after our young, and sometimes even produce more Nagah for our cause. Out of necessity, however, we never become particularly close to our kinfolk, no matter how much we value them.

A Nagah's nest usually provides her with all the friendship and companionship she desires or needs. While we understand the value of having allies in the useful places and are more than capable of feigning friendship when it serves our ends, few Nagah maintain true friendships outside of their nest. Though we need them, kinfolk are no exception. This is a difficult decision to understand, especially for young balaram such as yourself, but it is not made out of cruelty — rather, quite the opposite. We must be distanced from our kinfolk because our very existence endangers them; the longer we associate with them; the more likely it becomes that they will be caught up in the worst parts of our lives.

If I were to choose a single word to describe our relations with our kinfolk, it would be “proper.” Those that know of our existence also know their place.

They do not allow themselves to interfere with our duties or interactions with our nest. When we require them to act as breeding stock, they nobly accept this necessary role. Likewise, we never abuse our kinfolk in any way. We go to great lengths to protect them from harm and see to it their needs are provided for when we can. Such is the arrangement that has come to be over the years.

Passion, or rather the lack thereof, is an obstacle for us. Instances where a Nagah loved her kinfolk mate are so rare as to be considered nearly legendary; love is something that we can only really feel for our nestmates. That does not mean, however, that we cannot honor and respect our kinfolk. A Nagah is expected to show both of these things in ample amounts to her kin mate. Although we do not feel such love ourselves, we do not begrudge it from our kin; when one of our balaram mates wishes love, he may take another human lover with our blessing, so long as he remains available to us. For our female kinfolk mates it is slightly more complicated; they may take other lovers, true, but they must be absolutely certain that they only bear children from couplings with Nagah, to be sure that the offspring of our race is born from the strongest stock possible.

## Human Spirituality

I do not know if you followed any of the religions of the humans previously, young one, but if you did you may have to adjust your thinking considerably in the next few weeks to accept your new role among the Nagah. It has likely become evident to you already that humanity has lost its collective way. Once, when the worlds of flesh and spirit were so close as to be considered almost one world, humanity had a deeper understanding of things — a balance of perspectives, if you will. That balance has sadly been long lost, and now humanity is overly concerned with matters of the flesh. Matters of the spirit no longer seem to be of any importance to them, much to our great regret.

Nevertheless, many humans can still sense that there is a void there, though they don't entirely understand it. They make religions to fill this need, despite the fact that they will never quite manage to fill it until they once again achieve an understanding of the world of spirit. Of course, some rare humans are an exception. Sometimes, when journeying through the penumbra, you will find a strange image that corresponds to a particularly potent soul belonging to a human in the physical world. I do not pretend to understand the causes that help create such a "blessed" being, but I nevertheless pity them. They know that something more is out there than what they are able to see and touch, but only in the most remote cases are they able to actually experience anything more.

Of course, even the densest of human beings can recognize the word "Gaia" and understand the concept behind it, even though they may dismiss it out of hand as a primitive superstition. In fact, the strongest faith found in India worships Gaia under the same name that we call her: Devi. It is impossible for me to say for certain whether they learned that name from us, or we learned it from them; I will leave that for sages with more time on their

hands than myself. Regardless, this faith exists as proof that though they are spiritually shallow, some potential can still be found in humans even in this dark age. It is, at least, a cause for some hope.

## *Nagah Spirituality*

For our part, of course, we Nagah share the same faith as all Khurah do. There are differences, of course, as there are differences in the way each of the different Khurah see their faith and the world around them, but such deviations are small enough that they can all still be considered followers of different parts of the same faith. Though we call her by the name of Devi and they call her by the name of Gaia, it is still the same being we seek to serve.

Likewise, we recognize the Triat just as the Khurah do, though we understand their nature better perhaps than most of our brethren. We respect the power and wisdom of the Celestines, as do all wise members of the Changing Breeds. Mind you, we lack the skill that many of the Khurah possess when it comes to dealing with spirits. Our role has always distanced us from the spirits outside of the court of the Wani. Because of this, our spirit allies are much fewer and further between than those of our charges, but this is a necessary shortcoming.

We give our thanks and worship first and foremost to the Three Mothers, as we should. Devi first gave us life and ushered us into this world. This mother we share with all of the Khurah. Then Luna kissed us, blessing us with many of our spiritual powers and promising us her aid. As with Devi, we share Luna with most of the Khurah as well. Finally, Apsa provided us with her blessing, giving us a home in her waters.

Unlike our other two mothers, Apsa is our mother alone; no other Changing Breed, not even the Rokea, worship her as we do. We are very grateful for the privilege that she has shown us. Serpents have always been portrayed as creatures of water. I think that this is in large part due to our association and relationship with Apsa.

## *The Need for Beauty*

To strive to produce works of art and beauty is a long standing tradition among the Nagah, and a most important one as well. We Nagah suffer from conflicting urges; our serpent half creates in us a desire for solitude and privacy, while our human half creates in us a need to connect with others in a meaningful way. Art provides us with that connection, and allows us to feel a passion that would otherwise be lacking in our cold lives.

Additionally, we kill and destroy as part of our duties to the Three Mothers. A Nagah sees perhaps more than her fair share of blood in her life, but as we are required to maintain a properly balanced perspective, we must know the ways of creation as well as the ways of destruction. It is considered very important for a Nagah to develop skill in the arts of her choice, be it song,

dance, painting, sculpture, or anything else she wishes. Not only does this offer some solace when the toll becomes too high to bear, but it also allows us to relate to both halves of our nature in a way few other activities do.

For my part, although I am skilled in many artistic mediums, my great love will always be music — both in creating and appreciating it. I remember with great fondness the first time I ever heard the work of the human composer Pachelbel. It remains the only time in my life that I have ever shed tears. I had no idea what I was missing in my life as a deaf serpent; if I can attain even a tenth of the mastery that composer possessed, I will be very proud indeed.

## The Sacred Laws

The Nagah are Devi's judges, a fact I'm sure you've picked up on by now, haven't you? To perform her role, a judge must know well the laws that apply to those she is judging. This goes without saying, but it is for this reason that we Nagah must learn not only our own laws, but also the laws of the Khurah.

Our own Sacred Laws are by far the most important to us. We have many laws for many different aspects of life, and these help us make certain that we can trust ourselves to perform our duties properly and without bias. A Nagah who bends our Sacred Laws is not necessarily a corrupt judge, but she is at the very least on her way to becoming one. No corrupt judge can be allowed to do the work of our race. It is far too important, and one of the reasons why one's nestmates are expected to watch each other for signs of corruption.

I expect you to spend a great deal of time learning our Sacred Laws, young one. You must come to know them better than you know yourself, not just in word but also in spirit. Speaking them must eventually become as natural as breathing to you, but for now simply do what you can to remember them. Yes, there *will* be a test later. Frightened? Don't be.

I'm sure that so studious a pupil as you will do fine.

## Preserve the Sacred Secret at All Costs

This is the first law listed among our Sacred Laws, and for a good reason: we must continue to let the world believe that we no longer live. If our continued existence were discovered, there is no telling to what conclusions the other Changing Breeds might jump, especially the troublesome Garou. They are so awfully good at seeing enemies where there are none, after all, and we could easily be faced with another War of Rage — one that we would not so easily escape this time.

The only place where this law is at all relaxed is in the Beast Courts of the Middle Kingdom. The Hengeyokai know of our existence, and have shown that they can be trusted to keep it to themselves. In all other parts of the world, the penalty for allowing this secret to slip out is death, both for yourself and for the secret's recipient. There are no exceptions to this rule.

### *Honor the Three Mothers*

Where we have come from is as important as where we are now, young one, if not more so. The Three Mothers provided us with life, home, and the powers we need to survive and perform our duties. It is a most sacred trust that they have given us, and for this we must not just worship them but also defend the honor and integrity of earth, moon, and river. You must never betray your duties to do so, for that would bring them further dishonor, but this law demands that you must seek compensation from those that would insult or defile them.

### *Punish Those Who Betray Their Duties*

This is, of course, our primary function as Nagah. We observe the other Changing Breeds. When one neglects or betrays the duties granted him by Devi, we judge him. Should we find that one wanting, we punish him appropriately; more often than not, this means death. There is a less obvious aspect of this law, however, that should also be mentioned: we are to punish those who deliberately betray their duties and are unlikely to receive justice otherwise. For example, Nagah do not punish a wayward Garou who is about to be properly punished at the hands of his fellows; aside from the fact that it is not our place, it is also wasteful to spend our energies on such a fruitless endeavor. If a problem will solve itself, better to instead direct your attention to another problem that won't.

### *Never Hunt Alone*

It is sometimes very tempting for an experienced Nagah to punish a wayward Khurah by herself, especially when an extremely convenient opportunity arises. Even I have felt this temptation on occasion. We must never succumb, however, for our Sacred Laws forbid such activities.

The reasons behind this law are quite simple, and are related to the tale of *She Whose Name Is Remembered But Never Spoken*. Most importantly, acting in such a manner opens one's heart to pride; as the human saying goes, pride goeth before the fall. It was pride that the Corrupter preyed upon, to the detriment of our entire race. Should you ever allow yourself to be swayed by any one force as *She Whose Name Is Remembered But Never Spoken* did, then it is our hope that this law will allow your nestmates to detect any behavior that would give such corruption away and avert disaster before it strikes.

### *Remain Humble*

It is vital that a judge, much less an assassin, remain very aware of her capabilities and limits; otherwise she will find her career to be a short one. There are many tasks that my nest and I do not attempt, even as Silver Coils, simply because we know that failure is the best outcome for which we could hope. As I just mentioned, pride is something we Nagah must guard ourselves against; being overly prideful is dangerous. It can be very tempting for those who live in secret, holding the powers of death and judgment as we do, to start

thinking of ourselves as superior to the other Khurah — or even our fellow Nagah — and act on this assumption in ways at once both shameful and destructive. Always do what you can to remind yourself of your rightful place beneath the Three Mothers; none of us are so great as to warrant the kind of pride seen so often in many of the Khurah.

### *Abhor Imbalance*

A proper judge must be just, and justice finds its best home in balance. To allow imbalance into your heart is to allow your perspective to become skewed and biased. In such a state, the rest of us cannot trust you to deal with the other Changing Breeds fairly and impartially.

This law, however, does not apply just to matters of judgment. To at least some degree, it applies to everything we do. We must seek to maintain a balance between our breeds, between matters of flesh and matters of spirit, between destruction, existence, creation and our loyalty to the Three Mothers. It takes a great deal of perseverance to maintain this balance, and I know of no Nagah who is able to do it perfectly. Still, that does not mean we can afford to neglect this law.

### *Strike Against the Corrupter if the Opportunity is True*

In an ideal world, we would never have to concern ourselves with such a matter as fighting the Corrupter's influence. I'm sure that I don't need to tell you, young one, that the world in the age of the Kali Yuga, the age of destruction, is a far cry from ideal. The Corrupter has become far too strong in recent times for us to ignore it entirely. Therefore, while this may not be our primary duty, we nevertheless must strike against the Corrupter if a proper opportunity presents itself to do so.

Note that I say "proper opportunity" — it is a foolish Nagah indeed who puts herself or her nest at undue risk to fight the Corrupter. Such battles are the strong suit of the Garou, not us. It would be unwise to put yourself in such a situation. It is also well to remember that, no matter how timely the opportunity seems to be, you must always remember our first Sacred Law. If given a choice between destroying a servant of the Corrupter and preserving the Sacred Secret, it is not in fact a choice at all; you must preserve the Sacred Secret at all costs.

### *The Lidless Gaze*

Now that you have a familiarity with the Sacred Laws of our kind, my handsome little Opening Eye, I will tell you of how we go about punishing Khurah in adherence to our laws. As you already know, we must seek to punish those Khurah who have violated the laws of their own kind and who, if not for our involvement, would otherwise go unpunished, free to continue their betrayal further. This has always been our primary duty to the Three Mothers.



The first stage of any punishment is always observation. At this phase, we gather as much information about our target as possible, learning of his habits and personality, likes and dislikes. We come to learn the places he frequents and his allies and enemies. We learn all these things in secret, always doing our best to avoid frightening off the target or alerting them that another is shadowing their movements. Subtlety is the name of the day, as they say. Each new piece of information we learn puts us one step closer to not only being able to give our verdict, but also to know exactly how to go about punishing the target in as efficient a manner as possible.

The second stage is for the nest to decide on the verdict and fate of the target. It should be noted that if the target has done enough to attract our attention in the first place, the verdict is almost always a guilty one. It would be foolish to automatically assume this is the case, however, no matter how many times it has been proven true in your experience. Treat each case as though it were your first and do not carry over unhealthy assumptions. Likewise, the sentence we proscribe is almost always death, although in some rare cases a nest may decide that some other manner of retribution would be more constructive.

The third stage is for the nest to plan and execute the punishment of the target. There is no such thing as a plan that is guaranteed to succeed, but it is our duty as Nagah to come up with a plan that is as near to perfect as can be managed. A proper plan has as many contingencies as is necessary given the nature of the target, and ideally would not allow the target the knowledge or opportunity to divulge our Sacred Secret to anyone, on the off chance that he should escape somehow. While many Nagah choose to let their target know *why* he is being killed, for this is one of the few mercies we can allow him, it is quite rare that he would know *what* it is that is doing the killing. There is no such thing as being too careful when it comes to this stage; in this age of surveillance, one never knows who might be watching.

Indeed, that is the heart of the final stage: disappearing. Great care must be taken to cover our tracks; if our intention is to merely have our target disappear without a trace, then this is what happens. Some of his allies may question what might have happened to him, but these questions will remain unanswered. Often, however, we need to leave some evidence, some explanation of the target's demise came about so that nosy Khurah and spirits do not go snooping about and inadvertently endanger the Sacred Secret. Many Nagah will stage the assassination to look like an accident because of this, making everything seem quite neat and tidy to any investigators. Exactly how you choose to mask your involvement doesn't matter as much as whether or not you are successful. Given the strictness with which we enforce the Sacred Secret, failure simply does not occur.

Personally, I prefer to make it look like a target's death was caused by a spirit he and his allies respect. This way, they may actually question the target's past behavior, uncovering the dirty secrets of his betrayal to the laws his kind holds sacred. It serves as a warning to any who may think of following in the

target's footsteps. I've found that even when they confront the spirits directly, the spirits tend to be rather tight-lipped about such matters, since so many spirits hate admitting they don't know something.

### *The Mortal Coil*

In the course of performing my duties to the Three Mothers, I have come to experience much this world has to offer, not to mention some of the worlds beyond. As a result, I have come to learn a few things about the many realms that surround us, and how we as a race fit into the larger scheme. During your life, you may find yourself traveling through some of the places I have, young one, so it would be prudent of me to share some of this wisdom with you.

### *Nagah in the Wild*

Simply put, wherever the Khurah can be found, we Nagah can be found as well. If you know what to look for, you can come across our homes in any land to which you journey, from the remote rain forests of the Amazon, to the expansive savanna of Africa, to the evergreen woodland of the Canadian north. This is no more nor less than what our duties require; some of us even live underwater in great lakes and oceans when absolutely necessary. Only Antarctica is free of a semi-permanent Nagah presence, and still we travel there whenever we are called upon to do so.

As I have already said, most nests are at least semi-nomadic in nature; we travel to any place we are needed, settling in at one location for a year or two at most before moving on. This wouldn't be possible but for our Anantas, our little pockets of the spirit world that we call our homes. We are capable of moving our Ananta wherever we wish, taking them along with us on our journeys.

Both snakes and humans are true embodiments of adaptability, so it makes sense that we Nagah are capable of adapting to the harshest of environments. Of course, we are not always *comfortable* in some extreme environments, especially ones involving extreme cold, but we manage when we must. We would make very poor assassins, after all, if our targets could escape us simply by living in a cold climate. Not that we didn't sometimes use this misconception to our advantage in the old times, of course....

We have kin living in some of the strangest places, and you are advised to contact them as discreetly as possible when entering a new area, in order to learn the lay of the land and any other relevant information they might have. Our balaram kin make some of the best information networks that an assassin could wish for, so we have eyes and ears wherever we need them. In one way or another, we are where the Khurah rogues are; the coils of the Nagah reach all over the world.

### *Nagah in the Cities*

Again, anywhere there are Khurah, there are also Nagah; this includes the sprawling urban lands around which humans have chosen to center their lives.

Though most Khurah prefer to avoid urban locations save when on assignment, particularly the sensitive ahi, a few thrive in such environments, so into the cities we go. We are most familiar with overcrowded places such as Calcutta, Mumbai and other cities of India, though I would not go so far as to say we're most at home in such places. At least, I'm not. I personally can't stand going to such urban slums, and do so only when necessary.

To speak truthfully, we have always been found in the cities, going all the way back to the days of the Impergium. We once lived as the rulers of India, after all, so living in the centers of power was unavoidable. We know well which Khurah are found in which cities throughout the world. Even if a vasuki like myself tends to dislike living in such places, we have many balaram among our number whose tastes differ considerably from my own.

### India

Once, this place was the center of our greatest achievements as a race: the great golden age of the Nagah. In those times we could live among humanity openly as their rulers, governors, and givers of culture. We taught the humans the art of dance and we shared in gifts of song. The culture's two highest castes, that of the Brahmin priests and the Kshatriya warriors, were where we found our strongest kinfolk.

Indeed, with our extremely involved role among the humans, it was often considered our place to act as intermediaries between humans and Khurah, creating a bridge where there otherwise would have been none. At least, that was often our hope, though to be truthful we were not as successful in this role as we would have liked. If we had been, perhaps there never would have been an Impergium. It is said that there was a time that every important community in this land had its own Nagah patron.

As should be obvious to as shrewd a student as yourself, young one, this time of living so closely with humankind is over. It is a true shame that such an age had to end, and even more so that the blame for this tragedy rests upon a single member of our own kind. Still, even today you can find more Nagah and more Nagah kin in India than in any other place in the world. We no longer control the nation outright, but we still do exert *some* influence upon it, if only subtly; enough, for example, to ensure that Garou find that part of the world rather disagreeable. And, needless to say, such Garou presence is as unnecessary as it is unwanted—although recent border tensions have alarmed us, the Corrupter has surprisingly little influence in India thanks to the efforts of the Bagheera, Khan, Makara Mokolé, Ratkin, and ourselves. India is still important enough to us that we keep an eye on it; we still consider it our center of power, symbolically if not literally.

### The Beast Courts of the Middle Kingdom

It is in the Beast Courts of greater Asia that we have the leisure of acting with our greatest visibility; there, our existence is an open secret that we trust

our fellow Changing Breeds to keep. It is a very dangerous situation that could have easily been the cause of much strife, but so far it has proven to be a good arrangement for all. This is something for which I am very thankful.

The Nagah who operate here have a separate set of laws, one shared by all the Changing Breeds who make their home there, called the Emerald Mandates. These they balance with our own Sacred Laws, to the benefit of all. Although it is rare, some Nagah even join a Sentai — a multi-racial Hengeyokai pack of sorts — with Khurah. Our role is not only known in the Middle Kingdom, but also accepted. Of course, even though we are given *carte blanche* in theory to act as we see fit, we must also temper our judgments with the understanding that we are trusting our brothers and sisters among the hengeyokai with our Sacred Secret. Should we ever act so zealously that we anger entire breeds, we could find ourselves in a very difficult predicament.

### *The Worlds Beyond*

I would not be speaking with false modesty if I were to tell you that we are not the most proficient of Umbral travelers, young one. Indeed, it is a sad fact that we will probably never truly understand or appreciate the Umbra to the extent that some other Changing Breeds do, such as the Corax and the Nuwisha. That does not mean, however, that the Umbra is beyond our grasp. We do travel there with considerable frequency, usually in the fulfillment of our duties. No Khurah can escape from the reach of our fangs simply by passing into the spirit world; as I have already said, we follow our targets where we must; the spirit realm is certainly no exception to this rule.

We are also the guardians of certain spirit waters; this is not the product of conscious decision on our part, but rather the duty falls upon our shoulders by default. Rokea do not frequent fresh waters and have great difficulty entering the spirit world besides; the other Khurah make their homes above the surface. Therefore, it falls to us to ensure the safety and sanctity of many spirit realms that correspond with bodies of fresh water in the physical world. Fortunately, it is a duty we have been quite a bit more successful at than other Changing Breeds have been with their own similar duties. Our relationship with our mother Apsa requires no less.

To reach the Umbra, we rely upon our jewel of passage, the Ananta. This portable spirit home allows us to reach the spirit world through it; if we have taken the Ananta into ourselves, we are even capable of entering the spirit world as are the more adept Garou through reflective surfaces. It is not our place to delve into the secrets of the Umbra, however, or to explore its furthest reaches. Our mundane serpent kin are close to the earth and so are we. Leave the aimless exploration for other Changing Breeds; ours is a duty that binds us to other things.

There are three main reasons a Nagah can commonly have to go into the Umbra. The first and most common reason is to track down certain targets who

## The Emerald Mandates

There is always a chance, my handsome little Opening Eye, that you may find call to travel among the Hengeyokai of the Beast Courts in the course of performing your duties to the Three Mothers. In preparation for such an occasion, it would be wise for you to become familiar with the laws that all of the Changing Breeds of the Middle Kingdom are obliged to observe, as well as something about how these laws are interpreted. This can require something of a balancing act, if you will, since we Nagah must also observe our own Sacred Laws, but we nevertheless manage to respect the laws of the land as well as the laws of the Nagah. As I have journeyed these lands and interacted with the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother, I will now share my wisdom with you.

### **Shirk Not the Tasks Which Have Been Given You**

Each of the Changing Breeds was created with a sacred duty in mind; the fulfillment of this duty is our sole purpose for being. Neither Nagah nor Khurah have the leisure of ignoring these tasks, for the very survival of the world requires we fulfill them.

### **Guard the Wheel, That It May Turn in Fullness**

Time is seen by the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother as a great Wheel that is attempting to turn full circle, as it has likely done so many times in the past. This cycle of time allows the world to continue growing as ages change from paradise to pain and torment and then back again. Attempting to stop the passage of the ages is considered the gravest of crimes in the Beast Courts. What this means to you, young one, should you ever find yourself in the Middle Kingdom, is to simply do your duty by hunting anyone who threatens to halt the Wheel in the age of the Kali Yuga.

### **Presume Not to Instruct Your Cousin in His Task**

This is... shall we say, a difficult mandate for Nagah to observe. After all, it is our duty to instruct the Khurah in the proper performance of their tasks by punishing those who fail to perform them correctly. Some leeway is given to the Nagah when it comes to this mandate; we interpret it as meaning that we should punish only the larger offenses which warrant punishment, and that small offenses should be allowed every now and then.

**Honor Your Territory in All Things**

Our territory, in this case, happens to be the rivers that form the very lifeblood of Devi and that are so precious to our third mother Apsa. This mandate simply reinforces the Sacred Law of the Nagah in the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother, to protect the river-waters from those who would defile them.

**Let Mercy Guide You in Our August Mother's Court**

In the fulfillment of our primary duty, mercy can be as dangerous as hatred since either one can lead to biased judgments and then corruption. We must be very careful when we judge the Hengeyokai, however — they understand and accept our role among them, but should we ever be viewed as unjust or overzealous, they could easily unite against us. Best then to err on the side of safety.

**Honor Your Ancestors and Your Elders**

We do not question the judgment of the Crowns or the Sesha above them, young one. We remember the names of our great heroes and the tales of their accomplishments, and we give thanks to our ancestors as we should. This much is easy for us. This mandate requires, however, that we also respect the Elders of the Khurah. Avoid striking against Khurah who technically outrank you if you have any choice about the matter; better to let Silver Coils like myself deal with such targets.

**Honor the Pacts with the Spirit World**

We respect the Wani and do as they request. Beyond that, we have no allies in the world of spirits. This is an easy mandate to follow.

**War Not Upon Human nor Beast**

War involves killing in great numbers, often with the power of hatred guiding one's arm. Nagah are assassins. It is neither our place nor our wish to enter total war with anyone. This, too, is an easy mandate for us to follow.

**Let No One or Nothing Violate the Sacred Places**

We defend the sacred sites, the places of spiritual power in the Middle Kingdom as do all the Hengeyokai. We merely do it in a different, more subtle way. Something the children of the wolf will never understand is that not every battle need end in crushed bone and spraying gore when a precise, surgical cut in just the right place will serve even better.

frequent the realm. The second reason is to hide, as many of us did during the War of Rage; there is an exotic gift taught to some Nagah by the Wani that allows a Nagah to exude a spiritual shell called the Serpent's Egg. This allows them to float through the Umbra for an extended period of time in a state of suspended animation, unaging and well protected; such journeys can last decades, sometimes even longer.

The last reason is to help maintain a proper inner balance. We are neither man nor serpent nor spirit, but a combination of all three; we are meant to exist in both the physical and spiritual worlds. The Umbra provides many opportunities to refocus yourself, gain perspective and peace as you refresh your soul — opportunities that cannot be found in any other place.

### *Ananta*

A serpent's journey is at times a troublesomely slow one; traveling on one's belly may provide a great deal of stealth, but it seldom provides much speed. In the water, things are different for a serpent — water provides for a freedom of movement that a serpent is unable to find anywhere else, the removal of limitations for a time. We were blessed by Apsa for a reason.

It is water that gives us access to the spirit world, since it is in water that we place our Ananta when we choose to settle in a new area: any clean river or patch of coastline will suffice. The Ananta is our little portable dream-world, our home; it is vitally important to us.

Each Nagah's Ananta is different. Here in my Ananta, for example, your senses tell you that you sit within a rainforest clearing, with colorful tropical flowers and delicious fruits growing nearby and a stream filled with nutritious fish running through. You can even hear the calls of animals in the distance. In fact, this is little more than an illusion I have crafted for my home; some Nagah prefer their Ananta to seem like royal bedchambers, deserted jungle isles or caverns. Although its size is finite, it can even be given the illusion of vastness, should a Nagah wish her Ananta to seem like a circle of stones in an open field. You would be able to see far off into the horizon in such a case, but should you walk to the edge of the Ananta you would feel a solid "wall" of sorts at its edge.

Our Ananta provide us with portable homes so that wherever our duties take us, we can bring them with us; we merely "breathe" the Ananta within ourselves and carry it inside us during the journey. After such a journey, when we find a suitable location, it is a simple matter to set up the Ananta, requiring us to simply "breathe" it out. Of course, it is not *exactly* like breathing, but it is the only word I can really use for lack of a better one. When you receive your Ananta and are taught how to do this yourself, you will understand what I mean perfectly well.

As I mentioned, the Ananta serves to act as our jewel of passage into the Umbra; once within its borders, entering the Umbra proper requires mere thought. Entry into the Ananta itself from either side of the Gauntlet, on the other hand, is a much different matter, since the Ananta is heavily guarded

against both creatures and spirits. In most cases, only those who have the permission of the Ananta's owner are able to do so without difficulty. Of course, the Sesha and the Crowns are able to enter any Nagah's Ananta whenever they wish regardless of permission, but then only a traitor would have any reason to seek to bar them entry.

There are some rare Ananta that are not moved about, but are instead kept in one place for their entire existence. A permanent Ananta, if you will. The Nandana is the best example of this. Such Ananta can become very large, and their permanent natures allow for the construction of entire structures within them. As with any Ananta, the masters who control such permanent Ananta are able to control traffic into and out of their domains. Such places can be safe havens for any weary Nagah lucky enough to come across one.

### *Serpent Waters*

Serpent Waters are places of safety and rest for Nagah. They are near Umbral reflections of certain bodies of water, and are very precious to us. Usually these are reflections of pure tropical waters or small lakes. You will not forget a visit to a Serpent Waters; their surfaces have a quality that can only be described as liquid crystal, gentle and soothing. Some young Nagah refer to them as jeweled pools, an apt description that still fails to capture their beauty.

We value Serpent Waters greatly and protect them from those who would violate them. In fact, we are extremely territorial when it comes to these sacred sites. We Nagah and our kin are welcome, of course, as are our most trusted cousins, the Zhong Lung. Spirits such as Feathered Serpents and their Sea Serpent cousins are likewise welcome. All others are turned away and discouraged to ever come back. Should they persist or somehow slip beneath our guard to actually reach the Serpent Waters itself, such intruders can expect only a swift death.

### *XiWangChi*

This powerful and terrifying realm is home to the Wani, sometimes called the Dragon Kings, other times called the Long Lu. It is a vast, stormy realm full of mist, fog and cutting winds. There are constant typhoons, hurricanes and monsoons battering the landscape; many great oceans of the spirit world are found only within the borders of this realm. It is here that the Sesha send us to be taught our Gifts by the Wani themselves.

Only the mightiest members of any Changing Breed can abide living in this realm for any extended length of time. Any weaker shapeshifter usually finds his death at the end of a lightning bolt, sucked into a watery grave or pulled down by an unexpected whirlpool — and this assumes they can survive the storms themselves.

It is said that most of the eldest Wani are slumbering now and have been this way for many, many years. The Mokolé also say that this time of slumber is soon to come to an end. Only the Sesha, I think, could say for certain whether either of these things are true.



## The Judged

There are many Changing Breeds that Devi put onto the world, and each was created to fulfill a sacred purpose. We Nagah, however, are the only Changing Breed who have been given rightful authority over the Khurah; a more significant and deeper trust has been shown us than has been shown our brothers, something we can never forget. We must always strive to do our Mothers proud, to show them that we were worthy of being granted such lofty responsibility.

It is therefore wise, young one, that we take a few moments to discuss the Khurah. They are your brothers and sisters as well as your charges; in order to judge them properly you must know their natures and their ways. There are many, but I trust you will remember them all in kind. Good.

Let us begin.

### Ajaba

Although still near the brink of extinction, hyena's ilk have been given a new chance at life with the death of the dreaded lion king, Black Tooth. Devi originally charged them with tending those who suffer and leading the infirm back into Gaia's embrace, but it has been many years since they have concerned themselves with such matters. Now all they seem to think of is their precious revenge against the races that wronged them. It is my hope that they will return to their sacred duties on their own — otherwise, we may have to help *ur*ge them along the right direction, so to speak.

### Ananasi

Oh, how the Patient Ones love their queen, almost as much as they love themselves. It is put upon their shoulders to fix the mistakes the Triat have made in the world, and they have been working at this task almost since their creation. Wonderful job they've been doing, isn't it? It is not my place, however, to judge the laws they have been given. We are merely to judge whether or not they follow them properly — and we are watching the clever spiders very closely indeed.

### Bastet

The Proud Brothers have been charged as the keepers of secrets, and so they are. There are some secrets, however, they have no need to keep — our Sacred Secret, for example. We must be ever vigilant not to allow the cat-shifters to discover our continued existence, especially the proud tigers of the Khan. Should they do so anyway, we must be very careful in how we deal with them as a result. After all, as the keepers of secrets, it would not be just to slay them simply for doing their duty. At the same time, we would have no guarantee that they would keep such a secret to themselves, in which case retribution *would* be required. In my mind, it is best for everyone if they simply fail to discover our secret in the first place.

### Corax

How I fear these prattling avians! The Corax pose the greatest threat to preserving the Sacred Secret, even more so than the Bastet — their skills at uncovering hidden lore are matched only by their inability to keep such things to themselves. Rest assured, should one of the Whispering Winds become privy to our Sacred Secret, the rest of the supernatural world would know shortly thereafter.

Luckily, the Corax are among the weakest of the Khurah; despite their keen flying ability, they are easy enough for a skilled Nagah to kill. That which makes them dangerous to us is also what makes them vulnerable to our retribution: their unmatched curiosity. Should you ever find yourself with a need to end the life of one of Raven's children, use this weakness against them; it has yet to fail me.

### Gurahl

The Mountain and the Thunder have always been wise and honorable siblings. They have always known their place and never sought to overstep their bounds. They diligently healed the wounds of Devi and loved their fellows like no other among the Khurah. The War of Rage ignored their virtue, however, and brought the once-great Gurahl to their knees. Even until this day, they do not know that She Whose Name Is Remembered But Never Spoken is to blame for it.

It is because of our shame that they have come to such harm, and I shall always look upon the Gurahl with sadness and remorse. I feel badly that they have been brought to their current state of near-extinction because of us. I do not, however, let this interfere with my duties; no matter how rare they have become, when a Gurahl deliberately betrays the duties he has been given, he must be judged as any other. It is not our place as Devi's Judges to play favorites.

### Kitsune

They are the youngest of Devi's children. This is problematic. As far as we know, it is our place to judge them. They are so young to the world, however, that we cannot be certain what it is their duties to Devi are, let alone how they could possibly betray them. How is it, then, that we are to properly perform our duties by ensuring they properly perform theirs? At present, we must simply continue our vigil until such time as their duty becomes clear... for then it will become our duty to see that they uphold it.

### Mokolé

Among Eclipse's Children, the Zhong Lung have always known of our continued existence. It would not be so much of a stretch to think that their western cousins are also privy to this wisdom, with their great memories. But they choose to keep their knowledge to themselves, for they respect us and understand that our duties are vital, especially in this dark age of the Kali Yuga.

Many Mokolé claim that we share a common ancestry with them. While I remain skeptical, I must admit that this is not so hard to believe. We are the two eldest of Devi's children, after all, and we are the closest to one another in nature. Still, this claim contradicts our teachings of the past, and given a choice between believing the Mokolé's memory or our own tales, I mean no disrespect to our older brothers and sisters in choosing our teachings first. Still, I know what it means for them to withhold information from others of their kind, and I respect the sacrifice that represents.

### Nuwisha

These ones are disrespectful — to them, everything is a laughing matter. Yes, it is their duty to bring such mirth into the world, to teach through trickery. There have to be limits, however; some things must be sacrosanct. Beyond this, the Lonely Skies are as any other among the Khurah. They have their duties, and they are judged by us when they deliberately betray those duties.

Be wary of the children of Coyote, young one, should you ever be called upon to judge one of their number. The Lonely Skies are as crafty as their patron, which requires extra diligence and planning on our part. Check and double-check to make sure that when your target falls it was indeed your target, and that the Nuwisha did not have any last tricks up his sleeve you failed to notice. Otherwise, you may find yourself in an embarrassing position the next time you come before the Sesha.

### Ratkin

I find the Fires That Cleanse amusing, if repugnant. They are given the right to do that which we cannot: to judge humanity. Despite their great losses in the War of Rage, they still do their best to continue their work even today; we respect them for this. Their drive for revenge, however, rivals that of the Ajaba, and at times it interferes with their duties. Though I find it touching that they call upon the fallen Nagah as one of their many rallying cries against their hated Garou enemies, that does not exclude them from my judgment. When a Ratkin betrays his proper duties, or indeed when he allows his ... *enthusiasm* to take his work too far, he finds his end with me.

When I say that they are also amusing, I refer to the fact that some of their number fancy themselves assassins. Watching such an assassin-rat at work is something you will never forget as a Nagah. It is like watching a skilled but nevertheless graceless and inexperienced child trying to take after his big sister. Still, I do not hold it against them — so long as they properly perform their duties given to them by Devi, what they do on their own time is their business.

### Rokea

Next to the Mokolé, the Rokea are our second-closest siblings. We are both creatures of water, though they prefer the great expanses of oceans to the our rivers. Generally, they are some of the most well-behaved of the Khurah;

it is a rare thing indeed for a Nagah to be called upon to judge one of the Ever-Waking. They live in their ocean territories alone, and do their duties to Devi diligently; that is all we could ask from a Khurah.

### Garou

The Storms of the Apocalypse are the subject of much hatred and held in great contempt by the other Khurah, a situation that is entirely understandable given their penchant for genocide. We Nagah, however, have a greater understanding of the wayward ways of the Garou. Devi made them to make war and to kill, and in this they excel; it is the focus of their very being. They can no more deny it than we can our own sacred mandates. We cannot truly hold their zeal against them any more than a scorpion's venom could be held against a scorpion. Knowing and understanding their natures as we do, we are more to blame for the War of Rage than they are.

Yes, we understand the reasons behind their crimes, young one. This does not mean that we excuse them from our judgment, however. We judge Garou more often than any other Changing Breed; many among their number, notably the Silver Fangs and the Fenrir, are unrepentant in their crimes, displaying their wrongdoing to their fellows with pride. It is a sad state of affairs, as they are needed in this age of the Kali Yuga more than ever before. We must be ever diligent in our judgment. Hopefully, if we continue our work properly, we will be able to bring their "great nation" to arms against the real enemies that need confronting, and the world will be able to continue on its proper cycle.

Of special note is the tribe known as the Stargazers. Though previously they were among the wisest of the Garou tribes, now we watch them very closely indeed. We Nagah grow impatient with their sulking — if they do not return to their duties soon, we will have no choice but to show them the error of their ways.

### The Others

The Changing Breeds do not exist in a vacuum; there are other creatures in this world that most humans would think of as supernatural, and occasionally they cross paths with one another. These beings are not ours to judge, though it is nevertheless wise to discuss them and the roles they often take. Our duties will sometimes put us in conflict with them, even if it is not our intent to do so.

### Vampires

The Hungry Dead of the west are cunning and dangerous, the natural enemies of all living things. They toy with the rest of the world as playthings and amusing baubles, amusements to relieve the ennui that comes with centuries of death-in-life all the while bemoaning their "tortured existence." The eldest among them commit unspeakable atrocities in hopes of being able to feel something — anything — that reminds them of the feelings they once had as living beings. They are a cruel joke played on the world around them, though whether it is a joke made by the Corrupter or the Trapper I cannot say.

As tempting as it might be judge them, however, it is not our place. They fight wars with themselves, with Garou, and with the Fires That Cleanse to determine who has the right to control and cull the ignorant human herds. Let these conflicts deal with the foul creatures, and do not get caught up in their games.

### **Kuei-jin**

The Kuei-jin are the Hungry Dead of the east, though they have little in common with their western rivals. The Kuei-jin, I am told, once possessed a divine state and had their place in Devi's eye. They have been cursed with their present state, a mockery of their former existence, and have lost much of their grace. Occasionally Nagah in the Middle Kingdom will find we have goals in common with them, and sometimes we will even work as allies. They covet the sacred places of the Changing Breeds of the Middle Kingdom, however, and they betrayed our oriental cousins. They are powerful, unpredictable and not to be trusted.

### **Fae**

These Waking Dreams struggle to keep their strange world from disappearing entirely. They find solace in the dreams and imagination of humanity, though such things become harder and harder to find in the time of the Kali Yuga. Wherever dreams die entirely, the Fae die as well. Pity them.

### **Mages**

The Namebreakers are often powerful, and arrogantly make war with one another over whose view of existence is correct. Their power goes beyond simple hedge wizardry — theirs is the ability to reweave the very fabric of reality itself. Exercise the utmost caution when dealing with these strange beings, as one never knows of what they may be capable.

### **Wraiths**

We do not speak of the Restless Shadows. It is best this way. Simply respect your power to take life. Do not forget to perform the proper Samskara for your victims to avoid needlessly delaying them from making the journey to their final reward. That is all that can be expected.

## *A Word in Closing*

Much I have already said this day, and yet you still look at me as if wanting to learn more, my handsome little Opening Eye. Rest assured, you will; there is still more to being a Nagah than what I have told you. You have now, though, learned a foundation of knowledge with which you can build a greater understanding not only of Nagah, but also the world around you. You have many difficult lessons to learn in the next year before your Celebration of First Venom; more lessons will be learned still after you join a nest proper and begin hunting rogue Khurah in the name of the Three Mothers. Remember the things you have learned today to help you in understanding your future lessons; they will serve you well in this regard.

For today, however, your lessons are over. Do not look so disappointed, young one — there is still much time for you to learn, and every student needs his rest. You have been offered the blessings of my Ananta and the company of a beautiful, wise Naginah. I think it would be sensible for you to take pleasure in both of these things for now; let the wisdom you have gained this day be absorbed and more fully understood. You have a long road ahead of you, my studious little serpent. I suggest you take it one slither at a time.

## Nagah Lexicon

**Age of Kings:** The legendary age during which the Nagah lived alongside humans, often as their rulers. They did so more openly and harmoniously than any other Changing Breed since.

**Ahi:** A Nagah “Metis”, but lacking the physical deformities and sterility of the Metis of other Changing Breeds.

**Ananta:** The Umbral “den-realms” of the Nagah; they are conveniently portable, unlike the den-realms some other Changing Breeds use.

**Apsa:** A powerful Incarna of fresh running water, such as rivers and streams. Equated by many Nagah with the Hindu “Ganga.”

**Azhi Dahaka:** The middle “war form,” or Crinos of the Nagah.

**Balaram:** A Nagah “Homid”; balaram (lower case) refers to the human-born breed, while Balaram, upper-case, refers to the human form.

**Crown:** One of the regional councils of Nagah; there are six Crowns to be found throughout the world.

**Devi:** Gaia, or the Emerald Mother. In particular, this term refers to the “knowable” aspects of Gaia that can be expressed to others, rather than Gaia as a whole.

**Dragon Kings:** See Wani.

**First Skin:** A supernatural shield that shelters young Nagah from detection prior to their first change.

**Jeweled Pools:** Young Nagah argot for the Serpent Waters.

**Jurlungur:** The Crown that watches over Australia and the South Pacific.

**Kali:** The winter auspice, given to direct and efficient action.

**Kali Dahaka:** The “great serpent” of the Nagah, roughly equivalent to the Hispo form of the Garou.

**Kamakshi:** The spring auspice, inclined toward actions of renewal and healing.

**Kamsa:** The autumn auspice; prone to endeavors of a psychological bent.

**Kartikeya:** The summer auspice; the most passionate of the race.

**Khurah:** Non-Nagah Changing Breeds. The term has a connotation of “our charges” or “our wards.”

**Jewel of Passage:** Another term for an *Ananta*.

**Lu Long:** Another term for the Wani.

**Naginah:** An archaic term for female Nagah. More common among Kinfolk “in the know” than among the Nagah themselves.

**Nandana:** The great *Ananta* of the *Sesha*; the “divine garden” and first among *Ananta*; it bears the gate to *Xi Wang Chi*.

**Nemontana:** The Crown of Nagah who judge Europe’s shifter population.

**Nest:** The most basic social unit of the Nagah; a nomadic “pack” of two or three.

**Samskara:** The term Nagah use to refer to their rites.

**Sannyasin:** A Nagah who has chosen to live outside of Nagah society, usually as a hermit or an ascetic; chosen as a result of physical infirmity from injury or age: this is the only form of “retirement” available to a Nagah.

**Sayida:** The Crown overseeing sub-Saharan Africa’s Nagah.

**Serpent Waters:** Aquatic Glens sanctified and claimed by the Nagah.

**Sesha:** The ruling council and highest body of government of the Nagah race.

**Silkaram:** The mostly human, partly reptile form of the Nagah; roughly equivalent to the *Garou’s* *Glabro*.

**Three Mothers, the:** The spirits of Earth, Moon, and River; more properly *Gaia*, *Luna*, and *Apsa*.

**Vasuki:** A Nagah “lupus”; *vasuki*, lower case, refers to the serpent-born breed, while *Vasuki*, upper case, refers to the “cobra” form (although it may be that of any poisonous snake species).

**Vritra:** The Crown of Nagah that metes out judgment on India and Asia’s shape shifters.

**Wani:** The great dragon-spirits that serve as ultimate patrons to the Nagah, protecting their secrecy and teaching them Gifts. Also called “the Dragon Kings” and “Lu Long.”

**Xi Wang Chi:** The Umbral realm of the Wani.

**Yamilka:** Serpent-folk of Arabian myth; a name assumed by the Nagah Crown who holds judgment over the Middle East and North Africa.

**Zuzeka:** The Crown that polices the Americas.

## Breeds

**Balaram:** You began life as a human, but you never really seemed to fit inside your skin; then everything changed. You were never the most personable sort, but now the cold blood of the serpent runs through you fully.

**Initial Gnosis:** One

**Breed Gifts:** (choose one) *Cold Blood, Persuasion, Prehensile Body, Self-Mastery*

**Ahi:** You were born the child of two Nagah and raised in the Serpent Waters. Your pure blood gives you a balance lacking in other breeds, but your spiritual upbringing makes you vulnerable to the toxins of the physical world.

**Initial Gnosis:** Three

**Breed Gifts:** (choose one) *Bones as Coils, Weaver Sense, Wyld Sense, Wyrmsense*

**Vasuki:** Your life may have begun as a serpent, but since the shedding of your First Skin it has become so much more.

**Initial Gnosis:** Five

**Breed Gifts:** (choose one) *Death's Rattle, River's Gift, Sense Vibration, Treesnake's Blessing*

## Auspice

**Kamakshi (Spring):** Blessed by the forces of life and renewal, your element is earth.

**Initial Rage:** Three

**Aspect Gifts:** (choose one) *Ganga's Caress, Kind Death, Resist Pain*

**Kartikeya (Summer):** Vigorous and true, your energy promotes the greatest passions to be found among the serpent people. Your element is fire.

**Initial Rage:** Four

**Aspect Gifts:** (choose one) *Brief Sensation, Eyes of the War God, Scent of the True Form*

**Kamsa (Autumn):** The mind of the target is your passion and your forté. Your element is air.

**Initial Rage:** Three

**Aspect Gifts:** (choose one) *Executioner's Edge, Predator's Patience, Slayer's Eye*

**Kali (Winter):** Your blood is the coolest, your vision the truest, and your dedication to your cause knows no bounds. Your element is water.

**Initial Rage:** Four

**Aspect Gifts:** (choose one) *Guided Strike, Iron Coils, Wyrmsense*



# Character Creation

## Character Creation Process

### Step One: Character Concept —

Who and what are you?

- Choose Nature and Demeanor
- Choose a Breed (balaram, ahi, or vasuki)
- Choose an Auspice (Kamakshi, Kartikeya, Kamsa, or Kali)

### Step Two: Select Attributes —

What are your basic capabilities?

- Prioritize Trait Attributes (seven primary, five secondary, and three tertiary)
- Choose Traits

### Step Three: Select Advantages —

What do you know and what can you do?

- Choose five Abilities (vasuki Nagah have the same ability restrictions as lupus Garou do during character creation)
- Choose three Basic Gifts (one each from Nagah, breed, and auspice)
- Choose five Backgrounds
- Note Renown (three Traits)

### Step Four: Finishing Touches —

Fill in the details.

- Record Willpower (4)
- Record Gnosis (determined by breed)
- Record Rage (determined by auspice)
- Choose Negative Traits (if any)
- Spend Five Free Traits and choose Merits (if any)

### Step Five: Spark of Life —

Narrative descriptions and other details.

## Attributes

For complete Trait descriptions, see **Laws of the Wild**.

**Physical:** *Athletic, Brawny, Brutal, Dextrous, Enduring, Energetic, Ferocious, Graceful, Lithe, Nimble, Quick, Resilient, Robust, Rugged, Stalwart, Steady, Tenacious, Tireless, Tough, Vigorous, Wiry*

**Social:** *Alluring, Beguiling, Charismatic, Charming, Commanding, Dignified, Diplomatic, Elegant, Eloquent, Empathetic, Expressive, Friendly, Genial, Gorgeous, Ingratiating, Intimidating, Magnetic, Persuasive, Seductive, Witty*

**Mental:** *Alert, Attentive, Clever, Creative, Cunning, Dedicated, Determined, Discerning, Disciplined, Insightful, Intuitive, Knowledgeable, Observant, Patient, Rational, Reflective, Shrewd, Vigilant, Wily, Wise*

## Abilities

For complete Ability descriptions, see **Laws of the Wild**.

Academics, Animal Ken, Athletics, Awareness, Brawl, Computer, Crafts, Dodge, Drive, Empathy, Enigmas, Etiquette, Expression, Finance, Firearms, Hobby/Professional/Expert Ability, Intimidation, Investigation, Law, Leadership, Linguistics, Medicine, Meditation, Melee, Occult, Performance, Politics, Primal-Urge, Repair, Rituals, Science, Scrounge, Security, Streetwise, Subterfuge, Survival.

## Backgrounds

For complete Background descriptions, see **Laws of the Wild**.

Ananta, Ancestors, Contacts, Fetish, Influence, Kinfolk, Pure Breed, Resources, Rites.

## Negative Traits

For complete descriptions of these Traits, see **Laws of the Wild**.

**Negative Physical Traits:** *Clumsy, Cowardly, Decrepit, Delicate, Docile, Flabby, Lamé, Lethargic, Puny, Sickly*

**Negative Social Traits:** *Bestial, Callous, Condescending, Dull, Feral, Naive, Obnoxious, Repugnant, Shy, Tactless, Untrustworthy*

**Negative Mental Traits:** *Forgetful, Gullible, Ignorant, Impatient, Oblivious, Predictable, Submissive, Violent, Witless.*

## Species Traits

Of all the Changing Breeds, Nagah are perhaps the most specialized. It logically follows that all those who are full-blooded Nagah have several biological and cultural traits in common. No two Nagah are exactly the same, but all Nagah perform the same duties overall and require the same basic powers to do so.

### *Blessings of the Three Mothers*

**Amphibious:** Nagah are blessed by Apsa, the great Incarna spirit of the river, and are therefore tied very closely with water. All Nagah wearing the Kali Dahaka or Azhi Dahaka forms can breath water as easily as they can breathe air. In any other form, are they able to hold their breath twice as long as an ordinary character can.

**Language:** Much like the other Changing Breeds, the Nagah have a racial language that only they are able to fully understand. Unlike other such racial languages, however, the Nagah's racial language is much less dependant on the spoken word. Instead, it mostly relies on scents, body posture and other such aspects; even a completely deaf Nagah can send and receive messages in this language without penalty — a boon in many situations where silence is a requirement. Learning this language is all but impossible for outsiders, especially those not drawn from reptilian stock. While Gifts and other powers may grant temporary knowledge, non-Nagah are unable to learn anything but the most obvious and simple concepts after long periods of training.

**Nagah Senses:** Nagah share a mixture of the senses of humans and serpents. This provides them with many sensory advantages. In any challenge to detect odors, the Nagah gains a number of bonus traits equal to the number of steps away from Balaram they are in form. For example, when wearing the Silkaram form, the Nagah gains a 1-trait bonus. This bonus increases to 3 Traits while wearing the Kali Dahaka form. While in Kali Dahaka, the Nagah gains the best of both worlds — his senses are attuned so sharply that he gains the benefits of the basic Lupus Gift *Scent of Sight* automatically.

**Nests:** In much the same way that Garou form packs, Nagah form nests. That, however, is where the similarity ends. A Nagah nest can never number greater than three; beyond the sacred aspect of that number, the Nagah race simply can't afford to have their members grouped together any further than they already are. A Nagah nest has no spiritual patron or totem, and can never gain the benefits of having a pack totem — Nagah have almost no significant dealings with any spirits outside the courts of the Dragon Kings.

**Regeneration:** Nagah benefit from exactly the same powers of Regeneration that Garou do.

**Stepping Sideways:** The Nagah lack the natural connection to the Umbra that many other Changing Breeds take for granted; a Nagah must rely upon his Ananta, the personal Umbral den-realm that a Nagah calls her home. When not carrying her Ananta inside herself, a Nagah may only enter the Umbra while in the physical presence of her Ananta (that is, the physical world adjacent to the

portion of the Penumbra where the Ananta has been established). A Nagah who is carrying the Ananta within her can step sideways just like a Garou would; unless she takes the time to lead her nestmates through the Gauntlet with her, however (see **Laws of the Wild**), doing so leaves them stranded in the physical world.

**Venom:** A Nagah's poison is perhaps her most potent weapon. She can access it in any form other than Balaram (and even that form if she possesses the requisite Gift). A Nagah has three doses of this venom; it requires 24 hours for the Nagah's body to replenish any and all used venom doses. The venom may be used with any bite attack that causes at least one health level of damage, inflicting an additional three levels of aggravated damage. Gifts such as *Resist Toxins* can be used to negate this effect as usual. Although the venom is totally ineffective against spirits, its highly corrosive qualities causes harm to even vampires (who take half damage, round up). Other Nagah are immune to Nagah venom, unless otherwise specified.

**Willpower:** All Nagah begin play with 4 Willpower Traits. The shedding of the first skin is quite an ordeal, and ensures that there is no such thing as weak-willed Nagah.

### *Imperfections*

Along with certain benefits come disadvantages inherent in a Nagah's heritage; some are biological by nature, whereas others are the result of the unique social structure the Nagah have developed. While they spend a great deal of time and training working out how to deal with these shortcomings, they can no more permanently overcome them than they could expect a natural snake to shed its scales for fur instead.

**Poor Hearing:** While their other senses are sharpened considerably, a Nagah's sense of hearing suffers in a similar manner to that of their mundane kin. While wearing the Kali Dahaka form, a Nagah's sense of hearing is so poor that she is at a 3-trait penalty in any hearing-related challenges. A Nagah is completely deaf to airborne sounds in Vasuki form; she is only able to hear sounds being carried through objects via vibrations.

**Rank and Gifts:** While Nagah have Rank very similar to Garou, they gain it in a different way. Renown as the Garou or most other Changing Breeds know it is irrelevant — it is the decision of the Sessa alone as to whether or not a Nagah gains Rank. In game terms, a Nagah's progress through the ranks is determined solely by the Storyteller, in her guise as the Sessa. It should be noted, however, that any given Nagah only rarely confers with the Sessa regarding such matters and at a time decided upon by the Sessa; never more than once or twice per year of game time. Additional requests over that limit are seen as poor form, and might even lead to some penalty for those foolish enough to waste the Sessa's time on trivial matters of personal glory.

Also, save for very extreme circumstances, Nagah can *only* learn Gifts from the Wani in Xi Wang Chi, once again only at the approval of the Sessa, thus

limiting the amount of Gifts that can be learned in a given period of time. Should a Nagah manage to learn a Gift without proper aid from the Wani, rest assured her fellows will be very interested in how it was done and why it was necessary.

Furthermore, it is the Sesha, not the Nagah in question, who determines which Gifts the Nagah is to learn. Since these Gift-learning sessions take place during the rare visits to the Sesha, a Nagah cannot gain Gifts as often or as quickly as a Garou of similar rank might. While the player may certainly contribute ideas about which Gifts they feel they have justified learning, ultimately it is up to the Storyteller to reach the decision based on what they feel the character's actions have warranted. There is no game mechanic for the Storyteller to employ in either of these instances.

**Silver Vulnerability:** Silver deals aggravated damage to Nagah, just as it does to Garou. All of the other effects that silver has against Garou, such as reducing Gnosis, apply similarly to Nagah.

## Forms

Nagah have access to a full five forms, much as the Garou do. A Nagah's non-Balaram forms take after her serpent heritage — thus, a Nagah descended from a viper can be expected to have distinctly viper-like traits in Silkaram, Azhi Dahaka, Kali Dahaka, and Vasuki forms, especially when it comes to such things as coloration and the patterns on her scales. Nagah shift forms exactly as the Garou do, using the same system of rules and challenges to do so successfully.

**Balaram:** This is the human form of the Nagah. The most prevalent ethnic group seen in the Nagah are those of Indian or Asian descent, however nearly every ethnic group has some representation within the Nagah race. Except to supernatural powers of detection, a Nagah in Balaram form is indistinguishable from a normal human.

**Silkaram:** Similar in theme to the Glabro form of the Garou, this is the “serpent man” form of the Nagah. It is a completely hairless form with ridges that resemble scales covering the body; though a Nagah in this form is generally humanoid in shape, he or she cannot pass for an ordinary man or woman. The form's webbed fingers and toes are ideal for swimming. Silkaram have an enhanced jaw line and receded nose. This form has fangs, but they fold back to become unnoticeable when not in use.

**Azhi Dahaka:** The Azhi Dahaka form is the terrible war form of the Nagah, with a barrel torso and a powerful set of trunk-like serpentine arms. Despite the serpent ancestry of the Nagah in question, this form always has an impressive cobra-like hood. The tail extends from the torso at least a good 16 to 20 feet, sometimes even more. Nagah in Azhi Dahaka can breathe water as easily as they are able to breathe air, and are also able to unhinge their jaws at will. The hide strengthens to an almost superhuman resiliency. The claws and venomous fangs are easily as terrible, if not more so, than those of their Garou cousins.

**Kali Dahaka:** This is the great serpent form of the Nagah, similar in theme to the Hispo form of the Garou. A huge snake that easily rivals the largest of anacondas in size, the Kali Dahaka is easily thirty feet long or longer. With enough effort, a Nagah in this form may even sprout slender arms — doing so requires a Physical test (retest *Primal Urge*) against a difficulty of seven Traits. These arms are awkward and somewhat less than impressive, so Nagah avoid using them whenever possible. The Kali Dahaka form is completely amphibious, so a Nagah wearing this form is able to breathe water as easily as she would were she wearing the Azhi Dahaka form.

**Vasuki:** This is the serpent form of the Nagah, indistinguishable from a mundane serpent to anything other than supernatural powers of detection. Though not the most powerful of the forms available, it nevertheless possesses the deadly venom of the Nagah.

### Trait Adjustments from Shapeshifting

**Balaram:** No trait adjustments.

Shift Difficulty: Seven traits.

**Silkaram:** *Ferocious, Wiry, Resilient, Tireless.*

Negative Traits: *Bestial x2, Repugnant.*

Shift Difficulty: Seven traits.

**Azhi Dahaka:** *Brawny x2, Ferocious, Graceful, Quick, Resilient x2, Tireless.*

Negative Traits: *Bestial x2, Feral x2, Repugnant x2.*

Shift Difficulty: Six traits.

Other: No Manipulation or Appearance-related traits. This form incites the full Delirium effect as a Garou in Crinos would. This form also allows the Nagah to breathe water.

**Kali Dahaka:** *Ferocious, Wiry, Graceful, Quick, Resilient, Tireless.*

Negative Traits: *Bestial x2, Feral.*

Shift Difficulty: Seven traits.

Other: No Manipulation-related traits. This form allows the Nagah to breathe water.

**Vasuki:** *Lithe, Quick, Enduring.*

Negative Traits: *Puny, Bestial, Feral.*

Shift Difficulty: Six traits.

Other: No Manipulation-related traits.

## New Ability

### Khurah Lore

As the deliverers of just punishment to wayward Khurah, Nagah must be experts on not only the laws of their own kind, but also the laws of those they oversee. This ability gives the Nagah the knowledge she needs to properly perform her duties. Of course, a Nagah will never know the laws of a given Changing Breed as well as one of its members, but she will still know a great deal more than your typical outsider and may know a few tricks in dealing with the Khurah besides. For details on what exact information this ability can provide, consult your Storyteller as well as relevant information in **Laws of the Wild** and other **Changing Breed** books.

## New Background

### Ananta

This background represents the Nagah's "den-realm," that portion of the Umbra that he or she calls home. This is a shared Background, however, — all members of any given nest contribute to the nest's collective Ananta, so that the Ananta of three Nagah is much larger and more impressive than it would be otherwise. Only one Ananta may be carried by a Nagah at any single time, and it is a measure of considerable trust to be the Nagah chosen by her nest to carry the Ananta when the time for moving comes.

The more traits spent in this Background, the greater the Ananta's size and ability to provide food and nourishment. Nearly every Ananta has a spiritual pool or stream running through it; such waters are not sufficient for the performing of the Nagah's rites, but nevertheless can provide refreshment to a thirsty resident. No matter how many points are spent into the collective pool, no Ananta may ever exceed five Traits unless given explicit permission by the Storyteller.

The entry point to an Ananta is completely invisible to any non-Nagah, both on the physical plane and on the Umbra — even spirits ignore the site of the den-realm and are unaware of its presence. For a Nagah, entering an Ananta requires a regular challenge against the local Gauntlet as per stepping sideways (see **Laws of the Wild**), with the difficulty lowered by one Trait for each two points spent in the Ananta background; in any case, the difficulty is a minimum of two Traits.

Even if an Ananta's existence is somehow discovered by a non-Nagah, entering or leaving such a place is extremely difficult since every Ananta comes with built-in wards to prevent intrusion — or escape. If attempting to enter or leave the Ananta against the wishes of the Ananta's owner, the would-be intruder must enter into a Willpower test against the Nagah owner. If the Ananta belongs to a nest rather than a single Nagah, the Nagah with the highest Willpower is used; she gains a two-Trait bonus on the challenge for each other member of the nest. The Nagah to which the Ananta belongs

immediately sense when their home's borders have been breached, regardless of the distance from their Ananta.

The appearance of the Ananta is determined by the Nagah nest in question; it can be literally anything they wish it to be, from a picturesque Indian royal court to a small sandy tropical island. While the Ananta has very solid barriers about its borders, those barriers can be made to look like anything desired, giving the illusion of being in the middle of an expansive ocean or a vast plain.

Moving the Ananta is a relatively simple matter; when she wishes to change its location, the Nagah merely “swallows” it from the physical realm, drawing it into herself. It can then be carried this way inside the Nagah indefinitely. When a new location (any river, lake or ocean shore will do, though bodies of fresh water are preferred) has been found in which to place the Ananta, she simply breathes it out again onto the area. Doing any of these things requires no test, as it is instinctual to a Nagah who has spent points on this Background.

Should an Ananta be destroyed through any means (such as by killing the Nagah who was carrying it), all Nagah who contributed to the Ananta keep their points in this Background but lose a permanent Gnosis Trait. Gnosis lost in this way can be bought back with Experience Traits as normal.

**One Trait** — A small and meagrely appointed Ananta; there might be room for a small cot, but little else could fit within. There are no refreshments available within the Ananta.

**Two Traits** — A modest Ananta, with roughly the size and furnishings of a guest bedroom. The Ananta may supply enough food and drink to entertain a visitor or two, although it is more illusion than nourishment and therefore is unable to sustain anyone for more than a day or two.

**Three Traits** — An Ananta well-suited to a nest, roughly the size of a hotel suite or townhouse. There's enough “empty” food and drink for the whole nest, or enough truly nourishing food to sustain a single member.

**Four Traits** — A pleasantly spacious nest, about the size of a comfortable house. The Ananta provides enough “true” food to sustain three individuals indefinitely.

**Five Traits** — A most luxurious Ananta, the size of a small mansion and appointed to look the part. The food and drink available is all as nourishing as the best mortal food, and can feed up to five beings.

## *Rage and Gnosis*

Nagah possess both Rage and Gnosis, and use and regain them in very similar ways to Garou in most cases. One additional way of recovering Rage is open to the Nagah, however, that the Garou do not have; a Nagah may regain one Rage Trait for every hour spent meditating while submerged or partially submerged in water.



Although they need their Rage for the proper completion of their duties, Nagah are not an inherently passionate race — Rage comes to them with difficulty. Because of this, any time a Nagah purchases additional Rage Traits with Experience or Free Traits, the cost is double that of a Garou. For similar reasons, the difficulty for a Nagah to enter Frenzy is always seven (or six when near polluted water), regardless of the phase of the moon. A Nagah can never enter the Thrall of the Wym.

All Nagah suffer from the Curse in a way very similar to the Garou; any human being whose current Willpower is less than the Nagah's current Rage seeks to avoid contact with the Nagah. Instead of the predatory menace of the Garou, however, a Nagah radiates a cool, venomous presence to those humans around her — equally disturbing, just in a different way.

## Breeds

Like the greater majority of the Changing Breeds in existence, a Nagah can be born from one of three breeds. These breeds likewise correspond with those commonly shared by their brothers and sisters among the Khurah. A Nagah's aptitudes and failings are largely tied to her pedigree, so that a vasuki will often have a very different set of outlooks and skills than a human-born balaram can be expected to.

### Balaram

Having been born as a human, balaram are to the Nagah as homids are to the Garou. They bring to the fold a greater understanding of the human culture from which they came, but lack the same spiritual potency from which the other breeds benefit. While most balaram can trace their cultural roots to Indian nobility, this is not always the case; in recent generations there have been Nagah balaram who come from all walks of life. Despite her human heritage, a human-born Nagah will nevertheless likely possess a decidedly inhuman demeanor, as the Curse makes it difficult to continue living among humans as she once did.

### Ahi

Although ahi are comparable to the metis of the Garou, the differences between the two are significant enough to make such a comparison of limited value. An ahi is the product of the mating of two Nagah. He possesses a natural breed form of the middle "war form" of the Nagah — the Azhi Dahaka. Unlike a Garou metis, however, an ahi possesses no disfigurement and is not sterile; Ahi are just as capable of producing offspring as are the balaram and vasuki breeds. They do possess a weakness to pollution, especially water pollution and Wym-toxins, thanks in part to the mingled blood and sheltered early life of every ahi.

With the closeness that is so often seen between nest mates, one might think that ahi would be the most common breed; this is not so for two reasons.

First, it is fairly rare for a Nagah-Nagah coupling to breed true; perhaps one in every ten such couplings produce a full-blooded ahi, with all other cases producing either a human or serpent child depending on the mother's wishes. (See the *Rite of Bearing* in the Samskara section, below.) The second reason is the quest for balance that drives the Nagah race — to produce too many Ahi would create an imbalanced perspective, and that would do the Nagah as a whole more harm than good.

### Vasuki

Vasuki are those Nagah born as snakes. Many breeds of snake will lay multiple eggs when they give birth, but this does not make it any easier for a Nagah to produce more vasuki young than balaram. In any particular brood of offspring, there is only a one in ten chance that the brood will turn out to have a single full-blooded Nagah among its number.

Vasuki are easily the most spiritually potent of the Nagah breeds. Much like the Balaram Nagah were once almost exclusively born of Indian royalty, Vasuki Nagah were once born almost exclusively from among cobra breeds. Even now, cobra is still the most common stock. In the modern age, however, there are Nagah born of practically every breed of venomous snake found in the world.

### Gifts

Beginning Nagah characters start with one Nagah gift, one breed gift, and one auspice gift at character creation. Available Gifts from breed and auspice are listed above in the short descriptions, and the general gifts are listed below. See below for longer descriptions of these Gifts.

In nearly all cases, a Nagah learns her Gifts in Xi Wang Chi from the Wani. She learns only those Gifts the Sesha allow her to learn, when they allow her to learn them. Nagah exist outside of the pact that the Garou have with the Gaian spirits; between this and the Nagah's code of secrecy, it is next to impossible for a Nagah to learn Gifts outside of those listed below. Should a Nagah somehow get around these obstacles, she must still pay an additional two experience points above and beyond the regular cost. She may never learn Advanced Gifts in this way regardless of the circumstances.

### Nagah Gifts

#### Basic

**Burrow:** The Nagah must be in Kali Dahaka or Vasuki form to use this Gift; otherwise it is exactly the same as the Metis Gift of the same name; see *Laws of the Wild*.

**Eyes of the Dragon Kings:** A Nagah must always strive to strike true, regardless of the circumstances. With this Gift, environmental obstacles such as fog, smoke, murky water or tree cover — in short, any visual obstacle up to

a solid wall — can be seen through with little difficulty, negating any penalties associated with such obstacles. To use this Gift, the Nagah merely spends a temporary Gnosis Trait; the effects last for up to one scene or one hour, whichever is longer. Note that this Gift does not see through illusions or powers such as *Blur of the Milky Eye*; activating this Gift puts the Nagah one Trait up on challenges related to seeing through such Gifts.

**Gift of Breath:** This Gift allows the Nagah to share her ability to breathe underwater with another being. By spending a Physical Trait, she may allow the target to breathe underwater for five minutes. An additional Gnosis Trait spent in activating this gift extends its benefits to a full hour.

**Lizard's Favor:** Sometimes acting unseen among the Khurah is next to impossible. In such desperate circumstances, this Gift can prove to be very useful for preserving the Sacred Secret. By spending temporary Physical Traits, the Nagah may develop a number of distinctly Mokolé-like characteristics, allowing her to masquerade as one. Each Physical Trait spent this way grants a single Mokolé-like appendage or trait, such as legs, a royal crest, horns, fins, or a back sail. These additions have no game effect; they grant absolutely no bonus Physical Traits, flight, gliding, swimming speed or anything of the like. They are merely for show, and attempts to employ them to any effect are bound to fail miserably. These traits last until the Nagah shifts into Balaram or Vasuki form.

**Night Whispers:** By spending a temporary Gnosis Trait, a Nagah with this Gift can speak via telepathy to another person in line of sight. For an additional Gnosis Trait, she may speak to all those nearby at once in this manner. Speaking to an unwilling target requires a successful Social Challenge (retest *Empathy*). The target may spend a Willpower Trait to block out the Nagah entirely if he desires. A Nagah may choose whether or not she wishes her telepathic “voice” to be recognizable or simply an anonymous message, though she cannot actively impersonate another with it. Special hand signals or even cell phones/walkie talkies should be used to indicate telepathic speech. This contact cannot be “overheard” or “broken into” by any known means, though other characters with similar telepathic powers may make a Static Mental test against a difficulty of the Nagah’s Mental Traits in order to detect that someone in the vicinity is using telepathy.

**Scent of Running Water:** As the Ragabash Gift; see **Laws of the Wild**.

**Sense of the Prey:** As the Ragabash Gift; see **Laws of the Wild**.

**Slayer's Eye:** As the Shadow Lord Gift *Fatal Flaw*; see **Laws of the Wild**.

**Snake's Skin:** By spending a temporary Gnosis Trait and a temporary Physical Trait, a Nagah with this Gift can shed her outermost layer of skin, allowing her to automatically slip free of any bonds that may be troubling her at the time. Likewise, this allows her to escape from an opponent’s attempt to grapple her. The shed skin is instantly regenerated. At Storyteller’s discretion, a Physical test against a variable difficulty (retest *Athletics*) may be required to

slip free of especially complicated or difficult bonds. In such cases, use a target difficulty of eight Traits, modified up or down according to difficulty as the Storyteller sees fit.

**Sting of Sleep:** Nagah see themselves as being more like surgical tools than implements of mass destruction; they kill with purpose and a great deal of discretion. Sometimes it suits them better to put a victim (especially a hapless passer-by) into a restful slumber instead of rending them limb from limb. By spending a Gnosis Trait, the Nagah with this Gift can alter up to three doses of her own venom. When used, venom altered this way induces lethal damage instead of aggravated. Although such wounds still produce wound penalties, these penalties are the result of extreme drowsiness rather than injury. If reduced to the Incapacitated health level this way, the victim falls into a deep, restful sleep for one hour, plus one hour for every health level beyond Incapacitated that would have been dealt by the venom. During this time, it is nearly impossible to wake the victim up. Once this time has elapsed, the wounds caused by the venom disappear. A victim can not be killed using altered venom.

**Veil of the Wani:** By spending a Gnosis and defeating a target in a Social test (retest *Subterfuge*), the Nagah possessing this Gift may alter another being's memory of an encounter with her. This is a very useful power for maintaining the Sacred Secret, though only a foolish Nagah would rely entirely on it to maintain his cover. The victim's mind will alter the memory to anything that seems feasible to him: A Garou victim might remember an encounter with a snakelike Wyrm creature, but the idea that the Nagah was actually a wereserpent would never cross his mind.

If successful, the Nagah may then make two additional win or tie Simple Tests; if she succeeds in these, the victim's memory of the event is completely removed instead. This does not leave any sort of "blank space" in the victim's memory, but rather the entire encounter is glossed over in a way that seems completely natural to the victim (though others who question the victim about events of the evening may notice there are some pieces missing).

### *Intermediate*

**Blessings of Kali:** While Nagah venom is a formidable weapon, the natural defenses of the Nagah are occasionally insufficient for the many dangers they must face. By spending a temporary Rage Trait and a temporary Gnosis Trait, the Nagah develops bony plates over her hide, forming natural armor. This armor sports sharp bony barbs over her shoulders, knuckles, skull, knees, and spine. In game terms, this provides the Nagah with two additional Healthy Health Levels and the additional Physical Traits *Sharp* x2 in all *Brawl* or *Melee* tests in close combat. This Gift lasts for up to one scene or one hour; the effect carries over between forms.

**Combat Healing:** Sometimes even the impressive regenerative powers of the Nagah aren't sufficient to repair damage done, especially when there just

isn't enough time to sit down and rest for a few moments. By spending two temporary Rage Traits, a Nagah with this Gift is able to regenerate wounds even during combat. The Nagah benefits from her normal powers of regeneration as if she were resting, regardless of what she is currently doing. This Gift lasts for up to one scene.

**Darting Fangs:** By spending two Gnosis Traits, the Nagah grows a pair of long, sharp barbs from her elbows. These barbs may then be removed and thrown at the Nagah's prey as darts (retest *Athletics*); each contains an amount of venom equal to one of her daily doses, though they do not deplete her reservoir. The barbs deal one level of aggravated damage upon impact; since they sport vicious hooks at their ends, they must be removed from the victim before this damage can be healed through any means. Unless done very carefully (impossible to do during combat), such removal deals an additional level of aggravated damage to the victim.

**Gaze of the Serpent:** By meeting her opponent's eyes with a piercing gaze, a Nagah with this Gift can paralyze her victim with an intense, overriding fear. Use of this Gift requires the Nagah defeat her target in a Social test (retest *Intimidation*). If successful, the victim will remain paralyzed until distracted by a loud noise, a flash of light or an attack of any kind — even if it takes hours or days for such a distraction to occur. This Gift may not be used on any single target twice in the same scene. This Gift is usually used to aid in a Nagah's escape, since its use in combat is limited at best — combat simply has too many “distractions” for the effects to last. Supernatural creatures may terminate this paralysis with the expenditure of a Willpower Trait at the end of the scene/hour, whichever comes first.

**Pure Venom:** This Gift is invaluable on the rare instances that a Nagah comes across a target who proves unusually resistant to her venom. To activate this Gift, the Nagah must spend a temporary Gnosis Trait before making a bite attack; if the attack is successful and the Nagah chooses to use one of her venom doses, the venom bypasses any resistance the victim has, such as *Resist Toxins*. Even vampires take full venom damage from such an attack; other walking dead take half damage.

**Shield of the Dragon:** A truly dedicated Nagah must be prepared to track her prey to wherever he leads her. By spending a Gnosis Trait, the Nagah with this Gift is able to adjust her body to any potentially adverse environmental effects for the duration of the scene; while still unpleasant, things like heat, cold, radiation, disease, and intense air or water pressure have absolutely no effect upon her. Even fire and electricity will only deal bashing damage to the Nagah during this time, as will heavy-duty pollutants or radiation exposure.

**Swimming the Spirit River:** With this valuable Gift, the Nagah no longer depends on her Ananta to enter the spirit world. She may step sideways exactly as a Garou would, using the same rules.

## Advanced

**Breath of the Dragon Lords:** A Nagah who possesses this Gift can breathe gouts of scalding gasses that greatly resemble flames. These attacks have a range of up to ten paces and deal two levels of aggravated damage to a single opponent with a successful Physical test (retest *Athletics*). Because they are gasses as opposed to actual flames, they don't actually cause materials to combust. Each use of this breath requires the expenditure of a Gnosis Trait.

**Destroyer's Blessing:** This terrifying Gift allows a Nagah to even the odds when outnumbered by her opponents, at least for a time. Upon spending three Gnosis Traits, the Nagah's arms each split into three serpent-like appendages, each of which ends with the body and head of a king cobra. Each of these heads have one dose of Nagah venom and provide the Nagah with two extra bite attacks per combat turn. This Gift lasts two turns plus an additional turn for every extra Gnosis spent on the Gift's activation. Obviously, while this Gift is in effect, the Nagah is unable to use her arms for conventional means.

**Evading the Watchers:** Even the most careful and paranoid of targets can be reached by a Nagah who possesses this Gift. Activation requires the Nagah spend a temporary Gnosis Trait, which allows her to in most cases evade *Aura Perception*, detection spells and wards, *Danger Sense* and all other similar Gifts and powers. Anyone checking the Nagah with such effects will instead detect whatever strikes the viewer as "normal" or "unthreatening" and will promptly ignore her. Those who have higher current Gnosis than the Nagah are allowed a Mental test to detect the Nagah's presence; observers with Advanced *Auspex*, a higher Arete rating, or greater relevant Arcanoi or Art level than the Nagah's current Gnosis are allowed the same Challenge. Taking any hostile action against any opponent ends this Gift's effects immediately.

## Balaram Gifts

### Basic

**Cold Blood:** Using this Gift, a Nagah is able to make her Balaram form as cold-blooded as her other forms. This allows her to avoid showing up on infrared scanners, more easily pass as a vampire, and considerably reduces the risks associated with strenuous activity in hot environments. Activating this Gift requires the expenditure of a temporary Physical Trait. The effects last for one scene, during which time all attempts to detect the Nagah on infrared devices or similar technology are at a two-Trait penalty and any attempts to pass as one of the undead in a physical sense are up two Traits.

**Master of the Body:** With this Gift, a Nagah can display such self mastery that she even gains control over bodily functions that are normally involuntary for her, such as heartbeat and metabolic rate. In addition to granting the Nagah the ability to ignore wound penalties short of Incapacitated, this Gift also allows her to enter a form of suspended animation, survive in an area without

air for much longer than would be normally possible and prevent herself from dehydrating due to a lack of water. By spending a temporary Willpower Trait, this Gift lasts for a scene; if an additional temporary Gnosis Trait is spent, the effects last for twenty-four hours instead.

**Persuasion:** As the Homid Gift; see *Laws of the Wild*.

**Prehensile Body:** It takes some Balaram a long time to get used to the limitations of their Vasuki form. In fact, some never do get used to it. Luckily, this Gift makes the transition a bit easier. A Nagah with this Gift is able to use her tail perform nearly any feat she is capable of doing with her hands. Feats such as turning doorknobs or holding small objects are automatic; more difficult feats such as tying a bow tie or loading a gun require a Physical test against a difficulty assigned by the Narrator.

**Self-Mastery:** Nagah are big on personal balance and intellectual self-discipline, things that are very apparent in those Nagah who possess this Gift. A Nagah with this Gift may spend Mental Traits as Willpower Traits for the purposes of defending against mental attacks or mind-influencing powers and Gifts. Additionally, by spending a Gnosis Trait, the Nagah is considered to be up a number of Traits equal to her current Gnosis on all Mental tests to resist such powers for the remainder of the scene.

**Subtle Serpent:** Nagah can be extremely persuasive and charismatic when it suits their purposes. By spending a Gnosis Trait and winning a Social test against the target's permanent Willpower rating, the Nagah's voice becomes almost hypnotic. If successful, she may ask her target simple, short requests that he must carry out for the remainder of the scene. Acceptable requests include "look over there," "take off your coat," or "step out of the car." Any action that would require more than a single turn to complete is unacceptable, as is any action that would obviously endanger the target's health or violate their Nature. Even the threat of danger will snap the target out of this trance, and he may spend Willpower Traits to negate requests on a one-for-one basis — requests negated this way cannot be repeated unless the Gift is activated again, although they do not break the trance itself. Victims will remember their actions during this time, though not why they felt so compelled to obey the Nagah.

**Unexpected Venom:** By spending a temporary Rage Trait, a Nagah with this Gift may grow fangs and generate a single dose of venom while in Balaram form. Venom used this way counts against a Nagah's daily limit. The effects of this Gift remain until she shifts form. Combined with the Gift *Cold Blood*, this also allows a clever Nagah to masquerade as a vampire quite convincingly.

### *Intermediate*

**Being One:** This Gift allows the members of a Nagah's nest to share almost everything, even such things as sensations, thoughts, and physical aptitudes. Activation requires the expenditure of a temporary Gnosis Trait. For the remainder of the scene, all Nagah in the nest can communicate telepathically

regardless of the distance between them. What's more, any Nagah who is part of this "network" and possesses this Gift is able to lend one of the following to another member of the "network": A Physical Trait, Mental Trait, Willpower Trait, primarily knowledge-related Ability (*Occult* or *Politics* is fine, but *Firearms* or *Drive* is not) or an extra Healthy health level. Only one such Trait, Ability, or health level can be lent by a single Nagah, though two Nagah with this Gift could each lend a Physical Trait to a third nest member.

This Gift is not required to receive such Traits, only send them. These loans last until the end of the scene or until the lender desires them returned, though if they are lost by the recipient they return expended to the owner when the loan is over. Any such borrowed Traits are lost immediately if the lender is killed. Needless to say, the mechanics of these exchanges may require a Narrator or such devices as cell phones and walkie talkies to properly simulate, and players are reminded to keep strict track of such "loans."

**Fluid Grace:** As the Lupus Gift; see **Laws of the Wild**.

**Pierce Illusion:** Nagah have long been enemies of illusion-weavers, going back to the great Vasana's purge of the Rakshasa prince Jatadaka. Without the ability to discern reality from illusion, it would be a great deal more difficult for them to be certain that their targets have truly been delivered their just rewards. By spending a Gnosis Trait, the Nagah may make a Simple Test (win or tie) whenever in the presence of an illusion for the rest of the scene — success indicates she senses an illusion is somewhere nearby. By then defeating the illusion's creator in a Mental test (retest *Investigation*), the Nagah is able to not only determine the exact location of the illusion, but also see through it to know what it is hiding. Only one Simple Test is allowed per illusion.

**Sang Froid:** No one could ever accuse a Nagah of being overly emotional in the first place, but those Nagah who possess this Gift are even further buffered from both such feelings and more importantly from Gifts and powers that prey upon a victim's emotions. Activating this Gift requires the expenditure of a temporary Gnosis Trait. For the remainder of the scene, the Nagah is considered five Traits up in any tests involving supernatural emotional manipulation or control, regardless of the source. This includes powers that incite frenzy of any kind. This extra measure of control also prevents her from regaining Rage by any means for the same length of time.

**Spirit Ward:** As the Homid Gift; see **Laws of the Wild**.

### Advanced

**Kundalini:** By spending a temporary Gnosis Trait and doing nothing but breathing exercises for a number of minutes, the Nagah is able to raise her body's energy through seven places of power called *chakras*. The number of breathing exercises required depends on what benefits the Nagah is wants; raising the Kundalini to the Muladhara requires only a single minute of controlled breathing, for example, while raising it to the Vishuddha requires a full five minutes.



The Muladhara, or root chakra, grants two additional Bruised Health Levels to the Nagah by raising her will to survive.

The Swadhishtana, or hara chakra, purges the Nagah's body of all diseases, possessing spirits, introduced poisons and other unwanted foreign matter, as well as simultaneously healing three Health Levels (even of aggravated damage) by raising her vitality.

The Manipura, or solar plexus chakra, grants the Nagah two extra temporary Rage Traits by controlling her raw emotional energy.

The Anahata, or heart chakra, causes the Nagah to radiate a strong sense of love and tranquillity by controlling her love and compassion for humanity. Anyone coming in contact with the Nagah must make a Willpower or Conscience test against three Traits to act or even think in a hostile manner toward her. This effect is ended should the Nagah herself act in an obviously belligerent fashion.

The Vishuddha, or throat chakra, controls creativity and clairaudience. This allows the Nagah to "hear" the thoughts of any individual within three steps. By concentrating for a full turn on a single target and defeating him in a Mental test (retest *Investigation*), she may probe a target's mind to ask a single question that the target must answer truthfully. The effects of this aspect last for a scene, though the Nagah may choose to target several different individuals during this time, provided they come within range.

The Ajna, or brow chakra, grants the Nagah control over her intuition and clairvoyance. This grants her complete knowledge of everything that pertains to her and her nest within line of sight. Secrets are revealed, illusions fall away, enemies are revealed for who they are, and the true forms and natures of all around are made known to the Nagah. In game terms, this allows the Nagah to automatically see through any illusions, sense whether a being has hostile motives toward the Nagah or her nest with a win or a tie on a Simple Test or determine whether a being is a supernatural creature with a win or tie on a Simple Test (on a win, the exact type of creature is revealed). These Simple Tests can be retested with *Empathy* or *Investigation*.

Finally, the Sahasrara, or crown chakra, controls the super consciousness and spiritual will. This allows the Nagah to attain a brief state of cosmic awareness, granting her the capacity to test one course of action for danger, as per the Silent Strider tribal Advantage (see **Laws of the Wild**), save that her sense is successful on either a win or a tie. Alternately, she may choose to gain a number of retests on Social tests with spirits or any knowledge-related Abilities equal to her Gnosis rating, as a manifestation of her newfound cosmic understanding. These retests may be used in addition to Ability retests on a Challenge.

Unless otherwise noted, the effects of this Gift last for one scene. The Gift may generally be activated no more than once per week; excessive use can lead to dangerous bodily imbalances. Only one chakra may be activated at a time.

**There Is No Body:** This Gift allows the Nagah to transcend the physical world completely, at least for a time. By spending a Gnosis Trait and a number of temporary Mental Traits (up to four), she becomes completely immaterial. Bullets, claws, fire, lightning: all of these things pass right through her harmlessly, and she may pass through any sort of physical barrier. Powers that are able to affect the immaterial, such as spirit magic, are still able to affect her. This Gift lasts for a number of turns equal to twice the number of Mental Traits spent upon activation; it is highly suggested that the Nagah be outside of any solid barriers at the time the Gift's effects end. (Reappearing inside a solid object deals levels of aggravated damage equal to the amount of mass that was trapped in the object, as determined by the Narrator.)

## Ahi Gifts

### Basic

**Bones as Coils:** This Gift allows the Nagah can squeeze through any opening no smaller than a quarter in diameter, regardless of the form she wears; activation requires a Physical test (retest *Athletics*) against a difficulty of nine Traits. The use of this Gift generally requires a full turn, though it may take more than that depending on how long the opening is.

**Face of Surya:** Cold-blooded creatures have always loved the caress of Surya, the golden face of the sun. This Gift allows the ahi to call upon Surya to shed his light, regardless of location or the time of day. Activation of this Gift requires the expenditure of a number of Gnosis equal to the number of turns the Ahi wishes the Gift to last. Make a Mental test (retest *Occult*) against a difficulty of six Traits, and a dark area is illuminated with ambient light for the Gift's duration. The Ahi may spend additional temporary Mental Traits to enhance the Gift's effects.

Trait	Effect
1	Sun pierces clouds or trees with enough brightness to illuminate targets.
2	Sun's rays are as strong through perfectly clear sky as through water, glass, clouds, or tree cover.
3	Sun's rays can light fires or bring heat when it is cold or appear inside windowless building or underground during the daytime.
4	Sun shines even at night. At this level, the light is "genuine" and strong enough to injure vampires.

Note that while the sunlight may only injure vampires and other light-sensitive creatures at the highest level of expenditure, even at the lower levels it certainly *appears* to be real sunlight, and still provokes normal instinctual

fear responses until they have time to calm down and realize the light isn't hurting them.

**Indra's Cloak:** As the Black Fury Gift *Curse of Aeolus*; see *Laws of the Wild*.

**Venom Blood:** As the Get of Fenris Gift of the same name; see *Laws of the Wild*.

**Weaver Sense:** By succeeding in a Mental test against a difficulty equal to 12 minus the local Gauntlet rating (retest *Investigation*), a Nagah with this Gift is able to sense emanations of the Weaver and determine their relative strength. Additionally, this Gift allows her to see creations and spirits of the Weaver on the other side of the Gauntlet. Extremely strong emanations of the Weaver may disorient the Nagah temporarily, though not to the extent of a Trait penalty. At the Narrator's discretion, it may also reveal strong incidences of mundane order and sturdiness, such as a bureaucratic institution or an obsessively organized and orderly human being. This Gift lasts as long as the Nagah in question is willing to concentrate upon it.

**Wyld Sense:** As per the Gift *Weaver Sense*, above, save that the difficulty of the test is equal to the local Gauntlet rating and that it reveals the presence of the Wyld and its creations rather than the Weaver.

**Worm Sense:** As per the Gift *Weaver Sense*, above, save that the difficulty of the test is equal to the local Gauntlet rating and that it reveals the presence of the Wurm and its creations rather than the Weaver.

### *Intermediate*

**Call the Tides:** Snakes have long been associated in folklore and myth with the element of water; fittingly, this Gift grants the Nagah control over the tides. When within sight of a tidal body of water (such as a river estuary, ocean, or sea), she may spend a Gnosis Trait and a number of Mental Traits depending on the effect she wishes to create:

Trait	Effect
1	Tides come in or go out twice as fast as usual.
2	Tides can be reversed, coming in when they should be going out and vice versa.
3	High or low tide can be brought in one scene.
4	Unusual tides (spring tide or neap tide) can be brought in one scene.
5	Freakish tides (heavy waves, for example) can occur in one scene.

Obviously, the game effects of such manipulation are up to the Storyteller to determine, but they can be quite disturbing to witness.

**Command the Water Spirit:** As the Uktena Gift of the same name, but with the following modifications: the Nagah can only summon water-spirits, and she must have a natural water source available. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**Throat Snake:** Through the use of this Gift, the Nagah's tongue becomes a slender, foot-long, pink-scaled snake that can leave her throat and travel on its own. She senses everything the throatsnake does; it bears a single dose of the Nagah's venom, which is taken from the Nagah's reserves. For purposes of Physical tests, it is considered to have the Physical Traits *Dexterous*, *Quick x2*, *Tenacious*, and *Wiry*. To activate this Gift, the Nagah must spend two Rage Traits and a number of Physical Traits equal to the number of Health Levels she wishes her throatsnake to have. Should the throatsnake be killed before returning to its proper place in the Nagah's throat, she will receive two aggravated levels of damage and be unable to talk until the damage is healed.

**Whirlpool:** By spending a number of Gnosis Traits, the Nagah is able to create a whirlpool in any body of water within line of sight. The body of water must be at least as large as a small swimming pool, and the number of Gnosis spent determines the strength of the whirlpool.

Gnosis Spent	Effect
1	5-foot diameter, large enough to suck down a human.
2	10-foot diameter, large enough to suck down a Garou in Crinos form.
3	20-foot diameter, large enough to suck down dinghies and similar craft.
4	50-foot diameter, large enough to suck down medium boats.

The whirlpool itself does no damage, although creatures caught in it may suffer damage from colliding with other debris or eventually drowning effects as they are sucked under; the Narrator should determine any damage normally.

### Advanced

**Child of Storms:** As the spiritual children of the Wani, Nagah tend to have an affinity for storms; it is not uncommon for storms to be the subject of much of their art or poetry. With this Gift, a Nagah literally becomes a storm, transforming her body into wind, rain, and lightning. Activating this potent Gift requires the expenditure of three temporary traits each of Gnosis, Rage, and Willpower. Upon doing so, the Nagah loses her physical body. While in her storm-like state, she can direct rain, hail, snow, or wind up to 50 mph. Once every three turns, she may lash out with a lightning bolt, using her total (not current) Gnosis in the place of her Physical Traits in challenges to hit her target; if successful, her target takes four levels of aggravated damage.

In such a state, the only things that can affect a Nagah are weather-controlling powers, which may even damage her if it is within the capabilities of the powers in question to do so. This Gift lasts for five turns for each permanent Rage, Gnosis, or Willpower Trait the Nagah possesses, whichever category is lowest.

**Force Balance:** A Nagah with this Gift can forcibly bring the powers of the Wyrn, Weaver, and Wyld in an area into a state of balance. Although this Gift can be used no more than once per week, its effects are nothing short of astonishing. It tends to anger the current owner of the location where this Gift is being used. Of course, the effects won't necessarily be to the benefit of the Gift's user, either; it merely brings the three forces of the Triat into balance in the local area (generally a radius of a city block or two), the exact details of which are often hard to predict.

The Nagah spends three temporary Gnosis Traits and makes a Mental test (retest *Enigmas*) against a difficulty equal to the local Gauntlet, or 12 minus the local Gauntlet (whichever is greater). If successful, the Nagah must begin making a series of Simple Tests, counting only wins and continuing until one is lost outright or until five such successes have been accumulated. The effectiveness of this Gift depends on the number of successes:

Success	Effect
0	The process begins and is somewhat weak. Complete balance of the site will take nearly six months, and mundane forces that try to stop the balance could do so. Returning the site to an unbalanced condition will not require much effort.
1	The effects of the Gift proceed far faster than they would otherwise. Balance returns to the site within three months. Gafflings don't have the power to stop or reverse the process, although Jagglings or greater spirits could do so.
2	The site effectively has a new spirit. The place is imbued with a sense of balance that would require the attention of several strong Jagglings, shapeshifters, or similarly powerful creatures to undo. Under mundane conditions, the place will remain balanced for at least ten years.
3	Change wreaks havoc on the place for a week, at the end of which the place is balanced. Powerful outside influences (an Incarna avatar, a horde of Jagglings, the efforts of shapeshifter elders) can still prevent the process, but otherwise, the place attains balance and will remain in balance for at least fifty years.

- 4 Everything old is new again, and it takes less than twenty-four hours. Any creature (including random spirits not part of the balancing effort) caught in the unfolding storm of order take one health level of aggravated damage every hour as the primordial forces at work try to use her as raw materials for the new harmonious state. Only creatures of Incarna or similar level can actually stop the process of restoring balance, and without actual interference, the site remains balanced for at least one hundred years.
- 5 It's like watching time-lapse photography. In the space of ten minutes, the site transforms from a nightmare into a balanced and sustainable system. Any creature caught in the transition takes two levels of aggravated damage every turn as the balancing process incorporates him into the new system. Only the direct intervention of an Incarna or the like can stop the Gift's effects before completion. Under mundane conditions, the site would require a thousand years to slip again so far out of balance.

**Rapture of the Deep:** By spending a Gnosis Trait and defeating the target in a Willpower challenge, the Nagah can instill a desire in her victim to go to the nearest large body of water (which must be at least the size of a small pond) and swim out and down as far as he is able. If the target makes it to the bottom, he immediately comes to his senses; otherwise, the effect lasts for up to a number of turns equal to ten plus the Nagah's Willpower, minus the victim's Willpower. Even the threat of drowning will not end the Gift's effects prematurely, and the victim will even try to escape those who attempt to restrain him (though he will not attempt to harm them in order to do so).

## Vasuki Gifts

### Basic

**Command Snakes:** Through the use of this Gift, the vasuki is able to call upon her mundane serpent kin for aid. Of course, in most areas the majority of the snakes that answer her call will not be venomous (some areas such as India, Australia, and the American Southwest are of course notable exceptions), but they will follow simple commands within their capabilities and defend the Nagah from attack as best they can.

To activate this Gift, the Vasuki spends a number of Social Traits depending on how many snakes she is wants; if only a few snakes are needed, one Trait will do. Three Traits will draw about thirty snakes, while five will draw a swarm. They will remain in the area for the duration of one scene or

until the summoner dismisses them, whichever comes first. Of course, this Gift does not provide the snakes with any special means of speedy transportation, so unless the vasuki knows she will be near a nest of snakes, it may be necessary for her to call upon their aid in advance.

**Death Rattle:** Although most Nagah are descended from cobra stock, they have still learned a few tricks from some of their other serpent kin; the rattlesnake is a good example of this. By activating this Gift, the vasuki grows a rattle that she uses to create a mystically-charged sound. As the sound is magical in nature, it is not necessary for the target to actually hear it for this Gift to work, merely that they be in line of sight (though many vasuki like their target to hear it anyway). This sound makes an opponent nervous and distracted — whenever the victim takes an action for the remainder of the scene, the Vasuki may choose to expend a temporary Social Trait to put the victim at a one-trait penalty for a single challenge. This penalty is not cumulative, so a vasuki could not spend two Social Traits at once to put the victim at a two-trait penalty. Should the victim discover the vasuki's location, this Gift ceases to function. It cannot be used again on that victim for the remainder of the scene.

**Herpetophobia:** This Gift afflicts the victim with a severe phobia of snakes. The vasuki must spend a Rage Trait and defeat the target in a Social challenge (retest *Intimidation*). The target becomes extremely irrational in the presence of snakes, and will instinctually flee or fight depending on the victim and the situation — a normal human won't attack a giant snake before them, but a Garou might. Victims may spend a Willpower Trait to fight the fear for a single turn; those who choose not to flee are still two Traits down in any tests involving snakes. The duration of this Gift depends on the number of Social Traits spent; regular mortals are affected by this fear for one day per Social Trait expended. Supernatural creatures are affected for one turn per Social Trait, while "partial supernaturals" such as ghouls, Kinfolk, and the like are affected for one hour per Social Trait expended. Should the hapless victim already suffer from a phobia of snakes, the results aren't pretty — at Narrator's discretion, he may go catatonic.

**Lightning Strike:** As the Ahroun Gift *Spirit of the Fray*. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**River's Gift:** A Nagah who possesses this Gift is able to breathe water in any form. Activating this Gift requires the expenditure of a Physical Trait; the effects last for up to one scene.

**Sense Vibration:** By spending a Gnosis Trait, the vasuki draws upon a snake's natural keen vibration sense to detect even the tiniest change in air pressure and ground vibration for the rest of the scene. Upon activation, the vasuki can discern such things at a distance of up to ten paces, enabling her to sense the size, direction, number and speed of approaching objects. While in contact with the ground, this Gift allows the Nagah to automatically defeat all

forms of true invisibility, such as *Camouflage* or fae *Hidden Form*, but not powers like *Blur of the Milky Eye* or vampiric *Obfuscate* that “cloud the mind” of onlookers. This Gift can only be used to any effect in areas of relative vibrational “quiet” — city streets, airports, construction sites and other places of great vibrational disturbance cut this Gift’s range in half or may even block it outright at the Narrator’s discretion if the vibrational “noise” is too high.

**Treesnake’s Blessing:** By spending a Physical Trait, the vasuki is able to draw upon the natural climbing ability of tree-dwelling snakes; for the rest of the scene, her climbing speed is as fast as her walking speed. She need only make tests to climb especially slick or otherwise forbidding substances.

### *Intermediate*

**Belly Ride:** This less-than-pleasant Gift provides a Nagah in Vasuki form with a very bizarre form of stealthy travel: inside the stomach of a human host. By spending a Gnosis Trait to activate this Gift and then entering an unconscious human’s mouth, the Nagah is able to crawl into his stomach, regardless of whether she should logically be able to fit there. This induces slight nausea and loss of appetite in the host, though he will refuse to believe that the cause is anything more unusual than the flu. The Nagah, meanwhile, is able to see, hear, and sense anything that her host does, is immune to acidic digestive fluids, and suffers from no damage unless it affects the host’s body as a whole (Narrator’s discretion). She may remain there for up to four days, after which her host vomits her up; of course, the Nagah herself may end the effect any time by choosing to activate her host’s vomit reflex, or by leaving while he is asleep. Nagah traveling in this fashion should stay with their host at all times and adopt a description tag or hand signal to indicate that they are not visible to onlookers.

**Kitesnake:** By spending a Physical Trait and a full turn shifting his body mass about so that he is mostly hood (with only the tiniest bit of thin tail hanging below), a Nagah in Vasuki form with this Gift is able to glide along with the wind for a time. Any strong breeze is sufficient to make him airborne, and under calm conditions he may even direct where he goes by angling his body this way and that. Of course, stronger wind conditions may make such control impossible. This Gift can also be used to fall with style, effectively negating falling damage if it can be employed in time.

**Long Strike:** Snakes are able to strike from a surprisingly long distance away, generally about half their total body length. A vasuki with this Gift can do even better. By spending a Rage Trait, the Nagah can increase her effective hand-to-hand striking distance for by a number of steps equal to her permanent Rage rating plus a number of extra steps equal to the number of Physical Traits she is willing to spend. This effect lasts a number of turns equal to her permanent Rage rating. Essentially, this Gift allows the Nagah to make a *Melee* or *Brawl* attack against a target an outside of her normal reach, making them



extremely dangerous and unpredictable close combat opponents. This Gift does not allow them to stretch in any other way than combat, nor does it actually move the Nagah from where she started when the Gift began; it merely allows her to deliver *Brawl* or *Melee* attacks at a greater range than normal.

**Sidewind:** By using this Gift, a Nagah in Azhi Dahaka, Kali Dahaka, or Vasuki form can move with great stealth and rapidity, taking after the snake of the same name. Activating this Gift requires a Gnosis Trait be spent; she moves at ten times her normal land speed for eight hours, during which the Nagah can do nothing outside of travel without ending the Gift's effects.

### Advanced

**Assassin's Well:** Normally, a Nagah can draw upon three doses of venom daily before running out. Usually this is enough to bring a target down, but this is not always the case. By spending two Gnosis Traits, however, a wereserpent with this Gift transcends that limitation, gaining an unlimited supply of venom for the remainder of the scene.

**Song of Takshaka:** As the Red Talon Gift *Curse of Lycaon*, but with the following modifications: it transforms humans into serpents, and it can force any Khurah into their animal form. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**Storm Surge:** This Gift allows the wereserpent using it to call upon her spiritual ties with the Wani to summon a concentrated storm. Note that the ability to summon does not necessarily equate control. This Gift can only be used on an area of coastline, and to activate it the Nagah must spend two Gnosis Traits and a between one to five Social Traits. The height of the storm surge is equal to the number of Traits spent times six in feet. A six foot storm surge is enough to break windows in beach houses, pound boats to splinters and strand vehicles; a thirty foot storm surge will flood streets, knock out electricity and communication lines, even batter sturdy buildings and wash vehicles out to sea.

Once summoned, the storm takes about twenty minutes to reach full effect and lasts about an hour after that. Traits spent on the storm cannot be regained for a full cycle of the tides afterward, and the Sessa strongly frown at wanton uses of this Gift. Once summoned, the wereserpent has no special control over the storm surge unless other storm-affecting powers are used.

## Kamakshi Gifts

### Basic

**Bask:** The warm, gentle caress of the sun's rays are pleasurable to all cold-blooded creatures — the Nagah are no exception. A Nagah with this Gift regains one Willpower Trait for each uninterrupted hour she spends bathing in the sun, provided it is a warm day and she can get direct sunlight.

**Calm:** As the Children of Gaia Gift. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**Ganga's Caress:** As the Theurge Gift: *Mother's Touch*. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**Kind Death:** Nagah are assassins and as cold-blooded as their job requires, but that does not mean they hate those whom they kill. This Gift allows a Nagah to ease the transition from life to death for a dying being. This also serves to prevent that creature's soul from becoming a wraith or vampire and helps ensure that a Khurah's spirit rejoins the Gaian cycle. The dying or very recently deceased victim must be in the Nagah's line of sight. The user of the Gift must make a Social test (retest *Empathy*) against a difficulty equal to the target's permanent Willpower. If successful, a dying victim's pain is eased and the soul painlessly escapes the body. If the Embrace is attempted it automatically fails, and the spirit will not linger on as a wraith barring some truly exceptional circumstance. Should anyone attempt to lay any dying curses, hexes, or use similar powers, they do so at a Trait penalty equal to the Nagah's Willpower.

**Resist Pain:** As the Philodox Gift. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Serpent's Sting:** The Nagah see themselves as teachers as well as assassins, since it is their hope that those they kill learn from their mistakes and improve in their next life. Of course, one of the best teachers happens to be pain; it works well on fleeing prey, and can even be used to teach a target a lesson without killing him. A Nagah with this Gift must spend a Rage Trait as she touches her target (a Physical test if they resist). If successful, her target then suffers double wound penalties for the remainder of the scene. Those who use this Gift are watched carefully for signs of corruption by their fellows.

### *Intermediate*

**Assassin's Insistence:** Kamakshi study the arts of both life and death, to better ensure a balanced mastery of both. This has enabled them to undermine attempts at healing their targets, preventing and even sometimes causing such attempts to merely harm the intended recipient. The Kamakshi spends a Gnosis and touches her target (a Physical test unless the target is unable to resist); if successful, the next attempt to magically heal the victim, such as with the Gift *Mother's Touch*, is wasted. What's more, would-be magical healers must make a Mental test against the Kamakshi (retest *Medicine*). If this challenge fails, the healer inadvertently deals a number of levels of bashing damage equal to the damage levels he would have otherwise healed. The effects of this Gift last until the first attempt at healing or the end of the scene, whichever is first.

**Dazzle:** As the Children of Gaia Gift. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Denial of Wellbeing:** The next step up from *Assassin's Insistence* — a prerequisite for this Gift — the Kamakshi is now able to potentially stop even natural healing and regeneration. To activate this Gift, she must spend two Gnosis Traits and touch the intended target (same as above), then make a Mental test (retest *Medicine*) against a difficulty equal to the target's Gnosis (or Willpower for those without a Gnosis rating). If successful, the victim's natural healing process (including regeneration) is halted completely. Magical heal-

ing of any kind is ineffective, and he is at a two-Trait penalty on any tests to resist poisons and diseases. This Gift normally lasts one hour; each additional Mental Trait spent extends this time by an hour.

**Prevent Adharma:** A being's Dharma is his or her destined role in the universe; an Adharma means literally a "wrong action" or "misstep". This Gift allows the Nagah using it to help ensure that another being continues to fulfill his proper role, at least for a time. To activate this Gift, the Nagah must spend a Gnosis Trait and defeat the target in a test of their Social Traits against the target's Willpower (retest *Enigmas*). If successful, the being immediately "comes to his senses" and stops acting in any way that is against his true calling in life until the end of the scene.

Of course, in these troubled times a person's Dharma isn't always the most obvious of things; most people don't know what their own Dharma is, and some don't even have one. Against such individuals, this Gift is useless. Against some targets, however, such as supernatural creatures, this Gift is quite effective. A vampire victim of this Gift would find himself unable to resist his Beast, a Garou would have to do its duty as a Fang of Gaia, and a Seelie changeling would have to attempt to inspire creativity in mortals around it. It is up to the Storyteller to decide exactly what a character's Dharma really is; sometimes it may surprise the user of the Gift, so it is advised that this Gift be used with utmost caution.

**Surya's Radiance:** As the Children of Gaia Gift *Halo of the Sun*. See *Laws of the Wild*.

### *Advanced*

**Shed the Years:** Some Nagah are extremely long-lived, even by Changing Breed standards; this Gift is the reason why. Once per year while undergoing the rite *Shedding the Past*, a Nagah may use this Gift to literally reverse the aging process. This power can be used by a Nagah on herself or a bonded nestmate. She must spend one permanent Gnosis Trait and make a number of Physical tests (difficulty seven, retest *Enigmas*) equal to the number of Physical Traits she has in her Balaram form. Each success accumulated reverses two months of aging, though knowledge and memory are unaffected. Scars, wrinkles, even long-term illnesses that were gained during that time vanish completely unless the Nagah chooses to retain them.

**Suspend:** It is a commonly myth that snakes are able to unhinge their jaws to eat; this didn't prevent the Nagah from developing this Gift, however, which enables a Nagah in Azhi Dahaka or Kali Dahaka form to unhinge her jaw and swallow creatures up to and including the size of a Crinos werewolf. Of course, only non-struggling creatures can be swallowed so easily. Attempting to swallow a resisting creature requires at least three successful Physical tests, and possibly more at the Narrator's discretion for particularly large or ferocious targets. The purpose of this Gift is not destruction, however — as the Nagah

swallows the creature, it is covered with a thick anesthetic slime that effectively paralyzes it and causes it to enter a form of suspended animation. While in such a state, nothing can affect the suspended creature — not fire, electricity or even time, so long as it remains in the preservative slime.

At any time, the Nagah carrying the suspended creature can reverse this effect and disgorge the creature — the slime dries out and the creature returns to full consciousness in three turns, no worse for the ordeal. To use this Gift, the Nagah must spend one Gnosis and win a Physical test (retest *Enigmas*) against a difficulty of eight Traits. While carrying the creature within her, she is down three Traits in all Physical and Social tests. This Gift is generally used only in dire circumstances, such as to save an ally who has been poisoned and would otherwise die before a cure could be found.

## Kartikeya

### Basic

**Brief Sensation:** This Gift enables the Kartikeya to produce a single illusionary sensation in a target. The sensation lasts for but a brief moment and can only affect a single sense; it must remain relatively simple. For example, the smell of turpentine, a hot flash or the shine of a jewel lying in the mud. The Nagah must expend one Mental Trait and defeat a target in a Mental test for each illusion created this way. While not powerful, this Gift can be vitally useful in some situations — there aren't many Corax who can pass up an opportunity to land and examine what looked like a discarded bit of shiny silver, for example.

**Eyes of the War God:** In Indian myth, Kartikeya was the name of the son of Shiva, a war god with six faces who could never be surprised. It is after him that the Nagah of this auspice were named. By spending a Gnosis Trait, the Nagah gains 360-degree vision for the remainder of the scene, effectively canceling most forms of Surprise. She is considered three Traits up in all tests to perceive enemies for the Gift's duration.

**Forked Tongue:** This Gift allows the Nagah to become an extremely convincing liar, able to expertly deceive all but the most skilled or paranoid of subjects. By spending a Social Trait, the Nagah gains a free retest on a single *Subterfuge*-based Social test when trying to convince another of the truth of her words.

**Scent of the True Form:** As the Philodox Gift. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Secret Serpent:** As the Ragabash Gift *Blissful Ignorance*. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**The Serpent's Voice:** Drawing upon their love for song and euphonious sound, a Kartikeya who possesses this Gift is able to reproduce any sound she has heard with absolute accuracy. Of course, this does not allow the Nagah to imitate another's voice perfectly; she would merely be able to repeat the things she's heard the person in question say. It's possible that after having heard that person speak enough, she could form new, choppy sentences, but anyone

listening who knows the imitated person can sense the deception unless the Nagah defeats the listener in a Social test (retest *Performance*).

### *Intermediate*

**Blood Running Hot:** As the Ahroun Gift *Stoking Fury's Furnace*. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**Lance of the Summer Sun:** By spending a Gnosis Trait, the Kartikeya is able to project a beam of searing, concentrated sunlight from his palm; this beam is extremely hot, able to burn right through fabric, sheetrock and even wood. Any creature struck by this beam — a Physical test, retest with *Firearms* — that takes aggravated damage from fire takes one level of aggravated damage; a vampire struck in this way receives two aggravated Health Levels of damage instead.

**Might of the Mountain:** As the Get of Fenris Gift *Might of Thor*. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**Veil of Maya:** As the Fianna Gift *Phantasm*. See **Laws of the Wild**.

### *Advanced*

**Hydra Warrior:** A Nagah nest's bonds can go very deep indeed; this utterly devastating Gift is proof. To activate this Gift, the Kartikeya must spend one Gnosis Trait and one Rage Trait for each nestmate, then all nestmates must touch. Upon touching, the nest temporarily fuses into a single horrible hydra creature; this form resembles an enormous Azhi Dahaka with one tail and as many arms as the members had separately — otherwise, the nestmates can determine the hydra's shape (it can have one head with three faces, three separate heads, three separate torsos joined by a single tail, etc.)

While in this form, the nestmates combine their Health Levels plus an additional three Healthy levels on top of that. They also pool their Rage and their base Physical Traits (receiving the benefits for Azhi Dahaka on top of that), but retain separate Gnosis pools. Despite their unified form, each member of the Hydra warrior can act separately. They benefit from shared thoughts, though they must move together for obvious reasons.

This Gift may only be used if all members are willing, and are in Azhi Dahaka form at the time of activation; the Gift lasts for up to one scene or until the Kartikeya who activated the Gift wills it to end, whichever comes first; while in effect, no nestmate forming the Hydra Warrior is able to change forms. Lost Traits and Health Levels may be divided however the nestmates would like.

**Jungle Snake's Hoodoo:** Through the use of this Gift, a Nagah may send a target into a waking dream over which the Nagah is able to exert some control. The effects of this Gift can vary from tormenting a victim to drawing information from a target, or even to granting a hapless mortal a pleasant experience in order to keep their attention away from the present; the Nagah sets the tone of the vision and can nudge it in the direction as she wishes, but

the overall composition of the hallucination is taken entirely from the target's unconscious. Bad visions will draw upon the target's latent fears and phobias, while good hallucinations use the target's desires and pleasant memories.

To use this Gift, the Nagah must spend two Gnosis Traits and make a Social test (retest *Enigmas*) against a difficulty equal to the target's permanent Willpower. This Gift lasts for a number of minutes equal to the Nagah's Gnosis Traits, though it is immediately canceled if the target is attacked or otherwise significantly disturbed. If successful, she may then spend a number of Social Traits, depending on how much of the hallucination she wishes to see herself. Each Social Trait allows her to enter the vision and observe/direct for one minute; should she stay with the target for the full time, however, she may risk running into some nasty side effects as the target's "psychic immune system" attempts to defend itself — Storyteller's discretion as to what might happen, but in general the more revealing or traumatic the vision, the greater chance the Nagah may be sucked in with unpleasant consequences.

## Kamsa Gifts

### Basic

**Executioner's Edge:** As the Shadow Lord Gift *Seizing the Edge*. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Eye of the Cobra:** As the Galliard Gift. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Forked Tongue:** As the Kartikeya Gift, p. 83.

**Inattention to Detail:** Daydreaming is the bodyguard's worst enemy. Skilled professionals normally don't suffer from such trivial distractions — unless they find themselves subjected to this Gift. By spending a Gnosis Trait and defeating the target in a Social test against the target's Willpower (retest *Subterfuge*), the Nagah puts the target at a two-Trait penalty on all tests involving perception as he finds himself continually preoccupied with daydreams. The effects of this Gift last for up to one scene or one hour. Note that unless the bodyguard is exceptionally versed in supernatural lore, they will not consider this Gift's effects as anything particularly unusual, however irritating it might be.

**Predator's Patience:** Patience is a virtue especially prized by experienced assassins. Using this Gift allows the Kamsa to remain completely motionless without growing tired, granting her a free retest on all relevant *Stealth* or stamina-related Physical tests. To activate this Gift, the Kamsa must spend a number of Physical Traits; for each Physical Trait spent this way, the Gift remains in effect for one hour.

**Slayer's Eye:** As the Shadow Lord Gift *Fatal Flaw*. See *Laws of the Wild*.

### Intermediate

**Doppelganger:** As the Glass Walker Gift. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Heartstrings:** As the Galliard Gift: *Head Games*. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Open Wounds:** As the Shadow Lord Gift. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Smothering Question:** By locking eyes with a target, defeating her in a Social test (retest *Intimidation*) and spending a Willpower Trait, the Nagah can quickly gain the most valuable commodity any assassin could have while on a mission: information. The Nagah merely asks a single, very carefully phrased question of the target. A target of this Gift feels as though he is drowning in the question; the only way to save himself is to answer her question as honestly, completely, directly and thoroughly as possible, working his way from the most pertinent points to the finer details. The idea of hiding anything from the questioner is not even remotely considered. Only once every possible relevant fact has been spoken can the target consider doing anything else but answering, though this state is then broken; the Gift must be re-used if they are attacked.

Should a target be unlucky enough to not actually know anything about the question, he will be reduced to crying and babbling as he suffers a terrible anxiety attack; the victim remains in such a babbling state for the remainder of the scene or until obviously threatened, whichever comes first.

**Staredown:** As the Homid Gift. See *Laws of the Wild*.

### *Advanced*

**Summon the Accused:** Through the use of this Gift, the Kamsa is able to draw her target to her, provided she knows the target's name. To use this Gift, the Kamsa must hiss quietly and sway hypnotically in a strange dance — as soon as this dance or hissing ends, the Gift's effects end as well. As long as the Gift is in effect, however, the target will enter a fugue-like state and begin heading for the Nagah as fast as possible — all he is consciously aware of is a deep-seated urge to follow a strange hissing sound, which only he can hear. If the Kamsa can keep it up long enough, the target will walk right into her presence, not entirely knowing why he's come. To use this Gift, the Kamsa must defeat the target in a Social test against his Willpower (retest *Primal Urge*). The Gift will not work if the target knows of the Kamsa's presence, nor will it work in combat. If this Gift fails, it may not be attempted on the target again that session.

The Gift lasts for only one scene — if it takes longer than that for the Kamsa's target to get there, she is out of luck and must resort to more traditional methods of hunting. Targets will take the fastest means and most direct route to the Nagah that does not put them in danger. It should be noted that while their behavior may seem odd to others, to the target it seems perfectly natural. He will not call for help, consciously delay travel or otherwise stall progress in order to gain more time to ride out the Gift and/or arrive there with a well-armed posse ready to kill some weresnake. (Doing so is cheating. Don't.)

**Undying Serpent:** This powerful Gift allows a Kamsa to gain a potent edge in combat, not just negating an opponent's attacks but actually using

damage suffered to strengthen herself in turn. To activate this Gift, the Kamsa spends three Gnosis Traits. Until the end of the turn, all damage dealt to the Kamsa is not subtracted from her Health Levels but added to them, up to the number of Physical Traits she possesses in balaram form (regardless of what form she currently wears). Bashing damage heals bashing damage; lethal damage heals either one lethal or two levels of bashing damage; each level of aggravated damage heals three bashing, two lethal or one aggravated wound. If the Health Levels gained from this Gift bring her past her Healthy level, she gains extra Healthy Health Levels equal to the damage dealt, which remain until the end of combat or until lost due to regular wounds.

## Kali Gifts

### Basic

**Discern Weakness:** As the Philodox Gift *Weak Arm*. Nagah born to the Winter auspice are particularly driven by a desire for excellence, which makes finding the flaws in their enemies much easier. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**Executioner's Privilege:** As the Get of Fenris Gift *Halt the Coward's Flight*. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**Guided Strike:** Sometimes a single opportunity is all you get to take out an especially difficult or cunning target. This Gift makes it less likely such an opportunity is wasted. A Kali with this Gift may spend a Willpower Trait to add a number of bonus Physical Traits equal to half her permanent (not current) Gnosis, rounded up. These bonus traits are good for only her next Physical test, and then disappear.

**Iron Coils:** As the Silver Fang Gift *Falcon's Grasp*, except that instead of increasing the Nagah's ability to trap an opponent in her jaws, this increases her ability to trap an opponent in her coils. See **Laws of the Wild**.

**Solidify Water:** A Kali with this Gift can imitate the season of her auspice, solidifying large portions of water almost instantly. The water does not freeze per se, but rather it simply becomes solid, allowing creatures to walk across it or take cover beneath it. Fish or other animals trapped within the water do not die, instead entering a brief hibernation until the Gift's effects wear off.

To use this Gift, the Kali must touch a body of water and spend both a Gnosis Trait and a number of Mental Traits. For each Mental Trait spent, a 10-foot-radius section of the water solidifies to the hardness of bulletproof glass — strong enough to stop most small-arms fire. This Gift lasts for ten minutes and does not function on the water in living or unliving creatures, though certain water-spirits or other beings made entirely of water may take damage from it at the Narrator's discretion.

**Worm Sense:** As the Ahi Gift.



## Intermediate

**Assassin's Strike:** Nagah know all sorts of tricks to skillfully exploit the advantage of surprise. Kali depend upon it especially in their quest for the perfect assassination; this is one of the Kali's favorite methods of gaining that advantage. By spending one Rage and one Gnosis, the Kali can disappear into the Umbra to instantly "teleport" behind an opponent, gaining an automatic Surprise attack. *Alertness* alone does not cancel this Surprise attack; the only way to negate this Surprise is if the victim has an appropriate Gift or other supernatural power that grants him extraordinary awareness or speed along with some way to suspect the attack was coming.

**Destroying Blow:** As the Black Furies Gift *Coup de Grace*. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Indirect Strike:** By spending one Gnosis Trait, a Nagah with this Gift can milk her venom glands to convert her venom into a colorless, odorless, nearly undetectable poison. This poison can then be used to coat blades or poison food; an edged weapon coated in this way will deal the Nagah's regular venom damage to the first person struck with it in addition to whatever damage the weapon would normally deal, while food deals the same venom damage to anyone who eats it. The venom remains potent for one day; spending more Gnosis at the time of activating this Gift will add more days to the duration on a one-for-one basis.

**Mindblock:** As the Silver Fang Gift. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Song of Winter:** As the Wendigo Gift *Chill of Early Frost*. See *Laws of the Wild*.

## Advanced

**Magistrate's Icy Judgment:** As the Wendigo Gift *Heart of Ice*. See *Laws of the Wild*.

**Mahanaga:** Sometimes a Nagah is called upon to deliver judgment to a foe so powerful and cunning that even the mighty Azhi Dahaka form can not overcome him, much less a Nagah's preferred methods of subtlety and stealth. The Mahanaga is a potent battle form taught by the Wani to the Kali for just such dire circumstances; it is considered a last resort. Indiscriminate use is one sure way to invoke the wrath of the Sessa. When a Kali takes the Mahanaga form, his ordinary battle form becomes even more enormous, with a wider hood and a significantly tougher hide while his scales take on the appearance of highly burnished copper, gold and obsidian. To activate this Gift the Kali must be in battle form. He spends one Rage Trait and one Gnosis Trait and makes a Physical test against a difficulty of seven Traits (retest *Primal Urge*).

If successful, the Kali may grant extra Physical Traits to his Azhi Dahaka form as desired, spending Rage Traits in exchange for extra strength-related Physical Traits, Willpower Traits for extra stamina-related Physical Traits, and Gnosis Traits for extra dexterity-related Physical Traits. Only four Traits

of each category can be gained this way. The extra Traits remain for up to one scene or until the Nagah shifts out of his Azhi Dahaka form. In addition, his tough hide cuts all non-aggravated unarmed or melee damage in half (round down, minimum of one), and at the Narrator's discretion may be entirely unharmed by "soft" attacks, such the bare hands of an ordinary person.

## *The Samskara (Rites) of the Nagah*

The Samskara, or rites, of the Nagah are very different from those of the Garou. For one, the social aspects of the Garou rites are significantly toned down in the Nagah Samskara, if not absent altogether. In addition to their small numbers, Nagah are very private creatures. The performance of a Samskara is considered a private thing for a nest — even the presence of other Nagah who are not nestmates make the entire ordeal quite awkward and uncomfortable.

Of course, the Nagah have no caerns; they move around too much in performing their duties to the Three Mothers. They simply don't feel it is their place to use or create caerns, though they recognize their importance. Because of this, there are no rites involving the creation or maintenance of caerns among the Nagah Samskara. This also serves to free the Nagah as far as the location of their Samskara go; Nagah may hold their rituals anywhere. Usually, Nagah will hold their Samskara at a river, or especially an island in a river, and almost always under the light of the moon — in this way, they hold their rites under the watchful eyes of all the Three Mothers at once.

Samskara are formal and elegant, with very little emotion displayed — in fact, showing too much emotion even in the most intimate Samskara is considered disgraceful. The Nagah participating in the Samskara continually repeat mystically resonant phrases called mantras until eventually the words lose their meaning. Unlike other Changing Breeds, there are no traditions linking any particular auspice with a ritemaster position, though Kamakshi tend to learn more Samskara than the other auspices.

The Samskara of the Nagah

### *Basic*

#### *Atonement Samskara*

The work of an assassin is dangerous enough without having to worry about additional threats from beyond the grave, but Nagah cannot ignore such things in the proper execution of their duties. To remain true to their nature, Nagah must always remember the gravity and responsibility that comes with taking another life. This Samskara serves to protect the Nagah from spirits whom their actions may have angered, as well as from the dangers of becoming callous as they go about their often thankless work.

The participation of the entire nest is required for this Samskara, who gather and chant an eerie mantra telling of both the dangers and the necessity

of killing. Honest apologies are offered to any spirits or wraiths the Nagah may have angered. The Nagah performing the Samskara makes a Social test against a difficulty of seven Traits (retest *Rituals*) and spends up to five Social Traits. If successful, each Social Trait spent this way puts any spirits or wraiths named in the rite, or other such spirit beings who are intimately related to them, one Trait down in all challenges to attack the participants of the Samskara. The effects of this Samskara last for one full month.

### *Birthing the Ananta*

Shortly after joining the ranks of the Nagah in full as a Singing Brook, a new Nagah will receive her Ananta, often as a gift from her sponsor or the Sesha. This is the method used to provide a Nagah with her Ananta, or to repair or replace an Ananta that has been damaged or destroyed. The Nagah performing the Samskara must succeed in a Mental test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of eight Traits, or seven if she is performing it on herself. Success indicates that a bit of the recipient's spirit energy has been bound with a portion of the spirit world's energy, forming or repairing an Ananta. This Samskara must be performed any time a Nagah character wishes to purchase Traits in the Ananta background after character creation.

### *Celebration of First Venom*

When the sponsor of a young Nagah feels she is ready to be brought fully into Nagah society, he brings her before the Sesha for the performance of this Samskara. The sponsor must bring a classic prey animal, such as a young elk or deer, which is bound before the Opening Eye. The Opening Eye is expected to take a venomous form — usually Azhi Dahaka, but sometimes Silkaram or Kali Dahaka — and, with her sponsor and all the Sesha as witnesses, kill the animal with her venom in an affirmation of her new maturity and blossoming lethality.

If she manages to kill the animal, all those present assume Azhi Dahaka form and help devour the animal in a quiet celebration; the young Nagah is an Opening Eye no longer, but has joined the ranks of the Nagah in full as a Singing Brook. She may now learn Gifts from the Wani in Xi Wang Chi and join a nest to fulfill her duty to the Three Mothers. Should she find herself unable to kill the bound animal, her sponsor must continue to teach her for another year until she is ready to make the kill without a second thought.

### *First Glory*

Once a Singing Brook, it now becomes the Nagah's duty to prove her worth by completing her first real assassination; if the mission goes smoothly and she does not show signs of poor judgment, unease, sadism or other such traits considered undesirable by Nagah, the young assassin is congratulated by her nestmates through this Samskara. Her nestmates point out all the things she did right and wrong in performing her part of the assassination, and then the entire nest chants a mantra of celebration and thanks. The one performing

this Samskara must succeed in a Mental test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of 7 Traits; if successful, the new killer regains all her spent Willpower Traits.

### *Invocation of the Spirit Messenger*

The Sacred Secret must always be protected, which often makes things difficult for the Nagah — communication between nests, for example, has to be performed very carefully. This Samskara allows a Nagah to send an encoded message by way of a spirit messenger in the service of the Wani, who will bear the message to any Nagah nest desired. To perform this Samskara, the Nagah must win a Social test against a difficulty of seven Traits (retest *Rituals*). Success indicates the spirit messenger is summoned and will be able to deliver a short message anywhere on earth or bordering the earth in an hour's time. Interception of this messenger is possible, but they will destroy themselves rather than give up their secrets; the offending party will incur the wrath of the Wani as well.

### *Nestbinding*

The bonds between nestmates are as important as they are strong; after all, a Nagah's life would be very lonely without her nestmates at her side. The path of an assassin doesn't lend itself to trusting others. This Samskara can only be performed by either the Crown of an area or the Sesha themselves. It binds two or three wereserpents together for life. The nestmates-to-be exchange vows of friendship and protection during the performing of this Samskara. Once completed, they have become a full-fledged nest. This Samskara requires no test to perform and has no game mechanics — nevertheless, it is one of the most important Samskara in which any Nagah will ever take part. Both players and Storytellers are encouraged to observe it with as much ceremony and depth as possible.

### *Rite of Auspicious Beginning*

This Samskara is used to boost a nest's morale upon beginning a new assignment; the ritemaster leads her nest in a mantra of strength, cunning, and discretion and makes a Social test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of six Traits. If the last mission went extremely well, this difficulty is reduced to five Traits, the difficulty rises to eight Traits if the last mission turned out badly. If successful, each participant receives an extra temporary Willpower Trait that can be used at any time during the completion of the mission. If the extra Willpower is not used before the assignment is completed, it disappears.

### *Rite of Bearing*

A Nagah who has become pregnant by mating with another Nagah instinctively knows whether or not her child will be born as a full-blooded Ahi. If it is destined to be otherwise, the mother has a decision to make; specifically, whether she will bear a human child or lay eggs as a serpent. The decision must be made (and this Samskara must be performed) within a week of conception, otherwise the growing child will lack a true form and be reabsorbed into her body.

The actual performance of this Samskara is meant to be done by the mother's nestmates; if she has but one nestmate the difficulty raises by one, while the difficulty raises by two should the mother have to perform this Samskara by herself. The nestmates invoke a spirit of Luna and a spirit of Apsa to bless the mother; one of the nestmates must succeed in a Social test against a difficulty of 6 Traits (retest *Rituals*). Success indicates that the child takes the form of the mother's choice, and that the pregnancy and birth will proceed smoothly and easily barring outside interference.

### *Shedding the Past*

Nagah shed their skin once a year just like their mundane serpent cousins, even those Nagah who remain in Balaram form. This molting takes several days, during which time the Nagah is almost deaf and blind thanks to the loose layer of skin over her eyes and ears. At this time, a Nagah's nestmates provide her with food and drink while protecting her. It is during this time when the Nagah is so vulnerable to the world around her that this Samskara is performed over her by her nestmates. The ritemaster must say a prayer over her at dawn, noon, dusk and midnight each day, as well as help her shed her skin and adjust to the extremely frightening experience of being so utterly helpless. To perform this Samskara, the ritemaster must succeed in a Social test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of six Traits.

In addition to enhancing the trust and co-dependence between nestmates, this Samskara also acts as a Rite of Cleansing of sorts. Any excessive degree of taint, allegiance, or commitment to any one member of the Triat is shed from the Nagah along with her skin, as long as she wishes it — curses, possession, emotion or thought control, ghouling, the Blood Bond and the like are also removed. Additionally, any former such allegiances can be physically viewed on her shed skin. A Nagah who was overly taken with matters of the Wyrms will produce a darker, slimier, and more fragile skin than normal; a Nagah whose affinity was to the Wyld will produce a shed skin with random chaotic markings; and a Nagah who harbored a great love for the Weaver will have markings on her shed skin that are sterile, symmetrical, and almost technological in appearance. It is considered a grave omen for a Nagah to display the same taint two years in a row, and the nestmates of such a Nagah are advised to prevent her from having any dealings with that member of the Triat for the next entire year.

After the skin is shed, the Nagah in question will feel refreshed and renewed, with perfectly smooth and unblemished skin devoid of any scars or markings she received during the last year. At the Storyteller's discretion, some marks may be too powerful or deeply ingrained for this process to remove, as suits game balance and more importantly the needs of the story. For example, it is poor form indeed to take several Traits of physical-, taint-related Flaws and/or Negative Traits and then try to get rid of them for free the first time the

Nagah sheds her skin, although this process could certainly be used as part of the in-game justification for buying off those Traits with Experience.

### Thanks to River Mother

The Nagah have not one, but three mothers. Two of their mothers — Luna and Gaia — they share with the Khurah. Only the Nagah, however, show allegiance to Apsa, the River Mother. She is their kindest mother and their link to the great Wani, and for those reasons and so much more all Nagah are very grateful to her. This Samskara is performed regularly to show her their thanks; it is considered proper to perform this Samskara prior to setting up an Ananta in a new river.

## Intermediate

### Conclusion

This Samskara is often performed after the successful completion of an assassination. It is a means of affirming the necessity and justice of the nest's decision to end the target's life. The mantra that is chanted is a summary of the essence of the target's crimes, and finishes with an intoned mantra that translates as "Punishment was necessary. Punishment was delivered. Punishment is now concluded. May his next life be better spent." All participants in the rite immediately refresh their Gnosis, Rage or Willpower.

### Investiture

Before a Nagah may take part in the killing of an errant shapechanger in Gaia's name, she must prove herself to be just and wise in her judgment. This Samskara can be performed by any Nagah of suitable rank. The Nagah performing the Samskara must succeed in a Social test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of seven Traits. Success indicates that a minor spirit representative of Gaia (or sometimes the Wani) appears and assesses the young wereserpent's judgment, dedication, and responsibility. In almost all cases, she will meet with the spirit's approval and be given the right and freedom to take life without undue consequence. In very rare instances the young wereserpent may be found lacking, in which case she must wait until after the next time she molts before she may petition for another chance at investiture.

### Naming the Target

This Samskara is often performed after the completion of a mission, when a nest is ready to take on a new assignment. The nest gathers together by a river or in a dark, secluded place and, with joined hands, chant a mantra of invocation to the Wani. Every participant in the rite must make a Mental test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of seven Traits. If one challenge is successful, the name of their next target becomes known to the nest, along with a very brief glimpse of the target's face. If two challenges are successful, the nest is also given some insight into the target's current location. If all three challenges are

successful, the Wani disclose further information, which may include the target's exact whereabouts, his full identity, his transgression, his allies, or other pieces of information that may help the nest complete the assignment at the Storyteller's discretion.

### *Punishing the Improper Strike*

Nagah are gifted by their spirit patrons with a great facility for delivering death, so it should be no surprise that they are expected to use their power with the utmost of responsibility and discretion. Assassinating the wrong individual is considered not only a grave mistake, but if the real target is also allowed to escape it is considered direct insult to the Wani themselves. When such an event occurs, the Sesha wait until the nest returns and accuse any they feel were responsible. The accused wereserpent is allowed to defend himself by pointing out exceptional circumstances, and of course his nestmates are expected to come to his defense as well. If he is unable to provide a proper excuse for his mistake, the Sesha remember his transgression. Any Nagah who has committed such an error twice will find himself the subject of this Samskara.

In performing this Rite, the Sesha brand the errant Nagah with a black circle over her heart — should he repeat his shame again, a spear will be placed within the circle. Once given such a mark, the Nagah must do everything in his power to make amends — until he does, he will never gain rank and will be considered a disgrace even by her own nestmates. What constitutes making amends is up to the Storyteller, but even if he manages to accomplish this, the Nagah can expect to be killed regardless should he ever make such a mistake for a third time.

### *River Mother's Eyes*

This Samskara allows the Nagah who performs it to see what is happening along a river for a great distance, akin to the Garou Rite: *The Badger's Burrow*. While in contact with the river through which she intends to extend her senses, the ritemaster chants a mantra of enlightenment and makes a Mental test against a difficulty depending on the size of the area to be examined. Five Traits for thirty feet of river, six Traits for a quarter-mile length, seven Traits for a half-mile length, eight Traits for a one-mile length, and nine Traits for a ten-mile length. Success allows the wereserpent to ask three questions about the area and receive an intuitive sense of the answer.

### *Sati*

To many Nagah, the loss of one's nest is the loss of one's self. After such a tragedy, some Nagah are unable to find the strength to go on. Sati is a ritualized suicide that can only be performed by a Nagah who has lost both of her nestmates in carrying out a mission, and who has also completed the mission that claimed their lives. The Nagah builds herself a funeral pyre and climbs atop it while it is catching. She then makes a Mental test (retest *Rituals*)

against a difficulty of five Traits; success indicates that her spirit leaves her body before she ever feels the heat of the flame. What's more, regardless of the success of that test, her spirit can instinctively discern where the spirits of her nestmates have gone. She will be able to join them in the Gaian cycle for as long as fate allows, perhaps even to be reborn together in the next life. This Samskara is frowned upon since the Nagah are so few in these dire times that they need everyone they can get, but it is occasionally still observed.

### *Shraddha*

A nestmate is more than just a partner; he is a sibling, a best friend, and often a lover all at once. This Shraddha Samskara is performed by the surviving members of a nest after the loss of a nestmate, and allows them to experience all the grief that such a tragedy would normally create in a very short period of time. This provides the nest with the necessary release they need to continue performing their duties. One Nagah sits at the head of the fallen nestmate, while the other lies at the fallen nestmate's feet; they chant a mantra of loss that can be loosely translated as "The best part of us is gone." Upon the completion of the Samskara, the fallen nestmate is delivered to a nearby river or canyon as appropriate, at which point the Samskara is over. As with the Garou Rite *Gathering for the Departed*, the Storyteller may allow the Nagah performing this Samskara to make a Social test against eight Traits for a bonus on future efforts to contact the deceased with the *Ancestors* Background. Doing so too often is frowned upon, however, as it is considered a sign that the survivors may maintain an unhealthy connection with the deceased.

### *Advanced*

#### *Sannyasa*

While a Nagah's life may be prolonged through the use of certain Gifts, old age will catch up with her sooner or later. When age becomes so great an obstacle that she is unable to continue performing her duties to Gaia properly, she may choose to undergo the ritual of Sannyasa. Through this Samskara, a Nagah retires from her service to Gaia to live the remainder of her life as a recluse and an ascetic.

In performing this Samskara, the wereserpent recounts to her nestmates all the tasks she accomplished in her service to Gaia. She then finds some deserted place alongside a river and tells her tale to the Wani, and often an avatar of Devi herself. If satisfied, these spirit representatives accept her "resignation," although with one important caveat: the wereserpent must vow to return to Gaia's service should she be called upon, or if her former vitality should return (such as through the Gift: *Shedding the Years*). Once this is done, she departs Nagah society, probably never to return.

Only Nagah who are suffering from a grave infirmity (due to age or injury) may undergo this Samskara. The ritemaster spends a Gnosis Trait and succeeds



in a Social test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of six Traits. If successful, the spirits are summoned and bless her with good health and a painless death when the time comes.

### Traitor's Torment

Nagah are very efficient killers; such is their duty to the Three Mothers. They abhor torture, however; to the Nagah, it speaks of mishandled power and sadism. A wereserpent who partakes in torture is opening the door to imbalance and corruption. Still, in some very, very rare circumstances, even the Nagah find that some crimes can only be punished through prolonged torment ... primarily when they have been deliberately betrayed by one of their own.

In performing this Samskara, the ritemaster reads a precise description of the traitor's deeds. She then looks the traitor in the eyes, explains to him what is about to happen, repeats the reasons why, wishes him a better life in his next incarnation, and then summons spirits of pain with an ugly, guttural mantra. These pain spirits torment, madden, and finally kill the traitor, at which point the Samskara is over and the ritemaster often performs the Atonement Samskara to free herself of the bad karma brought on by such cruelty.

The ritemaster must expend a permanent Gnosis Trait in performing this Samskara, then succeed in a Social test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of eight Traits. If successful she may spend up to five Social Traits, equal to the number of days the pain spirits are to inflict agony upon the traitor. The victim of this Samskara is so overcome with physical, mental, and emotional pain that he must

### Unnecessary Violence Disclaimer

The *Traitor's Torment* is an ugly, nasty, horrible rite. In fact, many of the things the Nagah do involve acts that can make people of normal moral disposition cringe. However necessary it may be in game terms, we are still talking about assassination and in this case torture as well — sensitive subjects at the best of times, even in an imaginary LARP context. Storytellers, do your best to make sure that no one is made to feel uncomfortable out of character by something as relatively minor as a rite. Players, be responsible with each other, and don't subject others to more than they're willing to handle. It's a lot better to simply blandly declare that a character is being tortured than to actually turn someone's stomach with a gruesome description of every hideous act.

If people are willing to go along with such lurid carnage, by all means enjoy, but if they don't feel up to it, it's not your right to push them past those limits in the name of "being in character." It's only a game, and games are supposed to be fun for everyone involved.

spend a Willpower Trait for each turn they wish to do anything other than curl up into a fetal position and whimper. At the end of this torment, the victim is killed; if the spirits are somehow driven off before then, the victim receives a number of Derangements, Negative Traits, Flaws or other negative characteristics of the Storyteller's choosing equal to the number of days of torture he endured — not to mention that the Nagah will certainly come to finish the job.

Note that the spirits invoked by this Samskara are powerful, very intelligent and will not punish a victim who is innocent of the crime of which he has been accused. Additionally, if both the victim is innocent and the initial challenge is failed, they will instead turn upon the ritemaster, taking her as their victim instead for her foolishness. This rite is never enacted lightly.

## Merits and Flaws

### *Spirit Acquaintance (2 or 4 Trait Merit)*

For whatever reason, a spirit outside the courts of the Wani has taken a liking to you and will assist you as though the two of you shared the bonds of the Pact. By paying this spirit proper Chiminage, it will answer your summoning, teach you non-Nagah Gifts (though still at the higher cost) and perform other favors if capable. Two Traits provides you with a Gaffling ally; for four Traits, it is a Jaggling. Although this spirit will not defy its superiors, it will nevertheless keep any secrets you share with it. The exact nature of the spirit is up to your Storyteller.

### *Infrared Vision (3 Trait Merit)*

Your serpent heritage includes serpents in the Crotalinae subfamily — pit vipers, rattlesnakes, fers-del-lance and moccasins — that have provided you with the ability to detect heat sources in your immediate area by sensing the infrared radiation they give off. This sense works on a line of sight basis and negates all combat penalties for darkness, visual obstruction or blindness provided your opponents give off enough heat to track through this sense, though you do not have access to it in Balaram form. Obviously, spirits, cold-blooded creatures or other icy beings such as undead are invisible to this sense.

### *Step Sideways (6 Trait Merit)*

You have a much stronger connection with the spirit world than is normal for Nagah. With this Merit, you are able to step sideways exactly as the Garou do, instead of depending on your Ananta.

### *Mnesis (7 Trait Merit)*

Some Mokolé legends claim that the Nagah were once Mokolé themselves. Of course, the Nagah refuse to believe there is any truth to these legends. By simply existing, however, Nagah like you provide the legends with an extra measure of credibility since you possess a trace of the Mnesis, the

Mokolé's great racial memory. To access this Mnesis, you must enter a trance for at least ten minutes and succeed in a Willpower test against a difficulty of eight Traits. Success means that you are able to dredge up some memory that, although it may or may not have any relevance to your current assignment, has some relevance to something important to you. This memory goes back as far as a century, but no farther.

### *Largely Deaf (1 Trait Flaw)*

The poor hearing of snakes affects you in all your forms to one degree or another. In Kali Dahaka, Azhi Dahaka, and Vasuki forms, you are completely deaf; in Silkaram form you are at a three Trait penalty in all challenges involving perception, and in Balaram form you are extremely hard of hearing and suffer a one Trait penalty in such challenges.

### *Inauspicious (1 or 3 Trait Flaw)*

Shedding one's First Skin in a season other than one's birth is considered very unlucky by the Nagah, but in most cases this is merely superstition. In your case, however, it is dead on. Because of this misfortune, you find it much more difficult to learn auspice Gifts; you purchase such Gifts as if they were "outside auspice" for purposes of Experience cost.

If you take the three Trait version of the Flaw, you also suffer from conflicting urges; this causes you to start each story one Willpower Trait down, and you are at a one Trait penalty in all Willpower challenges.

### *Weak Venom (2 or 3 Trait Flaw)*

The Nagah take pride in their venomous natures; it is a thing to be celebrated. Unfortunately it is also something that you partially lack, as your venom is much weaker than is normal. For two Traits, this means that your venom deals lethal damage to living creatures, and no damage at all to vampires or other unliving things. If you take the three Trait version of this Flaw, your venom deals only bashing damage — all it is capable of is knocking out a target.

### *Defanged (4 Trait Flaw)*

Prior to shedding your First Skin, you were captured by humans and had your fangs removed. As a result, you lack fangs in any of your forms; this means you cannot use your bite attacks or inject venom. This injury is far too old to be healed through Gifts. This Flaw is only available to Vasuki.

## *Fetishes*

### *Yantra*

Level: 1      Gnosis: 6

Also called a mandalla, a yantra is a complex, radially symmetrical diagram that symbolically represents the universe. It serves as a focus of

meditation that draws the mind to the center point, called the bindu. When inscribed onto an animal hide and made into a Fetish, a yantra's owner can activate it by meditating on the bindu for three turns; if successful, its owner will sense exactly where she is in the universe. Note that this does not mean the Nagah learns how to get home (or anywhere else), simply that she knows where she is at that moment. Strange or extremely distant locations (such as the deep Umbra) may require the owner meditate for longer at Storyteller's discretion. A spirit of knowledge must be bound into this Fetish.

### *Spirit Rattler*

Level: 2    Gnosis: 6

A Spirit Rattler is a snake's rattle tied with sinew to a long bone of any medium-sized animal. When activated and shaken, all spirits within ten paces of the Spirit Rattler will immediately freeze in fear. Spirits with seven or more Gnosis Traits are allowed a Gnosis test against the Spirit Rattler's owner to be able to flee; otherwise, the spirits remain nearly paralyzed with fear for three turns and can only defend themselves weakly (two Trait penalty on all tests). An appropriate spirit servant of the Wani must be bound into this Fetish.

### *Jewel of the River Spirit*

Level: 3    Gnosis: 7

By activating this Fetish and tossing it into a natural body of water, the Jewel's owner is able to speak the name of a spirit within and have that spirit appear. The spirit will be ready to provide the owner of the Fetish with a single favor related to the water in question, which may include catching fish, propelling a raft or distracting an enemy. The spirit will not endanger itself, and remains for either one scene or the time required to complete the requested task, whichever is shorter. Once the task is completed, the spirit gives back the Jewel then returns to the water. Should the spirit be mistreated, both it and the Jewel will disappear. A water elemental must be bound into this Fetish, which appears as a precious transparent stone of some kind.

### *Strangler's Scarves*

Level: 3    Gnosis: 7

The Thuggee of India were famous for strangling their victims with beautiful silk scarves. This Fetish was developed by the Nagah after observing their brutal yet effective tactics. When wrapped around a victim's neck and activated, the scarf will strangle its victim on its own, dealing a number of bashing Health Levels of damage equal to half the owner's Gnosis (up to a maximum of three, round down) each round it strangles successfully. When activated, this scarf is considered to have the Physical Traits *Stalwart* x2, *Wiry* x2, and *Tireless* x2, and has six Health Levels for the purposes of preventing itself from being removed from its victim. To craft this Fetish, the Nagah must create the scarf herself then bind an appropriate spirit servant of the Wani into her creation.

## Danbhalah's Drum

Level: 4    Gnosis: 6

These Fetishes were first developed by Nagah from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Southeast United States. They are highly prized by the Nagah, and are generally more effective but far less subtle than *Summon the Accused* at getting a target to come to you. The drummer must activate the Fetish and concentrate on her would-be target while she pounds out a rhythm on the drum. If the drumming stops, the effect is wasted and can never be used on that target again. As long as the drumming continues, the target will do everything he can to get to the location of the drumming without knowing or even caring exactly why it is he is doing so. Survival instincts come first, however — the Drum's victim won't do anything stupid or suicidal to fulfill this desire. Anything less than that is certainly fair game.

The Drum can call a target from anywhere in the world, although it can take a long time for a target to reach a drumming location a continent away. Luckily, other members of the drummer's nest can help out — by making a Physical test (retest *Performance*) against a difficulty of six Traits, a nestmate can take over the drumming without interrupting the rhythm. Of course, this drumming must be extremely loud if the Fetish is to work properly; if done inside a building, it resonates throughout the building's entire structure; if done outside, the sound can carry for a great distance indeed. This can serve to draw a great deal of attention to the drummer, so discretion is advised.

## Garland of Skulls

Level: 4    Gnosis: 7

This powerful Fetish is crafted from the skulls or shrunken heads of a Nagah's victims — obviously not the type of thing one wears in public. All such Fetishes have at least eight skulls that are strung together on a thick piece of sinew; a one of the Wani's spirits of war is then bound into it. The end result is quite impressive: when activated during combat, the Fetish grants the wearer five temporary Rage Traits and the wearer grows two extra sets of arms right below her normal ones. These extra arms do not grant any extra attacks or provide any extra traits, but can be used for any sort of utility purposes — fighting with a full complement of weapons while also carrying an unconscious captive, for example.

## Dart of Nullity

Level: 5    Gnosis: 7

This potent weapon is among the most prized tools of the Nagah; it is a small dart made from a bird bone, weighted with gold dust and fletched with peacock feathers. To use it, the owner activates the Fetish and throws it at a target (retest *Athletics*); as soon as it leaves its owner's hand, it becomes invisible to everyone but its owner. When it strikes, it deals no damage and the target feels nothing.

As long as it remains in its target, however, he is unable to use Gnosis or Rage. Other creatures are denied their mystical energies, such as a vampire's Blood Traits, a mage's Quintessence and so on. Once a target grows suspicious, generally after a failed attempt to use these energies, he may attempt a Mental test (retest *Enigmas*) against a difficulty of eight Traits to discover the dart.

Once found and removed, the next stage of the dart's effects begins. The removal of the dart inflicts merely a single level of bashing damage; however, all the pain that would have been felt by the victim suddenly hits all at once. The longer the dart went unnoticed, the more the pain — the victim acts as if he were at the Wounded health level for a number of turns equal to the number of turns the dart was lodged in his side.

## Talens

### *Ascetic's Ashes*

Gnosis: 6

When this talen is rubbed over the naked body of the wearer, it grants her a respectable amount of protection and turns her skin gray. For the duration of a single combat, the user receives the bonus Physical Trait: *Resilient*. A single pouch of these ashes is enough for four such uses. To make this talen, an elemental spirit must be bound into the ashes from a recent funeral pyre.

### *Cloud Popper*

Gnosis: 6

This talen appears as an arrow with a turquoise or quartz arrowhead. When shot into a rain or storm cloud, this talen causes the cloud to burst and quickly spill its contents. Showers created with this talen tend to be quite intense, often flooding flat or low lying areas; any outdoor fires are quickly extinguished. A water elemental or one of the Wani's rain spirits must be bound within this talen.

### *Flood Dust*

Gnosis: 4

Flood Dust is dust taken from a dried-out riverbed into which a water elemental is bound. A single pinch of this dust will cause the water in a 30-foot radius to rise by five feet within five minutes of hitting the water; in large bodies of water, this may not even be noticeable, but it can cause floods along sections of beach and river. A talen of this sort is a bag with between five and ten pinches of this dust; it is highly recommended that an entire bag not be used unless absolutely necessary, since the floods that result can be rather devastating to the immediate area.

### *Snake Oil*

Gnosis: 5

Snake oil has been the tool of many a con artist over the years, touted as the cure for ailments ranging from glaucoma to arthritis pain to allergies. It would

likely surprise many of these grifters to discover that snake oil does, in fact, have some healing properties — it's just that those properties are only present for creatures with Gnosis. By drinking this mixture, the user can spend a number of Gnosis Traits to heal an equal number of bashing or lethal levels of damage.

### Venom Arrows

**Gnosis:** 6

These talens look like arrows with a double-tipped arrowhead, usually in the shape of a crescent. By activating this talen and shooting it at a target, the arrow will deal an extra level of lethal damage if it strikes due to the venom of the snake spirit bound within.

### Bindhi

Bindhi are a type of Fetish unique to the Nagah. All appear as small jewels worn on the forehead over the *ajna*, or third eye chakra (about an inch above the bridge of the nose). To wear one, a Nagah merely needs to press it to the third eye, where it will remain in place on its own. Obviously, only one Bindhi can be worn at a time. Nagah are particularly fond of Bindhi since they evoke their royal Indian heritage. Each Bindhi lasts for three turns when activated.

#### Bindhi of Surya

**Level:** 1    **Gnosis:** 6

This Bindhi is made from topaz or diamond. When activated, it shines with pure golden sunlight, illuminating the area with the light of full day. Vampires caught within the glow take damage as from full sunlight.

#### Bindhi of Disillusion

**Level:** 3    **Gnosis:** 8

Usually made from moonstone or onyx, when activated this Bindhi will reveal to its wearer the presence of all illusions in sight. The illusions are not dispelled — they merely become faint, translucent images that the wearer can automatically see for what they are.

#### Indomitable Eye

**Level:** 5    **Gnosis:** 9

This type of rare Bindhi is always made from a deep red gem, often garnet. When activated, this Bindhi puts the Nagah wearing it up ten Traits in any challenges when defending against emotion or mind control powers of any sort. Additionally, anyone foolish enough to attempt to use such a power against the Nagah receives a number of levels of bashing damage equal to half his Gnosis, Arete, or the like (a maximum of three levels) due to the excruciating headache caused by the attempt.

### Rank and Renown

The Nagah care far less about Rank and Renown than the Garou do. Though they have their equivalent titles to “Adren” and “Elder,” a Nagah will

generally heed the advice of a Rank 2 who has had experience dealing with a particular problem at hand over the advice of a Rank 5 who has not. Nagah are very practical in that they care more about function than they do form, though they remain careful to show proper respect to their elders.

There are no Nagah rituals for gaining Renown. The Nagah do not share tales at moots or attempt to impress the spirits with their deeds for the benefit of wisdom or glory. A Nagah's renown is awarded by one source alone — the Sesha. After each successful mission, a nest goes before the Sesha to report what happened. Each Nagah is awarded Renown according to their reported actions. The Sesha are all very good at ferreting out lies even without the benefit of supernatural powers; since many of them possess such powers as well, it is extremely difficult to hide mistakes or claim more credit than is your due.

There are also no such thing as Rank challenges in Nagah society. Gaining Rank happens only if the Sesha will it. In this way, the Sesha control exactly how powerful a Nagah becomes, which Gifts she can learn, and how much influence she can exact on her nestmates; a Nagah who isn't trusted by the Sesha will find her journey through the ranks stunted if not halted entirely.

What type of Renown a Nagah earns is irrelevant, though they have only two categories of Renown: Wisdom and Cunning. Anything on under the "Wisdom" category in the Renown section of the **Laws of the Wild** book qualifies for Nagah, just with a Nagah twist on them. For example, Nagah gain temporary Wisdom renown for healing other Nagah outside of one's nest, or ending a threat without any Nagah coming to serious harm, and so on. They gain temporary Cunning for things that involve clever planning and the fulfillment of assassinations, depending on how ingenious the plan was and

### Nagah Rank

To determine which Rank a Nagah can qualify for through earned Renown — again, with the blessing of the Sesha — consult the chart below.

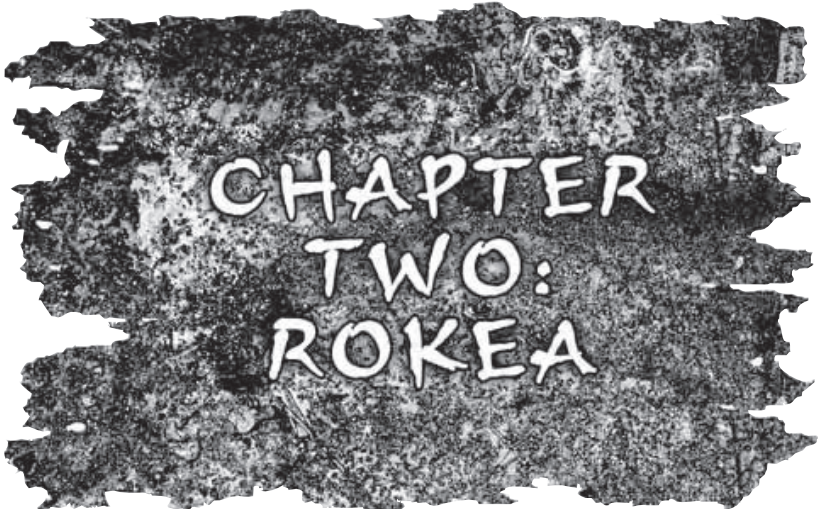
Rank	Renown	Title
Zero	0	Opening Eye
One	4	Singing Brook
Two	8	Razored Arrow
Three	12	Silken Noose
Four	16	Thunder Chakram
Five	20	Silver Coil
Six	24	Mouth of the Sesha



how difficult and powerful the target was. On average, such an act is worth 3 temporary Cunning renown, modified up or down as the Storyteller sees fit according to difficulty.

By contrast, a Nagah can lose Wisdom for similar things to the Garou—suffering from frenzy at an inopportune time, etc. — and lose Cunning for serious tactical errors during a mission. Of course, in their guise as the Sesha the Storyteller has the final say on how much Renown any particular act is worth. Once 10 temporary Renown of any particular category have been earned, they can be converted into a permanent Renown, though there is no equivalent to the *Rite of Accomplishment* as with the Garou — just the will of the Sesha.

Nagah have no renown analogous to Glory. They are not a particularly boisterous race to begin with, and such a thing would be counterproductive to maintaining the Sacred Secret.



## CHAPTER TWO: ROKEA

Hey, kid! Put down the spear gun. I'm not gonna bite'cha. Ya wouldn't be here if ya didn't want some answers. I want some too, like how ya exist. But that's for later. Right now, ya just need to ease that thing down onto the table and listen to me for a minute.

Yeah, I'm pretty much what ya think I am and no, the spear gun won't really hurt me. But it'll sure as hell piss me off, and ya don't wanna see me when I get that way! I'm here because ya called. Name's Bites-Through-Steel. Okay, so maybe ya didn't know you were calling, but yer lucky I'm the one that heard ya and not one of the hunters. I know you've changed at least once before and yer a little freaked right now, but seriously, we need to get outta here before they come for both of us.

How do I know ya changed? Well, that one's easy enough. Ya used the Sending. I heard ya, and I came. I'm even a little impressed ya got so far on your own, okay? So, if ya wanna live and find out more about what'cha are come on! We ain't got much time. There's one helluva nasty hunter on my trail — calls himself Foe-Ripper. By now, he's on yer trail too, and he won't stop to talk to ya like I am. So let's swim on outta here and I'll tell ya more when we're a little safer.



So, c'mon in. As boathouses go it ain't much, but we should be safe here for a while. Okay. Here it goes. Grab a seat and listen. You think I'm strange to you? Kid, you're not even supposed to exist! You were born human, right? Whadda ya mean, wasn't I? No, I wasn't born as a human; I'm shark through

and through — well, Rokea to be precise. That's wereshark to those who don't know any better. One of my parents was Rokea and the other was a shark. Nobody ever accused me of having *kadugo* in my family!

No, it ain't a curse; a *kadugo* is someone born from a human mating with a Rokea. I'd heard there were a few, 'specially here in the islands. I also heard that if a *kadugo* mated with a Rokea it could produce a human-born Rokea. Never believed it before. Guess I have to now, don't I? Kid, ya may be unique. In all my time I never heard of another like ya that anyone I ever knew had actually laid eyes on. What in the name of Sea am I getting myself into?

## History of the Rokea

Looks like ya were raised as a dirtwalker. Probably think ya know all about the creation of the world and everything leading up to now, what humans call history. Forget it, kid. Ya don't know anything! Most of the world is water. Ya know at least that much, right? I'm gonna tell ya the real way of it, so you listen. This is stuff ya need to know.

This history is a lot older than anything humans have. Yer kind wasn't even thought of when we first began swimming. Ya weren't there the way we were. Fact is, we're the oldest of what some folks call the Changing Breeds.

How do I know? Well, I get around. I even talk with Mokolé now and again. They've got memories that stretch back to the days when dinosaurs walked the earth. Of course, we were here before *that*. We don't learn ancient tales second hand. We experience history ourselves or hear about it first-hand. We live so long that we Rokea don't even understand the term "distant past." Don't think of us living decades, kid, think of us living centuries. That clear a few things up?

## In the Beginning

Ya probably heard the one that begins "In the beginning, there was nothing...." Well, that's a load of crap. In the beginning was Sea — formless, swirling, everything in motion. Even though everything moved, though, it was static because everything was Sea. There was nothing to contrast with it. 'Course that's pretty boring, but it changed when Sea decided to have children. Some say Sea was lonely. In any case, since all life comes from Sea, she churned and swirled her waters to create three daughters named Kun, C'et and Qyrl.

Sea's first daughter, Kun, is creation. She's the mother of all fish, including us. Most Rokea, even betweeners, claim her as their patroness. She provides us with wisdom. She guides us and gives us food and mates. What more do ya need?

C'et is the mother of the hard-shelled ones, clams and crabs and such that either move along or lie upon the sea's bottom. She's also the patroness of Unsea — that's the land to you — as well as the Undersea, the sea floor. Makes sense of a sort. Problem is she's always trying to bring that same solidity —

Unsea's land or Undersea's sea floor — to Sea. Sea doesn't go that route and C'et gets ignored while her children get eaten by dirtwalkers or attach themselves to ships.

Qyrl is called the Tentacled One. She's the mother of the spineless ones, like octopi and squids. She's really ambitious. Some Rokea follow Qyrl since she gives them lots of food, stealth capabilities and mystical powers, but following her swims against the tide where survival is concerned. True Rokea don't let her minions live long. If ya have any doubts about Qyrl, just remember she's the one who wounded Oversea. Yeah, I know ya don't know what I'm talking about yet. Gimme a minute.

When Sea's three daughters were born they were the only life in Sea. With all that space you'd a'thought they could get along, but they couldn't all live in harmony. They fought, and those battles pushed up great mountains and peaks in Undersea. Some of them reached upward beyond Sea's surface and became Unsea. But Unsea was empty. There weren't dirtwalkers yet. The daughters were each curious though, and each one decided to visit Unsea.

### *Kun Swims to Unsea*

Kun was first to swim to Unsea. She asked Sea for permission to go to Unsea and Sea let her. But Kun didn't like it much. Who would? It was dry, barren and lifeless, static, unchanging. Somehow, though, Unsea sensed that Kun held life inside her. Lonely, Unsea called to Kun, asking her to stay. She couldn't breathe well or swim on Unsea, though. It was too dry.

Unsea begged her newfound friend to find some way she could stay awhile because she was so alone. So Kun swam back to Sea and asked her for a way she could go to Unsea. Sea thought long and hard and finally had an idea. She called to Oversea (that black void you call sky — don't argue it was a void at that time) and asked her to draw up some of her waters and let them fall on Unsea so her daughter could stay moist and breathe there.

Oversea was happy to help and did as Sea asked. That's what ya know as rain, kid. Yeah, I thought you'd figured it out. Kun was delighted and went often to visit Unsea. Eventually, they became friends.

### *C'et Visits Unsea*

C'et, who loved stability, was jealous of her sister and wanted to visit Unsea too. She asked Sea if she could go there. Sea granted her permission and C'et crawled up onto Unsea. But C'et was shelled, not finned. She was too heavy to move. Unsea was glad of more company and concerned at her difficulties. She asked what she could do to make C'et more comfortable. C'et said she wished she could swim the way her sister did on Unsea, but she didn't have fins.

Unsea and Kun thought and Kun had an idea. She told Unsea she would have to change herself a little, that when the waters fell from Oversea, she

should collect them in some areas and make them like Small Seas so C'et could swim in them. Unsea did that, giving C'et places she could swim and ways to swim from place to place along some of the watery ways. Ya know what those are, right? Yeah, rivers and lakes.

C'et used them to move through Unsea and every once in a while she'd pull herself up onto Unsea and talk with her. Even though it wasn't her ideal solution, she didn't want either Kun or Unsea to think she didn't appreciate what they'd done. So she stayed near both Sea and Unsea, where they met, and feels torn between the two.

### *Qyrl Sneaks to Unsea*

When she saw that her sisters had gone to Unsea, Qyrl wanted to go too. But she was too proud to ask her mother for permission. Instead, she entered through the Small Seas and snaked along as her sister Kun did when rain fell. Unsea was again glad for the company and welcomed her, asking her name.

Qyrl was afraid Sea would find out what she was doing and be angry because she didn't ask permission. She lied and told Unsea her name was Kraken. Unsea had no way to know she was lying, or that she was there without Sea's permission. So Unsea asked if there was any way to make her more comfortable. Qyrl, ever sly, told Unsea that she was shy and wanted places to hide close to both Unsea and her mother, Sea.

Unsea decided to change again, and where she touched Sea she made murky places, part land, part water, so Qyrl could use her arms to feel her way through. Those places are what ya'd call swamps, marshes or fens. Once Unsea made them for her, Qyrl hid there and watched her sisters' comings and goings.

So Kun brought news from Sea to Unsea and back and C'et settled herself along the banks of the Small Seas, while Qyrl watched them all unnoticed in her hidden spot. Finally, Qyrl got bored and thought she'd go ask Oversea how it was possible to draw water up into himself. And that, kid, caused a huge change in the world. Ultimately, her actions brought about the beginning of life. Wild, huh?

### *The Wounding of Oversea*

Qyrl was still too proud to ask Sea's permission for anything, or to ask for her help to reach Oversea. Instead, she stretched her tentacles out and grabbed him. But her arms wounded him, puncturing him repeatedly. Agonized, Oversea screamed out for help to Sea. In response, Sea churned her waters and told Qyrl to release Oversea. But Qyrl was afraid. She didn't let go. She sank her teeth into Oversea to better her grip.

Oversea screamed with pain. Sea caused all the world's waters to churn and spume, erupting into geysers. Oversea whirled winds, creating hurricanes and tidal waves, but Qyrl wouldn't let go. Unsea created tall mountains out of herself, hoping Qyrl would step onto them instead of falling, but Qyrl held on.

Sea washed over Unsea and Unsea told her about Qyrl's hiding places. Sea's fury created an enormous fog that covered all of Oversea and Unsea, and Qyrl's grip gave way. She fell and her jaws tore a terrible, gaping wound in Oversea. Where the smaller puncture wounds bled a little, the gaping wound from her mouth bled great gouts of fiery blood. That Great Wound — what ya call the sun — bled onto both Sea and Unsea, boiling water and searing land wherever it touched. Qyrl knew her hiding places weren't good enough any more and she ran, secreting herself in the deepest trench of Undersea.

The Wound changed everything. Before, everything had been dark and cold. Now, Sea and Unsea had to turn themselves so no place would be boiled or seared away entirely. Still, Oversea was in terrible pain from the Wound and begged for something to help him.

Sea and Unsea, C'et and Kun all talked. Sea made another fog and Oversea tried to pack the Wound with it, but it quickly boiled away, leaving him in pain. Then Unsea gave up part of her body and Sea gave up some of her water; they mixed them together into a salve for the Wound. To this day, they still do that. Sea and Unsea create the salve and Oversea lifts it up with his winds.

When Oversea has a lot of the salve, his pain eases and the Wound disappears. Whenever that happens, ya can see all the smaller wounds — what dirtwalkers call stars — shining. Whenever Oversea runs low on salve, the Wound shows up more clearly. Even at night ya can see it as the moon's glow. We call it the Balm.

This has a lot of significance for us because when we're born during that cycle determines a lot about our personalities. Rokea born when Oversea's salve is giving out — that's during the full moon, kid — feel the Wound's pain. We call them Brightwaters and they're fierce warriors. Those who are born when Oversea has a good supply of his medicine come into a quieter cycle. They're known as Darkwaters, and are innovators and scholars. Rokea born in-between, when he has some salve but not enough to completely ease the pain, are called Dimwaters. Dimwaters usually choose to go their own way and travel.

Well, that tells ya what this all meant to us, but it had a much bigger effect on the world.

### Creation

Once the Wound was seen to and the waters returned to their place, Kun and C'et noticed small creatures that resembled Qyrl swimming in the water. They said they were Qyrl's spawn. Sea had never given her that ability, but discovered through talking with her that Qyrl had watched Kun and C'et with Unsea. She had taken Oversea's blood to make small beings like herself, which hid in the marshes and the trenches of Undersea just like their mother.

Seeing Qyrl's children, Kun and C'et wanted to spawn too. They asked for Sea, Unsea and Oversea to all help them, since all three were needed. They all agreed, on the condition that they make life that would swim in all three

places. They agreed, and life as you understand it started from there. We call this the Great Making.

Kun created all kinds of fishes, bright darting ones and slow, ugly ones. She made fishes for the Small Seas and the great Sea, ones that flicker near the surface and others that troll the darkest depths. On land, she made the Great Kings — dinosaurs, kid — who built and lived out their spans. What? Of course they built things. It's your books that are wrong, dirt-spawn, not our history.

C'et made the hard-shelled Scuttlers. Most resemble what ya call crabs. Most of them can survive on Unsea for a short while, but then they have to return to water. Still, C'et sent her children far off into Unsea and they became what ya call spiders and insects. We don't pay much attention to them. We mostly think they're pretty insignificant, like C'et herself. We just don't give it much thought.

Qyrl kept spawning too, producing children known as octopi, squid, snails, slugs, worms and all kinds of muck-crawlers. When she saw C'et and Kun creating flying children, she desperately wanted to make some too, but Oversea, terrified, threatened to fully open his Wound on her if she ever came anywhere near him again. Angered by this and upset at losing her "Kraken" disguise (but knowing she couldn't survive it if Oversea carried out his threat), Qyrl swam to the ocean's floor. She discovered that Undersea's blood was a lot like Oversea's, only thicker. She also found out how to make Undersea bleed, causing what ya call volcanoes. When she wounded Undersea and he erupted into a volcano, the pent-up release from that flew high into the air, as a dense cloud that blotted out Oversea's Wound for a time. Qyrl hoped whenever that happened that the Wound would close, but that never happened.

### *Qyrl Battles her Sisters*

The sisters had always vied with one another, engaging in great battles in the past. Now Qyrl spawned horrid beasts to war with the children Kun and C'et had made. Kun called upon the Great Kings since many of them could swim. Whole races were obliterated as Qyrl grew ever more furious that she could not have everything as she wanted. She made her children larger and stronger, then helped them learn to hide by giving them the power to change their shapes. Kun's children were at a terrible disadvantage. They couldn't fight foes that hid among them disguised as allies. Many of Kun's armies died.

As more of her children were destroyed, Kun began to believe that Qyrl might succeed in closing the Wound one day, bringing back darkness and cold. To withstand the cold, Kun created new children with strange, soft scales that helped them weather temperature extremes. The new children carried their young inside to protect them from the cold and to keep them safe until they were born. C'mon, kid, stretch your imagination a little, I'm talking about mammals. Your kind, kid: dirtwalkers.

Whadda ya mean ya don't understand how Rokea could exist before mammals? I've told ya, kid. Sharks have been around much longer than

mammals have and Rokea *are* sharks. We're just able to wear the shape of humans. That doesn't make us human.

Anyway, during that time, millions of years before apes spawned your kind, we didn't need to swim as anything other than sharks. We're the greatest of the fish. We're at the top of what you call the food chain. There aren't any other natural predators that hunt us — except ourselves. Huh? Humans. Well, yeah, but they ain't natural.

Kun talked things over with Sea, Unsea and Oversea to figure out if it was possible Qyrl could close the Wound. They all agreed that since making the Wound had started creation, closing it would unmake everything. C'et was especially troubled by this. She loved stability and couldn't imagine that things that seemed so permanent could be destroyed so easily. She vowed she would dissuade Qyrl from closing the Wound, and she still tries. Hasn't succeeded though.

Kun knew mammals had the best chance to survive on land. She searched Sea's depths looking for the children who could survive even the Great Unmaking. She searched and searched and even merged some of her mammals with fish. Those were promising, but she finally decided that what she was looking for was sharks. We swim, we hunt, we spawn, we survive. That's all we need to do.

We're not like you dirtwalkers; we don't try to do everything — just the important things. And because of that, we're the rulers of the ocean. Kun gave some of us the power to change. She told us that what we needed to do, above and beyond anything else, was to survive. We were given permission to do whatever we must as long as it helps us survive. We became the Rokea.

Maybe it'll help ya understand us better if I tell ya that at first we chose to just ignore Kun's gift of changing. We had been surviving for eons without it and we felt it might just be confusing and get in the way of our surviving. In fact, it wasn't until the Great Flood that any of us even tried changing into anything other than bigger sharks.

### *The Great Flood*

Don't be so skeptical, kid. The Great Flood really happened, just not because your man-form God caused it. It was a response to Qyrl's most heinous attempt to close the Wound. After the Wound had opened, Qyrl fled to the deepest trench in the ocean and hid there. That place held the mind of Sea, the place where she hid her greatest secrets. In there were the secrets of creation and of death, hidden knowledge so primal and devastating that even Sea herself couldn't look at it unshielded. Now Qyrl couldn't learn these secrets, but she swam around in the depths of Sea's mind just this side of Sea's Soul. She swam in silence and darkness, and after she had been there for some time, she wanted to hear a sound, any sound. So she spoke. Maybe she'd gone mad; maybe she hoped for an answer to her dilemmas. Maybe the silence just overwhelmed her. Whatever the reason, she spoke and something answered her.



I don't know what it was, kid. It must have been some horrible dream of Sea's that had been there trapped in her mind for some time. It didn't have a name, but we've since called it Nightmare. Nightmare told Qyrl that it needed a form to come fully into the world. Qyrl asked Nightmare what it would do if it did have a form and Nightmare said it didn't know. It asked what Qyrl thought it should do.

Qyrl told Nightmare about Oversea's Wound and explained that he suffered terribly from the pain. She said she wanted to heal Oversea but couldn't reach him. She slyly asked Nightmare if he could help, and Nightmare told her to imagine a shape for it. It said if she would do that, he would try to take that shape and heal Oversea.

Qyrl imagined something with many arms such as hers, and with a muscular, scaled body similar to the Great Kings. Then she imagined that Nightmare should have wings, wings like a manta ray's, wings like a dragon's so Nightmare could fly to Oversea's Wound. Once she imagined it, Nightmare took on that form and erupted into the world.

Sea immediately sensed that something was wrong. She knew something terrible had just happened. Nightmare's huge body wreaked havoc. She sent Kun and the Rokea to find out what was going on. The Rokea were appalled. They'd seen leviathans, but nothing like Nightmare! It beat its wings, and the Rokea were hurled up into Oversea and flung miles away to crash down into unfamiliar Sea. Nightmare stood waist deep in the sea, its legs stretching down through the darkness to touch Undersea far below. It flapped its wings again and Sea was propelled back by the force, uncovering a stretch that became a dry passageway for years afterward, connecting two parts of Unsea that had been separated before. Again, Nightmare flapped a third time and threw itself toward the Wound. Oversea was terrified. He threw off fire toward Nightmare, but this just killed a lot of those living on Unsea without significantly hurting Nightmare. The beast flew to the Wound and grabbed Oversea's mantle, trying to pull the wound closed.

Oversea shrieked in pain, more loudly even than when Qyrl had first made the Wound. Sea roiled furiously while Unsea quaked fearfully, terrified that more fire would rain down upon her. Qyrl laughed triumphantly as the battle continued, with Nightmare trying to pull the Wound closed. The battle lasted for years, with Nightmare blocking the Wound's light from Sea and Unsea alike. The world got real cold, kid. Creatures living on Unsea took the path that had been created by Nightmare's wings looking for a warmer place to live. They found a place, too. Kun hadn't put any creatures like them in that place, so it was still vibrant and the Small Seas there had much life in them.

Time passed with Oversea growing weaker. He had to keep his attention on Nightmare and battle the immense beast. He had no time to use his salve to ease the pain of his Wound. He had no time to draw up Sea's water and rain

it down on Unsea either. Kun's children, all of them originally creatures of the Sea who needed water to survive, began dying.

Sea couldn't stand aside any longer. She trapped Qyrl in a huge whirlpool and commanded her to undo her handiwork. Qyrl defied her mother, but Sea spun faster and more violently until Qyrl feared she'd be torn to pieces. Qyrl agreed. She imagined Nightmare changing, becoming weaker, smaller. Above, Nightmare's weakened form was unable to retain its hold on Oversea. In its weakness, it began to burn. Following Sea's prompting, Qyrl imagined Nightmare without wings and the great creature fell toward the Sea.

Qyrl imagined Nightmare as being only a little larger than humans, but she left her worst aspects and her foul temper within it. Nightmare took that shape. Qyrl could not imagine it out of existence; not even Sea could do that. But Qyrl also imagined Nightmare to be totally loyal to her. Because of that, kid, Nightmare's descendants worship Qyrl (even though they call her Dagon). They're terribly warped and swim the seas causing misery and inflicting pain on others.

Some Darkwaters say Kun made a similar child, but she didn't make the mistake of giving it too much power. The beings she created fill the gap between men and fishes. They're known as merfolk. If the merfolk are Kun's children, they are quite beautiful, noble and almost totally useless as far as I can tell. Usually, our races avoid each other, and I'm just as happy for that.

On land, most of the races had become too weak. Many were dying. Oversea was too weak to help them and Unsea was recovering from both the burns inflicted by Oversea and the long cold brought on by Nightmare. Sea made a decision to overflow Unsea without warning. Guess I don't have to tell ya that no man in a ship came along and saved the animals two by two, do I, kid? No, they got left to sink or swim on their own.

Most of Kun's land-bound children died in the flood. Only the strongest survived. During the flood, we swam over Unsea. We were amazed when we found places where huge numbers of a particular mammal lived. The mammal bred without any thought for how much its children ate. It ruined Unsea's fertility with its overpopulation and misuse of the land. The mammal slaughtered others of Kun's children for their own use or just for pleasure. It made weapons and other things that seemed to have no real use. And it survived. When the floodwaters drained from Unsea, we Rokea spoke among ourselves. We decided that someday those mammals might be a threat to us, so we took on their form so we could walk among them. Now do ya understand? This was the time we Rokea learned to swim as humans.

We watched the humans that lived near the Sea. Most often we watched from the water; sometimes we'd take on human form and walk among them. We didn't breed with humans. Why? We figured they have so many emotional issues and weaknesses that it would thin our blood. That would interfere with

our survival, which is our main concern. It remains to be seen whether yer fit enough to survive, kid.

We also didn't think humans would ever have much impact on the Sea or on us. We really screwed the pooch on that one. What we saw was that humans could only breathe air and that they didn't have sharp teeth or claws, so how could they contend with us? Yeah, so they caught Kun's children and ate them. Only the small ones that were prey anyway. Most of them stayed at home and the ones that traveled either didn't come back or maybe died at Sea.

So, we figured they were no big deal. We underestimated them. If we'd acted while they were still weak, if we'd trashed any of their ships that went out too far or that took too many fish, they'd have had some respect for Sea. But we didn't. We had other things on our minds. First, Qyrl's armies were attacking Kun's children and we were her warriors. We also needed to protect the Rorqual.

R-o-r-q-u-a-l, kid. They're whales and dolphins that carry Sea's love inside them and share it with others. Remember when I told ya about Kun creating special children to try to survive? Well, the Rorqual are some of them. I'll tell ya more about them later. Right now, ya need to know some more about the other Changers, even if they ain't what they were intended to be. Who knows what they've become nowadays? We may not know that, but we know where they came from.

### *Unsea Creates Defenders*

At some point Unsea understood that when Sea created us as a race to survive the Unmaking, it meant that most of Unsea's children would not survive. She realized that when the Unmaking came, she herself wouldn't survive it. Probably nothing else would except Sea (since Sea was the first and all came from her). Once she knew this, she decided that the best thing she could do would be to create races not to *survive* the Unmaking, but to prevent it.

She turned to what was left of the Dragon Kings, who were always changers. She asked them to remember everything that happened, in case a mistake could be corrected by backing up a few steps and starting over. The kings became known as the Mokolé. They weren't sure why she wanted them to remember everything, but since they were good at it anyway, they agreed.

Once she had memory nailed down, she started creating others. It's not important what order they were made in, just that she made a whole lot of them and ya should know about 'em.

She made cat Changers to watch stuff and fight if necessary. They, like all cats, so I've heard, went their own way to find lofty perches where they could sit and ignore Unsea.

She made Changers out of rats and told them they needed to keep the human population down or else they'd breed everyone else to death. The rats did that for awhile, but it sure looks like to me they ain't had enough success at it.

She made bears that changed too, and gave them lots of healing gifts and some power over both life and death. From the way I hear it, though, they weren't viable and died off or something.

She made Changers from some of Oversea's creatures and asked them to watch things that happened and send reports to her and to the other Changers, having obviously gotten the idea from seeing what the remora do for the Rokea. What? I didn't tell ya about remora? Well, hold onto your fins, I'll get around to it.

She also created Changers from wolves and dogs and all kinds of four legged critters and told them to do... oh, I don't know, everything else that needed doing. Some she wanted to make her laugh, some to sing, and a lot of them to fight. The most famous kind she created — at least they're most famous among your kind — she told to fight against the Unmaking for as long as they could, until their very last breath. If they did that, she said, they could turn aside the destruction. Kinda naïve of Unsea if ya ask me. Kinda arrogant too. Not to mention impossible. Think about it, kid! Can an army turn a tidal wave back? Duh.

Of course, there was this grand army of hers all ready to tear up the enemy and there's no enemy they can get hold of. And since there was no terrible all-consuming huge beast for them to fight, they needed to rip it up with something.

So they turned on the other Changers.

Yeah, they fought for years — still fight sometimes. Meanwhile, we just kept swimming, doing what we'd always done. We swam, hunted, bred and survived all while they were killing each other up on Unsea. They never came after us. Probably if they even knew about us, they couldn't find us. Not to mention that a Changer wolf that runs out of air under water is just as dead as a regular one. Yeah, ya got that right, kid, big toothy smile on that one. C'et's children told us some of what was going on since they sat by the Small Seas and watched it. We just laughed at their foolishness and went on with our lives, sometimes living among humans, most times in Sea.

### *Remora*

Let me interrupt the history just a little — or at least take it in a different direction for a minute. I mentioned remora earlier. We use them to keep tabs on things for us. They can ride on larger creatures — whales, leviathans, the Qyrall — kind of like anemones, only nastier and named after their mother, Qyrl. The Qyrall would build up tough fortresses and ride leviathans, using stealth to remain hidden until they could attack slews of Rokea. Well, once we found out that the remora remember everything they see and that they could attach themselves to the Qyrall and use the Sending to warn us of their coming, we made a bargain with them. We give them our protection, allowing them to attach and ride us to new places and occasionally providing them with free lunches in exchange for their help.

Needless to say, once Rokea had time to prepare for attacks from Qyrall, we handed them their... tentacles. Don't see so many of them anymore. Well, now that ya know about the remora, let's get back to the history lesson. Ya might find it boring — I don't, but you're a human, so who knows? — but it could help ya survive someday, so listen up!

### *The Impergium Begins*

The other Changers decided that they needed to keep humans under control, but they chose a method almost guaranteed to fail. They would make sure that not too many humans populated villages or cities or what have you by killing some whenever more got born. They intended this to teach humans their place.

Naturally, it didn't work. Humans are a stubborn and difficult race. They don't know their place and probably never did. We aren't so stupid as the other Changers. We might have (and still do) occasionally killed and eaten humans, but not very often. Some might say we should do it more often. I could see killing some, especially the ones who hunt us, but eating them? Ugh. They taste bad and they don't provide the nourishment we need. Give me fish or seal anytime!

We also don't make it seem like we are targeting humans in particular. Sharks bite fewer humans in most years than the number of years in your age — what are ya, kid, about 17? See my point? But the wolf Changers killed a lot of humans over a long period of time.

Now humans get afraid, but they also get angry. The wolf Changers weren't what you'd call subtle either. And that's led to humans losing it, panicking and denying what they saw whenever they see one of the wolf Changers changing to their true form. That's pretty weird, huh? But that's humans for ya, try to pretend a predator doesn't exist and hope that somehow makes you immune to attack? Any fish that tried that would earn a new name — dinner. We didn't have any part in this stupid affair, so our war form doesn't make 'em nuts, just sends 'em running.

Now, this is the really strange part. While they were attacking and killing some humans in this Impergium of theirs, some Changers chose certain groups of humans as breeding stock and wanted those particular ones to be exempt. Why spare some and not others? Makes no sense at all — probably not to the humans either. Now we never bred with them, like I told ya before. Why would we even want to breed with a race that has to be careful what they eat? Besides, we thought they'd either freeze or die out from disease or that the wolf Changers would decide to just kill them all sooner or later.

You've probably figured out by now that we were wrong to ignore the humans. They've grown strong, not each individual one, but as a race. Now they threaten both Sea and us; in fact, if we don't survive it'll most likely be due to humans. But back then, they hardly knew anything about the Sea. That changed when Qyrl next ventured to Unsea.

## *C'et's Pearl*

C'et had a pearl she kept inside herself that contained the secret of coral. The pearl held all the information about how coral grows and branches and encases things over time. C'et used the knowledge to help coral grow, and had given just enough of it to her children on Unsea that they could build nests, webs and hives. Humans saw these and copied them, making dwellings for themselves, but nothing as grand and beautiful as what was made from the knowledge contained in C'et's pearl.

Qyrl saw all that C'et built using her pearl. She took an interest in the humans because they crafted things — especially weapons — that no other race since the Great Kings had done. She had thought about trying to use the other Changers, but she knew they wouldn't trust her because Unsea had told them about her lie saying her name was Kraken. Qyrl thought she might use humans to make the world the way she wanted it to be, if she could give them this great secret.

C'et wanted to convince her sister to stop trying to close the Wound, for she greatly feared the idea of the Unmaking and wanted to delay it as long as possible. Qyrl knew this, and decided to take advantage of it. She went to C'et and told her she was sorry for all the trouble she had caused. She told C'et that to make up for it, she would help C'et swim across Unsea the way C'et had always wanted to do. C'et believed her and asked how it could be done.

Qyrl agreed to carry C'et if she would take up water into her shell to sustain Qyrl with during the journey. C'et agreed, eager to visit some of her children she had not seen in a very long time.

They set off, but almost immediately Qyrl asked C'et to give her a little water because she felt herself becoming dry. C'et opened her shell and little and let some water drip out onto Qyrl. A little while later, after bypassing a human settlement, she again asked C'et to give her water. Again, C'et opened her shell, a little wider this time, and let water flow out on her sister. As they neared a place where two Small Seas met, C'et rejoiced that she could replenish her store and they could travel even further, but Qyrl cried out that she needed what her sister had left in order to reach the Small Seas.

C'et opened her shell wide to pour water on Qyrl and Qyrl reached inside with her tentacles and stole the pearl. C'et screamed in outrage and closed hers shell so quickly one of Qyrl's tentacles was sliced off. Qyrl slithered away to a Small Sea and disappeared, leaving C'et stranded. Luckily, thousands of insects — C'et's children — heard her cries and carried her to the Small Sea. There C'et began a new pearl: not one made from a secret, but one made from Qyrl's severed tentacle.

Qyrl gave the secret of coral to humans, who promptly misused it. That's the human way, kid. Always muck up what might otherwise be something great. They built and they built, way further out than they should. Whenever one group built out far enough to run into another group, they had a war. It's not so

surprising that most Rokea stopped even visiting humans around this time. Again, we should have watched humans more closely. Some who lived close to Sea gave us respect, but most humans didn't. For centuries, few of us went on land, and then we traveled to certain places: Japan, Australia. California and Hawaii and to visit a few other coastal peoples and islanders. As a race, Rokea paid no heed to humans until they started dumping poisons into our home.

### *The Same-Bito*

One betrayal does haunt us even today. Eons ago, a Mokolé who lived near the part of Unsea called Japan approached a Rokea called Mizuchi and convinced him that the Rokea should come onto Unsea and join a council of Changers. Mizuchi convinced others, and they stopped following the Rokean way and joined something called the Beast Courts. Most of us avoid those lands and those Rokea, who call themselves the Same-Bito. They've weakened their blood by joining with humans, so most of us see them as weaklings and fools, anyway. Uh, no offense, kid.

### *The War on Sea*

I'm the first to admit I still don't get it. What sane creature spreads toxins into the ocean, then wonders why the fish are tainted and dying? Then when they found out what was wrong, they still didn't stop! We retaliated by sinking ships and sending storms their way. Some of us swam upriver looking for the source of the toxins. We found entire buildings created to "process" the toxins. That meant they removed most of the danger from their immediate vicinity and sent it roaring downriver to Sea. Even C'er's children didn't understand these buildings. Finally, we realized that the humans were using C'er's knowledge to carry out Qyrl's plans. We tried to send war parties onto Unsea, but it took so long to learn human ways and language, it was rarely worth the effort. Humans were winning the war against Sea because we didn't know enough to know where to strike back.

### *The Rorqual*

Kun created the Rorqual back when she was experimenting with crossing different races and fish. They swim gracefully like fish, but they need to breathe air. They also carry their children inside until birth rather than laying eggs. The Rorqual were very special, but they weren't warriors and might not survive the end times. So Kun gave them a different task. She gifted them with the ability to absorb the love of Sea, our mother into their bodies and share it with others that deserved to have it. Those include Rokea, merfolk, and some of the other Sea dwellers. Sea's love is what grants us our power. I've heard that the wolf Changers call it Gnosis, but I have no idea what that word means.

Naturally, since the Rorqual are gentle, helpful, non-aggressive folk for the most part, humans immediately began hunting them, wounding them with harpoons and cutting fat from their bodies, probably trying to steal Sea's love from them. That gave us even more reason to sink their ships.

## Human Kills Human

We knew humans could not get along with one another, so we were not surprised when war broke out. We watched what you call World War I with some interest, hoping more humans would kill others so there would be fewer to poison Sea. To our sorrow, we realized that when human war, they produce even more poisons and wastes while building their weapons. We were again surprised, when not too long afterward the humans that didn't learn anything from the first war started another one. This time, though, we had problems. Humans built metal whales to swim underwater and fight. We would attack these "submarines" but their weapons hurt us and they were hard to destroy. Working together, a number of Rokea could do it, but the cost was high. We decided to just let the humans kill each other and stay out of it so long as they didn't threaten us.

What we didn't know would come back to haunt us, kid. You may have heard the story about the *Indianapolis*. It was torpedoed and sank. About 800 men went into the sea. Lots of them tied themselves together to stay close, but as days passed, many couldn't stand it. They went mad, fought each other for their so-called "life vests," even drank seawater. Sharks ate the dead and sometimes the living. The Rokea just watched.

Several days later a Darkwater named Lightless-Tides arrived. He was a great seer and he was nearly frenzied, almost biting a man in half. He kept saying, "They will open a new Wound." We didn't know what he was raving about, but he made us understand the humans had done something so heinous they could not be allowed to live. We joined him in slaughtering them. When rescue for them arrived, only 316 men still lived. If the seer had arrived sooner, there might not have been that many. It was only later that we discovered the ship had just delivered parts for the most terrible human weapon ever built. By then it was too late.

## C'et's Second Pearl

Ya probably remember me telling ya about C'et starting a second pearl with Qyrl's severed tentacle. Well, C'et completed the pearl and spat it out onto Unsea. Now this tentacle was one of the ones that had long ago torn into Oversea and some of his blood remained on it. Unsea was afraid of the pearl and buried it. Naturally, humans dug it up again.

C'et intended the pearl to be used for energy, to take the place of oil and coal. Humans, of course, put it to the most destructive use they could imagine. Lightless-Tides's warning was barely a month old when we found out what it meant. The city was known as Hiroshima, and when the bomb obliterated it, Sea, Unsea and Oversea all screamed with pain as a small Wound opened while Qyrl laughed in triumph.

C'et, terribly distressed at how her gift was used, somehow withdrew almost entirely from Sea and took off across Unsea. We still do not know how. We believe she went mad.



Even after their war was over, humans decided to destroy Sea by creating more and more Small Wounds within it. Many Wounds were opened in Unsea's body as she wailed for relief. We fought back just once. A Darkwater named Deepest Trench created a ritual that turned ten Rokea into a huge monster called the Black Shark. It was so large that it was capable of destroying whatever ship humans could make. When humans opened more Small Wounds — on what ya'd call the Marshall Islands — the Black Shark sank destroyers, submarines and whatever else it could find. Unfortunately, the Black Shark hasn't been seen since Turna'a.

### Turna'a

Now listen, kid. We ain't cowards. But this was the turning point in our existence. The small Wounds concerned us. We decided we'd all meet in council and decide what to do. We decided to meet in a Grotto called Turna'a not far off the coast of California. Most Rokea pay no attention to your timekeeping, kid, but I know it was in 1955. So many Rokea were they that we couldn't use the Sending to communicate among ourselves. Remora-spirits carried messages back and forth. Darkwaters swam about nervously, Brightwaters wanted to attack and Dimwaters wanted to retreat to the depths and just let the humans destroy themselves. We even allowed the Same-Bito to attend, since they came to tell us what effect the Small Wounds had on Sea even when they were made on Unsea. We knew that several atolls in the Pacific had already been destroyed, and we'd seen our shark brothers and sisters sicken and die. The debates went on for days. Finally, our leaders, a slew made of two each of Brightwaters, Dimwaters and Darkwaters reached a decision and whispered the plan to a remora-spirit, who was to bring the decision to the rest of us.

Suddenly, a Small Wound opened in the water right above us. The blast killed most; others died from the heat or sickened and died afterward. Only those closest to Unsea, who tasted the metal of it seconds before it exploded, yet were still furthest away, managed to escape into Sea's Soul at the last instant. Less than 20 survived. None of the leaders escaped and only one Darkwater made it out.

How could this happen, kid? Something tried to kill us all. Think about it. For the first time since mankind existed the Rokea all came together in one spot for a meeting and humans opened a Small Wound right on top of us. Do you think that's a coincidence? What concerns me even more is that there were more than 30 ships above us, and not one of us noticed them or sensed anything wrong until it happened. Something tried to kill the only race that can survive the Unmaking, and if we are gone, there won't be anything left. Nothing.

We scattered. Why make ourselves more of a target? Nobody knew what the leaders had decided, so each Rokea had to make up his own mind. The Darkwaters went below, surfacing now and again to give us new secrets and

rituals. The Dimwaters retreated in a different fashion. They decided that Rokea and humans should be entirely separate species, that we should avoid contact with humans and not walk on land. They sent out remora-spirits with this edict.

Naturally, many Rokea were angry at this presumption. How dare some tell others what they could and could not do? Most of those were Brightwaters. They sent back a message saying the Dimwaters weren't kings of the ocean and other Rokea would do what they pleased. They also said that moments before the explosion, spirits had come and told them the leaders had decided to send some Rokea onto land to find a way to keep humans away from the Sea. That's what they intended to do. These became the betweeners, Rokea who venture onto Unsea, but who return to Sea as well. We've been outlawed — some high-ranking Rokea decided that betweeners should be hunted down and killed. It even became part of a young Rokea's first hunt. So, be on your guard, kid. You have no choice but to be a betweener. You're illegal by your very existence.

One more thing, kid. Have ya ever noticed that red light in Oversea? It opened some time back. Some say it's another Wound, and that it hates Sea and Unsea and wants to see them destroyed. That Red Star has caused a lot of questions in recent times, and the Dimwaters are trying to find every Darkwater they can to question them about what it means. Me? I dunno. Maybe it's the Unmaking coming our way and Qyrl's laughing at us all. Not much I can do about it, though, except try to survive whatever it brings. Maybe you'll be the one to figure it all out. It'd be just like a human....

## *Society of the Rokea*

I'm not so much for socializing as some ya might meet. Guess it's time ya met some other Rokea. Don't worry, you're not gonna get eaten. She's a betweener, same as me. She's just got a little more experience of things than I have. You'll like her, and she'll be able to tell ya what ya need to learn to make it among our kind. Our kind, listen to me, kid, I'm talkin' about our kind when I'm still damned if I can figure out how ya came about at all.

Anyway, be polite and you'll get along fine.



Don't be so surprised, young one. Not all of us are as ugly as Bites-Through-Steel. Or as sly! I suppose you've figured out by now that his regular-guy without a lot of culture is just an act. Still, he's right. I do have more knowledge of social things than he does. He's too busy swimming near Unsea and looking for new Rokea that haven't made the Long Swim, convincing them they need to join the betweeners. I suppose he thinks if he recruits enough of us, we'll someday outnumber the "true" Rokea who shun Unsea and hunt us for our

treacherous desire to know something other than Sea. My name is Swims-Deep. We'll be taking you to a Grotto where you will swim into Sea's Soul (what many other Changers call the Umbra) and meet with Kun and Sea soon enough. But unless you understand what I have to tell you now, you won't be able to fully realize your role as a Rokea. Bites has filled you in on our history, so I'll just give you a few more details about us. Let's start at the beginning and assume you know nothing, since that pretty much describes where you are.

### *Lifecycle*

Rokea don't actually have what you'd call a life span exactly. For one thing, we don't die natural deaths. We go on until something kills us. Qyrl's children kill us often enough, but we also hunt each other down as you know. Old age isn't a concern for us. Sounds pretty good, huh? Problem is that when there's too many predators in the ocean, it can get downright unpleasant. Naturally, there is a solution to this — breed more slowly. We do that naturally. Time was when only one or two Rokea might be born in a century, but with the destruction of so many of us, our enemies becoming ever more numerous and the dirtwalkers' war on sharks, we're stirring ourselves more on that front. Not that we're out of control now. In fact, we're hardly producing more than we ever did — force of habit probably. Still, we're doing what we can.

### *Auspices*

Some of your personality and what you are most temperamentally suited to is governed by when you are born. We acknowledge three, and each tends to function in a particular role in our society.

#### *Brightwater*

Brightwaters are born during the day, or when Oversea feels his greatest pain (what you would call being born under a full moon). May say that they feel his pain most keenly and that this is why they are the first to frenzy in Rage or in feeding, not stopping until everything in their path stops moving. Even then, they may shake it a few more times just to make sure.

They are our greatest warriors, obviously. They also are the most numerous betweeners. First, they have that connection to Oversea. They want to explore beyond Sea. Second, some idiotic high-ranking Rokea made it forbidden to travel Unsea — because it was too dangerous. Since the Brightwaters are headstrong and aggressive, this was like waving a red cape in front of one of those Unsea animals you call bulls. Of course, they took up the challenge.

#### *Dimwater*

Dimwaters are born during days when it is cloudy, at twilight and between the new and full moon phases. Obviously, Dimwaters are the most numerous of the Rokea. They consider themselves the stabilizing force of the Rokea and are rarely betweeners — even though Bites is an exception to that. They

enforce Rokean law and are the ones who most often come to Unsea as hunting parties in pursuit of betweeners. They always bring along at least one member from one of the other auspices, though.

While Darkwaters may come up with the idea for fetishes, it's the Dimwaters who make the actual items. Dimwater betweeners usually discover that city life isn't so terrible after they establish a predictable routine for themselves. Right, Bites?

### Darkwater

Darkwaters are born on the new moon or during total eclipses. They are, therefore, the most rare of our kind. They are our innovators and our mystics. They are usually quite resourceful and very curious about things. Many other Rokea consider them mad. They aren't, actually, they just happen to annoy the Dimwaters by becoming or aiding betweeners pretty often. If it is madness, then it is madness that created the Rite of the Black Shark and discovered many Gifts that Rokea now use. They like the deeper waters and communicate frequently with spirits and remora. They learn all they can about anything that strikes their fancy. Almost all venture to Unsea at some point during their lives, whether they become betweeners or not.

### Breeds

Until recently, we didn't really acknowledge that there might actually be Rokea who weren't born of the union between a shark and a Rokea. Now I guess we have to rethink a few things. I'll outline three possibilities for you just so we get them covered, but frankly, there are so few human-born Rokea, it's hardly worth the effort.

### Squamus

Obviously, most Rokea are born as sharks. Oh, you didn't know that part? Sorry. No, we are not born as Rokea. We start life as sharks. It's only later, when we reach sexual maturity, that we stop reacting just as sharks and begin to realize that things suddenly make more sense.

### Homid

Until I met you I wasn't actually sure that such things existed. Few of us ever leave Sea. Further, it is not usual for Rokea to breed with dirtwalkers, for they have weaknesses we can ill afford to bring into our breeding line. Still, I know that there are *kadugo*, the offspring of a Rokea and a human. I don't know if you've experienced it or not, but when we come to Unsea, Rokea want to breed all the time. It's not surprising that some few of us have bred with humans, then, especially islanders. What I've never seen before is anything like you. I had heard that if a Rokea bred with a *kadugo*, a Rokea would be the result, but not a usual Rokea, one born human. I'd never have believed it until I met you, though. We'll have to see how well you adapt.

## Metis

I've heard that some of the other Changers breed with one another and produce deformed Changers. We don't have that problem. We don't breed Rokea to Rokea, period. No deformed Rokea. End of story.

## Forms

It's probably time I told you about changing form. There are four main ones and one that Rokea can take on after they've been on land for awhile. I'll give you just a quick explanation of all of them. You can practice later.

### Squamus

Bites tells me you have changed before. Did you become a normal shark? I suspected as much. We call that form Squamus, or Swimming Jaws. All Rokea — except apparently for you — are born as sharks. We always have the form of the kind of shark one of your parents was. If your Rokean parent was of hammerhead shark parentage, you will be too. Do you know what you became? Shortfin Mako? Well, you're lucky to be such a swift swimmer. It's not so surprising considering you're from the Big Island. You'll spend most of your time in Swimming Jaws. It's our most natural form, after all.

### Chasmus

This form is also called Fighting Jaws, for obvious reasons. As a Mako you'll be a little smaller than some others, but in this form, you'll get a lot bigger. You may lose some maneuverability, but you gain the jaws of a really, really big shark. Humans that see a Rokea in this form panic. I think they remember something from long ago when some of us were even larger and it makes them crazy with fear for a while. Of course, this is advantageous for us, especially if they're trying to catch or kill us.

### Gladius

This form is called Standing Jaws. I'm sorry? Oh, the Latin names. Some fool who decided he needed to study us gave our forms the Latin titles. I don't think he actually survived long after that.... We don't usually use the Latin titles. They're a little pretentious, don't you think? Still, you should know them anyway.

Standing Jaws is somewhat like Fighting Jaws, but standing on two feet. It might surprise you, but in this form on average Rokea are about ten feet tall. Not surprisingly, we have a strong bite. We also have incredibly sharp talons in this form. I'm not certain why, since we don't even have hands in shark form. In Swimming Jaws and Fighting Jaws, our eyes roll back in our heads when we bite something — to protect them, so I've heard. In this form, that doesn't happen.

One thing you'll see about this form is that Rokea who don't come out of the water much retain their tails, while those that spend more time on Unsea lose

their tails in this form. We don't actually need a tail on land. It's useful in the water because it acts like a rudder on a boat and helps us swim faster, but on land it gets in the way a lot. Still, it's sort of a dead give away to Rokea that hunt betweeners. Luckily, we can re-grow the tail at will with a little concentration.

One more thing I haven't really mentioned before. You may already know that our skin is a weapon too. Just ask anyone who has ever tried to strike a shark barehanded. That tough skin is called shagreen. In Standing Jaws it gets even tougher. You can use it against enemies if you grapple with them. You might even be able to get one in a headlock and cut his throat. Surprised? Stop thinking like a human. If we fight, we intend to win. If we don't think we can win, we run. Our mandate is to survive, not to defeat all comers. Humans tend to go a little crazy when they see us this way too, but not as much as with Fighting jaws.

### Homid

We call this one Long Fins, and you probably think it's the easiest form. Human form might be easy for you, but for us it's a little different. You've probably noticed that Bites is black and I look Hispanic. That's because the first humans we each saw looked that way. I've seen some Rokea who are blond and white, some that look Hawaiian like you do, and lots of others in between. It just depends on your first contact. Rokea don't care about color issues like humans do. We don't care what one another look like in Long Fins form because so few of us use that form for long. Of course, that means most of us stay pretty ugly. Most are hulking and hunched over, top-heavy like most sharks tend to be. Hammerheads are the worst, since they look walleied with huge blocky foreheads. Then again, some of us take the time to improve our looks. Mostly we do that because really ugly people are too memorable.

For most Rokea, there are two disadvantages to being in this form. First, we can't use the Sending in this form. We can receive, but we can't send. On the other hand, that messes up hunting parties that come after betweeners, and that's good news for us.

The second disadvantage won't apply to you, but shark-born Rokea don't know any human languages when we first come to Unsea. As you might imagine, that also hampers hunting parties since they can't ask if anyone has seen us. I guess for us betweeners, it's as much an advantage as a hindrance.

### Glabrus

We call this the Round Back form. It isn't available to most Rokea, because they don't spend enough time on Unsea. Betweeners like Bites and you and me, once we've been on land for awhile, find that it takes longer to change from Long Fins to Standing Jaws. That's when we start developing the Round Back form. It got that name because the area on your back where the dorsal fin is swells and makes you slightly hunched look. You don't get claws in this form, but you lose all your body hair, your irises swell and darken and your teeth

sharpen. You almost double your body weight in muscle. It's a great fighting form on land because it doesn't cause people to go nuts. They will look at you funny, though. I can't say if you'll find it a natural change or not. I've never met another Rokea that was born from a human.

One thing to remember about this form is that even though it doesn't drive humans crazy, it makes wolf Changers go berserk. Apparently, we resemble some great enemy of theirs in this form. You're better off just using Long Fins form if you're going to meet with any wolf Changers. They don't really understand any of our other forms anyway.

### Rokean Law

We have laws — not many, but important ones — that govern how we live and interact. They've existed since we were first made, and will probably endure until the last Rokea ceases to swim. We follow them both because they were given to us by Sea herself and because they make sense.

#### Survive

Plain and simple, this law puts the survival of the Rokea first. We survive, no matter what else happens. Swim away from a tougher opponent if you have to. There's no shame in not throwing your life away. No blame, no shame.

Still, every now and then something threatens the Rokea or Sea or Kun so much that we sacrifice ourselves for a greater cause. During the period when humans were using the Pacific for nuclear tests, a very smart Darkwater found a way to merge 10 Rokea into one huge creature — the Black Shark. This 120-foot monstrosity sank battleships, ripped submarines in half and generally terrorized anyone who got near enough to catch sight of it.

As far as I know, the rite that created the Black Shark can't be reversed, so all those Rokea, including the rite's creator, gave up their lives as individuals so that they could become a super weapon for Sea. Nobody ever accused them of breaking the law of Survival. The nuclear tests would have destroyed far too many Rokea, so even if the individuals who became the Black Shark ceased to exist, the Rokea survived.

We have a duty to seek out and destroy whatever threatens a Rorqual or a Grotto. Rorqual perform tasks that no one else can, and Grottos are sacred to Sea and to Kun. We need them to survive, so a fight to save either a Rorqual or a Grotto has to be a fight to the death. We have no choice. Without them, we can't survive.

#### Hunt

We're sharks as much as we are Rokea. Sharks are hunters, top of the line predators. Hunting is what we do, and Rokean Law demands that we do it. Our actions affect everything around us, like a ripple effect that spreads throughout the whole marine environment. If humans kill off all the sharks, as they're

likely to do if someone (namely us) doesn't stop them, the balance of Sea will fall apart and if Sea fails, so does everything else. And I do mean everything.

The mandate to hunt means that we hunt for food, we track down and put an end to threats and, when we have to, we hunt those who hunt us and our Kinfolk. Whatever else we are, we are first and foremost hunters and predators.

### *Spawn*

This is the law that tells us we must breed. Spawning is not an option, it's a duty for us. It may take awhile for us to get around to it, but at least once in our lifetimes, Rokea must breed. For one thing, we must be certain that we survive (see the first Rokean Law). For another, we find this the best way we know to honor Kun, who is the mother of fishes and who represents creation and fertility. We call ourselves Kunspawn for a reason.

This law also carries with it the responsibility to teach our children. Every Rokea makes the Long Swim on her own. She meets with Kun in Sea's Soul and learns the basics of being a Rokea.

The rest is up to us. Only Rokea understand Rokea. If we don't teach each other, no one else will.

### *Swim*

Sharks die if they don't keep swimming. If they stop in the water, they stop taking in oxygen and end up dead in the water. Some types of sharks can stay still and keep their gills flushed and aerated, but those species don't breed with Rokea. This law commands us to keep swimming — and, while we're swimming, to keep exploring and moving.

So, how does exploring places that might be dangerous avoid conflicting with the law that says we must survive? Frankly it doesn't, but our failure to check up on what the humans were doing led to the mess we're in now. If we had dared to swim on land more often in the past, we might have caught wind of the humans' plots before they discovered nuclear weapons. We might have stopped them from finning sharks — nipping that practice in the bud. Maybe we'd have even found a way to keep them from turning Sea into their private toxic dump.

Swimming helps us survive not only because it's necessary to our physical make-up, but also because it gets us where we need to be, whether we're swimming in the water or on the land. Unless we know what's going on by seeing it with our own eyes or smelling it with our snouts, we can't protect ourselves from it.

So that's the whole of the law for us Rokea. Not a lot to remember, but to forget any of it is to die.

### *Betweeners*

So, how does this fit in with the likes of you? With your parentage, you're a natural betweener. Your human blood keeps you tied to the land even though



you can change into a shark and swim the Sea — and, in fact, must do so regularly to remain true to yourself.

Here's the story of what's going on between the Rokea and the betweeners. You need to learn this if you learn nothing else. (Have I said that before?)

First, don't think that just going onto land makes you a betweener. Rokea have always taken short trips onto the surface of Unsea. Sometimes we'd just take human form and jump aboard a passenger ship, chumming it up with the travelers and learning a lot about humans from their conversation (which some of us had to learn quickly). We've always kept an eye on island and coastal communities, occasionally walking on land and finding out as much as we could.

What we didn't do was breed with humans. This means that for a long time, no Rokeans had human blood. The good side to this was obvious; without a human mindset or human politics, we could concentrate on our purpose for existing rather than our "personal growth." We didn't complicate our lives with morals, ethics or religion. Our law was simple: Survive, Hunt, Spawn, Swim.

The bad side was not so obvious. We stayed ignorant of why humans do what they do, and that lack of understanding brought about some of our worst moments.

Since we only visited the coastal lands or the islands, we knew nothing about what was going on in the interior of Unsea. It turns out that most of the real problems, such as the Industrial Revolution, the nuclear era, both World Wars, toxic dumping and radioactive waste disposal had its start in places like Arizona, Austria, Pennsylvania and Chernobyl — nowhere near a coast.

You've already heard about Turna'a and how much it cost us. Here's the ripple effect. Only one Darkwater survived that debacle. That hurt us, since Darkwaters make our best mediators and come up with a lot of our new ideas and survival techniques. After Turna'a, the Dimwaters, our judges, decided that no Rokea should spend much time at all on Unsea. "Stay in your place," they told us. Without a strong Darkwater presence to counter the Dimwaters, their word carried full weight of law. Remora traveled far and wide with the message that Unsea was now forbidden to us.

Again, as you've probably heard, Rokea are stubborn — Brightwaters especially so. When the Brightwaters got the word through the remora that the Dimwaters were banning Rokea from Unsea, they took offense at being bossed around by a bunch of sniveling "thinkers." They grabbed their own remora and sent them away with a return message. "The Law says 'Swim,' so we swim when and where we please." The Dimwaters countered with, "No, you won't," while the Brightwaters responded with, "Try and stop us." And that was just the beginning.

This may seem childish to you, but you have to understand that none of us were exactly swimming on all fins. Turna'a destroyed about 60% of the Rokea population, a figure that would equal about three billion humans or so. If that many humans suddenly died, the survivors would be feeling a little shaky for a long time after that.

The feud between the Brightwaters and the Dimwaters continued for awhile until eventually they got tired. We thought the fuss was over and we could go back to our business, with a special emphasis on breeding to replace all those we lost at Turna'a.

In 1968, the first Hunt of betweeners took place. A powerful Brightwater sent out word that a rogue Rokea was swimming on Unsea, defying Rokean Law. Two Dimwaters and a Brightwater set out for Unsea themselves, caught the offender, dragged him back to Sea — and then realized that they had no way to make him stay there.

This became the pattern for awhile. Someone would hear of a Rokea who had taken to the land. A Hunt would form, the Rokea would be brought back to Sea and told to stay there. He would agree but at the first opportunity, he'd make his way back to Unsea.

The next step in the process went from “bring ‘em back alive” to “search and destroy.” The same Brightwater was responsible for that development, you can be sure.

All the Brightwaters who had no interest in Unsea agreed with their leader and began forming serious hunting slews. What was once a game of “fetch” became a life-and-death struggle over the right to “Swim” — even if that meant swimming on the land. Furthermore, in case no one noticed, killing betweeners was in direct violation of the First Law of the Rokea: Survive.

### *Rokea Learn Subtlety*

Those of us who chose to swim between tried to take a more subtle approach. Rather than boldly go ashore, we'd sneak onto Unsea, stay for a short time in one of the coastal cities or on an island, returning to Sea every few days to greet the remora and say hello to any nearby Rokea, as if we'd been there all along. For a while, that served us well. Then Qyrl stepped in.

We call ourselves Kunspawn for a reason. We revere Kun, not her sisters C'et or Qyrl. Nevertheless, Qyrl saw her chance to move in on Kun's territory. She threatened to rat on us betweeners, revealing our ploys and our location to the ocean dwellers unless we promised to serve her instead of Kun. Some of us agreed, to our shame. I've heard that Qyrl gives those who accept her patronage some pretty decent perks, but I suspect they come with a very high price. Most of us told her where to stick her tail fin and how long to leave it there.

She kept to her threat and told on us. The Hunt began in earnest.

That was in 1980 or so, human time. Since then, we've had more than two decades of pursuit by our ocean-dwelling kin. Young Rokea must hunt down and kill a betweener as part of their Rite of Passage, so I hear. Furthermore, we have no idea what Kun has said to the young ones, since most of us had our meeting with her long before the betweener war started.

## The Current Day

That's pretty much how things stand now. We're hunted by our own kind now, caught between sea and shore, for we can't stray too far from Sea for too long. We have no inkling as to how Kun, Sea or Unsea feel about what we're doing. Occasionally, Sea still gives us advice when we need it. We still learn Gifts and maintain our connection to her as if we were ocean-dwellers. Still, the other Rokea hunt us. Some of us wonder why Sea hasn't stopped them or done something to end this war. If she doesn't condemn us, why should other Rokea be so harsh?

Theories abound. One common thought is that Sea feels that we need to work this out ourselves. We created the "betweenner war" so we should figure out how to end it. Since Sea's timetable is not the same as humans (or betweenners, for that matter), she might not care if we took a few centuries to solve our problems and come to an amicable solution.

Another theory holds that Sea wants the hunt to continue as a test of our ability to survive. This is a little harder to believe than the previous one. After all, Sea still teaches us when we need her, so why should she have us hunted down?

A third theory, held by many Dimwaters, is that Sea is disgusted with the Rokea in general because we have failed to protect her properly. Her waters are growing more polluted daily, her precious plankton is diminishing, global warming is changing her temperatures, humans are over-fishing her creatures and we're busy hunting each other instead of taking care of business. Of course Sea's not going to do anything about it until we grow up and stop acting like pups. This theory says that Sea won't do anything except watch us kill each other. I don't like this theory.

## Betweenner Life

So, let's talk practical matters. First of all, if you live on the land, you'll soon develop an almost uncontrollable urge to breed constantly. Anytime, anywhere. This urge began a few summers ago, about the same time that the weird hurricane did so much damage in Bangladesh and caused a lot of other strange events. The urge strikes suddenly, as soon as a wereshark comes onto the land. Even those who are not betweenners feel this need to find something and do the sex-dance. This urge only affects our attraction to humans. Curious, yes? To me, this means that something is driving us to mate with humans and produce more human-born Rokea.

Living as a betweenner has a lot of complications. Unless you were born to a human parent — which I guess you were — you don't come to Unsea complete with everything you need to pass as a human. Betweenners need to establish legal identities, find a place to live and either get a job or find some other means of support. Without a birth certificate, Social Security Number or some other proof that you belong in the country of your choice, you're prey for immigration and naturalization departments all over the world. Eventually, you meet someone

who'll help you get the necessary documents — for a price — or else you'll find another betweener who's already been through it all and knows the ropes.

It was hard for me at first, but now I have a legal identity, a human name, a job and a place to live. Popular jobs among betweeners include dock workers or truck drivers. Mainly we try to take jobs that minimize our day-to-day contact with humans. When normal humans get angry with a co-worker or their boss, they either swallow their feelings, go home and kick someone or something, go out and get drunk or get into a fight. When a Rokea gets angry, she needs to control herself so she doesn't go up to the object of her anger and tear him limb from limb.

That being said, find some outlet for your emotions. Music makes a good one. Human music sounds strange and outlandish to a Rokea for awhile until her ears become accustomed to the patterns and the tonalities, but music does a good job of expressing feelings. Dancing (or thrashing about in a mosh pit) helps siphon off excess energy, not to mention putting you in touch with possible breeding partners. (Did I mention the uncontrollable constant urge to breed?) Playing drums is a perfect gig for a Rokea, if you're musically inclined. You can beat up on the skins all you like and practice controlling your temper at the same time.

Learning how to channel your anger is the most important survival tool a betweener can develop. Sexual partners are good, too. One thing you don't want to do is turn into a rapist because that's the only way you can get a partner. Rape is not sex, and most women try to make certain that they don't get pregnant from a hate crime. Since our urge to breed has as its purpose the continuation of the species, we need to find willing partners — lots of them, preferably.

We take one of two paths to willing sex. The slow way involves working hard to change our appearance so that we actually look like someone a human would want to go to bed with. You spend lots of time with a mirror, practicing facial expressions and learning how to tone up your facial muscles so that you have a human face in stead of the mug of a brute. This also helps disguise you from ocean-dwellers, who expect betweeners to look just as ugly in human form as they do.

The quick way involves awakening the mating urge in your partner. If you work at it, you can stare at the person you want to breed with and make that individual want you. Whether it's pheromones or just that special look in your eye, you can bring your partner to you for the sole purpose of "getting it on." No other compulsions, no long-term relationships, just "wham, bam, thank-you, ma'am."

The most important lesson you can learn is to swim with your mind. Just as we swim with our bodies, moving constantly to survive, keeping your mind active may prove the key to your survival on land. Learn everything you can, from how to drive a car to how to use a computer. Learn as many languages as you can. Get to know the city in which you live, or any city in which you spend time. Learn its back streets, its alleys, its shortcuts and, as always, the quickest way to Sea. Read books, newspapers and magazines — anything that can tell

# ROKEAN LAW FOR BETWEENERS

Rokean law works fine for those who stay in the water. Any Rokea who swim between, however, need to make a few revisions to those laws. So listen up. I don't want to have to repeat myself.

## *Survive*

This law stays the same. Whether we swim on land or water, our job is to stay alive. So much human thought is wasted trying to find a fancy meaning for existence. For us, existence is the meaning. How's that for philosophy?

## *Humans Are Not Prey*

Both humans and sharks are predators, preying on weaker species as well as on each other. Most of the time, we don't eat our own kind — at least not in human form. Those Rokea who swim between or who have some human blood in them may kill humans for any number of good reasons. Just don't eat them.

We have such a bad rep as man-eaters. Sure, it happens sometimes. We get excited, we smell blood, we go for it. At least, that's what happens to ocean-based Rokea. Those of us who stay on land or, like you, who were born on land, should avoid eating any humans you kill. Just don't go there.

## *Stay Near Sea*

Does this really need explaining? Whether we're born of fish or human, whether we swim the water or the land, Sea is part of us. Our spiritual survival comes from our connection with Sea. We must swim in Sea and make our way to a Grotto or visit with a Rorqual to sustain ourselves with the power that lets us use our Gifts. Without the Gnosis we can only get from being in Sea, we can't enter Sea's Soul under any circumstances. Also, if we stay away from salt-water for too long (and don't try swimming in the Great Salt Lake) we lose our shapeshifting abilities forever. That means permanently. I'm not sure how long it takes for that to happen, but I don't want to risk experimenting with staying inland for too long, do you?

**F.E.A.R.**

Contrary to what human self-help programs might want you to believe, F.E.A.R. does not mean Face Everything and Recover, it means Fuck Everything and Run. You laugh? Listen.

Remember the Rokean law that says we should breed? Well, that holds for betweeners and Homid Rokeans as well. On the other hand, there are some Rokea — a lot of them, actually — who'd like nothing better than to hunt us down.

So, go ahead and mate. That's part of what you have to do as a Rokea. Keep one eye open, though, even in the throes of passion. When the sea-born Rokea come hunting, do what any sensible predator does when he's outnumbered. Leave. Forget good-byes, just head out the door and down the road as fast as you can.

Remember that predators need to stay alive. They don't have time for long-lasting relationships for the most part. No child support, no nurturing, no taking the kids to dance recitals or soccer practice.

When we've done the two-backed dance, we're gone. That's not just because we're callous or unfeeling. We need to make sure that Rokea hunters don't find our mates and our unborn children, so we lead them away from anyone we've mated with. Those who hunt us can't find all our breeding partners or spawn.

In case you're worrying, this is typical human behavior as well, so running out on a mate won't raise too many eyebrows.

you what's going on in the world around you and how to cope with the modern, technological world with which you've chosen to surround yourself.

If you can jump in a car or catch a cab to escape pursuit by a Rokea hunting party, then you're one step ahead of the game. That's good, too, because losing this game could mean your life. Whether betweener like me, or human-born like you, we swim a very fine line between life and death, sea and sand, human and shark. Not many Rokea can make that claim.

All we have to do, really, is survive. Either the Great Unmaking will arrive, or a hunting party will finally catch us or Kun will finally decide what she wants to do with us and make her desires known to the rest of the Rokea. While we're waiting, we live by the Laws of the Rokea; we survive, hunt, spawn and swim, making the necessary changes we need to those laws to live as betweeners. We also live like humans; we work, play, fight and learn. This gives us the best — and worst — of both worlds.

## Slews

Before I go into where you can find Rokea around the world, let me tell you a little about our basic structure. While sharks may hunt alone, they aren't natural loners. They travel in schools or small groups.

We call a school of Rokea a "slew." Slews usually number anywhere from three to seven individuals. Before Turna'a, slews sometimes numbered ten or more and had the ability to rise up from the deep to sink ships. Now we travel in smaller circles.

Slews serve as fighting units, providing us the freedom to use some nifty maneuvers in the water. Just as important, slews supply us with a social support group — all the society we ever need. Unlike humans, we don't have a lot of anxieties or stress. We don't worry about whether or not we are likeable or worthy. We simply are what we are. We don't need a lot of people telling us we're "okay." Frankly, that's one of the reasons Rokea have bred so rarely with humans. It keeps things simple and uncomplicated. We tried to keep too much "humanity" out of our slews.

That cost us. Because we understood so little of humans, we could not foresee so many of their colossal blunders. Now that we have taken to swimming Unsea when we must, we find that our ignorance costs us dearly. Since so many of Sea's ills begin on land, slews now venture away from Sea for forays in Unsea in order to stop threats to Sea before they start. If we can keep a factory from polluting a river that empties into Sea, we've done a good thing. Too often, though, we know too little about how to do that. Nevertheless, this is one of the things we do as a slew. There's safety in numbers, or at least a better chance of winning a fight.

The oldest Rokea or the one with the highest rank automatically chooses who leads the slew. If a slew must travel on land and a young Rokea has a lot of information about life on Unsea, the ranking Rokea will generally choose the young one to lead the journey and make the necessary decisions for the slew. Being a leader is only a problem if the mission fails. If that happens, the blame falls on the leader, who may pay for it with his life if the failure is serious enough. When the quest succeeds, every member of the slew shares equally in the victory.

Slews often choose a spirit for their patron or totem. Most often, a slew chooses Shark, for obvious reasons. Occasionally, however, particular slews decide that some other spirit better represents them. Slews who serve totems know that their first priority is survival, so if a slew has to break a totem-spirit's ban in order to survive, then they will do what they have to do. Only humans put so much emphasis on blind obedience to the laws. If we break a spirit's ban, we accept the consequences and try to make up for it later.

## *Rokea Around the World*

So, now that you know what a slew is, let's take a look at where we are. Humans think they have spread out over all the world. They've touched the surface, certainly, but the world is more than land. Rokea have gone just about everywhere. Not only do we occasionally foray onto Unsea, we travel all of Sea's oceans as well.

Pay attention. The world is changing even as we speak, but here are a few guidelines as to what you can expect wherever you go.

### *Antarctica and the Arctic*

Few humans know much about the icy southern continent. They have a few research stations, but they're nothing more than barnacles clinging to the surface of the Antarctic ice. Likewise, only a few humans live in the farthest reaches of the northern ice cap. You may not know it, but some sharks can survive and even thrive in the icy waters of the northern and southern poles. The Greenland shark dwells in polar waters throughout the year. A few Rokea come from this species, though not many.

The Rokea who do hail from Antarctica have told us much about that continent and its oceans. The seas that surround the ice caps of both poles are quiet places where not much happens. Few creatures can survive there, and those that do pose little threat to Sea or to the Rokea and shark who live in those waters.

On land, however, things are different. The Antarctic as well as the Arctic harbor secrets that even the oldest Rokea have forgotten. Activity in Sea's Soul around the Antarctic has stepped up recently. Many Qyrlings gather there as if drawn to some new leader. No Rokea has yet ventured to the Antarctic Unsea to investigate matters more closely.

One rumor claims that the second of C'et's pearls, the one made from a severed tentacle of Qyrl, sleeps beneath the Antarctic ice, dreaming vicious dreams and developing a malevolent intelligence. Other rumors say that new servants of Kraken have gathered on the barren southern ice.

This is definitely a place to watch, despite the hardships involved in traveling and surviving there.

### *Australia*

North of Antarctica, Australia and its waters represent one of our most important areas — both in terms of Sea and Unsea. Betweeners have a hard time surviving in Australia because the Rokea who hunt them there are particularly fierce and deadly accurate. As a survival mechanism, many betweeners have made contact with some of the other Changing Breeds such as the Mokolé. The werecrocs have helped us from time to time. The werewolves can't make up their minds about us. Sometimes they help us, sometimes, they decide we're tainted and attack us.



Australia's Sea contains at least five major Grottos, including the Great Barrier Reef, known to us as the Long Grotto. This place is the largest Grotto in the world and contains an incredible amount of Gnosis. The Grotto called Chill Water Bites rests a short swim away from Shark's Bay, on the western side of the continent. The other Grottos don't lend themselves readily to directions relating to human maps.

You can find them best by swimming to Australia and "feeling" for them — if the hunters don't catch you first that is.

### *Pacific Islands*

Once upon a time (as humans would say), the people of these islands worshipped us as gods, revering "Mako" as the guardian spirit of the sea. Sometimes they gave gifts to us, including human sacrifices. We didn't always take these gifts; other sea-predators accepted them gratefully, though. Still, when food is offered freely... Don't tell anyone I told you, but I've heard that this practice still goes on in some island communities.

### *Marshall Islands*

Listen carefully to this, if you pay attention to nothing else. These islands include the Bikini and Enewetak atolls and became famous in the mid-20th century as testing sites for many Small Wounds. While few Rokea died as a direct result of these tests, at least two Grottos fell to the powerful and devastating explosions. As more and more tests took place, their ripples went out through the Souls of both Sea and Unsea. The Unseen arose from the chaos that consumed the area.

When both Sea's Soul and Unsea's Soul had suffered all the pain and torment they could stand from the many Small Wounds opening up all around them, they burst into flame and burned for long months. Qyrl heard their screams of pain and responded, cracking Undersea and opening the way for the Unseen. This entity absorbed all the spirits brought forth by the Small Wound but, when it had done so, it remained behind instead of going back to its own realm. The Unseen roams the Central Pacific waters, including the Marshall Islands, soaking up the poison left by the Small Wounds. Rokea who have tried to face it have never returned. They either died or were themselves absorbed by this "thing." We call it the Unseen because we have never actually seen it. We have no knowledge of its appearance, or even if it has one.

So far, the Unseen does not seem to hunt Rokea actively, only when we get in its way. When it does, it may pose the greatest threat to our species ever — with the exception of the human race.

### *Hawaiian Islands*

Both humans and sharks frequent the waters and beaches of these beautiful pieces of Unsea. Complications sometimes arise from these meetings, and every now and then a careless or hungry shark or Rokea attacks and

consumes a human or two. When this happens, the islands' population goes hunting, killing sharks indiscriminately. This hurts not only us but the humans as well, since doing so makes the islands' spirits angry. We were there long before humans were.

This is the most likely place for finding human Kinfolk of the Rokea — *kadugo*. Native Hawaiians worshipped us as gods for centuries before the coming of Europeans to ruin it all. Some of them even spoke with Rokea, asking for favors and giving gifts in return, treating us with respect and earning our tolerance, if not outright approval.

The Kopa Loei, certain humans with special powers that resemble some of our Gifts, still remember and honor the old ways. If they were more numerous, Rokea might not harbor such resentment against humans. But they are dying out.

### Asia

This is the territory of the Same-Bito, the weresharks of the Middle Kingdom. Most Rokea believe that the Asian weresharks have abandoned their proper duty. They have turned their backs on Sea and Kun and make pacts and alliances with other supernaturals in Asia's Unsea. I can't verify this because I've never met one up close and personal.

Sharks have a hard time off the coast of Japan and China. Finners haunt those waters, catching sharks and severing their dorsal fins for soup and aphrodisiacs and who knows what else. The finners toss the mutilated shark back into the water, where it dies a lingering death. Whalers also ply the oceans around China and Japan. Occasionally, they catch and kill a Rorqual along with the other whales they destroy for profit. We haven't heard that the Same-Bito are doing anything about these atrocities.

Neither Same-Bito nor Asian Mokolé generally welcome Rokea. As a result, we stay away from those waters. Our law says to survive, not interfere.

### Marianas Trench

This trench, the lowest place in Sea's bed, holds great power. Far below the surface, deep within the trench, the world's largest Grotto rests in a lightless world. The Rorqual had their beginnings here and, possibly, this is also the birthplace of the Rokea. In many ways, this place is our spiritual heart in the physical world.

It's not ours anymore, though. Human researchers and scientists built a great fortress near the edge of the Trench. When they did so, they destroyed an entire city of merfolk, who could not stand the spiritual deadness of the people who dwelled in the fortress. We attacked the metal construct en masse, determining to rid our trench of its foul presence. We lost — badly. Many of us died and we didn't even make a dent in its defenses.

Sea intervened in our battle. She spoke to us and told us to withdraw, to cut our losses. She said that those who lived within the fortress belonged to

Qyrl. She also warned us that these humans had brought forth something from the depths that they could not understand and that would eventually turn upon them. She promised us that one day, our revenge would come.

### *Middle East*

We have one of our largest Grottoes in the Bay of Bengal, which is home to many of our kind. Indian Rokea breed with the Ganges river sharks. Occasionally we run into one of the Same-Bito, since our territory overlaps theirs somewhat in the Middle East. Unlike Asia, however, there we have a strong enough presence to hold our own.

The best thing about the Ganges River is that local pilgrims to the river throw their dead into its waters. When that happens, both sharks and Rokea make use of the “free lunch.”

When the great storm in Bangladesh occurred, the Darkwaters went crazy for awhile, panicking as they claimed that another Small Wound was opening up. If this happened, we didn’t receive any of the usual poisons from it. In any even, betweeners (and human-born Rokea) should steer clear of the Bay of Bengal. The numerous Rokea have a tendency to send out droves of hunting slews when they catch the scent of a betweener.

The Persian Gulf, in contrast, is not a stronghold for Rokea. So much pollution exists there that few Rokea swim its waters. In their place, however, servants of Qyrl abound. The Rokea who make their home in the nearby Arabian Sea have so far managed to contain these creatures.

While a few betweeners make their homes in the coastal cities of Pakistan and Oman, we dislike this area in general. Overcrowding is not our idea of a fun lifestyle, and frankly many of the lands in this part of the world have far too many laws. Female Rokeans have a particularly difficult time in these countries.

### *Africa*

Humans have caused all kinds of trouble for this land. Light-skinned humans from Europe decided that they were better than the dark-skinned inhabitants of Africa. For several hundred years, the Europeans invaded Africa, took prisoners and sold them as slaves and claimed much of the land for themselves. It’s hard for us to understand why this could happen, either why the Europeans could treat other humans so horribly or why the Africans did not simply slaughter the invaders. If Rokea understand one thing about humans, it’s their love of freedom. We die if we’re confined or restrained. We can’t understand why such things were allowed to happen for so long. If you find out the answer to that, tell me first and I’ll owe you a big one.

The interior of Africa contains a lot of strange creatures, including other Changing Breeds. Since we have never gone that far from shore in Africa, we know little about what’s actually there. Besides, we have our own problems with the people along the southern coast of Africa.

The authorities in that area decided to clear sharks from their coastal waters, despite the fact that we came to the area in response to all the garbage tossed into the ocean nearby. Shark-hunters planted great nets in the waters to catch and kill hundreds of sharks as well as any other unfortunate creatures caught up in its tangles. In recent years, the locals have stopped killing sharks outright. Instead they release any they find still alive in the net. For us, this isn't good enough. Some of us want to take the fight to them, sink their ships and catch them in some of their own nets to see how they like it.

## Europe

Europe is a real haven for betweeners and contains almost as many as the United States. Sea is not far from most places in this small continent, so we can move about from country to country, staying near enough to the water to feel comfortable. We take great interest in some of the activities in Europe, such as the conflicts between vampires in the Mediterranean, where we often receive free gifts of dead meat.

A Grotto known as Miria spans both Sea and Unsea in the waters of the Aegean Sea. Unsea's portion belongs to a group of female werewolves, who keep the spirits happy and nurture the energies of the Grotto. We use Sea's part of the Grotto, protecting it from any sea-borne threats. The werewolves have no idea that we are below them, watching what they do. Recently, however, some of us have toyed with the idea of making contact with them.

We also try to avoid the Baltic Sea when we can. Those waters suffer from pollution as great as that of the Persian Gulf. Small Wound poisons seep into the water, contaminating it almost beyond repair. Until recently, we have been unable to get near it due to a great barrier that cut off the Unsea of Eastern Europe from the Baltic to Finland. Rokea who attempted to go there never returned. Those who lived there dropped out of existence. A few years ago, though, that barrier fell. Though I have no idea what (or who) brought it down, I thank Sea and Unsea that now we have a chance to find out what happened to our missing Rokean brothers and sisters.

## Bermuda Triangle

Humans fear this place and have built up many stories and legends about curses and other dimensions and strange supernatural events that cluster here. Some of the stories tell of ships and planes that have entered Sea and Oversea in the Bermuda Triangle and have never come out. Well, all I can say is that the Rokea who regularly travel through the Triangle have never seen any of these lost ships or planes.

Most Rokea, including me, believe that Sea deliberately made this place uncomfortable for humans, who have never really understood that they don't belong here. On the other hand, none of Sea's creatures, mer, Rokea, Qyrling or any other has ever lost their way in the Triangle.

The only place I need to warn you about is the Sargasso Sea, much of which lies in the Triangle. Not many Rokea go there because it just feels “wrong.” The Sargasso Sea does not smell of Qyrl; it is not poisoned or otherwise contaminated. Instead, it seems to contain a void, a place of nothing and no-feeling. We avoid it because the seaweed that abounds there affords our enemies too many good places to hide in ambush. Only eels stay there in any great number, and they aren’t one of my favorite foods.

### South America

A great war continues in the interior of this continent. The native Changing Breeds fight against the men and Qyrlspawn who are determined to cut down the life-giving trees along the Amazon River, destroying the ecosystem and polluting the waters. This would not concern us overmuch except that it also affects the Mokolé. We do what we can from our base in Sea, sinking occasional ships carrying human fodder for this war. Since no one has bothered to inform us when these ships are coming, however, we do not always have the best information to act on.

Sometimes, one of us goes ashore to find out first-hand how the war is progressing. For the most part, the native shapeshifters tell us, “thanks, but no thanks” if we offer to help. They are the jungle’s protectors, and they don’t want a bunch of sharks telling them how to do their job.

Betweeners live on the coast of South America, while ocean-dwelling Rokea move about the Sea with their shark-kin. In the big cities, vampires run rampant. Many of them involve themselves in the human drug trade. How these substances affect Rokea is not well known, at least not by me.

### Caribbean

Numerous Grottos exist in these waters. For betweeners, the Caribbean is a paradise. With all the pirates, vampires, sea-going werewolves, merfolk and sea-loving humans, the waters of the Caribbean provide good mating grounds for land-based Rokea, provided you are cautious about striking up a conversation with just anybody. A group of merfolk inhabit a city of coral here, and they protect it from detection by anyone, including us. They use the Bright Sands Grotto along with us, so we have frequent contact with them. They have some interest in us, and those of us who can speak with humans (or merfolk) have heard them speak of the Three Daughters, similar to our Triat.

### North America

Sharks frequent both coasts of North America and the Gulf Coast. The greatest concentration of betweeners lives in the United States, because travel is so easy and there is so much room to move. All a betweener has to do in America is travel away from Sea to escape her hunters. Trust me, it works. Most Rokea hunters don’t chase their betweener prey too far inland. It’s not hard for a betweener who loses his pursuers to double back and get close to Sea again.

In fact, all kinds of Changing Breeds abound in North America. Werewolves are most numerous, but there are also other kinds. The Mokolé in the Louisiana marshes keep an Unsea Grotto in the Gulf of Mexico, on Marsh Island. Sometimes we visit them there. We know much too little about life far inland. I've heard of cornfields and "seas of wheat," but have never seen one.

Something tells me, however, that as the time of the Unmaking grows closer, we must make inroads into as many parts of Unsea as we can. If Unsea can help Sea survive the coming times, we would be violating the first Rokean Law to refuse to seek her aid.

### *Thoughts on the Changers*

Not bored yet? Good, cause I have one more thing I need to tell you about. There are numerous other Changing Breeds in the world. Some of them think they're the oldest or the best or the first or the most beloved of their creator. Few of them know anything about us, but we have some feelings about them and how to deal with them.

#### *Garou*

Wolves are the most numerous changers on land, at any rate, and our numbers are diminishing as humans continue to hunt us and our shark-kin. One of the reasons for the proliferation of werewolves is that they have many pups in a litter, so they have a greater potential for having more than one little shapechanger. On the other hand, whatever makes a wolf or a human into a werewolf seems to skip a generation more often than not. Since this doesn't happen with us, I guess it all evens out.

Sometimes, werewolves can help a luckless betweener. Stories surface from time to time of Rokea on the track of a fleeing betweener who find themselves under attack by a pack of howling, snarling wolves. Since it seems werewolves can slip back and forth from Unsea to Unsea's Soul as if they were swimming in water, they can sneak up on their prey with ease. A concerted effort by a pack of werewolves is often enough to drive away a Rokean hunting party — or give the betweener time to escape.

Another betweener I know has some contact with these wolves and has told me a few things about them. They have packs, much like our slews. They consider themselves warriors of Gaia and are, in their own way, as ferocious as we are (though I find that hard to believe). They have tribes that have something to do with the geographical origins of their human Kinfolk. They have strong, sometimes uncontrollable passions and are not easily predictable. For the most part, it's best to avoid them.

One story from the ancient past tells of how the werewolves made war on other shapeshifters, slaughtering many of them because they were over-protective of their own place in the heart of their creator. Now they moan and groan about why the balance of the world seems wrong. Go figure.

### Mokolé

The werecrocodiles claim to be the oldest of the Changing Breeds. I would almost be inclined to believe them, rather than the wolves. Consider them as neighbors and allies if not friends. Some of them just don't want to get too close to anyone, preferring the seclusion of their swampy habitats. They live in Florida and Louisiana in the United States and, I suppose, you could find them wherever there are large lizards.

Rokea in Australia have quite a bit of contact with the Mokolé from "down-under" since the Australian crocodiles swim in salt water quite comfortably. They also consider humans as a regular source of food. To each his own, I suppose.

### Ratkin

These critters confuse me. On the one hand, they thrive in cities, enjoying them as much as we betweeners do. Often they help betweeners, hiding us from pursuers and causing distractions so we can get away. That bodes well for the wererats. On the other hand, I've heard that whenever they do anyone a favor, they expect a favor in return. Some rumors claim that the wererats want to exterminate humanity. Maybe what they want in return for their help is for us to join them and eat what they don't wipe out.

### Corax

These are the only surviving Changing Breed made by Oversea. They seem to serve the same purpose for land-based shapeshifters that remora do for the Rokea. They carry messages, give warnings and keep guard. For the moment, they seem to take no notice of us. Revealing our presence to them might gain us some allies or some enemies, depending on who they tell. Talking to the ravens is still up in the air.

### Nuwisha

The wercoyotes seem to have split from the werewolves. Unlike their too serious cousins, however, they seem to delight in playing pranks, elevating it to the level of a purpose for existing. Some of us are familiar with the *manokanaka* or shark-men of some of the Pacific Islands. These creatures often played pranks on fishermen. Occasionally a Brightwater will take it into his head to taunt and tease humans rather than simply attack them. Why the coyotes pick on the wolves, however, is something I'll never understand.

### Same-Bito

I believe I've already said a few things about the Asian weresharks. Stay clear of them for the most part. If they approach you peacefully, stay wary but listen. I've heard that some of them want to make contact with us. Maybe they think we can teach them everything they forgot.

## Other Changers

There are other shapeshifters in the world, but they have little to do with us or us with them. Werecats, shapeshifting spiders and bears all must have their place in the world. I don't feel any great urge, though, to find out what that place may be.

### Vampires

In the ocean, we call them lampreys and mark them as servants of Qyrl. On Unsea, they are called vampires, though I've heard the wolves call them leeches. They control much of Unsea, popularizing and romanticizing their image through films and books while they pull the strings of many human organizations from the police to the hospitals.

The remora tell of vampires with webbed-feet that swim the ocean, preying on anything that has blood, including Rorqual. These bloodsuckers deserve our enmity and ruthless retaliation.

Since you'll spend some time in the city, try to stay as far away from the vampires if you can. No matter how polite they might be or what help they may offer, all they really want is your blood.

### Mages

Humans have their own magic, powered from something similar to the energy we use but slightly different. The ones we know the most about are the rare Kopa Loei of Hawaii. They seem to be the best of the bunch.

Other humans who use magic draw their energy from the spirits of less reputable elements. Some get power from drugs, others from technology or computers. What kind of taint does that give their magic? Since humans are very resourceful, they've learned to use everything they can get their little hands on, so their magic is probably both very powerful and very suspicious.

Be careful of them. If a human causes you trouble and seems to have powers you don't understand, you're probably dealing with a mage of some sort. Either leave them alone or take your best shot and hope you kill him.

### Ghosts

Spirits of dead people are something of an obsession among many humans. They try to talk to them, drive them away, or convince themselves that ghosts are real (or not). I've never seen one either on Unsea or in Unsea's Soul, so I really have no information about them. If you really want to know about them, ask someone else or go spend a night in a haunted house.

### Changelings

Besides the merfolk, we know about some of the fae of the islands. These Menehune live in harmony with their home, just as we live in harmony with Sea. A bond of mutual respect exists between Rokea and Menehune. If we had made more of it at the time, we might have formed a powerful alliance to stop



some of the intrusions of other humans into Menehune lands, preventing the destruction of their sacred places.

The Americas have their own spirit-folk, though we know little about them. They have not seen fit to show themselves to us. Other fae folk seem to be involved in some sort of great war that doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

The merfolk dwell in the oceans. I've mentioned them a few times in passing. They acknowledge the Three Daughters by other names, but we recognize the similarity. Just as we suffered through Turna'a, they lost an entire city to the metal fortress on the edge of the Marianas Trench. If we could help them, we would, but until we hammer out this whole betweener thing, our fins are tied.

### Lexicon

Rokea have their own terminology for concepts familiar to most Changing Breeds as well as a few words that are uniquely their own. Most Rokea, whether ocean-born or betweener, use these terms in their daily speech.

**Betweener:** A Rokea who elects to leave Sea to live primarily on the land. Betweeners must return to Sea to regain Gnosis and maintain their ability to shapeshift.

**Breakers:** Enigmatic sea-spirits representing a combination of force and water. Breakers include wave-spirits, tide-spirits, spirits formed from underwater explosions and those caused by a fish swimming quickly through the water. Rokea can create powerful Breakers as they pass.

**Brightwater:** The auspice that governs Rokea born during the day or at the time of the full moon. These Rokea are fearless warriors for Sea.

**C'et:** Part of the Undersea Triat, C'et represents stasis, permanence and construction and corresponds to the Weaver.

**Darkwater:** The auspice that governs Rokea born during the full moon or at the time of a total eclipse. These Rokea tend toward mysticism and are great thinkers. Other Rokea call them "mad."

**Dimwater:** The auspice that governs Rokea born between the new and full moons (or the full and new moons) or at any time when the sky is overcast or during the hours of twilight. These Rokea become lawmakers, judges and explorers.

**Dirtwalker:** Used as a derogatory name for a land-dweller (or human).

**Grotto:** An underwater caern. Some Grottos have totem spirits unique to them. Sea or Undersea oversees the rest.

**Kadugo:** Human Kinfolk of the Rokea, born from a mating between a normal human and a Rokea. When a Rokea mates with a kadugo, the child may be a homid-breed Rokea.

**Kopa Loei:** Shamanistic mages native to the Hawaiian Islands. They may include some *kadugo* among their numbers.

**Kraken:** An alternate name for Qyrl, this is the name most frequently used by land-dwelling Rokea. (See *Qyrl*.)

**Kun:** Part of the Undersea Triat, Kun represents the incarnation of fecundity, creativity and fertility and corresponds to the Wild.

**Kunspawn:** An alternate name for the Rokea, meaning child of Kun.

**Lamprey:** What betweeners call vampires. The term is also gaining popularity among Rokea in general.

**Moon's Blood:** Silver, which the Rokea believe comes from the remnants of Oversea's Balm combined with his blood and spilled onto the surface of Unsea and sometimes Sea.

**New Wound:** The Red Star, known to the Garou as Antheios.

**Oversea:** The sky; Rokea use this to describe the physical sky as well as the Celestine ruler of the sky.

**Oversea's Balm:** The moon, otherwise referred to as The Balm. The Rokea believe the moon is part of Oversea, not a separate Incarna.

**Okeans:** Sea's spirit-servants.

**Pelageans:** Fish spirits that serve Kun.

**Qyrl:** part of the Undersea Triat, Qyrl represents ambition, destruction and entropy and corresponds to the Wyrn.

**Qyrlings:** Usually taking the form of cephalopods, these are spirit-servants of Qyrl.

**Rorqual:** A whale or dolphin who serves Sea. Rorqual supply Rokea with Gnosis and sometimes mentor new Rokea in the ways of Sea. They also provide Glamour to merfolk.

**Same-Bito:** Asian weresharks. Most Rokea consider them traitors and heretics because they do not follow true Rokean Law and consort regularly with humans and other supernaturals.

**Scuttlers:** Usually taking the form of shellfish and other hard-shelled crustaceans, these are spirit servants of C'et.

**Sea:** The seas and oceans of the world, used for both the physical waters and for the Celestine ruler of them.

**Sea's Soul:** The Umbra. On land, this is called Unsea's Soul.

**Small Seas:** Rivers and lakes.

**Small Wounds:** Once the name for stars, in modern times this has come to mean nuclear explosions.

**Three Daughters:** The undersea Triat of Kun, C'et and Qyrl.

**Undersea:** The ocean floor.

**Unsea:** This term describes any land, including dry land and the sea bottom and is used for both physical land and its Celestine ruler.

**Wound, the:** The sun; Rokea also call it the Great Wound.

# CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

## Step One: Character Concept —

### Who and what are you?

- Choose Nature and Demeanor
- Choose a breed
- Choose an auspice
- Choose a shark species

## Step Two: Select Attributes —

### What are your basic capabilities?

- Prioritize Trait Attributes (7/5/3)
- Choose Traits

## Step Three: Select Advantages —

### What do you know and what can you do?

- Choose five Abilities
- Choose two Basic Gifts (one each from Rokea and auspice)
- Choose five Backgrounds
- Note Renown (by auspice)

## Step Four: Finishing Touches —

### Fill in the details

- Record Rage (by auspice) and Gnosis (by breed)
- Record Willpower (Rokea begin with 4)
- Choose Negative Traits
- Select Merits and/or Flaws if appropriate
- Record shark species strengths and weaknesses
- Purchase Influences if desires

## Step Five: Spark of Life —

### Narrative description and other details

## Character Creation

It's time to put your knowledge to use and create a Rokea character for use in a live-action chronicle. Creating a Rokea character for **Mind's Eye Theatre** follows the same basic guidelines as described in **Laws of the Wild** with some differences, as explained in this section. Once you have thought about the kind of wereshark you want to play, follow the steps outlined below and get ready for action.

### How to Create a Rokea Character

Before you begin creating a Rokea, check with your Storyteller to find out any special requirements she might have for her chronicle. She may wish to restrict characters by shark species, geographical location or other criteria. Once you know if there are any restrictions on what choices you can make, you can proceed with building your character.

The guidelines presented below assume that you are going to play a Rank One Rokea, a wereshark newly come to the knowledge of who and what she is. If your Storyteller wishes to use more advanced characters, she should provide you with the means to modify your character to allow for greater experience, additional Traits and more Gifts and Rites.

### Step One: Character Concept

Before you start making choices for your Rokea character, think about the overall concept behind your wereshark. Since most Rokea begin life as sharks, you should determine your personality rather than your profession, as you might if you were playing a character that began life believing he was a normal human. You may decide upon a combat-oriented individual who acts on impulse or you may choose, instead, to play a Rokea who thinks about her place in the larger world. Thinker, doer, innovator, or challenger, your basic idea gives you something around which to focus your character's Attributes and Abilities. If you choose a Homid Rokea (and your Storyteller permits such characters in her chronicle), decide on what sort of interests you may have had before you realized your true purpose in life.

Once you have developed a central idea for your character, check with your Storyteller to make sure that your idea fits in with the overall chronicle so that you can participate fully in the action.

### Nature and Demeanor

Your Nature and Demeanor set the tone for your character's personality. Your Rokea's Nature describes her innermost self, while her Demeanor represents the outward image your character presents to others. In other words, your Nature expresses how you really are inside; your Demeanor reflects who others *think* you are. For many Rokea, Nature and Demeanor are the same.

Weresharks do not feel obligated to dissemble and prefer directness to subtlety and misdirection.

Common Nature and Demeanor Archetypes for Rokea are listed below, though you may choose others if your Storyteller permits. See **Laws of the Wild** for descriptions of these Archetypes.

Bravo, Caregiver, Competitor, Explorer, Fanatic, Follower, Jester, Judge, Lone Shark, Martyr, Predator, Reluctant Rokea, Survivor, Traditionalist, Visionary.

### *Breed*

Most Rokea come from matings between a Rokea and a shark. With the exception of the Same-Bito of the Middle Kingdom (see **MET: Hengeyokai** for information on the Same-Bito and the Middle Kingdom), few, if any, Rokea arise from matings between Rokea and humans. Outside the Middle Kingdom, the offspring of such matches rarely survive to maturity.

No metis Rokea exist. Since Rokea/shark couplings always produce a Rokea child, they lack the impetus to produce a shapeshifter at any cost that sometimes sparks such matings among other Changing Breeds. Furthermore, few Rokea experience the mating urge in circumstances that encourage Rokea/Rokea pairings.

**Homid:** You come from a rare occurrence: the mating of a Rokea and a human. You lived your early years as a normal human until some stressful event caused you to undergo your First Change. Since then, your life has not been the same. Most Rokea hunt you, with the exception of a few betweeners. Still, you survive. (Some Storytellers may not allow Homid Rokea in their chronicles.)

**Initial Gnosis:** 1

**Squamus:** Born a shark, you spent your early life in an endless cycle of swimming, eating and surviving. You became aware of your true nature when Sea and all her children spoke to you, and you realized that you could understand what they had to say. Since then, you have listened to their messages.

**Initial Gnosis:** 5

### *Auspices*

Rokea have three auspices, determined by the phase of the moon or the place or condition of the sun (the Wound) in the sky.

**Brightwaters:** Born when the moon over the ocean was full or when the full light of the Wound touched the waters, Brightwaters represent the ultimate in killing efficiency. These Rokea do not stop to think when entering battle; Rage and instincts govern their actions.

**Initial Rage:** 5

**Auspice Gifts:** *Eyes of the Wound, Restraint, Unseen Attack, First Feeling, Narke's Gift, Undertow*

**Dimwaters:** Birthed either at dusk, between the new and full moons or when the Wound wears a mask of clouds, Dimwaters understand and seek the Harmony of Sea. When this quest calls for hunting and killing other Rokea or any creatures that threaten to destroy the balance, they show no hesitation.

**Initial Rage:** 4

**Auspice Gifts:** *King Fish, Sea's Voice, Strange Blood, True Intentions, Crushing Depths, Know Oversea's Mind, Spit Teeth*

**Darkwaters:** Born during the new moon or at the time of a total eclipse, Darkwaters see the hidden patterns beneath the surface of life. They serve as Sea's mystics and seers, spending most of their time beneath the water searching out the secrets hidden in the depths of the ocean. When they journey to Unsea, they do so to expand their knowledge and wonder at the vastness of the world.

**Initial Rage:** 3

**Auspice Gifts:** *Blood of the Deep, Chill, Silent Sending, Qyrl's Blood, Enter Sea's Soul, Piercing Shriek, Voice of the Depths*

### Rokea Species

Rokea do not have Tribes, as do many of the Changing Breeds. Each wereshark, however, belongs to the same species of shark as her shark-parent. Homid Rokea "belong" to the species of their Rokea parent. Each species has some unique qualities and some disadvantages as well. More detailed information on shark species appears later in this chapter.

Rokea species are:

**Great White:** Perhaps the largest of the aggressive shark species, these sharks make their home in waters all over the world, wherever conditions support them.

**Advantage:** Gains an automatic retest to any Challenges involving sense of smell.

**Disadvantage:** Must spend one extra Willpower Trait to avoid frenzy.

**Hammerhead:** One of the species most favored by Rokea as mates, hammerheads dwell primarily in tropical waters. A medium- to large-sized shark, this species frequently swims in schools and is known for its relative sociability.

**Advantage:** Gains an automatic retest to any Challenges involving peripheral sight.

**Disadvantage:** Must spend a Willpower Trait to remain in a battle after allies have withdrawn.

**Bull Shark:** Though smaller than most sharks, bull sharks favor fresh water and spend much of their time along shorelines or even in rivers, often not far from human habitats. Able to survive in both fresh and salt water, these sharks are deceptively dangerous.

**Advantage:** Automatic survival in either fresh or salt water. Gains an automatic retest to any Challenge involving humans.

**Disadvantage:** Suffer a one Trait disadvantage in Physical tests against Rokea of larger species.

**Tiger Shark:** Noted for their omnivorous appetite and deadly bite, tiger sharks prefer tropical waters throughout the world. Large and dangerous, they make excellent warriors for Sea.

**Advantage:** Do one additional Health Level damage with bite.

**Disadvantage:** Must spend a Willpower Trait to withdraw from battle.

**Mako:** Known for their swiftness and their incredible leaps out of the water, the two types of mako (shortfin and longfin) inhabit tropical and temperate waters around the world. They are skilled at serving as messengers for Sea.

**Advantage:** Automatic retest on Challenges involving athletic ability in the water or pursuit.

**Disadvantage:** Do one less Health Level damage with bite.

**Goblin Shark:** Smaller than most sharks, goblin sharks dwell in the depths along the coast of Japan, Australia, Portugal and India. Usually only the Same-Bito breed with these sharks. You must have your Storyteller's permission to play a Rokea from goblin shark stock in a non-Middle Kingdom game.

**Advantage:** May enter the Umbra in the same fashion as Garou (see *Laws of the Wild*).

**Disadvantage:** Suffer a two Trait penalty in all Social Tests involving non-hengeyokai characters.

### *Renown Traits*

All Rokea begin with three Renown Traits, according to their auspice.

### *Rank*

All Rokea characters begin at Rank One.

## *Step Two: Attributes*

Choose a total of 15 Traits that define your character. Seven come from your primary category, five from your secondary category and three from your tertiary category. Rokea may not choose Social Traits as their primary category unless they come from human stock (and then only with permission from the Storyteller).

### *Physical Traits*

You may choose any of the Physical Traits listed in *Laws of the Wild* without restrictions for your Rokea character, though your shark species may lend itself to some Traits more than others. Use common sense and the information provided here on your shark species (or found in your own research) to guide your choices. Rokea rarely possess the Negative Physical Traits *Cowardly*, *Delicate* or *Sickly*.

## Social Traits

You may select from any of the Social Traits detailed in **Laws of the Wild** with the exception of *Alluring* and *Gorgeous*. Remember that most Rokea do not rely on subtlety and diplomacy, so choose your other Traits with this in mind. Passive Traits seldom occur among Rokea. The Negative Trait *Shy* does not usually apply to Rokea.

## Mental Traits

Any of the mental Traits listed in **Laws of the Wild** are suitable for Rokea, though *Patient* and *Reflective* are rare choices for most weresharks. The Negative Trait *Submissive* is almost unheard of among Rokea.

## Step Three: Advantages

After you have chosen your Rokea's Attributes, you should select Traits that further your character's personality and give her a wide range of actions from which to choose. Advantages consist of Abilities, Gifts, Backgrounds and Renown.

### Abilities

You may choose five Abilities for your beginning Rokea, using the list provided in **Laws of the Wild**. If you wish to focus on one particularly Ability, such as *Brawl*, you may choose it more than once. Squamus Rokea use the same rules as lupus Garou when choosing Abilities. They may not select *Academics*, *Bureaucracy*, *Computer*, *Drive*, *Finance*, *Firearms*, *Repair*, *Science* or *Security*. They do receive *Primal-Urge* and *Survival* automatically. Homid Rokea (if allowed by your Storyteller) may not begin play with *Primal-Urge*. A new Ability, *Seafaring*, is explained later in this chapter.

### Gifts

Rokea begin play with two Gifts, one chosen from her auspice and one from General Rokea Gifts.

### Backgrounds

You may choose five Background Traits that reflect your Rokea's place in the greater world and qualities that arise from her surroundings and general environment. Although you begin play with certain Backgrounds, these qualities change during play according to your actions and circumstances. Once you begin play, you may gain or lose some of your Backgrounds without spending experience Traits. If you wish to make some Backgrounds permanent, your Storyteller may require you to spend experience in addition to roleplaying the appropriate situations. Suitable Backgrounds for Rokea include *Allies*, *Contacts*, *Fetish*, *Mentor*, *Remora*, *Resources*, *Rites* and *Totem*. *Pure Breed* is unnecessary for Rokea. The new Background: *Remora*, exclusively available to Rokea, is described later in the chapter. See **Laws of the Wild** for all other Backgrounds.



## Renown

Rokea begin with three permanent Renown Traits determined by their auspices. (See Renown chart below). Rokea recognize three Renown categories: Valor, Harmony and Innovation. Each auspice places a greater emphasis on one type of Renown, but all three categories have meaning for weresharks.

Rokea Renown differs from that of most Changing Breeds in that the weresharks themselves only award or penalize Valor Renown. Sea metes out Harmony Renown, while Kun deals out awards or penalties in Innovation. Gaining Harmony or Innovation Renown simply requires for the Rokea to gain the acknowledgement of the spirit messengers of either Sea or Kun as appropriate. The Rokea makes a Mental test against six Traits (retest *Rituals*). Success results in the gaining of one Renown Trait in the category sought. Of course, the character must have done something notable to gain the spirits' recognition.

To gain Valor Renown, the Rokea must find another wereshark to petition for recognition for her deeds. Usually, Rokea use remora to communicate their request since these creatures have an instinct for truth that prevents them from spreading false deeds or inflating ordinary ones. To gain a permanent Valor Renown Trait, a Rokea must seek out another wereshark and request recognition for her deeds face-to-face. The Rokea who receives the petition may challenge the petitioner before actually awarding the Renown. This involves a Social test (retest *Rituals*). Alternately, the Storyteller may allow good roleplaying to substitute for a Challenge.

While ocean-dwelling Rokea need only find another wereshark to gain Valor Renown, betweeners have a much more difficult time. Using remora as messengers alerts other Rokea to the betweener's location; in any case, most ocean-dwelling Rokea refuse to acknowledge that betweeners deserve any Renown at all. Betweeners must, therefore, either locate another Rokea like themselves or find the rare wereshark who holds no prejudice for those Rokea who choose to dwell on the land.

### Valor

Rokea do not confuse bravery with Valor. Since Rokea do not admit to fear, they expect all weresharks to demonstrate bravery in battle. Valor consists of accepting or looking for challenges, either in combat, in the hunt or in the search for a mate, and doing so with the conviction that you are acting in accordance with your purpose in life. Rokea seeking Valor Renown do not lie, nor do they seek revenge.

#### Valor's Principles

- *Lie to others, you lie to yourself.*
- *Do not take on a challenge you cannot complete.*
- *If someone wrongs you, do not seek him out. Simply remember him.*

## Harmony

Rokea live in attunement with their environment and recognize that all things have their place. Humans may hunt sea-life for food and may sail the seas for travel and recreation, but participating in mass slaughter of sea-life and polluting the oceans violates the principles of Harmony. Rokea, in turn, may satisfy their hunger from the bounty that surrounds them, but eating humans destroys the Harmony of Sea since it encourages humans to fear and hunt sharks. Sea considers the Rokea to be her guardians and sentries. Anything that harms her, such as oil spills, over-fishing or intrusions into the ecology of Sea, requires decisive action. Rokea gain Harmony Renown from Sea by taking such action and restoring balance to the oceans of the world.

### Harmony's Laws

- *Everything has a place, including you. Stay in it.*
- *What happens to one part of Sea affects it all. There are no isolated occurrences. Remember this when you decide whether or not to act.*
- *If Sea makes a request of you, it is disharmonious to refuse.*

## Innovation

Kun, known as the mother of fishes and creativity, recognizes the creative spark in her Rokea children through Innovation Renown. Each time a Rokea approaches a problem in a new way or explores new territory, Kun rewards her efforts. New Gifts, rites and fetishes also receive Kun's recognition. Rokea who dare leave the sea to visit the land in order to conduct a preemptive strike against some threat to the Sea also gain Kun's approval for forethought and individual thinking.

### Innovation's Guidelines

- *Never assume you know everything, or even enough, about a situation.*
- *Humans are not destroying the world because they are strong, but simply because they put their minds to it. Speed and strength do not always win battles.*
- *You are not alone in Sea. There are other beings with knowledge to share.*

## Renown Awards

Since Rokea have unique Renown categories that differ considerably from those of the Garou or other Changing Breeds, the following lists provide suggestions for ways for Rokea to acquire (or lose) each of the various types of Renown.

### Valor Renown

#### Deeds of Valor

- Accepting a challenge when there is a possibility of losing.
- Keeping a promise even though it means facing great danger.
- Undertaking a difficult quest for a worthy breeding partner.

Foregoing immediate revenge on an enemy in favor of a more just retribution.

Showing absolute confidence and security in a crisis situation.

Making a difficult decision.

Seeking out and defeating a servant of Qyrl.

Risking yourself to protect Sea.

### **Shamefully Non-Valorous Deeds**

Failing to accept a challenge because you might lose.

Breaking a promise for any reason.

Refusing to seek out a mating partner when the urge surfaces.

Taking hasty revenge on an enemy.

Losing courage and decisiveness in a crisis.

Refusing to make a tough decision.

Running from a servant of Qyrl.

Doing anything to bring harm to Sea.

## **Harmony Renown**

### **Ways of Harmony**

Hearing and obeying a request from Sea without question.

Sparing a human when killing is not necessary or advisable.

Interfering with a plan to pollute or corrupt Sea or its creatures.

Stopping a group of shark-fanners.

Respecting the territory of other creatures of Sea (such as merfolk).

Discouraging tourists in fragile environments of Sea.

Protecting coral reefs from exploitation.

Encouraging your slew to take an active part in protecting Sea.

Saving a Rorqual from human or Qyrl enemies.

### **Dissonantly Non-Harmonious Ways**

Ignoring a request from Sea.

Killing humans on a whim.

Failing to interfere with a scheme to harm Sea or its creatures.

Allowing a group of shark-fanners or dolphin hunters to continue their actions without retribution.

Trespassing on the territory of others.

Allowing tourists to run rampant over Sea's most fragile ecosystems.

Failing to protect coral reefs from those who would destroy their delicate balance.

Holding your slew back from taking part in the protection of Sea.

Allowing a Rorqual to fall to minions of Qyrl or human predators.

## *Innovation Renown*

### **Innovative Ideas**

Discovering a new Gift or rite.

Creating a new fetish or coming up with an idea for one.

Discovering a heretofore forgotten Grotto.

Exploring an unfamiliar portion of Sea's Soul.

Going ashore to stop a threat to Sea at its source.

Learning something new that may benefit the Rokea.

Making a new and important ally for your slew or for your species.

Finding a solution to a problem that does not necessarily involve combat.

Acting as a mentor to a fledgling Rokea to encourage her to "think" as well

as act.

### **Decidedly Non-Innovative Ideas**

Refusing to attempt to discover new Gifts or rites.

Turning down the chance to participate in the creation or invention of a new fetish.

Refusing to look for new Grottos.

Failure to follow the urge to explore new places.

Refusing to go ashore to prevent a threat to Sea from materializing.

Failing to take advantage of available knowledge that could help the Rokea.

Making a powerful enemy of your slew or species.

Never trying a solution that does not involve combat.

Refusing to teach younger Rokea to think for themselves.

## *Rank*

All Rokea characters begin at Rank One. Rokea use titles that refer to their relationship with Sea to recognize Rank. A new Rokea might introduce herself as "a Dimwater on the Surface" while an esteemed elder might refer to himself as "a Brightwater in the Deeps." The five levels of Rokea rank are: Surface, Shallows, Open Sea, Cold Sea and Deeps.

Rokea gain in rank when they achieve enough Renown to deserve it. When a Rokea qualifies for a rise in rank, Sea or Kun simply grants her the right to change her title as appropriate. The next time she meets another wereshark, the Rokea uses her new form of address when introducing herself. If the other Rokea accepts her new title, she receives independent confirmation of her new rank. The other Rokea may, of course, challenge her in some fashion. If she succeeds in the appropriate Challenge as determined by the Storyteller, the other Rokea accords the wereshark her new rank.

See the Renown Chart below for the number of Traits in each Renown category necessary to advance in Rank.

## Rank and Renown

### Brightwater

Rank (Title)	Valor	Harmony	Innovation
1 (Surface)	2	*	*
2 (Shallows)	4	2	1
3 (Open Sea)	7	4	2
4 (Cold Sea)	9	6	4
5 (Deeps)	10	8	5

### Dimwater

Rank (Title)	Valor	Harmony	Innovation
1 (Surface)	*	2	*
2 (Shallows)	3	5	*
3 (Open Sea)	5	7	1
4 (Cold Sea)	7	9	2
5 (Deeps)	8	10	3

### Darkwater

Rank (Title)	Valor	Harmony	Innovation
1 (Surface)	*	*	2
2 (Shallows)	1	2	3
3 (Open Sea)	2	4	6
4 (Cold Sea)	3	6	8
5 (Deeps)	4	8	10

Note: Rokea begin with two Traits in their Primary category as determined by auspice with the third Trait in one of the other two categories. She must have a total of three Traits to be considered a Rank One Rokea.

## Renown Traits

Since Rokea Renown is unique, the Renown Traits for each category are therefore unique as well. A beginning Rokea should choose her starting Renown Traits from the appropriate lists. Each time she gains another Permanent Renown Trait, she should either select another Trait or have the Storyteller assign her a suitable Trait.

**Valor:** *Bold, Confident, Constant, Determined, Dutiful, Forthright, Honest, Implacable, Reputable, Secure*

**Harmony:** *Calm, Conscientious, Impartial, Instinctive, Just, Responsible, Serene, Steadfast, Stoic, Virtuous*

**Innovation:** *Adventurous, Aspiring, Creative, Curious, Daring, Independent, Inventive, Pioneering, Self-Reliant, Undaunted*

## Rage, Gnosis, Willpower

Rokea use Rage and Willpower in the same way that Garou do; like Garou, they use Gnosis to activate Gifts. Unlike Garou, however, Rokea cannot step sideways without the use of either the Gift *Enter Sea's Soul* or *Enter Unsea's Soul* (see the section on Gifts, below).

### Regaining Rage

Rokea replenish their Rage Traits (and sometimes gain additional ones) in many of the same ways as Garou (see **Laws of the Wild** for a more detailed description of regaining Rage). Some additional circumstances are described below:

—Rokea gain a Rage Trait when they surface at a time when they can either view the Wound at midday or Oversea's Balm when it first appears in the sky. If a Rokea surfaces during the time of day (or night) that corresponds with her auspice, she regains all her Rage Traits. For examples, Darkwaters replenish all spent Rage Traits if they surface during a new moon or a total eclipse.

—Viewing an example of something that violates Sea or her creatures, such as viewing an oil spill or coming across a shark that has been finned, causes a Rokea to gain at least one Rage Trait. A Storyteller may award additional Rage Traits depending on the severity of the offense against Sea or Kun.

### Frenzy

Whenever a Rokea makes a Rage test, she must follow it with a Frenzy test. The wereshark makes a Willpower test against her permanent Rage total +2 (retest *Primal-Urge*). If she succeeds, the Rokea retains control of her mind. Failure means that she enters frenzy; She may negate the frenzy by spending a Willpower Trait, but may take no more actions for the rest of the turn. Darkwaters do not add +2 to their Rage total when making a Frenzy Challenge.

Rokea only enter into berserk frenzy, in which they single-mindedly concentrate on destroying their enemy. A frenzied Rokea immediately shifts into her preferred fighting form (*Gladius* or *Chasmus*) and attacks anything that moves. A Rokea with more Gnosis than Rage does not attack members of her slew or other allies. By spending a Willpower Trait, a berserk Rokea may exert enough control over her actions to avoid attacking unwanted targets even if her Rage exceeds her Gnosis. The Storyteller may direct the Rokea's actions toward appropriate targets in such situations.

Rokea never enter fox frenzy. Although a Rokea may withdraw from an impossible battle (unless in a state of frenzy), she never flees from uncontrollable or Rage-directed fear.

### Kunmind

A Rokea who enters frenzy must make two Simple Tests. If she fails both these tests, she enters a state of mind called Kunmind, akin to what Garou call the Thrall of the Wyrn. A flood of Rage washes through the Rokea, purging her of everything and making her privy to the mind of Kun herself, an

experience too overwhelming for mortal minds to encompass. Rokea in a state of Kunmind enter a feeding frenzy from which they do not emerge until everything around them is dead. A Rokea driven by Kunmind must make a Mental test against seven Traits to avoid consuming a target she has killed. Weresharks may not spend Willpower to negate Kunmind.

Loss of Harmony Renown is usually the least of the consequences of falling prey to this bestial and uncontrollable state of consciousness.

### Gnosis

Unlike Garou, Rokea may not use Gnosis to enter the Umbra. For the most part, Rokea use Gnosis for the sole purpose of activating Gifts.

Regaining Gnosis is not quite as simple for Rokea as for Garou. Just as Garou may gain Gnosis from spending time in a caern, Rokea find their source for Gnosis in Grottos. These undersea “caerns,” however, are frequently too deep for many Rokea to easily reach. Instead, a Rokea must find a Rorqual (see below) and make a Social test against a number of Traits determined by the species of Rorqual and the auspice of the Rokea (retest *Primal-Urge*). Success replenishes one Gnosis Trait. The Rokea may test again for additional Gnosis Traits — up to three from one Rorqual — but failure means that she may regain no more Gnosis Traits from that Rorqual for one week.

Rokea may also gain Gnosis from Grottos that are near enough to the surface for the Rokea to reach them, or if they know a Gift that allows them to swim in deeper-than-usual waters (see Darkwater Gifts below). Rokea replenish their Gnosis in a Grotto in the same way as meditation in a caern restores Gnosis to Garou.

### Step Four: Final Touches

Once you have finished assigning the basic qualities to your Rokea character, all you need to do is flesh out those aspects of your wereshark that make her unique. You may decide to give your character more Abilities, Backgrounds and Merits or Flaws to tailor your character more exactly to your specifications.

### Negative Traits and Flaws

In order to gain additional Traits, Abilities, Backgrounds, Influences or Merits, you may select Negative Traits or Flaws for your character following the guidelines described in **Laws of the Wild**. The Negative Traits listed in that rule book, with the exceptions noted above, are suitable for Rokea. Check with your Storyteller to find out if she has any further restrictions on choosing Negative Traits before you make your decision. Flaws for Rokea are listed later in this chapter along with a brief list of disallowed Merits and Flaws.

### Influences

**Laws of the Wild** gives information on acquiring Influence Traits and descriptions of the different kinds of Influences available. At first glance, it

may seem that this Background is fairly useless for the ocean-going Rokea; indeed, for the most part, sea-born Rokea have no need for Influences since these Traits reflect a character's interaction with human society. As more Rokea find themselves forced to deal with humans, however, such connections are gradually becoming more common. This is not to say they are close to standard yet, but they are no longer unheard of either. For their part, betweeners and human-born Rokea may choose any Influences listed in **Laws of the Wild**. A few ideas for tailoring Influences to suit Squamus Rokea are listed below, assuming that even sea-born sharks have occasional contact with human organizations.

**Bureaucracy:** Some Rokea may have contacts among those who work in the halls of power. Using bureaucrats to clog underwater drilling projects and expansion of national or international fishing or whaling rights with red tape or vetoing decisions potentially harmful to Sea may have more lasting consequences than violent, small scale actions.

**Health:** Rokea who choose *Health Influence* frequently involve themselves with marine biologists in maintaining the health of sea creatures and making certain that toxic materials do not contaminate the oceans and waterways of the world.

**Legal:** Some Rokea become involved in environmental law with regard to the world's oceans. They also see that violators of Sea, such as whalers, shark finners and perpetrators of toxic spills receive punishment through strong legal measures.

**Occult:** The sea holds a mystic attraction for many people and Rokea who have some interaction with humans sometimes become heads of sea-worshipping cults or work with modern day shamans to encourage a respectful attitude toward Sea.

**Politics:** While Rokea seldom have the temperament for directly dealing in politics, they occasionally form contacts with humans who can lobby for better laws regarding the oceans and marine life.

**Transportation:** Anything involved with ocean travel interests the Rokea. Some weresharks make a point of cultivating contacts with those who control nautical transport, whether cargo or passenger. Such Rokea can make sure that ships do not make use of certain sea lanes that may place sea creatures in danger.

Few Rokea bother themselves with *Church, Finance, High Society, Media, Police, Street* or *Underworld* Influences. If you wish to select one of these Influences for your Rokea, however, work with your Storyteller to devise a plausible reason for your character to have connections in that area.

### Step Five: Spark of Life

The last step in the character creation process involves coming up with details that are less tangible but no less important in fleshing out your Rokea.



This is the life story of your character, including her looks, history and what drives her actions. Rokea are like no other shapechangers on the planet; indeed, with the possible exception of the Ananasi, they are the most alien of the Changing Breeds for a player to try to understand, much less portray well in live-action. Even human-born Rokea feel a primal connection to an environment we ordinary humans have only just begun to truly explore; that which they call home, we could not survive without sophisticated equipment or extremely durable equipment.

**Background:** *Where does your character come from? What did she do before she came to the knowledge that she was a Rokea? Who are (or were) her parents? If you are a human-born Rokea or a betweenner, what part do you play in human society? If you are a Squamus Rokea (as you probably are), what are your feelings about humans? About betweenners? About Homid Rokea?* These questions can provide a good launching your thoughts about your Rokea's backstory and personal history. Even the simple life of a shark can have a number of interesting twists to it, especially if you start trying to imagine what your Rokea saw (if not understood) in the time before her First Change. Perhaps she came across a common dumping ground for chemicals but previously lacked the capability to do anything about it — now, however, is another story entirely. Along with input from your Storyteller, you should use this information to help you decide your character's place in Rokea society.

**Motivations:** *What are your character's ambitions? How does she fit into Sea's plans? Does she have a special purpose? An enemy? If your Rokea does not know what motivates her, why not? Why come to land at all? What do you want to achieve? Do you want to go back as soon as you're done, or have you started to like it here?* Unless you are involved in a truly revolutionary LARP, chances are most game sessions won't take place in the rolling surf. Since even the nicest swimming pool fails to capture the beauty and majesty of the ocean very well, you're going to need a very good reason to be where you are.

**Appearance:** *What does your character look like in shark form? In Homid form? When you interact with humans, what sort of clothing do you wear? What mannerisms distinguish you from other individuals? How important is body language to you?* Although most Rokea spend the majority of their lives underwater and in shark form, they occasionally find it necessary to venture upon the land. When they do, such details as appearance and clothing can assume monumental importance. Humans make many judgments based on the personal appearance and attitude of others. You must learn to take this into account when dealing with humans or bear the consequences.

**Equipment:** If you have chosen the Fetish Background, the item selected by this choice is already in your possession. Only Rokea who spend any length of time on the land have use for other equipment. Check with your Storyteller about what kinds of equipment are available to your character.

## A Note About Bathtub Rokea

Please, for the love of all that is good in gaming, do *not* confine yourself (or allow yourself to be confined) to the pool, or worse still the bathtub, for long stretches of the game just for the sake of “being in character.” You’d think this would be unnecessary, but for unknown reasons some players and Storytellers develop a strange mania concerning Rokea, merfolk and anything else related to the ocean and insist that they abide by certain bizarre play requirements to ensure that they’re played “accurately.”

The reasons to resist this curious compulsion are numerous and well-founded. For one thing, Rokea would likely find the former terribly polluted with chemicals and the latter extremely confining and degrading. Besides, as much as they love the sea, they have forms that are biologically adapted to walk on land — and if sharks are anything, they’re extremely practical. A Rokea may complain about the limitations of traveling on land compare to swimming in the sea, but they don’t *need* water to survive in the immediate sense that such ridiculous requirements imply. Lastly, should your Storyteller seriously talk about requiring such behavior, remind them that all gamers have something called dignity, not to mention common sense, and that you no more need to abide in a swimming pool to play a Rokea than they must go soak their head to understand one. That should suffice to get the message across.

## The Five Forms

Sea-born Rokea have access to four forms: Swimming Jaws or Squamus, Fighting Jaws or Chasmus, Standing Jaws or Gladius and Long Fins or Homid. Betweeners and human-born Rokea have an additional form: Round Back or Glabus, which serves as an intermediate form between Homid and Gladius. Each form has advantages and disadvantages and presents players with unique role-playing challenges. **Laws of the Wild** contains complete rules for shifting forms.

### Swimming Jaws (Squamus)

**Trait Adjustments:** In addition to their normal Traits, Rokea in Squamus form gain the following Physical Traits: *Ferocious*, *Tough*, *Agile x 2*, *Enduring* and *Tenacious*. They also gain the Negative Trait: *Feral*.

**Change Description:** This is the usual form for most Rokea. Individuals take on the appearance and characteristics of their shark species — i.e. swiftness for mako, strength for great whites and so on. Rokea in Squamus form are no different physically from “normal” sharks, though they may be slightly larger or more agile than their purely animal kin.

**Roleplaying:** Rokea act according to their nature. They are creatures of instinct through their shark blood, and intelligence through their Rokea blood. They understand the importance of belonging to a group (slew) as well as their worth as individuals in relation to sea. Rokea do not concern themselves overly much with subtlety and are not forgiving toward those who harm Sea or its creatures.

### *Fighting Jaws (Chasmus)*

**Trait Adjustments:** Rokea in this form gain the Physical Traits: *Brawny*, *Ferocious x2*, *Enduring x2* and *Resilient*. In water, they gain the additional Physical Trait: *Agile*. Chasmus Rokea also acquire the Negative Trait: *Feral*.

**Change Description:** Chasmus Rokea tend to exceed 25 feet in length, giving them the appearance of primordial “monsters of the deep.” They become much stronger than normal sharks and inflict more damage on their opponents. This form invokes the full Delirium in humans since they react out of primal instinct, from the ages when primitive sea-goers suffered from these monstrous leviathans. Modern-day pop culture icons such as the shark from “Jaws” only increases the tendency of humans to react with mindless panic when confronting a Chasmus Rokea.

**Roleplaying:** Chasmus Rokea think mainly of fighting or accomplishing some task appropriate to this form. This is the ideal form for underwater combat. This form causes aggravated damage with its bite.

### *Standing Jaws (Gladius)*

**Trait Adjustments:** In Gladius form, Rokea gain the following additional Physical Traits: *Brawny*, *Ferocious*, *Stalwart*, *Enduring x 2*, and *Resilient*. In water, they also gain the Physical Trait: *Agile*. Gladius Rokea gain the Negative Traits: *Brutal x 2* and *Clumsy*.

**Change Description:** Rokea in Gladius form stand on two legs. They attain up to 10 feet in length and possess claws, a shark-like head (complete with jaws) and, in most individuals, a tail. Rokea who remain out of the water for too long, such as betweeners, eventually lose their tails in this form. A return to the water for a comparable amount of time will result in regaining the tail in Gladius form. The bite and claws of Gladius Rokea do aggravated damage, while the skin of a Rokea in Gladius form also causes damage. (See the chart below) This form invokes only partial Delirium in humans, because it is so unlike anything they have seen. It provokes curiosity and disbelief rather than fear and mindless panic.

**Roleplaying:** Rokea in Standing Jaws form can make sounds that resemble a cross between human snarls and the piercing wails of sharks underwater, resulting in a truly unnerving experience for those who hear them. This is one of the forms selected by a Rokea in frenzy. Rokea rarely carry on rational discussions when in Gladius form. Instinct or Rage dictate their actions.

## Round Back (Glabus)

**Trait Adjustments:** Glabus Rokea gain the following additional Physical Traits: *Brawny* x 2 and *Robust* x 2. In water, they gain the Physical Trait: *Agile*. They also acquire the Negative Trait: *Clumsy*.

**Change Description:** Available only to betweeners or human-born Rokea, this form bears a strong resemblance to fomori; many Garou grow testy when they encounter a Rokea in this form. The area on the back that usually holds the Rokea's dorsal fin becomes a round hump resembling a slightly hunched back. Body hair disappears, the eye's irises grow dark and increase in size till they appear as black holes in the face. Teeth grow sharper. Glabus Rokea have no claws, but they gain double the physical mass they have in Homid form. While this is an excellent form for land-based brawls, it does not invoke the Delirium. It does garner stares from those humans who hang around long enough to gawk.

**Roleplaying:** If Rokea have their version of the "mountain-man," this is it. Rokea in Glabus form take on a harsh, guttural quality to their voice while their actions are more brutish than they are in Homid form. Rokea in this form deal no extra damage, however, and all their damage is non-aggravated.

## Long Fins (Homid)

**Trait Adjustments:** None.

**Change Description:** Even sea-based weresharks assume Homid form from time to time, when they must interact with humans on land and sometimes in the water. In general, Rokea pay little attention to their physical appearance in Homid form and often resemble hulking, rough-hewn brutes (even the women). The rare Rokea born from a human/Rokea mating tends to resemble "normal" humans more closely and usually improves her appearance slightly over time. Betweeners also try to fit in with normal standards of human style.

**Roleplaying:** Rokea in human form still act brutish, caring little for the subtleties of human interaction. Their voices are harsh and loud, without the nuances of expression common to most humans. Their predatory nature is never far from them and humans often feel distinctly uncomfortable in their presence, as if the Rokea were sizing them up for a meal. (They sometimes are.) Weresharks communicate through non-verbal means such as the Sending, a type of communication unavailable to them in Homid form. Homid Rokea resemble the ethnic stock of their human parent, while Squamus Rokea take on the appearance of the most prevalent human culture in their geographic region. Once set, however, Rokea have the same form as humans.

## The Signs of the Shark

The following advantages and disadvantages mark Sea's chosen ones. While Rokea share some qualities with other Changing Breeds, they have some unique strengths and weaknesses that hold them apart from their changing kin.

### Bonus Traits

**Squamus (Swimming Jaws):** *Ferocious, Tough, Agile x 2, Enduring, Tenacious.* Negative traits: *Feral*

**Chasmus (Fighting Jaws):** *Brawny, Ferocious x 2, \*Agile, Enduring x 2, Resilient.* Negative Trait: *Feral*

**Gladius (Standing Jaws)** *Brawny, Ferocious, Stalwart, \*Agile, Enduring x 2, Resilient.* Negative Trait: *Brutal x 2, Clumsy*

**Glabus (Round Back):** *Brawny x 2, \*Agile, Robust x 2.* Negative Trait: *Clumsy*

**Homid (Long Fins):** None

\*Rokea gain this Trait only when under water.

**NOTE:** In Glabus form, a Rokea inflicts lethal damage with her bite. In Gladius form, the Rokea does one additional level of damage with her bite and her claws inflict normal damage. Both bite and claw damage are aggravated in Gladius form. In Chasmus form, the Rokea has no claws but her bite does two additional levels of damage and all damage is aggravated.

In all except the Homid and Glabus forms, enemies take one Health Level of lethal damage from making contact with the Rokea's tough skin with bare flesh. Actively grappling a Rokea deals two Health Levels of lethal damage to the attacker. Damage of this kind is aggravated if the Rokea is in Gladius form.

### Animal Attraction

Rokea exercise a subtle fascination toward other sharks, particularly when they wish to mate. Weresharks gain an automatic retest in any Social test involving other sharks that might be potential breeding partners. Humans, however, are not as attracted to Rokea, and Rokea suffer a two-Trait penalty when attempting to seduce humans.

### Appearance

Squamus-born Rokea may not have Social Traits as their primary category. If a Rokea has a human parent and the Storyteller permits, the player may choose Social Traits as her first priority. Even so, she may not have more than three Appearance-related Traits. By paying three times the normal cost in Experience Traits, a Rokea may gradually raise her appearance as she grows to look more and more "human" for whatever reason. Most Rokea choose to do this if they intend to blend in with human society for any length of time.

## Compulsion to Move

Sharks keep moving, rarely staying still in water. The few species of sharks who do “sit” on the ocean floor rarely breed with Rokea. Rokea therefore swim constantly. If they have no destination in mind, they swim in circles. The constant motion acts as a balm to their restless natures. Even in human form, Rokea pace instead of standing still. They may satisfy the need to be in constant motion by riding in moving vehicles, but they detest standing in lines or sitting still in waiting rooms. A Rokea must make a Simple Test each scene to avoid pacing. A Rokea who is confined, restrained or otherwise rendered totally immobile must make a Frenzy test. If she frenzies, she does everything possible — including biting through bars — in order to free herself.

## Delirium

The Chasmus or Fighting Jaws form of the Rokea invokes the full effects of the Delirium on humans. The Gladius or Standing Jaws form, however, only has a partial effect on mortals. Treat mortals as if they had two additional Willpower Traits with regard to the Delirium Chart included in **Laws of the Wild**.

## Regeneration

Rokea regenerate bashing and lethal damage as Garou, one Health Level per turn. Rokea in breed form may also regenerate damage in this fashion if they immerse themselves in salt water (or fresh water if they come from a freshwater shark species). In addition, Rokea so immersed also heal one Health Level of aggravated damage per day. (See **Laws of the Wild** for more detailed rules on regeneration of damage.)

## The Sending

Rokea communicate naturally when in the ocean through the Sending — pulses of electrical energy that travel through the water between two or more Rokea. The Rokea makes a Mental test against a minimum of four Traits for a simple message such as, “Grotto threatened” (retest *Primal-Urge*). The Storyteller may adjust the number of Traits upward depending on the complexity of the message to be communicated. Most messages travel for a quarter mile without suffering from distortion. Rokea may extend the distance by attempting additional challenges until she loses, at which point her message has reached its maximum distance of clarity. If a Rokea wishes to attempt to decipher a message that has become garbled due to distance, she may attempt a Mental test against seven Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*). If two Rokea are within sight of each other, they may use the Sending automatically. Unless they use the Darkwater Gift *Silent Sending*, however, any other Rokea in the vicinity will also receive the Sending. On land, the Sending travels for only 50’ and may only be used by Rokea in Gladius form. This poses a real problem for sea-based Rokea who have not yet acquire a human language, effectively rendering them unable to communicate on land.

## Senses

Rokea enjoy a variety of advantages involving their senses. Rokea in Squamus form receive a three Trait bonus and an automatic retest in any tests involving perception by scent. In Chasmus form, they receive a two Trait bonus and an automatic retest, while in Gladius form they receive a one Trait bonus and an automatic retest.

Like sharks, Rokea do not depend so much on sight for locating prey as on other senses. They receive, therefore, a two Trait penalty in Squamus, Chasmus or Gladius form on sight-related tests. Rokea may use vibrations to gauge the size or shape of an object as well as its approximate distance. The Rokea makes a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*). The Storyteller may adjust the Trait difficulty according to the circumstances; a thrashing fish may seem larger than it is, since it displaces more water and sends out stronger vibrations.

Rokea employ electrical currents as a means of sensing the direction of their prey or for simple navigation. The wereshark makes a Mental test against six Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*) in order to determine where she is in relation to where she wants to go. Rokea in Gladius form may use this type of direction sense on land, but they must test against seven Traits.

## Silver

Silver affects Rokea just as it does Garou, causing aggravated wounds. (See **Laws of the Wild** for more information.) Rokea consider silver to the residue of Oversea's blood that falls to earth and hardens, thus forming a substance that causes damage to Rokea and other changing creatures. Rokea do not generally craft fetishes from silver, believing that doing so insults Oversea.

## Skin

Sharkskin has a covering of tiny tooth-like scales or denticles. Humans can suffer painful (though not ultimately damaging) scrapes from abrasive contact between a Squamus Rokea's denticles and unprotected human skin, although they must rub against the grain to do so. In Chasmus or Gladius form, however, denticles become a weapon that does an additional Health Level of lethal damage if struck barehanded.

## Spirits

Rokea converse with sea spirits naturally, whether in the physical world or across the Gauntlet. This transpires because of the normal thinness of the Ocean's Gauntlet. In order to speak with terrestrial spirits, Rokea must learn the Gift *Spirit Speech*. Rokea naturally sense the presence of remora-spirits, regardless of which side of the Gauntlet the spirits inhabit, since these helpful spirit-allies of the Rokea make their presence known.

## Umbral Travel

Rokea may not enter the Umbra without the use of the Gift *Enter Sea's Soul* (or *Enter Unsea's Soul*) unless they receive the permission and assistance

of Kun, Sea or some other equally powerful spirit. The Same-Bito of the Middle Kingdom may enter the Umbra in the same way that Garou do.

## Breeds

### Homid

The most common Homid Rokea are those who live in the Middle Kingdom. Occasionally, other human-born weresharks arise. These rarities usually grow up near the sea, either in a port city or on an island. The ocean holds an undeniable attraction for them; many such individuals once planned a career as an oceanographer, marine biologist, Navy SEAL, underwater photographer or professional diver.

When the time comes for a Homid Rokea's First Change, usually sometime around the onset of puberty, something draws him toward the Sea. Usually, he has no real warning as he enters the ocean's depths. The Change may occur as a simple response to the overwhelming presence of Sea or through a sudden onset of Rage as the fledgling Rokea realizes how his fellow humans have harmed Sea. In any case, the former human now finds himself in shark form.

This is only the beginning of his travails, however. Until he finds his way to a Grotto and meets with Sea, or encounters a Rorqual or another Rokea, the new wereshark is not considered a true Rokea. Squamus Rokea do not accept most human-born Rokea. It may pose great problems for the fledgling as he tries to make his way in his new life. Sometimes a group of remora may take pity on the Homid Rokea and lead him to a Grotto, or act as mediators between Sea and the new wereshark. For Homid Rokea, the Long Swim often holds fear, wonder and not a little danger.

Many Homid Rokea choose to remain on land for most of their lives, hiding from other Rokea and doing what they can to help Sea without placing their lives in constant jeopardy from their Squamus Kin. Occasionally, they discover betweener society, and find a home with Rokea who understand him.

Homid-born Rokea have fewer penalties to their Appearance than their shark-born Kin. See the section on assigning Attributes above for guidelines governing the Appearance of Homid Rokea. Even the best-looking individuals have something of the shark about them, and almost all of them project the aura of the predator.

**Natural Form:** Homid (Long Fins)

**Initial Gnosis:** 1

### Squamus

Most Rokea begin their lives as sharks, born of a mating between a Rokea and one of many shark species. Growing up under the sometimes harsh circumstances of life in the ocean, Squamus Rokea find the Long Swim



somewhat less traumatic than their Homid kin. They already possess the instinctive knowledge of the balance of life that exists in the Sea. The events leading up to the Long Swim only bring their unconscious knowledge into their newly awakened consciousness.

The transition between “normal” shark and Rokea comes about gradually during the course of the Long Swim. Sensations that used to communicate simple concepts to the shark (such as “food” or “other”) become more complicated. The fledgling Rokea realizes that she must kill for her food and that the “other” may be either an ally or an enemy. She also comes to realize the meanings of both words. She learns how to use the Sending to locate someone, anyone, who might tell her more about the changes occurring within her.

Usually, this search for information results in a meeting with another Rokea, or perhaps a Rorqual, who takes her to a Grotto. There, the new Rokea enters Sea’s Soul to meet with Kun and Sea and to learn the basics about herself: her auspice, a few Gifts and rites and other knowledge about her nature. What she learns about Rokean society, she acquires from others of her kind, not from Sea. Unless another Rokea enlightens her, a new wereshark knows little to nothing about the betweener war or the existence of the Same-Bito.

A Squamus Rokea starts her new life in the same slew as the Rokea who found her, though she may decide to swim off on her own and join another slew. For the most part, becoming a Rokea is easier for one of the shark-born. Rokea simply continue doing what sharks do naturally, but with the conscious awareness of what it is they do.

The modern world, however, does not make life easy for sharks, much less Rokea. Though many sharks enjoy protected status, this often means little to serious shark hunters or to a population raised on the fear of shark attacks. Other dangers to Sea and Kun threaten Rokea: environmental disasters, disturbances in the sea’s ecology due to tourism and other forms of human incursions and attempts to “harvest” the resources of the sea for human consumption.

In addition, with the ability to change forms comes the desire to do so. Many Squamus Rokea experiment with their Homid form, visiting Unsea in order to learn about the life of the two-legged creatures that cause Sea so much trouble. Unfortunately, shark-born Rokea are at a severe disadvantage in human society. Their appearance leaves much to be desired; since they have no human blood in their veins, they are usually unattractive at best, downright ugly at worst. Furthermore, they must learn the basics of human existence: language. (Unless the Rokea character begins with the *Linguistics* Ability, she can only communicate through the Sending, which does not work in human form.) She must also learn other aspects of human culture, suffering the same restrictions as lupus Garou.

**Natural Form:** Squamus (Swimming Jaws)

**Initial Gnosis:** 5

## Auspice

Rokea recognize three auspices that reflect their beliefs concerning the cycles of the sun and moon. When Qyrl's huge jaws bit a chunk out of Oversea, she caused the Wound (sun) to appear. Light bleeds from the Wound and so Rokea refer to sunlight as the blood of darkness. The moon serves as the Balm that Oversea applies to the Wound, but as time passes, Oversea has less and less medicine; hence the moon grows smaller. When almost no medicine is left, the full moon shines down as the Wound bleeds completely through the Balm. Sea and Unsea together call forth a new supply of Balm and the cycle begins again.

Rokea determine their auspice according to the correspondence between their birth and the phase of this cycle.

## Brightwaters

Born during the time of the full moon or else during the day, Brightwaters possess the most aggressive natures of any of the Rokea. They throw themselves wholeheartedly into combat, attacking their foes with a ferocious tenacity that makes the belligerence of Garou warriors seem paltry in comparison. Because they feel the pain that the Wound inflicts on Oversea, they have more Rage than Rokea born under other auspices. Brightwaters enjoy leading the slew into combat, recognizing the front lines as their rightful place according to the will of Sea. First to frenzy, last to stop fighting, they epitomize the essence of Rage itself. Their patron is Kun, the impulsive spirit of the Wild.

Most betweeners come from the ranks of Brightwaters. Born in daylight, they have an obvious connection to both Oversea and the Wound that sparks their curiosity about life on the land. They seek explanations for the reasons that surface creatures (particularly humans) live the way they do. Even if they don't stray far from shore, they still seek out the coastal cities of the world for their journeys of self-discovery and personal challenge. Brightwater betweeners relish the opportunity to battle those who hunt them, whether the hunters are Rokea or the many other enemies of the weresharks.

In addition, the ban on inland travel pronounced by Rokea elders long ago serves as a dare to the headstrong Brightwaters. In general, these Rokea dislike rules and prefer to act according to their own intuitions.

**Initial Rage:** 5

**Beginning Gifts:** *Eyes of the Wound, Restraint, Unseen Attack, First Feeling, Narke's Gift, Undertow*

## Dimwaters

The most common auspice among Rokea, Dimwaters are born either on days when clouds cover the Wound, at night between the new and full moons or at twilight. Poised by birth between day and night, light and dark, sea bed and dry land, Dimwaters bridge the gap between Brightwaters and Darkwaters in temperament as well as function. Less aggressive than their Brightwater

siblings and not as mystical as the Darkwaters, Dimwaters serve as interpreters and enforcers of Rokean law. Most Rokea who venture forth upon the land to hunt down betweeners come from this auspice, though they generally bring someone from one of the other two auspices with them on their hunts to preserve the balance. Their patron is C'et, who thrives on stability.

Dimwaters hold firmly to tradition and practicality. When Darkwaters come up with new ideas for fetishes, Dimwaters take the job of constructing these items upon themselves. They serve as a stabilizing factor in wereshark society in the same way as Philodox function within Garou communities. Rarely do Dimwaters become betweeners; those that do, however, learn to appreciate the predictability of life in human cities.

**Initial Rage:** 4

**Beginning Gifts:** *King Fish, Sea's Voice, Strange Blood, True Intentions, Crushing Depths, Know Oversea's Mind, Spit Teeth*

### Darkwaters

Born at the new moon or during a total eclipse, Darkwaters embody the mystical, curious elements of the ocean's depths. Ever curious and willing to experiment, Darkwaters often go where no Rokea have gone before, searching for the new and the untried. Many Rokea believe that Darkwaters are more than a little mad. They, too, are children of Kun, though they embody her creative aspect rather than her aggressive passion.

Darkwaters follow a dangerous path that often takes them away from mainstream Rokean society. They are the Rokea most likely to come to the aid of betweener, though they do not often become betweeners themselves due to their abiding interest in the secrets of Sea and Sea's Soul. Even so, most Darkwaters make at least one foray to Unsea during their lifetime. They are too inquisitive not to do so.

Those born as Darkwaters spend as much time in the Umbra as they can, even if their passage sometimes leaves openings for other, less desirable creatures to enter the realm of Sea's depths. Over the course of millennia, they have discovered most of the Gifts and rites common to the Rokea.

These mystical weresharks spend most of their time in the deep waters conversing with remora and other spirits. They study the history of the Rokea and pursue whatever puzzles or mysteries their wanderings uncover. They serve a similar function in Rokea society as Theurges in Garou culture.

**Initial Rage:** 3

**Beginning Gifts:** *Blood of the Deep, Chill, Silent Sending, Qyrl's Blood, Enter Sea's Soul, Piercing Shriek, Voice of the Depths*

### Shark Species

While Rokea do not have tribes like some of the other Changing breeds, they do have a variety of shark species that make up the non-Rokean half of their heritage. These species have some distinguishing characteristics that

serve some of the same functions as tribes, such as general temperament, interests and lifestyles. With your Storyteller's permission, you may select a parent species not mentioned below, but you should develop some ideas based on the guidelines given here as to the appropriate qualities for your species, including advantages and disadvantages. While most Rokea slews choose Shark or Dolphin as their totem, single species slews also have an affinity for other totem-spirits, listed along with Shark in the following descriptions.

### *Great White (Karkha)*

Rokea from great white (or white shark) stock have a justified reputation as predators without peer. They are prodigious swimmers, combining both power and speed. They eat all kinds of sea creatures, from small fish to sea lions to seals. They even eat carrion when it is available. Great whites rip their prey into large chunks, swallowing the pieces whole without chewing. Their sense of smell is even more acute than that of most sharks. They are also the only species of shark that makes a habit out of thrusting their heads above the surface of the water.

While normal great whites do not usually attack humans intentionally, Rokea from great white stock take great delight in targeting humans who despoil the ocean's environment.

In temperament, these Rokea are quick to fight whenever they believe that Sea needs defending, or if they encounter any of Qyrl's minions. They assume the leadership of any mixed slew, relinquishing this position only with reluctance.

**Totem:** Shark or Hurricane

**Advantage:** Rokea of this species have an especially acute sense of smell. They gain an automatic retest in any Challenge that involves sensing or perceiving by smell.

**Disadvantage:** These Rokea find it more difficult to avoid frenzy than other weresharks do. They must spend one extra Willpower Trait to avoid frenzy.

**Backgrounds:** No additional restrictions. Great whites often take the *Mentor* Background.

**Shark Form:** In their great white form, Rokea have a body that resembles a torpedo. Their pointed snouts give them a fierce, predatory appearance. When they swim near the surface, their dorsal and tail fins protrude out of the water, giving warning of their approach and often striking fear in their observers. They may have as many as 3,000 teeth and average twelve to sixteen feet in length, though they often exceed twenty feet. Females tend to be larger

than the males. Great white Rokea are predominantly gray or blue-gray in color, with white appearing only on their underbelly. Since they usually attack from below, their dull color blends in with their environment, rendering them hard to see until it is too late.

**Organization:** Great white Rokea generally spend some time alone or with one other Rokea, who's typically either a mate or a mentor. When they must, they form slews with other weresharks.

**Habitat:** These Rokea make their home throughout the world, ranging from the eastern coast of North America and the Gulf coast to the waters along the South American coastline. In the Pacific, they extend from Alaska to California as well as along the coast of Japan and China. They have also been seen near Hawaii, South and West Africa, most of Australia and the Mediterranean Sea. They usually stay near the shore in temperate waters.

**Outlook:** Rokea from great white stock see themselves as leaders and warriors. They consider protecting Sea and directing Rokea society as twin aspects of the same mission. They occasionally use their large size to their advantage to intimidate others into following their lead. On the other hand, they can be reliable and dependable members of their slew.

### Hammerhead (Spynha)

Of the many species of hammerhead sharks, three — the scalloped, great and smooth hammerheads — serve as common breeding partners for Rokea. Known for their sociability, hammerheads often swim in schools and act as a group. Rokea born from a hammerhead parent also possess a desire to be around other Rokea and sharks. Their excellent sense of smell (almost as keen as the great whites) helps them locate their prey. They feed on many varieties of fish, including crustaceans, shellfish, squids and rays. They have even demonstrated a cannibalistic nature, sometimes feeding on other sharks. (They do

**Totem:** Shark or Dolphin

**Advantage:** The placement of the eyes of Rokea from hammerhead stock gives them excellent sight in every form except for Homid and Glabrus. When in Squamus, Chasmus or Gladius form, hammerhead Rokea gain an automatic retest when involved in any test that relies on peripheral sight.

**Disadvantage:** Hammerheads must spend a Willpower Trait if they wish to remain in a battle after the rest of their slew or other allies have withdrawn.

**Backgrounds:** No additional restrictions, though hammerhead Rokea often take either the *Contacts* or *Allies* Background to reflect their social nature.

not, however, feed on other weresharks.) While scalloped and smooth hammerheads generally avoid humans, great hammerheads occasionally attack swimmers. Rokea from hammerhead stock exhibit varying degrees of hostility toward humans, dependant on the parent stock.

Hammerheads have excellent peripheral vision due to the placement of their eyes. Hammerhead Rokea also enjoy this advantage. Although they do not possess the same visual advantages in Homid form, their eyes still tend to be set further apart, giving them a disturbing appearance to normal humans.

Hammerhead Rokea enjoy meeting others of their kind, even betweeners, and occasionally they will serve as mentors to rare Homid-born Rokea simply out of a desire to socialize.

**Shark Form:** Hammerhead sharks have broad heads, with eyes set far apart on either side. Their heads resemble hammers (hence their name), with a rectangular shape and a hammer-like indentation. Brownish-gray with a creamy-white underside, they have a large, pointed dorsal fin and serrated, triangular teeth. Great hammerheads range from eleven to twenty feet in length and between 500-1000 pounds in weight.

**Organization:** Hammerheads, particularly the scalloped variety, travel in schools more than other sharks.

**Habitat:** Hammerheads favor warm temperate, sub-tropical or tropical waters along the coast, though they also migrate toward deeper waters. They congregate around the continental shelves, reaching a depth of over 250 feet. During the summer they seek cooler waters, ranging further into the temperate zones.

**Outlook:** Rokea of hammerhead parentage have a distinct affinity for group activity. They enjoy socialization and are surprisingly tolerant of betweeners and mortals, so long as they do nothing to offend Sea or Kun. Hammerhead Rokea try very hard to keep their slews together and enjoy making contact with other Rokea and other creatures of Sea.

### **Bull Shark (Lexcha)**

Smaller than many sharks, bull sharks thrive in both salt and fresh water, spending much of their time along the coastlines and even in rivers. They have many names, including the Zambezi shark, Ganges shark and cub shark. They frequent places near human habitations. Rokea from bull shark stock often become betweeners, since their familiarity with human habitations makes living among the Long Fins an attractive proposal. They also find it a good way to learn about humans and to protect Sea from within human society.

Bull sharks' highly aggressive natures, however, also set them apart as predators on humans. Bull sharks are responsible for many attacks on humans since they inhabit shallower waters. They also eat almost any kind of living creature, including fish, birds, turtles, mollusks, other sharks and dolphins.

Rokea with a bull shark parent are often both attracted and repelled by humans. What begins as a friendly social encounter may quickly turn ugly if the human does something to offend the Rokea. Humans encountered by bull shark Rokea in the water provoke an attack if they are engaged in offensive behavior, such as large-scale fishing or dumping of toxic chemicals. Divers are often left alone until their intentions are known.

**Totem:** Shark or Crab

**Advantage:** Rokea from bull shark stock can live comfortably in either fresh or salt water. They never risk being a “fish out of water” by moving from one type of water to the other. They also gain an automatic retest to any Challenge involving interactions with humans due to their greater knowledge of human ways.

**Disadvantage:** The smaller size of bull shark Rokea gives them a one Trait disadvantage in any Physical tests against Rokea of larger species.

**Backgrounds:** No additional restrictions. Bull shark Rokea occasionally choose the *Resources* Background, particularly if they have any dealings with human society.

**Shark Form:** In shark form, bull shark Rokea have short, wide snouts, a dull white belly, gray back and small eyes. Their first dorsal fin is long and pointed, more so than their second fin. They have serrated, sharp triangular teeth located in rows that rotate in place according to their function. As is customary with sharks in general, females are larger than males. Males tend to grow from seven to ten feet, while females average eleven feet in length.

**Organization:** Bull shark Rokea travel both alone and in slews, varying their choice several times throughout their lives.

**Habitat:** Bull shark Rokea usually stay close to shore. They can remain in fresh water for some time and often travel inland via rivers. They occasionally find their way to lakes and set up temporary residence. They also inhabit tropical and subtropical oceans, primarily along the coast.

**Outlook:** Bull shark Rokea mix more easily with humans than other weresharks. They often take it upon themselves to perform any land-based duties for Sea, whether those duties consist of gaining support for laws protecting the Sea or removing human threats to Sea — permanently. Some jokingly refer to themselves as “Sea’s Gift” to the Long Fins.

### *Tiger Shark (Galchurva)*

One of the largest and most dangerous of shark species favored by Rokea, tiger sharks possess a deadly bite and a voracious appetite. The bite of a tiger

shark rips its victims apart with a rolling, tearing motion capable of cracking the shells of sea turtles (or small boats). Tiger shark Rokea, like their parent species, have an omnivorous appetite and will literally eat anything, whether normally edible or not. This includes tin cans, license plates, large and small animals, human body parts, and other odd items. In addition, they eat a wide variety of creatures including mammals, fish, reptiles and anything else they can catch. They are relatively slow swimmers but are capable of bursts of speed for a few seconds.

Like their parent species, tiger shark Rokea occasionally attack people. Their large size in shark form makes them objects of fear and adds to their reputation. While they do not seek out human prey, they do not hesitate to go on the offensive when they encounter humans who are up to no good or in service to Qyrl.

**Totem:** Shark or Manta Ray

**Advantage:** The powerful bite of a tiger shark causes more damage than that of other Rokea. These weresharks do one additional Health Level of damage (aggravated) with their bite.

**Disadvantage:** Aggressive to the extreme, tiger shark Rokea must spend a Willpower Trait to withdraw from battle, even when retreat would seem the best course of action.

**Backgrounds:** No restrictions.

**Shark Form:** In shark form, tiger shark Rokea have dark backs that display tiger-like stripes. Their underbellies are dull white. Their bodies are large and thick with a first dorsal fin that is longer than the second and a long, pointed tail fin. Between the dorsal fins, they have a bony ridge. A gill slit behind their eyes allows oxygen to flow straight to the eyes and brain, making them very intelligent and perceptive. Their sense of smell is keen. They have very sharp, serrated teeth that rotate, much like the bull shark. One of the largest of the sharks, they often grow as large as twenty feet, occasionally rivaling the great white shark in length.

**Organization:** Like their shark species, tiger shark Rokea often prefer solitude except when mating. They join other Rokea in slews only when called upon to do so by Sea.

**Habitat:** Tiger sharks and their Rokea kin range from the surface to more than 1000 feet below. They enjoy both tropical and temperate seas, frequenting both open waters and shorelines.

**Outlook:** Tiger shark Rokea take on much of the responsibility for acting as Sea's warriors. Their fierceness makes them good in battle, and they do not



easily give up. They do not always make the best leaders for mixed slews, however, since their stubbornness keeps them from retreating in battle.

### **Mako (Ixya):**

Also referred to as bonito and blue pointer sharks, Mako sharks are possibly the fastest and most athletic sharks in the world. Rokea often mate with the shortfin mako. Able to swim up to 20 miles per hour and make great leaps out of the water, mako Rokea frequently act as messengers for Sea. Mako sharks have sometimes leapt from the water into boats, usually by accident. In the case of Rokea from mako stock, these leaps are rarely coincidental.

Unfortunately, mako sharks make popular game fish and are often hunted to the point of danger to the species. Rokea guard their mako Kinfolk jealously, particularly if a shark is carrying a new generation of wereshark.

Mako sharks prefer dining on tuna, herring, swordfish, porpoise and other sea creatures that travel in schools, though they eat almost anything that is convenient. Though they have occasionally attacked humans, they are not as aggressive. Mako Rokea often give a warning before they attack, allowing their human targets the chance to make an escape.

Mako sharks only rarely become betweeners, preferring the ocean's far reaches to the land. If they do venture onto Unsea, it is usually for short exploratory excursions or to perform some mission for Sea.

**Totem:** Shark or Angler

**Advantage:** Speedy and agile, Rokea of mako parentage continually demonstrate their athletic skills. These weresharks gain an automatic retest for any Challenge that involves athletic ability in the water or when trying to avoid or engage in pursuit.

**Disadvantage:** Less aggressive than other Rokea, mako Rokea cause one less Health Level of damage with their bite.

**Backgrounds:** No additional restrictions. Mako often possess the Rites Background.

**Shark Form:** In Squamus form, mako Rokea have cone-shaped snouts, long gill slits, a dark blue-gray upper side and a white belly. They range from five to twelve feet in length. They have long, sharp teeth that allow them to catch small, slippery fish.

**Organization:** While most mako are solitary, male Rokea often remain with a mako mate to protect her, since mako sharks are notorious for aborting their young if captured. Mako Rokea occasionally associate with other sharks, making good additions to slews as scouts and messengers.

**Habitat:** Found throughout the world in tropical and temperate seas, mako Rokea travel in both surface and deep water. While they prefer the wide ocean spaces, they occasionally come close to shore. The warmer the water, the deeper they swim, since they prefer cooler temperatures than many tropical ocean-going creatures.

**Outlook:** Mako Rokea have grown increasingly belligerent against those who hunt their Kinfolk as game fish. They remember the time when island-dwelling humans revered Mako as a god, and occasionally they trigger this ancient memory to gain allies among humans who dwell in the Pacific island groups or in Australia and New Zealand.

### *Goblin Shark*

Smaller than many other shark species, goblin sharks almost exclusively mate with Rokea from the Middle Kingdom. They only rarely serve as breeding partners for Rokea other than the Same-Bito. Even western Rokea from Same-Bito stock have some of the same temperament as their Middle-Kingdom cousins. They have less problems with humans or other supernaturals than most Rokea, and sometimes serve as liaisons between the Rokea and other Changing Breeds.

Unfortunately, other Rokea also tend to mistrust goblin-shark Rokea. Goblin sharks have the ability to enter the Umbra as if they were Garou, by stepping sideways. This makes them invaluable in western slews, since most Rokea need special Gifts or the express permission of Sea or Kun in order to travel Sea's Soul.

Goblin shark Rokea are less aggressive in general than other Rokea, partly due to their smaller size and partly due to their relatively slow swimming speed. Temperamentally, goblin shark Rokea tend toward more mystic pursuits as evidenced by their affinity with the Umbra.

**Totem:** Shark or Moray

**Advantage:** Goblin shark Rokea do not have the same difficulty entering the Umbra as other Rokea. These weresharks may enter the Umbra in the same way that Garou do. **Laws of the Wild** give the rules for stepping (or swimming) sideways.

**Disadvantage:** Rokea from goblin shark stock suffer a two Trait penalty in any Social Tests involving non-hengeyokai characters due to other western Rokea's distrust. Same-Bito Rokea follow the rules set out in **MET: Hengeyokai**.

**Backgrounds:** No additional restrictions. Goblin shark Rokea often have the *Resources*, *Rites* or *Fetish* Background.

As sharks, goblin sharks generally remain near the bottom of the sea. They also like to assume Homid form and walk among humans and other Changing Breeds. As such, goblin shark Rokea sometimes become betweeners. Same-Bito do not have the same problem with land-dwelling sharks as their western kin, and goblin shark Rokea reflect this lack of prejudice.

**Shark Form:** In shark form, goblin shark Rokea have long, flat, pointed snouts with jaws that jut forward when they feed. Electrosensory canals within the snout help them locate prey. They have pinkish gray skin with a paler-colored belly. Their fins are low and rounded and they have an asymmetrical tail fin. Their jaws open quickly for catching prey. Their front teeth are long and sharp, with the upper teeth being longer than their lower teeth. They use these teeth to catch fish, while the teeth in the back of their mouth are smaller and serve to crush shelled creatures.

**Organization:** Goblin shark Rokea who are not from the Middle Kingdom either maintain a solitary lifestyle and avoid other Rokea, or else try to make themselves an invaluable member of a slew.

**Habitat:** Goblin sharks dwell in the deep ocean, as far down as 3,900 feet or more. They dwell chiefly in the western Pacific and Indian Oceans, though they are sometimes found in the Atlantic as well. They are best known off the east of Japan, India and Australia.

**Outlook:** Goblin shark Rokea who do not belong to the Beast Courts of the Middle Kingdom have to work hard to gain acceptance in western Rokean society. They use their connection with the Umbra to garner a place in slews. Otherwise, they dwell apart from other Rokea and concentrate on their connection with Sea, often acquiring a reputation as mystical recluses.

## New Ability

### Seafaring

You can use your knowledge of the sea's surface as well as its depths to navigate the waters with confidence and skill. You can pilot various types of sea vessels, as well as perform simple repairs on them. One Trait allows you to pilot small vessels such as sailboats and simple motorboats. Two Traits gives you familiarity with yachts and other medium-sized vessels. Three or more Traits enables you to pilot almost any type of vessel, even over rough water.

*Seafaring* tests usually involve a Physical test involving your reflexes or a Mental test involving either intuition or perception.

Homid Rokea or betweeners may purchase *Seafaring* instead of or in addition to *Drive* if they wish. While Squamus Rokea may not begin play with this Ability, they may purchase it with Experience Traits. Many Squamus Rokea prefer *Seafaring* over *Drive* since they usually have more opportunity to travel in boats than in cars.

## New Background

### Remora

These small fish gravitate toward sharks, performing services for them such as keeping their skin free of contaminants from the sea. Some remora, however, are most than just shark-friendly fish. These small servants of Sea are actually similar to Kami, spirits of Gaia embodied in fish-form. Remora-spirits are drawn to Rokea and serve several useful purposes for the weresharks. First, they carry messages between one Rokea (or slew) and another or between a Rokea and Sea. Remora carry the latest news, gossip and important events that affect the creatures of Sea.

In addition, Rokea use remora to speed up the process of gathering Renown. When a Rokea possessing this Background sends her remora to deliver a message of any kind, the Storyteller may call for a Simple Test. Success gives the Rokea one temporary Renown Trait (Storyteller's choice as to type). This Renown Trait is not an "extra" Trait, but serves as an indication of a more formal recognition of an increase in Renown.

Rokea may purchase this Trait more than once during character creation. Characters who work to befriend addition Rokea may receive additional Traits in this Background at the discretion of the Storyteller.

A single Trait provides the Rokea with up to five remora who carry messages for her. Each additional Trait doubles the number of remora available and thus increases the Rokea's chance for sending messages, as well as receiving Renown or expanding her reputation among the creatures of Sea. Remora may also help Rokea locate the Rorqual necessary for refreshing Gnosis Traits.

## Gifts

Rokea characters begin play with two Gifts: one selected from the list of general Rokea Gifts and one taken from the pertinent auspice.

### Rokea Gifts

#### Basic Gifts

**Breach:** As the Lupus Gift *Hare's Leap*; see **Laws of the Wild**. Regardless of their shark type, Rokea can use this Gift to propel themselves toward the surface, leaping great distances out of the water. Helpful in scouting out the "big picture" above water, this Gift is also useful in boarding ships. Though Sea-born Rokea seldom use it, the Gift functions on land as well as in the water.

**Fast:** This Gift allows the Rokea to live for long periods of time without eating, surviving on the oil stored in her body. Many Rokea prefer to use this Gift if they have to spend time on land, powering their metabolism through Gnosis rather than eating land-food. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait to

activate this Gift, which lasts for a week. No test is necessary. The Rokea may extend her time without food by another week by expending another Gnosis Trait before the expiration of the original Gift's activation. Otherwise, she must eat before re-invoking the Gift.

**Killing Bite:** Though most Rokea prefer the Fighting Jaws form for underwater combat, this Gift allows the wereshark to utilize her mighty bite in any form, a boon when fighting in a confined area such as a Grotto or amid a maze of coral. The Rokea spends a Rage Trait. Her next successful bite attack does two additional levels of aggravated damage.

**Sense Threat:** This Gift enables a Rokea to perceive the possibility of imminent danger. The Gift does not supply her with the nature of the threat or the motivation behind it, it simply alerts her to whether or not a threat exists. For instance, a raging wereshark and a harpoon-armed human hunter both register as "dangers" to this Gift. The Rokea must concentrate for one full minute, making a Mental test against six Traits for an immediate threat and eight Traits for a more distant threat (retest *Primal-Urge*); obviously, a Narrator is usually employed to assess the danger value of a particular individual or situation.

**Teeth of the Skin:** As the Metis Gift *Gift of the Porcupine*; see **Laws of the Wild**. Rokea may not use this Gift in Homid or Glabrus form.

**Gulp:** This Gift enables the Rokea to use her mouth to swallow anything she can fit in her jaws, hold it intact, and regurgitate it at a later time. The most common use for this is the transportation of clothing when preparing to go ashore. This Gift does not keep living creatures from harm. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait (no Test required) to activate this Gift.

A character can store items indefinitely in her gullet, since they effectively become part of her body as if they were dedicated items. A Rokea must be in a form large enough to swallow the desired items, and must take the same form to spit out the items when needed. Living creatures suffer normal damage from being digested (not to mention suffocated) inside the Rokea's gut, although they may struggle in whatever manner they can before being entirely consumed.

**Poisoned Flesh:** As the Get of Fenris Gift *Venom Blood*; see **Laws of the Wild**. Anyone making a successful bite attack against the Rokea suffers the effects of this Gift.

**Restless Waters:** As the Lupus Gift *Scent of Sight*; see **Laws of the Wild**.

**Shagreen Shield:** The Rokea can use this Gift to harden their skin enough to repel attacks from almost anything, including harpoons. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Physical test against six Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*). While the Gift is in effect, all attacks that do fewer than three Health Levels of damage do not affect the Rokea at all. The character receives half damage from attacks that do three or more levels (round down). Bashing damage is

halved before the Rokea makes an attempt to soak the damage. The Gift lasts for one combat (regardless of the number of opponents attacking the Rokea at one time).

**Strange Waters:** As the Red Talon Gift *Trackless Waste*; see **Laws of the Wild**. This Gift only applies to the target's direction sense when at sea or under the water.

**Unsea's Blessing:** Unsea recognizes her relationship to the Rokea through her sister, Sea, and heals her sister's children when they touch her. The Rokea must make direct contact with dry land or the sea bottom to invoke this gift. The character makes a Social test against five Traits (retest *Rituals*) to heal one Health Level of any kind of damage, including aggravated damage. The Rokea may attempt additional Tests to heal more damage once per turn but can do nothing else during the turn. This Gift may be used a maximum number of times per day equal to twice the Rokea's Gnosis rating; after that, Unsea may demand more in return for such reliance on her bounty.

### Intermediate Gifts

**Consume Taint:** This Gift allows a Rokea to deal with the refuse too often dumped at sea by eating anything from oil spills and chemical waste to organic and inorganic garbage. The tainted materials consumed do not harm the Rokea, nor do they endanger Sea. The Rokea makes a Physical test (retest *Survival*) against seven Traits. To consume nuclear waste or toxins spawned by the Wyrms, the Rokea must also spend a Gnosis Trait. Needless to say, as necessary as this Gift may be, it is far from pleasant. Rokea forced to enact it too often generally set their sights on bloody vengeance soon afterward.

**Fathom Sight:** The Rokea can extend all her senses over a great distance through the use of this Gift, including sight, sound, taste, smell and touch. All directions are covered by this Gift, including up and down, so the Rokea can even tell what's going on above the surface of the water. While a Rokea may hear a conversation aboard a boat, she cannot understand what is being said unless she speaks the language. The Rokea spends one Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental test against seven Traits (retest *Alertness*). Success enables the Rokea to sense everything that occurs within one mile underwater and 100 feet on land. The character may attempt additional Tests with no further expenditure of Gnosis in order to increase the distance by an additional mile (or 100 feet) per Test. If she fails a Test, she may not continue increasing the distance. The Gift lasts for one scene.

**Kun's Warning:** This Gift causes a second shark's mouth to appear on the person of the Rokea. Located on the back, this mouth provides the Rokea with a "built-in" alarm system as well as a way of evening the odds against multiple opponents. Used primarily by betweeners and by those Rokea who hunt them, this odd Gift is no doubt responsible for many island legends about monstrous humans with shark's jaws between their shoulder blades. The Rokea spends a

Rage Trait and makes a Physical test against seven Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*). The mouth that appears between the character's shoulder blades protrudes only slightly and can be concealed beneath clothes without making the individual appear hump-backed. Anyone attempting to sneak up on the Rokea from behind causes the teeth to begin gnashing, thus providing the Rokea with a "head's up" warning of impending ambush.

If an opponent uses a supernatural power such as *Blur of the Milky Eye* to remain undetected, the Storyteller should ask the Rokea character to make a Simple Test (compare Gnosis on a tie, no Traits risked). If the character succeeds, the mouth notices the concealed attacker and gives warning. If the Rokea can position herself accordingly, she can gain an extra bite attack from her secondary "mouth," though this can be tricky at best. This Gift lasts for one day unless voluntarily cancelled.

**Shark's Bones:** With this Gift, the Rokea can turn her bones into cartilage, allowing her to absorb bludgeoning damage and squeeze into and through tiny spaces (to a minimum of eight inches square). The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait. In addition to its helpful uses in escape artistry, this Gift also reduces any damage from a bashing attack by half, round down (minimum one). Only Rokea in Homid or Glabrus form may use this Gift, which lasts for one scene.

**Inundate:** The Rokea can call upon the moisture from the air to gather together and surround the target, enclosing the individual in an envelope of water from which it is difficult to escape. The envelope poses the threat of drowning for its victim. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Social test (retest *Occult*) against seven Traits. Success means that the victim is trapped in a watery globe unless he can make a Physical test against seven Traits (retest *Survival*). The victim may try as many times as he has Strength-related Traits, but each time he fails he takes a Health Level of damage from drowning until he either drowns or wins a test. This Gift only works on land.

**Patient Hunter:** This Gift enables the Rokea to meld or sink into any solid substance, such as a floor, wall or the ground. From this concealment, he may watch what goes on in his vicinity and come out of hiding suddenly to attack. The Rokea makes a Physical test against eight Traits (retest *Stealth*). If successful, the character merges with the selected material, which must be thick enough to cover the Rokea normally; the character could not merge into a 2" plywood partition or thin barrier, for example. Most searches fail to detect the hidden Rokea, including those using supernatural powers, as they are truly merged with the surface in question for the duration of the Gift. At the Storyteller's discretion, extremely powerful and perceptive supernatural creatures may notice the anomaly; such instances should be rare indeed. A Rokea who uses this Gift automatically gains a Surprise attack for the first turn of combat, which cannot be prevented by normal means.

**Relentless Hunt:** A Rokea that uses this Gift may focus on a single course of action and pursue it with persistent and undisturbed concentration until completion, ignoring distractions or attempt to force her away from it. The Rokea chooses a goal at the time she learns the Gift. From that time on, nothing and no one can dissuade her from her course of action. The goal must be a specific one, such as “protect my Grotto,” or “avenge the death of Swift Hunter.” The character gains an automatic retest on any test that *directly* pertains to her focus. To change her focus before it is achieved (if it is even possible), the character must expend a permanent Willpower Trait; once she has achieved her goal, she may choose a different purpose without losing Willpower. The Storyteller should approve the goal chosen by the player. It should be defined carefully, so that players do not attempt to min-max this Gift into a way to give them extra retests on all combat challenges or something similar.

**Salmon’s Return:** With this Gift, the Rokea can always find her way to a familiar place without fear of becoming lost. This Gift works equally well on land or at sea, and is not affected by either natural causes or mundane interference. Once the character learns this Gift it is always active, allowing the Rokea to unfailingly backtrack her steps. Other Gifts such as *Trackless Waste*, or other supernatural powers that attempt to confuse the Rokea’s sense of direction, automatically fail unless the user can beat the Rokea in an opposed Willpower Test. Even if the attempt to confound the Rokea succeeds, the effect is only temporary, lasting no more than a day at most. That may still be long enough, however, to delay the wereshark’s pursuit of an enemy. The Rokea can always recognize a place she has already visited, and she enjoys the benefit of perfect direction sense as a by-product of this Gift.

**Set the Mind Adrift:** If a Rokea decides not to kill an enemy outright, she may instead choose to use this Gift to confuse her foe without physically harming him. Instead, the Rokea forces the victim’s mind to experience vivid hallucinations, convincing him that he is adrift in the middle of an empty ocean. She may also use this Gift to incapacitate temporarily a frenzied fellow Rokea. By subtly changing the hallucination, the Rokea may use it as a technique for interrogating an enemy.

The character spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Mental test (retest *Intimidation*). Success means that the victim falls into a hallucinatory state of being cast adrift on the ocean. The affected individual “swims” in circles for the next hour, regardless of whether or not he is actually in the water. His mind believes that he is treading water in the middle of the ocean; if he becomes tired, he may “drown” and fall unconscious, though no actual harm will come to him unless he has a phobia of drowning or a similarly strong aversion to water.

If the Rokea wants to use this Gift as an interrogation technique, she must make a second Mental test (retest *Expression*) to add details to the hallucination, including the sound of her voice. If she succeeds, she may proceed to ask questions of her victim, who will often answer if they believe the Rokea to be



someone who can help them from their predicament. If the victim has any reason to doubt the hallucination, he may attempt to break free by making an opposed Willpower Test. Otherwise, the effects of the Gift last for one scene.

### Advanced Gifts

**Mindless Fight:** With this Gift a Rokea learns to control her frenzy, using it for more than simply speed in combat. Weresharks that know this Gift may channel their Rage into both endurance and sheer might. This Gift enables the Rokea to spend as many Rage Traits as she wants (provided she has them) during combat to gain extra actions regardless of normal limitations. In addition, the Rokea may ignore wound penalties in any combat turn in which she spends Rage Traits. She receives the additional Physical Traits: *Tireless* and *Ferocious* in a turn in which she spends a Rage Trait.

**Great Summons:** As the Lupus Gift *Song of the Great Beast* (see **Laws of the Wild**), except that this Gift summons prehistoric sharks, aquatic dinosaurs or other legendary marine creatures.

**Ocean's Peace:** This Gift makes the Rokea nearly invincible at Sea, where they are at home in their natural element. It has no effect on land but is considered automatically active when the Rokea is at least partially immersed in the ocean, regardless of their form. Note that this does not apply simply to the presence of seawater, but only to the actual ocean and its Umbral reflections.

This Gift grants the Rokea the power to automatically act first in any combat turn, regardless of the standard order of initiative or the use of other powers such as *Spirit of the Fray* or *Alacrity*. Opponents are also completely unable to Surprise the Rokea while she remains in contact with the ocean. Should two Rokea use this Gift against each other, the one with the highest Rage acts first; should that still result in a tie, the winner of a Simple Test acts first.

In addition, at the beginning of each combat the Rokea may make a Willpower test against six Traits; if successful, the Rokea gains a number of retests equal to her Rage or Willpower rating, whichever is higher, which may be used on any tests made during that combat. Any unused retests are lost at the end of the combat, however — they cannot be “saved up” for later. This Willpower test does not require an action to perform. Lastly, with the expenditure of a Willpower Trait, the Rokea may ignore one level of damage each time she is injured during that combat, including aggravated damage.

**Whirlpool's Maw:** This powerful Gift enables the Rokea to open her mouth and engulf any creature or object not firmly attached to the sea-bed. The wereshark does not actually ingest the items or creatures; instead they disappear forever, presumably somewhere within the depths of Sea. The Rokea must be in *Gladius* or *Chasmus* form in order to use this Gift. The gift works only in water, though any body of water of sufficient size will do. She spends a Rage Trait and makes a Physical test against eight Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*).

Anything that the wereshark could physically lift that is not firmly embedded in a larger object or affixed to the bottom travels toward her mouth, impelled

by the force of the Gift. Objects are pulled a number of steps equal to the Rokea's Rage each turn, regardless of size or their normal movement rate. A living creature attempting to resist the Gift must hold onto something sturdy and fixed, such as a buried ship's anchor, a large coral formation, etc., and succeed in a Physical test against eight Traits. Should they reach the Rokea's mouth, they may make a Physical test each turn to resist being swallowed, but the Rokea is considered to be up a number of Traits equal to her Rage on this test. Targets also face possibly being battered by other objects being pulled toward the Rokea. This effect even affects objects too large to fit into the Rokea's mouth under normal circumstances. The Gift lasts for a number of turns equal to the Rokea's Rage rating; it is up to the Storyteller to determine the final fate of objects or creatures swallowed by this Gift, but most never return.

## Brightwater Gifts

### Basic Gifts

**Eyes of the Wound:** Though most sharks have naturally reflective eyes that allow them to see in relatively dark waters, this Gift enhances the Rokea's natural sight so that she can see in the darkest places, both above and below water. In addition, using this Gift protects the Rokea's eyes from the negative effects of sudden exposure to light, such as going from a dark place into the bright sunlight, or a sudden camera flash. Once a Rokea learns this Gift, it is always active. They suffer no penalty of any kind due to darkness, and likewise no penalty from sudden exposure to bright lights of any kind.

**First Feeling:** The Rokea may use this Gift to amplify humanity's inherent fear of water, causing a human to run in terror from the ocean, or even a pool of water. The Rokea spends a Rage Trait and makes a Mental test (retest *Intimidation*). Success means that fear overcomes the target, causing her to flee from even a small body of water. This effect lasts until the end of the scene, and the target must immediately leave the vicinity of the body of water after this Gift's use. Should the target attempt to return before the end of the scene, or be unable to flee, they are at a one-Trait penalty to all actions due to their extreme discomfort. Creatures who possess the capability to breathe water are unaffected by this Gift; additionally, while this Gift affects mages, ghouls and other primarily human supernaturals, it does not affect inhuman beings such as fae or other shapechangers, nor does it affect undead creatures such as vampires or Risen.

**Narke's Gift:** Named for the electric ray, whose Greek name is *narke*, this Gift enables the Rokea to deliver a damaging electric shock to a chosen target or targets. The Rokea spends a Rage point and makes a Rage Test against six Traits. Success delivers one level of lethal damage to up to five targets within ten steps of each other in the water, or to a single target on land. Unless the Rokea touches a land-bound target, the victim must be grounded for the Gift to take effect. The Rokea must recharge her energy for three combat turns before she may again use this Gift.

**Restraint:** This Gift provides the Rokea with some selectivity when in frenzy, even when under the effect of Kunmind. Any time in a scene where she believes she risks entering frenzy, the Rokea can spend a Gnosis Trait and make a Willpower test against six Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*). Success allows the Rokea to ignore allies when in frenzy. The Rokea cannot use slew tactics when fighting under the influence of this Gift, since she ignores her companions. Since a character may not spend both Rage and Gnosis Traits in the same round, the Rokea must plan ahead to use this Gift.

**Undertow:** With this Gift, the Rokea can cause the appearance of a powerful undertow to drive a target in a direction chosen by the wereshark. This undertow can pull a human out to sea, shove a small boat aground or drag an enemy (or a meal) into the Rokea's mouth. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Physical test (difficulty seven Traits for an object, retest *Primal-Urge*). A living target may make one attempt after being caught to escape the pull by succeeding in a Physical Test (retest *Athletics*).

**Unseen Attack:** This Gift gives the Rokea an edge in executing a surprise attack, provided her opponent does not detect her approach. The character must first approach her target undetected and succeed in a Mental test (retest *Stealth*). Success means that she not only gains the advantage of Surprise against her foe, but her first attack also deals an additional level of damage. Her victim may not use any Abilities to retest the attack Challenge. The character may not use this Gift again in the same scene unless she is able to withdraw from her target's sight once more and perform another successful *Stealth* approach.

#### Intermediate Gifts

**Bends:** By using this Gift, the Rokea can inflict the condition known as "the bends" upon a target, regardless of whether or not they breathe air or are in the water. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Physical test (retest *Medicine*) to inflict two levels of lethal damage. Wound penalties are increased by one due to the severe pain caused by the bends; most ordinary people will pass out due to the pain.

**Best Policy:** This Gift enables the Rokea to tell the honest truth and have the listener accept it in stride, regardless of how inflammatory or offensive the statement may be. The wereshark makes a Social test against six Traits (retest *Expression*). Anyone hearing the Rokea's statement takes it at face value, so long as the Rokea is not lying. Furthermore, the Veil covers any revelation of the Rokea's true nature that may occur as a result of using this Gift. The effects last for one scene, though the effects of the Veil are permanent. For example, a Rokea may tell a security guard exactly why she wants access to a restricted area within a waste treatment plant. So long as she tells the truth, the security guard accepts the wereshark's explanation as reasonable and allows her access. When the Gift wears off, the guard remembers only that he let someone into a restricted area. He does not remember who he admitted, however, nor will he be able to give an accurate description of the individual.

**No Walls:** This Gift enables the Rokea to batter down any door, wall or other physical impediment, regardless of the barrier's thickness or material substance. Alarms and traps may still be set off, however, by the use of this Gift. The Rokea makes a Physical test (retest *Athletics*) against seven Traits. The Storyteller determines the amount of time it takes for the Rokea to bash through the physical obstacle; if this Gift is successful, the Rokea *will* eventually succeed in breaking through, barring some outside interference. The Gift does not affect objects that the Rokea can bypass or circumvent, such as ship's hulls or partial walls that a wereshark can simply walk or swim around.

**Oversea's Cycle:** Rokea may use this Gift to replenish Rage or Willpower or to heal lost Health Levels. If the sun or gibbous moon shines, the character may win or tie a Simple Test to immediately regain a Rage Trait. She may continue to make additional tests to regain more Rage until she loses a test. If the Wound (the sun) is clouded over or when the new moon rises, the Rokea may heal Health Levels or regain Willpower in the same fashion. This Gift recognizes the connection some Rokea (notably Brightwaters) have with Oversea. Once used, this Gift cannot be used again until the next phase of the moon or the next day, whichever is appropriate.

**School's Fear:** This Gift creates a feeling of panic in a group of individuals, whether a crowd of humans or a school of fish. The group suddenly becomes seized with the belief that someone or something is coming to eat or otherwise destroy them. The Rokea must see the group he wishes to affect, though they need not see her (a favorite tactic for Rokea interfering with cruise ships or military vessels). He then makes a Social test (retest *Intimidation*) against a number of Traits determined by the Storyteller depending on the make-up of the group — five or six for a school of fish or normal humans, higher for natural predators or trained individuals such as Garou or military personnel. The effect lasts for a number of turns equal to the Rokea's Gnosis rating, although strong-willed individuals such as PCs or significant NPCs may spend a Willpower Trait to think clearly during the confusion. Note that this still in no way immunizes them to the damage that the rest of the mob can cause!

**Wriggling Teeth:** This Gift enables the Rokea to cause any teeth dislodged due to a successful bite attack to continue burrowing into the victim's flesh, causing additional damage to the target. The character spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Physical test against eight Traits (retest *Brawl*). Success means that a tooth from the Rokea detaches itself and continues to penetrate the victim's flesh. The tooth increases the victim's wound penalties by one, so that a character that is Bruised takes penalties as if she were Wounded.

Victims reduced below Incapacitated by this pain immediately pass out and remain unconscious for at least ten minutes. In addition, the tooth causes a single additional level of aggravated damage to the character as it burrows deeper into the flesh. The tooth must be removed from the victim before the wounds can be healed either naturally or magically. This is a difficult and

unnerving process as the tooth attempts to resist being removed, though not to the extent of causing more damage. Add two Traits to the difficulty of all attempts to remove it through conventional means.

#### Advanced Gifts

**Blood of Darkness:** As the Children of Gaia Gift *Halo of the Sun* (see **Laws of the Wild**). Rokea consider light the “blood of darkness,” and this Gift affects Wyrn creatures and vampires in the same way as the Garou Gift it mirrors.

**Pain of the Wound:** This Gift enables the Rokea to use his connection with the blood of Oversea to call forth a mystical fire, even underwater. This flame does not go out until it consumes its target. The Rokea spends two Rage Traits and makes a Physical test (retest *Rituals*). The target of the attack bursts into flames and receives three levels of aggravated damage per turn until she dies, someone or something mystically negates the fire, the Rokea is slain or the Rokea chooses to end the use of the Gift. The target may spend a permanent Willpower Trait to avoid taking damage for one turn; she may do so until she has one Willpower Trait left, at which time she also gains a permanent phobia of fire (should she survive) that can never be bought off.

**Scuttle:** This Gift allows a Rokea to sink a ship of any size simply by biting a piece from its hull. The Rokea spends a permanent Rage Trait and makes a Physical test (retest *Brawl*) against a number of Traits ranging from four to nine as determined by the Storyteller, based on the size of the vessel involved. Small sailboats would naturally have fewer traits than ocean liners, oil tankers or aircraft carriers, for example.

The Rokea need only make one hole in the ship’s hull to cause the ship to begin taking on water so that it will sink unless it can reach port quickly; this hole resists all attempts at repairs until the ship reaches port, even supernatural ones. (It is the Storyteller’s decision as to the time factor involved, but most smaller vessels will be unable to make it back in time. Even larger vessels will seldom survive such damage once they are far enough out to sea.) Using this Gift exhausts the Rokea, who immediately returns to breed form and can do nothing but swim very slowly for an hour after activating the Gift.

**Sea’s Winds:** This Gift surrounds the Rokea with a brilliant aura of blazing light and violent winds (or pounding waves, if the Rokea uses this Gift in the ocean). No one may approach the Rokea without risking the fury of the elements unless given permission. The Rokea spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Willpower Test against seven Traits. For the remainder of the scene, anyone who wishes to approach the Rokea must make three consecutive successful Physical tests against eight Traits (retest *Athletics*) and suffer two levels of bashing damage per turn while the attempts are made (success reduces this damage by half). Minions of Qyrl receive aggravated damage from these attempts, since the light burns them in addition to the battering they receive from the winds or water. Anyone who reaches the Rokea may take one action, either making an attack or attempting to reason with the wereshark before being swept away once more.

## Dimwater Gifts

### Basic Gifts

**Crushing Depths:** This Gift enables the wereshark to inflict the crushing pressure of the deep sea on a single target. The Rokea must make eye contact with her victim and hold his attention. Once that has been accomplished, the victim feels the pressure on his body increase; while no actual damage is inflicted, the victim is effectively paralyzed, as they feel unable to do anything but struggle to breathe. The Rokea usually uses this opportunity to close with his victim.

To use this Gift, the Rokea locks eyes with her target and spends two Mental Traits, followed by a Social test (retest *Intimidation*). Success means that the victim can do nothing but struggle to breathe, unless he is capable of frenzying or is attacked, in which case the contact is broken and he is free to act normally again. Each turn that the Rokea wishes to maintain this hold on the target, they must make an additional Social test; they can perform other actions that do not break eye contact. They are considered up a number of Traits equal to the number of turns this power has been maintained.

**King Fish:** This Gift draws upon the body of cultural and historical myths and legends concerning sharks to command respect from others. The Rokea makes a Social Test against seven Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*). The character gains an automatic retest on any test involving *Leadership* or *Intimidation* for the duration of the scene. Most regular aquatic creatures will automatically obey her provided that doing so does not directly endanger them. Note that she must still possess some means of communicating with them if she wishes to impart orders more complex than simple gestures.

**Know Oversea's Mind:** Through the use of this Gift, the Rokea may rise to the water's surface and converse with the spirits of the air in order to predict with accuracy the weather for the general region. The Rokea makes a Mental test against seven Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*) to predict the weather for one day. The character may attempt additional Tests to predict the weather for succeeding days. Three successful Tests mean the Rokea can determine weather conditions for the next three days. A failed Test prevents the Rokea from continuing further in her predictions. Air spirits may occasionally provide other information as well, particularly concerning airborne pollutants or aircraft activity, but they tend to be quite flighty and unable to provide anything but the barest of details.

**Sea's Voice:** As the Galliard Gift *Beast Speech* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

**Spit Teeth:** With this Gift, a Rokea can spit teeth at an opponent at a distance. Though used most often on land, this Gift also works in the water. The Rokea may use this Gift in any form. The character makes a Physical test against six Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*) to loosen a tooth. If she succeeds, she can spit the tooth at her target by succeeding in a Physical test (retest *Athletics*), up

to a range equal to her normal throwing distance. This Gift ignores factors such as wind, or even the weight of the tooth. The tooth inflicts one Health Level of aggravated damage.

**Strange Blood:** With this Gift, the Rokea can smell the blood of a selected individual and determine if the target is a supernatural being. While Rokea often use this Gift to identify other weresharks, they can also discern other supernaturals by the scent of their blood. The Rokea makes a Mental test against seven Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*). Success enables the Rokea to identify the target as either another Rokea, a “normal” creature (whether human, fish or other), or some other type of supernatural.

The Storyteller should not immediately give away the precise nature of the supernatural creature. Instead of telling the Rokea that the target is a werewolf, the Storyteller might inform the wereshark that the individual’s blood has a feral scent and is laced with the taste of Rage. With enough uses of the Gift, of course, a Rokea may become an expert at identifying the various supernaturals by the smell of their blood.

**True Intentions:** This Gift enables the Rokea to discern a target individual’s true purpose by studying his actions. By watching a human tag a captured shark and then release it into open waters, for example, the Rokea can determine what the person intends to do with regard to the shark. This Gift works on actions only, not on words. The Rokea makes a Mental test (retest *Empathy*) to understand the true meaning behind a single action or a series of connected actions performed by the target creature during a single minute, with a difficulty determined by the complexity of the actions observed. For example, the Rokea could determine whether a person offering a handshake was giving a sincere greeting or whether they were merely presenting a friendly front, but it would not tell him anything about what the person was saying during that time.

#### Intermediate Gifts

**Drown:** Rokea use this Gift to force someone who naturally breathes air to grow gills, forcing the individual to “breathe” water as if she were a fish. A wereshark may use this Gift to enable a friendly human to breathe underwater when visiting Sea. Typically, however, the wereshark activates this Gift to drown her opponent or to force him into the water, where weresharks often waits with open maws.

The Rokea spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Willpower Test with her target. If the wereshark is successful, for the next hour the target can only breathe water (either salt or fresh) in order to survive, at the end of which time the gills recede without a trace. This Gift confers no additional protection against either the water temperature or pressure.

**Living Sea:** The Rokea animates a portion of the ocean or any other body of water, imbuing it with lifelike activity. The water takes on a semi-solid form, enabling it to seize and hold a person immobile or push a Rokea along faster

than a normal wereshark can swim. The animated water can also strangle a victim if the Rokea so desires. On land, Rokea can use this Gift to cause fountains and pools to extrude tendrils of water to wrap around victims.

The Rokea spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Social test against six Traits (retest *Occult*). Success enables the Rokea to control up to 5 cubic feet of water. The Rokea can increase the amount of water by another 5 cubic feet for every additional two Mental Traits spent after the initial Test is made. If the Rokea uses this Gift to strangle a water-breather or drown an air-breather, the victim takes two levels of lethal damage each turn until the Rokea ends the Gift or the victim succeeds in a Physical test (retest *Brawl*).

**Lure:** The Rokea uses this Gift to create an illusionary duplicate of herself that can act with some autonomy while performing simple repetitive actions, such as swimming or running. Though the image has no tactile existence, it looks, sounds and smells like the Rokea. By the time someone gets close enough to realize the deception, she has likely already placed herself within range of the true Rokea. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait to create the duplicate within her line of sight, which is usually portrayed by a Narrator. The image lasts until the Rokea's concentration is broken or she wills the illusion to disappear; she may perform other actions, but at a two-Trait penalty due to her concentration. The image can perform any simple action that does not require physical exertion to perform, such as lifting objects.

**Oversea's Wrath:** This Gift enables the Rokea to call down a storm on his enemies, capsizing small boats and creating turbulent waves on the ocean's surface. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Social test (retest *Rituals*). Depending on existing weather conditions, the storm called may either be relatively weak or hurricane force. The Rokea may spend additional Gnosis Traits to up the strength of the storm to the desired force.

A weak storm can overturn a small fishing vessel or pleasure boat. A medium-sized storm can topple mid-size fishing vessels or moderate-sized passenger vessels. Most terribly, a large storm can sink ocean liners and oil rigs, though Rokea are often reluctant to capsize rigs that might release tons of oil into Sea. Those that continually release large storms without good cause find themselves summoned to answer Sea herself.

**Sea's Wisdom:** By swimming in furious circles to create a small whirlpool, the Dimwater Rokea uses the roiling water to hear messages from Sea and ask advice of her great mother. Unfortunately, Sea has not given out any messages about betweeners as yet, but many other valuable things have been learned by means of this Gift. The Rokea makes a Mental test against seven Traits (retest *Rituals*). Success grants her information or advice from Sea about a single question. The Storyteller should determine what knowledge is granted to the Rokea. As a rule, the more the direct the question posed, the more direct the answer received. The Storyteller can rule some things are outside of the Sea's knowledge entirely; while pervasive, Sea's domain is not all-encompassing.



**Swim Undersea's Bloodstream:** With this Gift, the Rokea may enter the mystical tunnels that connect one Grotto to another, swimming through Undersea's bloodstream to any destination anywhere in the world. The wereshark must first somehow obtain permission from the spirits of the two Grottos that serve as departure and destination points, or risk being transported into a random and often dangerous location between the two sites. After securing the relevant permissions (or not), the Rokea spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Social Test against a number of Traits equal to the Grotto's level plus four (retest *Rituals*). She must repeat this test upon reaching her destination in order to return to where she started, though she need only spend the Willpower Trait at the journey's beginning.

#### Advanced Gifts

**Common Foe:** This Gift enables the Rokea to remind other supernaturals of a common enemy, usually some powerful minion of Qyrl, and call them to their aid in time of battle. The Rokea spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Social Test against six Traits. If successful, the Rokea emits a low call or a Sending that affects any non-corrupt supernatural being in the area for the duration of the scene. While the Gift is active, these creatures cannot attack each other or the Rokea, suffering immediate wound penalties as if they were Wounded should they try to do so. Even Gifts designed to ease pain do not alleviate the penalties or suffering caused by ignoring the Gift's strictures. So long as the common threat exists, the Gift remains active in relation to those present at the original Sending; ones that came later are not affected. Additionally, non-shapechangers such as mages or fae may spend a Willpower Trait to ignore this Gift. The urgings it prompts in them are not entirely natural for their race, though most instinctively feel that the Rokea's cause is just.

Note that the purpose of this Gift is to rally any supernaturals not in service to the Wyrms to join together against a common foe, not to convince others to attack betweeners or other personal foes of the Rokea. Those that attempt to abuse it in this fashion sometimes find it calling minions of Qyrl instead....

**Leviathan:** This power enables the Rokea to transform herself into a monstrous prehistoric shark, similar to the type of creatures called forth by the Gift *Great Summons*. The Rokea spends a Willpower Trait and a Rage Trait to change into an enormous shark, approaching eighty feet in length. The character adds five Traits to all Physical Tests after applying the usual Fighting Jaws Trait modifiers. In addition, the Rokea automatically regains one Rage Trait per turn and ignores all bashing damage not inflicted by beings with supernatural strength or natural causes of extreme power. The Gift lasts for one scene.

**Wound Undersea:** The Rokea can open a vent in the sea floor, bringing forth lava that boils the surrounding water and creating a disturbance that causes minor earthquakes in the vicinity. This Gift is only used in times of great need, since the damage it causes to the surrounding area can easily exceed the good it does unless employed very carefully. The Rokea inflicts one level of

lethal damage upon herself, slashing open her body so that she bleeds near the floor of the sea. She then spends one Rage and one Willpower Trait and makes a Social Test against eight Traits (retest *Rituals*). If the Rokea is successful, she opens a crack in the sea bed. Three turns later, enough time for the Rokea to swim to safety, lava boils from the crack, heating the surrounding water so that it inflicts three levels of aggravated damage each turn to any creature in the vicinity. The Storyteller should determine any by-products of the use of this Gift, such as earthquakes, tidal waves and other phenomena.

## Darkwater Gifts

### Basic Gifts

**Blood of the Deeps:** This Gift protects a Rokea venturing into the extreme depths of the ocean, making her immune to the crushing pressure and freezing water temperature. Darkwaters use this Gift to plumb the ocean's depths in search of hidden lore. The Rokea spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Physical Test against six Traits (retest *Survival*). For the next three hours, the Rokea is safe from the extreme cold and pressure of the ocean depths. The time period includes travel time, so the wereshark must make sure she reaches safety before the three hours elapse. This Gift only guards against natural environmental damage; cold or crushing attacks from other creatures or supernatural sources still do normal damage.

**Chill:** The Rokea may imbue her body with a numbing chill reminiscent of the ocean depths, projecting that cold to the water around her. This phenomena usually causes a great disturbance to anyone in the area of effect. The Rokea makes a Social Test against six Traits (retest *Occult*). Success causes a dramatic drop in the temperature around her, whether on land or in the water. All creatures in the area must win a Willpower Test against the Rokea in order to avoid taking a one Trait penalty to all Social and Mental Tests for the next scene, due to the distraction caused by the preternatural cold.

**Enter Sea's Soul:** Though most Rokea enter the Umbra only with Sea's permission and aid, this Gift enables a wereshark to step sideways as the Garou do. The Rokea, upon learning this Gift, may enter the Umbra using the rules for "stepping sideways" detailed in **Laws of the Wild**. This Gift offers no protection from the pressures of the oceanic Umbra, so many Rokea use the Gift *Blood of the Deeps* before activating this Gift.

**Qyrl's Blood:** As the Uktena Gift *Shroud* (see **Laws of the Wild**). Though this Gift works on land as well as in the water, many Rokea don't think to use it on the surface or on land.

**Piercing Shriek:** This Gift enables the Rokea to emit a piercing wail that can paralyze anyone within hearing distance, both allies and enemies. To soften the effect on other weresharks, Rokea generally use Sending. The Rokea spends a Rage Trait and makes a Mental test against six Traits (retest *Primal-*

*Urge*). Individuals within 30 feet in the water or 15 feet on land must succeed in a Willpower Test against eight Traits (retest *Survival*) or be stunned and at a one-Trait penalty on all actions for the rest of the scene from the agony of the sound. Anyone with enhanced hearing or using the Gift *Heightened Senses* is automatically rendered immobile for the rest of the scene, though they may still defend themselves at the normal penalty. The Gift *Silent Sending* can be used to help allies resist this Gift by allowing them an automatic retest.

**Silent Sending:** This Gift enables the Rokea to select which targets receive her Sending. Darkwaters use this Gift to keep other Rokea from getting nervous about their less-than-reputable pursuits. The Rokea makes a Mental Test against six Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*) to activate this Gift. Success allows her to choose which targets receive her Sendings for the rest of the scene.

**Voice of the Depths:** A Rokea may use this Gift to communicate soundlessly with the ancient creatures of the ocean's depths: the sea anemones, polyps and tube worms that inhabit the ocean floor. The Rokea makes a Social test against six Traits (retest *Rituals*) in order to approach the spirits in the proper manner. If successful, the Rokea usually receives advice and lore from these prehistoric creatures. The Storyteller should determine the precise information given, but such advice is often cryptically worded and requires much study to interpret it correctly.

#### Intermediate Gifts

**No Blood:** This Gift enables the Rokea to become invisible to the olfactory senses, vibrations and electrical pulses normally used by the creatures of the deep to track each other. Even if the Rokea bleeds from wounds, she gives off no odor of blood. In addition, this Gift alters the coloration of the Rokea to blend with her surroundings, allowing her to remain undetected so long as she makes no sound. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental test against six Traits (retest *Stealth*). If successful, the wereshark cannot be detected through electrical pulse signals, audio or other vibrations or scent. The Rokea also gets an automatic retest on attempts to detect her by sight. Most effective underwater, this Gift blocks the use of the Gift *Scent of Sight* on land, and it still puts her two Traits up on all *Stealth* tests on land. The Gift lasts for one scene or until the Rokea attacks someone, is herself attacked or voluntarily ends the Gift.

**Sea's Breath:** This Gift enables the wereshark to glide through the air as if she were floating in water. While she cannot achieve great height with this Gift, she can float over low-lying traps such as tripwires and pressure plates, attack her enemies from a hidden (and raised) vantage point and even execute combat maneuvers that seem to defy gravity. The character makes a Gnosis Test against a number of Traits equal to the local Gauntlet. Success activates the Gift for one scene, during which the Rokea may "swim" through the air at a maximum height of fifteen feet at her normal movement rate. This Gift also enables the Rokea to

assume any of her forms for the duration, even those forms restricted to watery environments, allowing some interesting Surprise attacks but also making it a very bizarre breach of the Veil, unless the Rokea is properly cautious.

**Shock Wave:** With this Gift, the Rokea can direct a shock wave on either land or water than can stun or even kill opponents. The Rokea spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Rage Test against six Traits on water, or seven Traits on land. Success causes a concussive wave to radiate out from the Rokea in a cone. Any living creature, friend or foe, caught in the area of effect suffers two levels of lethal damage. The Rokea may spend Rage Traits to increase the amount of damage on a one for one basis. Creatures on land must make a Physical test against five Traits to avoid being knocked to the ground by the force of the concussion. This Gift can affect up to ten targets in a thirty foot spread underwater or up to five targets in a fifteen foot spread on land.

**Summon Scuttlers:** This Gift allows the Rokea to paralyze an enemy creature temporarily in order to study it and learn more about it without killing or consuming it. The Rokea summons a horde of Scuttlers, tiny crab-like spirits of C'et, who swarm the target, rendering the victim immobile until asked to release their hold. The victim feels a crawly sensation as he is held but sees nothing in the physical realm. In the Umbra, however, the creatures are visible to anyone. The Rokea may use this Gift on land, but there it summons tiny spidery Weaver-spirits who do not always release their victim when asked.

The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Social test against six Traits in the water, eight Traits on land (retest *Enigmas*). The Gift lasts for one scene or until the Rokea asks the Scuttlers to release the victim, whichever comes first. In the case of Weaver-spirits, the Rokea must win a Simple Test to convince the spiders to release target. This Gift is immediately ended if the target is attacked in any way. It does not function to stop a fleeing creature if the Rokea's intent is to harm them — it is intended as a means of studying a target, not paralyzing him for a killing strike.

**Swim Through the School:** This Gift enables the Rokea to pass through crowds of air-breathers on land without attracting undue attention. It also alleviates the effects of the Curse temporarily. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait to activate the Gift, which lasts for one scene. During this time, she may move at a normal walking or running pace through a crowd of ordinary people. The crowd simply parts to let her pass. While she is not actually outright ignored, unless a person is particularly attentive or is forced to interact with the Rokea directly, they won't remember the Rokea's presence. A security guard won't automatically move aside to let the Rokea pass, for instance, but if the Rokea slips into a line of workers entering a factory, they will be waived in like anyone else. In addition, the effects of the Curse are lifted during this time, making it easier to deal with humans.

**Wave's Passage:** The Rokea may concentrate on an object and bring about a rapid aging effect, as if the object had lingered on the bottom of the ocean for many years. This Gift makes wood brittle and easily breakable. Metal

becomes rusty, silver appears tarnished, chemicals become diluted. The Rokea needs a full turn to activate this Gift, and it does not function on living (or undead) creatures of any kind. The character makes a Mental test (retest *Enigmas*). Success means that the target object ages as if it had been underwater for a year. Wood requires only one Test to fall prey to the aging effect, while metal and other more durable objects may require two or three successful Tests, as determined by the Storyteller. The Rokea can increase the effect by spending Gnosis Traits at the rate of two years per Trait spent. For example, a Rokea who successfully invokes the Gift and spends one Gnosis Trait causes the object to age three years. This Gift may be applied to a target more than once, up to a number of times equal to the Rokea's Gnosis rating per session.

#### Advanced

**C'et's Shell:** Some Rokea make a bargain with C'et's servants to learn this Gift, which protects them from one form of technology. When the Rokea learns this Gift, she spends one permanent Gnosis Trait and chooses one type of technology (i.e., flame throwers, guns, nets, etc.). From that time on, that chosen form of technology cannot harm the Rokea. A net cannot hold her, a bullet cannot damage her or fire from a flame-thrower cannot burn her. (Note as an example that immunity to flame throwers does not grant immunity to natural fire or fire from another source.) Needless to say, the Storyteller should be present to record what form of technology has been selected in order to avoid future confusion. Once this technology has been chosen, it cannot be changed without an appropriate quest and another permanent Gnosis expenditure. This Gift does not give a Rokea protection from Small Wounds — that is beyond the scope of C'et to give to the Rokea.

**Hunger of the Trench:** The Rokea can feed the ever-hungry deep waters of Sea with the will of others. By spending a Gnosis point and making a Mental test against six Traits (retest *Intimidation*), the wereshark may take one temporary Willpower Trait from a chosen target and use it to feed the Trench. This Gift can be used against a target more than once, but if it fails it cannot be used on that target for at least one full cycle of the moon.

**Oversea's Gift:** This Gift bestows the ability to fly upon the Rokea, transforming the wereshark's body into a lighter-than-normal form that possesses connective membranes between the extremities. These fleshy membranes allow the character to fly through Sea and Oversea until she decides to end the Gift. The Rokea can only use this Gift in Gladius form. The wereshark spends two Gnosis Traits to activate the Gift.

Once the Gift is in effect, the Rokea can fly at a maximum speed of 30 mph or swim at a speed of up to 70 mph. The character's attributes remain the same. Using this Gift, the Rokea can dive-bomb opponents. Normal humans experience an effect somewhat similar to the Delirium — they simply fail to notice the flying Rokea, even if others attempt to bring it to their attention directly. (It looks like a giant airborne cross between a shark, a human and a

flying squirrel, folks. As far as mind-numbing paradigm shocks go, it's pretty high on the list.) Supernatural creatures must make a Willpower Test against eight Traits to see the Rokea unless they possess extraordinary senses or other supernatural powers of perception, in which case they notice it normally.

**Pall:** This Gift enables the Rokea to create an area of total blackness, trapping anyone within it. The Rokea can not only transport herself anywhere within the darkened area instantly, but she also automatically knows exactly what transpires within the pall, both in the Realm and in the Umbra. To invoke this Gift, the Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Gnosis Test against a number of Traits equal to the local Gauntlet. Success produces an inky blackness that extrudes from the Rokea's eyes and mouth, completely filling an area the size of a large room or a spherical portion of similar size in a larger area. Anyone other than the Rokea caught within the darkness is considered blind, even if they can ordinarily see in darkness. Those using the Gift *Eyes of the Wound* can see normally. Those affected must spend a Willpower Trait and succeed in a Willpower test against the Rokea in order to escape from the darkness without the Rokea's permission.

The Rokea can see and hear all that goes on within the sphere even if creatures within it are communicating silently or using Gifts such as *Silent Sending* or *MindSpeak*. The sphere also imparts an understanding of whatever is thought or said, regardless of the language used. This Gift lasts for one scene. Though some other weresharks maintain that Darkwaters learn this Gift from Qyrlings (who can and do teach it), any deep sea fish can impart the knowledge of this Gift to a worthy Rokea.

## Betweener Gifts

Rokea who choose the land-bound life over life in the water develop some Gifts that are unique to them. They learn these from land-based spirits or from other betweeners.

### Basic Gifts

**Find Sea:** This Gift allows the Rokea to find the fastest way to the nearest ocean, no matter the distance. Depending on circumstances, the fastest route may not always be the most direct. The Rokea makes a Mental test against six Traits (retest *Primal-Urge*). If she succeeds, she knows how far she must go and in which direction to reach the sea.

**Enter Unsea's Soul:** As the Darkwater Gift *Enter Sea's Soul*, except that this Gift allows a betweener to enter Unsea's Soul (the Umbra that corresponds to land) rather than Sea's Soul, which sometimes poses a danger for land-based Rokea. Betweeners use this Gift to effect an escape from Rokea who hunt the land-based weresharks.

**Spirit Speech:** As the Theurge Gift *Spirit Speech* (see *Laws of the Wild*). This Gift allows Rokea, who can normally converse with only pelagic spirits, to speak with land and air spirits as well. Most betweeners learn this Gift early in their land-bound lives.

### Intermediate Gifts

**C't's Mysteries:** Betweeners can ask land-based Scuttlers (or pattern spiders) to assist them with technology, even if they have no prior knowledge of computers, cars and other gadgets of air-breathing society. The Rokea spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental test against six Traits (retest *Science*). Success enables the Rokea to use technology as if she had one Trait in the appropriate Ability. The character may attempt additional Tests to boost her effective Ability. The effects of the Gift last for one scene, and this Gift may not be used relative to more than one form of technology at a time.

**Forms of Sea:** A betweener may transform her body into liquid so that she can slide through narrow openings such as pipes, or through cracks or under doors. The Rokea may also maintain cohesion in this form and “walk” in the appearance of a watery human shape. By forcing herself down a target’s throat with a Physical test, the Rokea may drown an enemy. The character spends two Gnosis Traits in order to activate this Gift. She may remain in this form for one hour for each permanent Gnosis Trait she possesses. Her body neither evaporates nor freezes naturally, and she receives a Gnosis test to resist supernatural manipulation that would force it to do otherwise. If someone or something splits the body, the character cannot reform until her parts are brought together again. She cannot use attacks that depend on a solid physical form, such as bites or claws, but she can drown an opponent by making a successful Physical test and holding the opponent until he drowns. Immersion in salt water ends the Gift immediately.

### Advanced Gifts

**Wall of Granite:** As the Philodox Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

## Rites

Rokea have little use for the many rites that make up the social life of many other Changing Breeds. Rokea have many rites in common with the Garou, including the *Rite of Cleansing*, *Rite of Summoning*, *Rite of Spirit Awakening*, *Rite of the Opened Grotto* (instead of Caern), the *Rite of the Fetish*, the *Rite of Wounding* and several others. Rokea have no need, however, for Seasonal Rites or Punishment Rites. Storytellers and players should make adjustments as necessary to appropriate rites listed in **Laws of the Wild**. The following rites have been developed exclusively for Rokea and are the most commonly used among the weresharks.

### Basic Rites

**Rite of Rokea Blood:** This rite makes it possible for Rokea to find suitable mates. By performing this rite, sea-born Rokea can locate suitable sharks of their birth type while betweeners can find Rokea Kinfolk, usually products of a mating between a Rokea and a human. Betweeners may also use this rite to locate sharks to breed with, should they so desire. While pelagic weresharks

may also find land-based Rokea Kinfolk with this rite, the sea-born Rokea usually have more lethal intentions for these *kadugo* should they find them. In shark form, the Rokea leaps upward from the water toward the sky; on land, the character simply stretches her arms upward. The Rokea makes a Mental test against eight Traits (retest *Rituals*). Success informs the wereshark of any suitable partners within 5 miles on land or 10 miles in the ocean.

**Rite of the Hunt:** This rite serves as a *Rite of Passage* for new Rokea. In earlier times, the fledgling Rokea completed her Long Swim and was then taken to a Grotto to confront Sea and Kun in a mystical communion that had no particular tests attached to it. Because of the war against the betweeners, this rite has taken on a sinister and bloody element. A Rokea slew escorts the Rokea pup to Unsea for the purpose of hunting and slaying a betweener. Because of the rarity of these land-bound Rokea, other supernaturals are counted as acceptable substitutes.

A few Rokea refuse to hunt other Changing Breeds and, instead set their sights on Qyrl's minions, such as lampreys or fomori. Others have no such qualms, feeling that the other Changing Breeds have taken so much from Sea that they deserve to have their numbers slightly reduced. When Rorqual or remora find a Rokea pup, they take the new wereshark to a Grotto and then send her on her way without the further requirement of participating in a betweener hunt. If a Rokea completes the rite successfully (i.e., if she survives the hunt or if she is allowed to bypass the bloody portion of the rite), she makes a Social test against five Traits (retest *Rituals*). Success give the pup two temporary Valor Renown Traits over and above any she may have gained in the hunt itself. Any Rokea who accompany her gain one temporary Valor Renown Trait.

**Rite of Swimming Alone:** When a Rokea wishes to break off temporarily from her slew and swim alone, he performs this rite. The Rokea may swim alone for an indefinite period of time, but during his solitary wanderings he may not take advantage of the Traits granted by his Totem. On the other hand, he is not as strongly bound to his Totem's Ban as if he were traveling with his slew. Unless he commits any severe violations of his pact with his Totem, the Rokea suffers no penalties when he returns to his slew.

In performing this rite, the Rokea shifts to Gladius form and swims away from his slew to settle on the sea bottom. There, he asks his Totem's permission to make his way alone for a time. The character makes a Social test against six Traits (retest *Rituals*); success means the Totem allows him to go on his way.

**Rite of Passing the Net:** This rite enables the Rokea to enter the Umbra through a direct petition to Sea. The Rokea swims to a Grotto and asks Sea's permission to swim sideways. The character makes a Social Test against seven Traits (retest *Rituals*). If she succeeds, she enters Sea's Soul and may remain there for up to 28 days. After an entire moon cycle has passed, if the Rokea is



still in the Umbra, she finds herself deposited outside the Grotto through which she entered Sea's Soul.

**Rite of Sea's Distant Voice:** Betweeners and Rokea who spend any length of time on land use this rite to commune with Sea and communicate their deeds to her. For land-based Rokea, this rite provides a way to gain Harmony and Innovation Renown. The Rokea must immerse herself at least partially in salt water, whether in the ocean or in a bathtub full of salted water. While in the water, the Rokea mentally speaks to Sea and reports her significant doings. The character makes a Social test against a minimum of five Traits (retest *Rituals*); the Storyteller should feel free to add additional Traits according to the distance the Rokea is from Sea. Success means that Sea has heard the Rokea; Harmony and Innovation Renown should be awarded (or lost) according to the nature of the deeds reported.

**Rite of Talisman Dedication:** This rite is identical in function to the Garou rite (see **Laws of the Wild**) except that the Rokea must learn it from a betweener, since most weresharks have little care for personal belongings.

### *Intermediate Rites*

**Rite of the Black Shark:** This powerful rite has only been used once to anyone's knowledge. Created by a Rokea known as Mad-With-Pain, this rite enables a number of Rokea to merge into one gigantic black shark, large enough to destroy an entire fleet of ships. The original intent of the rite was to bring the practice of opening Small Wounds on or under Sea to an end. Performance of the rite requires a ritemaster of Rank Four or higher as well as at least ten Rokea (one Rank Four, two Rank Three, three Rank Two and four Rank One). The group sacrifices their lives in the creation of the Black Shark, a 120-foot-long monster with a fiery mouth and glowing red eyes. Used against ships involved in nuclear testing after World War II, the rite sank over a dozen vessels. No way to reverse the rite exists and none of the sharks that participated in the original and only enactment of the rite have ever been seen again. Whether or not any existing Rokea know the precise steps involved in performing the rite is unknown.

The ritemaster must succeed in a Social test against nine Traits (retest *Rituals*); if successful, the Storyteller should decide the precise effects of this rite, which creates a monster far stronger and more terrifying than the one summoned by the Gift *Leviathan*. In addition, the Storyteller should decide if the rite can be reversed and what steps must be taken to do so, though players should know that it is almost always a one-way trip and be prepared to deal with the consequences accordingly.

**Rite of the Man-Form:** This rite enables the Rokea, who are most often born in shark form, to choose a default "breed" form. This enables the Rokea to avoid an unforeseen change back to Squamus form on land in the event they lose all her Rage and Willpower. Usually Gladius or Homid are the preferred

forms. If the Rokea reverts to breed form in combat, Gladius provides the better choice; in public, however, Homid form offers more protection for the Rokea.

The Rokea makes a Mental test against eight Traits (retest *Rituals*). Success means that the Rokea selects either Homid or Gladius and uses that form as her default breed form. The Rokea can instantaneously assume this form and will revert to the chosen form if Incapacitated, brought to zero Willpower or Rage Traits or falls prey to supernatural powers that force the assumption of her “true form.” The rite’s effects last for one week and the Rokea cannot terminate the Gift early. Using this rite without good reason generally involves the loss of one Harmony Renown Trait, and is considered distasteful but necessary by squamus Rokea.

**Rite of the School’s Wisdom:** Just as sharks herd schools of fish together into a tight mass for ease of consumption, Rokea can herd such schools together to gain wisdom and information. The character makes a Physical test against six Traits (retest *Athletics*) to gather the school together into a compact group, then makes a Mental test against seven Traits (retest *Rituals*) to perform the actual rite. Success means that the school answers the Rokea’s questions to the best of their ability. Schools usually know about their immediate area, though they may, on occasion, possess other types of information based on their travels and encounters. Out of courtesy, Rokea do not usually eat schools that provide them with useful information.

### *Advanced Rites*

**Rite of the Gathering:** This rite has only been used once, at Turna’a. When successfully performed, this ritual summons every Rokea in existence to a great gathering. To enact this rite, one Rokea of every auspice must be present. The rite requires a full 24 hours to perform, as the participants choose the area for the gathering and purify it of all malevolent influences both in the physical realm and in Sea’s Soul. This means that at least one of the participants must know either the Gift *Enter Sea’s Soul* or the *Rite of Passing the Net*. Success summons every living wereshark, regardless of their location in the material world or beyond. It includes all auspices as well as betweeners, Same-Bito and followers of Qyrl. Those who called the rite at Turna’a perished in the nuclear blast; no one knows if the knowledge of the rite itself survived.

If the Storyteller allows this rite in her chronicle, the Rokea serving as ritemaster must accumulate three successes in a Social test against ten Traits (retest *Rituals*). A failure negates the rite and the Rokea involved must start all over again. Success summons every wereshark as described above. Failure means that Rokea within a few miles of the rite experience an odd tingling sensation but no compulsion to gather. Note that the gathered weresharks are under no particular compunction to play nicely with each other, although the strength and rarity of the rite is sufficient that even the most hot-tempered or corrupt Rokea will at least find out why it was called before they attack each other.

## Totems

Rokean slews seek the patronage of totems in the same way Garou do, but weresharks do not need a rite to create a bond between totem and slew. Instead, the totem either accepts the slew as its charges or the slew locates one of the totem's servants and offers its services to the totem. While the most common totems for slews are Shark and Dolphin, a few other choices are presented below.

Since Rokean totems are water-spirits, they lose their power if the slew ventures onto the land. Slews may keep their totems active on land by feeding the totem-spirit one Gnosis Trait per day. Storytellers may up the Gnosis requirement if the slew ventures too far inland.

When a slew chooses a totem, the players may negate this requirement by spending an additional 3 Background Traits. See **Laws of the Wild** for a description of the *Totem* Background.

### Angler

**Background Cost:** 5 Traits

Angler is a crafty and creative deep-sea fish that uses a false light to draw unsuspecting prey into its mouth. Angler prefers slews of Rokea that tend toward creativity and innovation in their approach to problems, using their brains as often as their teeth.

**Traits:** *Stealth* x 2. Each member gains *Enduring* for tests involving survival in cold waters. Once per day each slew member may spend a Gnosis Trait to evoke a glowing effect similar to the angler's false light. The Rokea's gums radiate a faint, yellow bioluminescent glow, shedding light in a five-foot zone in front of the wereshark. When Angler chooses a slew, each member receives two temporary Innovation Renown Traits.

**Ban:** Angler's children must never attack a foe in ignorance. They must know something about their opponent other than its size or general appearance.

### Crab

**Background Cost:** 4 Traits

Crab serves C'et, the Shelled One, the Rokean equivalent of the Weaver. Since few slews consider Crab as their patron spirit, she shows her gratefulness to those who do ask for her as their totem. Crab's nature resembles her name; she tends toward grumpiness and prefers privacy. She frequently preaches about the need to leave the ocean occasionally to learn more about the rest of the world.

**Traits:** *Science* x 2; *Seafaring*. When faced with human technology, Rokea under Crab's protection gain an automatic retest when attempting to understand how something works. Crab also grants her children one day on land per trip, during which they do not have to feed Gnosis to her.

**Ban:** Crab asks her children to venture onto Unsea once per week, even if they do nothing more than walk along the beach.

## Dolphin

**Background Cost:** 4 Traits

Naturally graceful and blessed with a playful nature, Dolphin can nevertheless become a deadly foe when necessary. Dolphin considers herself the guardian of the seas and expects slews under her patronage to adopt the same attitude, watching all that goes on around them in the sea and intervening to prevent harm to Sea and its creatures.

**Traits:** *Empathy* x 3. *Charismatic*, *Expressive*. Dolphin realizes that sometimes Rokea must stop marine disasters by taking action above the water or on Unsea and by persuading rather than pummeling. When a slew chooses to serve Dolphin, each member receives one temporary Harmony Renown Trait.

**Ban:** Dolphin requires her children to do everything they can to stop the hunting of sea mammals and to end the pollution of the world's oceans and other waterways. While most Rokea feel this is their duty anyway, Dolphin asks her children to give that much extra effort and do what others might not.

**Note:** Although natural dolphins and natural sharks show some antipathy toward one another, neither Dolphin nor dolphin Rorqual have any natural dislike for Rokea.

## Hurricane

**Background Cost:** 5 Traits

Hurricane embodies one of nature's deadliest and most terrifying forces, yet within its eye rests a place of serenity and peacefulness. Hurricane respects and relishes the Rokea's frenzy, but also likes to teach the weresharks under its patronage how to focus their attention despite their powerful Rage.

**Traits:** *Intimidation* x 2; *Ferocious*. In addition, Hurricane grants her children the Brightwater Gift *Restraint*.

**Ban:** Hurricane asks her slews to sink one vessel of any size per month.

## Manta Ray

**Background Cost:** 7 Traits

A true survivor and a powerful warrior, Manta Ray particularly hates fishermen. His children occasionally tow fishing vessels to areas frequented by Rokea slews or run them onto sharp reefs. Manta Ray despises Rokea who leave the water, and is one of the few totems taking an active side in the betweener war. Rokea who serve Manta Ray may expect to remain far out at sea. Many Dimwaters prefer Manta as their totem.

**Traits:** *Rugged*; *Tireless*. Each member of a slew serving Manta may use up to three extra Willpower Traits per story and receive 2 temporary Harmony Renown Traits upon choosing Manta.

**Ban:** Manta asks his children to do everything they can to disrupt fishermen, from tearing their nets to leaping aboard the ship and slaughtering the crew to sinking the vessel.

## Moray

**Background Cost:** 6 Traits

A patient and persistent hunter, Moray ambushes his prey, striking from his hiding place among the coral reefs and retreating quickly. Bad-tempered and extremely territorial, Moray expects Rokea who follow him to act as protectors and defenders of the coral reefs.

**Traits:** *Stealth* x 3; *Brawl* (bite attacks only). In addition, Rokea under Moray's protection can always find a hiding place, regardless of where they are. Moray's children receive the Gift *Unseen Attack*.

**Ban:** Moray asks his children to guard the coral reefs, where moray eels make their homes.

## Shark

**Background Cost:** 6 Traits

The spiritual parent of all Rokea, Shark is the most popular totem among Rokea slews and embodies both the best and worst qualities of the species. Swift, deadly and quiet, Shark does not require any emotional ties from his

### Special Totem: Qyrl

Rokea in desperate straits, such as many betweeners, sometimes petition Qyrl to accept them as her children. They do this in the hope that Qyrl can help them hide from those who hunt them. While Qyrl does protect her children, she also infects them with her taint, changing them into subjects that she can use to further her purpose. Such Rokea register a slight Wyrms taint to anyone using the Garou Gift *Sense Wyrms*. Other Rokea feel an immediate distrust for weresharks in service to Qyrl, although they may not realize the reason for their feeling.

**Background Cost:** 6 Traits (slew); 8 Traits (personal)

**Traits:** *Stealth* x 3; *Linguistics* (dominant human language in the Rokea's geographic vicinity); *Occult* x 2; *Survival*; *Shrewd*. Qyrl also provides shelter and food for her children, such as squid in the water and fortunate discoveries (abandoned lunches, etc.) on land. Qyrl gives her children whispered hints about how to survive on land, and does not need Rokea who serve her to feed her Gnosis when on land.

**Ban:** Rokea in service to Qyrl must obey her commands unquestioningly. Usually, these orders come at inconvenient times and may lead the Rokea into performing actions that make her feel uncomfortable.

**Note:** Since some Storytellers may not allow Qyrl as a totem spirit in their games, you should check with your Storyteller before taking this totem.

children. He only asks that they remain true to their predatory nature, faithfully following Rokean law.

**Traits:** *Stalwart* x 2. In addition, the slew gains *Stealth* x 2. In combat, a slew under Shark's patronage may add two additional levels of aggravated damage for each combat. The slew may choose to have the extra damage apply to one target or may split the damage between two opponents. When choosing Shark, each slew member gains 2 temporary Harmony Renown Traits.

**Ban:** Shark's children may never feel either pleasure or sadness in killing and must never hold grudges. They are predators, pure and simple.

## Fetishes

Rokea do not create or use many fetishes. First, doing so is difficult for them since they do not always possess the ability to craft a tool or object. Second, Rokea show a great reluctance toward asking a spirit to leave its natural place (Sea's Soul) for an unnatural habitat. Nevertheless, a few fetishes have proven so useful and important to Rokea that they find them worthy of creation.

### Sea's Garb

Level 1, Gnosis 6

Rokea who swim ashore do so naked. Finding clothing becomes their first priority and sometimes involves stealing it from humans, risking trouble from the very beginning. To solve this problem, an innovative Dimwater discovered how to create Sea's Garb.

This fetish appears to be a normal piece of human apparel, and, in fact, the Rokea creating the fetish must first acquire an article of clothing (the exact type of clothing is unimportant). When the fetish is activated, Sea's Garb clothes the Rokea in something appropriate to the place and season. If a Rokea wearing only a Sea Garb vest comes ashore along a beach in southern California and activates her fetish, her clothing might change to a halter top and split skirt, with sandals, a flouncy sun hat and a pair of shades. The clothes produced are considered dedicated and go with the Rokea into the Umbra. The fetish cannot create an entire wardrobe; the clothing remains the same so long as the Rokea stays on land. She may change her clothing by swimming out to sea and then returning to land. The Rokea has no control over what kind of clothing is generated by the fetish. Creating Sea's Garb requires binding either a stingray-spirit or eel-spirit into the article of clothing.

### Marlin's Tail

Level 2, Gnosis 6

Formed from several marlin bones strung together and worn around the waist, this fetish allows the Rokea to draw upon the speed and power of the

marlin. When activated, Marlin's Tail doubles the Rokea's swimming speed as well as the distance she can leap out of the water. This fetish is visible in Chasmus and Squamus forms as a row of protrusions surrounding the wereshark's tail.

The spirit of a marlin, swordfish or mako shark may be bound into the bones to create this fetish.

### *Barnacle Necklace*

Level 3, Gnosis 6

Made from a barnacle strung on a piece of leather or skin and worn around the neck, this fetish acts as a homing beacon when activated, enabling the wereshark to locate whaling or shark fishing vessels within a 10 mile range (more at the Storyteller's discretion). The fetish requires the spirit of a barnacle.

### *Net of Vengeance*

Level 4, Gnosis 7

A Rokea who wishes to create this fetish must first steal a section of net from a fishing vessel. When imbued by both an air- and a sea-spirit, the Net of Vengeance drowns both air and water breathers ensnared in it. The Rokea must entangle his victim by making a Physical test against seven Traits (retest Melee). If the Rokea succeeds, his victim suffers the effects of drowning as described in **Laws of the Wild**. To free himself before dying, the trapped person must make three successive Physical tests against eight Traits (retest *Survival* or *Swim*) to tear free of the net or three successive Mental tests (retest *Enigmas*) to work free of the net. If the victim succeeds, he begins to breathe normally. This fetish requires both an air-spirit and a sea-spirit.

### *Fragment of Oversea*

Level 5, Gnosis 8

To Rokea, meteorites are pieces of Oversea's body that the Wound has burned so badly they have fallen into Sea (or Unsea, as the case may be). Made into fetishes, these items have wondrous powers. Perhaps a dozen of them exist, and all have different effects. One such fetish may heal an individual completely when activated. Another might blaze with a brilliant light mirroring that of the Wound, blinding any who look directly at it and affecting vampires as if they were struck by sunlight. The most famous of these Fragments, called Woundbringer, causes a fiery explosion like that of a hand grenade when tossed. The fragments may be gathered up again and reassembled for later use.

These fetishes are allowed in a chronicle only with the Storyteller's permission. The player and Storyteller should work together to decide exactly what effect the Fragment has and what sort of spirit has been bound into it.

## Merits & Flaws

Rokea characters may choose many of the Merits and Flaws described in **Laws of the Wild**. A few, however, are not appropriate for Rokea. Disallowed Merits or Flaws include *Ancestral Mentor*, *Blind*, *Deaf*, *Fair Glabro*, *Longevity*, *Moon-Bound*, *Natural Channel*, *Nightmares*, *Sign of the Wolf* or *Wolf Years*. Human Society Merits or Flaws may only be taken by Homid Rokea (if these characters are allowed in a chronicle). Any other Merits and Flaws that apply primarily to human skills or capabilities may only be taken by Homid Rokea or long-time betweeners.

Some Merits and Flaws are particularly appropriate for Rokea. These include: *Animal Musk*, *Bad Taste*, *Berserker*, *Disfigured*, *Monstrous*, *Mute* and *Strict Carnivore*.

### Constant Sending (1 Trait Merit)

The Lorenzini's ampullae sensory organs in your body that enable you to use the Sending for communication do not go away in Homid or Glabrus form. This means that you may use the Sending regardless of your current form. Other Rokea in Homid form, however, cannot receive your communications. Rokea who possess this Merit may communicate with humans and relay any information to their slew from a distance.

### Good-Looking (2 Trait Merit)

This Merit negates the Appearance Trait restriction completely. Your Homid form looks totally human, an asset if you spend much time in human company or act as a hunter of betweeners.

### Venerable (2 Trait Merit)

You are older than most weresharks who become active in Rokean society. While you do not have any more Renown than a beginning Rokea, you begin play with five extra Traits in one or more of the following Abilities: *Etiquette*, *Linguistics*, *Occult*, *Politics* or *Seafaring*. You may not have more than two Traits in any one Ability and you must have your Storyteller's permission to have a single extra Trait in all five Abilities. Even though you have the same starting Renown as other Rokea, your greater age gives you a one Trait advantage in dealing with younger Rokea, who treat you with a certain deference.

### Fin Blades (3 Trait Merit)

When you assume Standing Jaws form, your arm, leg and back fins are as sharp as your talons, enabling you to attack with your fins and doing one additional level of aggravated damage. This does not give you an extra attack, but it does allow you several attack alternatives.

### Swim Sideways (6 Trait Merit)

Unlike most Rokea, you can enter the Umbra as easily as Garou, whether you are on sea or land. This ability, however, does not offer you any special protection from the dangers of the depths of Sea's Soul, so you are better off using your ability near the surface of the water.



**Betweener Sympathizer (1 Trait Flaw)**

Although you are not yourself a betweener, you have no problem with those Rokea who choose to live on land. In fact, you may know some betweeners and sympathize with their plight, warning them of impending attacks. You generally try to beg off participation in betweener hunts or manage to fail to catch your prey when you do “hunt” betweeners. If your sympathies are discovered, you may face serious difficulties (including death) from other Rokea, so you try not to be obvious about your feelings toward betweeners. Betweeners may not take this Flaw; if you decide at a later date to “go between,” you must buy off this flaw with Experience Traits.

**Shark Teeth (1 Trait Flaw)**

Your teeth remain mildly pointed and loose even in Homid form. Although these teeth are not strong enough to cause damage, they may cause comment from any humans around you and they tend to fall out when you bite into anything tough or chewy: steak, caramels, etc. The teeth do regenerate, however, so you are in no danger of losing them permanently.

**Short-Lived (1 Trait Flaw)**

For some mysterious reason, you have continued to age after your Long Swim. You age at the same rate as humans, giving you a finite life span in comparison to other Rokea. This may affect your temperament and actions in a number of ways, causing you to avoid taking risks or, alternately, giving you a devil-may-care attitude about your shortened life-span.

**Garou Enemy (2 or 4 Trait Flaw)**

You have somehow managed to earn the enmity of a pack of Garou, who believe that you are a Wyrms-creature and who pursue you with the intention of killing you. They may not hunt you incessantly, but they may tend to show up at extremely inconvenient times. They may not realize what you are but some instinct may tell them to drive you toward dry land (or inland, if you are on the land) making escape a difficult process. For ocean-dwelling Rokea, this is a 2 Trait Flaw; for betweeners, it is a 4 Trait Flaw.

**Honest to a Fault (2 Trait Flaw)**

You find it impossible to lie, or even fudge the truth. You do not understand either subtlety or deception. If Sea sends you on a mission that takes you onto land or into some hostile territory, you do not know how to dissemble about the nature of your sacred quest. In fact, you may very well inform questioners of the fact in no uncertain terms. Humans may not take kindly to answers such as “I’ve come here to hunt and kill those who go between,” or “I intend to sink that whaler as soon as possible.” You are at a two Trait penalty when involved in any tests pertaining to deception or lying. This Flaw does not require you to blab the truth; it merely prevents you from lying or denying the truth when questioned.

**Known Betweener (3 Trait Flaw)**

Rokean society knows you are a betweener and you are the regular object of hunts. You have learned to stay on the move and avoid places where you

might run into a slew of betweener-hunters. Humans who become your friends or romantic partners are also fair game for those who hunt you, in case you should reveal information about yourself or your species to them.

#### **Tonic Immobility (3 Trait Flaw)**

Like many sharks (and unlike most Rokea), you become catatonic and immobile when turned onto your back. Even if you are in Homid form, you tend to fall asleep immediately if lying (or forced to lie) on your back. In Squamus, Chasmus or Gladius form, you fall asleep immediately and remain unable to move until someone sets you upright.

#### **Unsure Footing (3 Trait Flaw)**

You have a problem walking around on two legs. The slightest obstacle tends to trip you up and you are prone to stumbling over nothing. You also suffer from attacks of vertigo when walking upright. Fine motor skills such as those used in writing are unaffected, but other actions such as dodging, firing a gun, walking and engaging in physical combat are difficult. You are at a two Trait penalty to all Dexterity-related challenges that involve body coordination or balance. This includes all combat maneuvers in bipedal form.

#### **Uncontrolled Lust (4 Trait Flaw)**

While all Rokea feel the need to mate when on land, you experience a powerful urge to mate constantly when out of water. The presence of eligible breeding partners (i.e., anyone of the opposite sex who is of breeding age) provides a constant distraction for you. You suffer a two Trait penalty to any actions involving concentration or any extended actions. If you enter Kunmind on land, your mating urge takes over completely. Your companions will need to restrain you in order to prevent serious problems.

## **New Combat Maneuvers**

Rokea have access to most of the same combat maneuvers as do Garou. In addition, they have some special types of attacks that make them particularly deadly in combat. These are optional rules for Storytellers to consider using in their chronicles. You must have your Storyteller's permission to employ these maneuvers.

## **Creatures of the Sea**

Sea-spirits abound and frequently interact with Rokea who visit Sea's Soul. These spirits fall into one of four classifications, depending on the Celestine they serve.

### **Okeans**

These abstract spirits serve Sea directly. They include wave-spirits, tide-spirits, foam-spirits and the unusual spirits known as Breakers.

### Breaker: Sample Okean

Even in Sea's Soul, Breakers are usually invisible. They only speak with others if addressed in the proper fashion. A character wishing to speak to a Breaker must make a Mental test against 6 Traits (retest *Rituals*) to locate a Breaker and gain its notice. Breakers who choose to communicate with an individual usually form themselves into a water-image of the creature they deign to address.

Breakers embody the force of water, so any creature that moves forms a Breaker. Most Breaker-spirits have short existences, spinning off from their creator and dissipating as their "force" disperses. Those formed from underwater explosions and other powerful ocean forces have longer lives and can sometimes sink ships of their own accord.

Some Rokea believe that Breakers are the children of Sea and Oversea, but their speculations have received no confirmation from either Sea or the Breakers themselves. Breakers tend to be friendly toward Rokea, since the battles of the weresharks spawn many of their kind.

Rage 2-8, Gnosis 3-9, Willpower 2-9, Essence 7-27 (varies)

**Charms:** Reform, Airt Sense and others; including but not limited to Flood, Updraft, Umbraquake, Break Reality, Cleanse the Blight, Freeze or Healing

### Pelageans

These sea-spirits serve Kun, the Celestine that corresponds to the Wild. They are the most numerous spirits of Sea's Soul and can take the form of any fish: from tuna to turbot, eel to shark. In addition, they may appear in the form of sea mammals such as whales or seals. Remora belong to this classification.

### Angler-Spirit: Sample Pelagean

These deep-sea fish make use of their natural bioluminescence as a lure for prey. They dwell in the coldest, darkest regions of Sea's Soul. They tend to encounter Darkwaters more frequently than other Rokea and gladly teach Gifts to these daring weresharks.

Rage 5, Gnosis 6, Willpower 6, Essence 17

**Charms:** Reform, Airt Sense, Lure\*

\***Lure:** As the Galliard Gift *Eyes of the Cobra* (see **Laws of the Wild**). The spirit makes an opposed Gnosis Test to lure in her prey. Victims must spend a Willpower Trait to resist. Angler-spirits may also use their luminescence ability without the attempt to draw their prey toward them.

### Qyrlings

Servants of Qyrl, the Celestine who corresponds to the Wyrmling, these spirits take the shapes of boneless creatures such as octopi, squid, jellyfish and others too gruesome to mention.

### Rider: Sample Qyrling

Rider-spirits resemble enormous lampreys, often reaching 8' in length. True lampreys are fish and their spirits are, therefore, Pelageans. Riders, however, belong to Qyrl. Close inspection of these creatures shows tiny appendages resembling hair-thin tentacles covering their entire body. Like lamprey, riders are parasites. They drain Gnosis rather than blood, and can attach themselves to either a Rokea or a Rorqual, using its Drain Gnosis Charm to good effect. They may also use Rage to inflict damage on a target.

Rage 7, Gnosis 4, Willpower 7, Essence 18 (+ Gnosis drained from victims)

**Charms:** Materialize, Blighted Touch, \*Drain Gnosis

**\*Drain Gnosis:** The Rider makes an opposed Test, using its Willpower against its target's permanent Gnosis score. If the Rider wins, it drains one Gnosis Trait and increases its Essence by one. If the victim wins or ties, the Rider remains attached but drains no Gnosis that turn. The victim may attempt a Rage Test each turn to detach the Rider from her body.

### Rorqual

Rorqual belong to the group of creatures known as Kami — spirits of Gaia bound inside living creatures. Taking the form of whales or dolphins, Rorquals exist to carry Gnosis from the Grottos of Sea to the Rokea. Rorquals also carry Sea's blessing to the merfolk in the form of Glamour. Only a few of the many cetaceans in the oceans are Rorqual. Each of these "living caerns" bears a particular type of energy depending on the form it takes and its innate temperament. Although Rokea may acquire Gnosis from any kind of Rorqual, they find it more difficult to do so from creatures used to supplying the merfolk with Glamour.

The following list of Rorqual provides descriptions of each kind of creature, as well as its general attitude toward Rokea and whether or not it prefers to supply Gnosis to Rokea or Glamour to the fae of the sea. To acquire Gnosis from a Rorqual, a Rokea must make a Social Test against a number of Traits listed in the descriptions below (retest *Primal-Urge*) as well as the maximum amount of Gnosis a particular Rorqual may carry at any given time.

### Blue Whale

Blue whales are one of the largest living creatures in existence. Though gentle, blue whales are fearless. They can carry enough Gnosis to supply an entire slew with energy for months or to power an entire mer city with Glamour, or possibly even both at once. Blue whales have no preference as to whether they give their Gnosis to Rokea or merfolk but they must be approached respectfully by whoever seeks their gift.

**Difficulty:** Seven Traits for all Rokea

**Maximum Gnosis:** Unknown

## Narwhal

One of Unicorn's brood of Umbral spirits, the graceful and beautiful narwhal rarely appears to Rokea, preferring to swim in colder waters than the Rokea generally favor. Nevertheless, Rorqual in narwhal form rarely carry Glamour, preferring to give their Gnosis to Rokea and favoring the curious and daring Darkwaters above other auspices, since they are the weresharks most likely to encounter narwhal.

**Difficulty:** Six Traits for Darkwaters, seven Traits for other Rokea

**Maximum Gnosis:** 20 Traits

## Humpback Whale

Known for their hauntingly beautiful songs, humpback Rorqual tend to carry energy in the form of Glamour for merfolk. They sometimes make exceptions when they pass through an area inhabited by many Rokea. Any weresharks who wish to obtain Gnosis from these Rorqual, however, should have an exciting tale ready to share with the humpback.

**Difficulty:** Seven Traits, or six Traits with a good enough story

**Maximum Gnosis:** 50 Traits

## White Whale

White whales usually provide merfolk with the energy they need rather than supply Gnosis to Rokea. Rokea seek them out occasionally, however, because white whales can serve as liaisons and interpreters between the weresharks and the merfolk. Though each species usually gives the other a wide berth, recent events in the oceans have made contact between them advisable.

**Difficulty:** Eight Traits, if the Rorqual happens to be carrying Gnosis at all

**Maximum Gnosis:** Unknown (possibly comparable to a narwhal)

## Killer Whale

Besides other sharks, orcas — or “killer whales” — are the only creatures in the ocean that prey upon sharks. Rokea therefore show some wariness and caution whenever approaching killer whale Rorqual. These mighty Rorqual provide Gnosis to those Rokea who prove themselves mighty warriors, either by chasing down a fast-swimming fish to present as a gift or by engaging in a game of “hunter and prey” with the killer whale Rorqual. Orca Rorqual tend to prefer dealing with Brightwaters.

**Difficulty:** Six Traits for Brightwaters, seven Traits for other auspices

**Maximum Gnosis:** 40

## Sperm Whale

Many Rokea prefer gathering Gnosis from sperm whale Rorqual, primarily because these Kami have a fondness for consuming giant squid and, as such, stand as stalwart enemies of Qyrl. Most sperm whale Rorqual lament the fact

that Qyrl has gained so much power over Sea and wish to do something about it, gladly aiding Rokea who are so inclined with their Gnosis. Their emphasis on the importance of their place in the Sea and the primacy of Sea itself results in sperm whale Rorqual showing a distinct preference for Dimwater Rokea.

**Difficulty:** Six Traits for Dimwaters, seven Traits for others

**Maximum Gnosis:** 70 Traits

### *Dolphins and Porpoises*

Rorqual may be found among any of the many species of dolphins and porpoises. Dolphins carry both Gnosis and Glamour, but their small size limits the amount of either type of energy they can carry at one time. Dolphins are much less aloof than whales and tend to form bonds more readily with individual Rokea or slews. (Rokea characters may take a dolphin Rorqual as either an Ally or a Contact when choosing beginning Backgrounds.)

Though sharks and dolphins are natural enemies, Rokea and dolphin or porpoise Rorqual willingly serve Sea. They therefore do not hold the same enmity toward each other.

**Difficulty:** Five Traits for all Rokea

**Maximum Gnosis:** 5-10 Traits, depending on the Rorqual's size

### *Scuttlers*

These hard-shelled spirits take the forms of creatures such as crabs, lobster, oysters and other shellfish. They serve C'et, the Celestine who corresponds most closely to the Weaver in the Rokean cosmology. Barnacle-spirits serve as C'et's spies, attaching themselves to ships and reporting to C'et about their travels.

#### *Pearl-Keepers: Sample Scuttler*

Resembling giant oysters or clams, these spirits conceal themselves on the ocean floor or within reef or rock formations. Each guards a sacred treasure (in the form of a pearl) concealed within their shells. A Rokea who takes one of these pearls can acquire knowledge not usually known by sea-based weresharks. A Rokea may make a Gnosis Test against seven Traits (retest Enigmas) to gain a Trait in one of Science, Craft or Linguistics for the scene. Using the pearl too frequently, however, inclines the Rokea toward the service of C'et, evidenced by a reluctance to destroy technology or an increased difficulty in shapeshifting. The Storyteller should decide how often is too often and begin informing the character of her changing feelings.

Rage 3, Gnosis 8, Willpower 5, Essence 16

**Charms:** Reform, Realm Sense, Armor