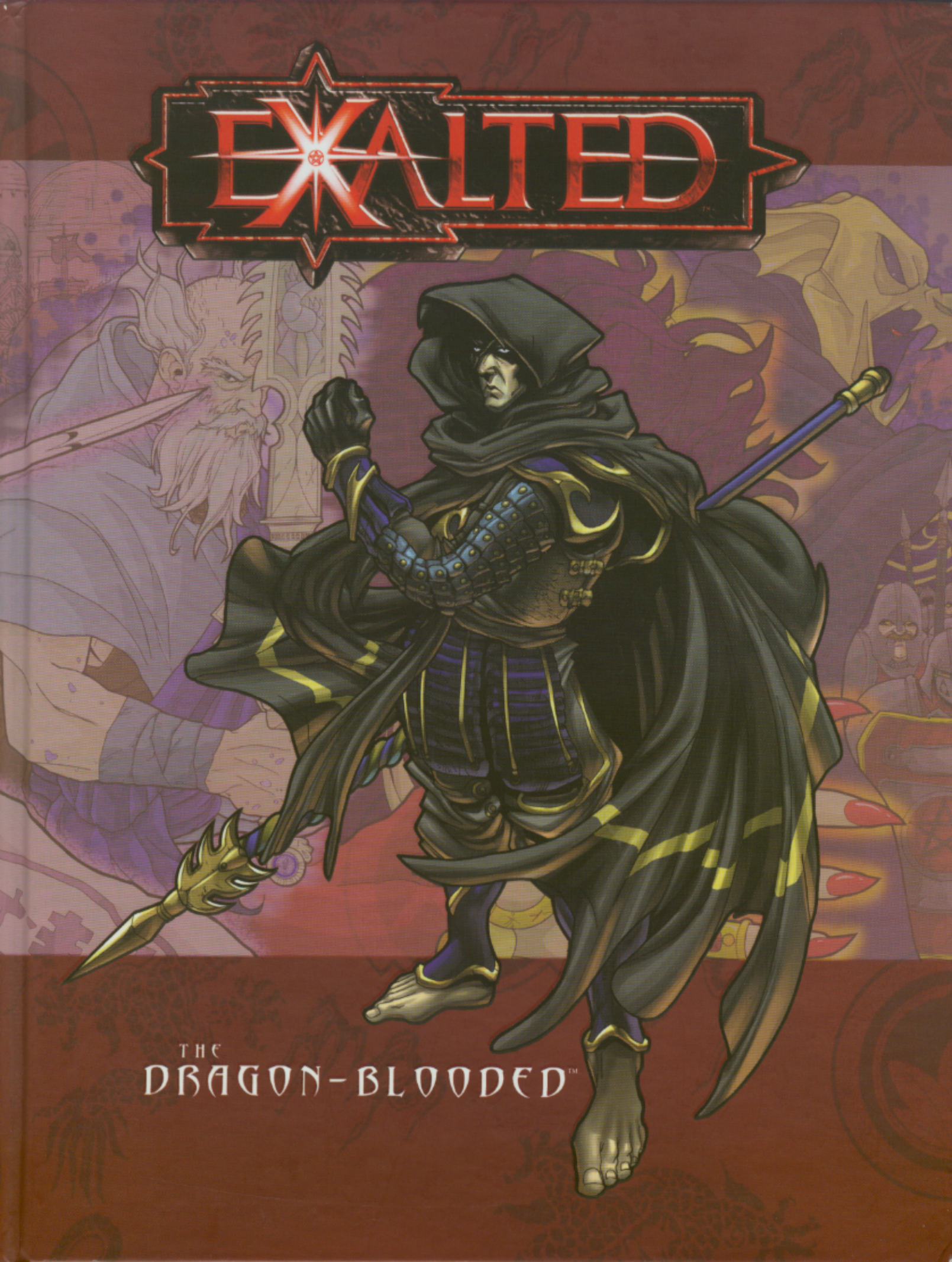
# EXALTED



## THE DRAGON-BLOODED™


END
OF THE TEST

The sea is vast, uncaring, pure and cruel. It is the greatest tomb in Creation and, also, its greatest highway. The water that washed the thousands of bodies onto the beach at Sharktooth also carried the ships that made civilization possible. Tepet Ejava stared at the water with weary eyes, striving in her tired heart to be like the ocean — endlessly enduring, endlessly uncaring. Her arm was in agony from the bone-deep wound in her shoulder. It would have felled and perhaps killed an unExalted, but it was simply one more agony in a life full of pain to the Roseblack. She bore the injury and the sting of the surgeon's needle as he stitched the wound closed without flinching or complaint. The unExalted medic was amazed — but not unduly. He had tended to the wounds of the Princes of the Earth before, and rarely did they cry out in pain.

The surgeon finished attending to Ejava's injury and hurried off. There were others who needed aid — even other Dragon-Blooded. The battle for Sharktooth had been hard fought. The Roseblack barely noticed him go. She sat on a gnarled driftwood log, alone save for her bodyguards, and stared at the line where the surf met the sand, and the bodies rose and fell on the surge. The tide was out now, and many of those who had died were left high and dry. The corpses lay on the sand amid the cracked and battered hulls of the ships her men had beached and waded ashore from.

The sand beneath the corpses was becoming a solid mass of brown and darkening red as the blood flowing into it slowly congealed. The air above the waterline was thick with gulls, and they dove down to feed on the corpses and on the crabs that had come up at the scent of blood in the water, searching for carrion. Grave details — prisoners supervised by the walking wounded — were already pulling the bodies out of the surf. They had to be burned, and the ashes buried, or else, the coastline would be thick with hungry ghosts before the next new moon. Roseblack watched the men gather up the dead, and some distant part of her admired the fighting force she had built. There was still fighting in Sharktooth, and yet, her men were already policing the battlefield. There didn't seem to be any sign of looting or burning. Her troops were as disciplined as any of the regular legions, at least any of the legions still extant today.

Later, she knew, the prisoners would dig their own graves and then pull out a lot to determine their fate. One in ten would draw a black lot and have his throat cut. For the rest, the grave digging was intended as an object lesson. The survivors would be tattooed on their foreheads, marking them as pirates, and then sold into slavery. If caught again, they would be executed. The Roseblack would have rather put the whole lot of them to the sword, but the campaign's war chest was far from bulging — the army needed the money it would receive from the sale of the slaves to make its payroll.

The stink of the ocean and the stink of burning flesh and the stink of blood and shit and fear all mixed in the air over the beach. The stench was an undertone to every perception, and when the breeze stopped, it was a suffocating blanket. Inland, pillars of smoke reached up to the heavens like prayer offerings to the Dragons, but the wind tore them apart long before they reached the sky. It was just as well — death and battle were poor offerings, and battle on a still day often brought bad luck because of the pyres. The Roseblack's body breathed it in, but her spirit was elsewhere. Her heart swam through the ocean depths, cold, certain and alone. It soared through the ice of the upper air, unweeping and perfect in its chill aerie.

The meditation slipped away, and her eyes once more saw the gulls tearing at the flesh of the dead and understood the sight. She turned to one of her bodyguards, "Call the officers. I want to have a staff meeting in an hour."

The man nodded, "Where will the meeting be?"

Tepet Ejava looked around her and up at the rose-and-thunderbolt banner that fluttered in the ocean breeze, marking the commander's location. "Send them here. It's impossible to miss, and I like the sound of the surf."

The bodyguard followed Ejava's eyes to the water, where the bodies and the blood slopped to and fro in the swell. He swallowed nervously and nodded. "I'll get them, general."

"See that you do."

* * * * *

A little over an hour later, the Roseblack looked over her subordinates, and they fell into silence as her posture changed to one of business. The meeting started late, as she had known it would. Some of the officers were leading troops when the order for the meeting arrived, and it had taken them time to extricate themselves from command.

Closest to her were Sextes and Tatara, two younger relatives from what had been lesser branches of her family until most of the senior Tepet offspring had died fighting the Bull of the North. They had been junior officers in other legions before the Tepet-sponsored troops were destroyed in the North, part of an insurance policy against just such disasters. Now that they were the next generation of leaders, the house elders wanted them made familiar with command and kept away from assassins while the house rebuilt its legions. Normally, there would have been an alliance or a compromise, but the Roseblack's expedition was an opportunity to blood them without worrying about the possibility of a superior officer deliberately sacrificing them or having them executed.

Sextes had been handling logistics for the expedition, and he'd come from further down the beach, where the support boats had been unloading. He was winded, and his armor dripped with water. The young Aspect of Earth had clearly been helping with the unloading himself — once a Tepet, always a Tepet. Roseblack made a note to talk to Sextes to make certain he understood that sometimes leading by example was simply inefficient. Tatara, his more impetuous cousin, was smeared with blood. She commanded an assault unit that had landed up the coast several day ago and filtered in behind the pirates to strike them from the rear during battle. She was an excellent unit commander but a mediocre staff officer. Not for the first time, Roseblack wished that she could combine the two of them together to get one really excellent commander.

The other two Exalts were senior officers in the Red Piss Legion. Cathak Anano was its commander, and Bhutro Malala its executive officer. Anano had been one of his house's most promising leaders until he let a penchant for rape get the better of him. He'd kept it confined to the lower classes or covered up with blackmail until he had made the mistake of buggering a Cynis Exalt while drunk at a party. She'd been willing to talk about the matter, and the resulting scandal was made all the worse because Anano refused a dignified suicide or flight into exile. Only his military abilities had allowed old man Cathak to intercede with his mother. Instead of a painful show trial followed by an execution, Anano had received a permanent posting to the Vermilion Legion. Ejava hated him, not because of his personal habits, but because working with him in the field had convinced her he was a sadistic, domineering martinet with inadequate self-discipline. Still, his men worshiped him, and he had never lost a battle.

Bhutro Malala was another story altogether. His dossier said that he was born to a low patrician family, and he claimed to be the unacknowledged by-blow of a Dynastic liaison. He had Exalted in a shabby primary school and been sponsored into a prominent patrician military academy by an anonymous patron. It was a

prominent school as patrician institutes went, with some Dragon-Blooded instructors and even a few washout Exalted students struggling to make good their family names. Presumably, the instructors there had taught Malala something about Charms, and he'd gotten a junior commission into the legions, then risen through the ranks, transferring to the Red-Piss for the prestige. Malala alleged he was trying to marry well and had made a few polite gestures in Roseblack's direction. Both Malala and Anano were soot stained, their armor bloody and their faces haggard with fatigue. Both led from the front in the Tepet style — the men of the Vermilion Legion accepted no other sort of commander.

Ejava assumed Malala was a spy. Relatives reported his history checked out as far as secondary school, which meant he was probably a House Iselsi spy in very deep cover under the orders of the Scarlet Throne. Not even the largest of the Great Houses could cut young Exalts from the family structure just to use them as agents. He was no danger, unless someone bought the house's loyalty or he decided to do the Empress' will of his own accord. It wouldn't be the first time unrequited love for the Empress made an Exalt do something stupid for the sake of the Scarlet Throne.

The mortals were a different matter — not family. One was Ifan the Wolf, who led the Red Wolf Legion, a ragtag but effective force, mainly drawn from criminals and runaway serfs from the Lap. It had an ongoing relationship with the Realm, and the legion's soldiers had been used as pirate hunters and bandit chasers before with some success. Ifan himself was a giant bear of a Northerner who spent most of his time peeling — probably the origin of his unit name, though she'd never asked. Ifan was ugly and effective, and the way he held himself made the Roseblack certain he'd had a little more training than his savage barbarian act implied. Ifan had taken the longest to arrive at the meeting — he'd been leading his men in burning down a wooden building that sheltered resistance. The Roseblack had been afraid he'd miss the meeting, but hall burning was a sport the Northerners were familiar with, and it hadn't taken long.

The other mortal was Aniaxos, who led the Delzahn Volunteers, a unit of nobles from the Delzahn Horde. Aniaxos was only the latest commander of a mercenary unit the Tri-Khan encouraged and subsidized, both to further his foreign policy goals and to keep the warriors of the Horde battle-focused. Despite their heathen worship, the Delzahn also paid homage to the Immaculate Dragons, and they idolized the Realm's martial character. Normally, members of the Delzahn Horde were the Roseblack's skirmishers, but today, they had acted as a second wave, landing shortly after the first to act either as a fire brigade or as security forces, depending on how the battle went. The Delzahn were far more disciplined than the Vermilion Legion troopers or their Red Wolf counterparts, and most of them saw no need for personal wealth. Aniaxos looked as prim and composed as usual and had her note tablet and reports with her.

As the Vermilion and Red Wolf troops pushed the pirates out of the settlement, the Delzahn had secured the buildings and the pirates' ships and stores. The army needed the supplies, and the loot from the sack would be shared out among the men, not given to the fastest thieves or destroyed by the units' resident vandals.

Missing was Abiri, the fugitive from the Lap, half pirate himself, who had managed the operation's logistical base. He'd taken the second wave in, and his ship

had struck a rock and sunk almost instantly. There were no survivors reported. It was a terrible end for a salt-swamp rat like Abiri, but that was war.

* * * * *

Ejava looked up at the officers who surrounded her. This moment was the determining one. If things went badly here, there would be violence. Alerted by her tension, the other officers likewise readied themselves. Roseblack reached her ungauntleted hand into her oiled leather pouch and touched the white silk letter, folded into a square — the standard letterhead of the Dynasty. The silk was unmarked, and although it had been delivered in a dispatch pouch with the rest of the diplomatic mail to the expeditionary force, it wasn't government correspondence. It was a missive from someone in the Thousand Scales, written in one of House Teper's inner ciphers. Doubtless, the letter had been slipped into the pouch by a cousin through a complicated exchange of jade and favors — it wasn't cheap to buy the imperial diplomatic post.

The letter was received by Roseblack just before the expedition departed. After deciphering it, Ejava found her brow wet with cold sweat. Its contents were succinct and terrifying. *There is a movement in the Deliberative to have you recalled. If you are recalled, I suggest you avoid a return to the Blessed Isle under any pretext. You may be arrested and executed if you come to the capital without your troops.* It was unsigned, and the writing was the bland, unreadably perfect brushwork of a professional scribe.

She knew then what a sharp point matters had arrived at — detention under the pretext of state security followed by judicial murder, doubtless under the charge that she had been planning a mutiny. The judges would see "secret evidence" of her guilt, and they would find her guilty as charged — all because her victories pointed out that she was a dangerously competent commander. Maybe it was the Cathaks, or maybe it was Mnemon's hand. Anybody who had profited from the loss of the Teper legions had an interest is seeing her dead. Ejava put these thoughts aside and studied the faces of her staff. It was, she reflected as she looked across her subordinates, the portrait of a dying empire.

This was the ruin of an empire, and she could tolerate it no longer. House fought house while the tributaries pulled away and the Realm fell to pieces — rotted from the inside by hate and ambition. It couldn't go on, or soon, there would be no future.

She needed to start a war, and she needed to start one quickly. Any pretext would do — hopefully, the staff would be able to develop one that didn't kill too many civilians. The local economies had already taken enough punishment without another massacre. Someday soon, the Roseblack would return to the Imperial City, and she would bring her troops with her.

The Roseblack gathered her breath and calmed herself. The seconds ticked by, and her subordinates watched, waiting for the announcement. Finally, Ejava cleared her throat and said, "Thank you all for coming on such short notice. We're about to commit treason, so if any of you have a problem with that, now's the time to speak up."

The faces of her generals registered no objections, and so, the Roseblack began to outline her plan.

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

PRINTED IN CANADA




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Gardens, Nagezzer reflected as he trimmed his roses, were complex creatures. They were like societies — sturdy, yet vulnerable. Some things they could stand up to. Even if a blight wiped out many of the plants, it would only be certain sorts of plant that died. Even if pests ate at the roots, the pests would eat only specific flowers. But certain threats — fire, drought, locust — they would strip the garden bare and leave only a desert.

The man his compatriots called "the Slug" finished tending to his garden and crossed the vast lawn of his Manse with his characteristic limping waddle. Many mocked him for his obesity, forgetting that he had been crippled in a fight with a rampaging Little God as a young officer. Though he was not able to run, Nagezzer had never ceased the other components of his training. When his bulk reached the closest entrance of the Manse almost 100 yards away, his breathing was the same slow, calm speed as when he had been gently shaping the bushes of his garden.

It was a busy day today for Nagezzer. A new shipment of bright morning had come in from the Scavenger Lands. The better grades were destined for uncut sale to the sorcerers of the Realm, who found the mildly addictive substance quite useful in their work. The lower grades of the mixture would be cut and sold to the patricians already lining up for their little taste of enlightenment.

Nagezzer took a long and agonizing walk, not to the treasury where the drugs were stored, but to his planning room. Others would have used a cane or had servants carry them on a palanquin, but Nagezzer insisted that he make the walks himself. The pain, he felt, was a constant reminder to him that nothing in life came without cost. Today was not only the day for new drug shipments, it was also the day for reports from Nagezzer's new protectorates.

Three years ago, seven prominent satraps whose military garrisons had been disbanded or withdrawn had been offered an arrangement. If they provided some mercantile concessions, they could have access to a force of Nexus or Chiaroscuran mercenaries that, while not equal to the legions now withdrawn, would be enough to maintain the borders and keep civil order. Five had accepted.

The matter was handled with the utmost discretion, of course. Nagezzer had been concealing the profits of his operations for many years and had no desire for the Treasury to come sniffing around searching for where the money to pay the mercenaries had come from. More importantly, the last thing Nagezzer needed was to be seen by his house or by the Great Houses as a whole as a dark horse contender for the throne. The Dynasts would never accept a cripple as their leader and would have destroyed him out-of-hand for his impertinence. Nagezzer did not hate them for this prejudice, for he shared their views, being one of them. What was important was that if they destroyed him, the empire as a whole would suffer, and that was a thought Nagezzer could not bear.

For, cripple though he might be, Nagezzer was still able to contribute to the good of the Realm. While the leaders of the Dynasty struggled for power, he would keep some of the most valuable satrapies in line. He did not do it out of expectation of profit, but from a sense of obligation. The Realm was not about the individual, but about the Dragon-Blooded as a people, and he would not allow the entirely necessary struggle for power in the wake of the Empress' disappearance destroy his people.

His planning room was a bustle of activity. On a pair of large tables, maps of the satrapies he protected lay spread out, with figures representing his troops here and there, often opposed by figures representing barbarians or neighboring kingdoms. Young men queued up to present Nagezzer with reports, with data, with news from his many fronts. For a little while, just a few hours, Nagezzer forgot his bulk and his crippled leg. He was an officer again, battling for the safety of the empire. It was the greatest campaign of his career and one he would do anything to win.

# INTRODUCTION

*The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus it has ever been.*
— Luo Guanzhong, *Three Kingdoms*

The Realm is the jewel at the center of the world. The queens and princes of Creation bend their heads to the might of the Dragon-Blooded host. There is nowhere the traders and armies of the Realm do not travel, and there is no lord who can count himself safe from the wrath of the children of the Elemental Dragons. As rulers and masters of the world, the Dragon-Blooded brought culture, safety and commerce to the four corners of Creation, paving the way for a world that, if it does not match the glory of the First Age, still allows for prosperity and hope. They are heroes who have sacrificed much to defend Creation, to shore up the petty states surrounding the Inner Sea, to preach the good news of the Immaculate Philosophy and to reclaim the lost artifacts of the First Age that they might make the world a better place again. The Dragon-Blooded alone cling to the culture and sophistication of the First Age, preserving the vanished glory of that lost time against the tides of history.

With its ageless sorcerer-queen and its arsenal of First Age weapons, the empire of the Dragon-Blooded was, for centuries, an invincible colossus. Now, with the Empress gone, the juggernaut of empire seems poised to tear itself apart. The Scarlet Empress' long years of divide and rule policy have left her empire crippled in face of her disappearance. At all places, the Great Houses struggle for control of the Realm, while the ship of state founders. Enemies loom on every side, yet the Realm's armies are a quarter of the size they were but five years ago. The empire stumbles toward civil war, and responses to threats are blunted by inter-house rivalry and the unwillingness of any of the Great Houses to have their strongest forces across the Inner Sea and a month or more away from the capitol should civil war break out.

Into this chaos are thrust the players' characters, Dragon-Blooded recently graduated from secondary school. They are the doers and agents of their houses, pursuing new ventures where the house elders may not have looked and serving the houses' interest as their relatives order them. The world they have grown up in the arms of is tearing itself apart. All around them, the Great Houses are devouring the empire to fuel their rivalry, and though the elders say they are united against the enemies of the Realm, they squabble like children and cost the empire satrapies through indecision and treachery.

How do these Exalts, raised with the Princedom of the Earth as their birthright, react to this time of tumult? Do they seek to further their family and house or the oft-forgotten greater good of the empire? Do they cross swords with their oath-sworn brothers at the behest of warring families, or do they cling to the ideals of an empire that have come to seem increasingly false? Will those who stay seek reform or revolution? Will they seek to further their cause through politics, through the power of the Philosophy or through military might? Will those who turn against the Realm linger on the shores of the Blessed Isle, or will they flee into the Scavenger Lands, to join up with the forces of Lookshy or other outcaste groups?

All of these conflicts combine to make the Realm a rich setting. Characters have external enemies, in the shape of the various Anathema and the Fair Folk, and internal enemies, in the form of the tensions between the Realm's power-holders. Now the Dragon-Bloods must fulfill their destinies as the greatest warriors the world has ever seen. Further, their loyalties to their friends, to their families and to their empire will all be sorely tested. Each will have to make many terrible choices in the course of the years to come, and their hearts and souls, as well as their sword-arms, will be tested in the balance of crisis. As the world groans through this vast turning point, these heroes will forge legends that will be recounted for a thousand years — or else wiped away in the fire of war and apocalypse.

### This Is Not a Complete Game

Despite its size, **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded** is not a complete game. It is a supplement for White Wolf's **Exalted**, a game in which characters take the roles of Anathema, the demonic enemies of the Realm, who were once, in fact, the sun-blessed rulers of Creation. This book doesn't include descriptions of the game's various Traits, rules on combat or a complete setting. It just has an in-depth treatment of the Realm and rules for creating and playing Dragon-Blooded characters. You'll need to at least have access to a copy of **Exalted** to use this book.

## How to Use This Book

This book contains everything you need to run a game focusing on the Dragon-Blooded or to include a very detailed treatment of the Dragon-Blooded in another **Exalted** game. In structure, it is similar to the main **Exalted** rulebook, except that there are no Systems, Drama or Antagonists chapters. The contents are as follows:

**Introduction:**

The section you're reading now. It contains a statement of the book's overall character and a short glossary.

**Chapter One: Setting**

This chapter details the Realm, primarily from the perspective of the Dynasty. It describes the history of the Realm, the shape of its government and the details of some of its prominent prefectures.

**Chapter Two: The Dragon-Blooded**

This chapter is companion material to Chapter One, examining Dynastic culture and the Great Houses and, also, the Dragon-Blooded schooling process and their attitudes toward magicians.

**Chapter Three: Character Creation**

This chapter contains the rules for creating Dragon-Blooded characters for use in an **Exalted** game. Though they are mechanically compatible with the Solar Exalted, Dragon-Blooded characters are not balanced with their Solar counterparts. Storytellers should think about the matter carefully before trying mixed-Exalt games.

**Chapter Four: Traits**

This chapter describes the specialized Traits used in Dragon-Blooded character creation. Traits detailed in the **Exalted** book are not discussed here. The chapter also contains the few mechanical systems unique to this book.

**Chapter Five: Charms**

This chapter details the elemental Charms commonly used by the Dragon-Blooded.

**Chapter Six: Martial Arts**

This chapter discusses the other Charms available to the Dragon-Blooded, the five Dragon Styles of the Immaculate Order. These powerful martial arts are equal to those practiced by the Celestial Exalted, and though they are difficult to master and require great spiritual power to execute, they are attacks of devastating power.

**Chapter Seven: Storytelling**

The final chapter of the book discusses the special needs of storytelling a Dragon-Blooded game.

## Lexicon

Most of the terminology in this book was introduced in the **Exalted** book, and we have not reproduced that book's glossary in full. The following entries are either altered to reflect the Dragon-Blooded point of view or specialized vocabulary relevant to the Dragon-Blooded.

**The All-Seeing Eye:** The imperial secret police, who guard the throne against sedition, corruption and treason. The All-Seeing Eye employs countless mortal and *Dragon-Blooded* agents recruited from *the Thousand Scales*, but its core are spies and assassins of both the Bronze Sidereal faction and House Iselsi.

**The Blessed Isle:** The island at the center of Creation, which *the Scarlet Empress* governs directly. This isle is traditionally the center of the world — it was the seat of the Solar Deliberative in the days before the Usurpation and of the Shogunate in the days before the Contagion.

**The Cloister of Wisdom:** The *secondary school* oriented toward preparing students for service in the Immaculate Order.

**Dominion:** A very large *prefecture* created from the personal lands of the Shogun in the post-Contagion era. Managing the dominions is a very important task. There are two dominions, Arjuf and Lord's Crossing. Juche Prefecture is almost a dominion and is considered of equivalent stature.

**Dragon-Blooded:** Spiritually advanced humans Exalted into power by the blood and might of the Five Elemental Dragons. The Dragon-Blooded are creatures of great mystical refinement and are permitted to pray outside of holy days and to interact with gods and ghosts. They are the natural-born rulers of Creation.

**The Dynasty:** The *Great Houses* and their immediately subordinate lines together comprise the Dynasty, the ruling elite of *the Realm*. *Dragon-Blooded* born outside the Dynasty are either adopted or married into its ranks, placed into the legions or the Immaculate Order, or branded outcastes.

**Great House:** A line of *Dragon-Blooded*, generally descended from *the Scarlet Empress*, that has special legal status in *the Realm*. The Great Houses receive special tax breaks, provide the Realm's most important officers and officials, lease land at favorable rates from the Throne and may keep small numbers of armed troops. The Great Houses were created by imperial decree, usually for political reasons. There are currently 11 Great Houses, but there are others that have risen and fallen before the present day.

**The Heptagram:** A *secondary school* that teaches the secrets of magic and First Age lore to the young sorcerer-savants of *the Realm*.

**The Host of the Dragon-Blooded:** A more formal term for *the Dynasty*.

**The House of Bells:** A *secondary school* that prepares young officers for service in the legions.

**Imperial Service:** The proper name for the imperial bureaucracy, more commonly called *the Thousand Scales*.

**Itinerant:** A wandering Immaculate with special authority to look into matters of interest to the faith. Similar to the imperial *magistrates*.

**Lease:** *The Scarlet Empress* owns all the real estate on *the Blessed Isle*, and all land deals are trading in negotiable land-lease agreements issued by the state. Most peasants on the Blessed Isle pay land-lease fees as their primary tax, and the *Great Houses* always have various leases up for renewal that the Empress can change the terms of as a form of leverage.

**Magistrate:** Plenipotentiary officials who speak with the voice of *the Scarlet Empress* and act with her authority. The magistrates investigate corruption and treason as well as serious criminal cases, and there is a great degree of competition between them and *the All-Seeing Eye*.

**The Northern Isles:** The two small isles to the northwest of *the Blessed Isle*. These islands are "part" of the Blessed Isle and are governed by prefectural rather than satrapial methods.

**Prefect:** The appointee who runs a *prefecture*. Prefects are rarely *Dragon-Blooded* because the job isn't seen as challenging enough to merit the skills of a Prince of the Earth.

**Prefecture:** *The Blessed Isle*'s equivalent of a *satrapy*, governed by a *prefect*. Prefectures were generally much more fairly administered than satrapies. Their taxes were much more reasonable, and the many faces of the imperial bureaucracy acted as a check on local power and guaranteed the peasantry certain rights and protections. Without *the Scarlet Empress* to check the growth of house power, many prefectural administrations have begun to favor large leaseholders and to burden the peasants with oppressive taxes.

**Primary School:** A school with a general focus attended by Dynasts and patricians between the ages of 9 and 14. Before the age of nine, children are tutored in the home. After they finish primary school, most Exalts go on to one of *the Realm*'s four most prominent *secondary schools*, while patricians either begin training with their families for the role they will fill in the family or attend a less prestigious secondary school to continue their education. Most *Dragon-Blooded* Exalt during their time in primary school.

**The Realm:** The empire of the Dragon-Blooded. The *Dragon-Blooded* see themselves as the direct heirs

to the First Age and forbid the use of the terms "First Realm" and "Old Realm."

**Satrap:** A representative of imperial power in a tributary state, almost always one of *the Dragon-Blooded*. The satrap is assisted by a staff that might be only a half-dozen imperial bureaucrats or that can include several hundred unExalted imperial citizens, thousands of local employees and dozens of *Dragon-Blooded*. Satraps are powerful individuals, often commanding private armies and with incredible influence on local government.

**Satrapy:** A tributary state or, sometimes, a number of very small states lumped together for administrative convenience. These are the building blocks of the imperial system. Each satrapy is ruled by whoever the local ruler is — *the Realm* is not concerned with the administration of day-to-day affairs among its tributaries. The *satrap* is instead present to look after imperial political and commercial interests and to oversee tribute payments.

**The Scarlet Empress:** The queen of the *Dragon-Blooded*, who ruled from *the Realm*'s rebirth to her disappearance five years ago.

**Secondary School:** A more advanced academy than a *primary school*. Most Dynastic *Dragon-Blooded* attend one of *the Realm*'s four prominent secondary schools, while patricians attend less-prominent institutions.

**The Spiral Academy:** A *secondary school* devoted to teaching students the skills necessary for service in *the Thousand Scales*.

**The Thousand Mazy Paths:** *The Scarlet Empress*' strategy of divide-and-rule governance, pitting the imperial government against itself to prevent any challenges to her power from arising.

**The Thousand Scales:** The bureaucracy that governs *the Realm* and manages the tributary states. The staff of the Scales is primarily patrician, but most auditors and senior decision makers are *Dragon-Blooded*.

**Tribute:** In addition to oaths of subjection and loyalty, *the Scarlet Empress* required tribute from the Threshold states that paid her homage, payable in talents (man-weights) of gold, silver or jade. The *Great Houses* actually collect the tribute as part of a tax-farming system, and the Great House that currently has the rights to the *satrapy* appoints the *satrap*. This means satraps are serving two masters, *the Realm* and their house. It was the business of *the magistrates* and *the All-Seeing Eye* to see that the house wasn't favored at the expense of the imperial coffers.

## Suggested Resources

While the resources suggested in the main book are obviously still applicable to Dragon-Blooded games, there are also other books that are specifically useful to games focusing around the Terrestrial Exalted. While few of these share **Exalted**'s highly spiritual fantasy world, all of them provide good insights into the culture and philosophy of the Realm and its self-aggrandizing rulers.

*The Domination*. S.M. Sterling. Baen Books. New York, NY. ISBN 0671-57794-8.

An alternate history featuring a successful expansionist, slave-taking white state in the south of Africa, these excellent books are so grim as to verge on unreadable. This series provided much of the inspiration for the culture of the Dragon-Blooded.

*The General, Book I: The Forge*. S.M. Sterling and David Drake. Bean Books. New York, NY. ISBN 0671-72037-6.

Though properly a science fiction novel, this book is an excellent look at running and serving in an army in the pre-modern era. There are more books in the series, but the first is the best. A must for campaigns involving the legions.

*Three Kingdoms*. Luo Guanzhong. Foreign Language Press. Beijing, China. ISBN 7-119-00590-1

One of the all-time great epics, this book tells of the fall of the Han Dynasty after the Yellow Turban rebellion and the beginning of the Three Kingdoms period. While extremely long, this book should prove of great interest to Storytellers and players of civil war games.

*The Swordswoman*. Jessica Amanda Salmonson. Tor Books. New York, NY.

A young woman is hurled across worlds into a feudal Asian society she has fantasized about for years. An ugly and well-written book that provides an excellent illustration of the Realm.


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The barbarians fell back in disarray down the stone-strewn valley, their wolf-skin cloaks tattered and bloody. Many had wolves' features, either from the Anathema's blood that flowed in their veins or from the influence of the Wyld — it hardly mattered how they had become subhuman. Horns sounded, low and flat, and the legion opened ranks so that the Linowan skirmishers could race through the line. Slings and arrows pursued the wolf-tribe warriors as they fell back to reform around their standards.

Avaku walked the lines, making sure his men were in proper array. Veterans hauled the dead away by their heels, and senior sergeants tapped men on the shoulder to pull them out of the line. They were the seriously injured — most of them were too charged up from the battle to even realize they were wounded. They'd have fought on in shock, weaker and weaker, until they passed out and died. The sergeants sent them to the surgeons to bleed out or live as the case might be. Either way, they wouldn't fall over in the middle of the engagement and ruin the unit's dressage.

Avaku was anxious. The legion had been understrength before the assault. Too many good men were deserting or jumping ship into the private security troops of the houses. After the last two tries by the barbarians, the ranks were thinner still. The men were holding together, but they didn't trust their new officers, and many of the senior noncoms were fresh promotions to replace soldier who had left for house or mercenary service. The formations were holding tight for now, but another serious press and the risk of a rout would be real.

There was a flurry of activity down the valley, and the young officer tensed as he saw the tremendous shapes of buck-ogres moving forward. The great forest monsters had held back until now, guarding their lord, Sleeves of War, the Anathema leader of their army. Though he was lost amid the giant beasts, there was no doubt that the shapechanging demon was the heart of the barbarian threat, and his standard came with him. The last two attacks had been demonstrations, tests to see if the legion could stand against the horde. It had. Now came the main event. Barbarians drifted forward in clumps and warbands with their army's standard held high.

There was a rattling of drums, an expected one, calling the Exalted officers of the legion to the unit standard. Avaku slapped his unExalted executive officer on the back with far more confidence than he felt and moved off to join the battlegroup at the banner. This was how the legions fought such foes, the strength of the Dragon-Blooded against the sorcerous might of their foes in a direct contest. There was no need to waste the lives of their soldiers against foes mere mortals could not hope to best.

Avaku nodded to the commanding general and took his place in the cluster of Dragon-Blooded troopers. His anima flared to life as he strengthened himself for battle. Reaching out to touch and clap his comrades on the back, he shared his strength with them, and they with him. This was the might of the Dragon-Blooded host; together, they were far stronger than as individuals.

The lines parted for the Exalted as they walked forward, passing the skirmishers racing back to shelter behind the heavy infantry. Both the legionaries and the barbarians were drifting back from the upcoming fight, stepping away from the show of deadly power that was certain to erupt. The Dragon-Blooded were a deadly vortex of elemental power, striding forward to meet the enemies of the Realm and of civilization.

The buck-ogres bellowed challenges from both their throats and lumbered forward, Sleeves of War's thin little-girl body visible among them, a lithe flicker of naked skin, tattoo and scar. It was a tribute to her control over them that they didn't charge directly into combat, but maintained formation. Both groups advanced, their respective armies trailing slightly behind them, until Sleeves of War's first glittering silver arrowhead fired from amidst the buck-ogres announced that the battle was joined.

# CHAPTER ONE
# SETTING

## History and the Empress

Any history of the empire of the Dragon-Blooded is, by definition, a history of its Empress. She created it from the smoldering ashes of the Contagion, sustained it when it was weak and guided it throughout its history. It has always reflected her will and her vision, and it has always been the instrument by which she has imposed both upon the world. While there is no formal cult of personality within the Realm, there really doesn't need to be one. Any inhabitant of the lands under her sway, from the haughtiest Dragon-Blood to the lowliest slave, knows that, on a fundamental level, the Empress and her empire are one and the same.

## The Making of an Empress

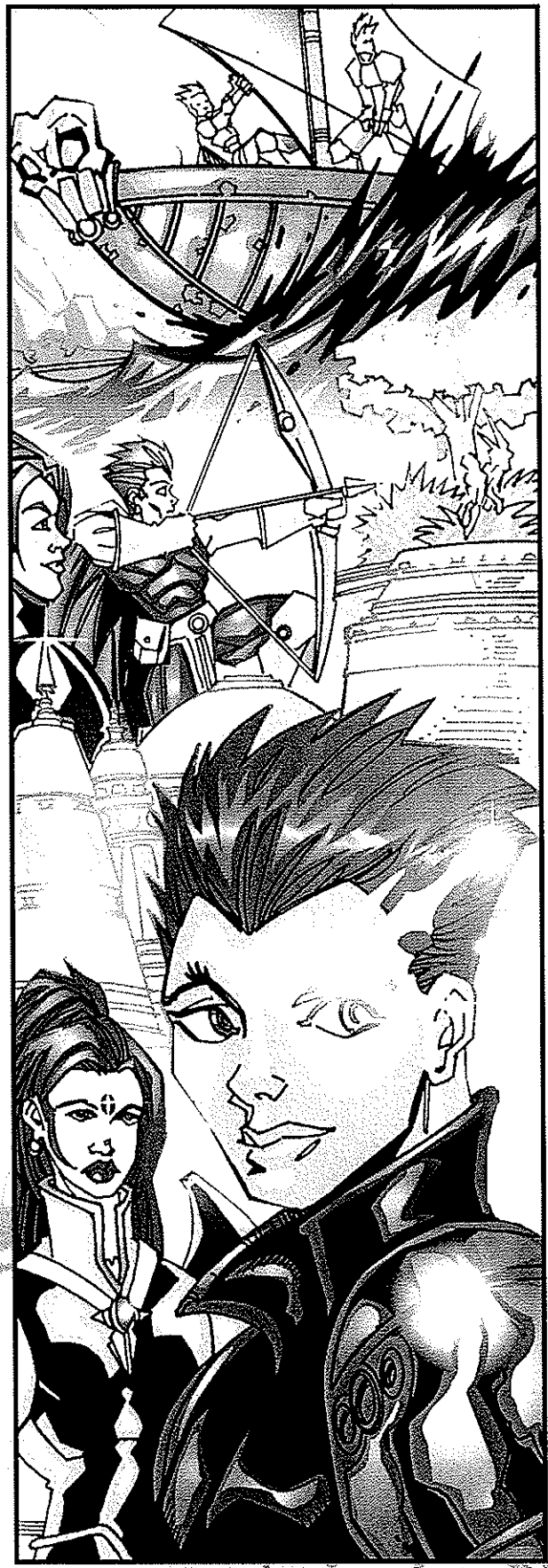
Every schoolchild of the Realm — indeed, much of Creation — knows how the Scarlet Empress came to her throne. The tale has been told and retold for seven and a half centuries, increasingly embroidered and spangled with poesy. The surprising thing is that the bulk of the tale as it has been handed down through the generations is, in fact, true.

### Many Flavors of History

The official history of the Realm — the one that states that the Empress overthrew the Fair Folk, put down the Contagion and assumed command of the empire in a single day — is pure fiction. It is a useful fiction, however, serving to unify the populace of the Realm behind a common cultural myth, a presumed shared heritage and an iconic and all-powerful figure who personifies their land.

The real history is, of course, somewhat stickier. It is full of delays and hesitations, moments when the Empress had no desire to seize power or she stood, paralyzed, at the crossroads of destiny. It is a tale of betrayal and ambition, of rebellions whose very names have been wiped from the official histories of the Realm to reinforce the notion of the Empress' omniscience and of bargains cut under the table to ensure that the Realm might survive.

Only a handful of the Realm's denizens — the now-missing Empress, some of the oldest of Kejak's Bronze faction, a few particularly trusted and well-beloved scribes and Dynasts — know the true tale of empire, and they are compelled by both fear and self-interest to never repeat it.



## The Rallying of the Legions

The Contagion left the surviving legions of the Old Realm worse than decimated. Reduced to a minuscule fraction of their original fighting strength, they nonetheless took to the field with alacrity when the Fair Folk and their barbarian hordes first appeared. The commanders of the various legions took counsel and decided to establish their lines as close to the edges of Creation as possible, the better to deny the Fair Folk subjugated populations from which they could feed and draw strength. As a result, the legions of what would someday be called the Threshold advanced, and the Blessed Isle was emptied of troops to support them. Elaborate defenses were constructed on the Isle itself, but the bulk of the island's fighting soldiers were put in the field as quickly as possible, ferried across the Inner Sea by whatever craft could be put into service.

Unfortunately, the generals' plans required more manpower and organization than the legions had to spare. The defensive lines they'd drawn were too long, their soldiers spread too thin, and the cooperation between formations too perfunctory. The haughty Fair Folk lords punched through the Dragon-Blooded lines in a dozen places. Even the intervention of long-hidden Sidereal Exalted on the legions' behalf proved a temporary stay at best, as draws became retreats and retreats became routs. Soon, the armies of the Dragon-Blooded were tumbling back toward the shores of the Inner Sea in a full panic, while their leaders grimly prepared for what they thought would be a last stand.

## A Solitary Deserter

Among those officers attempting to hold off the inevitable was a young captain of the Ninth Legion of the personal army of the Shogun of the Realm, a woman of impeccable family and some wealth, whose ability to rally her troops in the face of even the most dangerous crisis had earned her several commendations. Fortunate enough to possess well-equipped and well-motivated soldiers, she nevertheless realized the futility of fighting the Fair Folk in the field. Their numbers were too great, their powers too terrifying, and the Dragon-Blooded simply too few.

The key, she became convinced, lay in the relics of the First Age. Legends told of prior efforts by the Fair Folk to gain a foothold in Creation, but always, they were driven back by heroes wielding ancient and terrible powers. From study of ancient texts, she became convinced that these legends were true and concentrated in a single structure, the forbidding Palace of the Anathema, a long-sealed fortress sited at the center of the Shogun's capital city.

Commandeering a boat, she and several of her trusted lieutenants sailed back to the Blessed Isle. In their possession were several tattered books and one ancient map. She believed that these items held the key to locating and activating the defenses the ancients had used against the encroaching Fair Folk in years past. While battles raged

throughout the Threshold, she and her companions sought to unseal the entrances to the ancient Manse. After weeks of frantic attempts to breach its defenses, which proved proof against the mightiest weapons of her age, she managed to open the gates of the Manse and enter.

### The Palace of the Anathema

None living in Creation save perhaps the Scarlet Empress herself know precisely what transpired that day. What is known is simple: That the Empress found and bent to her will the ancient systems and engines that contained within them the might necessary to drive the Fair Folk back beyond the walls of Creation and that, within hours, the armies of the soulless invaders were broken and fleeing.

What is not known is the price that was paid. The woman who would become Empress entered the Palace of the Anathema with four companions. None of the four companions survived. Two were slaughtered by the still-serviceable defenses surrounding the engines of destruction. The third sacrificed his heart's blood upon a hungry stone slab so that the hot blood might awaken and feed the ungentle spirits who tended the venerable defenses. And the last was given, willingly, as a gift by the Empress to the guardian of the site, her soul torn screaming from her broken body as a token of the Empress' deadly earnest. All had been ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the land when they entered the citadel; only the future Empress was left with the terrible burden of survival.

But with the proper gifts made and the engines of destruction humming eagerly once more, the lone young officer took them up with a will. She turned the devices on the Fair Folk hordes, striking at them with all the powers at her command. And on that day, none could say which was louder — the wailing of the Fair Folk as they fled back into the outer dark or the howling, vicious wind, which scoured the flesh from their immortal bones.

## The Year of Seven Tigers

In the hours in the wake of the fury that signaled the end to the Contagion, there was stunned silence. For days, the only sights on battlefields were stunned soldiers keeping a dazed sentry against a possible counterattack and looters half-heartedly stripping the bodies of the dead. Rain poured steadily from the heavens, casting a gray veil across all Creation and driving even the greediest corpse-robber to higher ground. But for a precious handful of days, there was no strife, as the entire world struggled to come to grips with the fact that the Contagion and the Fair Folk invasion were both over — and that an Age had ended and a new one had begun.

Dragon-Blooded commanders found themselves in the field with armies at their back and no Shogun to command them. Some few elected to harry the rear guard of the Fair Folk as they retreated, but they did so half-heartedly. The horrors of the Contagion and what followed were too fresh for them to risk an over-aggressive pursuit.

Certain others began casting about and wondering what to make of the world. Even as the forces of the various Threshold daimyos struggled out of the mire, they were faced with the spectre of a new age of warfare, as the shattered Shogunate made conquest a possibility now that mere survival was no longer an issue.

A handful of the boldest and most ambitious of these generals and daimyos gauged the others' relative strengths and decided that it might be better to work together than against one another. The oldest, Skri Shanash, invited the others to her camp at what is today the Lap, to discuss the future of the lands around the Inner Sea. Quickly, they drew up plans to carve up both the Blessed Isle and the lands of the Threshold, with provinces apportioned to each. Satisfied with the arrangement, at least temporarily, the so-called Seven Tigers returned to their troops and began a systematic war of conquest.

### The Empress' Response

Word of the Seven Tigers' depredations reached the Empress quickly, as refugees from the Threshold streamed onto the Blessed Isle with tales of butchery and rapine. Quickly, a picture of the situation painted itself: armies methodically reducing cities and fortresses, surviving vessels pressed into service as troop transports and the gathering of an invasion force clearly meant for the Isle itself. In coastal cities, defenses built in haste against the Fair Folk were hastily repaired and augmented, and old men and young girls were mustered to man them. Messengers were sent to order the Seven Tigers to desist their actions; the heads of the messengers were returned across the Inner Sea, their mouths stuffed with the silken scrolls they'd carried.

With terrible clarity, the Empress saw her choices. Either turn the weapons she had so recently mastered on those soldiers who once fought alongside her or allow them to overrun the Isle and then turn on one another. And in the forests and the Wyld places, she knew the Fair Folk still lurked, ready to return if they saw weakness.

Reluctantly, she made the only choice she could. Pale streamers of fire struck from the heavens at the encampments of the Seven Tigers. Shapes of water that strode across the waves like men smashed ships at harbor, and screaming winds that left coats of frost on the ground cast down siege towers and froze men solid with a touch. By the time the Empress called a halt, the armies of the Seven Tigers were scattered, and the generals themselves were being led back to the Isle in chains. Met at the harbor by a handful of Dragon-Blooded who had already thrown in their lot with the Empress, they vanished, never to be seen or heard from again. Meanwhile, the laborious task of rounding up the scattered troops of the Dragon-Blooded daimyos and reforging them into legions was begun. A course had been irrevocably set toward empire.

## The Devil's Bargain

In the wake of the Empress' first triumph over her rivals, she was approached by an emissary of Chejop Kejak, leader of the Bronze faction of the Sidereal Exalted. Troubled by the possibility of a recurrence of the Contagion and dismayed by the collapse into depravity of the Dragon-Blooded that had allowed such a calamity to occur, he wished to ensure that such never happened again. The Empress, he judged, was his best hope for achieving this goal.

The Empress, for her part, recognized the precarious nature of her situation. Having seized power, she could never let it go, lest her enemies destroy her. If she used her power indiscriminately to eliminate those who stood against her, she'd simply raise new generations of enemies — or depopulate the Realm of the Dragon-Blooded needed to defend it against further invasions. And while she, personally, was safe from any sane rival so long as she was the only one with access to the defenses of the Realm, she was well aware that very few of her rivals were sane.

Kejak's rough proposition, then, offered a faint glimmer of hope. She returned the emissary with a promise of acceptance... so long as Kejak came to her. At first stunned by her insolence, the Sidereal finally swallowed his pride and journeyed — alone and on foot — to the ancient fortress that housed the Celestials' defenses — and the Empress as well. He knelt before the gates and stayed there, head bowed, for a full day. Impressed by this show of humility, and by the fact that the arrangement was important enough to Kejak that he would humble himself thus, the Empress opened the doors of the Palace to him and bade him enter.

What transpired in that meeting can be pieced together from later events and scraps of correspondence long since destroyed. Kejak, maneuvering skillfully, outlined his problems, what he thought the Empress' problems were and where their interests overlapped. He then proposed a solution: the resurrection of the Realm, under the Empress' guidance. He'd get what he wanted, in the form of a stable central political entity that could impose some kind of social structure on the Dragon-Blooded, and as for the Empress, she'd receive the empire itself.

The Empress' objection to this plan was simple. Officially reestablishing the Realm would, in her opinion, engender a series of bloody civil wars. And while she, with the power of the ancients at her disposal, was certain to win those wars, the price of victory seemed prohibitively high.

To assuage the Empress' fears, Kejak offered her the assistance of the Bronze faction and its most prominent tool, the Immaculate Order, in establishing her reign. He did so on one condition, however. Feeling that a purely secular empire would sooner or later collapse into decadence, he proposed linking the political necessity of empire to the spiritual structure that the Order had already created — one that would do much to support a Terrestrial Exalted on the throne. The doctrine of the Immaculate faith was already in place, namely, that the Dragon-Blooded themselves were essentially divine and that their word was law. Using this philosophy to explicitly support the new Realm (as it had implicitly supported the old before the Contagion) would serve to pacify the masses and also offer a sop to the other Dragon-Blooded. If they bought into Kejak's plan and supported the empire, they would be regarded as gods. If they didn't, they'd rapidly find themselves outside of the empire and at the mercy of the Anathema and Fair Folk in the hinterlands. Meanwhile, the humans of the new Realm would be trained to support the empire as a matter of faith as well as good business, ensuring the loyalty of the populace, and successive generations of Dragon-Blooded would grow up with a spiritually and politically advantageous code of conduct in place.

The risks were many. If the populace rejected the new interpretation of the faith, then any empire attached to it would be rejected as well. If the Dragon-Blooded refused to take the bribe Kejak and the Empress offered, then she'd find herself ruling over an empty desert or embroiled in an endless series of revolutions and civil wars. Each possibility was laid out, discussed, and anticipated.

Ultimately, both Kejak and the Empress needed each other, and to their credit, they recognized this early on. With the support of a young and vigorous empire, Kejak's religion could flourish, and he would have a suitable perch from which to carry out his endless quest to shape history. With the support of a faith that advocated her divine right to rule, the Empress' new kingdom could quickly be unified behind her. The alternatives — another Contagion, increased barbarian incursions, civil strife, famine and desolation — were too terrible to contemplate.

And so, the bargain was struck. Kejak would use his considerable resources to help the Empress proclaim the new empire and to support her through its early days. She, in turn, would grant Kejak imperial sponsorship to his Immaculate Order, with the caveat that it be dedicated to upholding the reign of the Dragon-Blooded and, through them, the Empress. Neither trusted the other, but both recognized the higher loyalties that would bind each to keep their end of the bargain.

After nine days and nine nights of negotiation, Chejop Kejak left the Empress' Manse and was met at the gates by a palanquin with six bearers. They took him back to the silk pavilions he had erected on the site of what would someday be called the Palace Sublime and left the Empress wondering if she had, in fact, made a terrible mistake.

## The Founding of Empire

In the wake of her meeting with Chejop Kejak, the Empress finally took the step of declaring her authority. With the Immaculate Order as an ally, the Seven Tigers destroyed and the most powerful weapons in all Creation at her beck and call, she had, by far, the strongest hand of



## Kejak and the Order

Among those who know Chejop Kejak and have observed him over the centuries, there is considerable debate as to why he built the Order of the Immaculate Dragons along the lines he chose. Combining popular myth, an ascetic social policy and thinly veiled political instruction, the Order's Immaculate Texts are a fascinating hodgepodge of everything from instruction on tending herd animals to erotica to commands to venerate the Dragon-Blooded.

Regardless of the reasoning behind the Order's creation, however, Kejak has stood behind it since its inception, and the rest of the Bronze faction has stood with him. They have strengthened it when it has been weak, provided it with miracles to woo the faithless and with power to crush heresies and rivals. Whether Kejak himself feels the irony of having spent the better part of a millennium serving as the power behind an order that promotes the divine nature of the lowly Terrestrial Exalted is unknown, but if he does, he does not let it affect his labors.

any of the contenders for authority on the Blessed Isle. A strong central power was needed, to replace the Shogun, to order the farmers to till their fields and the merchants to buy their crops, to post the soldiers to ward off bandits and guard the roads along which merchant caravans would travel. If such authority were not imposed, the results would be dire. As Kejak had reminded the would-be Empress, if civilization on the Isle collapsed, so too would the Wyld Hunt, and the Anathema who still roamed Creation would have a chance to take root and seek to free the souls of their peers.

Therefore, with what was a heavier heart than her enemies or her historians might suppose, the Empress once more reached forth with the powers at her disposal and let it be known throughout the land that, henceforth, the Realm was hers to do with as she willed. Some strange property of the engines she commanded let her image appear in the sky above every village and city and her voice be heard as clearly as if she stood no more than an arm's length away from each and every listener. She was clad in scarlet when she spoke, and those who saw it could never agree whether she wore robes woven of silk, of flames or of ever-flowing blood.

## Reaction

In the wake of the Imperial Proclamation, there was, predictably, chaos. Local daimyos who dreamed of greater things swore they'd serve no usurper and gathered their soldiers around them to make ready. Immaculate temples were packed with the faithful and terrified, and true to

### The Imperial Proclamation

*Children of the Blessed Isle, soldiers and priests, Exalted of the Immaculate Dragons and those who toil in the dust, hear me. Know that the wars and the Contagion are over, now and forever. Know that the Fair Folk have been driven back to the empty places beyond the walls of the world and that it is my power that has done so. Know that those who sought unlawful dominion over the Blessed Isle have been vanquished and their bones sunk beneath the mire at the bottom of the hungry seas. You have peace. This is my gift to you. I think you are all wise enough to accept it.*

*Your gift to me shall be obedience. For I am the Scarlet Empress, she who has laid waste to the Fair Folk and washed clean the Contagion and she who has protected the Blessed Isle so that you might live. Mine is the power and the right to rule, and mine is the power and the right to destroy all those who would threaten this land.*

*Let it be proclaimed, therefore, that the Realm has risen and that the Scarlet Empress reigns over it with honor as its shogun and queen. Let it be proclaimed that the subjects of the Realm do fealty to the Empress and serve the Realm faithfully, for it nurtures and protects them even as the Empress does. And let the enemies of the Realm tremble, for there is no power in all Creation that can stand against it.*

Kejak's word, the priests therein counseled the troubled flocks to accept the divinely granted authority of the Empress. Troops who'd witnessed the destruction of the Seven Tigers or who genuinely wished to support a central authority flocked to the Empress' scarlet banner, which was raised in every town and hamlet on the Blessed Isle (often through the actions of itinerant priests, who'd been warned that the proclamation was coming).

Within a fortnight, the bulk of the troops on the Isle had sworn fealty, and their loyal commanding officers had received visitations from the Empress like the one in which she had proclaimed her authority. The legions were put in motion against those Dragon-Blooded who had announced their defiance, and the results were swift and bloody. In less than a year, the Empress' legions had scoured the Isle of most opposition and established the new Realm with iron and blood in a way that the Empress' proclamation had not.

## Political Repercussions and the Imperial City

The more politically savvy Dragon-Blooded immediately flocked to the Empress' banner, vying to be the first and the loudest to swear fealty. Recognizing the strength of her position and the untenability of any opposition, they latched onto her like remoras clinging to a shark, determined to be carried along by the greater power to their own advantage.

It was a single day after her proclamation that the Empress received the first offer of marriage from one of her freshly minted vassals. Couched in terms so flowery that it was practically incomprehensible, the missive from the Dragon-Blooded Araka Jeresh of Arjuf was simultaneously a proposal of marriage, an oath of fealty and a condescending reassurance that Jeresh would be happy to assist the Empress in upholding the burdens of power, which were clearly too heavy for her.

Green fire rained from the heavens that day over the Jeresh compound, harming not a single soul but reducing the haughty Manse in which Araka dwelt to rubble. Much humbled, he sent a second missive begging the Empress' pardon, withdrawing his presumptuous offer of marriage and begging leave to rebuild. Suitably amused, the Empress took Jeresh as her lover, and in the wake of this sequence of events, a steady stream of declarations of loyalty, offers of marriage, proposals of seduction and priceless gifts flowed to the Imperial Manse(as it was now known).

A steady stream of supplicants to the Scarlet Throne soon made their way in person to the site of the Imperial Manse itself, determined to present their persons and petitions to the Empress directly. To impress her, many of these petitioners brought rich gifts and large entourages and camped out in splendid pavilions outside of her Manse. As the Empress herself was fickle in whom she chose to see (initially, she took great delight in summoning the humble to her while the wealthy and powerful waited furiously, but this game soon lost its appeal), some supplicants waited weeks, months or even longer. Few, however, dared to depart once they had set up camp and announced themselves. To do so would be to level a grave insult at the Empress, and none were willing to do so.

Instead, the encampments of the petitioners became dotted by permanent dwellings. To be certain, there were a great many buildings already in place around the Imperial Manse, relics of the First Age that were still quite habitable. Among these cyclopean structures, those who sought the Empress' favor erected houses for themselves and their servants. To cater to the demands of these new developments, stonemasons and craftsmen of all sorts were imported, and they built habitations for themselves even as they constructed the rudimentary palaces of the Dragon-Blooded. Merchants, too, arrived in the burgeoning city, setting up shop to supply the waiting nobles with foodstuffs, wines and other intoxicants, rich fabrics and more. Thieves, prostitutes and wandering entertainers drifted into the settlement, plying their trades and necessitating the arrival of more troops to keep order. Sons and daughters of petitioners arrived or were born, and tutors, nursemaids and scholars found places waiting for them as

a result. And as the settlement of petitioners grew, it became less and less a place to wait to see the Empress and more and more a place to see and be seen.

Little by little, the Imperial City as it is known today arose. The Imperial City — for it needed no other name — was the place to be if one wished to play the games of politics. The bulk of the most powerful Dragon-Blooded in the Realm had residences here. The finest restaurants and shops, the wisest and most puissant priests, the best and best-armed legions — all could be found here. And all of them orbited the Empress and her elegantly simple Manse, a Manse already beginning to disappear into the outbuildings the acolytes of Pasiap built around it to house the growing imperial staff.

# The Imperial Service

As the storm of construction swirled around her dwelling, the Empress (assisted by Jeresh, who, once stripped of his delusions, had become an extremely competent advisor) looked past the encampments to the Realm as a whole. An informal structure of runners, courtiers and constables had sprung up around the so-called "Imperial Encampment" to facilitate petitions, resolve squabbles and, generally, keep the situation in line, and the Empress recognized that something similar — but better organized — was needed for the Realm as a whole.

## The All-Seeing Eye

The first branch of what would later be called the Thousand Scales to be organized was the All-Seeing Eye, which was given charter in RY 12. Initially, it was nothing more than a network of informers among the petitioners, information brokers with something to sell that the Empress might find interesting. However, as more and more of her more powerful subjects began pressing in on the Imperial Manse, the Empress felt the need for more and better intelligence. Even with the powers at her disposal, her eye could not be cast everywhere at once. There were too many opportunities for conspiracies that would threaten the fledgling Realm, too many chances for traitors to conspire. And so, by means of bribes, threats and cajoling, she pressed those who had brought information to her into her service. Jeresh was installed as the head of the newly minted All-Seeing Eye, charged with recruiting operatives and organizing them.

## Magistrates and Ministers

When petitioners first swarmed around her, the Empress called upon trusted friends and allies from her days in the legions to serve as go-betweens. They served as her court when she received supplicants and saw to the upkeep of the imperial household. They also served as her hands in the Realm and traveled out among the people to spread word of her wishes — the trick of projecting herself was far more taxing than she let on, and she had no desire to repeat it unnecessarily. Within a dozen years, however, and over the protest of many local nobles who saw their hereditary privileges being usurped, this informal network of friends, advisors and trusted servants was forged into the second branch of the Thousand Scales. Those who showed particular aptitudes for various fields were made ministers and given power to hire underlings. Soldiers were assigned to support the right of these freshly minted authorities, often escorting new ministers into the field so that they might make a show of their power. Others, trusted more for their judgment than a given talent, were made magistrates and empowered by the Empress with the right to mete out justice in her name. As the empire's infrastructure knitted itself back together, the need for more and more ministers became apparent, and the skeleton of the Imperial Bureaucracy was rapidly forged. Taxes were assessed, levied and collected (often at swordpoint in the first few years). Laws were established, and examples were made of those Dragon-Blooded who thought they were above imperial justice. Slowly but surely, life in the Realm came to be defined by the regulations of the ministries and the judgments of the Magistracy.

By RY 38, the core of the ministries was in place. A single coinage was established and accepted in all corners of the Realm. Laws were promulgated from one end of the empire to the other and were enforced universally as well, demonstrating the Empress' absolute authority. Those who sought to defy magistrates or ministers were punished, and the power of these representatives of empire was reinforced. Slowly, generations were born who knew nothing but the authority of the Empress and her humble servants and who accepted it as the natural order of things.

## The Legions

The military of the Realm had been broken in the wars following the Contagion. Those straggling remnants that pledged fealty to the Empress in her first days of rule were pale shadows of the mighty armies that the Shogun and his daimyos had once commanded. While they were still the mightiest military force on the Blessed Isle, they were weakened, disorganized and held together by a tenuous mixture of personal loyalty to the officers who commanded them and desperate loyalty to the Throne itself. One of the Empress' first tasks was to rebuild this shattered army, though, cunningly, she took many years to do so.

Well aware that her enemies within the nascent Realm were still strong enough to cause her some difficulties should she be seen as contemplating a purge by building up her own personal army, the Empress, instead, undertook a slow process of rebuilding. Bonuses for recruits were increased, and officers who demonstrated success in the field were richly rewarded. These actions spurred the

ranks to swell with new soldiers and encouraged officers to compete for recognition. The Empress granted tax remittances to those who supplied the needs of the legions, whose numbers eventually grew to 30, and even the great merchant houses found themselves supporting the revitalized military. New commissions were created to reward those who fought or commanded well, and slowly but surely, the legions' strength was restored. While the legions could never be as strong as they had been in their pre-Contagion incarnation — the decimation of the world's population ensured that — by RY 40, they had once again become a formidable, well-armed fighting machine that could be deployed in strength.

### The Seventh Legion

The Seventh Legion had stood in the field against the Fair Folk in the wars after the Contagion. Armed with First Age weaponry and commanded by the brilliant general Nefvarin, it had refused to throw in its lot with the Seven Tigers in the confusion when peace first descended. Rather, it settled in Lookshy, in the former River Province, and established its position as one of permanence.

On three separate occasions, the Empress sent emissaries-cum-spies to Nefvarin, asking for his allegiance. Each proposal was politely rebuffed, and each ambassador returned with reports that the Seventh Legion was poorly armed and organized and would offer no real resistance if forced to take the field. Concerned with more pressing matters at home and unwilling to extend her gaze so far beyond her own borders yet, the Empress accepted these analyses. It was an error in judgment both she and the Realm would regret greatly in later years.

## The Deliberative

The early years of the empire were perilous ones. Subjugated daimyos and tributaries complained loudly at every opportunity about the Empress' poor decisions. Every failure of the legions in the former River Province brought new waves of criticism, much of it directed at the Empress herself. Even the actions of the Immaculates, under pressure from the Bronze faction to venerate the Empress subtly, did not serve to quell the rising tide of discontent. Worse, much of the ruling elite in the River Province and elsewhere had had decades to establish their legitimacy, and the old daimyo system strongly favored local autonomy. Many rulers wouldn't consider joining the Realm unless there was some mechanism to represent and protect local interests.

As the reports of this dissatisfaction rolled in, the Empress listened to the suggestions of her advisors and spies and arrived at the conclusion that much of the unrest could be traced, not to her decisions, but to the fact that those decisions seemed to have been made arbitrarily.

The key, the Empress felt, was to give the restive nobles the sensation that they indeed had a hand in the creation of the Realm's policies. One method of doing this, of course, would be to involve them in the genuine legislative process, but this notion was dismissed out of hand. The Realm was the Empress', and it was her word that was law. To invite more cooks into the governance of the Realm would be to spoil the broth, weakening the Realm and crippling its decision making.

However, it would certainly be easy enough to present the appearance of involvement and, thus, to co-opt the most vocal and annoying elements of the theoretically loyal opposition. All that was required was the creation of a body wherein the nobles of the Realm might debate policy and spout oratory to their hearts' content — all of which the Empress could then ignore, save for the occasional effort at political maintenance.

In accordance with this notion, the Empress created the two chambers of the Deliberative in RY 103, just after the turning of the new year. Appointing the loudest of her critics to the Greater Chamber in numbers sufficient to cause a never-ending logjam in debate, she granted unto them the right to propose laws — after suitable debate — that she would then consider. Implied was the notion that her consideration was a mere formality on the way to approval; ignored was the fact that the formality was the idea she'd consider their recommendations at all.

As the Empress had foreseen, the vitriol and energy that had been directed at her now stayed primarily within the Deliberative's chambers. The most venomous critics of the Empress' reign were silenced, deprived of their most potent argument and co-opted into the very power structure they'd railed against. And as the Empress had seeded the Deliberative with enough of her own quiet supporters to derail any actual trend toward progress within that august body, she could continue to rule unimpeded and unvexed.

## The Subversion of the Threshold

As her dominion over the Blessed Isle grew more stable, the Empress cast her eye toward the lands surrounding the Inner Sea. Historically, these had been possessions of the Shogun of the Blessed Isle, but in the



## The Empress of Misrule

It was shortly after the founding of the Deliberative that the Empress began her long program of pitting her servants against one another. While the first century of the Realm's existence was devoted to building up the organizations and ministries of government in order to maintain the empire, the years thereafter were dedicated to pitting them against one another so that none might grow too powerful and threaten the Empress' authority. While the policy was initially confined to the toothless Deliberative, it was rapidly expanded across the Thousand Scales as well.

It seems likely that an assassination attempt in RY 114, funded by several powerful magistrates and one high-ranking official of the All-Seeing Eye, was what drove the Empress to cripple her own tools. Brutally confronted with the fact that even her most loyal servants were capable of treason and well aware of growing factionalism within the Thousand Scales, the Empress determined to pit her servants against one another so that they would have no time to plot against her instead. By RY 202, the process was in full bloom, with overlapping responsibilities established for ministries, the magistrates and the All-Seeing Eye at each others' throats and the legions divided and constantly kept off balance.

The result was a mixed blessing for the Realm as a whole. These policies allowed the Empress to defeat the coup attempts of House Manosque in RY 244 and of House Iselsi in RY 303. This strengthened the Empress' resolve, and attempts at revolt or assassination were few, far-between and feeble in the years after the Empress decimated House Iselsi. Yet, at the same time, the efficiency of the empire suffered dramatically. Easy conquests slipped through the Realm's fingers due to infighting. Grain rotted in warehouses on one end of the Blessed Isle, while peasants starved a few hundred miles away, all for lack of proper clearances and permissions. Barbarians and outcastes ravaged territories in the Threshold because generals and ministers were too concerned with cementing their power within the Realm to defend its physical borders.

And now, with the Empress gone, all of the drawbacks to this scheme have been exacerbated, without any of the benefits. Whether the scheme the Empress instituted to protect her reign will ultimately doom her empire remains to be seen, but the continued strife between branches of the Imperial Service, even in the face of growing opposition, does not bode well.

wake of the Contagion, their relationship to the Realm had become muddied. Several had immediately sworn allegiance to the Empress upon her assumption of power; others sent tokens of respect but made no formal declaration of fealty. And in what had once been the River Province, bandit chieftains and local daimyos made proclamations of independence.

While she realized that she could never hope to govern Creation as the Shogun once had, the Empress also recognized that her newly founded empire could be strangled in its cradle if it were cut off from the rich provinces surrounding the Inner Sea. The Empress resolved to act to ensure an imperial foothold off the Isle without assuming an impossible administrative burden. Those areas that had immediately offered allegiance were granted special privileges. Their princes were invited to meet with the Empress and offer counsel, they were given seats in the Lesser Chamber, and legions were posted throughout their territories so that they need not bear the expenditure of their own defense. The exports of their goods to the Isle were made exempt from the usual tariffs imposed on foreign trade. Ambassadors, accompanied by operatives of the All-Seeing Eye, traveled on diplomatic missions to the neighbors of the allied provinces. Empowered to offer similarly generous terms, these ambassadors proposed unification with the new Realm without the slightest threat or effort at coercion. Meanwhile, other agents of the All-Seeing Eye canvassed the territory, with an eye toward subversion or gathering intelligence for invasion should the offer be refused.

Ultimately, most of the kingdoms, duchies, provinces and city-states along the rim of the sea agreed to various tributary relationships with the Realm. Several came to agreements with imperial ambassadors only after legion troops deposed previous executives disinclined to negotiate, and independent-minded governors had a tendency to suddenly drop dead with no visible cause, but the end result was that much of the Threshold had come under imperial control by RY 223. Both imperial territories and tributary lands paid taxes to the imperial coffers and, in exchange, received the protection afforded by the legions, the benefits of the presence of the Immaculate Order (which spread rapidly from the Isle during this time), a preferential trade relationship both with the Isle and with other imperial territories and tributaries. The Realm also built paved roads and harbors in many areas. These latter were put in place to facilitate the movement of troops should such become necessary in the future, but in the interim, the benefit they afforded trade was immeasurable. Using an admirably devised mixture of carrot and stick, the Empress was able to minimize revolts and disruptions to trade from one end of the Inner Sea to the other, and the resultant flow of wealth to the Isle was both immense and unceasing.

Many states were reduced to penury, but several of the stronger young nations were potent enough to be able to dictate their own terms in their dealings with the Realm. Armed with magics of their own, strong defenses and ready troops, they were rich but unprofitable targets, and the Empress was wise enough not to press the issue. With her legions badly damaged by the fighting in the River Province, the Empress had no wish to have her resources bled still further in more inconclusive conflicts. Rather, she opted for generous treaty terms, while doing her best to hem in these independent states with her allies, tributaries and vassals. Other states, like the petty kingdoms along the north shore of the Inner Sea, had established positive relationships in the earliest days of the Empress' reign and, so, were given generous terms.

The only term that was immutable in any treaty made with the Realm involved the Anathema. Other concessions could be asked for and granted, tariffs lowered and taxes negotiated. But in every single instance of discussion with the Realm, one constant held: Any Anathema found were to be turned over to the agents of the Realm immediately. Failure to do so would be grounds for war.

### Failure in the East

While the Empress' program reaped success everywhere else, in the former River Province, her efforts were an unmitigated disaster. Thousands upon thousands of troops were dashed upon the rock of Lookshy or bled away by guerrilla actions. Each new defeat increased the Empress' determination to bring the Seventh Legion and its allies to heel, for each disappointment suffered by the legions damaged their reputation as implacable conquerors and gave new hope to those who chafed under the yoke of imperial rule. All her efforts were in vain, however, and the Empress was forced to settle for close relations with nearby states.

## The Founding of the Scarlet Dynasty

Even the Scarlet Empress did not devote all of her energies to the duties of state. Even before the assassination of her lover Jeresh by a would-be suitor in RY 44, the Empress began a centuries-long process of accepting (or in two cases, offering) proposals of marriage, bearing and adopting the children who would ultimately become the core of the Dynasty.

In the early years of the Realm, the Empress was sufficiently jealous of her power that she entertained no serious offers of marriage but, instead, took both male and female lovers for purposes of pleasure only. However, she

## The River Province

For over seven centuries, the Realm has attempted to subdue the rebellious territories once known as the River Province and now called the Scavenger Lands. At various times, as many as five legions have been sent into the field against the might of Lookshy and its loose confederation of allies, only to be thrown back time and again. In its relentless insistence on battering the Scavenger Lands into submission, the Realm has wasted the strength of some of its best troops and, more recently, reduced the client state of Thorns to a withered husk, ripe for picking by the Deathlord Mask of Winters.

In the face of so much failure, when so many other efforts of the Realm have been met by unending success, the question must be asked: Why? Why did the Empress allow this repeated military travesty, particularly with the powers at her command?

There are a number of answers. One is that the Daimyo of Deheleshen was, at one time, second only to the Shogun of the Realm in the terms of personal power and influence. He had also possessed mighty weapons of destruction, an unknown number of which fell into the hands of the Seventh Legion when it fell back on his ruined capital during the Contagion. Not only did it make them critical to take intact, because the Empress' weapons were finite and costly to use, they were also dangerous to attack at all. The Seventh could potentially return the favor and devastate the Imperial Manse or all of the Blessed Isle's remaining cities. This was proven to be the case in RY 76, when the forces of Lookshy used First Age weapons of mass destruction to break the imperial siege of their encampment.

More importantly, there was another power that restrained the Empress — the River of Tears. This sorcerous prodigy was a product of the Anathema at the height of their rule, and it drew seawater from the White Sea in the North to the Inner Sea and served as both a trade route and a blatant display of Celestial might. This river was caused to flow by powerful geomantic artifice. Any serious disruption of the artifice or the landscape, particularly by Essence effects, could potentially cause a Creation-wide catastrophe.

Threatened by the twin dangers of retaliation and a sorcerous feedback loop, the Empress held her fire, and the Scavenger Lands remained outside her grasp. She could certainly have worn the Scavenger Sons down later, but by the time she recovered the strength to do so, she had already begun to commit herself to the Thousand Mazy Paths strategy. As she spun her webs, the Empress found the Scavenger Lands more useful as a perennial menace than they would ever have been as an untrustworthy agglomeration of conquered tributary states. For more information on the Seventh Legion, Lookshy and the River of Tears, see the sourcebook Scavenger Sons.

quickly realized the importance that others attached to sharing her bed and the need to create a group of followers she could trust implicitly. She chose her own offspring.

She began choosing her lovers more carefully, picking playmates from weakened political factions to hamstring the stronger ones, splitting alliances by playing favorites and turning competition for her bed into a political game as vicious as any in the Realm. She also, in RY 114, took her first husband, Rawar, a noble from Arjuf whose iron-clad determination to remain outside of politicking intrigued the Empress enough that she forcibly co-opted him. Rawar remained married to the Empress until his death by assassination in RY 370, and a three month "Season of Mourning" was declared in his memory — though the Empress had borne over a dozen children to other fathers during their union, Rawar was clearly close to her heart. She and Rawar produced several children, only two of whom, Ragara and Mnemon, produced lineages lasting to the modern day.

## Ragara

The eldest of the Empress' surviving sons, Ragara was born in RY 139 under a sky full of comets, which Chejop Kejak pronounced was an auspicious sign. The child of his father's middle age, Ragara was a serious, quiet boy who spent much of his childhood with the ministers of the Thousand Scales rather than in the exercise yards or debaucheries favored by his older siblings. In addition to remarkable skills in finance, organization and bureaucracy, Ragara also acquired an enduring hatred for both his mother and his siblings, one that he disguised admirably. Determined to succeed his mother whether she willed it or no, he established his own fortune by the age of 30 and carefully tended it over the years so that it might propel his claim for the Throne. In addition, he systematically eliminated quite a few of his siblings and their descendants, ruthlessly pruning away any competition. His goal was simple: to present himself to his mother as the only possible heir and to cripple the Realm financially if she did not agree.

### Consorts and Spouses

During the 750-plus years of her reign, the Empress has taken innumerable lovers and four husbands. Of these lovers, only 13 have been recognized in the official histories as imperial consorts. Most of the Empress' lovers were passions of the moment and nothing more, and their numbers are great enough that their names were rarely recorded.

While rumors persist of lost imperial bloodlines and legitimate children spirited off to the hinterlands, there is no proof anywhere that the Empress produced any offspring unlisted in the imperial records. Even if there were, it would matter little — many are the Dragon-Blooded born from the Empress who have never founded a Great House or achieved great influence.

Aware of her son's manipulations, the Empress refuted them before any confrontation could be forced. She took as a lover the lesser nobleman Nellens and immediately became pregnant with a child who would later be known as Sesus. Charging Ragara with the life of his half-sibling, she informed him that if the child died, so would he. Seething with hatred, Ragara became his half-sibling's guardian and assured the permanence of his rival.

## The Dynasty Grows

The Empress' consort, Nellens, was a great boon to imperial fecundity. He fathered two children on the Empress, Sesus and Ledaal, and supported them lavishly from the Imperial Treasury. Both married young and frequently and produced a great many children of their own. Possessed of a vicious rivalry, the two competed in all things and passed their hatreds and desire for the Scarlet Throne on to their respective broods. Thus began the great game of the Dynasty, from the maneuverings of the children of Ledaal and Sesus against one another.

The term "the Dynasty" also dates from the early days of the Sesus-Ledaal rivalry. As criers for each family strode forth in advance of their masters, announcing their sponsors as the true heirs to empire, factional violence erupted. Nobles and powerful merchants chose sides, and fighting in the streets was common. Protests from scions of Houses Mnemon and Manosque, who'd been certain that theirs would be the line to inherit, added to the chaos.

Initially determined to eliminate both her children by Nellens and their troublesome offspring, the Empress instead announced, in a blandly worded proclamation, that each of her children was dear to her and that she could not possibly choose an heir. She also resolved to replace the dying Nellens as quickly as possible once he passed on and to produce more potential heirs who would distract the Sesus and Ledaal from one another. In this, she succeeded admirably.

### What Is a Great House?

A Great House is a lineal group that has a recognized political place in the Realm. They were created by the Empress as recognition of a fait accompli — that the lineal nature of Exaltation among the Dragon-Blooded meant that certain families were destined to become politically and economically important to the Realm. The leaders of Great Houses have special rights of audience, they may keep small numbers of household troops, they get special tax arrangements, and they fill important roles in the Realm by providing generals, satraps, ministers and other important functionaries in the imperial government.

Generally, founders of Great Houses are Dragon-Blooded — House Nellens is the only Great House with a mortal founder. Leaders of Great Houses are always descended from the Empress, but this is also pro-forma. Three times, the Empress has adopted a worthy as her child in order to use them as the foundation of a Great House. Founders of Great Houses have only a single name — the founder uses his given name only, and any offspring they bear or adopt take the founder's given name as their family name.

Great Houses come and go. There have been 23 recognized Great Houses during the Realm's history, of which 11 survive today. The other 12 fell to treachery, treason or misfortune. The last house created was House V'Neef, founded 60 years ago by the imperial cupbearer, probably to counterbalance the Peleps maritime advantage, though that was only apparent several years later. New Great Houses always enjoyed the Empress' utmost favor; if they did not, their peers would quickly rend them asunder. The Great Houses always dreaded the creation of a new house, as it meant that some or all of the established houses would lose assets, which were stripped away and given to the new house, so it could establish itself.

## The Status Quo

By RY 590, all 11 of the modern Great Houses except V'Neef were recognized and in place. The Empress announced that she would announce her heir at the thousandth anniversary of her reign. As she had already

outlived most of her children, both the Realm at large and the ever-burgeoning population of Dynasts had no doubts of her ability to survive that long, though many of her would-be successors were despondent at the sure knowledge that she'd outlive them by centuries.

With the timetable for the announcement of succession set, however, the houses turned on each other in their great game with renewed vigor. While none dared to openly eliminate a rival, centuries-long plans were enacted to sap other houses' strength so that, by the time the Empress' jubilee arrived, they would no longer be viable candidates. Such was the status quo in the Realm for almost two centuries, until the playing field was suddenly upset by the one thing no one could have anticipated: the disappearance of the Empress.

## Peasant Revolts

Peasant rebellions were a long-accepted fact of life in the Realm, as one generally flared up every time a few bad harvests ran back-to-back. Most evolve along the same lines: Dissatisfied peasants band together with the local Immaculates, find an eloquent leader, band behind her when she voices their grievances and burn a few local nobles' houses after dealing with vastly outnumbered militia. At that point, the legions are sent in, the revolt is put down, and most of the peasants flee back to their fields. An example is made of the leader and a few of her followers, and shortly thereafter, all returns to normal. Trae Leng's Revolt In RY 299 was perhaps the most successful of these, as the rebelling peasants briefly succeeded in breaking through the gates of Lord's Crossing and looting the city. Other notable peasant revolts include the Vengeful Harvest of RY 326, the Ragara's Widows' Uprising of RY 591 and the Bloodied Scythe Uprising of RY 707. The Ragara's Widows' Uprising was so-called because the levies laid by the Ragara on their tenant farmers were so ruinous that it was a matter of popular belief that it was better financially for farmers to starve to death than to work their land for their hated overlords.

But the revolt that reared its head in RY 465 was something altogether different — and more disturbing.

Called the Unbroken Rushes Rebellion, it appeared simultaneously in nine prefectures just before the harvest. Everywhere, peasants laid down their tools and simply refused to labor. Claiming that three consecutive years of drought was a sign that the Empress did not have the favor of the Elemental Dragons, the farmers clamored for change. Even when flogged or otherwise punished, they refused to return to their labors.

The leader of the rebellion, a monk named Seven Rivers, had an uncanny ability to avoid the Empress' agents. He would appear in a prefecture, raise the local farmers and slaves in peaceful revolt, then vanish before members of the All-Seeing Eye could descend. A few days later, halfway across the Blessed Isle, the process would repeat itself. The Immaculate Order disowned Seven Rivers, but it did no good, and his popular support continued to grow. "For if we do not labor," read one of the popular tracts of his writings that his supporters distributed across the Isle, "then the fields will lay fallow. Thus will the cities starve, unless the Empress truly possesses the favor of the Dragons and can conjure food and drink from the air for her subjects."

By the end of RY 465, the Realm was a panicky hotbed of rumor and strife. Food shortages had already begun to

### Stasis and the Status Quo

The history of the Scarlet Empress' Realm has been marked by decades- or even centuries-long stretches when, seemingly, nothing happened. Crops were planted and harvested, taxes were levied and collected, and the sun rose and set every day without incident. In part, such is the Empress' design. She desired the stability of her empire above all other things, and a decade without the need for another war was another decade without anything that might upset her reign.

Furthermore, while the incidents of those long decades might not have shaken the pillars of the empire, they were certainly not dull to those living through them. Great Houses rose and fell to intrigue or poor fortune. Peasant revolts arose and were put down — brutally. Provinces declared independence and were dragged, forcibly, back into the fold. Pirates hunted Realm shipping and were harried across the Inner Sea. Anathema appeared and were dealt with by the Wyld Hunt, and not a year went by without some prodigy, omen or false heir appearing and causing the gossip-mongers of the Imperial City to do a very good business indeed. However, as dramatic as these moments may have been, briefly, they neither shook nor altered the course of the Realm. Business continued as usual, and the average citizen could no more tell you which province was in revolt on a given day than he could the price of wheat in Arjuf six months prior. The Realm, stolidly, endured. While the elevation of each Great House and the fall of each rebellious satrap were duly recorded by clerks of the Ministry of Scrupulous Observance of History, most of these events were forgotten before the ink dried on the scrolls preserving them for posterity. Before the blood had coagulated in the gutters, the gawking crowds had moved on to the next crisis of the moment.

afflict the cities. Rumors swept the Imperial City every day: The Empress had abdicated, the Empress would summon the Elemental Dragons to put down the rebels, the Empress was, in fact, the power behind the rebels (all part of an elaborate plan to see which of her supporters and children would desert her), and so forth.

Ultimately, it was not the favor of the Dragons that saved the Realm, but the deep pockets of the Imperial Treasury, as augmented by the coffers of House Ragara. Tons upon tons of foodstuffs were imported to the Blessed Isle from the Threshold and lands beyond. Agents of the All-Seeing Eye discredited the mysterious Seven Rivers as an Anathema seeking to lead the righteous subjects of the Empress astray and lavishly bribed traveling performers and tale-tellers to make sure their story was spread. And created by the Empress' First Age tools, visions of the Dragons themselves appeared in the sky over the Imperial City one night, causing all who saw them to fall to their knees and ask forgiveness. By the end of RY 466, the Unbroken Rushes movement was scattered, and the peasants had mostly gone back to their labors.

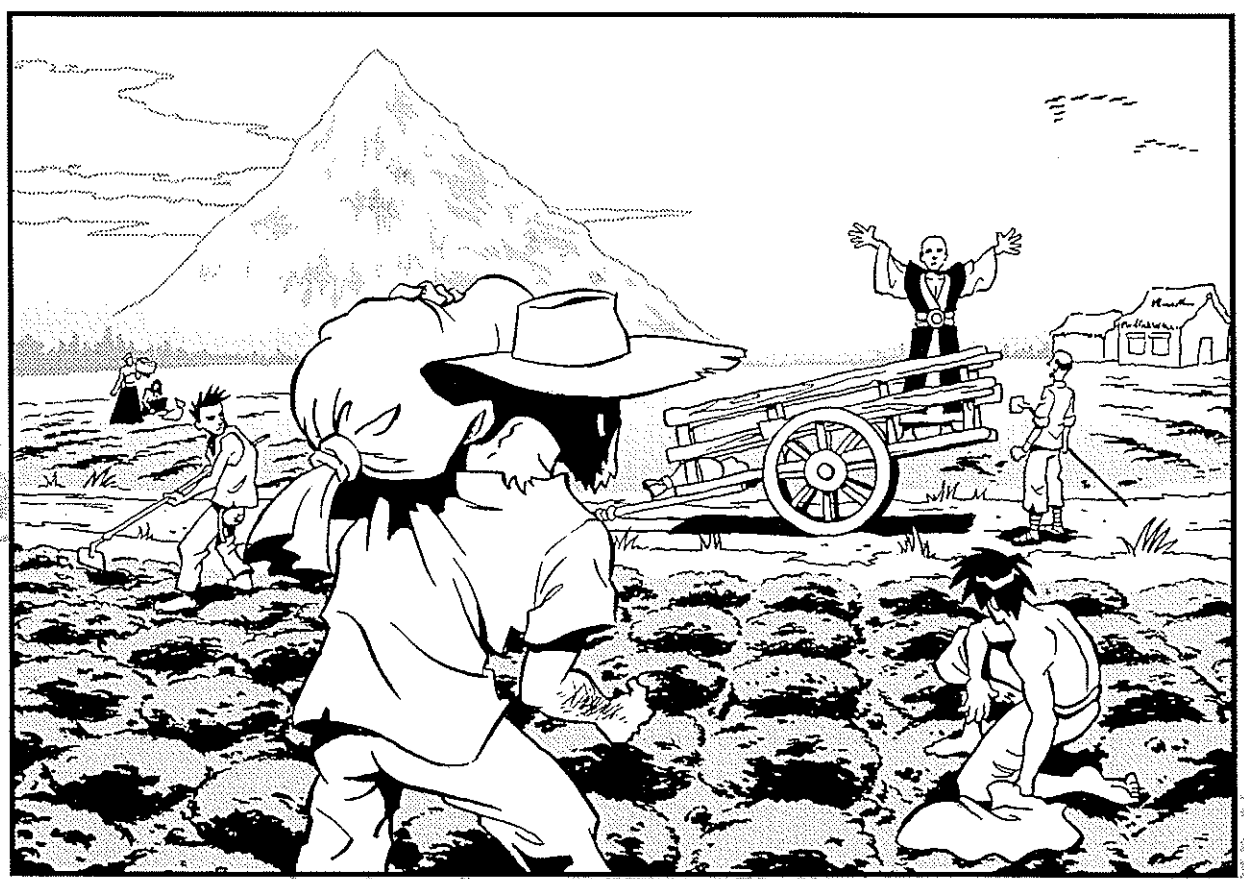
The identity of the mysterious Seven Rivers was never established, however, nor was he ever caught. In outlying prefectures he is still regarded as something of a folk hero, and sightings are reported every few years. Each is duly investigated by the All-Seeing Eye (as well as by itinerant monks of the Immaculate Order, as Chejop Kejak takes a very personal interest in this matter), and each time, the report comes to nothing. The legend, however, persists.

## The Modern Day

Five years ago, the Empress disappeared so completely that it was if she had never been. This occurrence, in and of itself, was not necessarily unusual. She had taken brief sabbaticals from the Scarlet Throne before, some lasting as long as six months. Even in her absence in those times, the Realm continued to function smoothly, carrying itself forward on sheer inertia as the mechanisms of government lurched along with business as usual. None of the Great Houses made a play for the Throne, wary that this could be some trick of the Empress' to see which of her offspring were too ambitious for their own good. And always, she returned as if she had never been away, with no word as to where she had been or what she had done.

### Absence from the Scarlet Throne

Popular romantic songs of the Realm speak of what the Empress did during her disappearances. They claim that, during these times, the Empress took it upon herself to disguise herself as a humble peasant woman and to walk



to and fro in her lands, and up and down in them, so that she might better understand the suffering of her people. When she had seen enough, the songs went, she would return to the Imperial Manse and use what she had learned to govern the Realm more wisely.

This is, of course, complete hogwash, though politically advantageous hogwash. During her sabbaticals from the Scarlet Throne, the Empress was most emphatically not laboring sympathetically among the proletariat of the Realm. Long years of rule and harsh decisions costing tens of thousands of lives had long since flensed any care for such things from the Empress. The Realm and her continued dominance of it had become all to her, the ends and the means so inextricably intertwined as to be inseparable.

In truth, the Empress' absence from public life was spent deep in the depths of the Imperial Manse itself. There, she labored to propitiate the engines and the things dwelling therein that had brought her to power, offering them sacrifices of treasure, blood and souls in exchange for continued mastery of the devices and continued instruction in their use. Thousands of slaves have been sacrificed thus over the years, as well as some of the Realm's most powerful Dragon-Blooded, a handful of unwary spirits, at least one imperial consort and the Empress' youngest daughter, whose curiosity led her to follow her mother a trifle too far into the palace.

### The Absence Lengthens

While everyone pretended it was business as usual when the Empress first vanished in RY 763, by late 764 those stalking the corridors of power were well aware that something was seriously amiss. While the Empress had vanished before, she had never vanished for so long, and the complete absence of any communication had senior members of the Thousand Scales, the Dynasty and the Immaculate Order extremely worried. Several, most notably the venerable Shenesh of House Iselsi, the ancient and well-respected Minister of the Imperial Gardens (whose purview also included the Empress' Manse), and no fewer than six abbots of the Immaculate Order convened a meeting at which the sticky topic of what to do if the Empress were really gone was addressed.

The first order of business was to establish that no one did, in fact, know what had happened to the Empress, nor when or even whether she was likely to return. Presented with what might be their golden opportunity, the most powerful Dynasts were reluctant to seize it. Instead, an unlikely alliance of Nellens, Ragara and Cynis nobles put forth the following plan: It would be announced that the Empress had gone into seclusion to meditate upon the state of the Realm and would return in due time. Meanwhile, the Deliberative would choose a regent to guide the Realm in her place, doing nothing save occasionally waving to the populace, so that the peasants might avoid growing restive. Should the Empress not return within seven years, then steps toward a more permanent succession might be taken, but in the interim, all were to regard themselves as caretakers of the Realm against the day when the Empress returned.

Well satisfied with themselves, the various representatives to the Council of the Empty Throne departed and immediately began strengthening their positions — subtly — against the day when competition for the Scarlet Throne would be thrown open.

The Deliberative did its part to perfection, selecting a feeble mediocrity of House Tepet to keep the Empress' seat cushions warm in her absence. That selection, however, was the only aspect of the council's decision to go as planned. Even before the council, the allied city-state of Thorns was conquered and transformed into a grim shadowland. Barbarian attacks on legion outposts increased, and as the various branches of the Imperial Service strove against each other, the legions found themselves increasingly ill supported. Rainy winters and dry summers wrecked crops, and the taxes levied on tributary states spiraled upward as the machinery of empire lurched toward a halt. Slowly but surely, the least loyal tributaries in the Threshold edged toward revolt and independence, while on the Blessed Isle, the families of the Dynasty circled each other warily, waiting for an opening either to ascend or to bring a rival down.

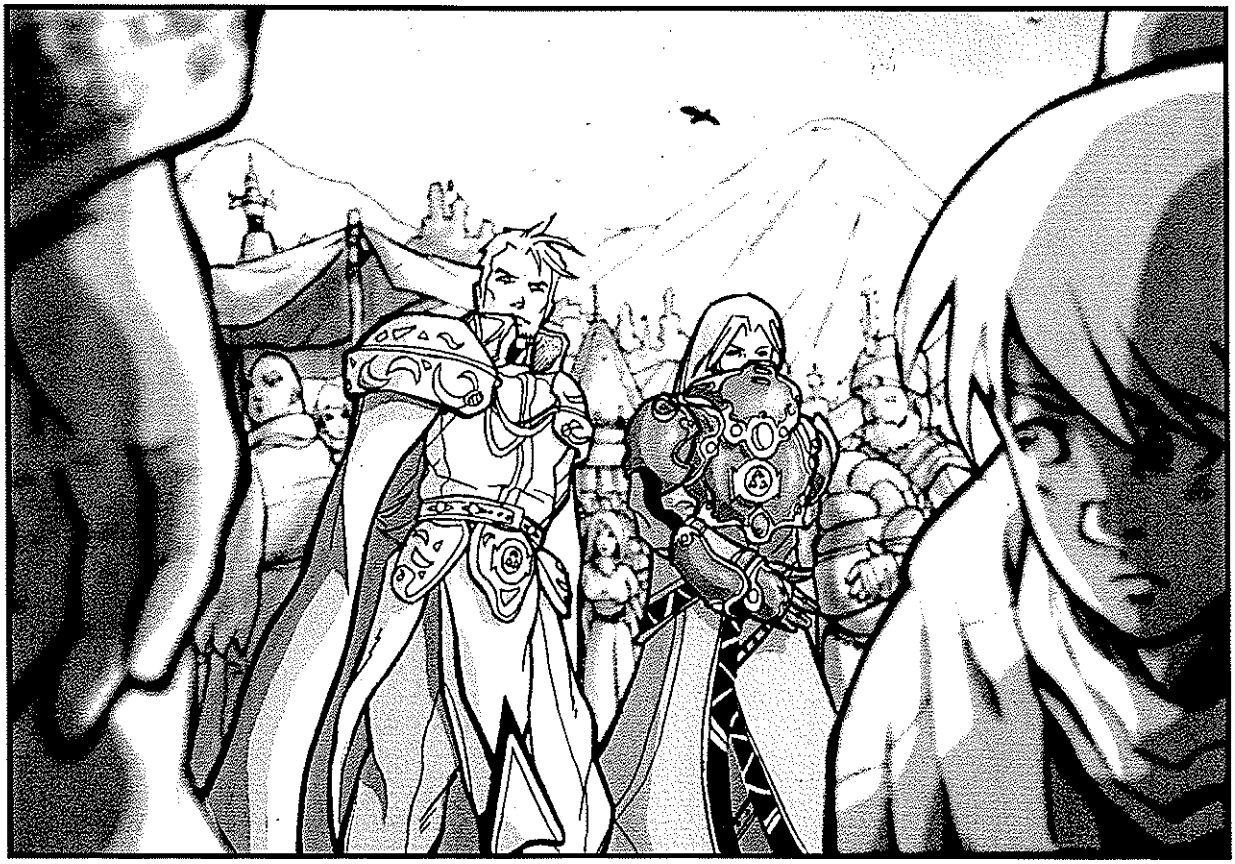
Meanwhile, the Scarlet Throne sat empty, for not even Regent Fokuf dared seat himself upon it more than once. In the streets, they sing songs of the Empress' triumphant return; in the temples they discuss solemnly whether the Elemental Dragons are displeased. And in the Realm's halls of power, the possibility of civil war becomes ever more real with every day.

## The Realm

The Realm is more than history. Though it is ancient and seemingly unchanging, the Realm is still a living, breathing place. Recently, it has been a living, breathing place on the edge of chaos, as threats to the satrapies and the struggle for the Throne are on the verge of hurtling this ancient kingdom into an age of war. Everyone knows the tension will break soon, but no one is sure precisely where or when. It is as if the empire is holding its collective breath, waiting for the first thunder of the storm.

### Day-to-Day Details

The cities of the Realm are noisy places, with street vendors shouting to be heard over the noise of the crowds. Imperishable stone buildings left over from the



Old Realm stand side by side with elaborately carved wooden manors, and the streets are sometime claustrophobically narrow. They are packed dirt or paved with cobblestones. Some of them are filthy from the wastes of beasts of burden. In other places children, old men and the indigent are hired to clean the streets in return for a loaf of bread or a skin of beer. Many people walk through cities — the streets are too narrow for carts and caravans. In most places, cargo is loaded onto porters at the city gate and run to its destination.

Through this world, the Dragon-Blooded move like giants among men. The bright colors of their clothing stand out against the drab colors of the poor. The aura of power around them makes their subjects move aside without a second thought. Even the bustling glory of the Realm seems to dim for a moment when one of the Terrestrial Exalted passes.

## Clothing

Peasants in the Realm dress much like peasants everywhere — in ragged, rugged clothes. The patricians dress in body wraps of white silk or linen, and the middle class emulates them with similar wraps of bleached wool and cotton. Most people wear sandals, and cloaks are a common body covering during the wet and often chilly winter months.

Clothing for Dynastic men and women are similarly functional. Both genders may wear long pants, long skirts or short skirts over pants to social events. It's usually considered crass to show one's legs or torso in public (Exalted-only parties don't count as "public"), but beyond that, there are few rules. In the warmer climes, Dragon-Blooded who attend trendy parties make a game out of commissioning clothing that creatively and artfully displays as much skin as possible while still being considered clothing.

Belts are common and usually incorporate scabbards for sword and dagger. They do not include purse-pouches as belts worn by commoners do unless they're designed for rough wear; Dragon-Blooded are expected to have servants and slaves to carry their money. Typically, Dynasts purchase things by agreement, and their immediate household pays all bills at the end of the month. Only those Dragon-Blooded whose households have failed to pay the bills reliably are forced to pay for everything up front.

Dynastic clothing designed for show is often worn over or under protective clothing — there is nowhere a Dynast is safe from assassination, and they may be required to do battle at any time. The Dragon-Blooded typically wear boots and gloves when they leave the house, as well as armor.

## Important Dates in Realm History

| Realm Year | Event |
|---|---|
| 1 | The destruction of the Fair Folk armies. The annihilation of the Seven Tigers. The founding of the Realm. |
| 12 | Founding of the All-Seeing Eye. |
| 38 | Establishment of the first ministries and magistrates. |
| 40 | The legions are reestablished. |
| 44 | Jeresh assassinated by a lovesick suitor. |
| 47 | First assault on the River Province. |
| 53 | Imperial forces withdraw from the Scavenger Lands. |
| 75 | Second invasion of the Scavenger Lands. |
| 76 | Seventh Legion troops use First Age weapons against the legions of the Realm. Imperial forces withdraw from the Scavenger Lands again. |
| 88 | Realm's last full invasion of the Scavenger Lands. |
| 89 | Empress' Guard destroyed at Melevhil. |
| 103 | Founding of the Deliberative. |
| 114 | Assassination attempt on the Empress; founding of the policy of the Thousand Mazy Paths. Empress marries Rawar of Arjuf. |
| 130 | Birth of Manosque |
| 139 | Birth of Ragara |
| 146 | Bagrash Köl uses the Eye of Autochthon to build a great kingdom in the North, which surpasses the early Realm. |
| 174 | Nine Duchies Banner is raised to the northwest across the Inner Sea. Three legions are sent to crush it. |
| 176 | Bagrash Köl destroyed by the Eye. |
| 202 | Thousand Scales reaches its current form. |
| 211 | Delzahn Horde conquers Chiaroscuro, offers fealty to the Realm. |
| 223 | Relationship finalized with all states along Inner Sea and many well into the Threshold. |
| 227 | Nellens taken as consort. |
| 231 | Sesus born. |
| 235 | Ledaal born. |
| 244 | Viridian Manosque uses the Eye of Autochthon in an attempt to stage a coup. He is destroyed by the defenses of the Realm, and his house is put to the sword. |

A Dynast's armor is often designed specifically for the individual by a master armorer. Such armorers combine the abilities of tradesman and artist, advertising superb protective properties combined with a "look" that matches the individual's taste. Not everyone can afford these artisans; such armor is a mark of wealth and prestige, worn with pride. A single suit of armor can cost as much as a full year's salary for a well-placed Exalt. Less expensive suits can be purchased from less prestigious armorers; the cheapest would cost about three months' salary.

Most Dragon-Blooded prefer to wear colors that match their personal aspects: strong, bright colors. Some heads of houses — Ragara, Mnemon, Ledaal and Peleps — prefer that clothing colors match the official elemental identification of the house; others — such as V'neef, Cynis, Cathak, Sesus and Iselsi — allow their relatives to wear whatever suits their fancy or matches their own elemental alliances. Not all heads of houses who attempt to dictate clothing choice do so successfully; Ledaal and Peleps have had some trouble in this area. Non-Exalted members of Houses Ragara, Mnemon, Ledaal and Peleps wear the house colors. Non-Exalted members of other houses often wear either a riot of clashing colors or very muted shades to set themselves apart from their Exalted brothers and sisters, but the choice is usually left up to personal preference.

### Food, Drink and Mealtime

Vegetables and grains are cheap and easy for farmers to produce. High-density agricultural methods make rice a cheap staple of the Realm's diet. Most Dragon-Blooded serve meat at their larger meals, and the patricians emulate them. The more expensive, exotic and dangerous the animal, the more likely it is to be shipped in and served to guests. Private meals across the classes are rather less exotic, consisting primarily of local vegetables,

| | |
|---|---|
| 261 | Nellens dies. |
| 299 | Trae Leng's Revolt. |
| 301 | House Iselsi sponsors a semi-official expedition into the Scavenger Lands, and it fails spectacularly. |
| 303 | House Iselsi attempts a coup after its unsuccessful adventure in the Scavenger Lands. The attempt is crushed out of hand, and the Iselsi are stripped of most of their possessions and made servants of the Throne. |
| 326 | Vengeful Harvest uprising. |
| 362 | Tepet taken as consort. |
| 364 | Barbarian incursions along the northern coast of the Inner Sea repulsed by the Gleaming Fang Legion (formerly the 11th). |
| 369 | Birth of Mnemon. |
| 370 | Rawar dies. |
| 371 | Imperial consort Tepet vanishes. |
| 416 | Guild boycotts trade with the Isle. Trade Wars ensue; resolved in 418 as each side recognizes the untenability of continued hostilities. Guild trade items bear an extra tariff for the next two centuries as a result. |
| 422 | Elevation of House Nellens. |
| 433 | Fire seen in the skies over the Imperial Mountain. Mountain People send emissary to the Empress and return with remarkable gifts, though their delegation had been reduced in number. |
| 465 | Unbroken Rushes Rebellion. |
| 550 | Treaties renegotiated with Chiaroscuro and other major cities to relax tariffs. |
| 578 | War against the Anathema Jochim, which ends in 585. |
| 591 | Ragara's Widows Uprising. |
| 707 | Bloodied Scythe Uprising. |
| 748 | The Empress supports an underdog in the succession of the city of Thorns in exchange for a catspaw to use against the Scavenger Lands. |
| 752 | The forces of Thorns are mauled. |
| 754 | Battle of Mishaka. Armies of Thorns devastated. |
| 763 | The Empress vanishes. |
| 764 | Council of the Empty Throne. Armies of Mask of Winters attack and sack Thorns. |
| 768 | Current Day |

rice, fresh sourdough breads and local meats, if the family can afford them — Dragon-Blooded are warriors, and most eat meat at least once a day to maintain their strength. Cured meats are a favorite for traveling, along with dried fruits, dense breads, crackers and rice.

Fermented beverages, including beer and watered wine, are served at most meals. Most well-to-do households serve honey with wine, again as a sign of status. Among Dragon-Blooded and patricians, fruit juice is a common beverage. Among the lower classes, fruit juices are served as a delicacy, at holidays or when guests visit.

In the Realm, peasants and patricians typically eat together, usually having large lunches and dinners. Dragon-Blooded households only hold large communal meals for specific purposes. Such purposes include announcements, political machinations, holidays, showing a child off to another house in the hopes of arranging a marriage, entertaining a guest and so on. Otherwise, the kitchen usually prepares the meal and either brings it to individuals' rooms or serves it in various small dining rooms around the house, where groups of two to five people can dine together. Bonded circles traditionally eat together. Groups of Dragon-Blooded of a similar age also eat together. Parents rarely eat with their children.

Dragon-Blooded are fond of strong flavors, so they import spices and keep herb gardens near the kitchen. Fresh breads are typically flavored with herbs, spices, honey and even roasted vegetables or dried fruits. Food served to guests should be exotic and artistic, blending flavor, color and texture into pleasing combinations. The best chefs, typically schooled in the Scarlet Prefecture, are hired to design food for Dragon-Blooded parties. The decorators usually consult with the chefs to be sure that the decor will accentuate the food.

At feasts, unExalted family members traditionally sit at a separate table from the Exalted. Exotic foods in short

### Trends in Armor

There are three types of armor design that are currently in vogue among the Dragon-Blooded. The "White Rose design," named for the armorer who originated it, incorporates the image of an animal into the center of the breastplate. Various other embellishments reflect that animal's nature. For instance, if the image is of a large hunting cat, then the ornamentation might include hunting scenes, images of the cat's preferred territory and images of prey fleeing before the predator. The most notable aspect of this design is the use of gemstones to indicate the animal's eyes. It's traditional for the animals displayed on armor to be predators and hunters. White Rose design is considered a bit risqué in the Realm's aniconic culture but is tolerated because it's worn by the Dragon-Blooded, who are permitted to give homage. The Immaculate Philosophy has found predators on armor to be a due and legitimate expression of homage, and so, the armor is legal, if not popular with fundamentalists.

The Thundercloud design, originated by one of White Rose's rivals, is based on the White Rose design but uses fantastical creatures as its foundation instead. Some of them are imaginary; others are based on Wyld-touched animals. This design is popular among some of the youngest Dragon-Blooded and is generally seen as overly extravagant by elder Exalted. It is also less expensive than an original White Rose design. Thundercloud-design armor treads much closer to idolatry than White Rose school, and many elders and parents forbid their offspring from wearing such gear. It is favored primarily by the young, the daring and the openly impious.

The Elemental school of armor design has been popular for nearly a century and shows no signs of going out of style. Such armor incorporates images, both literal and metaphorical, that represent the Dragon-Blooded's favored element. Some particularly skilled armorers also work in images from legends of the Elemental Dragons. Many of these suits of armor incorporate face masks depicting one of the five Immaculate Dragons, either in the shape of a dragon-like face or in the Immaculate's human form. The most famous Elemental armorer is Windrunner, and he can be found in Tuchara, the former artist's colony.

supply never make it to the lesser tables. UnExalted family members who have achieved significant power of another sort or unExalted spouses of good breeding may be honored with a place at the table with Exalted family members. UnExalted spouses go through a period of time — at least six months — sitting at the lesser tables before they're accepted at the head table. If the mortal is particularly famous and well respected, the period can be shorter than six months without disgracing the Exalted hosts. It is improper for the hosts to relegate a socially acceptable spouse or famous and respected family member to the lower tables for more than five years.

Patricians and the lower classes typically eat large, household-wide meals, with a large proportion of grains and vegetables. Those patricians with enough money do what they can to emulate the Dragon-Blooded, serving meat and flavoring dishes with spices and herbs. Less wealthy households with high political ambitions eat poorly as a family so that they can serve exotic foods to important guests.

### Animals

Animals are kept for many purposes in the Realm: They serve as food, pets, hunting aids, companions and guards. The unExalted keep food animals and beasts of burden, but many Terrestrial Exalted keep animals — the more exotic the better — as pets.

In the hot climes to the south of the Blessed Isle, Dragon-Blooded keep austrech as hunters. These animals are naturally vicious and are kept that way in captivity by handlers who starve them before hunts. Austrech handler is a very difficult and dangerous job. In some areas, bears, boars and hybrocs are hunted for food. Dragon-Blooded breed or capture these animals for guests to hunt.

Raiton are dirty animals, carrion eaters, and Dragon-Blooded will only eat them if no other options are available. River dragon and siaka are delicacies, and their skin is also used in the making of boots and armor. Squid is also considered a delicacy and reserved for the largest parties. Mammoth meat is popular for feasts, as so much can be taken from a single carcass. The Dragon-Blooded prefer red meat to fish and pork; the less expensive fish is referred to as patricians' meat, and the poor eat pork and what local river fish they can afford.

The lower classes of the Realm keep cats both as pets and to hunt rodents and lizards. Dogs are uncommon because they're so expensive to feed, but some are kept to draw carts or act as watchdogs. Dragon-Blooded keep dogs, great cats, and even strix as pets. Dogs are common pets and companions to the Dragon-Blooded. Great cats are more often kept on display by wealthy households when they are kept at all, but a few Dragon-Blooded have tamed them enough to turn them into companions. Once the cats have bonded with an Exalt, they are extremely loyal

and protective — and can be jealous of that Exalt's bonds with other Dragon-Blooded. Strix are believed to be omens of ill fortune; members of House Ledaal have recently made use of the birds' reputation to improve their own frightening stature among the peasantry.

Dogs are also kept as guard animals; the great cats are considered too volatile for such duty. A few households keep giant wolf spiders as guard animals.

## Temples and Shrines

An Immaculate temple can be found in every city on the Blessed Isle; particularly large cities have up to 5,000 temples, mostly to the Dragons but also to the local gods, so the Immaculates can offer them their due prayers. In addition, about one-half of small towns have at least one shrine, and occasionally, a temple is built in a convenient location close to several small towns. All Dragon-Blooded households keep personal shrines unless the household is particularly small, and they are usually tended by a member of the House who has joined the Immaculate Order.

Smaller shrines can be devoted to a single Immaculate Dragon. In Dragon-Blooded homes, this shrine is always dedicated to the Dragon of the element that the house identifies itself with. House members who identify with a different Dragon sometimes keep personal shrines in their own rooms.

City temples, particularly those near large populations of Dragon-Blooded, are opulent and beautifully decorated. Smaller shrines are usually simpler; some are crude structures of rough wood, while others are elegantly carved. Those Exalted who particularly value the potential of the faith to keep the common people content sometimes pay to have beautiful shrines installed in the towns under their care. Typically, only shrines and temples actively tended by monks contain valuable goods that could be stolen. Shrines that aren't constantly tended either lack adornments altogether or contain decorations that are not easily removed, usually heavy statues made from common stone.

## Slavery

Contrary to the popular misconception of the Realm as a nation of slaves and slave-owners, the unExalted are prohibited from owning slaves.

Slaves are usually barbarians, soul-dead victims of the Fair Folk or criminals. They have no rights over their person — the Dragon-Blooded can sell, trade, abuse, kill or use them in any way they wish. Slaves are allowed to learn to read and write (if they can find anyone to teach them) and can own private property (if anyone is willing to give them anything), although they are not allowed to keep drugs or weapons unless given permission by their masters.

Loyalty is highly valued in slaves who have frequent contact with their masters. Those slaves who disobey or attempt to harm their masters will find themselves brutally tortured and slowly killed. For lesser infractions, the Dragon-Blooded resort to beatings, starvation, isolation or drugs. A few households have a permanent policy of lightly sedating their slaves.

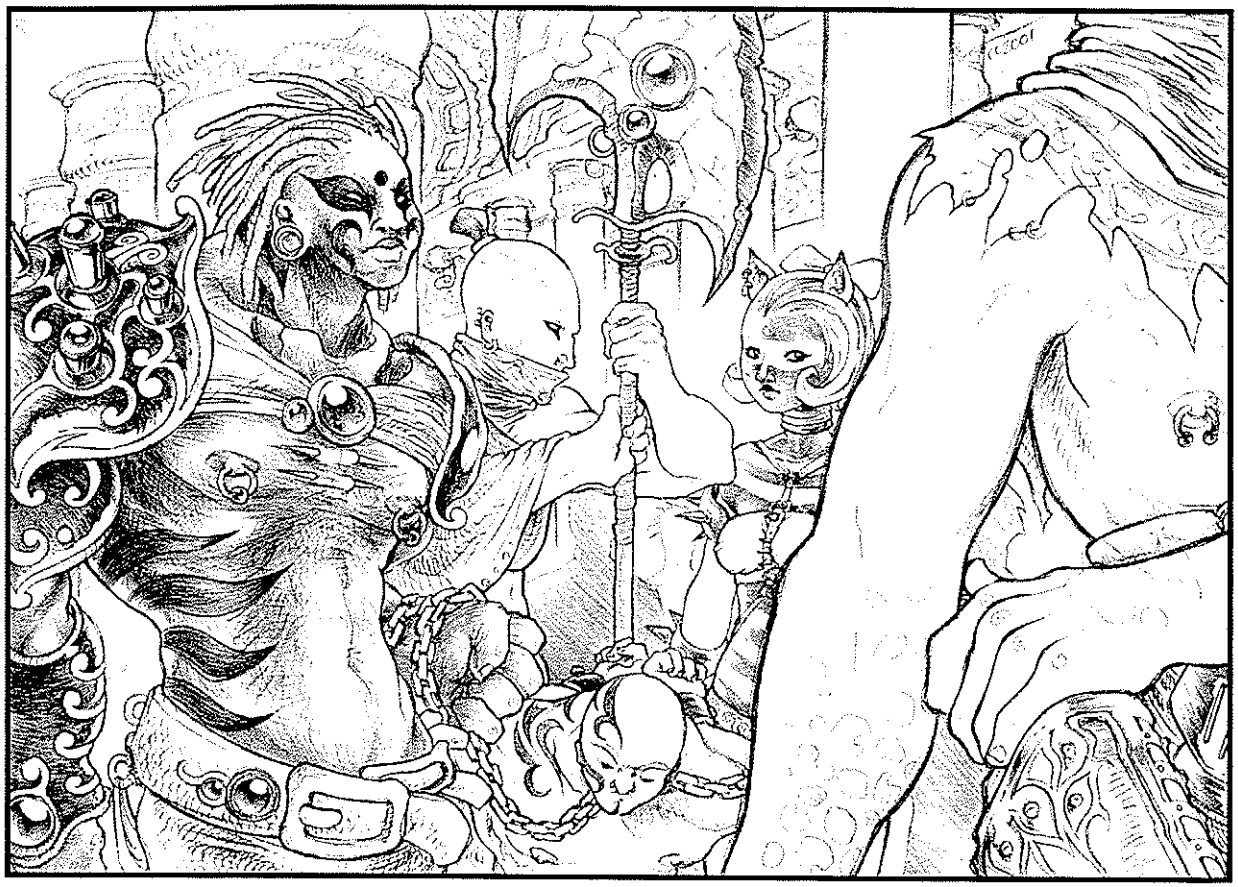
Treatment of slaves ranges from generous to deplorable. Slaves who are lazy or disobedient are kept in filthy conditions and fed only what they need to stay alive. Slaves who work hard and obey their masters are housed like any other household staff; those with generous masters may be fed on leftovers from the family's own meals. As slaves who have slept well and eaten reasonably do better work, most are treated with at least a modicum of care.

### What Do They Do?

About half of the Dragon-Blooded have jobs. One might teach in one of the academies, run or help to run a prefecture or a satrapy, hold a position in the ministries or magistracies, sit as a Senator in the Deliberative, serve in the legions, the navy or the Immaculate Order, manage a family business or estate or practice a prestigious craft such as weaponsmithing or horse-breeding.

The unemployed Dragon-Blooded hunt, socialize, practice their martial skills, compose art and poetry, write erotic novels, party, engage in self-indulgent behavior and "adventure," a term that can mean anything from bar-crawling in the Threshold capitals to mercantile adventurism and open military meddling in the policies of foreign states. Their socializing keeps the wheels of Dragon-Blooded society turning. In a sense, they do have a job, to be the Host of the Dragon-Blooded. They are 5,000 heroes, constantly training, ready to spring to the defense of the Realm if needed. At this, they are excellent, and it speaks well of the Dynasty that every Exalted scion of the Empress' many lines is a competent soldier, whatever else she may be.

The older a Dragon-Blooded is, the more likely she is to be employed. Most youngsters are at loose ends for a while after they graduate from or fail out of the academies. As they get older, these Dragon-Blooded tend to move in and out of lower-level positions. If they aren't excellent politicians, they'll tend to stay at this level, while the better politicians graduate to the empire's senior positions, which are for life or until unseated and, in the past, served as much to keep these Dragon-Blood in the Empress' eye as to run the empire.



Not all Dragon-Blooded consider slavery to be a morally sound condition, but they recognize that their economy depends upon it. Those Exalted who don't like slavery either don't keep personal slaves or buy as many slaves as possible and treat them as well as normal servants. Some few are secretly involved in movements to smuggle slaves out of the Realm, but even these usually own a small handful of slaves to keep up appearances.

Most Dragon-Blooded see the barbarians who are typically sold into slavery as worthless and ignorant, unworthy of freedom and incapable of making use of it. Slavery keeps the cost of goods down, which is a benefit not to be underrated in these unsettled days. Some truly believe that their slaves have a better life than they would have had otherwise — and often, they're right.

Most Dragon-Blooded households have at least two or three slaves around the premises, either to handle the particularly distasteful or dangerous jobs or for pleasure. Dragon-Blooded keep additional slaves for dangerous mass labor such as mining, and the Dynastic families lease slave gangs to the Realm or to patrician interests to perform unskilled and manual labor. Most Dynastic household servants are slaves, but some households also hire from among the local peasantry and pay wages in food, clothing and staple goods.

It is possible for a Dragon-Blooded to free a slave but only with the permission of the Deliberative. Each Dragon-Blood is allowed to free no more than three slaves per decade. Some Dragon-Blooded use freedom as a reward for slaves who perform heroically in the service of their masters. Others use the lure of eventual freedom to prod new slaves into ever-more dangerous or degrading acts. A few Dragon-Blooded simply free as many slaves as they can get away with. It is rare for the Deliberative to deny a request to free a slave.

## Law & Order

Law enforcement annoys the patricians, terrifies the peasants and, privately, amuses the Dragon-Blooded. There is a permanent police force throughout the Realm, referred to officially as the Guardians of the Realm and unofficially as the guardians, "those bloody bullies" or the Black-Helms, for their imposing choice of armor. Among the peasants and patricians, the guardians have a great deal of authority, mostly because the Dragon-Blooded don't want to be bothered dealing with any problems among their "lessers."

The main force of the guardians has little authority over Dragon-Blooded. At most, they may detain a Dragon-Blooded who wantonly kills a patrician, citizen or peasant or deliberately destroys large amounts of public property. In certain cities (particularly those controlled by Nellens or Cynis appointees), this may include the deaths of a great number of slaves, but for the most part, the lives of someone else's slaves need only be paid for with jade. Dragon-Blooded may not be detained for killing their own slaves or the disenfranchised. When a Dragon-Blood has been detained, a special group of the Guardians of the Realm is called in — the Imperial Force (non-Dragon-Blooded quietly refer to them as Dragon Handlers). This group has the authority to bring a Dragon-Blooded before the imperial courts. The Greater House of the Deliberative must approve appointments of officers to the Imperial Force, so it is rare for anyone to end up here who isn't sympathetic to the Dragon-Blooded. There are a number of Exalted on this force — usually veterans or Immaculate martial artists — since humans don't stand much of a chance if a criminal Dragon-Blood decides to put up a fight.

Patricians detained by the guardians are brought before the judges of the imperial courts so long as there is a reasonable case to be made against them; the guardians have a fair amount of latitude in deciding who to prosecute. The guardians may hold someone for up to a week without prosecuting them, although if a prisoner is particularly influential this can cause problems, and the guardians take this into account. Some guardians are also quite amenable to bribery. As long as they don't release anyone too dangerous, their superiors typically turn a blind eye.

The guardians have the authority to settle charges against peasants and the disenfranchised as they see fit, without the intervention of a court. For this reason, most peasants either try to avoid the guardians as much as possible or to make friends with them, often by paying "customary gratuities."

In cities and large towns, the guardians are professional and well organized. In small towns, either one or two guardians are posted from a larger town or one or two locals will be given the job. Locals are typically taken to a city for a few weeks and given training for the job, then returned to their town. They earn a small salary, but their job is to settle problems among the peasantry and to send for help in serious cases. Guardians taken from among the local peasantry do not have the authority to do anything more to a patrician than detain him until help arrives, and they may not touch a Dragon-Blooded.

The magistrates and the All-Seeing Eye, the Realm's secret police, helped to maintain order throughout the empire during the reign of the Scarlet Empress. In her absence, those groups have lost much of their influences. Both subsisted on the Empress' authority, and both have begun to lose cohesion and influence in the years since her disappearance.

## Dominions and Prefectures

The Realm is divided into several hundred prefectures, two of which are large enough to be called dominions and scores of which are barely worth the notice of an Exalted Dynast. Each prefecture includes about 10 to 12 farming towns and several small or large cities. A prefect oversees the entire prefecture, with a governor overseeing each town or city underneath the prefect. Governors collect taxes from the towns and cities; prefects collect tribute from the governors. Isolated areas with no governor are visited by roving tax collectors. These rural tax collectors have had a difficult time since the Empress disappeared, and many have vanished without trace. What follows is an overview of some of the Realm's more important prefectures.

### Arjuf Dominion

Arjuf Dominion borders the Great Inland Sea on the southwestern shore of the Blessed Isle, next to the Caracal River. The city of Arjuf itself is the largest port in the Realm and the home of the merchant navy. It's also firmly under the thumb of House Ledaal, as is the dominion.

The prefectship of Arjuf is a powerful position, currently occupied by Ledaal Maris. Maris is mortal, the daughter of Ledaal Kemar, a powerful Dragon-Blooded sorcerer. She is cunning, totally loyal to her Exalted father, about 20 years older than she looks and completely paranoid. Rumor has it that her father uses his powers to slow her aging so that she'll be able to run Arjuf for a long time to come. The two are also lovers and believe very few people outside the family suspect this. In this, they are wrong; their relationship is an open secret among the Exalted nobility of Arjuf.

Ships leave Arjuf every day, journeying to all corners of the Realm and beyond. The governor of the city, Rainbow Faith, has made an agreement with the merchants who ship goods through the city. If they sell a certain percentage of their goods within the walls of the city on the open market — usually through brokers — then their harbor fees are halved. Because of this, many unusual things can be found for sale within the walls of the city. The additional traffic that this deal has brought to the city has more than made up for the loss in fees.

House Ledaal uses the port to launch its expeditions into the Threshold, so young Dragon-Blooded looking for passage to exotic and dangerous locales can usually find suitable ships here. For a fee, they may even be able to hire a guide familiar with their destination. Such guides are often secretly loyal to (or, at least, well paid by) the Ledaals

### Houses and Prefectural Government

The prefects are imperial bureaucrats who answer to the Honorable and Humble Caretakers of the Common Folk. UnExalted Dynasts and patricians with Dynastic patronage fill most of the Thousand Scales, so the various prefectures can become dominated by representatives of one or another of the Great Houses. Income from the prefectures supported the Throne, so the Empress kept tax collection and civil order on the Blessed Isle reasonably honest. She preferred to show her favor instead through the size of the annual subsidy she presented to a house. Since her disappearance, the leadership of the prefectures has come to contain mostly bureaucrats with ties to local Dynastic interests. Arjuf Dominion, for instance, is dominated by those loyal to Ledaal.

As a given house usually oversees the majority of services and leadership in a given prefecture or dominion, about 10 percent of taxes and tribute from that area end up — legally and properly — in the coffers of that house. Another tenth is lost to graft, and the other eight tenths ended up in the imperial coffers. At least, that's how it used to work. Now, eight tenths is lost to graft, and the collecting agencies and the Throne receive only one fifth of the prefecture's total tax revenues.

If a house needs to take large-scale action (a building project, mercantile scheme or military maneuvers) within a prefecture controlled by another house, it is best to petition the controlling Dynasts for permission to do so. This involves the exchange of gifts and other pleasantries between houses. Even without formal permission, it is illegal (by decree of the Empress) to outright prevent such large-scale actions from taking place. However, local officials have an easy time obstructing political opponents' activities in their province. This leads many houses to lean on sworn brotherhoods and similar groups to achieve goals in foreign prefectures, even if those goals might be better suited to larger mercantile or military groups.

or another Great House and report back to the house on any interesting items their charges find.

Nishimo is one of the two other major cities in Arjuf Dominion. Nishimo used to be a thriving, wealthy metropolis until about 15 years ago, when the nearby quarries tapped out of marble. Now, Nishimo's a dirty, dying place, haven to bandits and criminals. A few beautiful old buildings made of the local marble still stand; all the others were torn down so that the material could be sold. They've been replaced with cheap, tawdry wooden affairs.

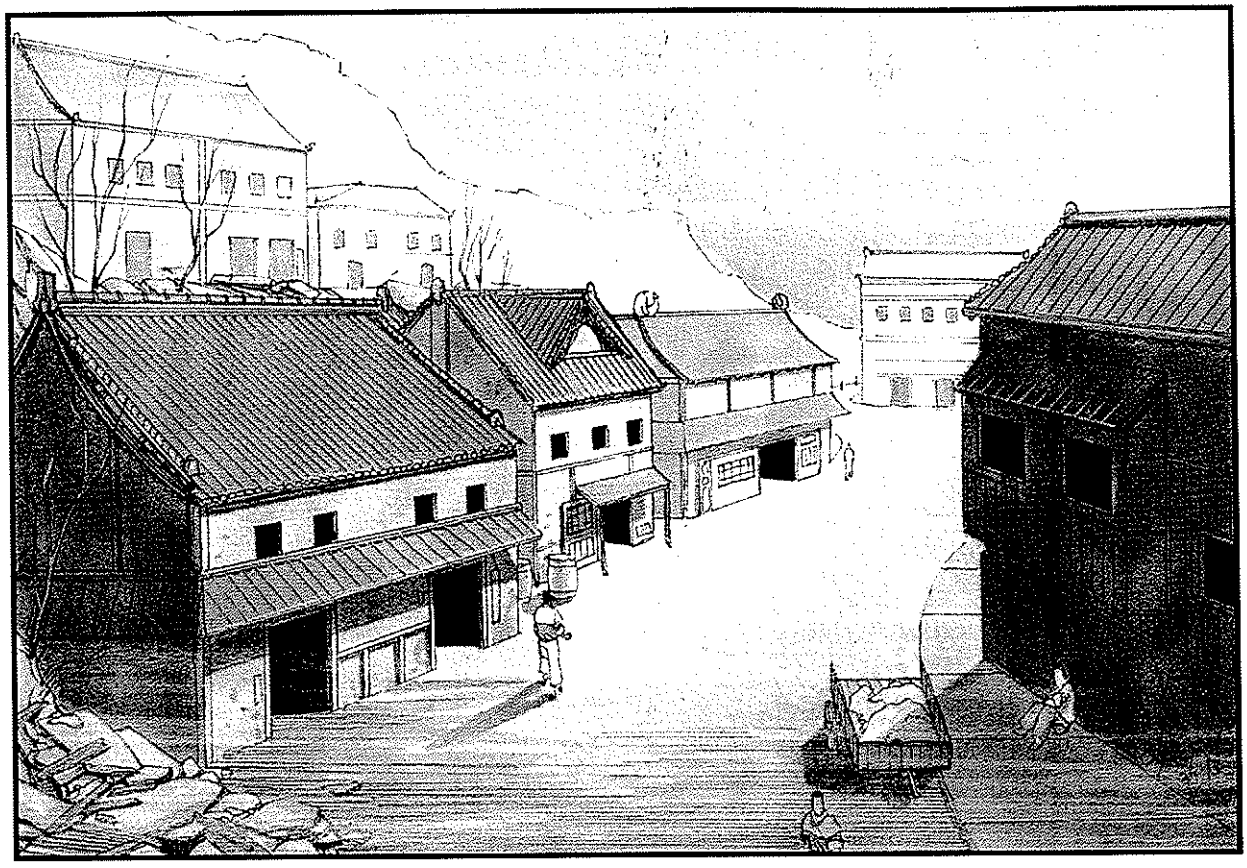
Ledaal still pays a few mercenaries to guard the main thoroughfare through town, as Nishimo sits directly between Arjuf and the third city in the dominion, Tuchara. The usual services catering to travelers still crowd in the main road — inns, taverns, supply shops of all sorts, tack shops, blacksmiths and brothels. The inns and taverns on the main road cater to the Dragon-Blooded and their retinues and, as such, retain most of the grandeur of the city's golden days. A block or two off the main road, however, establishments suited to patrician and peasant travelers can be found, as can more dangerous places, which the wise travelers eschew. Ledaal's mercenaries occasionally earn enough to have business elsewhere in town — but only occasionally. Mercenaries valuable enough to regularly earn such a wage rarely remain in such a pestilent posting as Nishimo for long.

Tuchara started as an artisans' colony and slowly grew to become the city it is today, and many artists and artisans can still be found within its walls. Dragon-Blooded come from far and wide to have their armor designed by one of Tuchara's master armorers or to have a special outfit made for an imperial party by one of Tuchara's dressmakers. Tuchara even has a small school for Manse architects. Because there is such demand for these artisans' work and because people will travel here from all over the Realm, almost everything in Tuchara is stunningly beautiful and painfully overpriced.

The inns are built tall and strong, showpieces designed by architecture students. An inn-keeper may go on at length about which now-famous architect designed her inn and why he made the architectural choices he made, usually right before she quotes the outrageous room prices. Some of the best restaurants in the Realm can be found in Tuchara, and several Dragon-Blooded families own houses in the city or nearby. It has become a fashionable vacation spot.

### Rural Life

Most of the towns and farming areas in Arjuf are reasonably well off. The additional traffic created by Tuchara and Arjuf has allowed them to sell the goods they produce at higher prices than usual to travelers. There are a few areas of total squalor, most of which can be found in the immediate suburbs of Nishimo.



## Ayreon Prefecture

Ayreon Prefecture is found in the northwest of the Blessed Isle and touches briefly on the coastline near the town of Maya.

Ayreon Prefecture has only one sizeable city, called Eye of Creation. For a city with such a pretentious name, it's politically unimportant. Some minor weaponsmiths have set up shop here in the last 20 years and have created an organization they call the Talon League. This guild sets prices and regulates who can make and sell weapons and who cannot. Few of these artisans show any real talent; those who do are usually blocked from joining the League out of jealousy and greed. The League has a deal with the governor, Starfall Dust. She has the local guardians shut down anyone who tries to operate without the permission of the League, and it gives Dust and the guardians a steep discount on weapons. The Talon League keeps a low profile within the Realm; few outside of Ayreon know it exists. This is deliberate: The leadership of the League has no interest in coming into conflict with the various commercial interests of the Great Houses.

Dust is an ambitious woman. While she chafes at the low stature of her city, she also sees an opportunity. Her lack of power means that people rarely pay much attention to her. Because of this, she has been able to quietly amass a small personal army (about one wing's worth), a cache of weapons paid as bribes by the League and a growing amount of blackmail material to use against local politicians. She has also arranged to have the local branch of the guardians infiltrated and controlled by her people.

There are two towns in Ayreon: Werck and Maya. Werck is a mining town and ships sulfur and gemstones to Tuchara in Arjuf Dominion. The yield is not large, and the town also relies on local agriculture to stay afloat. The governor, Joy Canyon, is a smart and even-tempered man. He only gives mining permits to a few people at a time so that the veins of gemstone will last the city for some time yet. In the meantime, he encourages local farming endeavors and slips some of the gemstones to a local household of House Peleps in return for a military guard on both the mines and the shipments of gems.

Maya is purely an agricultural community, but its crops are consistently bountiful. The locals placidly ascribe this to a remarkably mild local weather system created by hills on one side of the town and the sea on the other. The town's governor, Tower Stone, as well as a few hand-picked allies, knows better.

In the hills there is a small valley with a bad reputation. The trees there are inhabited by a small population of strix, and dark, flitting spirits are seen among the trees. A couple of people trying to explore the area have fallen unconscious and woken to find themselves lying just

outside of town. The townspeople never talk about the valley unless pressed, so very few people know of it. If pushed, they'll admit that it's a little spooky, but they stay away from it, and no one ever gets hurt.

In that valley is an entrance to an extensive system of natural underground caves. One particularly large cavern contains an altar erected by Stone and his accomplices. On this altar, Stone sacrifices small animals and jade beads to a great golden lion spirit that stands four feet tall at the shoulder. In return, that spirit uses his Charms to keep the weather favorable. He also uses them to put intruders to sleep and then to call on Stone (through headache-inducing visions) to remove them.

In contrast, the nearby farming community of Ashra fervently follows the teachings of the Order of Immaculate Dragons. As a result, its residents are very friendly to any Dragon-Blooded who travel through the area, and they invite all visitors to worship at their well-kept shrine. The few works of art and jewelry that the farmers have accumulated have gone to adorn this shrine, and it is guarded day and night by young women from the village.

## Chanos Prefecture

The prefect of Chanos is an actual Dragon-Blooded, Ragara Nova. He had a reputation as a wastrel and a fop. He was appointed to the prefecture five years ago both as a slap in the face and as a means to get him to shape up — Chanos was not seen as a plum assignment in those days, and a prefecture generally carries a lot of responsibility with it.

The plan has worked almost too well. The city of Chanos itself, where Nova has based himself, is a port city and a military town. It lies on the northeastern border of the Blessed Isle, not far from the frozen North, and many troops and military ships move through the port. It is a rugged place with comparatively few creature comforts, and some of the troops there were not afraid to show what they thought of this fop. Nova quickly learned he would have to shape up if he wanted the respect that he was used to getting by default in other places. In so doing, he has displayed something that no one expected — a keen grasp of military strategy and the attending politics. He has also developed a friendship with Tepet Ejava, the Roseblack.

The family has done its best to keep up Nova's reputation outside of House Ragara as a useless child — they're keeping him in reserve. They hope he might be able to help sway the contest for the Scarlet Throne in some way.

The people of Chanos oddly combine the grim aspect of men on their way to a battle they may not return from, with the kind of hard partying that only off-duty troops indulge in. There's a brothel on almost every block in Chanos, usually sandwiched in between two taverns.

Other than services for the military, towns in Chanos Prefecture produce mostly mined goods such as marble, gemstones and some substances used by sorcerers. The towns also mine iron ore and work it into usable shape, resulting in heavy, choking air and hopelessly polluted water supplies. The entire area is more gray than green. Local towns have developed a pattern of situating the mines deep in the hills, putting the town itself off to the side, and building any processing equipment downstream from there. Between illness and overwork, lifespans in these towns are often short.

Many artisans have set up shop in the area; the materials are cheaper if they don't have to be shipped. Artisans who have the money to settle elsewhere usually do so, and as a result local artisans are rarely the cream of the crop. Their prices are low.

Nova has been more generous than his predecessor about stationing small military units in local mining towns to cut down on robbery. Because of this, the town governors are better than many about paying their taxes.

## Eagle Prefecture

Eagle Prefecture is the western-most prefecture on the Blessed Isle and the gate to the western isles. The prefect, Orchid Coral, is known to be in the pocket of House Sesus and even married one of their unExalted sons, Sesus Lilon. This is much of the reason why the major port city of Eagle, Eagle's Launch, is not as well used as Arjuf. Coral doesn't keep secret the fact that she uses her position to badger anyone visiting the properties of the Peleps family in the northern isles. She also isn't nearly as evenhanded in her policies as Rainbow Faith, so many traders have found it cheaper to sail the extra distance to and from Arjuf.

The governor of Eagle's Launch, Orchid Sand, is Coral's son. He has no love for his father and isn't as loyal to Sesus as his mother is, but he likes the money they pay. Occasionally, he'll take money under the table from someone who wants to get around Coral's rules.

Eagle's Launch serves mainly as a distribution center for products and resources from the isles, such as fish, shellfish, siaka, squid, whales, carved coral and seashells and seaweed. A few siaka and whale hunters base themselves out of Eagle's Launch, sailing out for days or even weeks at a time on strong vessels.

The western tip of the Blessed Isle is rather narrow. Thus, most of the towns in the prefecture are coastal towns. Even those that aren't coastal border the Serpentine River. They fish for a living and do a small amount of farming, primarily to supplement their own diet. A few small herds of cows are kept, for milk and cheese and for meat to be sold to the Dynasts in Eagle's Launch and the islands.

The western coastline is haunted by an unusually high number of little gods. The inhabitants of coastal towns

usually do their best to deal civilly with these spirits and go about their business. Sometimes, such closeness inspires religious zealotry, however — on both sides of the issue.

The small community of Glalo maintains a quiet practice out on its boats of sacrificing three fish from the first catch of each day to the local weather spirits. This first small indiscretion eventually lead to others. The town is very quiet about its "superstitions" and would laugh them off as silly old traditions if anyone asked, but the truth is that the townspeople have slowly and steadily fallen into heresy. A Ragara who passed through the area not long ago picked up just enough to guess and, eager to cause problems for the Sesus, sent word to the Immaculate Order that it should send a monk to check things out. In these hectic and trying times, a few suspicions about a small town are a low priority, but certainly, someone will eventually come to look in on things. Glalo is an isolated community that dislikes travelers and visitors. There are no inns and only one tavern, which does its best to make non-locals feel uncomfortable and unwelcome.

In the community of Guin, on the other side of the prefecture, the opposite is true. Its people have embraced the Order of the Immaculate Dragons to what some might say is an unhealthy degree. An old couple was burned alive after they were caught setting out milk for a small cat-spirit. The event shook everyone up, and the town has desperately kept the affair a secret. Guin also has a problem with a river dragon that has been eating the local wildlife. The townspeople have had to go farther and farther from shore in order to fish, and they've lost a couple of boats to storms that way. They fear to send for help, in case those sent discovered the town's secret.

The mid-sized town of Cloaka, governed by Prism Flame, is best known for its horse-breeders. The local breed, called firemanes, are bred for speed and endurance. They aren't particularly strong and are rarely used for pulling carriages or hauling packs, but they're perfect for long-distance races and for traveling. Several Dynastic families visit Cloaka to purchase horses. Sometimes they'll bring a favorite mare for the purpose of breeding her with the local stock. firemanes are tall, long-lined horses with beautifully arched necks. They're black or dark red, and their long, flowing manes and tails are always a deep red.

## Incas Prefecture

Incas Prefecture, located in a wide valley between hills on the southeastern edge of the Blessed Isle, is prime farmland. Cows, milk and cheese, fruit, rice, grains and vegetables are major exports of the area, as are cloth and clothing.

Incas has two cities: Sion and Noble. Sion started out as a small town of weavers and farmers. Eventually, it grew up into a manufacturing city that produces cloth and clothing of all sorts. The majority of the material it produces is common, everyday material for patricians and peasants, but it does put out a small amount of high-quality material for the Dynasts.

The captain of Sion's guardians, Oak, is the son of a patrician mother and a Sidereal father. Most people believe that his father is dead and was human, but Oak keeps in touch with his father, a member of the outlawed Cult of the Illuminated, and knows exactly what he is. Oak has occasionally smuggled a newly Exalted Solar off of the Blessed Isle and to his father. He also keeps a quiet eye on the actions of the Dragon-Blooded and the Immaculate Order and sends word on to his father about anything that sounds interesting. While he believes in his father's work, he's still more concerned with maintaining his own safety than with doing everything he can to help.

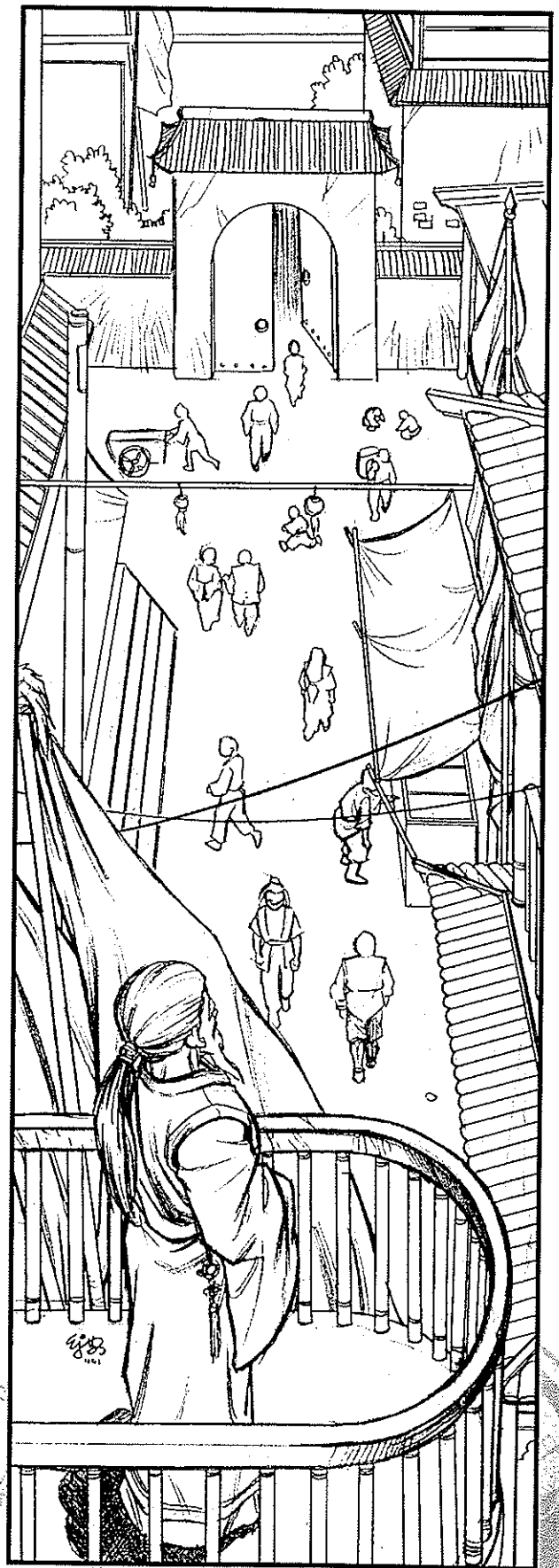
A few artisans reside in Sion and design particularly beautiful clothing, but most of the material produced here is made in bulk. Once a year, in the month of Resplendent Fire, a festival is held in Sion. Clothing designers come from all over the Blessed Isle to display their designs. Sion provides free room and board for these designers, and the festival, in turn, brings in a great deal of business. This time is when many year-long contracts are signed to ship Sion cloth all over the Blessed Isle.

Noble is half-military town and half-marketplace. It is located on the furthest southwest point of the prefecture, where the South stretches its arms close to the Blessed Isle. It was originally built to help repel any invaders from the South and to serve as a staging ground when sending troops into the region. Since this resulted in so many people moving through the town, it also grew into a marketplace for the various foodstuffs and animals grown and raised within the prefecture, as well as for a number of other products.

Now that forays into the Threshold are fewer and farther between and several legions have been disbanded, Noble is shrinking. There is less traffic, sales are down, prices have been lowered, and local farmers have had to tighten their belts. Entire streets stand empty now.

The Palace Sublime stands in Incas Prefecture, just outside of Sion. House Iselsi has a strong presence here, and most towns in this prefecture are reasonably religious and loyal to the Immaculate Order. The Sidereals within the Order know that there is a threat to them somewhere in Sion, but for the moment, Oak's father uses his powers to help keep his son hidden from the far-seeing eyes of his fellows.

Incas Prefecture is home to a cluster of fire- and sunlight-related little gods who make their homes along the southern shoreline. Even the Golden Stars have occasionally been seen walking the sandy shores, collecting tiny seashells to braid into their hair. No one is entirely sure why these spirits find the area so attractive, but most people spend as little time as possible on the



shoreline so as to avoid angering them. Every now and then, a sorcerer will travel through the area to petition or make a deal with one of these spirits.

### Land Ownership

The Empress owned the Realm. The entire Blessed Isle was her property, and everyone was paying her rent or living somewhere for free at her pleasure. She used and abused her ability to renegotiate and terminate leases to keep control of the Dynasty and choke off houses that were getting too large. This was the standard avenue of taxation, and now that the Great Houses are bolstering the tax rates to rake in more skim, many of the Realm's poor have found themselves unable to pay their rent. These disenfranchised individuals wander the roads of the Realm, living in squatter camps and working at what seasonal labor they're able to scrounge.

## Juche Prefecture

The quarries at the foot of the Imperial Mountain (just outside of the city of Juche) are the source of most of the stone used for building and most of the jade used for coins. The city itself houses laborers for the mines, artisans who carve the stone and design buildings and a small colony of Mountain Folk. Juche Prefecture really should be a dominion, as it includes all of the land from Juche city to the Imperial City. Only the Imperial City and the land from there to the sea are not included (see "The Scarlet Prefecture").

The governor of Juche, Gemstone Jade, is friendly with the Mountain Folk and consults with their princes often. She is careful to be seen as taking their advice under consideration, however, rather than being under their control. She has quietly taken one of their number as a lover.

There are three princes of the local Mountain Folk: Alies Wildflower, Karlie Scarlet and Cory Stone. All three dress in beautiful gossamer clothing and armor in varying shades of green. While the Mountain Folk appear to go about their business as normal even in these trying times, they keep a very close eye on things. A quiet debate rages among their nobility as to what their loyalty to the Realm means right now. Is it loyalty to the Scarlet Empress? Loyalty to whomever is chosen by the Deliberative? Loyalty to a particular candidate who serves their interests?

The only thing they've been able to agree on so far is that they cannot be seen as interfering in the volatile political situation and that their loyalty is to the Realm. As soon as they can figure out what that means, they'll do

something about it. In the meantime, they've been courting Jade for information on the potential candidates under the guise of simple curiosity.

Most of House Nellens lives in the city of Juche while they negotiate with House Ragara for a wing of the palace. Nellens Ranes, one of the few Dragon-Blooded members of the house, is trying to figure out how best to make use of the family's proximity to the Mountain Folk in their bid for the Throne. Unfortunately for him, he's a bit of a loud, pushy person, and while not overly obnoxious, he hasn't particularly won the admiration or friendship of the elegant, stolid Mountain Folk.

There are four mid-sized towns in the area, most with a reasonable contingent of Dynasts in them. Plenty of people want to be close to the Imperial City, but they also want some distance now and then. As a result, many Dragon-Blooded keep "get-away" homes in the towns of Juche Prefecture.

House Iselsi is perhaps the only house that has no family members with publicly known homes in the area. It does, however, maintain two small pieces of property through very distant human relations. One of these is a small inn located in a town called Spider's Crossing. The inn is an unassuming and popular place to stop for travelers, and it has several rooms hidden underground for family members who need a place to hide or hold meetings. The employees are all distant family, and all keep their eyes and ears open — although not all of them know who it is they're spying for. The second piece of property is a small farm not far outside of Juche. Certain agents of the All-Seeing Eye use the farm as a resting place and message post.

Enough farming is carried on in the area to support the needs of the prefecture. Very little food is exported, however, and many non-staple foods are imported.

A particularly large population of slaves can be found in Juche Prefecture — there's a fair amount of heavy labor to be done in the area, and there are many Dragon-Blooded living locally. The city of Juche has an extensive ghetto, and the prefecture's towns have a larger proportion of poor people than most. There may be plenty of stone for buildings coming out of the mines, but it either goes to the building projects of wealthy patricians and Dynasts, or it gets shipped out. Cheaper living quarters are formed of wood, leftover odd-sized pieces of stone that never quite fit together right or even sod, in some farming communities.

## Lord's Crossing Dominion

Lord's Crossing Dominion can be found inland, between Arjuf Dominion and the Imperial Mountain along the Caracal River stretching westward to the Serpentine River. House Tepet makes its primary residence in the prosperous trading city that sits in the foothills at the head of that Caracal River, Lord's Crossing itself.

With the recent loss of Tepet's legions, the morale of Lord's Crossing and the nearby towns has dropped precipitously. Many husbands, wives and children mourn family-members lost in the North. Tepet has done its best to avoid having these emotions focused on itself. The family spends what money it can afford on solemn parades and memorials honoring the dead, listing their own lost children right next to the names of the soldiers who died under their command. In this way, they subtly remind everyone that they lost family as well, while simultaneously assuring everyone that they see other families' losses as being just as important as their own, and that they must rebuild together.

The entire area has the feeling of a sick patient that has stumbled and now wavers trying to get back onto its feet. Sawyer Shadow, the governor of Lord's Crossing City, and Carpenter Reason, the prefect, are working together to bring as much traffic, trade and money to the area as possible — and to find new recruits for the Tepet forces. The two officials are doing their best to balance the people's need for a time of mourning, the economic necessity for visitors, contracts and shipping and the desire of House Tepet to rebuild its shattered forces. Shadow is the dark-skinned, red-haired granddaughter of a Dynast and a Southern prince; she has her grandfather's Southern fire and her grandmother's keen economic sense. Reason is a self-assured patrician born of a long line of powerful patricians, and he learned the labyrinthine mysteries of politics at an early age.

The two politicians have planned several large festivals over the next few years. Publicly, they're saying it's to help the people move on and to celebrate the brave dead. Privately, they also want the influx of people and recruits such festivals will bring.

The dominion exports a particularly large range of goods and services; this is why Lord's Crossing, an inland city, has become such a center of trade. Mining for ores and stone is carried out in the hills. There are two local processing centers in Lord's Crossing for ores; the rest is shipped raw. Marble, jade and other gemstones can all be found in modest amounts in the hills. Farmland is particularly fertile along the river, and local farmers produce rice, vegetables and fruits and raise cattle. Beautiful raw cloths are produced in comparatively small yet high-quality yields. The swift trade that the city does has attracted quite a few artisans who do work on demand for the traders and tourists passing through. There's even a small college for architects studying Air-aspected and Earth-aspected Manse construction, specializing in Hearthstone adaptation.

There are two famous local dog-breeders located in two nearby cities. In Traiter, Starlight breeds oversized, menacing black dogs and trains them to be vicious guard dogs. Anyone who wants to purchase one must send someone to spend two weeks at Starlight's facility being

introduced to the dogs and learning how to handle them. In Portee, the second breeder, Whitecloud, breeds small lap dogs for wealthy Dynasts. The dogs are bred for their long, silky white hair, their light bird-like cries and their unusual eyes — which come in every bright color of the rainbow and sometimes change color during times of high emotion, which is to say constantly.

The dominion as a whole has become a very popular tourist area. Most farming communities have at least one charming bed and breakfast where visitors can fawn over the quaint architecture and home-cooked food. Towns ship handmade goods in from the artisans in the cities and sell them at ludicrous prices. Several of the houses have homes high in the foothills that stay cool even well into the month of Resplendent Fire.

## Pangu Prefecture

Pangu is a small prefecture in the northeast of the Blessed Isle, across the river from the Scarlet Prefecture and the Imperial City. The prefecture is almost entirely comprised of farming communities, and much of the food produced there goes to feed the various legions of the empire on their travels — only the Threshold city of the Lap surpasses Pangu Prefecture in feeding soldiers. Time Rain, the prefect, has had a deal going with the Empress (through Mnemon Bata, who takes care of the day-to-day details of the Scarlet Prefecture) for the past 15 years whereby he keeps his prices low, and she decrees that the legions have to buy from him. He expects to lose that deal the moment someone new takes the Scarlet Throne and is desperate to keep that from happening. He's also eager to find new contracts, particularly now that a good handful of legions have been destroyed or disbanded. He's just starting to realize that his reliance on his deal with the Empress has left him vulnerable, and he has no contacts in other prefectures to whom he can sell his farmers' produce.

There is a small cult based out of the town of Blind Love whose members secretly worship the Empress as a deity. They pray for her return and do what little they can to find out what happened to her, including sending their children to find work as servants in the Imperial Palace and its environs. Each Calibration, they hold somber nighttime services. They sacrifice a single child — always someone deformed, blind or mentally handicapped — to appease whatever demon or other god holds their goddess prisoner. For surely, it would take such a being to hold the Empress against her will.

House Cynis keeps a palace on the shore of Pangu Prefecture. The locals, who are fairly moralistic, aren't particularly fond of the house. They gossip amongst themselves about the terrible things that will surely befall such outrageous hedonists, but they don't hesitate to take Cynis' money in return for food or supplies. They do, however, charge Cynis higher prices than they otherwise would.

House Cynis is a favorite topic of conversation in the area. If there aren't any children around, talk will often turn to speculation about what Cynis does with its slaves. Some of the locals believe that the house's tastes run to the violent, and they will point to various areas as theoretical dumping grounds for used-up bodies. Almost all of the accounts of people seeing bodies buried are third-hand at best. There are also stories of local disappearances, which are always quietly attributed to House Cynis setting its jaded eye on someone it couldn't have.

Most locals refuse to hire their children out to the house as servants, so Cynis usually imports servants from other prefectures. Given its fondness for slaves, however, Cynis uses fewer servants than most houses.

## The Scarlet Prefecture

The Scarlet Prefecture includes the Imperial City and the land from the city to the sea. It is a small prefecture, as such things go, but then, it's also under the direct control of the Empress (the Regent, currently). The Empress appointed someone to deal with the day-to-day affairs of the prefecture and give her reports once a month. The Regent has happily kept up this practice but without the monthly reports.

The de facto prefect is currently Mnemon Bata, one of Mnemon's human sons. He is headstrong and doesn't tend to side with his mother in political matters, which is why the Empress chose him. His family is now trying to curry favor with him, which he milks for as much worth as he can without technically stepping outside the bounds of his job. His favored tactic is to find things that he needs to have done anyway and then to subtly maneuver someone in his family into "convincing" him that he'd be doing them a great favor by doing it. He's made a game of accumulating as many favors as possible without doing anything he wouldn't have done anyway; it's likely to get him in trouble eventually.

The head of the Imperial Force in the Scarlet Prefecture is Nellens Birane. He was hand-chosen by the Empress from among the human members of his house. He could not abuse his position in major ways without her notice (through Mnemon Bata). But it has given Nellens some small measure of control and power among the Dragon-Blooded, which has helped to keep the playing field a little more even. Now that the Empress is gone and Mnemon Bata is busier than ever, Birane has slipped in a few extra favors for his house around the edges. He doesn't want to give Bata reason to replace him, but it would be a shame not to take advantage of the circumstances.

Many of the industries in the Scarlet Prefecture are service oriented, aimed at taking care of the extensive Dragon-Blooded population and their endeavors. There are quite a few taverns, brothels, artisans, libraries, stables, barracks, mercenary squads, guides, blacksmiths, jewelers, tailors and so on.

There is also a surfeit of con men running scams, but they rarely stay for long. As long as they only con patricians and peasants, they're likely to get a warning the first time or two they get caught, but after that, the penalties get harsher. Once they've been caught once or twice they tend to move on until they can be sure their faces have been forgotten.

Much of the region's food and cloth are imported, although there are several farming communities between the Imperial City and the sea. The peasants in these areas tend to be unusually literate, and many have spent time in the city. There is less superstition in these parts, particularly since bored Dragon-Blooded sometimes roam the area looking for spirits that have stepped out of their places or river dragons that need to be put down. Pretty much everyone follows the Order of the Immaculate Dragons, but there are few fanatics. Since the Dragon-Blooded are seen so frequently, it's harder to view them as distant, powerful and mysterious entities.

## Ventus Prefecture

Ventus Prefecture spans the rugged fields and forests of the northern shores of the Blessed Isle. The farming communities are small and close-knit and sell any extra produce to Chanos for the Ragara legions. They raise hardy crops resistant to the moderate cold spells the area receives and are particularly well known for their sweet-tart apples.

Many of the foothills are forested, and several houses have hunting lodges in the area, including Ragara, V'neef, Cynis and Mnemon. There is a fair population of bears, a few hybroc in the higher regions and some of the smaller great cats.

The area is also a source of various substances used by sorcerers, alchemists, healers, pharmacists and chemists. Healing herbs of all kinds are found in the forests and on the heights of the hills; many of the locals are named after the herbs that they raise or collect. Sulfur, mercury, coal and other substances are mined or otherwise collected and shipped out. Ventus has laws against processing these substances into usable form within the bounds of the prefecture, as the by-products would destroy many of the healing herbs that are so valuable.

Ventus has only one major city, Bright Obelisk, named for the gleaming silvery monument erected in the middle of the city by its founders several centuries ago. Even this city is comparatively small; apart from Dynasts visiting their hunting lodges and the occasional caravan, few people travel through Ventus. The prefect of Ventus, Sage Lake, spends most of her time drinking herself into a stupor. She leaves most of the details of government in the hands of the governor of Bright Obelisk, Holly, a quiet but capable woman descended from both human and Mountain Folk stock.

The streets of Bright Obelisk are of packed dirt and are kept surprisingly clean. They also wander confusingly in odd directions, and finding your way through the city if you haven't lived there for several years can be difficult at best. Some people have lived in the city all their lives and still only know their way around certain neighborhoods.

The populace of Ventus is comparatively quiet and well mannered. Most are happy with their lot and even-tempered. Some speculate that this is due to a noticeable infusion of Mountain Folk blood throughout the region. Few travel unless they have specific reason to do so, but there is no stigma attached to traveling.

There is only one mid-sized town in Ventus; the rest of the population lives in small farming and fishing communities. Blackwater is a mining town that grew up near a vast underground lake in the foothills. The cavern that houses the lake is eerily silent, and it's impossible to see beneath the waters of the lake. Any water that is drawn up has a blue-black tint to it and slowly burns through the vessel it is held in. It irritates the skin and temporarily numbs the nerves beneath. It also seems to cling to the skin of anyone who reaches into it. The natives know better than to try to touch the water and warn strangers away from the lake. Occasionally, movement can be seen beneath the water; the townspeople

### The Imperial Manse

The Imperial Palace of the Realm is simply huge, and the grounds cover nearly a third of the interior of the Imperial City. When people talk about the Palace, they're talking about here, not the "palace" of the Deliberative. The Imperial Palace is the seat of the imperial government and also home to much of the Dynasty. At any given time, there are several thousand Dragon-Blooded in residence in the Palace, as well as a host of bureaucrats, servants, functionaries and, of course, the Legion of Silence. The Palace is vast, and while some areas constantly crawl with traffic, others have been almost totally abandoned over the years.

At the center of the Imperial Palace lies the Imperial Manse, a huge, squat structure poised over one of the most important dragon lines emerging from the Elemental Pole of Earth. Today, none can enter this fortress-within-a-fortress, for only the Empress could open it. It is said that the Hearthstone of the Imperial Manse gives the bearer control over the defenses of the Realm. It may be that the defenses of the Realm can be controlled otherwise and that the empire's weapons are not hollow threats, but if someone has control of them, he isn't advertising the fact.

assume that these are spirits, as normal animals should not be able to live within the water.

## The Thousand Scales

Officially, there is nothing in the Realm known as the Thousand Scales. The bureaucracy that drives the engine of empire is officially known as the Imperial Service, a massive web of ministries, departments, councils and advisory committees that serves to perpetuate all of the functions of empire while carefully obscuring those functions from the imperial citizenry.

The Imperial Service itself is broken into three branches: the legions, the Magistracy and the All-Seeing Eye, as well as innumerable bureaucratic ministries that are officially set underneath the magistrates. Each performs a vital function in perpetuating the Realm, and each branch is jealous and fearful of the other two. Until recently, all three worked in relative harmony, as the hand of the Empress balanced their rivalries, but her absence has propelled the magistrates — or more accurately, their putative subordinates, the ministers — into a position of greater authority at the expense of the other two.

## The Magistrates

The true magistrates of the Realm are few and far between. Appointed by the Empress herself, they are plenipotentiaries without portfolio. Their task is to ensure the continued smooth operation of the Imperial Bureaucracy in all its guises, and they walk to and fro in the land and up and down it performing their tasks as they see fit. The magistrates are troubleshooters, authorized to deal with situations ranging from rampaging beasts to murder investigations. With the authorization of the Empress behind him, a magistrate could confiscate any property, execute any sentence and, in general, exercise his will and powers as he saw fit. Limited to the Dragon-Blooded and often drawn from the criminal ranks, magistrates long served as the visible manifestation of the Empress' will (as opposed to the All-Seeing Eye, the invisible manifestation of same). Without the Empress in place, the magistrates technically now report to no one at all and are a law unto themselves.

### The Magistracy of Hares

In reality, the magistrates have lost their all-powerful protector, and many magistrates find themselves harried or hunted by those whom they have judged against in the past. The current state of affairs has been dubbed "the Magistracy of Hares" by one wit, for never before have so many of the Empress' favorite toys been forced to seek shelter, all at once.

Ministers, on the other hand, are appointed officials who serve in the actual Imperial Bureaucracy. They are the cogs that turn the wheels of empire, and in the popular mind, they are confused with the roving magistrates. Drawn from the ranks of mortals as well as Dragon-Blooded, the ministers have their powers severely proscribed by law. However, as the number of tasks associated with the maintenance of the Realm is huge, the ministers' number is legion.

There is a natural hatred for the unfettered magistrates among the ministers and a natural contempt for the deskbound clerks of the ministries among the magistrates. However, in recent years, the ministers have gained the upper hand. Using the laws and regulations of the Realm as a noose, they have slowly drawn their powers tight around the once-proud magistrates and seem intent on either harnessing them or grinding them into dust.

### Duties and Honors

The job of a magistrate is to defend the Realm. Whether she does so by organizing hunts to eliminate beasts plaguing imperial lands or by sitting in judgment on a murderer makes no difference. Each task the magistrate performs is for the good of the Realm, either enforcing its laws, protecting its citizens or punishing its recidivist inhabitants.

Of no fixed abode, magistrates wander the land waiting for trouble to find them. News of a magistrate's appearance in an area travels like wildfire, and if there is anything in the region that demands the magistrate's attention, runners will be sent to find her posthaste. Interestingly, the Empress has forbid her magistrates from acquiring wealth, so that they might be the poorest inhabitants of the Realm and thus its humblest. However, since all citizens are duty-bound (and wise enough) to accede to any requests a magistrate makes, the functional definition of poverty that magistrates enjoy is a bit different from that afflicting the average peasant. However, the imperial strictures on the position do make magistrates hard to bribe; when they can have anything they want for the asking but cannot carry any wealth with them, magistrates are almost incorruptible. After all, what could they possibly be offered that would compare to what they already enjoy?

Magistrates most often travel alone — or nearly so. Officially, they generally travel with a single scribe and perhaps a warrior or two as a bodyguard. The former serves to record all of the magistrates deeds and decision so that they may be inscribed in the official histories, and the latter serves primarily to attract arrows in the case of an ambush, for the ranks of the magistrates include some of the most dangerous, skilled and puissant Dragon-Blooded in all the Realm. Many were plucked from prison or worse by the Empress in her mercy, so that they might choose between death and service to the Realm. Having

been spared thus — and well aware of the price they will pay if they lapse into former habits — the magistrates pledge their considerable skills to the service of the Realm. Almost uniform among them is a deep personal loyalty to the Empress herself, which is almost unheard of in the Imperial Service.

Less prominent, however, are the servants known as archons, who are to the magistrates what the magistrates are to the Empress. Like their superiors, they are often recruited from the ranks of the most dangerous criminals and promising young revolutionaries, and the vast majority would have faced the executioner's axe had they not been offered the chance to serve the Realm instead. They are bound to obey the orders of the magistrates they serve and can bring a vast array of skills to bear on any problem that might vex their masters. Finding evidence, locating witnesses (and convincing them to testify), spying and, if necessary, eliminating those whose actions the magistrate judges to be detrimental to the Realm — these are just a few of the duties laid at an archon's feet. The number of archons attached to a given magistrate varies; inexperienced magistrates usually have perhaps three archons at most, while those who have been at the trade for years can have as many as a dozen. This is not to say that a senior magistrate is surrounded by a traveling horde of archons. Rather, a magistrate in position to support a number of archons will have them working solo or in small teams, moving about the countryside on a variety of vital assignments.

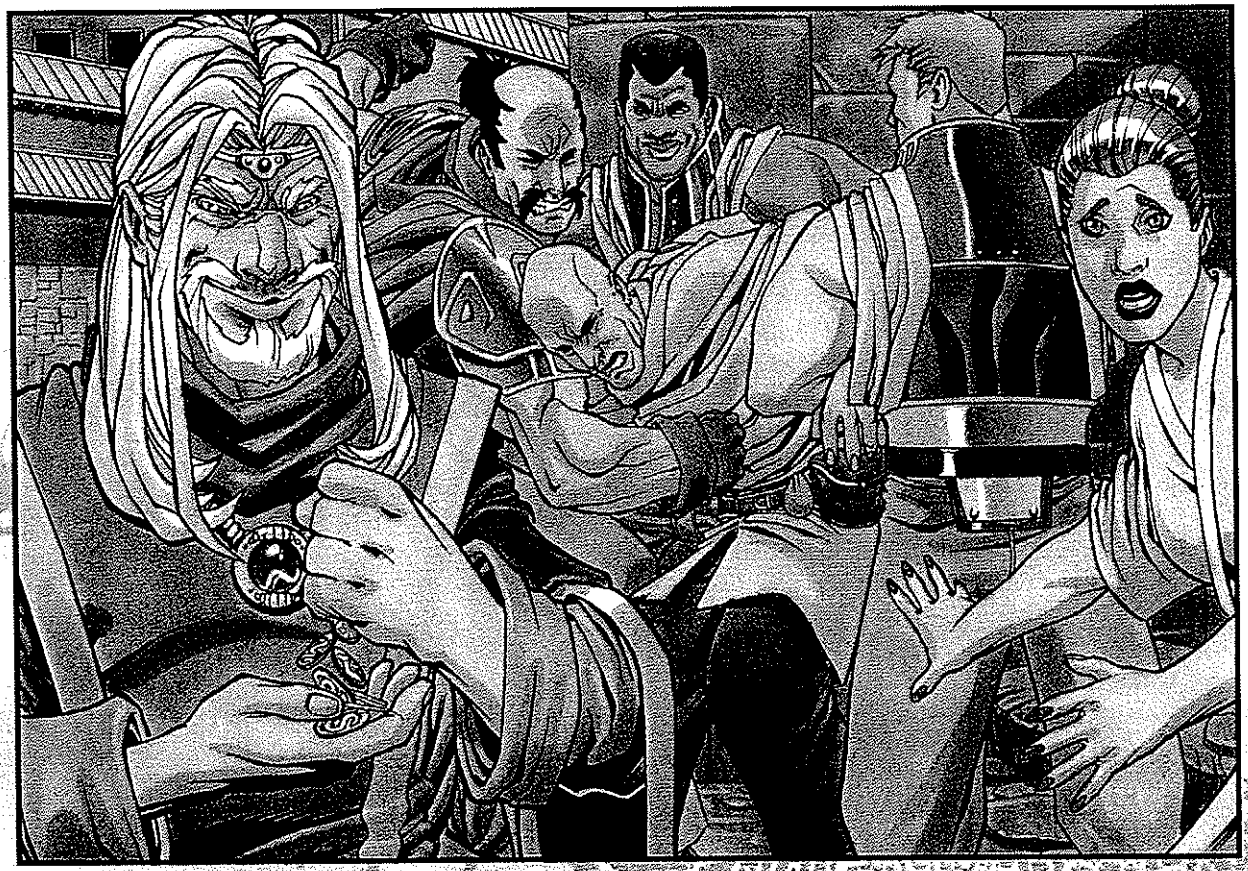
Each archon's life is bound up with the life of the magistrate he serves, for when the magistrate's life ends, so does that of the archon. While this penalty is rarely invoked, due to the simple fact that most magistrates are Dragon-Blooded and most archons aren't, it is still a powerful incentive for archons to see to their masters' well-being.

## Common Tasks Performed by Magistrates

Magistrates will be sent for to perform a wide variety of tasks. The most important include:

• **Sitting in Judgment** — Magistrates often hear suits or are petitioned to serve as judges in cases of murder and other heinous crimes. No Dynast wants to take a case before an actual judge because all the judges are loyal to various Great Houses. Magistrates also frequently serve as an amicus curiae, when they feel the local judge has the situation well in hand but want to legitimize the proceedings.

• **Hunting the Beast** — Many of the oldest and best-loved children's stories of the Realm revolve around this theme: Beast terrorizes village, magistrate hears of the village's distress, magistrate arrives and dispatches the beast. In these dark times, the magistrate is just as likely to gather a posse as to attempt to beard the creature in its den,



alone, but the end result is generally the same. In the past, beasts were generally regarded as just that — animals or monsters who'd decided to prey on the Empress' subjects. However, of late, the definition has expanded to include lawless men, infestations of undead, ambitious Fair Folk and, most recently, incautious Anathema.

• **Rooting Out Corruption** — When suspicion grows that a satrap, prefect or minister is unduly corrupt, it is the magistrates who are called in to investigate the matter. Woe betide any whom they find guilty.

• **Punishing Bandits** — Oftentimes, it is easier and faster to get a magistrate on the scene in a region terrorized by bandits. Once the magistrate arrives, however, it is the bandits who become the hunted. In most cases, they are eradicated within the week.

• **Dealing with Unquiet Spirits** — If a spirit or, worse yet, a ghost is refusing to behave, generally, a magistrate is called for. The expectation is that the magistrate will demonstrate to the spirit or ghost the folly of its ways and resolve the problem forever. If necessary, the magistrate will destroy the offending entity, though this is generally held as a last resort. In these situations, members of the Immaculate Order are also often called in, and there is a roughly friendly working alliance between the monks and the magistrates. At such times, the Immaculates politely bow to the civil authority of the magistrates, who then politely requests the monks' assistance. In this manner, the maximum amount of expertise and force can be brought to bear on the situation while all of the proprieties are observed.

### Above the Law

No law of the land, save those applying to treason, applies to magistrates. They have carte blanche to do as they see fit in defense of the Realm, whether that be confiscating land, shattering a crystal vase or ordering an execution. In theory, their power has no limits except the Empress' direct opposition to one of their decrees. In reality, they are strongly encouraged to exercise restraint. When possible, they will work through others to enforce their judgment — for example, hiring mercenaries to rid a region of a marauding pack of beasts or giving a cook an addictive powder to mix into the wine of an overly ambitious landowner. Here is where the archons earn their pay — and their stays of execution.

More rarely does a magistrate hand down overly harsh decrees. This is, in part, because doing so makes enemies, and while each magistrate is a power unto herself, the roads are long and lonely, and the wrath of a Dragon-Blooded who has been humiliated by a magistrate's decision is fearsome.

Rarest of all is for a magistrate to use force. Only under the most pressing and dire of circumstances does a magistrate throw decorum to the winds and harness her own power to effect a judgment. To do so in most cases is to admit that the magistrate has lost control of the situation or that some element of the case is so far beyond the bounds of the laws of the Realm that only raw power can resolve it.

### Recruitment

Before her disappearance, the Empress selected and initiated each magistrate personally. Now, there is no way to restock the dwindling ranks of the magistrates, as no one has the authority to appoint new ones. This factor, more than any other, has speeded the ascent to prominence of the ministers. Beneath imperial notice most of the time, they have swarmed like ants, and their numbers are telling.

### Training

There is no formal training for magistrates. They are merely given their badges of office, instructed in their duties and given a suggestion that they should learn the laws of the Realm to the best of their ability. Left unspoken is the knowledge that the older magistrates often shadow the younger ones, to assess their performance and provide assistance, as well as to test them.

Magistrates also have no set routes. Most will make something of a home in a single town, often a provincial capital, but a fair number live on the road. Occasionally, their paths cross by design, occasionally, by accident. Once every five years, a magistrate is required to report to the Imperial City to detail her deeds and judgments. At this time, the records kept by her associated scribe (if she has one) are tallied and pored over, and the magistrate is commended or rebuked. Only twice has a magistrate been stripped of rank for poor performance in the field, and such a horrific event has not occurred in 170 years.

With the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress, magistrates have become notably reluctant to answer the five year summons for fear of being ambushed or stripped of their power by the Regent. Instead, they continue to function in the far reaches of the Realm as best they can, praying for the Empress' return and calling on favors from those who have valued their judgments in the past.

## The Ministers

There are well over 100 different bureaus, departments, ministries and offices within the Thousand Scales, each rigidly defined as to what it oversees. They range from the minuscule (The Office of the Imperial Overseer of Airships, which consists of one minister and one clerk) to the mundane (The Righteous and Accountable Ministry of Weights and Measures) to the massive (The Humble and Honest Assessors of the Imperial Tax). Each has its powers, responsibilities and areas of authority set down in a massive tome called, simply, the Imperial Register. The Register is the final authority (at least in theory) on all disputes between ministries, and once a verdict is handed down from the Respected and Impartial Keeper of the Registry, no further discussion is allowed.

## Ministries of the Thousand Scales

It's all well and good to say that the Thousand Scales have many powerful ministries in them, but what *are* these ministries? Certainly, there are many insignificant ministries, but what are the really important ones, the ones that everyone knows?

These are the Realm's most important ministries:

**The Humble and Honest Assessors of the Imperial Tax** (Tax Collection): An extremely important and (formerly) heavily policed ministry, the Humble and Honest Assessors both assessed the imperial tax and collected it. Estates were assessed accurately, while regions of peasants were slapped with a flat tax that the tax assessor had to make. The pressure for corruption at all levels was countered by the constant scrutiny of the All-Seeing Eye. With the Eye blinded by the disappearance of the Empress, the local tax collectors have gotten very generous to the Great Houses and very oppressive to the average citizen. Keep in mind that this isn't just assessment of the value of the lease on a give tract, but also taxes on imports, exports, licenses for taxable items such as grain-mills, use taxes on roads and bridges and the like.

Cathak Curuk rules the Honest Assessors. Though he is a man of great business acumen, the entire structure of the Realm has leagued against him. He survives by the support of Bal Keraz and his own willingness to bow to inevitability. Curuk's bureau has shrunken in the last five years and shows no sign of ceasing to dwindle.

**The Imperial Treasury** (The Treasury): The Assessors have their power of tax assessment blocked by the fact that they have no authority to spend a single penny of the money they collect. It must all be remitted to the Treasury, which authorizes the Assessors' expenditures. These tax revenues, along with the tribute of the subject princes, formed the bulk of the Empress' income. Much of this was immediately doled back out in the state subsidy to the Dynastic houses or to pay for the upkeep of the Realm, but there is little doubt that the Empress was the most fabulously wealthy being in Creation. Those who tended her fortune were her most loyal and trusted servants, and they have several almost-impregnable treasure Manses guarded by demons and the Realm's most elite troops. The Realm's income may have dried up, but the current fortune won't be gone any time soon.

In addition to being the world's wealthiest woman, the Empress was also the world's largest mercantile bank, and she bonded and financed much of the world's trade. Since her disappearance, the Treasury has been avoiding risky commercial and development loans, and many merchants have been forced to deal with the Guild at usurious terms. Her favorable terms on loans to Dynastic adventures are part of what kept the Realm dynamic over many centuries.

The Treasury is ruled with an iron fist by Bal Keraz, the semi-hereditary holder of the post. One-hundred and eighty years old and as ruthless as his legendary father Kesif, Keraz is as powerful as the leader of most Great Houses. Holding the purse for most of the ministries, he commands loyalty throughout the Thousand Scales.

**The Wise and Knowledgeable Advisors of Foreign Tributaries** (Foreign Office): The Wise and Knowledgeable Advisors are the satraps and their various advisors and staff. Each satrap is a Dynast from one of the Great Houses who oversees the collection and remittance of a kingdom's tribute to the Empress. In theory, it's a trivial task. In reality, it's a challenging combination of power politics, military leadership and managerial skills. Overseeing a tributary state successfully is difficult, keeping it free enough that it can grow and defend itself and yet still weak enough it doesn't dare test the limits of imperial control. Though the actual satrap is a political appointee, most of his staff are career bureaucrats. The Foreign Office works closely with the legions and has been disastrously on the rocks since the army's gutting. The satraps are attempting to retain control of the tributaries, but without a credible army, this is proving difficult. The lands of those satraps who already had private armies (a not-uncommon situation) have, in some cases, become virtually independent principalities.

The Knowledgeable Advisors are run by Ledaal Arnis. Despite the name, she has little to do with the Great House. Since her grandmother took the post almost 400 years ago, Arnis' line has managed itself separately from the Great House of the Empress' fourth child. Arnis is currently in a terrible situation — without the Empress, her advice on the satrapies is going unheeded, her bureaucracy is being subverted, and more than half the Realm's income has dried up. The Deliberative refuses to do anything, and the satraps have ceased to respond to her demands. All she can do it watch her bureau die.

**Honorable and Humble Caretakers of the Common Folk** (Home Office): Just as the satrap oversees and accepts tribute from a satrapy, so does the prefect oversee the well-being and tax collection from the Empress subjects on the Blessed Isle. The prefects were always more closely monitored than the satraps, and the prefectural taxes formed the bedrock of the Empress' budget. Now, the prefectural establishments are tools of the Great Houses, as likely as not feuding — sometimes to the point of bloodshed — with the Humble and Honest Assessors, who are as likely as not in the pocket of a different house. Currently, the houses and their cronies receive about 80 percent of domestic tax receipts.

The chief of the Caretakers, Sesus Sereda, was assassinated several years ago by parties unknown, and the Deliberative has not yet seen fit to appoint a successor, despite several attempts by the Regent to name one. This has actually been a benefit to the ministry, as Cathak Curuk and Bal Keraz have been able to influence it to some degree and keep the empire from withering totally.

**The Infallible Conveyors of Official Messages and Heartfelt Expressions** (Imperial Post): The Imperial Post is one of the empire's most enduring bureaucracies. Without communications, the legions, the satrapies, the far-flung military and the trading empire — all would be impossible. In the public eye, the Post consists primarily of post riders, couriers who gallop horses between closely spaced relay points, carrying correspondence. The Imperial Post also features a series of fast-packet catamarans carrying messages to and from the satrapies. It maintains a complex network of heliography towers that allows important news to traverse the Blessed Isle in mere hours. It is also supported by a closely held agreement with the sorcerers of the Realm to use their magic to scry and communicate for the Empress' need when the Realm is at stake. The Post is useful to everyone, and it is one of the bureaus that has retained the greatest percent of its budget. Of course, you can now rest assured that other people at the very least know who you're corresponding with, but that's pretty much always been a given anyway. If the Great Houses have something important to say, it goes by private courier.

The Infallible Conveyors are directed by Minister Nellens Junaj, one of his house's most prominent Dragon-Blooded diplomats. Junaj attended a patrician academy for his secondary education and rose through the ranks, promoted on merit from a diplomatic courier, through the ministry and into his current position. He is intensely loyal to his ministry and has maintained its integrity as best as he is able, even in the face of the current crisis. Not even other members of House Nellens have been able to get their hands on the Post.

## The Imperial Registry

The Registry itself is well over 3,000 pages of elegantly calligraphed lists, dating back to the very first days of the Empress' reign. It is a living document, and with each imperial decree that modifies the terms of imperial service, careful corrections are made. Only the most highly qualified and elegant scribes of the Thousand Scales are permitted to inscribe even the smallest change in the Registry. The penalty for a single misplaced brushstroke is blinding by hot irons, though this has only been invoked once in the past 1,000 years.

Physically, the Imperial Registry is imposing. Its covers are plates of beaten brass, cunningly inlaid with characters in gold and silver. There is a single lock on the book, to which the Keeper of the Registry has the single key, and the book itself rests on a lectern in an otherwise unadorned chamber in the Imperial Palace. In a nearby room, a small army of calligraphers, all answerable to both the Keeper of the Registry and the Master of Palace Scribes, toil day and night transcribing copies of the book for distribution to various outposts within the Realm. Every office and ministry has a copy of the Registry, some more recent than others, and any bureaucrat worth her salt spends many hours each week poring over the text, making certain of the limits of her office's power and testing to see where the laws of the land allow her to usurp others' authority.

## Interpreting the Registry

Beneath the Keeper of the Registry is a small cadre of legal scholars whose duties consist entirely of traveling the Realm and resolving disputes over inter-ministerial authority. These roving arbitrators are well versed in the Registry itself; one of the qualifications for the post is memorization of the book in its entirety. They are also widely renowned for their incorruptibility, as every decision made by one of the scholars is recorded, sent back to the Imperial City and listed as precedent for future decisions. A small decision in a fishing village on the far end of the Realm can serve as precedent 100 years later in a dispute between the

legions and the Ancient and Honorable Register of Harbormasters over where troop ships can be docked on the eve of an invasion, so the interpreters of the Registry tend to be very conservative in their pronouncements. None wish to be haunted centuries later by a dubious (or disadvantageous) decision made in the flush of youth.

### The Process of Interpretation

When a dispute arises between two or more ministries, arbitration can be called for from the Keeper of the Registry — if all parties agree. This generally happens only when the rival ministries are well matched; otherwise, the stronger generally overwhelms the weaker. An interpreter is dispatched and, upon arriving, hears the arguments from all concerned parties. She then deliberates for a period of not longer than a fortnight and not less than three days, calling additional witnesses into private discussion and otherwise assessing the evidence and the writings of the Registry. The pronouncement, when it is made, is final and binding, and a runner is dispatched to the Imperial City with news of the decision. The interpreter then continues on her way; by tradition, she must leave the city by nightfall on the day her decision is announced, to prevent her from being rewarded by the winning side. Furthermore, no arbiter may render judgment twice in the same city in a given year, lest the groundwork for a favorable decision at a later date be laid during an earlier, less important visit.

That being said, attempts to bribe interpreters of the Registry are manifold and clever. Often, a minister thinking of calling for an interpretation will dispatch runners to ply all of the arbiters in the area with lavish food and rich gifts, to kindly dispose them toward his point of view long before their services are required. During residence in a city, arbiters are often gifted with food, gems, jade, concubines, silks and other bribes — all provided not by the interested parties, but by friends, allies and those seeking to curry favor with the arbiters. Sometimes, a litigant is in a position to do something for a relative or favorite of the arbitrator and lets this fact be subtly known. The period of secluded contemplation, after all, provides endless opportunities for bargains to be struck.

Penalties for arbiters who abuse their position are harsh. The most common involves removing the tongue and hands of the offender, then affixing a tablet detailing his crime to his neck and forcing him to wander the roads of the Realm, penniless, as a warning to all and sundry. Those found guilty of conspiring to bribe an arbiter also suffer penalties, ranging from fines to removal from office to exile or death. Such strict penalties have not eliminated bribery of arbiters, but they have made practitioners of that particular crime much more circumspect and subtle.

### The Imperial Purpose

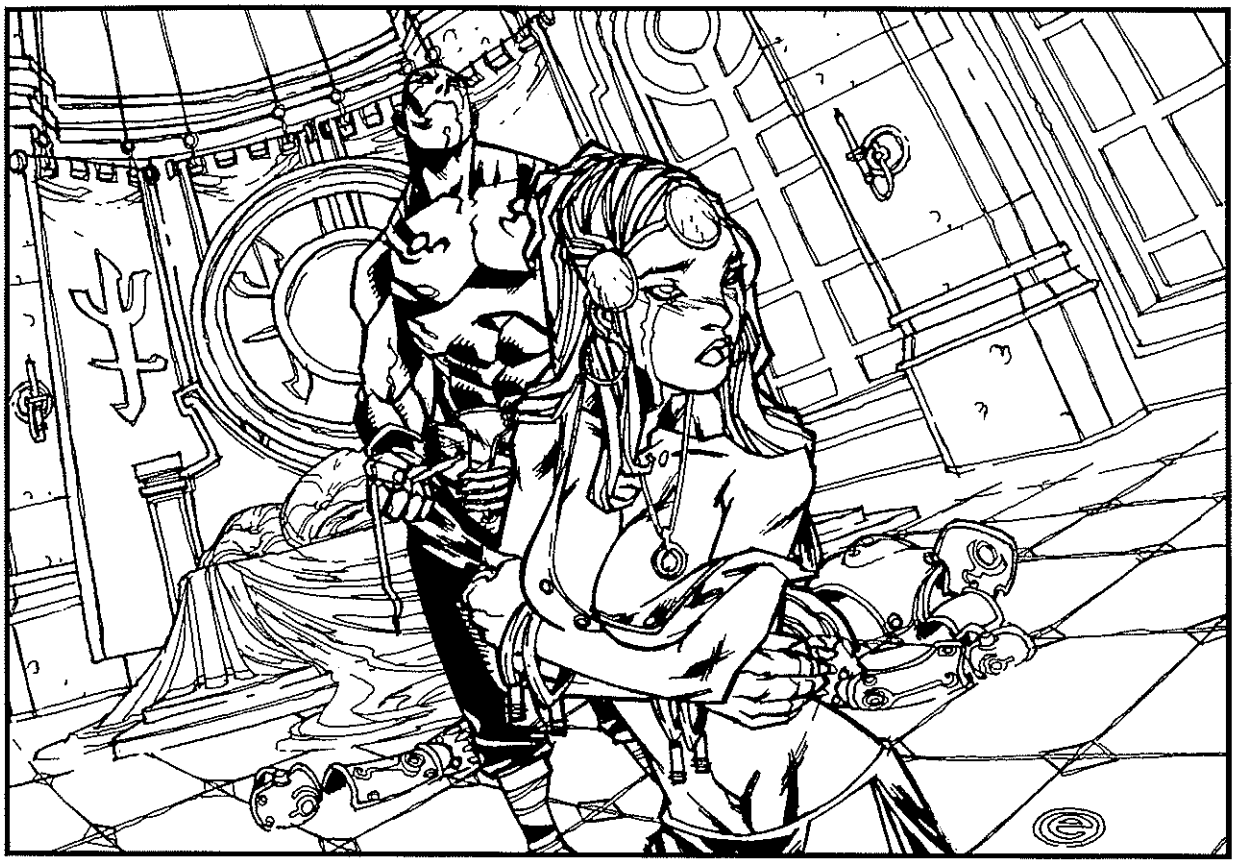
The convoluted nature of the various ministries was, in fact, deliberately set up by the Empress for the sole purpose of ensuring that no branch of the Imperial Service (and by extension, no individual civil servant) acquired excessive power. By creating overlapping areas of authority, she set the various ministries against one another — and not against her. Furthermore, overlapping areas of authority also created overlapping areas of expertise, which made it possible to weed out an entire ministry by the roots if it became too ambitious or troublesome. No government organ was irreplaceable — there were always other ministries glad to for the chance to demonstrate their expertise and expand their areas of uncontested authority.

However, the system was never meant to be self-perpetuating. Rather, it required the Empress' delicate hand on the balance of authority, pruning back a ministry here and creating a new office there and preventing the Great Houses from subverting entire departments and ministries. Without the Empress' presence, the conflicts between ministries rapidly grew into hopeless snarls, as various ministers and houses grab desperately for power. The deliberate conflicts put in place to divert ministries' energy now absorb it all, and slowly but surely, the machinery of empire grinds to a halt as a result.

## Shedding the Skin: Entering the Ministries

The life of a magistrate is something that many citizens of the Realm aspire to, if not for themselves, then for their children. The advantages are obvious: safety, security and respect. The merchant fleets are growing increasingly vulnerable to piracy. The armies of the Realm have become something of a scattershot career, depending on which legion one joins, and the trend shows no sign of reversing. The priesthood of the Order of the Immaculate Dragons offers many of the same benefits as the bureaucracy but with many fewer openings per year. Furthermore, the mother who is relying on her child to take care of her in old age had best not rely on an Immaculate monk, who has few personal possessions and no hopes of producing an heir.

Indeed, to outsiders, the life of an imperial bureaucrat looks like an easy and admirable one. To do nothing



all day but deal with papers — to a farmer that sounds like easy labor. To be forced to wear finery every day against the off chance that one might be required to appear in court — to a merchant that sounds like paradise. And to dwell in the Imperial City, or better yet, the Palace, why, that is a dream beyond dreaming for most human residents of the Realm.

It goes without saying that the truth is somewhat different, but it is very much in the Imperial Bureaucracy's best interests to maintain the alluring illusion. With it firmly in place, the ministries can pick and choose from a never-ending flood of candidates. Thus, the ministries are ensured a constant supply of talented, eager potential recruits, all of whom are accompanied by thoughtful, impressive bribes.

Every poor family in the Realm knows by heart the stories of clever peasant boys and girls who, by their innate virtues and merits, have mastered the required skills to such an amazing extent that they are ushered into the ranks of the magistrates without hesitation and dwell happily in the Imperial Service ever afterward. Such stories are carefully nurtured and propagated, and they are not without some basis in fact. As recently as 20 years ago, a peasant girl from near Arjuf was selected to join the ranks of the Imperial Treasury, and her service has been most efficient and remarkable. However, such heart-warming tales are few and far between, and those who ascend from the masses are among the Realm's most extraordinary citizens.

### The First Families of the Bureaucracy

Just as there are Great Houses of the Realm, so too are there first families of the magistrates, those whose sons and daughters are expected, without question, to join the Imperial Service as soon as they come of age. While the houses contribute their fair share of candidates every year — after all, it is extremely beneficial to have allies bound by blood quietly walking the corridors of power — the ministries have their own royalty, clans that have dominated certain offices and ministries since the early days of the Realm. While the Imperial Service is technically a meritocracy, families that have been long in service take every precaution to ensure that it is their offspring who are seen to have the most merit. Regardless of their family names, these individuals are powers unto themselves, equal in power to and independent from the Great Houses. Many of them command private armies, and they recruit the best and brightest offspring of the Great Houses as *their* servants.

## Advancement

Advancement among the ministers is a question of merit, timing, politicking and luck. Each year, every member of the Imperial Service takes the Nine Rigorous Examinations for her rank, and those scoring the highest are selected for advancement — if any open positions can be found. If there are no openings in a particularly exceptional civil servant's branch of the government, she simply bides her time until an opening does develop — at least, in theory.

In reality, the process of promotion in the Imperial Service is much more complicated than that, an elegant dance of favors, alliances and murder. While a bureaucrat's marks on the Nine Rigorous Examinations are part of the process by which advancement is doled out, they are only a part — and not always the most important one.

### The Gentle Art of Assassination

A time-honored technique for rising in the ranks is the genteel and artistic removal of one's superiors through foul play. While murder of one's superiors and rivals is officially frowned upon, it is as much an aspect of life among the Thousand Scales as breathing. There are only so many high-level posts, and most of them are held by Dragon-Blooded. The rate at which the pyramid of power narrows for mortal bureaucrats is alarmingly steep. Thus, competition for choice offices is fierce, and the number of voluntary retirements and deaths from natural causes each year is staggeringly small. Therefore, assassination becomes the only option for the ambitious bureaucrat.

There are unwritten rules to the art of murder in the Imperial Service. Doing the deed oneself is considered tacky and boorish and costs the murderer status in the eyes of others. After all, it is perfectly acceptable to eliminate a rival, but to allow oneself to be linked directly to the crime is to demonstrate that one is lacking in the necessary finesse to assist in running the imperial government.

Poisoning is likewise regarded déclassé, though a sufficiently clever application — on the skin of the victim's concubine's breasts, for example, or on the pen he intended to use to commission one's own murder — often wins admiration. In fact, assassination has become something of a spectator sport within the Imperial Service, and particularly clever, subtle and vicious murders win admiration for the ones who authored them. Indeed, it is best, if one plans on eliminating a rival or superior, to plan the murder so as to allow the slightest hint of suspicion — but no more than that, and no proof — to settle upon one's self, so that one may plausibly deny involvement to imperial investigators, yet still reap the benefits of having one's peers know exactly how dangerous one is.

### The Simple Art of Conspiring

Murder among the Thousand Scales is a serious business. Members of the Imperial Bureaucracy pride themselves on the sheer purposefulness of their assassinations. Let the scions of the Great Houses fight duels over matters of honor or temper; the Thousand Scales kill only with deliberation and malice well aforethought.

It is extremely rare for a member of the Imperial Service to kill in the heat of the moment. Instead, assassinations within the bureaucracy are usually planned months, if not years, in advance. Rare, too, is the assassination that is done for a single stroke of advancement. Rather, a proper assassination is commissioned with dozens of shifts in station in mind. The removal of this clerk will promote that young student, which will strengthen the position of his teacher in that particular ministry and bring it closer to an alliance with the guardians... and so it goes. Only the very young and very dull assassinate those who stand directly above them in the pyramid of advancement.

### Getting Caught . . . or Not

Misdirecting the investigation of the murder is part of the assassination itself. If the murderer is clever, she has seen to it that any investigation of her deeds by the

### Who Staffs the Ministries?

The imperial Bureaucracy is vast, and there are only a comparatively tiny handful of Dragon-Blooded to staff it. Of the graduates of the Spiral Academy, not all become bureaucrats. Others go to manage their house estates or business operations, and what remains must be split among all the ministries. While the Dragon-Blooded's long lives mean that the bureaucracy isn't suffering from a staff shortage, it does mean that, while the Dragon-Blooded are the ruling class, they aren't the governing class. The patricians truly govern the Realm.

That doesn't mean that the houses don't have control over the bureaucracy. Many of the patricians who govern the Realm are unExalted children of Dynasts and their immediate descendents. The Dragon-Blooded deliberately marry their mortal children into prominent patrician families, giving them influence over and agents among the patricians. Normally, serious corruption or collusion was kept to a minimum by the ministers' internal auditing process, and the Empress' power allowed the patrician ministers to deal with the Dragon-Blooded as equals. Today, only the strong ministries can trust their own reports and offices — in all the weak ministries, the influence of the Great Houses has become well established.

### Failure

Not every attempt to remove a rival ends in success. Many fail to do more than annoy their targets, and some simply amuse. Even the cleverest attempt can go awry, assuming the target is sufficiently wary — and anyone in the Imperial Service who is worth assassinating has long since learned how to be wary.

Once an attempted assassination is foiled, the would-be target has a myriad of choices as to how to respond. Some tend toward instant retribution, serving notice that they are not to be trifled with. Such approaches tend to discourage repeated assassination attempts, at least for a while.

Others prefer to wait days, months or even years before extracting their vengeance. A steady stream of reminders to the would-be assassin during that time lets him know that he has not, in fact, escaped and will pay for his crimes... eventually. Some elder bureaucrats enjoy the torment they can inflict with the waiting far more than the actual moment of revenge.

If an attempt is particularly poor, the intended target may not even acknowledge it ever existed. This is a supreme insult, and it often drives rash, young would-be killers to perform foolish deeds. Said deeds, including challenging detractors to duels, attempting more hasty assassinations and so on, generally get their perpetrators killed sooner rather than later, but the blood is not on the original target's hands.

And finally, on rare occasions, an intended target is so impressed by her would-be killer's cunning and ambition that she seeks out the putative assassin as a protégé. After all, young talent like that should never be allowed to go to waste.

Guardians of the Realm is both brief and perfunctory. This is usually accomplished by the bestowal of lavish or clever bribes or through the intervention of allies to whom the guardians owe favors. In such instances, it is best to have a convenient scapegoat available to hand over for the purpose of providing closure. After all, the guardians and the judges both much prefer executing (beheading, followed by quartering of the corpse is standard practice) even the most pathetic-appearing "murderers" to allowing a case to go unsolved. Furthermore, only the youngest and most naïvely enthusiastic guardians have any urge to mount serious investigations of assassinations among the Thousand Scales. Senior guardians are fond of saying "There is never only one corpse" at such times, well aware that any real investigation will uncover a lengthy trail of murders — one that is best ignored, as it will inevitably lead someplace embarrassing.

On the other hand, there are times when an assassin finds the guardians knocking on his door mere moments after the deed has been committed. This is to be expected, after all; there are a great many guardians who owe members of the Thousand Scales favors. Furthermore, there are those in the Imperial Service who might object to having a favorite forcibly removed from a position of authority or who might wish a protégée to accede to a spot that the assassin had wanted for himself. It is not uncommon for the more skillful players at the game of political assassination to encourage an overly ambitious youth to strike, only to have the youngster — the real target all along — subsequently removed for his misdeeds. Inevitably, in such cases, both the victim's position and his murderer's are filled by the patron's loyal supporters.

### The Dragon-Blooded and the Ministries

To become a minister is to take a bloodless, soulless, heartless position for the remainder of one's days, and as such, many Dragon-Blooded spurn the chance. After all, when there are legions to command, estates to manage and Wyld Hunts to join, why would one want to sit behind a desk for 300 years?

The answer is power. Dragon-Blooded ministers worked directly for the Empress. Some were (and still are) powerful enough to shrug off the houses, while the others were important assets, whose opinion and assistance is very valuable to their houses. With the Empress present, it was enough to keep the Imperial Service staffed and reasonably loyal. Things have gone downhill now, however, and the Great Houses have begun to treat the bureaucracy as just another territory to fight over, much to the detriment of actual governance.

## The Legions

For centuries, the legions have been the means by which the will of the Realm has been imposed on its enemies. Superbly trained, equipped and commanded, the legions dealt with barbarian hordes, rebellious princes and armed heretical uprisings with equal aplomb and professionalism. Those days, however, are past, and now, the armed branch of the Thousand Scales is perhaps its least reputable, as it has strayed far from its original purpose.

## The Thirty That Survive

The Empress once commanded as many as 81 full legions, each with 5,000 front-line soldiers and half that many skirmishers and auxiliaries, all of whom would kill or die at her whispered command. In these fallen days, however, there are but 30 legions remaining, plus the infamous — and not entirely beloved — Vermilion Legion. Further, few of those legions currently fight at full strength, as the decline in the legions' prestige and the lack of proper financial support have combined to render a career in ranks a less-than-appealing prospect.

### Those That Did Not

In the wake of the Empress' disappearance, seven full legions were disbanded, though technically one rebelled before it could be dissolved. Soldiers of the disbanded legions were mostly absorbed into the standing legions to bring them up to fighting strength, and their officers were either transferred or forcibly retired. Some few officers took their troops with them and became mercenary commanders, working in the Scavenger Lands and anywhere else bloody constraint reared its head. Others simply vanished, leading more paranoid members of the Deliberative to conclude that they are still out there, biding their time and waiting to extract vengeance on the Realm that abandoned them. The usual response to this theory is disdain and mockery of its author as a weak-livered worrywart. Still, there are a surprising number of soldiers from those vanished legions that no one — not even the magistrates — can account for.

After the Empress' disappearance, imperial funding to support the legions dried up. More importantly, the central intelligence that directed them as harnessed components of a single force was gone as well, and there was no contingency plan, no emergency chain of command left in place. Unprotected by the Empress' guiding intelligence and cut off by the lack of a formal dictum for continued financial support, the legions were left to the mercy of their enemies: the Great Houses of the Dynasty and the two other branches of the Thousand Scales.

The ministers of the Imperial Bureaucracy had long despised the swaggering bravos in uniform who worked perhaps a few days in the field each year but drained resources all year round — all for the pitiful benefit of subjugating the occasional batch of pathetic barbarians. The All-Seeing Eye was suspicious that individual generals had established power blocs among their troops, far from the Blessed Isle and difficult to infiltrate. And the Great Houses simply disliked the fact that there was a military force beholden to a power greater than themselves, that could bring any one of them to heel as easily as a child might snap his fingers. And so, between the three, a plan was devised to subjugate the legions as soon as the lead conspirators overcame their fear of the Empress' imminent return long enough to act.

At the Celebration of the Seven Shattered Helms, when the elite troops of each legion traditionally paraded past the throne of the Empress for her approval and largesse, the trap was sprung. The Esteemed Minister of the Imperial Treasury sorrowfully informed the generals that no funds had been allocated for their continued support by the Deliberative and that unless an alternate source of funding could be found, the legions themselves would have to be disbanded. After all, it was not like they were truly necessary any more — surely the mere memories of the Realm's wrath would be enough to deter any foolish barbarians. And in case the generals had entertained any foolish thoughts about perhaps using the troops at hand to remonstrate against the decision, there were several thousand private troops and dozens of sorcerers — all loyal to the Great Houses and not under any general's command — positioned outside the Great Square wherein the legions' elite units were currently assembled. However, if the generals might consent to listen to a plan proposed by the masters of those Great Houses, perhaps some accommodation could be reached?

And so, the legions were brought under the control of their "sponsors," with each Great House taking one or more legions under its wing. The purges that followed were swift and deliberate, as the legions' officer corps were tested for loyalty to their new masters, and those who were found wanting (or unwilling to put an individual house's needs before those of the Realm entire) were either dismissed or dealt with. In their place were raised scions of the Great Houses and their allies, dependable women and men whose loyalty was assured and whose ambitions were for house and self, not the Realm.

And so, a few short years after the disappearance of the Empress, the legions have become the tools of the Great Houses, subservient to their whims and moving on their commands. Though nominally loyal to the Realm as a whole, the legions are no longer the empire's.

This state of affairs has proved a boon to the Great Houses, who now are saved the expense of mounting private armies and supporting the defense of the Realm as a whole. Furthermore, commissions in the officer corps of the individual legions are now doled out as prizes to favorite daughters or loyal supporters. While the professional officer corps has not been replaced entirely — skill in the field is not necessarily incompatible with political pragmatism — the number of experienced, competent officers is shrinking at an

alarming rate, and there are not enough talented political appointees to take their places. With inferior command in the field, casualties are rising, and even the dullest peasant is starting to learn that a long, dull life toiling in the fields is preferable to a short, terrifying one in the legions.

## Structure and Organization

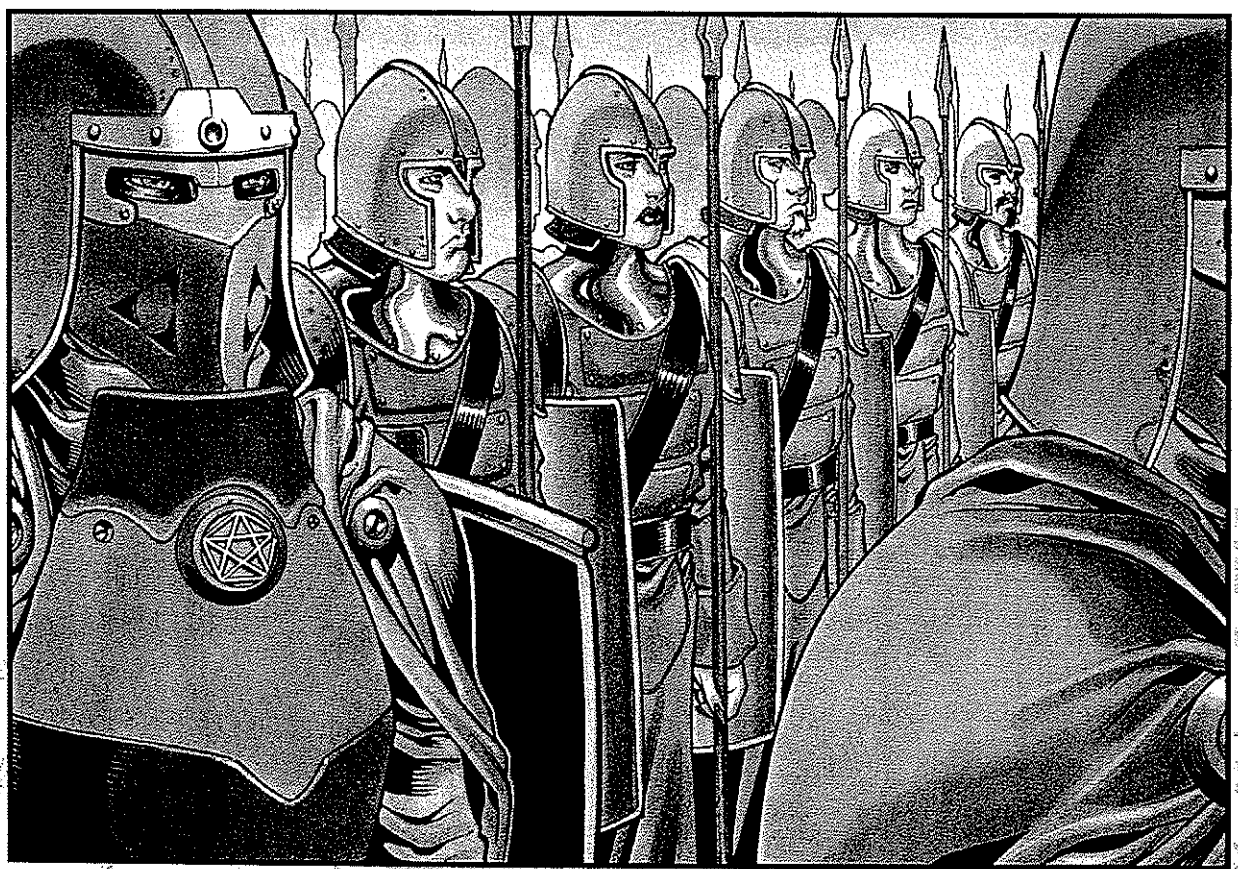
When at full strength, each legion consists of 5,000 infantry, with both women and men serving in ranks. The legions employ no cavalry, as the logistics of tending the steeds are an insurmountable obstacle in legion deployment. Instead, when a legion goes into the field, the local potentate or satrap's house cavalry is co-opted, or less frequently, irregulars are recruited from the local population. Similarly, the legions do not travel with siege engines, though there are anywhere from a half-dozen to 30 fangs' worth of engineers attached to each legion to construct such engines on-site.

Legions also have associated talons of archers or slingers, usually amounting to half the legion's strength, and working at half-pay. Such soldiers are lightly armored and are not considered to be a true part of the legion itself. These troops are generally considered expendable by their commanding officers, and the soldiers themselves are well aware of it.

Each legion also travels with a baggage and supply train, tended by slaves. Commoners are discouraged from traveling in a legion's wake, though many merchants have grown rich outside of Guild strictures by paying visits to legion encampments. The baggage train is guarded by a single wing under the command of the quartermaster, whose rank is second only to the legion's commander. Ironically, slaves in military service are often treated better than those in domestic service, as no general wishes to return from battle to find that her baggage handlers have run off or, worse yet, overwhelmed their guards and looted the baggage train. Officers commanding at least a talon generally have at least one personal slave as well, and a general is liable to have a small household (including a scribe/secretary, a dresser and a majordomo) in tow.

With the baggage train also comes the legion's support: smiths, armorers, fletchers (if there are archers present), coopers, cooks and so forth. Usually, the slaves and laborers can equal up to a quarter of a legion's strength in additional manpower, though it is considered a sign of considerable disgrace if a general is forced to arm his support.

Each legion is commanded by a single commanding general. The 10 dragons under her command are led by colonels, with the chain of command (should the commanding general be incapacitated or the dragons



operating independently of the legion) determined by seniority. Commanding generals tend to attract subordinates of similar aspect, and an Air-aspected Exalt on an Earth-aspected general's staff has little hope of advancement. Generally, four dragons are composed of heavy infantry, and six of medium infantry, and there are between four and six loosely organized dragons of skirmishers and missile troops.

This unwieldy number of subunits is made manageable by the use of *flights*, ad hoc formations of dragons put together to accomplish a given task. A legion in the field normally uses three dragons of heavy infantry in one flight, two medium infantry dragons and a dragon's worth of skirmishers. The last heavy infantry dragon and the remaining skirmishers are kept under the control of the legion commander for use as a reserve. The most senior dragon commander in the flight leads it.

Beneath each dragon's colonel are a pair of wings, each commanded by a major. A wing comprises two talons, and each talon answers to a captain. Talons are broken up into five scales, each the responsibility of a lieutenant, and at the bottom of the command structure are individual fangs, under the authority of non-commissioned sergeants. Furthermore, each officer ranked major or higher has at least one subaltern attached to her, so that he might learn the proper conduct of an officer before being entrusted with so much as a single fang.

## Names and Standards

Each unit has a numerical designation, i.e. "10th Legion, Second Dragon, First Wing, First Talon, Fourth Scale, Second Fang." In the field, however, this is cut down to the smallest unique designation possible; odds are that when an officer shouts out "Third and Fourth Fangs, advance!" everyone concerned will know whom she's talking about. Most units also have nicknames. These are related to incidents in the unit's history. Often, they're named after famous battles the unit took part in, legendary commanders or spectacular incidents. Shivash's Talon, for example, is named after a lieutenant who carved his way through hundreds of barbarians to extricate his soldiers from a trap he had led them into, while Nine Gorges Talon is named after a forced march that the unit undertook to relieve a besieged watchtower. No unit ever names itself; the name must be bestowed from outside. Once named, a unit is rarely, if ever, renamed. Only the most dire circumstances or epic heroics call for a unit's old name to be retired.

Furthermore, every unit, down to the talon, has its own standard, which is carved in the shape of a dragon. Each unit's pride is bound up in that standard, which has been made unique by the unit and passed down from soldier to soldier for centuries. A soldier who loses his unit's standard has only one justifiable excuse for doing so: death. Surviving the loss of one's standard marks one as cowardly, incompetent and just plain old bad luck — qualities no other soldier wants anywhere near her.

## Rank

The Dragon-Blooded, except under spectacular circumstances, do not enlist in the ranks. On certain occasions, a scion of one of the Great Houses has been known to join up as a common soldier specifically to thumb her nose at a hated parent, cousin or rival, but such gestures are regarded as exactly that — gestures, not to be taken seriously.

Instead, the Dragon-Blooded comprise most of the legions' senior officer corps. It is possible for an unExalted soldier to achieve an officer's rank, whether by being a patrician or unExalted Dynast or else through spectacular battlefield performance, but these individuals rarely rise above the rank of major. The vast majority of the Realm's commanders are Terrestrial Exalted and are quick to remind any challengers or naysayers of that fact. In fact, many officers are Exalted not of a Dynastic family, sponsored into the legions by the Empress (now the Regent) and using them as a way to gain social respectability.

## The Soldiers

The soldiers of the legions are of mixed race, mixed gender and uniform competence. A legion's history of postings is written in its troops, as most recruit wherever they go to fill the ranks of the fallen. However, once a soldier enters the ranks, he leaves his previous nationality, city allegiance and so forth behind. Once you are of the legions, nothing more need be said. Most troops enter the ranks as slingers or archers, are trained there and graduate into the actual legion as other troops die or retire.

## Officers' Duties

In the field, the responsibilities of an officer of one of the legions are straightforward, if not simple: Drill the troops, command the troops, and obey orders from one's superiors. In theory, at least, chain of command is strict, though there are always instances of experienced superior officers handling well-connected juniors with kid gloves for fear of political repercussions. No general, no matter how well respected, has the time or inclination to explain to a senior member of the Dynasty precisely why her precious offspring was removed from command and disciplined at the whipping post.

Orders, once received, are to be carried out immediately and without question, regardless of whether those orders are for a simple bivouacking procedure or the slaughter of every man, woman and child for a league in any direction. They are, after all, orders, and much of the legions' fearsome reputation was built on their officers' ability to transmit even the most complex orders down the chain of command and have them followed instantly and to the letter. With greater and lesser success, depending

### Discipline

Discipline in the legions is swift, stern and public. Penalties for crimes such as disobeying orders start at canings and ascend rapidly, and even minor infractions are punishable by having one's weapons confiscated in front of one's unit. Officers who perform poorly, are caught taking bribes or otherwise violate the legions' stern traditions and code of conduct find themselves stripped of rank, publicly caned and, sometimes, either discharged or executed. Penalties vary depending on the individual crime, but unsurprisingly, they are steeper for officers than for enlisted men. The officers, after all, should know better.

upon the legion, an attempt has been made to instill this respect for the chain of command in the newer officers, though many of the recent political appointees seem to have tremendous difficulty imagining an authority superior to their whims.

However, no army spends all of its time in the field, and an officer's duties extend far beyond the campground and battlefield. Officers are also expected to recruit — with permission of the local magnate, of course — as well as making something of an appearance in local society when not actively campaigning. Despite the legions' recent decline in prestige, an upwardly mobile officer is still quite a catch for marriage or assignation. During months when no campaigning takes place, an eligible officer is liable to be inundated with invitations to tea, concerts, demonstrations of gardening techniques and so forth, all in the interest of producing a sufficiently honeyed lure.

Even when not on the prowl for — or avoiding — conjugal alliances, an officer is expected to represent the Realm in social situations. Dignity, professionalism and a steadfast refusal to be drawn into discussions of internal politics are the hallmarks of legion service under those circumstances, whether it be a state dinner with a local governor or a hastily arranged tour of a base camp for a magistrate who "just happened to be in the area." The legions' mandate, after all, is to deal with threats to the Realm from outside its borders, and an officer who is drawn into internal politics isn't keeping his eye on external matters. In the meantime, however, officers are encouraged to attend performances, theater, dinners and so forth on their best behavior, the better to enhance the image of the legions as a whole. And if by doing so, the officer manages to gain permission to recruit or arranges for additional supplies to be sent to the commanding officers' pavilions, well, so much the better.

## Tactics and Regimen

*The Thousand Correct Actions of the Upright Soldier* details within its pages the proper response to any situation, from making camp to facing a vastly superior foe with no archers. Each officer carries with her a version — abridged in the case of junior officers, complete in the case of senior — and is expected to study it so that proper responses to all tactical situations can be learned, memorized and prepared for use.

If a commander follows the Thousand Correct Actions, he stops his troops on the march well before nightfall so that they can properly entrench and ensure supplies of clean water before sleep. He sets pickets for when the soldiers under his command are not advancing, and sends out skirmishers when they are. He sees to their supply, their morale, their training and their obedience, all with the implicit understanding that he will have no qualms about ordering them to their deaths should it be in the best interests of the legion as a whole. Furthermore, the Thousand Correct Actions also contains a wealth of small-unit tactics, ranging from espionage to infiltration to ambush to house-to-house fighting. Officers who heed the tenets of the Thousand Correct Actions generally have healthy, well-trained and loyal troops. In part, this is because one of the first rules laid down within the book's pages is the incontrovertible fact that, while soldiers may be sacrificed for the good of the legion as a whole, they should never simply be thrown away. Doing so, the Thousand Correct Actions teaches, weakens the legion as a whole and undermines the resolve of those soldiers who have not yet been discarded. Respect for this concise manual of all things military has declined of late, as the political appointees promoted into command follow their own often flawed instincts and not the tried and true lessons of this ancient field manual.

## The Great Mission

The legions' orders are simple: to obey the commands of the Empress or, in her absence, those of the Regent (and through him, the Deliberative). The rest is just details. In theory, if tomorrow the Regent called for the legions to raze Arjuf to the ground, they would do so or die, to the man, trying.

While, in the past, the Empress did call upon the legions to express her displeasure on some of her more fractious subjects, the legions have historically been used for three purposes. These are: to expand the Realm, to defend it and its tributaries and allies and to aid and abet the functioning of the empire (in other words, tax collection, intimidation and generally demonstrating the pointlessness of rebelling against an infinitely superior foe). The first is something that rarely occurs in recent years. While the cries in the Deliberative are loud for the

## The Best of the Scum: The Officers of the Vermilion Legion



Like the other legions, the Vermilion is led almost entirely by Dragon-Blooded officers. Like the women and men they command, these officers are considered to be the scum of the earth. Disgraced members of the Great Houses, drunkards, thieves, victims of political infighting, vengeful survivors of poorly fought battles, insubordinate officers once attached to more reputable assignments — you'll find any and all of them commanding the battle-hardened misfits of the Red-Piss Legion.

Buying a commission in the Vermilion Legion is cheap, if not easy. The Great Houses have long used a post in this legion as a sort of rathole, a convenient way of getting rid of troublesome sons and daughters, and it is said that upon enrolling her most undisciplined rakehell of a son in the Vermilion's ranks, one matriarch of House Chanos told him, "I look forward to hearing of your glorious death. I simply ask that it be on the field of battle." Indeed, many of the officers of the Red-Piss Legion have had their commissions purchased for them by family members anxious to help them disappear without actually soiling their hands with murder. The price for a commission varies. Sometimes it is jade, sometimes supplies or winter quarters and sometimes the delivery of an enemy of the Vermilion Legion. The one thing that does not vary, however, is that unlike the more "reputable" legions, the Vermilion does not put untrained officers in positions of unmerited authority. Anything above command of a single fang is reserved for experienced soldiers.

Generally, officers who enter the Red-Piss Legion in this fashion find a chilly reception waiting for them. Most break (fleeing to their patron houses with every intention of becoming dutiful drones) or are cut down in battle within the first few months of their service. This is, after all, precisely what the houses wish.

Experienced officers, however, find a warmer reception waiting for them. Those Dragon-Blooded who have proven their mettle can be awarded higher commissions upon expressing interest in joining the Vermilion ranks, assuming that their loyalty to the legion is demonstrated and vouched for. Skill and experience are valued in the Red-Piss Legion, not one's prior service or political history. As the saying goes, "Vermilion blood washes away the past."

Vermilion officers are generally more solicitous of their troops' lives than their counterparts in other legions, in part, perhaps, because they spend so much time training those troops to be soldiers. Then again, it may well be because the officers of the Vermilion Legion are well aware that their men are the only real support they have and that squandering them is foolhardy.

Holding a commission in the Vermilion Legion is a double-edged sword politically. While one is attached to the Red-Piss Legion, one is considered disgraced, a failure — untouchable in polite company and likely to break the china and steal the silver at fancy dress parties. It is socially acceptable for officers of other legions, not to mention any other Dragon-Blooded with the merest pretensions of military prowess, to sneer at the work of the Vermilion Legion and its officers and dismiss it as "not real soldiering." However, on those rare occasions when a former officer of the Red-Piss Legion reappears in polite society, her service suddenly becomes a benefit, a badge of honor marking her as worthy of awe. After all, if she could endure service in the Vermilion Legion, who knows what else she might be capable of?

fist of the legions to smash the impudent rebels who have dared to set foot on the soil of imperial tributaries, the likelihood of the legions going on the offensive are minimal. Instead, they are deployed to support tottering allies, to turn back barbarian incursions that strike too deep into valued territory and, most importantly, to maneuver around the Blessed Isle seeking advantage over the troops of other houses.

With each passing day, the Great Houses of the Dynasty have more and more say in where the legions are deployed. They pay for the posting, and so, the legions go where the Great Houses want them. Those members of the Deliberative who stand outside the Great Houses see and are alarmed by this trend and are frantically scrambling to prevent the legions from becoming the Dynasty's private armies. However, even with the help of many of the commanders in the field, their efforts may be too little and far too late.

## The All-Seeing Eye

The All-Seeing Eye is, at once, the secret service and the last line of defense of the Realm, and it is crumbling. A collection of spies, assassins, observers and informants, it has long been the invisible whip that the Empress held over her closest subjects. So skilled were — and are — the women and men of the All-Seeing Eye that the merest whisper of their presence was often enough to dissolve conspiracy or drive corrupt officials to confess their iniquities. There are innumerable tavern tales of the assassins in the Eye's service, whose touch is death and whose gaze is a curse. Fear of the Eye's attention was an effective rein on would-be conspirators, rebels and other riffraff, and ensured that the other branches of the Thousand Scales were able to operate smoothly. Toiling in anonymity, the operatives of the All-Seeing Eye were feared, envied and richly rewarded.

Success, however, brings with it enemies, enemies who were all too happy to see the All-Seeing Eye reined in once the Empress' protection vanished. While the magistrates and the Great Houses of the Dynasty were quite happy to enlist the support of the visible aspects of the Eye to hamstring the legions, they were quick to turn on it immediately thereafter. Known Eye agents were discredited, exposed and, in some instances, killed. Funding for the Eye — which, in the Empress' absence, was forced to report to the Esteemed Minister of the Imperial Treasury — dried up, bit by bit. This left agents in the field vulnerable to the very houses they were supposed to be observing, as their subjects now had the resources either to eliminate or subvert them.

### Playback

Naturally, the real powers behind the All-Seeing Eye — the assassins and spymasters whom the Esteemed Minister of the Imperial Treasury believes to be nothing more than Iselsi Dragon-Blooded — are more than passing concerned with the daily erosion of their bureau. As such, they have been very carefully feeding information, though their subordinates, to the Esteemed Minister of the Imperial Treasury and his pets and seeing where that information surfaces. It is worth it to the Eye's masters to sacrifice operatives and even whole networks to see precisely how and when their enemies are making use of that information. The ultimate goal of the operation is to reclaim the survivors of the rolled-up networks, to spin new ones in areas that the magistrates and the Dynasty think are clean and to go to work with a clearer understanding of precisely how their enemies operate.

### Recruitment: Coming Under the Eye

Unlike the other two branches of the Thousand Scales, the All-Seeing Eye chooses its members. Sometimes, they are soldiers or officers in the legions. Other times, they are talented clerks hoping for a ministerial position someday. Still others are drawn from the ranks of the patricians or even the Dynasty, and the Eye does not hesitate to use peasants, slaves and even Immaculate monks in its efforts.

In certain ways, the Eye is the most egalitarian organization in the Realm, as in its ranks, Sidereal Exalted assassins toil side by side with guttersnipes and trustworthy slaves, each chosen and rewarded according to skill and usefulness. Perhaps the largest segment of the Eye's agents, however, are Dragon-Blooded, though a surprisingly high number are taken from the ranks of non-Dynastic Exalts or Iselsi fugitives. This reduces the risk of an agent's having divided loyalties and also makes it easier to produce a cover for a new agent. When every scion of a Dynasty house is supposed to be toiling ceaselessly for the house's advancement, All-Seeing Eye agents putatively stuck in dead-end positions tend to attract unwanted attention. Still, there are a fair number of Dragon-Blooded from the Dynasty who find the work of an agent of the Eye — and perhaps the real power that comes along with it — appealing.

### The Sign of Death

Those whom the Eye feels are worthy of being recruited are given a sign marked with the organization's symbol — a single, lidless eye. Those who are clever enough to recognize the sign for what it is, and to hold their silence, are duly taken into the fold eventually. Those who cannot refrain from spreading the word of what they've received, however, are killed (and rest assured, any candidate for recruitment is closely observed from the instant she receives her token).

However, to outsiders, it appears that assassination followed close on the heels of the victim's receipt of the sign of the All-Seeing Eye, and so, it has been wrongfully equated in the minds of the citizenry with sudden, violent death. Amused, the elders of the organization have done absolutely nothing to shatter this illusion — and much to encourage it.

## The Operations of the Eye

The All-Seeing Eye's function, if it can be said to have a single one, is to ensure the continued existence of the Realm. Beneath that rubric, multiple other duties crowd for space, resources and attention. However, when resources are scarce, certain duties take precedence over others.

### Finances

Verification of revenues and suchlike is perhaps the least exciting of the Eye's duties, but on a day-to-day basis, it is the most important. Without an eye on the tax revenues collected from the tributaries and the prefectures, the Realm would quickly find itself robbed blind. And so, in every counting-house and customs office, the Eye had access, if not an actual agent in place. Often, a single informer was enough to keep the operations of an entire satrapy in line, but those days have passed. Many of those access routes lie fallow now, and many of the observers have been bribed, threatened or otherwise forced to turn a blind eye to embezzlement and graft. With the Eye's watchers removed, nobles, patricians and merchants are in a much better position to make certain... decisions on the tax revenues they turn over to the Realm. While some money still makes its way in, the numbers are down and decrease every year, as more and more tax revenue stays local and lines the pockets of the local authorities.

When incontrovertible proof of embezzlement is found, the Eye is still quite capable of action. Depending on the severity of the crime (and whether the criminal has interfered with the Eye in the commission of her illicit activities), the Eye passes and executes sentences ranging from the return of the missing funds to public humiliation of the offender to execution. Long ago, the Empress gave her blessing to the Eye's ability to serve as judge, jury and executioner, and even now, the magistrates are reluctant to tamper with that right.

### The Wyld Hunt

Mixed in with its more scurrilous and fearsome agents, the All-Seeing Eye also employs any number of augurers, astronomers and diviners dedicated to locating the Anathema, wherever they may appear. Working hand in hand with the diviners of the Immaculate Order (in many cases without the Immaculates' knowledge of their true allegiance), these are the souls who call down the Wyld Hunt.

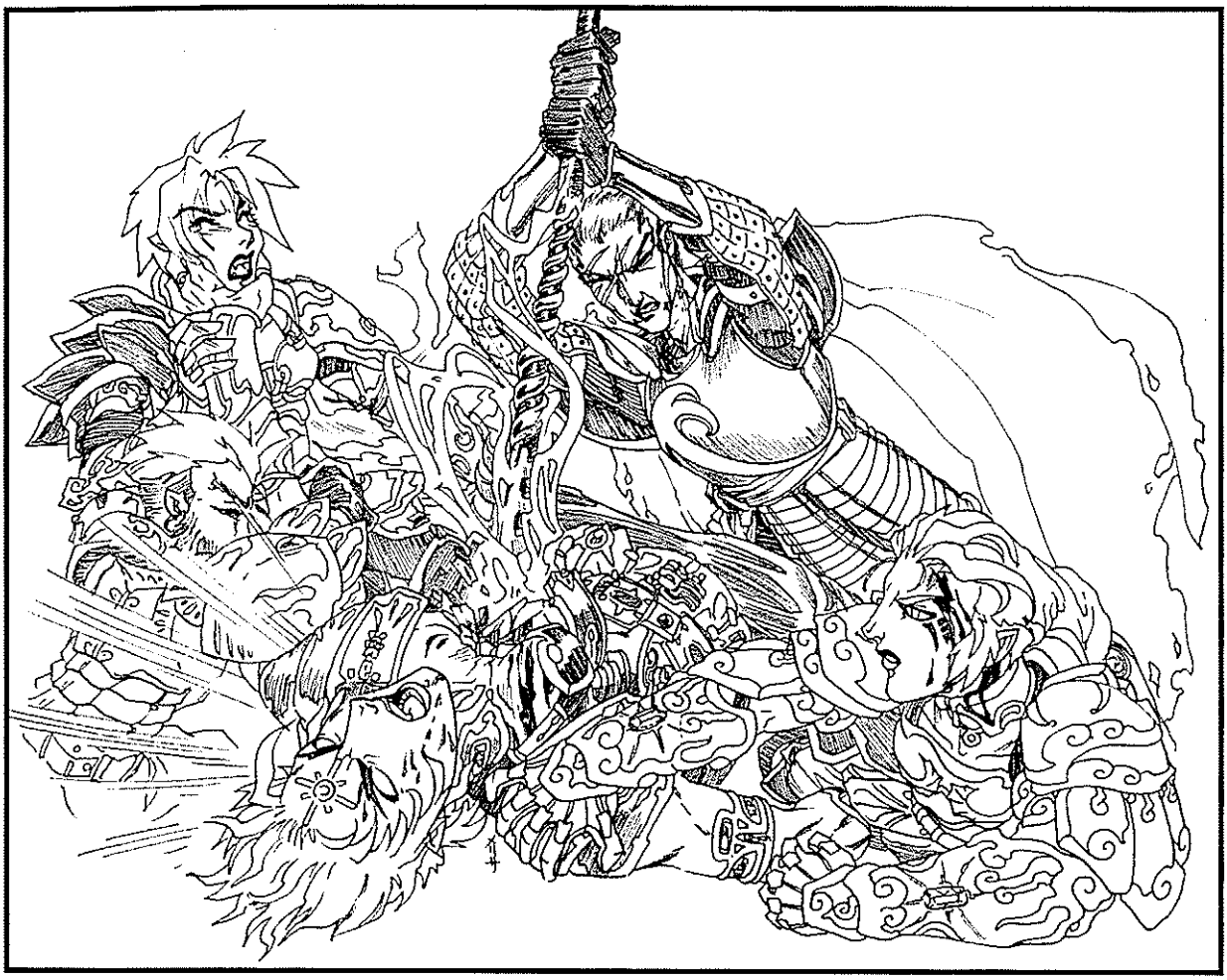
The duties of the diviners are simple: Watch the skies and other signs for indications that an Anathema has been reborn into the world. When such signs appear, pinpoint the location of the new problem and sic the Wyld Hunt on it. Finding the exact location of a new Anathema's appearance, however, is more difficult than discovering its existence, and so, often, this results in an odd partnership of augerers and spies, diviners and informants. Once the Eye is convinced that a new Anathema is to arise, the diviners are asked to give their best estimate as to where the new threat will be located, and the area is flooded with agents, observers and informants. After all, stories of a local child suddenly being bathed in light and emerging unharmed tend to make the rounds, and sooner or later, an agent of the Eye will hear them.

Once the Anathema has been located, the Wyld Hunt is called forth. Officially, the Hunt is the provenance of the Immaculate Order, and the Eye prefers it that way. However, it is usual for at least one agent of the Eye to ride with the Hunt when it goes out, to ensure that the hunters perform their duties with the suitable efficiency. Hunts also provide an excellent cover for agents engaged in other business. Often, multiple agents will be attached to a single Wyld Hunt, unaware of one another's true status.

With fewer and fewer agents in the fold, more and more Anathema are slipping through the Eye's grasp, however. Even when the diviners trumpet the arrival of a new Anathema to the heavens, there is often simply not enough manpower available to run the suspected abomination to ground. As the newly reborn Solar Anathema emerge, the sheer number of targets has likewise swamped the Hunt. Many of the younger members of the Eye find this situation intolerable, and have spoken of establishing a permanent, roving Wyld Hunt to deal with such matters.

### Preserving the Peace

The role in which most inhabitants of the Realm know the All-Seeing Eye is that of secret police. The rumor, which



the leaders of the Eye are happy to encourage, is that the Eye is *everywhere*. While this is far from the truth, as long as it is perceived to be real, it keeps subversion at a minimum. In fact, it aids the Eye in its duties, as, more often than not, citizens will stumble over one another to betray putatively treasonous neighbors and acquaintances, lest they be tarred with the same brush.

The Eye does devote considerable resources to nipping potential conspiracies in the bud. After all, it's easier to deal with a few conspirators, even Dragon-Blooded ones, than with an army at the gates. With agents inserted into all of the houses of the Dynasty, the Eye's few analysts listen very carefully to what is (and isn't) said in order to determine who's deserving of closer attention. The opening of letters, the rifling of private chambers and the use of threats, bribes and drugs to obtain information are all part of a day's work for the Eye. After all, the safety of the Realm outweighs any other consideration.

If evidence of treason presents itself, careful deliberation is taken before any action is taken. Treasonous nobles of House Cynis need to be dealt with differently than noisy and disgruntled tradesmen. In most cases, the mere knowledge that the Eye is indeed watching the traitors is enough to send everyone scurrying back into safe and socially acceptable patterns of behavior. In other cases, a private meeting with the revelation that the traitor's work is known is enough to frighten him back onto the path of good citizenship.

However, sometimes, death is the only solution, and in such cases, the Eye strikes according to the situation's demands. Sometimes, the execution is that of a minor conspirator, quietly, to serve as a silent warning to the remaining traitors that they are being watched. Other times, a public execution, complete with a denouncement and a recitation of the traitor's crimes, is best for instilling proper obedience in the citizenry. Regardless of circumstance, however, the All-Seeing Eye stands ready to carry out the sentence upon which it has decided.

## Watching the Borders

The All-Seeing Eye does not turn its gaze exclusively inward, however. The final aspect of its labors involves the struggle for intelligence outside the Realm. Whether it's learning that a minor prince in the Threshold is looking to declare his principality's independence from the Realm or uncovering the whereabouts of a dangerous

### The Old Ones

The Empress established the All-Seeing Eye to report to her and to serve as her method for observing and controlling the rest of the Realm. It is primarily filled with members of House Iselsi, whose membership in the Eye is an open secret among the Dynasts. What is not known is that the upper ranks are heavy with Bronze faction affiliated Sidereal Exalted of great age and power. Those who seek to learn too much about the Eye, however, tend to vanish. Whether they've been punished for their inquisitiveness or rewarded by being taken into the organization is unknown.

exile, it is vital that the Realm be aware of the activities of those outside its borders. Every city of the Threshold, and several well beyond, have agents in place whose duties are to observe, to recruit and, on rare occasions, to act to defend the Realm. Unfortunately, the recent financial reversals have led to several of these networks withering on the vine or being taken over by entities other than the Eye itself. It is this betrayal of the Eye's methodologies, more than anything else, that has proven harmful to the organization, and while they recognize the necessity, several of the true handlers of the group deeply regret casting their net so widely.

## The Deliberative

The Deliberative is the lawmaking body of the Realm. It represents the entire population of the empire — or at least those segments of it that matter — and it has the power to defy the Empress herself. In the halls of the Palace of the Deliberative Senate, the laws of the Realm are crafted, debated upon and polished, and the great orators thunder forth their arguments.

Such, at least, is the theory. The reality is somewhat different.

### The Chambers

The Deliberative is divided into two chambers, one Greater and one Lesser. The Greater Chamber consists entirely of Dragon-Blooded from the Great Houses of the Dynasty, while the Lesser Chamber comprises representatives drawn from the ranks of the merchant and patrician classes. Dragon-Blooded are rare, but not unknown, in the ranks of the Lesser Chamber, where they tend to wield considerable power. Members of either chamber are called Senators, or Deliberators, though the latter title has fallen out of favor in the past century.

### The Offices

There are several offices within the ranks of the Deliberative that Senators can aspire to. The most powerful is the Master of the Deliberative, who oversees the Greater Chamber's debates and plays an extensive role in shaping the debate. Also attached to the Greater Chamber is the Incorruptible Secretary, whose primary responsibility is to tally any and all votes taken. These two roles have their echoes in the Lesser Chamber, with the Master of the Lesser Chamber and the Scrupulous Monitor of the Will of the People serving essentially the same functions. Each chamber also has a Guardian of the Enlightened Discourse (called the Protector of the Debate in the Lesser Chamber), who commands the Guardians of the Deliberative, an elite force of guards on hand to protect the Senators from all threats — and from one another. Beyond that, all Senators are considered equal — at least in theory. There is no doubt that a Senator of the Greater Chamber outranks one of the Lesser, and within each chamber is an ornate hierarchy of alliances, allegiances and blackmail that ensures a rigid, yet mostly invisible, pecking order.

All offices are voted on at the first session of the new year, though a no-confidence vote can be called at any time. If the no-confidence vote succeeds, all officers are removed from their posts and no new business can be brought to the attention of the Deliberative until a new Master of the Deliberative is in place. The chambers cast their no-confidence votes separately, though a change in the Greater Chamber almost always signals one in the Lesser.

New officers are elected by a two-thirds majority in the Greater Chamber and a simple majority in the lesser. In both chambers, no-confidence votes require a two-thirds majority.

### The Senators

The Senators of the Greater Chamber are allowed to be attended by up to three servants and three slaves while they are in debate. One of the servants is inevitably a scribe, to record the pertinent details of the debate for the Senator and to hastily write orations or denunciations, as the situation demands. A personal secretary is generally included as well, and there is a constant flow of these servants around the hall of debate, as they arrange clandestine meetings or seal agreements on their masters' behalf. Swarms of slaves are also used as runners, either to deliver messages or to obtain bits of evidence, comforts and anything else a Senator requires to perform his legislative role adequately. Slaves are not allowed to speak while in the actual hall of debate, while servants are not permitted to allow their voices to rise above a whisper. The penalty in either case can be death and, worse, severe loss of face for the Senator thus discomfited.

Lesser Chamber Senators are permitted two servants and one slave. This is as much a practical consideration as it is a reminder of rank; the Lesser Chamber has vastly greater membership than the Greater, and were each Senator allowed to bring in an entourage equal to her sense of self-worth, a coliseum would not be able to hold the throng.

### The Halls of Debate

The Deliberative is housed in the Palace of the Deliberative Senate of Exceedingly Judicious Nobles (the second building of that name, the first having been burned to the ground four centuries ago). The building itself is a massive structure of polished white stone set amidst immaculately manicured grounds in the Imperial City. The palace itself and its attendant gardens are patrolled by the Guardians of the Deliberative, and by custom, all who enter must leave their weapons and accouterments of sorcery once they enter the palace proper. This gesture is widely regarded as a symbolic one, yet the ceremonial surrender of one's arms to the home of the laws of the Realm does emphasize the putative nature of the work performed here.

The interior of the Palace of the Deliberative Senate is laid out to facilitate contemplation of the weighty matters of state, and as such, it features innumerable small gardens, pools, private chambers, baths, steam rooms, residential quarters, libraries containing every debate the Deliberative has ever held and kitchens. All of this is constructed around the two largest rooms in the complex: the Hall of Contemplative and Prudent Debate, where the Lesser Chamber is seated, and the Great Hall of Most Inspired and Noble Lawmaking, where the Greater Chamber performs its labors.

The Hall of Debate is furnished entirely in wood, with the benches of the Senators surrounding the debate floor on three sides. To the north are the seats of the officers of the Lesser Chamber. The benches themselves are plain wood and extremely uncomfortable. Officially, this discomfort is to remind the Senators that they are here to perform a difficult labor and not to aggrandize themselves. In reality, it is to ensure that the legislative process is as uncomfortable as possible for the lawmakers and that their workdays are short and their attention scattered.

The Great Hall is laid out in similar fashion, though the Master and the other officers' places are at the south end of the hall. The benches here are of stone, though Senators of the Greater Chamber are permitted cushions. The walls of the Great Hall are covered in tapestries representing the Great Houses, and each house's representatives sits in the area marked in front of their respective tapestry.

There are five doors to the Great Hall, each marked with the sign of one of the five aspects. Senators are expected to enter and exit through the appropriate door for their aspect. The Hall of Debate has nine doors, for a reason no one has yet been able to adequately explain, and its walls are bare of all decoration.

## Entering the Deliberative

The members of the Greater Chamber are drawn exclusively from the Great Houses. Having a house member selected to the Deliberative is something of a double-edged sword. While it is an honor and it keeps the family's interest from being trampled in debate, it also incurs the expense of supporting a Senator during the legislative sessions, and it takes the newly minted Senator out of other, potentially more useful labors. However, an appointment to the Greater Chamber is an honor and must be treated as such and is generally celebrated with banquets, hunts and, on some occasions, auspicious marriages. An optimist would say that it means that the merits of the new Senator are recognized; a pessimist that she was finally troublesome enough to merit keeping a close eye on.

Once selected, a Senator of the Greater Chamber journeys to the Imperial City for her formal investiture, a process that takes place at the opening of each meeting of the Deliberative. This ceremony is a command performance, and no dawdling is allowed. A Senator who arrives late for her investiture is already three steps behind in the great political game of the Deliberative.

Lesser Chamber Senators, on the other hand, are selected not by the Empress, but by the members of the Greater Chamber. Drawn from the ranks of the patricians, the wealthiest merchants and the tributary queens and princes, the Senators of the Lesser Chamber are picked for their pliability, their wealth and their potential to be useful to their betters. Often, a Senatorial position is a bribe to a particularly important tributary prince or a reward for a scion of a patrician family that performed sterling service to a Dynast. There is a great deal of horse-trading that goes on between Greater Chamber Senators when it comes time to appoint new faces to the Lesser, as Senators jockey to appoint their favorites — or upstarts they want to keep an eye on.

### Leaving the Senate

There are three ways to leave the Deliberative and divest oneself of the rank of Senator. The first is to be summarily removed by the Empress herself, a tactic frequently employed in the past. The second is exile, and the third is death. On six separate occasions, the Empress did reinstate Senators she had banished from the Deliberative in the past, though one of these six, Perek of House Iselsi, was executed several days later for treason while serving as the Master of the Deliberative.

### Swelling Ranks

It has always been true that in good times, the Deliberative shrinks, and in bad times, it swells. The disappearance of the Empress and the resultant situation can most certainly be identified as "bad times," and a slew of new Senators were duly appointed. The Greater Chamber Senators themselves made the selections in a carefully worked out compromise, then presented it to the Regent as a recommendation. The Regent, unsurprisingly, accepted the recommendation of his trusted advisors verbatim.

## The Art of Debate

When she first founded the Deliberative, the Empress laid down a strict set of rules as to each and every one of that august body's behaviors, ranging from how new Senators are appointed to the rules of debate. Over the years, the latter have acquired a near-religious authority, and the process of initiating debate on the Deliberative's floor has become ritualized to the point of ponderousness. This was quite pleasing to the Empress herself, though perhaps for reasons other than those imagined by the Senators, and on occasion, she would sit, veiled, in the Greater or Lesser Chamber to hear the debate. The Regent, however, never addresses or observes the Deliberative at all.

## The Greater Chamber

If there is any power in the Deliberative at all, it rests in the Greater Chamber. An appointment to the Greater Chamber carries with it more prestige and, indeed, more authority than one to the Lesser, and Senators of the Greater Chamber are sure to let their so-called peers know about it. Greater Chamber Senators have right of way in processions, are served first at formal occasions and have the right to displace a Lesser Chamber Senator from her seat at any state function.

Senators of the Greater Chamber are responsible for their formal robes of office, yet another reason the post is de facto limited to the wealthy as well as powerful. A Senator who cannot afford to keep up her robes of office — white silk, with scarlet trim indicating ultimate familial allegiance to the Scarlet Dynasty — is not allowed to take her place among the Deliberative while it is in session. To do so in tattered or shabby robes, after all, would be to show grave disrespect. Senators of the Lesser Chamber are held to less exacting standards but must still provide their own robes of gray and scarlet. Officers of the Deliberative wear capes of many colors denoting their particular office over their robes.

### Introduction of a Motion

Only the Senators of the Greater Chamber can introduce a motion into debate. Each motion must have a sponsor and a pair of seconds, who together compose a Declaration of Harmonious Intent to present to the Master of the Deliberative. The Declaration is a scroll consisting of the content of the proposed motion, as well as testimonies from its sponsor and his seconds that the motion will, if approved, blend harmoniously with the existing laws of the Realm. While initially a simple text, the Declaration has gotten more complex over the years, and now, any Declaration that is delivered to the Master without suitable ornamentation (often by artists or poets kept on staff for just such an occasion) is regarded as déclassé and not worth the Master's time. The Master cannot officially refuse to present a Declaration, but he can find faults in one, real or otherwise, that can render it "unsuitable," accomplishing the same thing.

The Declaration must be hand-delivered by the sponsor to the Master of the Deliberative at the beginning of a day's session, and there is great honor associated with being the first to present to the Master that day. Those who find themselves at the tail end of the line are subject to ridicule and abuse from the seated Senators, who feel that the stragglers are delaying the opening of the day's work and, by virtue of their worthless petitions, will extend it well into the night. They may have a point — after all, if the sponsor of the Declaration could not be bothered to arrive sufficiently early to present it in a timely fashion, its content surely cannot be that important. Jockeying for position within the line of petitioners has become something of an art form unto itself; allowing a senior and respected Senator to advance past one in the line is the sort of favor that can reap huge political dividends down the line.

As each Declaration is received, it is read in its entirety to the Greater Chamber as a whole. The Master of the Deliberative then calls for a formal vote to determine whether the Chamber is willing to debate the Declaration. If the majority accedes to the notion, the Declaration is burned in a brazier kept to the left of the Master's chair. If it is refused, the Declaration is returned to the sponsor as a badge of shame. Once a Declaration's fate has been decided, the next petitioner presents her document, and the process begins again. Not until the last Declaration has been voted upon does the actual day's debate begin, and it is a common tactic to flood the Master with Declarations on trivial matters to delay the opening of serious debate. Indeed, Senators have been spotted scribbling new Declarations on the floor to extend the line that much further. Such Declarations are inevitably shot down, but they serve their purpose.

Once the day's Declarations have been dealt with, the Master of the Deliberative then formally opens the

debate on each petition, starting with any left over from the previous day's discussion. If debate is extensive, days and days of undebated declarations can pile up. It is the Master of the Deliberative who decides the order in which the proposals reach the floor, and this is the real power associated with the position. By simply delaying a proposed piece of legislation until the end of the day's debate, the Master can effectively kill it or buy its opponents (or allies) enough time to see their viewpoint carry the day in debate. And if the session ends by acclamation, then the petition is put off to the next day after the recitation of Declarations. At the last full month of the scheduled meeting of the Deliberative, a ban is placed on further Declarations except by express order of the Empress. This ensures that, sooner or later, the debate catches up to the backlog of Declarations.

When debate opens on a particular petition, the sponsoring Senator is given the chance to orate in favor of it. He may take as much time as he feels necessary, and some notorious filibustering sessions have stretched over days of continuous blather. Most Senators prefer to speak from a lectern at the center of the hall in which the Greater Chamber meets, but others walk the floor, and on one occasion, a Senator from House Cynis gave her entire oration laying on her back between the benches.

Once the sponsor is finished, the rest of the Deliberative may join in the debate. The Master of the Deliberative, aided by her secretaries, chooses the order of the debate, and again, this grants the office tremendous power. While it's rare for a Master to be so unsubtle as to simply ignore an eloquent speaker in a proposal's behalf, she can certainly select a clumsier proponent to go first and, thus, discredit the cause through sheer incompetence.

When debate on a petition finally dies down — and there is no guarantee that it will do so in timely fashion — a vote is called for and tallied by the Secretary. If a simple majority approves, it moves on to the Lesser Chamber, to dare their disapproval. If a majority disapproves, then the petition is considered denied, and debate moves on.

### Ending a Session

There are two ways in which a daily session of the Greater Chamber's labors can end. The first is that the Master of the Deliberative declares the day's work done and extinguishes the brazier to her left. She then exits the room, and under normal circumstances, the rest of the chamber follows her. On three noteworthy occasions of crisis within the Realm, the Greater Chamber refused to leave its debate, and the next day, a new Master of the Deliberative was in place to receive Declarations.

The other method to end a day's session is by acclamation. At any time, a motion to adjourn takes precedence, though proposing an adjournment in the middle of debate before a vote has been cast is considered extremely bad form (and is liable to boomerang on the Senator who does so the next time he sponsors a petition). A vote is immediately taken, and if it carries, the session ends immediately. All results of the day's work are tallied, petitions that have been passed are sent on to the Lesser Chamber, and within minutes, the hall is empty.

#### Interruption

If debate on a petition is deadlocked, a tabling of the motion can be called for, along with a proposed delay in returning to the particular issue. If the vote succeeds, the current petition is taken off the floor, not to return until the pre-agreed date. Such motions are generally the result of cloakroom alliances between more moderate Senators on either side of the issue, who recognize that neither side will gain any advantage by continuing the verbal deadlock.

### Where the Real Work Gets Done

Ascribing particular effectiveness to any aspect of the Greater Chamber is a tricky task because, by design, the Greater Chamber is not *supposed* to be effective. However, what work there is that does get done is generally the result of as much work off the floor as on it. The endless maze of cloakrooms, meditative gardens, corridors and chapels that surround the Deliberative's meeting halls is the perfect place to cut deals. Indeed, it is not uncommon to see Senators summoned from the floor during debate to urgent meetings down the hall.

Ultimately, the work of the Greater Chamber boils down to a series of quid pro quos. A vote here equals a voice raised in support there, a Declaration allowed onto the floor today buys one a year later. Most of the scheming and politicking within the Greater Chamber is about the long term, as junior appointees — particularly those with a penchant for rabble-rousing — find to their sorrow, as they almost inevitably incur massive long-term political debts in exchange for meaningless short-term support. The old hands, instead, carefully hoard and swap favors, calling in the debits they have accumulated with agonizing slowness. Indeed, the mere hint that they may consider a debt discharged if a vote goes a certain way is often enough to sway those who are undecided.

## The Lesser Chamber

The Lesser Chamber of the Deliberative cannot introduce petitions. Rather, it votes on those pieces of legislation passed down from the Greater Chamber. The

### When Civility Breaks Down

On occasion, tempers flare during the Deliberative's debates. Usually, the Senators can restrain themselves from flinging more than words at one another, but every so often, actual fisticuffs break out. While this is not so much of a problem in the Lesser Chamber, which boasts few Dragon-Blooded, in the Greater Chamber, it can lead to impressive chaos, not to mention loss of life and limb. The Guardians of the Deliberative are supposed to interrupt such brawls, but even these selfless souls have more sense than to insert themselves into a brawling mass of Dragon-Blooded. Instead, they generally wait until one side has been pounded senseless (or worse) and then move in to "mop up" any small pockets of squabbling still remaining. By ancient custom, combatants in the Deliberative chambers are to use neither weapon nor Charm nor sorcery, but that still leaves a great deal of leeway for breaking furnishings... and people.

The last instance of a scrum in the Greater Chamber occurred during the "packing" of the Chamber just after the Regent's accession. Several older Senators of House Tepet decried the process as a blatant ploy by the younger houses to seize power unlawfully. A representative from House V'Neef took offense to this accusation, and in the resultant melee, two of the most vocal hecklers of the appointments — including the venerable and well-respected Tepet Salas — were killed. Several of the younger V'Neef Senators and their allies took leaves of absence from the Deliberative immediately afterward, and the Senator who'd initiated the brawl was assigned to a 20-year diplomatic mission to the smaller archipelagos of the Western Ocean.



Master of the Lesser Chamber solemnly reads each motion that the Greater Chamber has passed, and then, debate is opened. In theory, the Master of the Lesser Chamber calls the order of the debate, but in practice, this tends to break down into a verbal scrum.

At any time during the debate, any member of the Lesser Chamber can call for a vote. The motion must be approved by the Master of the Lesser Chamber and then voted on by the entire body. A two-thirds majority is required to pass the motion for a vote; any less and the debate continues.

When a vote has been called, the Scrupulous Monitor records each Senator's aye or nay — as in the Greater

Chamber, all votes are public — and tallies the results. If any less than a two-thirds majority votes to the negative, the motion passes. It achieves the status of decree and goes to the Empress (now the Regent) for consideration. If, however, more than two-thirds are mustered in opposition, then the motion is defeated. In such instances, a scroll bearing the text of the motion is returned to the Greater Chamber, bound in twined black and red ribbons.

### A Surprising Degree of Resistance

The Lesser Chamber would seem, at first glance, to be nothing more than a rubber stamp for the machinations of the Greater. For two equally compelling reasons, however, this is not the case. For one, many of the Senators of the Lesser Chamber are so desperate to assert their statesmanship that they feel compelled to comment on each and every piece of legislation proposed, regardless of whether they have anything of value to say. This tends to wear down even the staunchest advocates of a petition.

Second and more importantly, almost to a man, the Senators of the Lesser Chamber hate those of the Greater and take great pleasure in confounding their designs. While, on occasion, either bribes or a sense of responsibility to the Realm as a whole can sweep the Lesser Chamber along with a piece of particularly pertinent legislation, given their choice, the patricians prefer to stick it to the Greater Chamber.

## The Empress... and the Regent

Written into the laws surrounding the Deliberative is a sizable role for the Empress herself. She could, at any time, propose a petition without going through the process of Declaration, and she could veto any decision of the two chambers. Only a near-unanimous vote of both chambers could overturn her veto — one dissenting vote was allowed in each chamber.

More importantly, the Empress had the ability to appoint Senators to the Greater Chamber at will, and she used this tool masterfully. An appointment to the Greater Chamber cannot be refused save through suicide or joining the Immaculates, and as such, the "gift" of sitting in the Deliberative was often used to defuse young firebrands and defang rebels. Elevation to the Deliberative carried with it an immediate audience with the Empress, which made it useful as a method for disrupting activities that the Empress looked upon unkindly. Once named to the Deliberative, even the most hardened dissident generally assimilated into polite society, seduced by power. Even those rare few who didn't were rendered harmless, pinned to the palace by their duties and overwhelmed by their self-seeking peers.

Of late, however, the policy of adopting would-be reformers into the Deliberative is having some unexpected consequences. Operating under the formerly mistaken notion that the Deliberative possesses real authority, these firebrands — many of them from outlying estates or even the Threshold — are pushing for real alterations in the structure of the Realm. Accordingly, debate in the Deliberative has taken on a more serious and explosive air. Votes on Declarations over such issues as redistribution of taxes, greater autonomy for the governors of prefectures and Threshold states, increased civil liberties and taxes on the Immaculate Order have gotten uncomfortably close for the Deliberative's conservative old guard. Several members of the so-called Yellow Banner faction of Young Turks have been ambushed by thugs on their way to the Deliberative in recent weeks, and threats of retaliation have been issued on the floor of the Deliberative itself.

### The Regent

The Regent holds precisely the same powers as regards the Deliberative as did the Empress. He simply does not exercise them. Engaging in lawmaking holds no interest for him, and besides, the Senators have assured him that there is no need for him to trouble himself with the matter, as they have the situation well in hand.

## Sitting in Session

The Deliberative is technically in session the year round, but few Senators can afford to abandon their affairs totally. Instead, by gentleman's agreement, the Deliberative meets from the first day of Ascending Air to the last day of Descending Earth. The Empress may call a meeting at any time in response to a crisis or, more importantly, for the sake of political expediency. It is considered extreme

### The Long Corridor

The passage between the two halls of deliberation is called the Long Corridor, though, in actuality, it is all of 10 yards in length. In the parlance of the Deliberative, however, "walking the Long Corridor" refers to cutting a deal with a member of the other chamber. Such arrangements can be lucrative for both sides and have repercussions far outside the palace. A Dynast might secure a commission in a legion her house sponsors for the child of a Lesser Chamber Senator, who, in return, promises to deliver a bloc of votes to halt a particular petition — such is the trade between the chambers. Generally, exchange features favors from the Greater Chamber in exchange for votes in the Lesser. Officially, such trade is forbidden, but it is accepted as the way business is done in the Deliberative.

### The Succession

A two-thirds vote in each chamber is required to ratify the status of the Empress' successor, should one ever declare herself. At the present moment, the political situation is far too precarious for any serious contender to even whisper aloud her ambition for the Throne, much less present herself to the Deliberative as a candidate. To do so would be to beg for assassination.

However, even if a candidate were to announce that she sought the Throne, it is most unlikely that the necessary majority could be achieved in either Chamber. Most Senators hold at least some belief that the Empress will return, and will be most displeased with anyone who voted to give away her empire in the interim.

And even those who don't believe are inclined to hedge their bets, just in case.

bad luck, however, to call a session to order during the Calibration, and doing so is regarded as a last resort.

During sessions, the Senators are either put up in house accommodations in the Imperial City or in the Palace of the Deliberative itself, though many seek their own apartments elsewhere in the city to cut down on the risk of having their business spied upon. The legislative season is a boon to the merchants, innkeepers and restaurateurs of the Imperial City, as the Senators try to outdo each other in appearance and hospitality. Lavish banquets are the order of the day, as well as a useful tool for establishing status and incurring debts of hospitality — ones that can be repaid on the debate floor.

## A Day's Work

A day's deliberations begin an hour after sunrise and can run no later than an hour after sunset. They almost never run this long, however, as other obligations take precedence. No food is served while the Deliberative is in session, though Senators may refresh themselves at their leisure by sending runners out for wine, sweets and other refreshments of their choice. Ordering slaves to bring such noisy delicacies as shellfish to be eaten during a rival's presentation is regarded as an emphatic expression of disdain. At noon, there is a two-hour break for luncheon, and tea is served at hour intervals throughout the day.

### The Power of the Purse

The normal way that a legislative assembly controls the ruler is through threat of withholding the budget. However, the Empress didn't just rule the Realm, she *owned* it, and she could spend her monies as she pleased. Any budget was just a pro forma stamp on something that had already happened. Now, with the Empress gone, the Deliberative has to manage the budget, and it has proven totally incapable of doing so. Eighty percent of income is lost from tributes and tax collected, as the Great Houses skim strictly for their own profit. If Bal Keraz allowed it, the Treasury would be long empty.

## Attendance

Attendance at a session of the Deliberative is, contrary to popular belief, not mandatory. A Senator is perfectly within her rights to skip a day's session — or even an entire month's worth. However, doing so was frowned upon emphatically by the Empress, who liked knowing precisely where all of her Senators were at any given time. Even with the Empress gone, however, the Senators rarely, if ever, miss more than a single day, as the fear of falling behind in the great game of politics outweighs any desire they might have to be elsewhere.

### Dissolving the Deliberative

In the spring of Realm Year 643, the Deliberative took the unprecedented step of overturning the Empress' veto no fewer than three times within the space of a week. She was exceedingly disturbed by this display of solidarity and independence on the part of her Senators, and so, she resolved to dissolve the Deliberative.

She did so by stationing an entire legion outside the Palace of the Deliberative. When the day's session was well underway, she gave the fateful order, and the troops rushed forward, slaughtering the entire Lesser Chamber and most of the Greater. The few survivors were exiled, and a new Greater Chamber was chosen in due time.

The new Senators, unsurprisingly, were more cooperative than their predecessors.

# The Immaculate Order

To say that the Order of the Immaculate Dragons is the official faith of the Realm is to be, on a certain level, ingenuous. After all, the Immaculate monks do not mandate attendance at religious services or demand tithing. They do not denounce those who are not sufficiently pious as being damned to everlasting torment, and they do not feel the need to organize pogroms or religious crusades against less enlightened neighbors.

After all, they know better.

And that, ultimately, is the key to the Immaculate faith. They *know*. They know that there is a celestially ordained order to the universe and to the beings within it, and they know precisely where they — and everyone else in the Realm — fits in that order. Theirs is the supreme confidence that comes from having all of the answers, a perfect understanding of the way the universe actually works. With the Immaculate Texts as a guide, an Immaculate monk is confident in his role in the greater scheme of things — and satisfied with it.

This is, at the same time, the great blessing and the great mystery of the Immaculates. Their serene confidence — and their obvious prowess — serve to reassure the populace as a whole of the rightness of their beliefs.

## The Central Tenet

The core belief at the center of the Immaculate faith is a simple one. There is a structure to the universe, a celestially inspired blueprint in which every thing and every living being has its place. Every being must show respect to those below it in this great chain of being and has a duty of obedience to those who are higher. Thus, it is right and proper for a farmer to kill and eat a chicken for sustenance, and it is right for the chicken to give up its life so that the farmer might live. By the same token, it is right and proper for that farmer to give part of the fruits of his labors on his land as taxes to the Dragon-Blooded noble who owns the land he toils on. So long as all provide their proper obedience and accept their proper respect, the cosmos functions smoothly, and all is well. The chicken has fulfilled its destiny, the peasant is fed, and the Dragon-Blooded is honored.

It is when proper obedience to one's role and one's superiors is not given that chaos results, and where chaos grows, bloodshed follows. It is not proper, for example, for a fox to devour the chicken, as the chicken owes its obedience to the farmer. By eating the farmer's fowl, the fox disrupts the chain of appropriate behavior. In the small scale, this creates local chaos. By eating the

### Constructed Belief

To dismiss the faith of the Immaculate Order as something created from whole cloth for political ends is to, ultimately, miss much of the point of **Exalted**. Yes, the Immaculate faith was created — and done so as a tool to support the fledgling Dragon-Blooded Shogunate. The motives of those who created it can be described as pragmatic at best, cynical and power-hungry at worst. But to concentrate on those things is to ignore the single most important aspect of the Order.

People *believe*.

It has been centuries upon centuries since the Contagion, and the Immaculate Philosophy was practiced for centuries *before* the Contagion. Five generations of Dragon-Blooded have entered the cloisters and taken the vows since the coronation of the Empress. For hundreds of years, they have studied, listened, meditated and learned the faith. For just as long, they have handed it down to those who came after them, doing so with reverence and dignity. They believe.

Hundreds of years' worth of peasants have grown up listening to temple bells, hearing chanting from the monasteries and seeing the perfectly composed monks at funeral celebrations performing the rituals that are right and proper. They believe.

The Immaculate faith does more than just keep the peasants in line. It provides a framework for citizens' lives, one that they are happy to use to give their days structure. It assures them of a place in the grand scheme of things and answers questions which might otherwise be unanswerable. And in hewing to that framework of belief, the monks and those whom they minister to do a great deal of good. The Immaculate Philosophy maintains and structures communities, feeds and shelters the destitute and rallies and inspires the congregation in times of trouble.

People believe, and in believing, they act appropriately. The Immaculate faith is their rock, and the monks are their shepherds. Theirs is not to question, and in a world where the merely mortal are in mortal danger if they attract the attention of their betters, perhaps it is better that way.

And so, the faith of the monks is an honest one, and they strive to uphold all its tenets as best they may. They pass down that honest belief to the rest of the Realm, and the laymen, too, uphold it to the best of their understanding.

After all, from where they stand, it's the right thing to do.

farmer's chicken, the fox makes the farmer's family go hungry, which is inappropriate for a spiritually superior being, or it dooms another fowl to a premature, and thus inappropriate, death. And so, the farmer must hunt the fox and leave his true labors behind. The fox reaps death, which he would not have had he kept to his proper prey. The farmer's holdings are diminished by the fox's predations, and his crops are weakened because of the time he spent neglecting them while chasing the fox. The fox may have eaten well in the short term, but because of his greed and his disobedience, all have suffered.



And what has been writ small in the case of the farmer and the fox can be writ large in the case of men. If the farmer refuses to pay his taxes, then the Dragon-Blooded is not being accorded proper respect and is not being supported as is her intrinsic right. The farmer must be punished for his disobedience, which takes the Dragon-Blooded away from her proper tasks. No one benefits. And if other farmers view their justly punished comrade as a martyr, then the disruption can explode into open revolt, much to the detriment of all. Surely, those slain in the rebellion and the acres of earth scorched by those suppressing it would have been better off had the farmer simply paid his taxes. And if those taxes were truly unjust, then it is still a disruption of the proper chain of being that caused the revolt. For, by setting unjust taxes, the Dragon-Blooded did not show the proper respect for his inferiors.

It is best, then, that one accepts one's role and strives to perfect it. The perfect farmer is immune to the depredations of the fox, as he has protected what is rightfully his well. After all, such is part of a farmer's labors. The fox, confronted with the farmer's preparations, goes off to seek his proper prey.

And by the same token, the Dragon-Blooded who instills obedience properly into his tenant farmers is assuring the peace by insuring that all concerned act properly. Such is the method by which the central tenet of the Immaculate Philosophy is applied to everyday life in the Realm.

## The Five Elemental Dragons

In Immaculate theology, there are five perfect beings: the Elemental Dragons. Each took it upon him or herself to manifest in the form of a Dragon-Blooded, the better to teach the Exalted of the Realm the path to enlightenment. Each left a litany of prayers, practices,

### The Central Tenet, Refined

One of the core elements of the Immaculate Philosophy is that souls approach perfection (defined as the Exalted incarnations of the Five Elemental Dragons) by harnessing Essence, and that, because of this, the Dragon-Blooded are as near perfection as can be imagined. Since they are nearer perfection than other souls, they are charged with bringing those other souls along the path to enlightenment. It is right and proper, then, for lesser souls to heed the words of the Dragon-Blooded, for it would be inconceivable for such enlightened beings to derail others on their quests for enlightenment themselves.

This is perhaps the most boldly political facet of the Immaculate Philosophy, one which demands obedience to the Dragon-Blooded. With time, it is has expanded somewhat into the greater notion of the appropriate place for all beings, but the Dragon-Blooded (and especially the Empress) remain at the top of the pecking order. At its heart, it ensures that the Dragon-Blooded have spiritual as well as physical authority over their human subjects, but the added spiritual element makes the arrangement more palatable to both.

examples and lessons in the Immaculate Texts, that those who came after them might study and know the path to enlightenment.

Monks dedicate themselves to one Elemental Dragon or another when they are fully initiated into the Order. Dragon-Blooded acolytes most often choose the Elemental Dragon whose sign matches their elemental affinity, though, on rare occasions, a postulant feels that she is called to serve another. Human acolytes ironically have more freedom once they are initiated, as they may choose to follow any of the Five Glorious Dragon Paths.

Monks dedicated to following in the footsteps of one of the Five Elemental Dragons are charged with studying that Elemental Dragon's teachings, with following the path he or she prescribed and with furthering that Dragon's teachings. Rivalry between the followers of the various Dragons usually remains aboveboard and is rarely more than argumentative. The teachings of the Five Elemental Dragons are so wildly diverse in their specifics, yet so carefully intertwined in their philosophy (a credit to the authors of the Immaculate Texts), that there is precious little common ground for debate and, thus, for schism.

## Life Cycle

Immaculate monks are a vital part of the communities of the Realm. Through the ceremonies the monks perform, they mark the life cycles of the Realm's inhabitants and show their place in the scheme of things. No baby is born in the Realm without an Immaculate pronouncing his name for the first time; until a priest does so, the child is simply "girl" or "boy." While the Dynasts may have house priests of their own blood, peasants or owners of remote estates may wait months or even years until the opportunity arises to formally name their children.

Likewise, Immaculates oversee rites of death and marriage and those of coming of age. It is an Immaculate who lays the first torch on the cadaver's funeral pyre and who informs the community that he who was once a boy is now a man.

### Temples and Monasteries

Apart from wandering monks, Immaculates generally labor in one of two sorts of buildings: temples and monasteries. Temples are dedicated to the function of the Immaculates within the community. The temple is where services are held and classes taught and where appropriate offerings are made in the sight of the congregation. Except at rare times, temples are open to the public, so that the common folk may contemplate, pray and gaze on enlightenment whenever they wish. Monks who are assigned to temples are outgoing rather than contemplative, and many in rural areas or the Threshold also walk routes among the people.

Monasteries, on the other hand, are devoted entirely to contemplation and study. Often, they are staffed and occupied by the devotees of a single Elemental Dragon, and the form and decoration of the monastery is dictated by this fact. Monks share cells in monasteries, usually two or four to a room, and spend their days in contemplation, prayer, gardening and whatever specialized tasks (such as transcription, illumination of manuscripts or musical composition) the monastery specializes in. Monasteries are not open to any outside the Immaculate Order, and trespassers are gently but firmly shown the gate. Same-sex monasteries, which are rare, are referred to as abbeys, and any monk who heads either sort of monastic community is referred to as an abbot.

### Schooling

Temples, especially those in the hinterlands, often serve as a replacement for schools for those families who cannot afford tutors or schooling for their children. These temple schools rarely teach more than basic reading and arithmetic, as well as a healthy dollop of Immaculate Philosophy, but they are free, and they are open to all. Peasant children from four years of age to

### On Route

Monks who walk circuits are responsible for a variety of duties. In the simplest terms, they are given a path or an area to cover, and it is their responsibility to wend their way through every village and farmstead in that region to provide comfort, prayer and sanctification of life-cycle functions. Usually, circuit monks have a set travel pattern that lasts between three months and a year, depending on the size of the area they are given to cover. Unless interrupted by some form of crisis (a plague, an unruly ghost that needs to be dealt with, etc.), a monk will move heaven and earth to stick precisely to his set schedule.

Once at the day's destination, a circuit monk provides a sudden shot of spirituality for the local populace. Namings, marriages, funerary rites, prayer services — all of these are held one after another in order to take advantage of the monk's presence. Because most circuits are large and most monks walk their routes, extended stays in a given village are rare. If, on his journeys, a monk discovers that a village has grown large enough to require a permanent temple, word is passed through the network of circuit-walking and itinerant monks back to the Palace Sublime, and the Mouth of Peace decides whether a permanent assignment will be made.

### Hermits

There are those monks who find the cloister system to be too oppressive and prefer a solitary spirituality. These monks leave their posts (with or without permission, depending on how the spirit moves them) and seek a lone lifestyle far from civilization. A surprising number manage to find isolation on the Blessed Isle, particularly along the western coast or on the slopes of the Imperial Mountain. Others leave the Isle and spread out past the Threshold into the hinterlands.

The Immaculate Order's hierarchy publicly maintains that these hermits, who receive attention far in excess of their actual numbers, are part of the Order's plan and that they are nothing extraordinary. However, rumors of miracles and new methods of channeling Essence swirl around these hermits, despite official Immaculate denials of such tales. Awed by the legends, pilgrims in the hundreds seek this hermit or that one every year, convinced that they can learn wisdom and power at the feet of these solitary figures.

nine are taken at the temple schools, which are taught by monks on a volunteer basis.

There are a few Order-sponsored primary schools. All save one charge fees commensurate with their prestige. The exception, the Academy of Those Who Tread in Jylis' Footsteps, is free and limited to children whom monks all over the Realm feel are worthy. If selected, a child is sent to the school (located a few leagues west of the Imperial City) and supported there by the Order until she graduates. Unsurprisingly, most of the graduates of the temple schools later apply to the Order for admission.

## The Rules of the Order

Immaculate monks live under a strict series of behavioral codes that serve two purposes. The first is to set aside the monks from the rest of society. An Immaculate is instantly identifiable no matter where he roams. His robes, his shaven head, his dietary habits — all of these instantly set a monk apart, so that there can be no confusion between the secular and the spiritual.

The second is to focus the monk's energies and attentions on her spiritual task, rather than any mundane ones. All of the Order's rules are designed to remove the concerns of the self and the workaday world.

### Becoming Immaculate

Those who hear the call — or whose families wish for them to be safely ensconced within the Immaculate Order — must travel to the Imperial City, there to present themselves to the Paragon of Sextes Jylis. Often, a postulant must wait days or even weeks before seeing the Paragon. This time is spent in communal prayer with other postulants and in assisting with small tasks around the Palace Sublime. Often, postulants have sponsors, either secular or within the Order. This is taken into account when the Paragon sees the postulant. After all, it benefits the Order to have the goodwill of the Dynasty, and the wishes of influential monks should be respected as well.

Postulants wear gray robes at all times, made of a coarser material than those of acolytes. At any time, postulants may be chastised or ordered about by the monks, the better to prepare them for life within the Order. Those who cannot stomach it, or who are turned down by the Paragon, are sent home, the better to spread the word of the Immaculates' powers of endurance.




The Palace Sublime is the only place where new acolytes can be accepted. Once accepted, they may be sent to another temple or monastery to study and to train, but all roads into the Immaculate Order pass through the Paragon of Sextes Jylis.

### The Itinerants

Just as the Thousand Scales have their magistrates, women and men chosen to wander the land to see to the functioning of the Realm, the Immaculate Order has its Celestially Guided Itinerants, monks who are charged with traveling from place to place, tending to the common folk and, more importantly, observing both local practice and local heresy. Mandated by the Bronze faction and empowered by the Mouth of Peace, the Itinerants have a sweeping range of powers, ranging from assuming control of an abbey to expelling a monk from the Order. Often devotees of the Elemental Dragons of Earth or Air, the Itinerants meander from place to place as the spirit moves them. Answerable only to the Mouth of Peace, these priests exhibit a remarkable knack for stumbling across questionable financial affairs, burgeoning heresies, corrupt monasteries and the like.

Itinerants also serve a more specialized purpose on occasion. When the affairs of the Order require that a more subtle or underhanded approach be used, the Itinerants are the ones called upon to do the job. The most skilled of the skilled and most trustworthy of the trusted, they can be relied upon to accomplish any task set before them, whether it be assassinating a heretical leader or looting the tomb of an ancient Anathema. The Itinerants are utterly devoted to the Immaculate Order and, in many cases, to the Mouth of Peace or the surviving Bronze faction Sidereals to whom they report. As such, they do not question their tasks, nor do they seek recognition or reward. Each is sure that he does what is right, and that is reward enough.

## Dress

Immaculate monks dress simply, as befits their station. On most days, they wear plain, belted robes and sandals. Those who travel may wear broad-brimmed hats, but otherwise, the head is left unadorned. Jewelry of any sort is forbidden, as is any sort of makeup, tattooing or piercing.

Belts indicate a monk's rank, with the material of the belt ranging from rope (postulants) to silk (Most

Enlightened Masters). For holy days and special occasions, monks also have ceremonial robes, which are intricately decorated versions of their workaday clothes. These are generally stitched with colorful threads in either geometric patterns or images depicting scenes from the Immaculate Texts. Dragons, unsurprisingly, are a favorite theme.

Monks who wear anything other than their prescribed robes, if caught, are immediately clad in the gray robe of the postulant for a month, as a reminder to be humble and to adhere to their appropriate station. Those who manage to duck this punishment find themselves the victims of bad luck, which grows steadily worse until they mend their ways.

### Celibacy

Immaculate monks are celibate from the moment they take their first vows and are expected to hold to this standard throughout their lives. Masturbation is permitted in order to allow the monks a stable psyche, but sexual contact with others is prohibited, regardless of the genders involved. The prohibition is not so much moral as professional. A monk who is devoting her energies to the pleasures of the flesh is not devoting them to matters of the spirit. A divided focus does not allow for proper contemplation, hinders meditation and prevents the monk from performing her duties in the most efficient fashion.

Monks caught dabbling in carnal matters are stripped of their rank and robes immediately and expelled from the Order. This is done more in sorrow than in anger, but there are no exceptions to the rule. On the rare occasion that a monk becomes pregnant, she is allowed to stay within the cloister until such time as she gives birth. Then, after sufficient time for recovery, she is expelled. The baby, however, remains with the Order and will be raised to someday enter its ranks. Some of the most notable monks in the Immaculates' history have come from such humble origins, the cause of a great deal of theological debate and reflection among the Immaculate Order's philosophers.

### Poverty

Immaculate monks are expected to live in poverty, as wealth is a distraction from enlightenment. The truly enlightened need no material wealth, after all, for they have something far more precious.

While individual monks may all dwell in poverty, the Order as a whole is quite wealthy. This wealth is reflected in the temple adornments, tapestries and so forth, not in the garb or chambers of individual monks. When it is necessary, though, the Order has an enormous war chest to draw upon. Whether those funds are used to hire mercenaries in the Threshold to safeguard a proposed temple site or to throw lavish banquets for members of the Deliberative who need to be reminded who their friends might be, the wealth is the Order's. It is used for the Order's benefit and not any individual's.

### Diet

As a monk ascends the Coils of the Immaculate Order, his diet is more and more steadily restricted. The reasoning behind this is simple: The purer the diet, the purer the body, and the purer the body, the purer the spirit. Monks who break their dietary strictures are subject to purification rituals that take five days. During that time, they are allowed no food and only water to drink, and they must spend their days in meditation, prayer and reflection on precisely why they chose to violate the dietary laws. Repeat offenders are often demoted ranks until they can learn proper discipline. For if they cannot discipline their palates, what chance do they have of disciplining their spirits?

Monks who attempt to hew to the dietary restrictions of those more advanced in their studies are generally regarded as overly ambitious. Piety is all well and good, but appropriate piety is better, and attempting to shame one's peers by overshadowing them is contrary to the Order's best interests. Those who restrict themselves voluntarily are generally let off with a lecture and a suggestion that patience is rewarded. Those who are simply ambitious are inevitably found out and given on the exercise yard to the monks whose diet they attempted to emulate for the wrong reasons.

#### Dietary Restrictions of the Immaculate Coils

- Postulants — No gluttony.
- First Coil — No intoxicants or narcotics, no red meat.
- Second Coil — No fowl.
- Third Coil — No sweets, sorbets or coarse grains.
- Fourth Coil — No meat of any kind, no drinks save tea and water.
- Fifth Coil — No fruits, only rice, bread, vegetables, tea and water.

### Tonsure

One of the first actions taken by a new postulant at a temple is the shaving of his head. All monks are shaved bald, though men may keep their beards if they so choose. The shaving of the head is thereafter performed every fifth morning with a bronze razor. Monks who do an inadequate

job of this are publicly chastised and shaved in front of others of their coil.

The shaving of the head is considered a reminder to each individual monk to beware of vanity. Hair is the symbol of devotion to the self, and the time required to groom it, tend it and otherwise care for it is time not spent in contemplation of the Immaculate Texts. By shaving his head, the postulant symbolically removes that devotion to the self and accepts his role as one among the many members of the Order.

It is considered extremely arrogant for a postulant to have shaved his head before entering the temple. Doing so indicates that the would-be Immaculate has chosen the Order for himself, rather than being chosen, and such cocksure behavior is rarely rewarded.

### Weapons

A large portion of the Immaculate study involves the martial arts, both armed and unarmed. Archery, sword-play, spear-work and knife expertise are all taught at the various abbeys, along with unarmed combat, giving the Immaculates a well-deserved reputation for being fearsome warriors. There are no restrictions on weapons that a monk might use — edged, blunt or otherwise. What is compulsory is that the monks achieve excellence in its use. The Immaculate Order is no place for dilettantes.

Poison, on the other hand, is expressly forbidden by the Immaculate Texts. Poison allows the weak to strike down the strong and the lowly to slay the mighty, and as such, it is a contravention of the Order's stated purpose. That does not mean, however, that the Order's herbalists have not spent extensive hours studying poisons. However, they have done so strictly in order to find cures for anything from the venom of serpents to the most vile concoctions imagined by man.

## The Bronze Faction

The power behind the Immaculate Order is that of the Bronze faction of Sidereal Exalted, those who orchestrated the slaughter of the Solar and Lunar Exalted for the greater good. From behind the scenes, these Sidereals maintain an active hand in the affairs of the Order, particularly as regards divining the location of new Anathema and stamping out destabilizing heresies.

The vast majority of the Bronze faction Sidereals who remain dwell either in the Palace Sublime or in one of the many temples near it, all of which are linked through a maze of underground tunnels. The tunnels themselves are a palisade of traps for the unwary, foolish and unExalted, as the routes leading to the lairs of the Sidereals are blocked by hazards that can be passed only by certain unique Charms and sorceries that the Sidereals alone can work.

### Aniconic Faith

The Immaculate Philosophy is aniconic, meaning it opposes the use of pictures, images and sculptures. Depiction is adoration, and depictions are repositories for worship and admiration. These are forms of prayer.

In the Realm, objects are decorated with intricate abstract deigns rather than with depictive illustration. The only depictive art permitted to mortals in the Realm is of the Five Elemental Dragons and of their five incarnates. Most of this art occurs on Dynastic weapons of war, an attempt to invoke in battle the power of those patron deities on their Exalted supplicants. In the Threshold, a lack of depictive art is a sure sign that the Immaculate Faith has a strong hold on the land.

Dragon-Blooded are permitted to do homage to spirits, and so, they may have depictive art in very special circumstances. This is why some Dragon-Blooded have hunting animals worked into their armor. Orthodox Dragon-Blooded eschew such depictions, however.

### Chejop Kejak

Chief among the Sidereal survivors is Chejop Kejak, the creator of the Immaculate Philosophy and *éminence grise* of the Immaculate Order. While the Mouth of Peace controls the day-to-day decisions, it is Kejak who steers the greater course, directing the Order's ultimate direction and with it, the course of the Realm. If a Mouth of Peace disagrees with him, Kejak outmaneuvers her or, if necessary, outlives her and sees to a more pliable successor's ascent. Ancient in power and utterly assured of his rectitude, Kejak is also the final authority behind the Order's wandering Itinerants and keeps several of them for his personal use.

Obsessed with astrology and divination, Kejak is extremely pragmatic in his approach to affairs. The revolt against the Celestial Exalted was regrettable but necessary, and thus, he and his peers incited it. Once, he may have wept for the innocents struck down by the Wyld Hunt, but those tears are long since dried; the necessity overwhelms all. He has no sentimentality and will use a single priest as readily as the Immaculates — and their followers — as a whole. After all, it is for the greater good.

### The Inner Circle

Around Kejak are the surviving older members of the Bronze faction, who advise and work with him to guide the

Immaculate Order. Some have temples or monasteries that they oversee outside the Imperial City, though all return to the Palace Sublime every few years for a consultation. All are effortlessly powerful and devoted to the Bronze faction's cause. They, along with Kejak, created the Immaculate Order and view it as theirs to do with as they will — all for the greater good, of course. For each of them also saw clear signs and divinations associated with the reign of the Celestial Exalted, and each consoles himself with the knowledge that any action can be justified in the name of averting oblivion.

Like Kejak, the Bronze elders are known and honored within the Immaculate Order as particularly studious and powerful monks. They have free run of the temples and command the respect and obedience of all but the most powerful Dragon-Blooded Immaculates. Those are permitted, at least publicly, to retain their authority.

### The Outer Circle

As various of the Bronze faction have passed away over the years, some few have been reborn. The Inner Circle tracks these births and Exaltations with feverish accuracy, spending many hours each day ordering and reading auguries.

The result of these searches is the younger membership of the Bronze faction, Sidereals reborn into the world after the great betrayal of the Celestials. Younger, less powerful and more aggressive than the Inner Circle, they cannot help but regard the tales of the First Age as somewhat exaggerated and, perhaps, apocryphal. They sense that Kejak and his cronies will not live forever, and wait — some less patiently than others — for the day when the Immaculate Order will be theirs.

### The Bronze Faction and Belief

Having created the Immaculate faith out of whole cloth, members of the Bronze faction cannot ultimately believe in it, at least not as written. However, even the old guard respect its philosophies and practices, drawn as they are from their own beliefs and approaches. And for many, it is soothing to lose themselves in the chants and the rituals, allowing the wave of belief to wash over them and reaffirm for them the rightness of what they have done.

On a more practical level, the members of the Bronze faction hew to the Order's strictures because they are at least somewhat visible members of the Order. Any deviation from standard practice by these powerful, yet mysterious monks would begin to raise questions, and if there is one thing the Bronze faction needs none of, it is questions.

## The Order and Politics

Whether the Mouth of Peace wishes it or no, the Immaculate Order is an imposing figure on the political landscape of the Realm. By dint of its wealth (many Dynast households make gifts to the Order in an attempt to buy luck from the Elemental Dragons), holdings (huge tracts of land all across the Realm and the Threshold have been willed to the Order, either out of piety or as bribes in hopes of greasing the skids for a postulant's acceptance), military power and spiritual authority, the Order wields a great deal of clout. Moreover, the Mouth of Peace and her advisors — not to mention the shadowy members of the Bronze faction — are well aware of this.

The Order generally does not stoop to dabble in secular affairs directly. To do so too often would compromise its spiritual authority, after all. Instead, the Mouth of Peace picks and chooses her battles, and when she decides it is time to intervene, then she does so without reserve. The pressures the Order can bring to bear are enormous: sermons read at services every morning, pointed interpretations of the Immaculate Texts that are released for public perusal and, most of all, the threat of being denounced. A denunciation from the Mouth of Peace carries the weight of a hammer blow, as it is popular belief within the Realm that curses follow her displeasure, and the Elemental Dragons themselves lend their strength to such efforts. Whether this is actually the case or the result of the Bronze faction and the Empress working behind the scenes to strengthen the illusion is of no matter to hoi polloi. They simply see even the mightiest Dynasts toppled after an accusation from the Mouth of Peace, and in this act, they see the power of the Immaculate Order confirmed.

### Active Interference

A careful examination of the chain of being as imagined in the Immaculate Texts shows the Order's place as outside the rest of society, steadying it rather than partaking of it. If the monks do their job properly, then respect for place is instilled in all, and society functions smoothly. If not, however, it is the monks' responsibility to try to restore proper order.

What that means, in the broad view, is that monks rarely dabble in politics. It is not their purview, and it is not their place, and to express their viewpoint in secular affairs is to overstep their bounds. In cases where a local abbot sees something she feels is inappropriate, it is likely that she may dispatch a runner with a particularly fitting quote from the Immaculate Texts to the guilty party. In other cases, the sermons and instruction at the local temples will contain pointed and topical lessons for the next several days. However, the monasteries generally do not play political hardball. Instead, they provide an example and trust that the weight of the populace will recognize that it is a correct one.

If a crime against propriety goes on too long or is simply too much of an outrage, the monks can be mobilized to act, and at these times, the carefully structured society of the Realm can be turned neatly on its ear. It takes a great



deal to mobilize the wrath of the Immaculates; wanton rape and pillage, taxes that drive entire villages into starvation, gross dereliction of duty on the part of ministers, magistrates and landowners and so forth. After all, by acting in this fashion to unkink the rightful order of being, the Immaculates are themselves overstepping their bounds. It is not something they undertake lightly, and the wrong they are setting right must be something truly horrific. Mere embezzlement or cruelty is not enough; the very spirits of the land must cry out for vengeance and correction before the Immaculates will act.

The first step is an innocuous enough one; the plastering of posters with the monks' declaration of purpose on them. Usually, these go up all over the temple and, in many cases, on whatever walls are handy in the area. Attempts to stop the postering are met with polite refusal, though those who seek to physically interfere with the process find themselves on their backsides in the dust. The monks take this sort of thing very seriously.

If five days of postering do not have the desired effect, then the town outside the temple is treated to a procession of monks. Most hold banners with appropriate passages from the Immaculate Texts drawn on them. Others play cymbals or drums. None are armed, and none speak. Instead, the procession wends its way through the streets in a seemingly random pattern — but one that always finds its way to the palace, place of business or estate of the offender whom the monks wish to chastise. Once they arrive, the monks stand a silent vigil, the only sound the beating of percussion instruments. Then, at a prearranged signal, they turn and trace their path back to the temple, their disapproval clear.

On occasion, these processions are accompanied by vigils at other places within the city. This depends on how large the local Immaculate community is, the size of the city and so forth. If the site of unrest is a major city, then it is entirely possible for a half-dozen processions of monks to be snaking their way through the streets at once and for a dozen more individual acolytes to be performing public fasts or prayer vigils in busy intersections.

Soldiers, for their part, prefer not to interfere with monks engaging in this sort of behavior. Superstition dictates that doing so brings the unfortunate soul who tries a decade of bad luck. Practicality indicates that any city watchman who attempts to interfere with an angry monk is going to get manhandled. As a result, city watchmen usually do their best to steer traffic around the monks and to avoid any incidents. The sooner the monks return to their temple, after all, the happier everyone involved will be.

## Violence and the Order

If peaceful protests and warnings are not heeded, then there is only one logical next step, which is called "The Blossoming of Sorrowful Violence." As much time

### Standing Silent Watch

Broadly speaking, it is best not to try to break up the vigil, as the monks can get very firm about holding their ground. Guards who try to break up their formation find themselves politely but firmly abused, and attempts to use violence are met, silently, in kind.

One notorious incident took place in Broken Cliffs Prefecture 90 years ago, when a prefect renowned for her impiety and rough treatment of peasant boys who caught her fancy decided to teach the monks standing before her palace a lesson. She ordered one group of her personal guard to loot the local temple while the monks were absent, to remind them to keep to their place. The second she commanded to take a position on the palace roof and shower the monks with arrows. This act, she was certain, would demonstrate to the monks the error of their feeble attempt to protest, and to the citizenry that the prefect's power was indeed absolute within the prefecture.

Imagine her surprise, then, when the monks scattered so that the first flight of arrows struck none of them. Again, she gave the order to fire, and again, the monks dodged. After the fifth attempt, the archers would fire no more and threw down their bows lest they be cursed. The other troops fared worse, as when they entered the temple they were met by postulants, acolytes and a bare handful of monks who were deemed too ill or infirm to join the procession. These striplings and ancients proceeded to thrash the intruders soundly, stripping them of their weapons and armor and forcing them to retreat to the palace naked, bruised and bloody. Upon their arrival, the monks bowed as one to the furious prefect, then turned and left.

The prefect resigned her post the next day and entered the cloister in the Imperial City, and her successor as prefect was wise enough to learn from her mistakes.

as they spend in the abbey courtyard practicing martial arts forms, few Immaculate monks actually enjoy putting those arts to use as anything other than a meditative technique. They are infinitely aware of how bone shatters and ligaments tear under their blows, and they deeply regret the damage and pain they cause. However, sometimes, it is necessary, to repair the proper order of things and for the greater good of all.

When the decision is made to use force, the monks march out of the temple and find their target or targets. Without warning, they attack and, in most cases, make short work of their opponents. They then move on to other targets, declaring their righteous purpose and calling out the conditions under which they will return to the temple.

Few rebellions are limited to just the Immaculates, however. As the monks wreak havoc, the peasantry and merchant classes, used to taking their behavioral cues from the monks, join the rebellion as well. In a best-case scenario, they follow the monks in reasonably good order, swelling the ranks of the crowd and lending force to the Immaculates' statement. Much of the time, however, the citizenry is inflamed by what they perceive as the vigilante spirit, and the populace transforms into a mob. What follows is an orgy of fire, looting and destruction, and even the monks can become caught up in it. If they perceive the offenders who caused them to take to the streets as sufficiently wicked, the monks will condone fire and sword to drive them out.

In some cases, the action of the mob results in the creation of temporary theocracies, until a sizable legion detachment arrives to restore order. Until such time as the rightful government reasserts itself, the monks are the only law, and the temple hierarchy is the one that organizes fire-fighting details, rations food and sees to basic human continuity in the wreckage.

Once their point is made, the monks retreat to the temple. However, if they feel that arriving troops will reinstate the conditions that forced them to act in the first place, the Immaculates will fight. They do not expect to win under such circumstances; it is, after all, not their place to topple the entire Realm. They will, however, fight to the last and to the best of their ability. This can make for long, drawn-out battles, particularly if the troops fighting the priests have been brought up to revere and fear them.

## Martial Arts

The monks of the Immaculate Order are, without a doubt, the foremost practitioners of the martial arts in the Realm. However, even for the followers of the Immaculate Dragon of Air, martial arts are not an end in and of themselves. Rather, they are a means of meditation, of imbuing discipline and practicing grace. Submitting to the rhythm of forms and stances is a metaphor for submitting to the natural order of things; one cannot truly understand the Immaculate Philosophy without thus becoming a part of it.

The fact that this intense regimen of training and testing also transforms each and every monk into a swiftly efficient killing machine is just an added — albeit extremely welcome — benefit.

## The Basics

Monks begin their martial arts training the day they join the Immaculate Order. After being accepted by the Paragon of Sextes Jylis, they are shown to their quarters, issued their robes and then herded into one of the Palace Sublime's many exercise courts. There, Dragon-Blooded and mortal alike are tested ruthlessly by one of the many Puissant and Humble Instructors who labor in the Palace Sublime, monks whose duties consist solely of training those less skilled than they. Relentlessly poked, prodded, stretched and forced to defend themselves, the new acolytes have their skill level and limits quickly established. The Humble Instructors are not gentle, and many acolytes suffer blackened eyes, bloodied noses or worse. However, this is all in accordance with the greater plan, one that molds rough, unpolished seekers into assured, confident monks.

For the first year, acolytes line up every morning shortly after sunrise in the exercise yard to which they have been assigned. There, they are drilled relentlessly in the basic forms, stances and moves of Five Dragon Style, the martial arts school upon which all of the other Immaculate schools are based. A mixture of simple punches, kicks, throws and blocks, Five Dragon Style is more a primer on how to move and how to study than it is an actual combat style, though a suitably skilled practitioner is more than a match for an unschooled thug or three.

There are five ranks within Five Dragon Style, each named after one of the elements. At the turn of each season, the students are tested on their progress. Those who demonstrate sufficient skill and discipline are promoted to the study of the next rank, while those who fail are punished and forced to repeat their studies — and the grueling examination — until they pass. An acolyte remains an acolyte until such time as he has completed all five examinations to the satisfaction of his instructor. If one of the Puissant and Humble Instructors feels that a student will never achieve sufficient progress, that student is expelled from the Order, regardless of how devout his observations or how keen his mind might be. To be Immaculate, after all, is to strive to approach perfection on all levels, and to seek mental improvement while neglecting the physical comes dangerously close to falling into the Way of the Unmanly Babbler.

Only the most talented students and those who have had previous martial arts training are given instruction beyond the most general. These special students receive additional teaching late in the evening, when their brethren have retired for the night. The Immaculate Order's hierarchy keeps a sharp eye on these special students, and many of them are later chosen for unique and dangerous duties.

## Further Studies

When, after a year as an acolyte, a newly ordained monk selects the Elemental Dragon whose teachings he will follow, he also selects his primary martial arts school. Each of the schools of the Five Elemental Dragons has a series of styles associated with its devotees, and a monk will not be allowed to study other styles until he has made significant progress in his native one.

Monks who have selected a school are instructed by monks known as Diligent and Skilled Teachers, who proceed to drill their new students both morning and night for as long as they remain at the Palace Sublime.

There are, unsurprisingly, five levels of mastery to each of the schools. Examinations are given to students without their foreknowledge, based upon the opinions of their instructors as to whether or not they are ready. Examinations test the spirit, stamina and physical prowess of the candidate. Often, a student is called upon to sing hymns or recite sutras from the Immaculate Texts while defending himself or to hold a single stance for an hour while insults are shouted at him and blows delivered that stop a whisker's breadth from his face.

Monks who pass are honored and advanced to the next level of instruction, while those who fail are given neither praise nor scorn. They simply return to the ranks of their peers, bruised and bloodied, to await the next opportunity to prove themselves.

The first three years of training focus on unarmed combat. Weapons training follows thereafter and becomes an increasingly important part of the curriculum. Each student is allowed to chose his initial style and may not deviate from that style's study until he has passed at least two examinations in it. A monk is not allowed to study any school other than his own until he has mastered his base style, and even then, it is frowned upon for the unExalted.

Depending upon whether a monk is human or Exalted, he is taught different techniques. Many of the Dragon-Blooded-only techniques involve incorporating the use of Essence in one's movements, combining the physicality of the martial arts with the supernatural potence of Essence. Needless to say, these arts are not taught to the human members of the Order, who are taught what is referred to as the "lesser styles." With the ability to channel Essence or to harness it behind the force of their blows, Dragon-Blooded monks quickly outstrip their merely human brethren. Furthermore, the most advanced ranks in each style are closed off to mortals, as the tests for those ranks are composed almost entirely of feats of Essence manipulation.

### The Heresy of the Antitheses

One of the most persistent, yet smallest heresies against the Immaculate Order is the Heresy of the Antitheses. Its belief, simply stated, is that the Immaculate Dragons will be reinvested in flesh as their Antitheses, though whether this is to punish the wicked or to herald the end of the world is still the subject of the debate. The Immaculate Order as a whole has no patience for this sort of thing and shows unusual ruthlessness when stamping out the Heresy of the Antitheses wherever it appears.

## Heresy

The Immaculate Order has a curious attitude toward heresy. On one hand, it mounts no crusades and no witch-hunts. Secure in its correctness, it sees no need to legitimize any would-be rivals by paying active attention to them. The continued existence of the Realm and the obvious blessings bestowed upon the Immaculate monks are all that is needed to convince others of the doctrine's accuracy. Only those heretics who actively advocate tearing down the Immaculate Order are dealt with publicly and then with a great deal of sadness. Here, it would seem, is a soul who has not advanced on the road to Exaltation and perfection and who would be better off trying again before he can distract others from their proper path.

However, behind the scenes, the Order can be jealous. Should a particular heresy, whether it be a deviant reading of the Immaculate Texts or a particularly atavistic resurrection of the Hundred Gods faith, begin to gain momentum, it is swiftly and efficiently taken apart. Itinerants infiltrate the heresy and tear it to pieces from the inside. Failing that, they'll deal with the heretics more permanently and then vanish, allowing the carnage to be ascribed to the wrath of the Dragons.

### The Hundred Gods

A particularly persistent heresy, this is one all monks are trained to refute before ever being assigned to a temple. The Immaculate Order does not deny the existence of spirits, nor does it deny their elevated status. It does, however, make very carefully the distinction about whom it is right and proper for spirits to speak to. The task, naturally enough, should fall on the shoulders of the Dragon-Blooded, who have sufficient enlightenment to treat honorably with those spirits and to appease them with sacrifice. This prevents spirits from growing mighty on the worship of men and enslaving the populace and reduces corruption in the Celestial Bureaucracy, as the Little Gods are less inclined to favor one individual or group over another.

Another unstated reason is to separate the peasantry from communication with spirits, who might contradict the Immaculate faith and tell stories of the days before the Order was in place. The vast majority of spirits bear no love for the Immaculates, but do have respect for them. In accordance with their faith, Immaculate monks make generous and proper offerings to the spirits. This, generally, is enough to engender at least enough goodwill that spirits will not assault an Immaculate on sight. However, attempts to proselytize among the spirits — who, of all beings in the Realm, know better — are generally met with varying degrees of refusal.

### The Converted Spirits

Creation is littered with spirits of all stripes, and so, it is hardly surprising that some have chosen to embrace the Immaculate Philosophy. Such tame — or at least well-behaved — spirits can sometimes be seen in attendance at Immaculate temples, advising worshipers as to the correctness of the Immaculate faith and generally reinforcing Immaculate Philosophy.

Precisely why a given spirit would chose to ally itself with the Immaculates is a matter of debate. No doubt, some spirits do, in fact, come to believe, particularly those who are weak and easily cowed by powerful monks and the Sidereals who stand behind them. Others, more cynical in their approach, feel that being the Immaculates' tame spirits is a safer existence than freedom — and a potentially more lucrative one in terms of sacrifices received.

### Worship of the Unconquered Sun

This faith is thought to be dead, its rare flare-ups the last spasms of a fading belief. It is particularly disliked by the Immaculate priests who've studied enough to recognize it, as it exalts the sun over the Terrestrial Dragons. The Order's Bronze faction handlers particularly dislike this faith because of its clear link to the Solar Exalted. The worship of the Unconquered Sun is also linked with several slave revolts, and as such even a whiff of it is enough to get secular authorities to crack down on the Order's behalf.

Despite their supernatural awareness, the two Dragon-Blooded inside the building had no idea that the shadows outside the windows had ears. In the darkness beyond the window of the Manse, Sesus Rafara hung in a harness of silk. The men below her were only of middling consequence, Mnemon Savar and Peleps Melad — both graduates of the Spiral Academy.

Sesus Rafara recognized them from long study, not long familiarity. Unlike her peers, she had never attended school in the Realm, had not grown up beside her peers and rivals. Instead, she had been taken from her parents by the elders of the house and sent to study under the Sesus spymasters. The elders had wanted an agent with an outsider's perspective on the house and the Dynasty, and they had asked young couples if any of them would be willing to sacrifice one of their children for the good of the house.

Rafara's family had agreed to sacrifice their child's future, so that the new spymaster of House Sesus could be an outsider to Dynastic culture. Rafara had left primary school early, just after her Exaltation, and rather than going to school and holiday with her peers in other houses, she had studied under the best and brightest of the family's tutors, scholars and warriors. When other children learned archery for hunting, she was learning archery for assassination. While Exalted her age were meeting the Dynasty by attending holiday parties with their school friends and spending their vacations at other people's manors, Rafara had been studying their dossiers and reports on their personal lives.

Not even Rafara was sure if the result was worth it. She was certainly a talented spy and assassin, but she was also a cipher. Nobody knew her, and in turn, she knew no one and everyone. It made it easy to double-cross the people who had never been friends or classmates, but it meant living forever outside their circles of life. No good husband for Rafara, she thought glumly. No decorated officers or influential speakers for her. They'd probably marry her off to some patrician or foreign prince, so she could come home from an assignment to see her mayfly spouse and pump him for information as well, and no chance for promotion either, since she didn't know any of the right people. Not that her parents had done badly. Their darling baby child had gotten them a wonderful country Manse in the foothills. Rafara had been there once, for the housewarming party, and several times afterward to recruit agents among the servants.

But there would be no charming guests and expensive dinners for Rafara. She'd just be out here in the dark listening to them plot and scheme for the next two-and-a-half centuries. She wasn't even spying on Savar and Melad. Her house was part of their little plan for judicial murder. She was here to make sure they didn't fall in a hole or get any ideas of their own.

Ideas such as, just for example, forging a warning and slipping it into a diplomatic packet through an agent they had recruited with house resources but that their house knew nothing about. It was imperative that nobody warn the Tepet scion that her upcoming recall would end in a treason trial, which made it even more imperative that nobody ever find out about Rafara's own personal intervention in the matter. Hanging outside the window like a spider on a black silk thread, Sesus Rafara sighed. After these two numbskulls got done with their meeting, there was a diplomatic clerk who needed to meet his destiny, and it had to happen in a way that could never come back to implicate her.

She hoped sincerely that the Roseblack impaled every last one of those treacherous bastards. They'd find out what their fish-bowl lives and their precious treasures and all the lies they told themselves were worth when they had a sharp stick up their ass. Like a spider, Sesus Rafara waited. Her time was coming, she could feel it.

# CHAPTER TWO
# THE DRAGON-BLOODED

The Dragon-Blooded of the Dynasty lead long and unusual lives — and not just in terms of their political maneuverings and legendary adventures. From birth their lives differ from those of the patricians and peasants around them. Childhood, school, marriage — even retirement — all are creatures of a different color for individuals who live for centuries and wield the power of the Elemental Dragons.

## Houses

The Dynastic houses wield an incredible amount of influence in the Realm. It is the fact that they fight amongst themselves so much that keeps them from being an even greater force to be reckoned with than they are. The Empress deliberately fostered such differences in an attempt to keep anyone from growing strong enough to challenge her own position.

### House V'neef (Wood)

V'neef, head of the youngest legitimate house, is a quiet but strong-willed woman. She rules her house not by force of personality or an iron fist, but rather, with a well-placed word here, a subtle push there and a quiet order to an advisor on the side. Because of this, most people do not see her as "ruler" of her house. This misconception frees V'neef from much of the public scrutiny that some of her siblings receive.

V'neef is a dignified, yet unassuming woman. Her hair is long and bark-brown, worn braided down her back. She is slender and unusually short. She wears brown or green breeches and tunics for most occasions, although she has several simple, silken gowns for social occasions. Her one indulgence is a set of armor so finely wrought it fits her almost like a second skin.

V'neef has no less ambition than her brothers and sisters, but she chooses to exercise it in different ways. Her schemes are long-lasting and quiet, like her personality. Her children don't constantly and consciously work to serve all of her interests the way some of her siblings' children do. Yet, she has subtly and carefully shaped them, paying perhaps more attention to them than most Dragon-Blooded parents do. As a result, most of them exert their efforts in directions that she chose for them, whether they realize it or not.

#### Major Lines

House V'neef is fairly unified. V'neef herself is only 60, so her offspring haven't had time to multiply in all directions yet. One of her granddaughters, V'neef Aliset, is expected to drag off the first major off-shoot of the house. On the surface, she's very different from her grandmother — fiery, outspoken and brash. The two of them actually get along very well and occasionally stay up until all hours debating house matters. They disagree

### House Bloodlines

Traditionally, each descendant of a Great House keeps the same last name, which is the give name of the house's founder. In most cases, a sizeable minority of a house will live together or within close proximity to one another, while the majority of the house is spread across familial holdings throughout the Realm.

Often, couples will leave to start their own households. Most of these are small and fairly insignificant — a married couple, any young children they have, a handful of servants and slaves and a couple of cousins or nephews and nieces. A few, however, become significant family lines in and of themselves. While members of these lines still legally keep the last name of their Great House, they are often referred to by the name of the person who started or heads up their separate household locally or within the house. Sometimes, for convenience, people go by a three-part name: house name, household name, given name — for example, Cynis Denovah Avaku from the **Exalted** rulebook. Most households are firmly loyal to the overarching house that spun them off, even if they do prefer a little bit of distance.

on many things, and of course, V'neef's word is always the final one, but V'neef believes that her granddaughter keeps her on her toes.

There is no acrimony or anger in Aliset's intention to start her own household; the two women agree to disagree. V'neef believes that having someone like Aliset around, someone who will be seen as a rebel by most outsiders who don't understand the family dynamics, could be very useful to her. Aliset, for her part, thinks this is a grand plan and is more than happy to play along with it. Every now and then, she deliberately stages a public scene to help foster the image that she doesn't get along with her family.

### Economics

V'neef is careful not to claim too much tribute from her satraps and is reasonable about making investment deals with satraps she has some trust in. Because of this, most of her satraps still pay the tribute she claims. The Empress liked V'neef's potential to upset some of the existing power structures among the Dynasts, so House V'neef receives a larger subsidy than its size and age would seem to indicate. The Empress' replacement probably won't see things the same way, so V'neef has strong incentive to get involved in the fight for the Throne.

V'neef's extensive involvement with the wine trade has given her family many contacts within the Guild. She has arranged for some of her tribute to travel by Guild



## House Income

The Great Houses receive income in several major ways. They all have extensive commercial interests, usually overseen by unExalted family members. In addition, all receive a state subsidy — this not only helps the houses, but also gives the Empress a lever against them. The Great Houses also collect tribute from satraps and oversee tax collection from the various prefectures. The Empress decides which houses collected tribute from which satraps and prefectures, giving her yet another hold over the houses. She set a fixed amount of money and goods that the Realm expected to receive from each satrapy or prefecture via the house in charge of collecting the tribute. Houses could petition to have this amount lowered in cases of natural disaster.

Anything the house collects above and beyond the fixed amount is theirs to keep. This results in a fine balancing act. If the house collects too much tribute, the province cannot sustain itself, and there is little or nothing to collect the next year. If it collects less than the amount the Empress set, then the house must make up the difference. If it collects only what the Empress set, then it makes nothing extra. This tax farming system applied only to tribute from satrapies. Prefectures on the Blessed Isle had their taxes assessed by the Imperial Service, and the house in charge was not permitted to collect more than this amount.

The house must also figure out how to collect the tribute and get it safely to their holdings. Houses often work deals with satraps where they give them a break one year (making up the lack of tribute themselves) so that the satrap can use the extra money and goods to give the province's economy a boost, paying extra tribute the following year to give the house a return on its investment. All of this has become much more difficult since the Empress disappeared. No one wants to send too many troops overseas in the current economy and rush for power. This state of affairs makes the tributaries bold, and many of them have reduced their tribute in the expectation that the houses will not be able to claim the rest of what they're due. Pirates and thieves have also stepped up raids on tribute caravans.

caravan (giving the Guild a cut, of course), so most of her tribute makes it home safely. Through her satraps, V'neef has control over one of the best sources of firedust in the Threshold, a desert town called Chenau.

V'neef not only has control of most of the vineyards across the Realm, but she has also branched out into related manufacturing areas recently. She's had two of her patrician children purchase the factories that put together the barrels and other wine-making equipment her house needs to support its major business interest.

V'neef's control over the merchant navy is a recent matter. The post was granted to V'neef by the Empress a decade before her disappearance as a source of revenue to allow the young Dynast to build up her newly created house — whoever controls the merchant navy is entitled to a cut of the duties collected by its customs cutters. Prior to this it, the merchant navy was under the control of House Peleps, and its removal from the Peleps' domain caused them no small hardship, as they were left to bear the expense of the imperial fleet without the benefit of customs duties. House V'neef's control over the merchant navy is a critical financial and military asset. While the house is too small to fill all the important posts with blood relations, individuals who occupy prominent places in the merchant navy chain of command are all unquestioningly loyal to the house, and the V'neef spymasters have thoroughly purged the organization's ranks of those loyal to House Peleps.

## Goals & Alliances

While V'neef would love to see herself or one of her children on the Scarlet Throne, she thinks it an unlikely outcome. She'll be satisfied if she can arrange for the Empress' replacement to be in her debt instead or to see her as an ally. V'neef carefully watches the proceedings, taking notes on potential candidates and encouraging her children to rack up favors.

Before House Tepet lost most of its legions, V'neef thought them one of the best contenders for the Throne. She had spoken with a couple of powerful Tepets about the possibility of marrying one of her two grandsons who just graduated from the House of Bells to a young, eligible Tepet in order to cement ties to the house. Since Tepet's loss, V'neef has halted negotiations. She hasn't entirely rejected the possibility of some sort of alliance, but she's much less enthusiastic about the possibility now. Tepet, of course, is now much more eager to talk. V'neef is giving the house time to convince her that it still has something to offer.

## House Members of Note

**V'neef Aliset** is a proud and temperamental woman with short, spiky red hair and a taste for ale. She's an expert at the Hunting Cat variant of the nobles' game

Gateway (see page 103 for details on Gateway), she makes friends very easily, and she's currently the most eligible member of House V'neef. Matchmakers representing major families in Mnemon, Tepet, Cynis and Cathak have all engaged in marriage talks with Aliset's parents. Aliset isn't particularly eager to cut short her adventures, but she would like to start her own household, which is much easier to do once married. Aliset is in a sworn brotherhood with the hot-headed young Cathak Laten and Tepet Darik, and the three are fast friends. Aliset hopes to parlay her friendship with Laten into some sort of long-term connection between parts of the two houses. She sees the vast differences between the two houses as all the more evidence that they have something to offer each other.

**V'neef Satepis** is V'neef's youngest unExalted son. He's young, born in Realm Year 751, but he has a sharp wit and quick tongue. He's already betrothed to a Dragon-Blooded twice his age, Cynis Lelet. Personally, he finds House Cynis distasteful, but he understands that it's useful to House V'neef. The Cynis orgies and parties are one of the steadiest sources of local sales for the V'neef wineries. Satepis understands that his job is to make his wife happy with him while picking up as much information as possible to pass on to his mother's house. He is already working to ingratiate himself with his future wife's family and hopes to quietly slip into a position of managing his wife's affairs while she's away from home.

## House Ragara (Earth)

Ragara himself is retired, ailing and perfectly happy to be free of politics and manipulation. His second son, Banoba, carries on quite well in his father's absence. Banoba is a tall, stocky man who moves and talks slowly and thinks quickly. He first rose to prominence by taking advantage of others' tendency to think him dull-witted. Even once others learned better, however, his wits kept him going. He has married a succession of intelligent and wealthy patricians in the interests of the house but maintained only a single lover throughout the years. Heral, a distant Dragon-Blooded nephew, caught Banoba's heart more than 100 years ago, and the two have been inseparable since.

Banoba speaks for the family, and when he speaks publicly, nearly the entire family follows his lead. He leads the house with a strong hand and is unafraid to tell his siblings and children what they're going to do with their lives. He is known as a reasonable man and, if approached correctly, will often go out of his way to work his family members' interests and wishes into his plans. He has informally disowned two of his own children, however, for refusing to meet him halfway, and this encourages others to go along with their patriarch's plans.

### Major Lines

Most of House Ragara lives in the Imperial Palace. There are two major households, however, that do not live with the bulk of the family. The first of these is the Soras household. This household makes its home in the northern isles and has provided land and buildings for Ragara and a few of his friends to retire on. The Soras are primarily a merchant family and do a great deal of business through the port of Chanos. They have kept up many of the family's Guild contacts.

The Calel household lives in Juche Prefecture on a sprawling rural estate. The Calels breed hunting dogs, spend much of their time at parties and happily entertain important politicians and merchants for House Ragara. The younger members of this household travel extensively, actively keeping up contacts and alliances with other houses, reminding debtors of their debts to the house and otherwise presenting Banoba with an excellent picture of the house's holdings.

### Economics

House Ragara has been called "the imperial bank" behind its back, particularly since the Empress's disappearance. Ragaras will loan money to anyone and everyone as long as they think they can get it back with interest. With their money, they're happy to hire mercenaries and leg-breakers to collect debts owed them by patricians and subject princes. It might seem like a loss in the short term, but it only takes one successful enforcement to encourage the next 10 people to pay off their debts. They like to come across as reasonable and helpful, always willing to help someone find an alternate way to pay off a debt she can't handle. Some members of the house delight in loaning money to those who won't be able to repay it, simply so that they can push the debtor into repaying the debt in much more valuable tender than money. Ragara has a large number of favors it can call in from all sorts of interesting sources due to this practice.

On occasion, the Ragaras find that a Dragon-Blooded has reneged on a contract or otherwise refused to pay back funds they have loaned. House Ragara has no interest in encouraging other houses to use violence in matters of finance, so it does not employ mercenary leg-breakers to reclaim debts from the Exalted. Indeed, it doesn't even directly refuse to do business with the debtor; it will extend him lines of credit until Ragara's accountants believe that the house has loaned the debtor an amount equal to his total real property.

At that point, House Ragara leans heavily upon the debtor for extensive information and favors. It does not offer to eliminate or even reduce the Dragon-Blooded's debt, and if he should balk at complying with the Ragaras' demands, they will begin a whispering campaign against him, as well as immediately closing down

lines of further credit. This sort of treatment can destroy an Exalt's finances and reputation in a matter of just a few days. While most Dragon-Blooded keep things from going this far or fall into Ragara's welcoming arms as their own businesses start to collapse, some do run for the Threshold, hoping to establish themselves well away from the network of houses that they believe lured them into trouble.

Ragara frequently sends unExalted family members as auditors to visit its satrapies. These family members tour the countryside and do an accounting of a province's resources. They carefully calculate exactly what they think the satrap can afford while still allowing some room for the province to grow and use that figure to determine their tribute. Many satraps groan at the arrival of these auditors, knowing that they'll be squeezed for everything they can afford. Others, having seen neighbors get far worse deals from their patrons, are grateful that Ragara at least takes economic growth into account. Ragara is good about hiring mercenaries to help protect its investments, both from foreign threats and from the satrap's own greed. Because of this, most of their satraps are still paying most, if not all, of their tribute.

### Goals & Alliances

Ragara prefers to keep the other Great Houses in its debt rather than ally itself with them, and this is one of the few things standing in its way of the Scarlet Throne. This policy worked well before, but it's leaving Ragara behind now. Banoba is considering trying to marry one of his own sons off to V'neef Aliset but realizes he's probably a bit late. He thinks he'll have a better chance with a young Tepet, since Tepet is more in need of Ragara's help right now.

Ragara doesn't get along with House Ledaal at all. It has never been able to fathom the actions and choices of Ledaal, and that makes Ledaal seem dangerous. Ragara has tried again and again to get Ledaal into its debt, but somehow, Ledaal always seems to slip through Ragara's fingers.

Ragara Felis, a high-ranking patrician in the Thousand Scales, recently married Peleps Magaret, an inspired Dragon-Blooded sorcerer 40 years his junior. The two are very much in love, and their families took advantage of the situation to cement an alliance between some of the Peleps judicial influence and the Ragara Guild interests. The Guild is always willing to trade goods and favors for judicial rulings to its benefit.

### House Members of Note

**Ragara Felis** is in his 160s and feeling a little old next to his elegant bride. He's hardly going to let this stop him from showering her with gifts and signs of his affection, however. He met her when he taught a class on the Thousand Scales bureaucracy at her primary school, and he's followed her career with interest ever since. His wife is an intense, ethereal woman who sees the world through alien eyes and hardly seems to notice the difference in their ages, much less mind. Felis thinks the sorcery has done something to Magaret's mind, but he loves her and tries not to contemplate the matter.

**Ragara Soras Tara** acts as caretaker for old Ragara himself right now. She oversees the servants who tend to his needs, runs his home, entertains his cronies and uses what little sorcery she knows to extend his failing life. She loathes both Ragara and her current position, but she hides this fact beneath a perfectly polished exterior. In the meantime, she listens more carefully than appearances would suggest to all of Ragara's stories, uses Ragara's gatherings as an opportunity to introduce herself to all of his friends and close relatives and takes extensive mental notes on everything she learns.

## House Cynis (Wood)

Cynis herself has been dead almost two centuries. House Cynis is run jointly by her three Exalted daughters: Wisel, Belar and Falen. These three hedonistic Dragon-Blooded have few quarrels over how to run the house. In fact, they spend most of their time in the Palace of Trees in Pangu Prefecture, hosting parties and orgies, overseeing the day-to-day affairs of their family and taking turns visiting the Imperial City to host parties there.

### Major Lines

All of House Cynis is descended from these three daughters. Cynis only had two other children, both unExalted daughters, and they died in their early 20s. Rumor has it that Cynis was so upset they didn't Exalt that she drove them to suicide. Unkinder tongues say she had them killed.

Outside of House Cynis, all members of the house take Cynis' name as their family name. Within the house, all members of the house except the three daughters take the name of the daughter they're descended from as their family name. Although the daughters have no qualms about allowing family members to intermarry, they do insist that intermarriage must only occur between members of the different lines. It only took a few generations before the blood was hopelessly mixed, but the tradition remains.

### Economics

House Cynis makes the bulk of its money by purchasing slaves from the Guild and then selling and trading them within the Realm. The Guild's slave prices have skyrocketed since the Empress disappeared, however, and Cynis' profits have dwindled away. Falen has suggested that hiring some mercenaries to haul home slaves without the intervention of the Guild might be cheaper, but Wisel has so far successfully argued that the sisters cannot afford

to alienate the Guild — particularly with the number of favors the sisters owe the Guild by now. Belar has quietly made it known to some of Cynis' more pliable satraps that if they can't make the normal tribute, Cynis will take some of their peasants as slaves in its place.

Meanwhile, Wisel has started a new and little-known family business. House Cynis has learned enough about the Dynasts and patricians who attend its discreet orgies by now to know which ones have "unnatural" tastes. The Cynises now quietly offer certain services to their favorite politicians and allies that would make the patrons very unpopular if the general public found out. Thanks to their location in rural Pangu, they have plenty of open land on which to bury slaves' bodies.

Cynis also likes to hire out its slaves to those who need cheap labor. The unExalted aren't allowed to keep slaves, and the house is perfectly happy to make money off of this fact. As long as the slaves are only on temporary loan, technically, Cynis still owns them. The temporary employer of these slaves makes a payment in jade to House Cynis. In accordance with the laws of the Empress, Cynis sends an overseer — usually a mortal but, occasionally, a young Exalt — in its own employ along with any slaves that it lends out. It is ostensibly the responsibility of this overseer to manage the slaves' daily activities, but in many cases, the overseer allows the client household to oversee the slaves as it wishes, while he enjoys the client's hospitality. The overseer's main responsibility to House Cynis, then, is to make certain that all slaves sent out to a client household return alive and in good health. Those killed or maimed in working for the client are held against the overseer's stipend.

### Goals & Alliances

Although the Cynises are very popular come party time, there are many Dynasts who don't want to be *seen* as allied with them. This can make formal alliances and public showings of support difficult for the house. This is one of the reasons why Cynis fights so hard for the Scarlet Throne. The Cynises know that if they're going to stay in a real position of power, they need to secure it now.

In the interest of this goal, Cynis is hurriedly setting up as many marriages as it can with other houses. This gets the house a few extra bits of support here and there, but it could backfire — Cynis isn't researching these matches as well as houses usually do, and some of the other families are sure to take advantage of this.

### House Members of Note

**Cynis Falen** is the only one of the three sisters still married. Her husband is Sesus Kayes, a powerful imperial judge. They aren't in love, but they do enjoy each other's company, and while the two only rarely see each other, their relationship is pleasant when they do spend time together. Falen has the best economic sense of the three sisters but has lost much of her taste for slaves and wine. Her sisters quietly worry that she's showing her age; Falen likes to think she's grown a bit wiser. Falen's oversight of the house's purse strings often leads her to suggest some of the house's colder strategies; she's the one who came up with Wisel's new business.

**Cynis Falen Debos** inherited his great-great-grandmother's cold practicality but loathes the hedonism of his house. As soon as he graduated from the House of Bells he joined the Immaculate Order, becoming a very devout monk. He coldly and ruthlessly does everything he can to interfere with his house's more loathsome practices, while being careful not to catch its attention too much. Although he has little contact with his family, who are quite aware of his views on its activities, he does everything he can to find out about its latest schemes and projects.

## House Cathak (Fire)

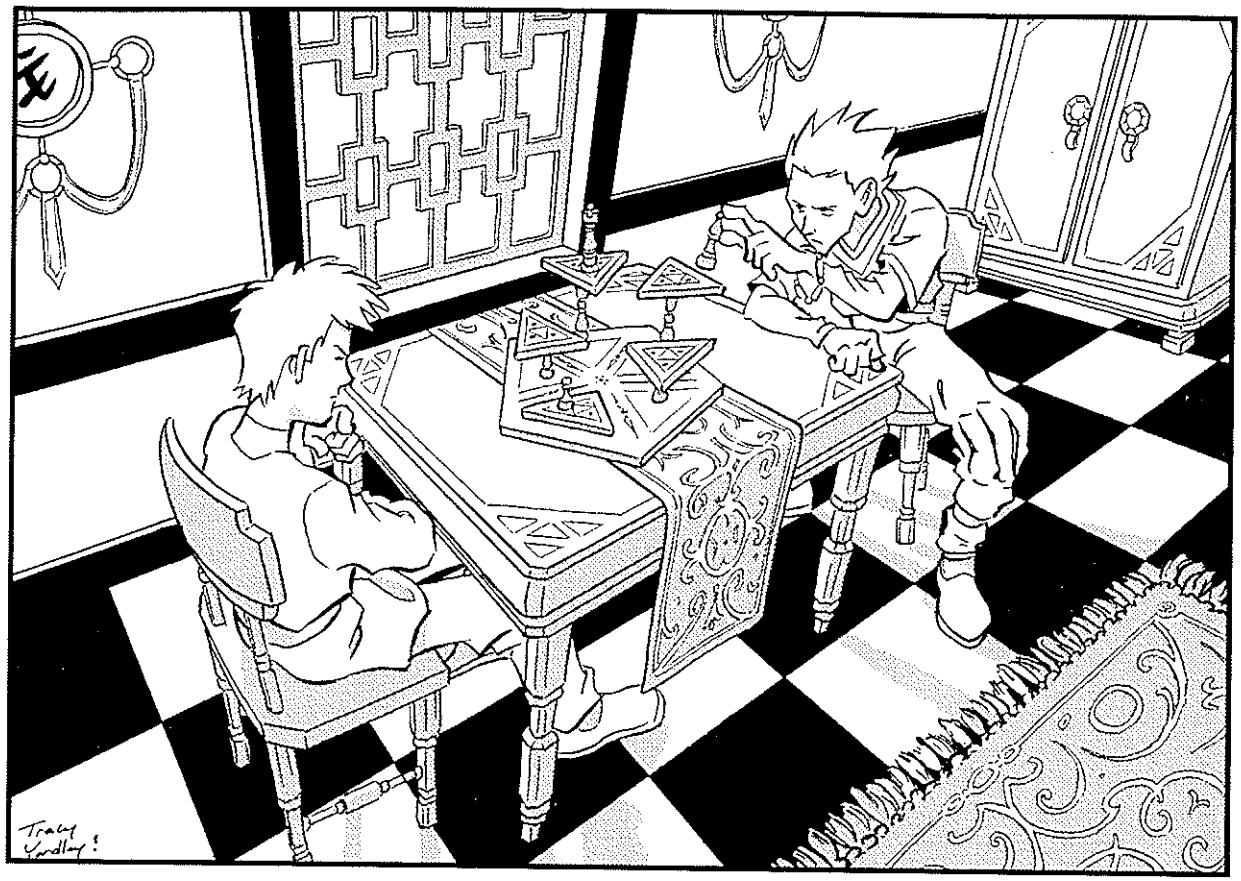
Cathak Cainan, the elder of the house, is a great-grandson of Cathak himself. The martial nature of House Cathak causes a greater than average death rate among the house's Dragon-Blooded, and the founding members of the house are long dead. Cainan, a surprisingly tall man with shoulder-length fire-red hair, is proud and strong. He walks with measured stride and a confident smile. He has a strong influence over his house, but he doesn't consider himself its ruler or leader.

Cainan enjoys power but cares more for the strength and power of the Realm than his own personal power. He believes in the inherent right of the Dragon-Blooded to rule and knows with certainty that they are the only ones fit for the job. Cathak has a great deal of influence and power to throw into the struggle for the Scarlet Throne, and Cainan has yet to decide whose side will receive his support. He feels that a worthy successor to the Empress has not yet come forward, and he will not stand behind someone who cannot lead the Realm into greatness.

### Major Lines

Cathak Garel, a military historian, formed her own household in Realm Year 542. The line of Garel has produced many fine historians as well as the traditional Cathak contingent of strategists and generals. The Garel household, based in the Arjuf Dominion near the city of Tuchara, is said to keep the most complete and accurate written histories of imperial conquests and battles in the entirety of the Realm.

Cathak Cacek created and developed the game of Gateway more than 300 years ago. He always had trouble sleeping, and he came up with the game to keep himself occupied during the wee hours of the school-year morning while everyone else slept. He kept dragging people into



games with him to test his new invention, and the game spread through the school like wildfire. At first, the dominie of the school intended to punish him for disrupting the studies of the students. Then, she realized that the game could be used to help teach strategy, and Gateway made its official entrance into the history of the Realm. Members of the Cacek household take it as a point of honor to be among the best Gateway players on the Blessed Isle.

## Economics

Cainan has a habit of squeezing the house's satrapies a bit hard. He sees it as fair recompense for the empire's guidance and protection; many of the subject princes see it somewhat less kindly. While Cathak has many legions, they can't be everywhere at once. Some of Cathak's satrapies have become suspiciously delinquent with their tributes lately. Others have left out some of the tribute and claimed that's all they have to send, counting on Cathak not having enough power to enforce the tribute.

Lately, some of Cathak's subordinate households have hired out their house troops to the empire's tributary queens and princes for money. Cainan frowns on this practice, but acknowledges that the house needs money. He tries to convince Cathak's Dragon-Blooded to limit these mercenary actions to causes that have at least a small chance of advancing the cause of the empire, but not everyone listens to him.

One of Cathak's lesser patrician descendants, Cathak Haral, runs the Talon League in the Eye of Creation and funnels some of the guild fees back to the house. He also gets good deals on bulk weaponry for lesser troops. Cathak has interests in several Manse architectural schools, including the Tuchara school. Traditionally such schools charge moderate tuition and then take a cut of the fees paid to architects who graduate from the school. The cut is a small enough percentage to not bother the architects, but large enough (given the fees traditionally paid to such skilled designers) to provide the house with a nice bit of pocket change. Dragon-Blooded graduates from these schools afford House Cathak a subtle benefit: These students know better than any other how to manipulate Hearthstones, changing the stones' natures over the course of years.

## Goals & Alliances

Cathak is historically a little less paranoid than its sister houses and a little more interested in the health of the Realm as a whole. Because of this, Cathak is often willing to make alliances and partnerships. This isn't to say that the Cathaks rush into every deal they're offered; they check things out thoroughly and think matters through, taking only the alliances that benefit them in some way. Recently, Cathak has used its legions to help guard other

houses' tribute caravans in return for a small cut of the tribute. Not only does this make money for Cathak, but it helps to ensure that the Realm's coffers stay full.

Cathak is currently negotiating a possible joint venture with House V'neef through V'neef Aliset. Aliset wants backing and occasional military backup for a new trade route she's trying to establish with a couple of isolated Threshold towns between Larjyn and Rathess willing to supply unusual weapons, scavenged First Age goods and odd foodstuffs. Cathak wants to make sure Aliset can handle setting the whole thing up before it commits any goods or men. Aliset has promised to arrange for samples of the wares and a few Tepet boats to do the actual shipping. She knows of a particularly promising village, Poral, on the coast of Lake Carda, between Larjyn and Rathess; rumors abound of First Age goods submerged beneath the waters of that lake.

### House Members of Note

**Cathak Mae** makes a living in Tuchara as a master armorer. Normally, such a career would be seen as beneath one of her stature. However, she's so good at what she does, and has such high-ranking clients, that her house is quite proud of her work. She gives a steep discount to family. Mae is perfectly happy where she is and has no interest in politics. That doesn't stop members of her family from trying to drag her into them, however. Cainan sees Mae's client list as a potential source of contacts. He tries not to push the issue with her often, but when necessary, he calls on her to make use of that resource.

**Cathak Laten** is a member of a sworn brotherhood with V'neef Aliset and Tepet Darik. The three of them together conceived of their joint shipping venture. Laten hopes to convince his parents to make a bid for Aliset's hand in marriage for him; he isn't in love with her, but he's convinced she'd make a powerful wife. Laten is hotheaded and impulsive but honorable and caring. His parents have high hopes for his future.

#### The Dinner Companions

Cathak Laten, V'neef Aliset and Tepet Darik have been friends since childhood. They attended primary school together at Golden Band Institute, a small, elite academy for aspiring merchant-kings in Fargas Prefecture.

## House Nellens

Nellens is not governed by one, two or even three people. Nellens is run by a group of seven: three Dragon-Blooded and four patricians. As far as the rest of the Great Houses are aware, the three Dragon-Blooded make the decisions; Nellens decided it would be easiest to be taken seriously this way. Since Nellens was not founded by Dragon-Blooded, however, it firmly believes that it should not be governed entirely by its Exalted members.

All seven of the house's governing body are "elders." The Dragon-Blooded are three of the oldest Exalted in the house. The four patricians are all highly placed politicians with decades of experience. The group's members argue incessantly among themselves, but they do their best to present a unified front when dealing with the other houses. Other members of the house are free to agree or disagree with the committee as they see fit, but as the members of the committee have a fair amount of power between them, most Nellens put forward at least a token effort to comply with their wishes.

### Major Lines

Because Nellens has such a handicap when dealing with the other houses, its members do their best to act as one when they can. All Nellens households go to great lengths to keep the Nellens name, and most of the family lives together in the city of Juche. There are two major households that bear the Nellens name but do not live in Juche; both were formed by patricians.

Nellens Kepel acted as the governor of Guin, a farming community in Gedir Prefecture, for 40 years. His daughter took over after him, and her daughter after her, and even now, the household looks over the majority of this sprawling village and the surrounding environs. The household is fairly provincial and a little secretive and doesn't tend to travel much, but it has given House Nellens an economic foothold in the farming and livestock industries.

Nellens Chenault started a very successful shipping company more than a century ago and formed an equally successful household around the endeavor. This company services various farming communities and small-scale manufacturers around the Realm and ships through Arjuf, Lord's Crossing and Eagle's Launch. The family uses the opportunity to keep up contacts with many of the minor lords and governors around the Blessed Isle.

### Economics

House Nellens has its fingers in a number of the smaller industries around the Realm, areas that the Dragon-Blooded typically overlook. These include farming communities, fisheries, whaling expeditions, small textile operations, minor shipping and trade routes and so on. None of these endeavors make Nellens fabulously wealthy. But they do add up, and they also make Nellens surprisingly well connected in a level of society that many Dragon-Blooded completely ignore — something the Empress actively encouraged. All of this helps to make Nellens one of the very few houses whose income is still growing.

Nellens has very few satrapies under its control, but this suits the house just fine. It'd rather stick to its many small ways of making money. The house isn't set up to deal with large shipments of tribute and all of the attendant difficulties that spring from it. In fact, rather than taking tribute directly from those satrapies it does claim, Nellens often makes complex deals instead. These result in the house's satraps shipping goods to entirely unrelated locales where the Nellens have allies and friends. These allies and friends then do other favors for the Nellens or pass the house a safer and easier source of income or trade. It's a complex maze of connections and trades that leaves Nellens not only in possession of more goods for less effort, but also helps to keep its tributaries and satraps happy. The smaller trades and shipments are not only cheaper, but easier to protect. Such arrangements even managed to hide some of Nellens' income from the Empress, and Nellens elders are certain they will have even more success concealing their transactions from the Empress' successor.

Nellens also goes to some lengths to make friends with tributaries that are feeling squeezed by other houses. It has secretly underwritten a handful of tribute payments in return for favors of various sorts.

### Goals & Alliances

The Nellens know that most of the Dragon-Blooded loathe and despise them, so they prefer to work on the patricians. UnExalted Dynasts, Exalted Dynasts, they really don't care. They'll work with and fete almost anyone who's capable of furthering their ambitions and helping them to contend with the more powerful houses. Their favored tactic is to make friends with unExalted Dynasts who feel disillusioned with or betrayed by their houses.

Nellens desperately wants either the Throne or a very firm grasp on the house or person who takes it. Unlikely as that seems, Nellens expect it's the only way it'll remain a viable house in the long run.

### House Members of Note

**Nellens Mirar** is one of the younger Dragon-Blooded members of the house. While on the surface she is treated as the spiritually superior being that the Immaculate Philosophy deems her to be, she cannot help but sense a certain resentment among her patrician siblings. She does her best to ignore it and treat all of her family — Exalted and unExalted — with fairness, but she's reaching her limit. Her patrician parents subtly put their unExalted children first, and Mirar's temper grows shorter with each perceived slight.

**Nellens Chenault Linus** is a patrician with more ambition than his position in the shipping company can encompass. His plan for a meteoric rise to power requires him to marry a Dragon-Blooded, and he'll use his handsome looks, silver tongue, wealth and contacts to achieve that milestone. Linus can be found at any party that admits unExalted Dynasts, wining and dining potential contacts. He has a network of informants that has impressed even House Iselsi, and he hopes to parlay the use of that network into permission to marry an Iselsi Exalted. He has some idea of the Iselsi connection to the All-Seeing Eye and is more interested in the information that could provide him than he is in Ragara's wealth or Cathak's military power.

## House Tepet (Air)

Tepet has become fairly fractured in recent decades, and the situation has only gotten worse since their legions were destroyed battling barbarians in the North. Tepet himself has been dead for some time, and his five Dragon-Blooded children fight over the direction and influence of the house. They have enough similar aims that the house isn't torn apart by their bickering, but they do keep it from being as powerful as it could be.

### Major Lines

Tepet has six major family lines. Two of these were started by elders, Marek and Vergus. Both are military families. Grandchildren of Tepet started several other households: Nerigus, Berel and Tilis. Nerigus and Berel are both merchant families based out of Lord's Crossing; Tilis is another military family.

The last of the lines was started by a recently Exalted and wedded descendent of the house. Deramol is unusual for the Tepets — he cares more about lazy pursuits such as horse-breeding and hunting than military matters, and prefers social events to the heat of battle. Ironically, the three military families, long the more influential households within House Tepet, lost the best and brightest of their young Exalted in the destruction of the Tepet legions. The other three households, although they lost a few of their children, survived with much more of their resources intact.

### Economics

Economically speaking, Tepet is in dire straits. It collects few tributes and now has no means of enforcing those tributes. It is unlikely that the house's satrapies will continue to send it anything now that its legions have been destroyed and it lacks the money to pay for mercenaries.

The two merchant lines and the health of Lord's Crossing as a major trading center are the only things the family has going for it right now. It isn't enough to support the house in the long run. The Regent, who is a Tepet, has arranged for a slight increase in the state subsidy for Tepet, but there's only so much he can or will do. Tepet needs to find either a major means of income or a major means of power — one that will cause others to want to curry the house's favor. It's rebuilding its legions and trying to marry off as many of its young ones

as it has left, but few houses want to marry into the family now, and the matches they offer are poor.

## Goals & Alliances

Tepet needs all of the alliances it can handle, but the proud elders of the house don't want to be seen as desperate. They have little choice, really. They're pulling in every favor they can to partner up with other houses. They're sending every young house member they have left out to find new opportunities and sources of income. Notably, house elders have begun to lean on young Tepet Darik to take advantage of his relationship with his bonded circlemates Cathak Laten and V'neef Aliset to improve the house's financial and military straits.

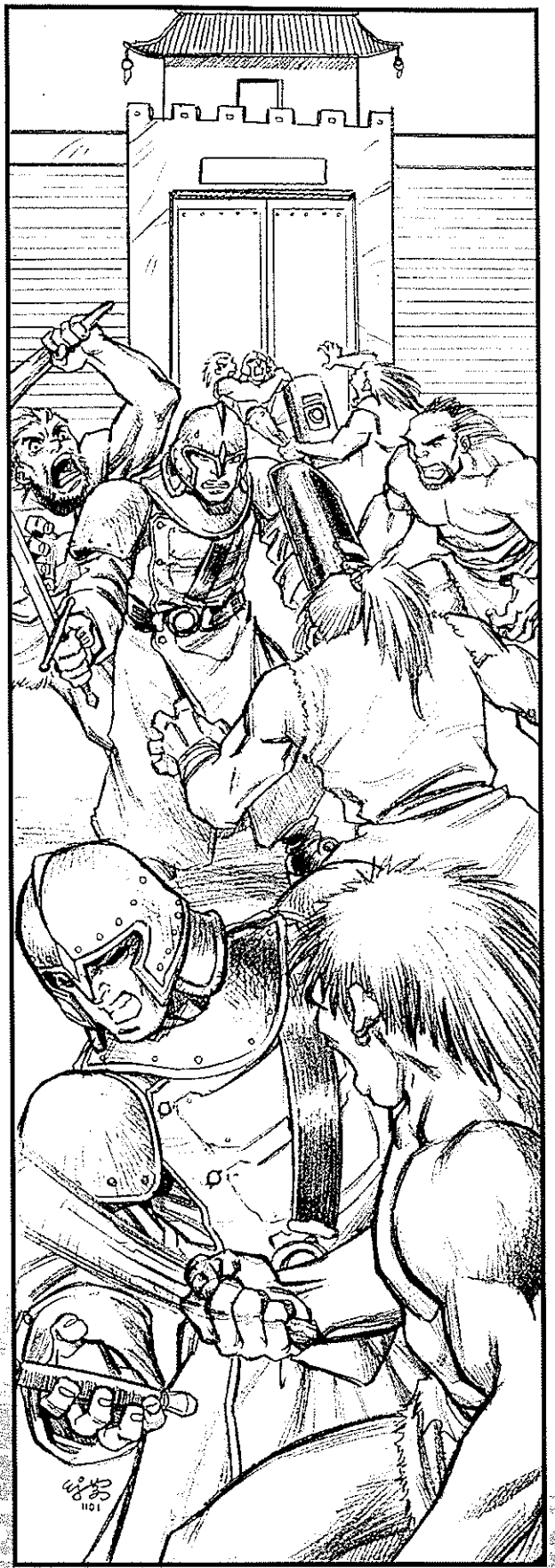
Tepet Vergus has long been friends with V'neef, and he's calling on that friendship now. He wants a hand up into what has recently become V'neef's nigh-exclusive province: wine production and sales in the Realm. V'neef hasn't yet decided whether their friendship is worth such a price.

## House Members of Note

**Tepet Locus** recently graduated from the Heptagram. His teachers have deemed him full of promise, and he has an eagerness and energy to match. He's slightly naïve in the ways of politics; he just never seemed to get the point of betrayal and back-stabbing. He's faultlessly honorable and unfailingly polite. He's also head over heels in love with Ledaal Sirel, another Exalt in his class. Preliminary talks between his parents and hers were going well until the Tepet legions were destroyed. Now, Sirel's parents won't even talk to Locus.' Locus has sworn to find a way to make marriage worthwhile for Sirel's family before she's married off to someone else.

**Tepet Deramol Kelles** is just as idealistic as her younger cousin but not nearly as naïve. She's an abolitionist and, publicly, a socialite who plays up her reputation as shallow nobility at the many parties she attends. She finds out which people abuse their slaves the most and works to steal those servants away to the Threshold. Still, she retains her practicality — she often returns to claim favors from those she frees.

**Tepet Ejava**, the Roseblack, is an imposing woman with an aura of command about her. She holds the rank of general and leads what remain of Tepet's legions. Ejava is widely regarded as a military genius who came into her own at the battle of Tamrin Plain. Tepet observers ruefully note that if the Roseblack's now-dead commander, Tepet Tilis Mallon, had kept her in the field during the ill-fated campaign in the North, the house's legions would still exist. Currently, Tepet Ejava serves her house and the Realm by hunting smugglers and pirates in the Southwest with an astonishing degree of success, especially given that her force consists mainly of



the Vermilion Legion, mercenaries and survivors of the slaughter in the North.

## House Mnemon (Earth)

Mnemon should be the obvious choice for the Scarlet Throne — she's extraordinarily powerful, very old and experienced and, arguably, the next-most-powerful single person in the Realm after her mother. This also explains why no one wants her there — nobody would willingly have elected the Scarlet Empress either. Someone who already has that much power and is so far removed from the concerns of her lessers is hardly a popular choice for Empress. Perhaps she could do a lot for the Realm, but it's also certain she'd put herself and her house first.

Mnemon is arrogant, frighteningly intelligent and as publicly devout as she can manage. The Immaculate Philosophy is what put her near the top of the totem pole, and she's determined to use it like the club it is. She has an extraordinary talent for Charms and sorcery. While the demands she makes on the abilities of her descendants are outrageous, she'll go to equally great lengths to protect their reputations and positions. Her great-grandchildren are fond of saying that Mnemon expects her family to kill themselves to please her every whim, but at least they'll die at the top.

### Major Lines

Almost all of House Mnemon is publicly devout. Some emulate the Earth Dragon because it is expected of them. Some keep up the practice because they realize that the Immaculate Philosophy is what helps them stay in charge. Still others — and a surprising number at that — are truly devout. The family of Mnemon Caras number themselves among the devout, and fully one-third of the children of this family go on to become monks of the Immaculate Order. Most of the rest attend the Cloister of Wisdom and study both philosophy and the martial arts at the knee of the Order. The descendants of Caras take House Iselsi's presence at the Palace Sublime as a personal affront and long for the day when they can relocate the center of the Order to the Imperial City.

Mnemon Darow married a Cathak general many years ago, and the two of them started a household that has since spawned many fine generals and strategists. It has become something of a tradition for the eldest daughter of each generation to marry a Cathak, keeping the military ties of the household strong.

### Economics

Mnemon controls some of the best tributaries that claim allegiance to the Realm, including Paragon and many of the northern coastal states. So far, the house has been able to keep the tribute flowing by using its private legions to quash any sign of rebellion. Since Tepet's disaster, however, Mnemon has been more cautious about sending her legions outside of the Realm. As a result, her tributaries have become bolder about withholding tribute. The satraps have little love for the house — while it has protected its tributaries in the past, it's much more cautious now, and yet, it hasn't reduced the outrageous tributes it expects.

House Mnemon has its fair share of merchants in the family, and this has helped to keep the house from losing too much money in the recent upheaval. Also, thanks to the house's fervent emulation of Pasiap, there are a number of architects in the family. While the rate of construction of new buildings has fallen off due to the recent economic troubles, someone always needs a new house or temple designed and built, and there are certainly plenty of fortifications going up. House Mnemon sends a number of its young patricians to study in the schools of Tuchara, insisting on only the best education for its children.

### Goals & Alliances

Mnemon has a habit of looking down on everyone — even, some gossip, the Empress herself. She certainly doesn't see her siblings' children as her equals in any way and has made no secret of this attitude in the past. This arrogance is hurting her now. What makes up for this is the fact that House Mnemon is so powerful. No one can afford to *look* like they don't want Mnemon's help.

Mnemon's line breeds quite true, producing a prodigious number of Dragon-Blooded. Every single one of the houses wants the benefit of that sort of pedigree, and children of House Mnemon have no trouble finding suitors. This means that Mnemon has ended up with many small alliances spread throughout the houses rather than a few very strong ones. While this gives the house contacts and aid from all quarters, it also means that none of that aid is particularly powerful. The closest the house has to an actual ally in this quarter is House Sesus, which particularly prides itself on marrying for Mnemon blood and Cynis business sense.

Mnemon will not be satisfied with anything less than the Throne. The thought of bowing down to any of her lesser relatives is completely galling and violates everything Mnemon cherishes about the Immaculate Philosophy. She is privately furious that the matter isn't already settled.

### House Members of Note

**Mnemon Nepel**, one of the youngest of Mnemon's grandchildren, likes to see himself as a good-for-nothing ladies' man, but his deep and inconvenient sense of honor always seems to get in the way. He tries to drown himself in V'neef wine and Cynis slaves at the society parties, but somehow, he always ends up jumping out of windows in his expensive clothes to help some peasant being robbed or dueling someone to first blood over a slight to a good

friend. He tries so hard not to get involved, but somehow, he just can't stay out of anything. He cares much more for personal honor than for house loyalty.

**Mnemon Timaro**, Nepel's twin sister, seems the exact opposite of Nepel — she's quiet and a little shy, and she seems to keep to the sidelines in any dispute. No one can remember the last time she publicly chose sides except for the minimum necessary display of house loyalty. In truth, she's avidly loyal to the house and nearly worships Mnemon herself. Timaro simply shows that loyalty in more quiet ways, through several layers of contacts or with a silent blade in the night.

## House Sesus (Fire)

House Sesus is comprised of five separate family lines; the eldest couples of each line gather to make decisions for the house as a whole. The first line was started by Sesus Kajak, a famous general and the eldest son of Sesus himself. It is now run by Sesus Kajak Raves and her husband, Cynis Nesil. Once a proud military household, it now holds more interest in mercantile affairs. While it still bankrolls quite a number of troops, it mostly uses them as a source of income, loaning them out inside the family to browbeat satraps. The line still produces the occasional brilliant general, however.

The second line was started by Sesus Alon, a powerful senator and a granddaughter of Sesus. It has remained a very political family; the resources of its sister families give it a great deal of leverage to work with. It is currently lead by Sesus Alon and her husband, Mnemon Barin. Alon is a cautious player, who researches political situations thoroughly before casting her vote.

The third family line was started by Sesus Magel, a politician whose husband, Cynis Parovar, was a patrician merchant with a keen and coldly calculating business acumen. The current head of the household is Sesus Magel Talor, a widowed politician thoroughly and happily in the pocket of the Guild. He has recently taken a secret peasant lover in an attempt to deal with the loneliness created by his wife's death.

Sesus Chenow was a brutal adventurer who enjoyed killing and pillaging to such an extent that he became a political liability. When the family threatened to disown him, Chenow pulled himself together and started his own military household. It soon became apparent that he'd done so in order to have the means to carry on his brutalities in distant Threshold lands instead, but this didn't make the house look bad, so Sesus let him have his toy. To this day, the household of Chenow maintains some of the most effective and brutal troops on the Blessed Isle, and they prefer to get involved in Threshold situations, where they can take liberties not allowed on the Blessed Isle. Chenow himself has retired, and his youngest daughter, Sesus Chenow Mareq, runs the household with her husband, Cathak Catis.

The final household was started by Sesus Denerid, a rebellious youth with a great love of Cynis parties. The Denerid household maintains the house's "legion" of slave concubines and has a long-term contract for slaves with House Cynis. It has become traditional for the Denerid household to intermarry extensively with Cynis, and some consider the household to be almost as much a part of House Cynis as it is a part of House Sesus. It is currently controlled by Sesus Denerid Gutar and his patrician wife, Cynis Violas.

### Economics

House Sesus has a pretty good reputation with its satraps — it hasn't insisted on huge tributes, and it has occasionally let shortfalls slide for a year if matters have gone badly for the tributary in question. This leniency is proving half-useful for Sesus now, as its tributaries have no real grudges to bear. On the other hand, Sesus is trying to tighten its grasp now; it needs every bit of tribute its satrapies can spare. Its satrapies, however, aren't used to enforcing these sorts of demands, and the subject queens and princes are resisting it as best they can. So far, Chenow's troops have been able to keep things under control, but there's only so much they can do. Things have already started slipping, and there's rumor that one of the family's tributaries — either Kernig or Valis, both woodcutters' strongholds in the East — might try to revolt.

Sesus has profited well off of Cynis' commercial acumen through extensive intermarriage. The patricians of House Sesus have their fingers in all sorts of middling commercial ventures around the Realm. These ventures include two textile factories in Incas Prefecture, a siaka-hunting interest in Eagle's Launch, a mining group in Blackwater and a physicians' cooperative in the Imperial City. Unfortunately, the house has concentrated on military might to an extent that has prevented it from acquiring any major commercial ventures to keep it profitable in the current times. So while its members aren't starving, neither are their coffers expanding.

### Goals & Alliances

Sesus prides itself on its breeding and has concentrated on wooing Cynis and Mnemon almost to the exclusion of some of the other houses. This gives it a high rate of Dragon-Blooded births, some practical commercial know-how and a taste for slaves and hedonism, but it hasn't made Sesus a lot of friends. This situation might be more useful if Mnemon didn't desire the Throne so fiercely. Sesus isn't willing to hand over the reins to Mnemon, and Mnemon certainly won't put Sesus in a better position to take the Throne. For the moment, the two houses dance around each other, promising much and delivering little.

House Iselsi has made quiet noises about helping Sesus get a leg up over Mnemon if Sesus will guarantee that the Immaculate Order will remain centered at the Palace Sublime. Sesus still hopes to work something out with Mnemon or Cynis, so it hasn't given Iselsi an answer yet; if Mnemon does take the Throne, Sesus certainly doesn't want her to find out that it bargained with the Iselsi. However, Sesus would rather see anyone else on the Throne than Mnemon, despite their ties; Sesus knows intermarriage won't count for much once Mnemon has control. The house is still hoping that the future ruler will either be a Sesus or a Cynis, and it may need to deal with Iselsi to have a chance at that.

### House Members of Note

**Sesus Chenow** has officially retired to an undisclosed location in the Western Isles. Unofficially, he has pulled his old sworn brotherhood back together again and gone out for another few rounds of vicious war and bloodshed. He swore in his youth that he'd die fighting, and he isn't about to let old age creep up on him and deny him that right. He's just past his prime and barely starting to go gray. As soon as he developed his first few wrinkles, he retired with barely a goodbye, secretly afraid that if he waited any longer he wouldn't be in any shape to go back to his old ways. Chenow and his friends have made it their personal mission to keep Threshold tributaries paying their tribute in full and on time, particularly those that belong to House Sesus. They might succeed, but they're certainly making some enemies along the way.

**Sesus Geroc** is young, nice and recently graduated from the House of Bells. He is also in the unfortunate position of being Chenow's chosen protégé. Geroc is a bit impulsive, and the aging Chenow decided that he could shape this young man into his successor. He's sure he can rectify the boy's unfortunate lack of brutality by showing him how barbaric and ungrateful the house's subject queens and princes are. Along the way, Geroc is seeing more than he ever wanted to of poverty, degradation and violence. He's fiercely loyal to his house, but recently, he's entertained some very unloyal thoughts toward Chenow, and he's close to the breaking point.

## House Iselsi (Water)

House Iselsi cannot realistically be said to have a ruler of any kind. No committee guides it. No powerful elder speaks for it. No head of household makes decisions in the name of the house. The closest the house has to a guiding hand is the suggestions that get passed down from the elder members to the younger. Some of them are even followed.

There's really no need for a strong guiding hand, of course — there's barely a house to guide at this point. The family is scattered, and its members are forced to travel incognito. They have no chance whatsoever in the battle for the Scarlet Throne. Their only hope is to get someone in power that doesn't want to exterminate them or move the Palace Sublime into the Imperial City. The house has no voice in the Deliberative and previously subsisted on the favor of the Empress and the Bronze faction, working as spies and assassins for the Throne and the Immaculate Order. Its reputation has been destroyed, and the other houses see Iselsi as a pawn at best and a bug to be squashed underfoot at worst.

### Major Lines

Rather than a handful of major bloodlines, Iselsi has been broken up beyond recognition at this point. Before the house fled in disgrace, there were considered to be three major households. The first was started by Iselsi Yamah. It concentrated its efforts on the All-Seeing Eye and indulged in some less-than-popular activities such as assassination, weapons sales and shipments to Threshold tributaries and spying on anyone and everyone. Iselsi sacrificed much of its influence to retain its positions in the All-Seeing Eye. This part of the house was long ago made subject to the powers that controlled the Realm, but it managed to retain its identity and some influence as an agent of the Realm. Not a single one will be found living openly as an Iselsi. Some of the family's more distant lines have already forgotten that they are descended from a Dynastic house.

The second household was created by Iselsi Manoton and had a distinctly military bent. Unfortunately for Iselsi, this household was fairly young and had not yet built up much in the way of troops. This household took the brunt of the repercussions from the attempted assassination attempt against the Empress in Realm Year 303. Most of them died in the coup attempt, the ill-fated campaign that led up to it and defending the retreat of the imperial forces from the Scavenger Lands. This household has vanished into obscurity.

The third line, created by Iselsi Savenis, preferred to have its hands into anything that furthered the house's pursuit of knowledge. It too made use of the All-Seeing Eye, but it also sent sworn brotherhoods out into the Threshold to learn everything possible about the cultures and provinces there. Many descendants of this line still live in the Threshold, and there are pockets of Iselsi still living under the family name in areas neutral toward the Realm. Though they are considered outcaste by those members of the Dynasty that even know they exist, the Yamah bloodline maintains some tenuous contacts with these fugitives. Now, with the Empress gone, the contacts have become much firmer, and individuals have begun to move back and forth between the groups.

## Why Do the Iselsi Survive?

Given that they have been disgraced for centuries, left powerless and unable to defend themselves, why is it that the Iselsi persevere while Great Houses rise and fall? Part of the answer is that the Empress wanted them to. They are a lesson — offend the Scarlet Empress, and your grandchildren's children will live in disgrace.

The dismemberment of House Iselsi has been a long and painful process, an ongoing object lesson for the other Great Houses about the rewards of treachery. Though the ill-fated coup attempted happened shortly after the disastrous campaign of RY 301, it was almost two and a half centuries later than the Empress formally dissolved the house. In RY 570, the Empress formally ordered House Iselsi struck from the imperial ledgers, through she had slowly been stripping it of satrapies and privileges for all the intervening years. No further members were named to the Deliberative, and the last Iselsi member of the Deliberative died in RY 696.

The other reason was that the Iselsi disgrace wasn't as complete as the imperial government implied. The Empress didn't annihilate the house, she appropriated it. Many of those "executed" and "imprisoned for life" were given new faces and identities through sorcery and bureaucratic footwork and used as Dragon-Blooded agents of the All-Seeing Eye, with their remaining relatives held hostage to their good performance. For centuries, they were among the most reliable assassins and agents of the Scarlet Throne, Dragon-Blooded spymasters and killers unable to enter normal society and willing to do anything to preserve their lineage. All were fully aware of the fact that the if the Empress fell from power, their chances were nonexistent. Now that she is gone, the wolves are closing in, and the Iselsi are desperately seeking a way to preserve their house against even these impossible odds.

While the Great Houses always knew this was happening, the legal pretexts made it difficult to tell who actually died and who was made an agent. This is one of the reasons the Great Houses haven't moved jointly to smash Iselsi yet. Not only do Bal Keraz and the elders of the Immaculate Order support the house, nobody knows who might actually be an Iselsi agent — and what terrible reprisals they might exact if misfortune were to strike the remnants of the family.



### Economics

Iselsi is dying, fiscally as well as numerically. It might be a long, slow death, but it is a death nonetheless. Iselsi has no voice in the Deliberative. It has no legions, and it has no satrapies under its control. It cannot openly delve into commercial concerns, so all of its commercial ventures must, of necessity, be small and subtle. The house cannot risk catching the attention of its distant cousins, and since its members cannot openly intermarry with the other houses, its blood becomes more diluted with every generation.

Iselsi bolsters its flagging coffers by becoming involved with various religious communities around the Realm, but few of these communities are wealthy, and this tactic is a delaying one at best. Iselsi has a firm presence, as well as political support and some money, in the towns of Ashra, Guin, Noble and Spider's Crossing. It has moved spies and other operatives into Nishimo, Cloaka and Traiter, as well as a few other small communities, but it must move slowly.

### Goals & Alliances

The elders of House Iselsi currently split their efforts in several different directions. They'd like to influence the battle for the Scarlet Throne. Their most important goal is to see that Mnemon doesn't take the Throne, and they're prepared to do almost anything to see to that — up to and including assassination, if it comes down to that (and if they can pull it off, which is unlikely). Mnemon would certainly move the Immaculate Order within the Imperial City, which would send Iselsi scurrying for cover again and ruin any chance of the house pulling itself together. Iselsi's current favored house is Sesus; Sesus has strong ties to Mnemon but is ultimately self-serving. Sesus also stands a relatively strong chance of taking the Throne and has enough jaded tastes that Iselsi might be able to get a handle on one of his vices. The house elders second and third choices are Ledaal and Tepet, but neither house is likely to take the Throne and, Iselsi knows this. It would rather bet on a winner.

Iselsi has lately debated the wisdom of moving the remaining center of the house to the Threshold. It seems as though every year the concentration of Mnemons in the Immaculate Order grows. While the Mouth of Peace insists on giving Iselsi sanctuary as the policies of the Order (and its secret allies among the Sidereals) dictate, it's only a matter of time before the anti-Iselsi sentiment in the Palace Sublime grows beyond a safe level. The Iselsi also stand a high chance of losing what safety they have in the Realm when the Empress' successor is chosen, and they'd prefer to leave before they're hunted down like dogs.

The Iselsi's position as the Empress' left hand allowed them to work their disguised house members into safe and secure positions. Their power was always checked by the fact that the Empress could have easily ordered the house liquidated. Now, with the Empress gone, Iselsi is hoping to marry some of its people back into the Dynastic houses and, thus, work them into truly influential positions again. It's a risky gambit, but Iselsi has little left to lose.

### House Members of Note

**Whitemane Vocal** is the patrician governor of the town of Spider's Crossing. His father is one of the few remaining Iselsi elders, and he's completely loyal to the house. Vocal projects an image of a relaxed, calm, completely provincial governor. He has a strong local accent (exaggerated) and uses his reputation for approaching everything slowly, thoroughly and seriously to gather information for the house. He's known as an honorable and trustworthy man, and he considers that reputation his most valuable asset. Vocal carefully balances the maintenance of that reputation with his desire to feed all information to the house. Vocal is descended from the Yamah line of House Iselsi.

**Blackwing** is a Dragon-Blooded who emulates the Water Dragon. He comes from a minor patrician family and revels in acting as one of the black sheep of the Dragon-Blooded of Iselsi. His mother was an unExalted Iselsi, but she carefully doctored her husband's family records to imply that a Dragon-Blooded had sired the child. While this still leaves Blackwing to be looked down upon by other Exalted as a non-Dynastic patrician, it at least keeps the Dynasts from looking too carefully into his parentage. He is strong-willed and brash and loves to crash Dragon-Blooded parties that he hasn't been invited to. This habit has earned him some enemies and gotten him beaten up a few times, but it has also made him a couple of friends among the more rebellious Dragon-Blooded youth. Blackwing doesn't yet know of his parentage, although his mother has tried to subtly teach him that House Iselsi has been treated unfairly by the Realm.

## House Ledaal (Air)

House Ledaal is run by a small committee of elders. Ledaal Kebok Omeger is a scholar and sorcerer, an avid student of history like many of his family. He spent most of his life searching out lost historical texts and studying the ruins of the First Age and returned only 20 years ago to help lead his house. When he returned, he came with a new scar on his face, a bright white slash down his cheek that he won't discuss with anyone except his close Sidereal advisor.

Ledaal Catala Gamam is a true adventurer at heart. She has spent most of her life to date in the Threshold, mapping out the locations of shadowlands, gathering intelligence on Deathlords and, since the appearance of the Abyssal Exalted a few years ago, finding out everything possible about those mysterious beings. She returned barely

six months ago at her family's insistence, after the joint Ledaal-Cathak victory at Scorpion Ridge. She would prefer to continue her work, but she realizes that her knowledge and experience are too valuable at home.

Ledaal Caros is a strategist. He studied (and has taught) at the House of Bells, and has advised several of the Realm's great generals. The house's Sidereal advisors predicted his worth as a strategist at his birth, and so, he has never been allowed to take his own course in life. He has suppressed his frustration at this, as he understands what is at stake. As a result, he has gradually become more and more morose and peevish throughout the years.

Ledaal Cycel has an eidetic memory and an uncanny ability to figure out who will do the most good where. Because of this, she runs most of the day-to-day operations of the house and often consults with the Sidereals on which children should be encouraged to go into what fields. She has no compunctions about pressuring parents into dictating their children's career choices.

## Major Lines

There are only two major lines of House Ledaal. The first was started by Ledaal Catala and is based in the eastern forests of the Threshold rather than in the Realm. This branch of the family finds it easier to gather information and items in the Threshold without being noticed when its members don't have to travel back and forth to the Realm all the time. They concentrate on studying the Deathlords, the shadowlands and the Anathema. They collect old texts and new intelligence, ferret out foreign business opportunities to keep the house afloat and make friends and allies in places where much of the empire fears to tread.

Ledaal Kebok is a scholar and sorcerer, and he still teaches occasionally at the Heptagram. His descendants collect historical texts and record oral histories, study sorcery at the knee of the Sidereals and run a decent information-gathering network with eyes and ears in most of the major cities around the Realm. Rumor has it that one of Kebok's eldest daughters, Sulco, took a demon as lover and that a strain of demon-blood taints his family line. This rumor is true, although Kebok firmly denies it.

## Economics

Most of Ledaal's funding comes from its control of several major southern ports, particularly Arjuf. This gives it a large infusion of tariffs and taxes. The Catala family also brings in a fair amount of money by arranging business ventures in the Threshold. Often, the family will quietly back one side in small local wars on the condition that it tithes to Ledaal if it wins. The investment doesn't always pay off, but the Ledaals' ties with the Sidereals make them fairly safe bets.

Ledaal has a decent handful of satrapies under its authority. The house treats them reasonably well, but any tributary prince with experience knows to fear House Ledaal. Ledaal doesn't squeeze every talent it can out of its tributaries, but it accepts no excuses either. Anyone who doesn't pay up on time and in full can expect his province to experience mysterious troubles — droughts, floods, earthquakes, plagues and spirit infestations of the worst kind.

## Goals & Alliances

Ledaal has no interest in governing the Realm, but it has every interest in maintaining the empire. To that end, it is willing to make deals that help others get their chance at the Scarlet Throne in return for money, information, old texts and help against the Deathlords. Their choice for ruler would be a Cathak — they expect that the Cathak's military nature and lust for conquest would lead it to do something about the Deathlords where other houses might not.

Ledaal hunts down the Anathema more vigorously than any other house, and because of this, as well as its Sidereal connections, it gets along well with the Immaculate Order. Occasionally, the Mouth of Peace will send a monk or two to accompany house members on expeditions of particular importance to the Order, and Ledaal does the same in return. The only thing that keeps the Order and Ledaal from getting along perfectly is Ledaal's tendency to hoard items and texts it finds rather than giving them to the Order.

Ledaal makes all of the marriage-based alliances it can, in the hopes that its members can draw other houses into the fight against the Deathlords. So far, Ledaal is the only house that acknowledges how serious the situation is, and it wants to change that. Thus, Ledaal is quite happy with the other houses' rush to obtain alliances for their efforts to take the Scarlet Throne. They're currently trying to arrange several marriages with Cathak.

## House Members of Note

**Ledaal Kebok Coren** makes even her own siblings nervous. Though she is newly graduated from the House of Bells, her skill with a sword is prodigious, and her mastery of Essence impressive for one so young. Her eyes are the color of the sky, changing color with her mood from clear bright blue to the roiling darkness of storm clouds. And as her mood changes, so does the weather around her. When she is happy, the sky nearby is clear. When she despairs, it rains. And when she's enraged, great bolts of lightning and peals of thunder shake the heavens. She is learning to control this wild ability, to tame her stronger emotions, but it's slow going. She's a passionate person by nature and finds it difficult to subdue her feelings. Her great-grandmother, Sulco, has told her that her ability comes from her great-grandfather, a storm-demon called Yan. Sulco has taken a

strong interest in her descendant's doings, and it is possible that Yan has as well.

**Ledaal Ricot** graduated from the Cloister of Wisdom less than a decade ago, and his family held high hopes for his promise as a scholar and politician who could look after his family's interests in the political realm. Unfortunately for them, Ricot had other ideas and wasn't willing to buckle to pressure. Ricot is far more interested in adventure, parties and beautiful partners than he is in any sort of political career. Maybe someday, he tells them, he'll settle down, but he hopes that day won't come any time soon. His family is trying to make up for his unexpected break from its plans for him by arranging a marriage to someone with strong political influence.

## House Peleps (Water)

The Peleps are as slippery and tricky as the element they emulate. The husband-and-wife team that currently runs the house embodies these traits. Peleps Febaris and her husband, Peleps Taxin, are very distant cousins and both Dragon-Blooded. Both are politicians, and each has been a member of the Deliberative. They have many children, each one raised in an atmosphere of harsh competition; trickery and back-stabbing are encouraged as long as the house isn't harmed. Febaris and Taxin believe that this is the best way to train family members for a life of politics.

This attitude has trickled down to many of the Peleps families. In some branches of the family, competition is more friendly; in others, it's vicious and cutthroat. Competition is never supposed to be to the detriment of the family, but sometimes, such problems are hard to avoid. Few Peleps truly trust each other; for this reason, most Peleps prefer to marry completely outside the family. Other houses might use marriages to spy on the family, after all, but at least they're likely to be a little less open about it. Most Peleps are fanatically loyal to the *house* but would ruin each other's plans in a heartbeat.

### Major Lines

Because of the cutthroat nature of the family, independent households come and go all the time. They rise up defiantly only to be cut down by their siblings. Two major lines have managed to survive through all of this infighting, but a handful of minor ones can be found at any given time.

Peleps Nalin established her own household early on and firmly started a new tradition among her heirs: competition paired with respect. This household is comparatively small and sneered at by some of its more vicious distant relations, but it holds its own. Peleps Danic, on the other hand, started one of the most successful Dynastic political households. For some reason, his descendants include a much larger proportion of unExalted than most Dynastic households, but this has allowed the household to ensconce itself thoroughly in the Thousand Scales.

Three of the more recent minor households have been started by Yolan, Calut and Deham. Yolan is a high-ranking officer in the imperial navy, as is her unExalted husband. Calut is a powerful politician with a great ambition to see his house win the Scarlet Throne. Deham is a monk who believes that the Immaculate Order should take a greater role in the political arena of the Realm.

### Economics

House Peleps makes its money in two ways: from the support it receives for maintaining the imperial navy, which Peleps commands, and from its political endeavors and constant maneuverings with and against the other houses. The Peleps are constantly offering political and legal aid to other houses in return for political support, joint investments and marriage arrangements.

The Peleps also make a fair amount of money off of siaka- and whale-hunting endeavors in the northern isles where they make their home and from their tributaries, which they squeeze mercilessly. So far, they've kept the tribute coming by using the navy to threaten their tributaries. It's only a matter of time before this threat isn't enough, however, and Peleps may soon go beyond mere saber rattling and land mercenaries or a loyal legion to keep the locals in line. If it does not, then house elders fear a revolt within the year.

Calut's household has brought a surprising amount of money into the house so far. The household attributes this to its members keen business sense and willingness to invest in Threshold provinces and businesses. In reality, they accomplish this through black-market sales of weapons, food and resources overseas. They've so far managed to avoid retribution from the Guild by blatant use of force, but the leaders of the Guild can't be very happy about it.

### Goals & Alliances

Peleps alliances and rivalries tend to be short-lived. Most Peleps see little point in long-term alliances; the political necessities that spur alliances rarely last that long, after all. They make deals as the need strikes them. The house sets a fair store by honoring its word, however, and alliances, if made with promises and oaths, will be kept. After all, if they weren't, then it wouldn't take long before the other houses simply stopped working with Peleps at all, and then, the Peleps power base would erode away. Because of this, Peleps tend to be careful how they word things. If they haven't very specifically promised to do something or given their word on something, then they don't consider themselves bound to do it.

Because Peleps alliances and conspiracies are very goal oriented, the Peleps have conspired with every house

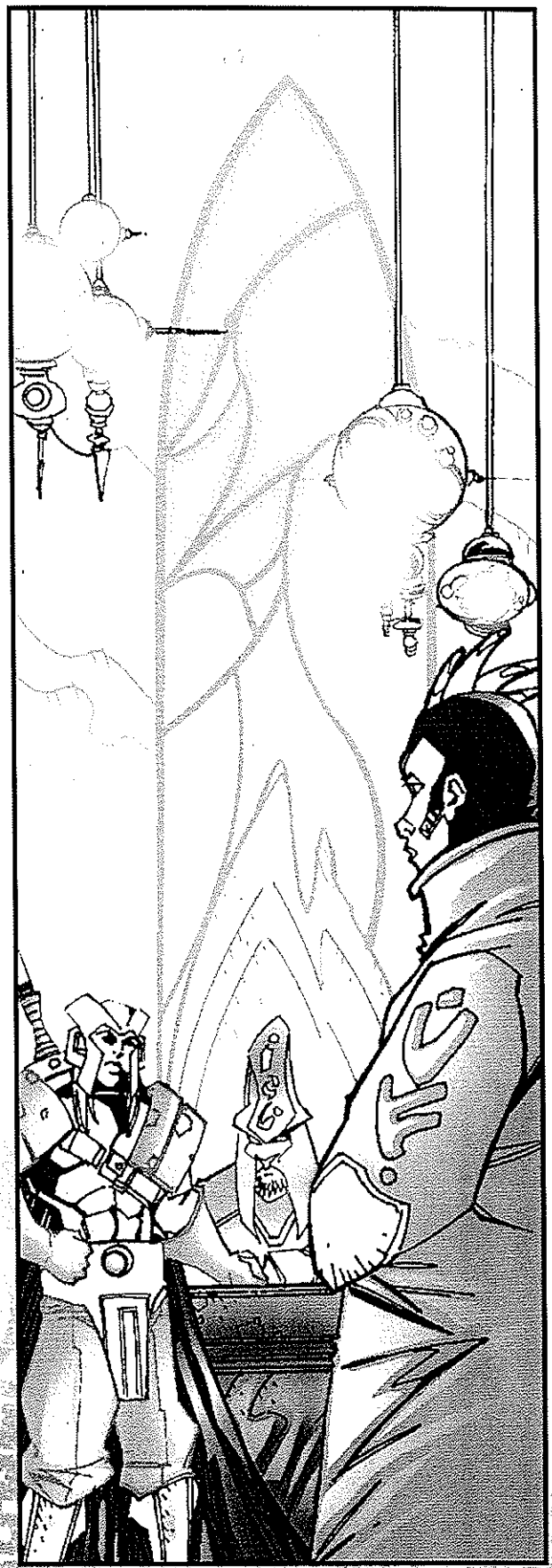
at one time or another. The Peleps power in the imperial courts and the Deliberative is something every house envies and needs, so everyone comes to the Peleps eventually. Indeed, the empress is generally believed to have created House V'neef to strip Peleps of much of its political power by making it more dependent on the Realm and the other Great Houses for revenue.

This is not to say that long-term alliances with the Peleps never happen. There have been some very long, very happy marriages between Peleps and other houses, often when a Peleps flees the combative nature of the house and seeks solace in a more temperate family. The house likes to take advantage of these situations by developing business concerns with the newly related family.

### House Members of Note

**Peleps Magaret** graduated the Heptagram three years ago. When she went in, she was a lively, ambitious girl. When she came out, she was thin, ethereal, almost wasted. Half the time, she seems to be lost in her own head, and some of the observations she makes on the world just don't make any sense to those around her. Her teachers call her an inspired young sorcerer, but her parents just worry. They married her off as quickly as possible to the patrician Ragara Felis so there'd be someone other than them to take care of Magaret. Magaret seems totally unaware that Felis is many decades older than she; she behaves as a loving and devoted wife. The only time that he doesn't get her full attention is when she locks herself away for days at a time to study and practice her sorcery.

**Peleps Howit** is a powerful unExalted judge in his 50s. He enjoys his power and particularly enjoys the fact that his Dragon-Blooded relatives rely on it. He likes making the Exalted Dynasts run around trying to please him so that he'll help them, while he gravely plays the respectful mortal just trying to aid his betters. He's a scheming bastard with a very quick mind whose only weakness is Cynis orgies. He's wasted quite a bit of what he's gained just to gain entry to a couple of these events.



## Life as a Prince of the Earth

The Dragon-Blooded spend their entire lives training for or fulfilling the role they set for themselves; warrior-heroes, guardians of the human race and defenders of civilization. This section details the life of a Dragon-Blooded, from early schooling to working retirement.

### Childhood

For a member of the Dynasty, childhood is hardly a time for fun and relaxation. The children of Dynasts spend their time in lessons, learning to be the Exalt they might one day become. They're tutored privately as soon as they can walk and talk and sent off to boarding school at an early age.

## Family

Dynastic children spend little time with their parents, seeing them primarily at the few public functions children are allowed to attend. At that time, they're expected to behave themselves properly and to speak only when spoken to. They might be asked questions that test their wits or their progress with their lessons; they're rarely asked how they're doing or whether they're having fun. It isn't necessarily that their parents don't care about them — ensuring their suitability for life among the Dragon-Blooded *is* caring for them. Public displays of affection between parent and child are frowned upon, but House Cynis has bucked this particular social more for almost as long as it has existed — sometimes in rather disturbing ways.

This isn't to say that Dynastic children don't have contact with family. The Great Houses know the value of loyalty among their children, and over the centuries, they've found a way to promote that loyalty that doesn't involve parent-child interaction. While those who take care of the child's basic needs are likely to be servants, many tutors are unExalted members of the child's own family and house.

Family members teach children those things that are directly relevant to the Dynastic lifestyle or that involve socialization. This includes riding, sailing, hunting, behavior at social events, games that the nobility play and so on. Usually, Dynastic children are accompanied by mortal family members whenever they leave the home, although, occasionally, a trusted servant may be allowed to take a child out on very short trips to safe locations.

Children are also brought to observe their Dragon-Blooded parents punishing slaves, meting out justice to peasants or arbitrating disputes between family members. At these times, they're expected to remain silent and unobtrusive; they're only there to learn.

Dynastic children sit at the unExalted tables at family meals. In matters of status, they are usually treated as high-ranking unExalted. They are expected to comport themselves at the high standards of the Dragon-Blooded, however, in all things (except those of which mortals are physically incapable). Their manners must be perfect. They must excel at music and sports. They must learn things quickly and thoroughly.

### Those Who Do Not Exalt

The training Dynastic children receive results in unExalted family members who are exceedingly skilled and polished. It also results in unExalted family members with more than the usual number of psychological problems. Most of those who do not Exalt are made well aware that they've failed their family. And no matter how smart, slick and ambitious they may be, they will never be accorded the status they were raised to desire and expect. They'll live for decades instead of the centuries they'd hoped for. They are raised to become demigods and find themselves to be human.

Some of these Dynasts fall into a sort of worship of their Exalted relatives. It makes them feel a little closer to the power they were denied. Others resent or fear their luckier siblings and cousins. Some unExalted Dynasts do their best to make their new peers comfortable, while others become extremely competitive in the effort to be noticed by their betters.

When it has been determined that a child just isn't going to Exalt, he's usually watched for signs of emotional instability. If his frustration renders him otherwise useless to the family, he may be shipped off to a distant and unimportant post where he can do little harm. Those scions with a lot of rage might find themselves volunteering to join the legions in the hopes that they will get over that anger or die trying. Some mortal children of Dynastic houses may be summarily executed by the elders of their families, including those who have clearly gone mad, those with undiminished anger who cannot simply be shunted into the legions and those few souls with the poor luck to have serious enemies and no allies among the house's elders.

## Friends and Caretakers

Dynastic children spend most of their time with servants and tutors. Servants teach them proper behavior, respect for their elders, the concept of loyalty to the house and so on. They provide the basics on which all of the other tutors and teachers build.

A child's wet nurse, who takes charge of him immediately after birth, will usually stay with the child until he leaves for boarding school. As he grows, he'll acquire an assortment of other caretakers. In some of the less well-off houses, children might have only two caretakers; in wealthier ones, they could have up to six. The preference is more rather than less — it is believed that the more caretakers a child has, the less likely he is to become emotionally attached to any of them. Emotional attachments to servants are strongly discouraged. House Cynis goes so far as to send a child's wet nurse away after the first year and to move servants around from child to child every two to three years. The only constant is the child's tutor.

Children don't have much free time in which to play, but they are encouraged to develop bonds with

other children in their house. Children of the same age are sometimes tutored together and might also be allowed to take meals together and even sleep in the same room. It is believed that this helps to encourage house loyalty. However, they are also encouraged to compete. They're each pushed separately to do better than the other, and some households go so far as to punish a child who falls behind his peer.

### Early Education

Dynastic children aren't shipped off to boarding school until their ninth birthdays, and there's plenty they can learn before then. The children go through an exercise regimen each day designed to teach them the basics of coordination and strength and to teach them how to endure discomfort and physical stress.

They're usually taught a second language during these early years. Which one depends on where they live — it's often something useful to their daily lives. They're also taught the basics of survival or how to sail if they live in the islands. If they live in a coastal area of the Realm, they probably learn both. Most learn to ride horses.

Children are taught enough self-defense to be able to protect themselves a little; the emphasis is usually on getting away from their attackers and calling for help. Houses with a strong military emphasis, such as Cathak, Ragara, Tepet and Peleps, often teach the basics of the martial arts and archery during these early years. This isn't to say that there are seven year olds running around capable of beating up adults, but they learn enough that later lessons come more easily to them.

Children do play games with each other, including Gateway, but children's games are always designed to teach them something. That something might be as simple as hand-eye coordination, endurance or strength or as complex as strategic thinking or philosophical concepts, but the lesson is always there.

Many Dynastic children are taught to sing or to play a musical instrument with at least minimal skill — enough so that their parents can show them off without being embarrassed. Ragara, Tepet, Cynis, Sesus and Cathak in particular value these skills.

Dynastic children raised outside of the Realm proper are often taught the basics of how to live off of the land. Human family members take the children out into the countryside and teach them which plants are edible, which animals are dangerous and how to stay warm or cool when necessary. The children might also be taught a little about hunting.

Small children are rarely bored with long, convoluted accounts of geography, history, religion, spirits and other cultures. These are usually considered the province of the schools. They are, however, taught enough to understand a little of their own house's political situation.

#### Gateway

Almost every Dynastic child is taught the intricacies of Gateway, a complex, strategy-based game involving a tiered board, pieces (usually made of gemstones, ivory or metals, but some cheap sets are made of wood) shaped like animals from around the Realm and beyond and days or even weeks of game-play. Gateway is also played at the social parties of the adults, as well as the various schools the child will attend, so a child who does not learn it is viewed as backward at best. Gateway is thought to develop a child's complex thinking skills, as well as his understanding of strategy. It can be played by two to five people.

The Gateway board and pieces can also be used for other games. The three most popular are Hunting Cat, Guardian Gate and Spirit-Frog. Hunting Cat is a short, aggressive game for two to six players. Guardian Gate is a defensive Gateway variant that takes more time than Hunting Cat but less than Gateway. It is one of the few variants that allows teaming up, making alliances and deals and back-stabbing. Spirit-Frog is an odd, allegorical one-person game used to teach children basic philosophical and religious concepts.

## Education

Schools do a great deal to shape future Dragon-Blooded and the unExalted family that supports them. Because of this, much is expected of the schools. They are expensive and exclusive, and they are always overseen by the Exalted in some capacity or another.

While it is possible for a Dragon-Blooded child to be schooled at home, it is almost never done. A few households have tried it and found that their children had an extremely difficult time being accepted into society. They are inevitably behind their peers in terms of ability and experience and lack the connections necessary to get the positions they want.

### Primary Schools

Primary schools can be found in every prefecture and in almost every major city on the Blessed Isle. A few can even be found in the Threshold, although these generally do not have the resources of their sister-schools in the Realm. Members of the satrapial administrations typically send their children to the Blessed Isle for education. Sometimes, schools in the Realm organize "field trips" to



these foreign schools, to give the children a comparatively safe look at the Threshold.

Each school teaches a certain basic curriculum mandated by the government. This curriculum includes: archery, bare-fisted fighting and self-defense, sword-play, athletics, history, geography, government and politics, religion and philosophy and spirit lore. This isn't to say that every student will excel in every field. Students couldn't possibly take every class offered, and even if they did they wouldn't get top marks in each one. In addition to the basic curriculum, students must usually complete at least one advanced course on combat skills, one on government and politics and one on religion and philosophy, to prepare them for their lives as Dragon-Bloods.

Students cannot be failed out of a primary school, although children who cause real and constant disruptions may be returned to their families. These children are often readmitted to another school once their family teaches them the error of their behavior.

Depending on the school, other courses may be offered as well. Primary schools are not as specialized as secondary schools, but are not entirely generic. To achieve favor from various houses, the earliest schools that the Empress authorized found it necessary to compete for the best instructors. Each school discovered that the best way to attract the most skilled professors was to specialize in particular fields of study; that specialization brought the most talented scholars in the school's favored field to that school. A child who goes to one sort of school, however, can still easily go on to a career in a different field — the specialized curriculum is meant to give the child color, not to preeducate him in a profession. Some secondary schools prefer to take students with widely varying backgrounds; they believe the practice makes the educational experience richer for everyone.

Some schools specialize in outdoor activities, such as hunting, tracking, forestry, mining, farming, riding, sailing, skilled labor, ecology and so on. These are the less expensive schools and are usually attended by the children of lesser Dragon-Blooded. Eagle's Launch, Traiter and Bright Obelisk house the only schools of this nature.

Other schools specialize in politics and government. They offer entire courses on the Thousand Scales bureaucracy, the Deliberative and relations with Threshold provinces. These schools teach the history of the Realm, the satrapy system and the finer details of cultures in provinces the Realm is allied with. Parents who have high hopes for a political career for their children usually send them to these schools. The Imperial City, Lord's Crossing and Juche are home to three of the best-known political schools: Ilicar Academy in Imperial

City, Immaculate Preparatory Institute in Lord's Crossing and the Chestnut School in Juche.

There are also military-oriented schools. These institutions traditionally teach basic strategy, tactics and military history, as well as simple physical combat. Their history courses concentrate on the Realm's victories and defeats — and how they were achieved. The best military schools can be found in Noble, Chanos and Arjuf. Several Ragara generals have been known to teach semester-long courses at the Chanos school, which makes it very popular.

Still other schools emphasize lore and learning. These academies teach languages from far-off places, the rules of distant spirit courts, the intricacies of philosophy, religion and history, the basics of medicine and first aid and so on. Some parents believe that these schools prepare Dynastic children for the widest range of possible professions, and thus, these schools are very popular. The best of these schools are found in Eagle's Launch, Cloaka, Sion and Portee.

The last type of school emphasizes artistic ability and working with one's hands. Children who attend these schools might be taught the basics of architecture along with music, sculpture, painting and glass blowing. The best such school is the Gournay Academy in Tuchara, and it has a long waiting list. Other well-known artisan-schools can be found in Blackwater and Juche. Artistic ability is highly valued among Dynastic children, although few parents want their children to make a living in the field.

Typically, about one-third of the classes in primary school are "dabbling" courses. This means that the students spend one or two classes each term on various sub-topics within a field. For example, an artisanry course at a military school might cover glass blowing one week and blacksmithing the next. These classes aren't intended to teach the skill to the students. They're intended to give them a realistic view of what the skill entails and what concerns the workers have. This knowledge helps the child make better decisions later, both regarding his own career path and that of those who work for him.

### Experienced Teachers

Some schools give the parents of Dynastic children steep discounts in tuition if one or both of them will teach a course at the school for a term or two. Schools don't do this randomly — they only make this offer to parents who have skills and perspectives worth the cost. The institutions also make certain that the parents are never teaching at the school at the same time that their children are attending.

### Secondary Schools

By the time they're ready for their six years of secondary school, the Dragon-Blooded have had their Exaltation. They're no longer distracted by the worry of whether they'll disappoint their parents or whether the bully in the next room over will Exalt first and make their lives even worse. It's time to get down to the real work.

Most of the secondary schools have long waiting lists, so parents typically start the application process long before their child finishes primary school. Not everyone gets into secondary school, and some drop out without finishing. There is a certain stigma attached to the failure to graduate; such Dragon-Blooded are considered inferior, less capable and less able to handle the rigors of life.

It's during secondary school that many Dragon-Blooded meet and make their closest friends. These are the people that they adventure with after they leave school. Often, these individuals become political allies, lovers and hunting companions. Even if they don't stay close, they might do favors for each other now and then.

More information on secondary schooling is included on page 122 of this chapter, in the section under "Dragon-Blooded Schooling."

## Coming of Age

When a Dragon-Blooded graduates from secondary school, she is considered to have come of age. She is officially an adult and a member of her house. This recognition brings with it both responsibilities and freedoms previously unexperienced. It is probably the first time that the Exalt has been allowed to truly make her own important decisions, and there's no slow, gradual transition.

### Dropouts

Dropouts from the secondary schools are generally not offered posts of importance in the Imperial Service. However, if the dropout takes a less important post or otherwise picks up a profession that stays within the Dragon-Blooded purview, then the child's parents do not ignore him. They might fail to invite him to parties where there will be important people, but they do treat him as family.

More dropouts choose to travel and socialize instead, particularly if they believe themselves to be capable people — if they make a name for themselves out in the world, then their lack of a degree can be overlooked. These are the dropouts who might actually get somewhere, who are accepted by their peers (assuming they do well in their travels) and who end up being accepted by their families. This route is the one most Dragon-Blooded dropouts take.

### After School

Graduates usually make their official home with their house. They may choose to live with their parents, but

many more go off to live with other house members. Dynastic parents promote this to broaden their children's experiences and keep them from falling back into childhood habits. The status of the relatives who offer up their homes depends on how well the child did in school and how promising her future looks.

While the graduate can return to live with those relatives at any time, an ambitious young Dynast has little time for such coddling. She will have a job and often an apartment (termed a "day home"), which could be in another city entirely, though rarely one more than a few days from the home she has chosen.

A Dragon-Blood may choose to take a sabbatical before the job she has been offered starts. Those Exalts who do take sabbaticals spend two or more years lazing about and enjoying high society, learning things not taught at school, traveling or adventuring. It is expected that most graduates will do this, and those who offer positions to graduating Dragon-Blooded take this into account.

Most sabbaticals involve wide travel, visiting distant lands, meeting influential people and involving oneself in all the excitement one can handle. Travel is recognized as a very enlightening occupation for a young Dragon-Blooded and is highly approved of. A young Exalt is only considered to be wasting her talent and time if she occupies more than 30 or 40 years on these adventures. However, if she noticeably furthers her house's interests during her travels, then she will be allowed to travel as long as she likes without protest.

If the Dragon-Blooded skips her sabbatical to stay with her house and immediately take a position, then she involves herself in the intricacies of high society right away. Young Exalted focus their energies on the hunt, late-night games of Gateway, pleasure-sailing and the maneuverings of the imperial court. Exalted who skip their sabbaticals have more contacts in the Imperial City than their traveling brethren, and they often have the ear of various officials. These Dragon-Bloods haven't had as much practical experience out in the world, however, and their views and skills are more narrowly focused. They've a leg up in the political world, but their more worldly cousins often consider them stodgy and narrow-minded.

Those Dragon-Blooded who immediately move into military careers fall between the two groups described above. Through maneuvers and campaigning, they experience some of the same travels as their more adventurous cousins. They're often stationed for some time in a single city, however, so they also have the chance to get involved in society circles and to make long-term contacts. Since they're housed in barracks most of the time with other military personnel, they don't have a home with their house. They are, however, welcome to spend time with any members of their house who live in whatever city they're currently posted in. Many officers take frequent leave to attend to familial matters.

Dragon-Blooded who move into military careers right away also make more friends and allies among the patricians than do other Dragon-Blooded. They work constantly and closely with the unExalted; it takes a very arrogant or disconnected Dragon-Blooded to avoid making any ties or friendships during this time.

### Dragon-Blooded Society

The normal unit of Dragon-Blooded society is the household. This is a husband and wife or a single senior individual who acts as the head of the household. If the household is located in a Manse (all the better ones are), one of these individuals will bear the Hearthstone by right, but it can be loaned out, typically to children or relatives in need. Also part of this household are any of the family's children, either those too young to attend primary school or older children on holiday from school. Finally, a household will generally include one or more Dragon-Blooded who have graduated from (or washed out of) secondary school and are living away from home but haven't set up households of their own. These cousins or nieces and nephews can vary in age from freshly graduated to quite old, and some may have their own offspring. These loosely related Dragon-Blooded see to household security, help raise the children, hunt and train for battle and socialize with members of other houses to further their house's image. How long a Dragon-Blood remains with the household depends on what sort of relationship he develops with the mistress of the household. Add to this the unExalted family members living on the premises and the assortment of tutors, slaves, bodyguards, functionaries and servants, and even minor households can grow quite large.

### Income

Newly graduated (and freshly washed-out) Dragon-Blooded get a "family income" through their house. Before the Empress disappeared, this stipend was usually enough to support a young Dragon-Blooded with modest expenses. Today, it is barely enough to set them up with an apartment, food, clothing and all the amenities in a typical city. It is, however, more than enough for a traveler who wishes to camp out under the stars sometimes.

Dragon-Blooded who choose travel and adventure after graduating often find that this money is enough to support them in a spare lifestyle. They supplement their income by taking food and items from others or by performing suitably impressive tasks for payment. No self-respecting Dragon-Blooded will engage in acts of mere menial labor to earn money; the Terrestrial Exalted are willing to help set the piers for a great bridge, but they would never dig ditches.

Those who go into the military straight out of secondary school are well taken care of. Housing, clothing and simple meals are paid for by whoever sponsors the legion. Dynasts use their family income to pay for particularly good weapons or armor, for gifts for distant family or potentates they're visiting or for fancy clothing for society parties. Many military Exalted save up their family income against a future day when they might choose to move into a less active position or when they have a family of their own to provide for.

Dragon-Blooded who immediately go into jobs and find homes supplement their family income with their personal salary. The family income allows them to either live beyond the means of their position or to save up. Most Dragon-Blooded use it to suitably attire themselves for parties and gatherings and to throw wild parties for their friends and peers. Typically, the stipends of a given generation of Exalts are under the control of an aunt or uncle; one child of a given generation is given the responsibility of managing the stipends for all of the next generation. House leaders see this as a good way to teach the young how to work with their elders. The uncle or aunt with the purse strings is often better attuned to the competencies and politics of that younger generation than any of his own siblings and cousins, giving him leverage in dealings with both elder and younger Dynasts.

Married Dragon-Blooded receive an increased family income to aid in the support of their spouse and to help pay for the new social responsibilities that come with marriage. Exalted with children who haven't yet come of age receive a further stipend. Also, as each Dragon-Blooded completes another decade of activity that in some way benefits her house, she typically receives an increase in her stipend. The idea is that those Dragon-Blooded who best serve their house will receive the most from it and that older Dragon-Blooded, who have more responsibilities and are expected to throw more parties and host more guests, will have more income with which to do it. By the time a Dragon-Blooded is a couple of centuries old, she normally receives a fairly substantial income from her house.

Dropouts who turn their backs on their family responsibilities receive no stipend. If they ever prove themselves useful to their house, this may change, but otherwise, they have to find their own way. Particularly soft-hearted Dynasts argue that these are precisely the people who are most in need of a supplementary income, and a few generous parents successfully argue their child's case with the Exalt responsible for the child's stipend. But by and large, these Dragon-Blooded must fend for themselves.

Dragon-Blooded do not count on inheritances. Their parents tend to live so long and beget so many offspring that inheritances are rare and generally insignificant. When there is an inheritance, half of it goes to the spouse or eldest Dragon-Blooded child. Another 40 percent is divided between all remaining Dragon-Blooded children. The final 10 percent is divided up between all mortal children.

### Inheritance & Wills

In theory, a Dragon-Blooded may leave behind a will that overrides the official inheritance percentages. In practice, most wills are conveniently lost or damaged, while others are blatantly ignored. If the will slights a Dragon-Blooded in favor of a patrician, most imperial judges will take any half-formed excuse to rule it invalid.

## Society

Society with a capital "S" comes in three main parts: parties and salons, visits and public celebrations. Dragon-Blooded are expected to participate in all of these events, and the Dynasts usually make political contacts and wrangle contracts and votes in these settings.

Large parties (referred to as "galas") usually involve all of the Dragon-Blooded of a city or region, and to fail to invite someone can be seen as a grave insult. Because of this, if a host doesn't wish someone to attend, she'll do her best to either throw the party when he'll be traveling or to arrange something to delay him from arriving. This makes it almost impossible to snub several nobles at once; it is said that the Empress preferred this state of affairs, as it kept the Dragon-Blooded more worried about measuring their social status than interfering with her rule. Galas usually begin in the early afternoon and continue until the wee hours of the morning, although some last for several days. Wedding galas are a particularly important type of gala; they are detailed on page 113, under "Marriage."

Galas can include important local or visiting patricians; such invitations are treasured among the patrician class and lead to years of stories. Attending a gala is an exciting event, one that comes with amazing sights and experiences. Servants may even be allowed to take leftovers home, an act of generosity that allows those commoners to feed their families for a week. Cynis parties are entirely staffed by slaves, allowing Cynis to do anything at all to them without worry of upsetting someone.



Smaller parties usually involve anyone related to the event being commemorated. A birthday party, for example, would include the Dragon-Blooded whose birthday is being celebrated, any local house members, any distant house members who are important or close to the honored Dragon-Blooded, the Exalt's betrothed and his family and any important house allies. "Related to" is often interpreted loosely to include anyone the family is trying to impress or make an alliance with.

Salons can be brunch or afternoon affairs, or they can last for several days. It is not uncommon for five or ten local Dragon-Blooded of a similar age to spend the weekend together, usually bringing their lovers as well. They discuss poetry, talk about the latest measures going through the Deliberative, take drugs, play romantic and political games or simply go hunting together and play Gateway for days on end.

Visits occur when one Dragon-Blooded visits another's home for circumstances other than a party. These events combine an odd mix of formality and camaraderie. The host always brings out his best food, and the entire household is called together for the meal. Traditionally, it's considered crass to talk about business at any point in the day before the diners finish their main meal; conversation prior to that point is filled with details about whose child got into which academy, what the crops have been like this year and how the visitor's trip was. Of course, plenty of these details are useful and can say quite a bit to an experienced ear, but the fiction of irrelevant and friendly conversation must be maintained.

In theory, all Dragon-Blooded are supposed to play host to any other Dragon-Blooded who visit without complaint. The visitor never pays for her room or the food or for any other normal resources she uses during her stay. In practice, if a visitor stays for longer than two weeks, she is expected to present her hosts with goods that more or less make up for the cost of housing her (a "visitor's gift"). Close friends are not expected to provide a visitor's gift, but they often bring gifts of lesser value in thanks.

The host cannot ask for or insist on a visitor's gift, but it is considered acceptable to find an excuse to turn out a visitor who does not provide it. Reasonable excuses include home renovations, closing down a seasonal home as the weather changes, arranging for an event that needs the visitor's attention or any other seemingly "unavoidable" circumstance. The expectation of a visitor's gift from long-term visitors is such a deeply held tradition that visitors who try to take advantage of the hosting tradition can find their own houses manufacturing reasons for them to come home.

Public celebrations can be sponsored by either patricians or Dragon-Blooded. Since anyone may attend a public celebration, however, Dragon-Blooded usually disdain to put any effort into them. Thus, the unExalted

### Hosting Obligations

In practice, Dragon-Blooded who have never been married are almost never expected to play host except in times of necessity. Necessity could refer to a Dragon-Blooded who is traveling through an area and simply has no other shelter he can make use of, or it could mean that the visiting Dragon-Blooded has urgent business with the single Dragon-Blooded and, thus, must visit her.

If the single Dragon-Blooded has made his home with other members of his house, then the head of the household is considered to be the host. Dragon-Blooded who have at one time been married are considered married for the purposes of the hosting tradition.

An unmarried Dragon-Blood may choose to extend an invitation to anyone she likes, in which case, she is expected to obey the usual hosting traditions with regard to that guest. Several cities contain coteries of young Dragon-Blooded whose anchors are older Exalted that never married; these coteries often act as surrogate families for the elder, and in many cases, that elder acts as a married host would and is treated appropriately by the rest of the family.

typically organize them. The meals at public celebrations are less fancy, the dress less elaborate, and most Dragon-Blooded behave themselves a little better since they're in the public eye. A public celebration could be as short as a day-long parade or as long as a two-week festival; most last around three days.

Parties can range from wild Cynis orgies to week-long Ragara Gateway tournaments with wines, the best delicacies and the most popular poets. Nellens likes to include gladiatorial contests. House V'neef is best known for its drunken revels and for including patricians of all sorts in its festivities — this keeps them from having many Dragon-Blooded attendees, but makes the house all sorts of friends in other places. Tepet has long been renowned for the beauty of its parties. Tepet hires the best actors to put on plays or the best musicians and composers to perform original works of music, and it lavishly appoints the venue. Unfortunately, the house has had to curtail such activities since the loss of its legions and, with them, Tepet's best and brightest.

Mnemon celebrations always seem to include some reminder of the Immaculate Dragons and the Immaculate Philosophy. Often, this takes the form of elaborate pageants designed to remind people of their place and duties in the Immaculate view of Creation. These reminders are always spectacular and entertaining, however, so most partygoers don't feel like they're being preached to. Mnemon parties are guaranteed to include powerful and important guests, so people politick, wrangle, beg and plead to be invited.

Ledaal tends not to throw as many parties as the other houses, but it isn't left out entirely. Most of its parties are smaller, more private affairs and include hunting, small gladiatorial games and complex contests of wit. Most Peleps parties take place on the water in one of the house's pleasure yachts. Peleps guests hunt for particularly elusive or dangerous sea-prey. No one really cares if they succeed — the excitement of the chase is considered enough. In the meantime, storytellers give dramatic performances, guests eat delicacies of all sorts, and some impressive vote collecting occurs; Peleps parties have what some might consider undue influence over the activities of the Deliberative.

### Invitations

Patricians in political positions will go to great lengths to acquire invitations to a Dragon-Blooded party. In the case of Cynis orgies and Nellens gatherings, this is not difficult. In the case of Mnemon's legendary power-parties, wrangling an invite can be almost impossible. In Realm Year 736, a patrician imperial judge by the name of Rain Mask saved the life of Mnemon Rena when the Exalt was attacked while sleeping. Mask discharged the entirety of the life-debt in return for an invitation to a Mnemon pageant. It was worth it — the contacts he made that night caused his career to soar. The invitation was considered such an honor that Mask continued to do small favors for Rena for years afterward.

## Sworn Brotherhoods

Dragon-Blooded often become involved in sworn brotherhoods (also known as bonded circles) similar to the Circles of the Solar Exalted. These are not predestined groupings, however, but matters of mutual friendship and loyalty. Members of elite troops form many brotherhoods; the situations they find themselves in foster strong feelings of loyalty and respect. Others are formed by friends who meet in school and wish to continue on together or by Dragon-Blooded who have become close through other circumstances.

The bonded circle is formed through the use of Terrestrial Circle Sorcery (see page 161). It is both a mystical and

a social bond, joined with oaths of mutual service and protection. Often, a circle forms for a specific purpose, and oaths are taken regarding that purpose.

The sworn purpose of a brotherhood can be vague or specific, idealistic or practical. Those that are vague can be creatively interpreted to include or exclude whatever the group wants but also sometimes leave the members feeling that they have to intervene in matters that they might otherwise prefer to stay out of. Narrow purposes are less open to interpretation but also include a smaller range of responsibilities.

Possible purposes include: the protection of a prefecture or province, the hunting and slaying of Anathema, the betterment of the Realm, the discovery of ancient secrets and lore, the spread of the Immaculate Philosophy, the destruction of harmful spirits, the protection of the helpless and so on.

The Empress encouraged the formation of sworn brotherhoods. Once every five years, she publicly honored a brotherhood that had done something particularly noteworthy in service to the Realm, and she instructed the stipend-masters of the houses of those involved to give small increases to the family income of the brotherhood members. After all, not only do most brotherhoods wander around doing good things for the Realm for little reward, but they usually cross house boundaries. This complicates house loyalties and results in Dragon-Blooded whose first loyalty is not necessarily to their house. This helps to keep any one house from becoming too strong and, thus helped the Empress to maintain her position.

Depending on a citizen's particular experiences with past brotherhoods, he might passionately despise them, laud them as godlike and noble or guardedly approve of them. Brotherhoods do noteworthy things, and not everyone loves their actions. Many citizens of the Realm have strong feelings one way or another regarding the sworn brotherhoods and their habit of involving themselves in other people's problems. A village that was saved from a river dragon by a brotherhood will surely give free room and board — and anything else it can possibly afford — to any brotherhood that passes through. A village whose "heretical" altar was burned and whose favorite Little God torn asunder might shut its doors to any brotherhood it sees.

Not all brotherhoods are equal. Some do their research, make sure they know what's going on and do a good job according to their beliefs. Others make hasty decisions and step in wherever they think they can make their mark, regardless of the situation at hand. Some brotherhoods work for idealistic goals; others work for recognition and reputation and the hope of being recognized by the Empress for their work. Still others just want an excuse to travel and do whatever they want with a few good friends to watch their backs. A brotherhood can range from a band of heroes to a group of glorified brigands.

Brotherhoods usually stay together for at least 10 years. A very few have stayed together for several centuries. Brotherhoods disband by mutual agreement — this often takes place when one or more members of the brotherhood find themselves elevated to positions of authority from which they cannot travel the Blessed Isle or when one of their number dies. The first step in the disbanding of a sworn brotherhood is a mystical sundering of the oath all swore when the group first formed. Afterward, most brotherhoods individually inform their houses that they will no longer act as traveling companions; some hire heralds or messengers to pass that word along to large cities where they have received acclaim in the past. Even once they officially disband, most brotherhoods stay in touch. The sort of closeness engendered by the experiences a brotherhood goes through is not easily dispelled. These Dragon-Blooded often become political allies, arrange for their children to marry each other, do favors for one another, attend parties together and just generally support each other. Some eventually retire together, living out their last decades together or going out once more as a brotherhood to die in a last heroic effort.

A few brotherhoods end badly, breaking up with vicious feelings of betrayal and anger. It is said among the Dragon-Blooded that the best friends make for the best enemies, and this is just as true among the sworn brotherhoods. Not all members of all brotherhoods have the same ideas of what they want to do with their lives, and all it takes is one closet idealist among bullies (or vice versa) to turn everything bad.

## Adventure & Responsibility

"Adventure" is considered a proper part of a Dragon-Blooded's life. There is much good that can be done for the Realm through the impulse for individual heroism. Sworn brotherhoods are just one official channel for this desire; many Dynasts choose to adventure without the formality of a brotherhood behind them. Individually or in small groups, the Dragon-Blooded travel, experience the world, meet people and learn where their preferences lie in matters from swordplay to sexual position.

The Dragon-Blooded live for a long time. Although it's entirely possible for them to change jobs and even careers midstream, completely leaving behind their power structure and supporters is difficult. It's best if the Dynasts learn ahead of time what they want to do with their lives, at least in a general sense. Adventure and exploration help this process and ensure that Dynasts enter their careers with a more educated view of the world.

Most Dynasts are expected to settle down eventually — they have responsibilities, and those include marriage, children, the support of their house and the use of their

influence to back their house's schemes. It is not unheard of, however, for a Dynast to juggle adventure with responsibilities. Spouses who don't love each other, after all, don't need to live together all the time. Some spouses actually adventure together. As Dragon-Blooded spend very little time with their children, it doesn't take much time out of adventuring to have a child now and then. Adventuring can easily support the Exalt's house, as long as the Dragon-Blooded keeps his house's aims and goals in mind as he chooses his path.

Indeed, some Dragon-Blooded further their own political careers in this fashion, spending decades adventuring with a brotherhood (be it formal or informal). It is a small step from adventurous roaming through the Realm and Threshold to taking the same kind of action on behalf of the Scarlet Throne. Such groups work as archons or the agents of other groups and, depending on their prestige, might outrank local satraps in matters of imperial security.

Even Dynasts who settle down and take on sedentary political careers often go out for weeks here and there to adventure. Many use the protection of villages or prefectures under the control of their house as an excuse to get out and take in a little excitement. Others take "vacations" to outlying provinces in the Threshold, traveling to locations of unrest and upheaval. Those with some military background take temporary positions with brief military campaigns or exercises, those without it simply cause trouble. Most satraps and prefects try to keep in mind the fact that up to 100 Dragon-Blooded of varying power, interests and influence may turn up independently of one another in response to local crises.

## Keeping in Touch

Dragon-Blooded are encouraged by their families to keep in touch with their houses after they've come of age. This helps both the young members of the house and the house itself. It is not uncommon for traveling Dragon-Blooded to take the time to send regular missives to their families, often via the Imperial Post or Immaculate monks they meet during their travels. Others use family members, servants of the family, Charms, spells, Hearthstones, Guild caravans or even friendly spirits who owe the Dynasts a boon.

For the young Dynasts, the more they can convince their families that they're helping out in the grand scheme of things, the more they're likely to get the regular increase in family income. They're also more likely to get aid in other forms during their travels. If they tell their parents that they're traveling to Juche, it gives their parents a chance to tell them that they have cousins in Juche who would be happy to put them up for a while — or have a history of stabbing family members in the back. If the young Dragon-Bloods explain that they'll be dealing with a particular spirit court, a family member might pass on a token that will give them safe passage. If they explain about their upcoming court battle with another Dynast, it gives their family the chance to decide whether or not to intervene.

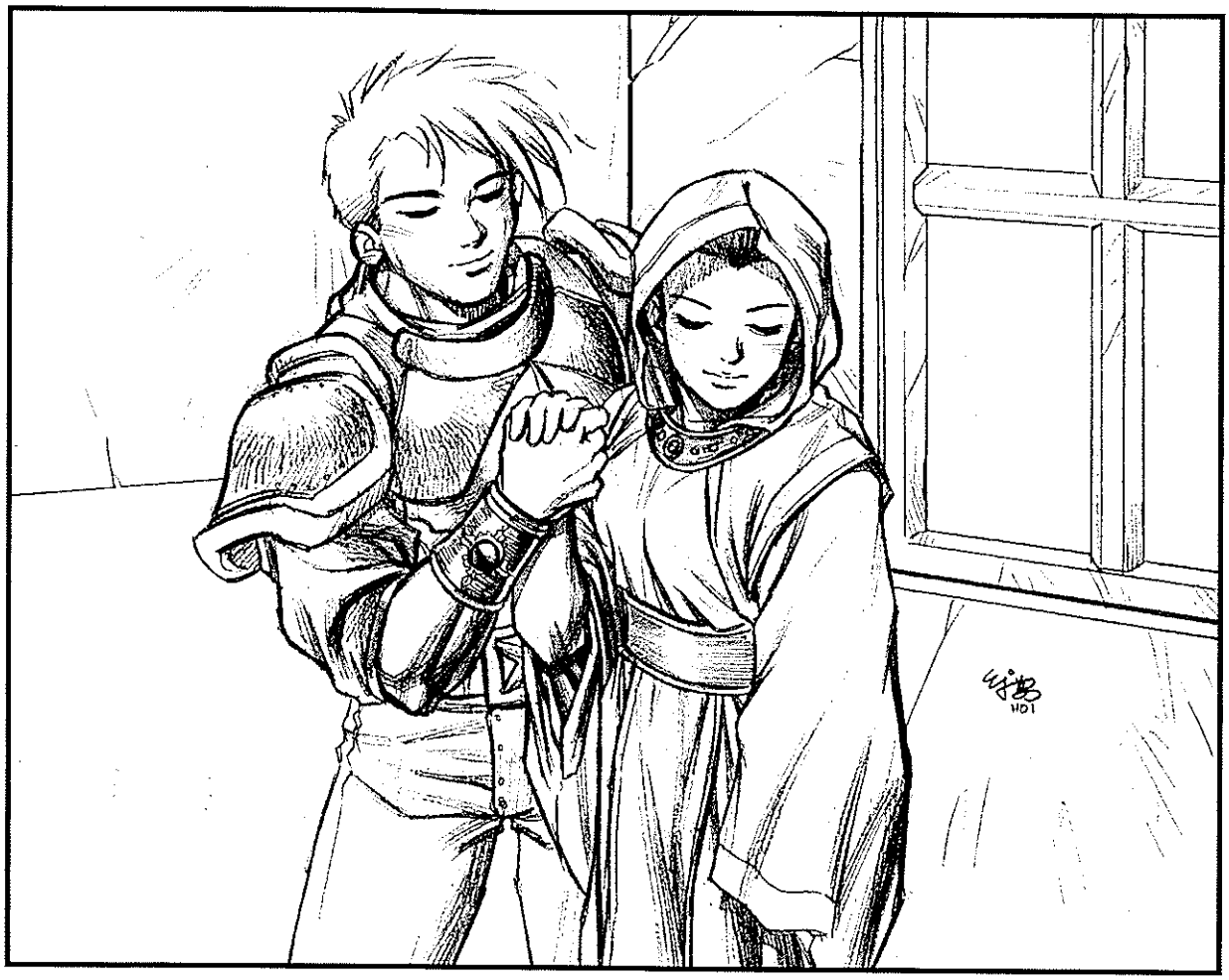
For the families, they gain knowledge of goings-on in distant provinces. They know what contacts and relationships their children have to call upon in times of need. They have tales of their offspring's derring-do with which to impress friends and political allies. They have the option of trying to shape their children through how they choose to help (or choose not to help).

### Calibration Venturing

A tradition has started up over the last 200 years. Each time Calibration rolls around, bad things seem to happen around the Realm. Even when monsters don't mysteriously attack and disasters don't befall the populace, the sheer level of superstition surrounding the time causes everyone to go a little crazy. Because of this fact, various houses indulge in a tradition called "Calibration Venturing" for those five days. Ragara first started the tradition, and it has slowly spread from Great House to Great House since then.

Anyone who can be spared gathers together with friends and family and heads out into the countryside. In theory, they wander around keeping people calm, reminding the populace that everything is under control and dealing with any true disasters that happen. In practice, most help to keep the populace under control, some hole up in their hideaways and party, and the remaining few take the opportunity to do a little pillaging of their own.

In some Threshold towns bordering on lands allied to the Realm, people dressed as demons have descended upon the towns during Calibration. They burn the buildings, kill and rape the residents and take whatever they like. Rumor has it they were seen using Dragon-Blooded Charms, but no one is willing to substantiate this claim. Those few peasants who live through the attacks are usually too frightened to speak of them. A number of sworn brotherhoods have promised to travel to these villages during the next Calibration, though the various Dynastic houses are too busy trying to outmaneuver one another for the Throne to worry too much about what is a relatively minor problem in the hinterlands.



Traditionally, such missives are always phrased in neutral terms of what is happening. Few young Dynasts stoop to asking for help or whining about their situation. They're expected to be strong, and they know that if their family chooses to help, it is usually because the family expects to get something out of the deal. While Dynasts carefully phrase their missives so as to subtly evoke the reaction they want from their family, they know that asking outright is one of the surest ways to convince their family not to help.

## Marriage

Marriage is a very important part of a Dragon-Blooded's life. Through marriage, alliances are made and broken. Futures are assured. An up-and-coming Exalt's perceived worth is reflected in the status of his spouse. When Dragon-Blooded marry each other, they're more likely to produce Dragon-Blooded children, and this is seen as both a sacred and a political duty.

The status and placement of one's children can also have a huge effect on one's own career and status. Arranging for a child to enter a key political position is seen as an ideal way to promote one's interests.

### Reasons & Decisions

Marriage is seen as a sacred duty by the Dragon-Blooded, for many reasons. Particularly in these trying times, the Great Houses need all of the alliances they can build, and marriage is one of the surest ways to create an alliance. After all, both sides of the family will want to assure the future of any Dragon-Blooded children who are born, and they can't do that if they're back-stabbing the rest of the immediate family. Marriages also take place to produce children, as well as to legitimize Dynasts' role in society.

Some Dragon-Blooded marry to make alliances for their families. Others marry to get the increased family income that comes from such an event. Some Exalted have children with the intent of creating useful, easily dominated pawns for the centuries to come, while other Dragon-Blooded have children so that they can start up their own household and get out from under the thumb of their families. It's hard to run one's own household without children of both Exalted and mortal status for support. Marriage and children are considered the first step in obtaining freedom for

those Dragon-Blooded who don't enjoy living with their families but don't wish to travel.

Still others choose to marry simply because that's what their families want of them. Parents can have a fair degree of influence over their children, and they often use this influence to bully or manipulate them into getting married. Marriage is almost always a benefit to all parties involved, so there's plenty of reason to push for it.

Many houses, particularly Ragara and Mnemon, distinguish between "coming of age" and true adulthood. Dragon-Blooded can still be considered children, or at least childish, until they've married or agreed to marry. As a result, some members of these houses marry to gain greater respect or to be taken more seriously.

A few Dragon-Blooded do marry for love. Some simply choose to marry someone they love, consequences be damned. Others fall in love with the person their family wants them to marry. After all, courtships and betrothals can last for a long time, even decades. During this time, the families try to make it as easy as possible for the betrothed to get to know and like each other. Most families take care not to betroth Dragon-Blooded who despise each other, so there's at least some good will to parlay into possible love. Also, some Dragon-Blooded who fall in love while at school manage to convince their families that a betrothal to the beloved would be a good idea.

Patricians who marry into a Dragon-Blooded line are expected to provide a wedding gift to the Dynastic family (the patricians often refer to this as "the bribe"). This gift is expected to be lavish and expensive and often includes fine silks, livestock, promises of political favors and jade. When Dragon-Blooded weds Dragon-Blooded, both families provide wedding gifts to each other.

### Marrying Without Permission

Marrying without one's parents' permission is a difficult thing to do and brings with it unpleasant consequences. First, the marriage of a Dragon-Blooded is not a legal marriage unless an imperial judge oversees the ceremony. Few imperial judges will consider wedding a Dragon-Blooded without his parents' permission, particularly if those parents are powerful and the young hothead is not.

A marriage to a peasant is not legal unless three imperial judges sign the paperwork. A few judges are softhearted; others will perform marriages that lack parental approval for their own reasons. Others are greedy and will do it for a great deal of money. Such judges had better acquire protection (political, magical or physical) from the Exalt's parents, however, unless they happen to be suicidal. If neither of the families approves and there are no promises to protect the judges, then the wedding is unlikely to go forward.

No imperial judge would ever wed a Dragon-Blooded and a slave or one of the disenfranchised, even if the family did, for some reason, approve. Such a wedding is considered wholly illegal and could not be performed without a direct dispensation from the Empress and the Deliberative — permission that has never been given.

### Ceremonies

Marriage ceremonies are usually gala events, overseen by both immediate families, at least a few important members of both houses and, depending on the importance of the parents, possibly the local governor and prefect. Both sets of parents contribute to the preparations. Often, a competition develops — each set of parents wants to be in charge of the most important parts of the ceremony or to provide the most lavish and expensive settings.

The judge is usually contracted well in advance. He is paid a fee in jade (agreed upon in advance), and he is invited to remain to sample the wedding fare whether or not he is Dragon-Blooded.

Weddings are not considered religious affairs — they are primarily affairs of politics. Nevertheless, it's traditional to have present at least one priest devoted to the Immaculate Dragon that the house as a whole is associated with. Usually, this priest is a member of the

### Love Among the Outcaste

Dragon-Blooded who are not recognized as Great House members are usually free to marry whomever they like, however they like. This is considered one of the few advantages of dropping out of Dragon-Blooded society. The Exalt still needs to convince three judges to sully their hands with such a ceremony, however, which usually requires a hefty bribe and a bit of shopping around.

### Dowries

A family must be in fairly dire straits to accept the marriage proposal of a mortal to a Dragon-Blooded scion. Even the most respected patrician child of a noble house is less likely to provide a Dynastic house with further Dragon-Blooded heirs than another Dragon-Blooded is. The wedding gift from the parents of the mortal half of the wedding party to the family of the Dragon-Blooded is sure to be lavish, a Resources •••• investment. The wedding gifts from both sides to the happy couple are sure to be considerably smaller, Resources ••• expenditures.

house, and it is traditional for her to stand with the judge during the ceremony.

The couple getting married speaks brief but solemn vows promising to support their families and the Realm. They also vow to do their best to produce Dragon-Blooded children and to raise them to serve the Realm. The ceremony primarily consists, however, of a speech by the judge about the duties and responsibilities of marriage, adulthood and serving the empire. Judges are often chosen based on their speaking skills, and certain judges are constantly in demand for weddings. The priest then blesses the union, and the couple is legally wed.

The ceremony is followed by music, pageantry and poetry. Plays, poems and songs all expound on the subject of marriage and children, and some families expect the couple to perform at least one song or piece of music together. The rest of the day usually passes in a haze of wine, food, gifts and congratulations.

### Length of Marriage

Dragon-Blooded marriages are typically lifelong affairs. There are only a few situations under which divorce is allowable. If the couple has tried to have children for at least two decades and been unable to do so, then the marriage is considered void. If the couple has gone five decades without having children, then the marriage is also voided, whether or not the couple has tried to have children. Special dispensation may be given by the Empress and the Deliberative to allow such spouses to remain married, but it is rarely extended — usually only in cases where both spouses can be proven to be sterile. It only takes one living child every 50 years to keep any of this from being a problem.

A Dragon-Blooded can petition an imperial judge to void his marriage if his spouse is convicted of committing a serious crime such as treason or the murder of an Exalt. He can also petition for an annulment if he can prove that his spouse tried to harm or kill him or one of his underage children. Otherwise, death is the only end to a marriage.

Re-marriage after widowing is considered completely acceptable, particularly since not all Dragon-Blooded marry other Dragon-Blooded. Patricians don't live nearly as long as the Exalted, and the Realm sees it as foolish to remove a Dragon-Blooded from the possibilities of parenthood simply because he married someone short-lived.

### Adultery

Adultery is considered the perfect answer to the fact that most Dragon-Blooded are not allowed to marry people they love. Adultery is not illegal and is not grounds for the voiding of a marriage. Being able to prove that none of the couple's offspring are actually the father's children would be, however, because then he wouldn't have had any children with his wife.

Adultery is an open secret among the Dragon-Blooded. It is socially accepted among them and considered one of the secrets to a happy marriage. Dynasts often take public trips and vacations with their lovers. It is, however, considered appropriate to *pretend* that one is not having an

### Marriage, Names and Homes

When two Dragon-Blooded marry, both keep the name of the houses they were born into. Any children they have take the name of their mother's house and are considered upon their coming of age to be members of that house. The couple may make their home with a household of either house, keep homes with both houses that they occupy at different times (or separately) or may start its own household. When two unExalted Dynasts marry, the situation is similar.

When a Dragon-Blooded marries a patrician, the patrician takes on the name of the Dragon-Blooded's house. The children take the Dragon-Blooded's family name and are considered members of her house. The couple makes its home with the family of the Dragon-Blooded spouse or starts its own household. The patrician spouse may, if he wishes, keep a home with the family he was born into, but the children are expected to live with the Dragon-Blooded parent. A patrician who marries an unExalted Dynast is in a similar situation.

In the unlikely event that a Dragon-Blooded marries a peasant, the peasant keeps his own name and the Dragon-Blooded keeps hers. The children are considered to be of the class and family of the Dragon-Blooded spouse.

Children born out of wedlock belong to the class and family of their mother. If the mother was not Dragon-Blooded and the child Exalts, the Dragon-Blooded parent may choose to publicly admit parentage of the child and adopt her into his class and family. In practice, even the products of good patrician primary schools are seen as backward by Dynast families, so bastard children are generally adopted at birth rather than after having been miseducated for several years. Children who Exalt from the other classes and who are not adopted by a Dragon-Blooded family typically join the military or the Immaculate Order to gain social status.

### Mixed-Breed Marriages

Marriage between Dragon-Blooded and humans can work out well if the marriage is not done for love. Such marriages almost inevitably end in tragedy if the couple is in love. The human is incredibly unlikely to live as long as the Dragon-Blooded, although a few Exalted have found sorceries to extend the lives of their beloveds a little. Three Dragon-Blooded in the history of the Realm have committed suicide on the deaths of their loved ones. Because this act robs the Realm of an important resource, such suicides carry with them a great stigma for any children of the couple, and the couple's estate is fined heavily.

affair. Dropping that public fiction is considered crass at best, although this tradition is another one that house Cynis rarely pays attention to.

Failing to uphold this fiction usually results in a slight loss of status among one's social peers. A Dragon-Blood who passionately kisses his lover on a public street of his hometown, for example, would probably find his friends spending less time with him and doing fewer favors for him. A Dragon-Blood who simply holds hands with his lover, is seen having dinner in a public restaurant with her or kisses her passionately in a foreign land where, *surely*, no one knows that she isn't his wife, however, is unlikely to receive any disapproval.

A spouse is also not expected to raise a fuss over adultery unless his partner is particularly public about it. This act is considered breaking the fiction of faithfulness just as much as a public kiss on the part of the unfaithful spouse. Most spouses simply pretend that their husband or wife isn't having an affair at all, and find their own lovers to enjoy. Because of this, wives often pretend that any children that result from their liaisons are legitimate children from their marriage, with almost no discussion of the truth.

When Dragon-Blooded host parties, they often invite their guests' lovers as well. They go to great lengths making certain quarters are positioned so that lovers can meet discreetly.

## Having Children

Having children, like marriage, is a duty. The Realm needs all the Dragon-Blooded it can get its hands on in order to protect itself, deal with the Anathema and expand its reach. Because Dragon-Blooded are considered to be more spiritually advanced than those of lower castes, the breeding of more Dragon-Blooded is as much a spiritual and religious affair as it is a political one.

### Biology

Dragon-Blooded have a one-year gestational period. The mother shows no visible signs of the pregnancy for the first five months and develops slowly after that. The pregnancy doesn't show enough to physically get in the way of most activities until the 13th month — a fact that is particularly beneficial to those covering up the true parentage in a pregnancy, as described above. Dragon-Blooded tend to be very fit, and their bodies very strong, so mothers often remain physically active until the last few weeks of pregnancy. Mothers whose jobs aren't very physically active may continue to perform them until the final few days. It's unheard of for an Exalt to die during childbirth, though the baby may.

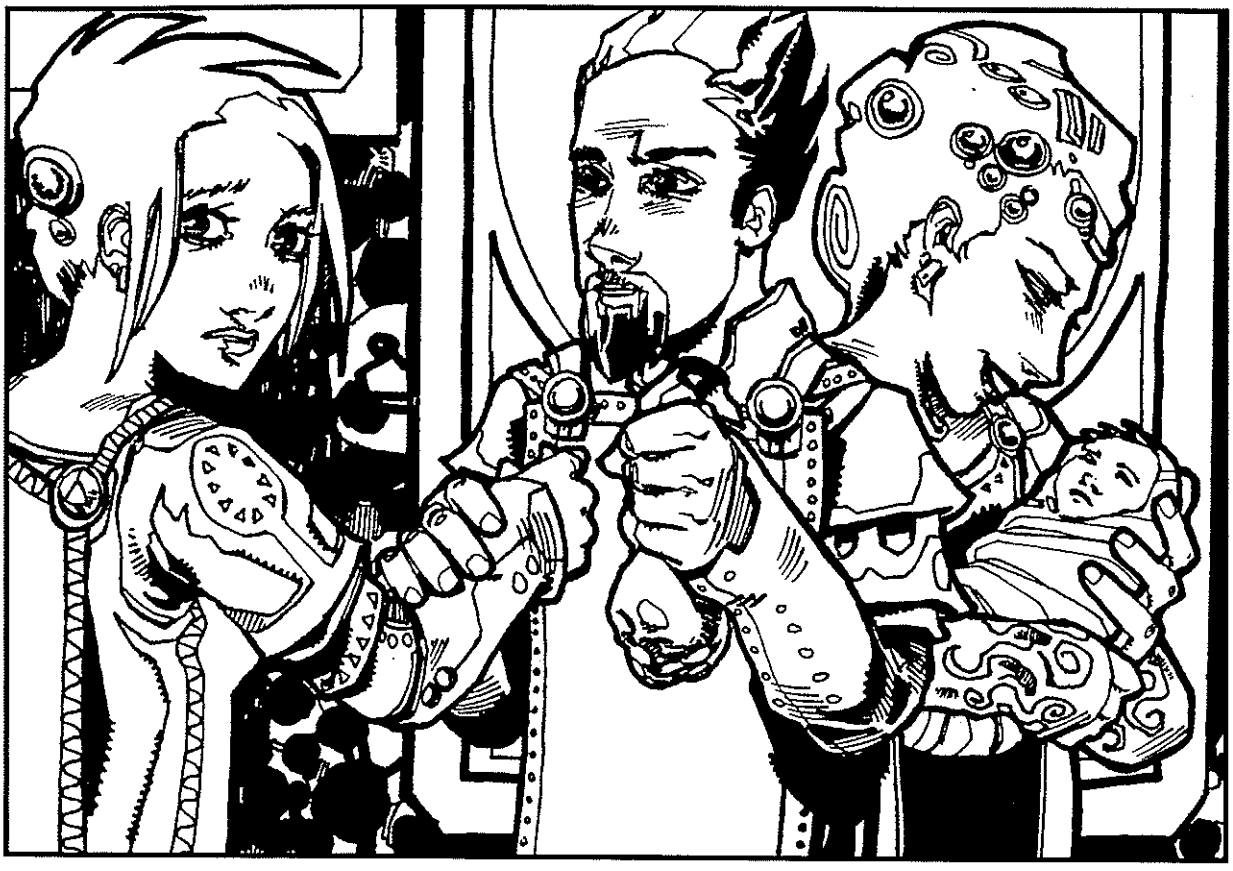
Childbirth is a similar experience to that of a mortal, if a little less painful. It's traditional for the father to be present if the mother is married. The child is handed off to a wet nurse within minutes; it's considered improper to allow mother and child time to bond.

Homosexuality is quite prevalent among the Dragon-Blooded, and it's considered perfectly acceptable for Exalted to take same-sex lovers. If anything, it's easier to do because they don't have to worry about the possibility of unintended conception giving them away. It is not considered appropriate for this predilection to get in the way of a heterosexual marriage and the production of children, however. This is why Dragon-Blooded are not allowed to marry members of the same sex — they wouldn't be fulfilling their duty by having children and increasing the number of Dragon-Blooded.

## When to Have Children

Dragon-Blooded are expected to have children within 50 years of marriage, or their marriage is automatically voided. If they don't have children with 30 years, people tend to gossip. The rumors will fly — which spouse is infertile, which spouse spends too much time and energy on his lover, whether both spouses are trying to hurt their families. It isn't a particularly fun position to be in, so most couples try to have at least one child before then.

Parents take little part in raising their children. Dragon-Blooded tend to be very fit, so childbirth takes very little time out of a parent's life. This means that Dragon-Blooded who might otherwise not want to limit themselves can have children fairly early on in life. Childbearing is



quietly considered to be a burden by some Dragon-Blooded women, who would rather be out traveling or concentrating on their political games, but the social benefits in the long run far outweigh the disadvantages.

It is considered particularly inauspicious to give birth to a child during the Calibration, and even Dragon-Blooded have been heard to whisper that such children are cursed. Because of this belief, Dragon-Bloods go to great lengths to avoid conceiving during or near a Calibration.

Drugs that produce long-term infertility of any kind are frowned upon in Dragon-Blooded society, although they may be used on slaves or peasant lovers. Temporary birth control measures are considered acceptable, particularly when they're used in the proper circumstances — such as to avoid conception during Calibration or with an improper lover or to avoid conceiving too often. Abortion is illegal for a Dragon-Blooded or for a member of a lower caste who bears a Dragon-Blooded's child, even if the child is a product of rape. Both the mother and the person who performed the abortion may be imprisoned or even executed, depending on their castes, the situation and the judge involved. A mother who attempts to get an abortion and fails will be imprisoned, and her child will be seized for adoption once it is born.

## How Often?

Once a couple has had a single child, it no longer has to worry about its marriage being voided. Some naïve couples take this as license to forget about childbearing altogether. However, such a couple discovers that, after a few decades of childlessness, rumors abound that the child it did have wasn't the product of a legitimate coupling. Couples that aren't particularly interested in having children average two to three children per century. The average across the Realm is eight per century — about one every 12 years.

Couples particularly eager to take advantage of the monetary and political gains to be had through children might have them as often as every five years. However, just as the Exalted live longer than mortals, certain biological processes take longer in Exalted than mortals. Female Terrestrials who have children more often than about once every five years tend to suffer from occasional weakness and dizziness, as well as a decreased resistance to illness. As a result, their children will also be weaker and more likely to be born with birth defects — the children may even be less fertile than their peers. There is also an increased risk of the mother's death during childbirth.

Children born to the same Dragon-Blooded mother are rarely children at the same time, and so, they don't tend to have particularly close bonds. None, at least,

### Baby-Swapping

Even though children legally belong to the social class of their mother, Dynastic families go to elaborate lengths to fake the birth of the child of an affair into their family if the mother is a peasant or low-status patrician. For instance, in Realm Year 731, Peleps Zatar brought his pregnant lover into his household as a servant and had his wife, Kidra, pretend to be pregnant, even to the point of isolating herself in her rooms for the last days before birth. When the baby was born, it was presented as the child of Peleps Kidra, and the patrician was allowed to remain as the baby's wet nurse for the first year. The peasant was given money to keep her quiet and promised that her child would be raised with all of the advantages that a peasant child would never have.

This is a common happening among the Dynastic houses; whether the ruse is believed or not is not of great concern. It's more important to see that every potential Exalt is trained as well as possible. As a result, one simply does not comment on the fact that a woman is clearly wearing a pillow and not actually pregnant. Obviously, this is done only if the child has a good bloodline. Likewise, female Dragon-Blooded are expected to know enough to avoid becoming pregnant to lovers of pure mortal breeding.

closer than what they might have with the rest of their extended family of cousins, aunts and uncles.

## Bloodline & Breeding

Bloodline and breeding are very important to the Dragon-Blooded. The more they dilute their bloodlines with human stock, particularly humans who aren't of Dragon-Blooded lineage, the less likely they are to give birth to children who will Exalt. Thus, by breeding with peasants or slaves, they reduce the chances that their children will advance to spiritual harmony. This act is considered foolish at best and cruel at worst.

Parents who produce children of mixed human-Exalt parentage, particularly if their families didn't sanction the marriage, bear a certain stigma. They tend to be seen as impetuous, foolish or selfish. They may be seen as not caring for the family that raised them or the empire that allows them to rule. The stigma is worse for Exalted women because it's another five years before they can breed with a Dragon-Blooded. At least the males aren't actively removing the chance to produce another Dragon-Blooded child.

### Too Many Children

Tepet Lesaral was the only female Dragon-Blooded ever to have succeeded at having one child every two years for 20 years straight without any obvious ill health effects. It is rumored that she achieved this effect through sorcery, but she refused to admit that it was anything other than a natural strength garnered from her emulation of the Earth Dragon. Whatever she did, it took its toll eventually, and she aged much faster than most Dragon-Blooded. She died of old age in Realm Year 757, just 102 years after her birth.

Because having children by poorly bred partners is seen as a mark of bad character, the word of an offending female Dynast is often distrusted and scorned. Her behavior is seen as an embarrassment, and her friends may shun her. Some houses reduce the family income of the offending Dragon-Blooded by the same amount that they would have raised it if she'd had a "proper" child. As a child's behavior is often seen as reflecting upon her parents, some families will go to great lengths to hide their children's indiscretions, applying punishment privately. Should poorly bred children happen to Exalt later in life, this stigma vanishes as quickly as it came.

By contrast, a male Dragon-Blood who sires many children out of wedlock receives no stigma to speak of. It is not as though the children so produced will render him unable to father again for six years, after all; house elders tend to see this as a chance for the father to sow his wild oats. Just as long as he doesn't make his wife wear the pillow too often, the worst he's doing is breeding more lieutenants for the legions.

Officially, the stigma of mixed breeding does not apply directly to children produced by such liaisons; it wasn't their fault, after all, that their parents did something wrong. In practice, however, it does spill over, simply because the reputation of a Dynast is seen to affect the reputation of his children and parents. In some ways, a lack of stigma for breeding improperly is almost worse than the bad treatment — it's a sign that the Exalted parent is of such low rank that no one cares that he bred poorly. The stigma for illegitimacy is even worse should one parent be known to be Anathema, a demon or one of the Fair Folk.

## Responsibilities

Although the Dragon-Blooded spend little time with their children, they are seen as partially responsible for them. If the children are part of their household, then the parents must provide for them. They must feed and

clothe them. They are expected to do their utmost to obtain the best education for their children, particularly as these efforts are seen as investments.

There are no laws preventing child abuse in general, although killing or crippling a Dynastic child who might yet Exalt is a severe crime. It's unusual, however, for parents to hurt their children — they don't spend enough time with them for this to happen, and it would be seen as endangering their investments. They're more likely to harm a slave's child or a peasant's child if they're in an abusive mood. If a servant were to harm a Dragon-Blooded's child, she would be lucky to escape with a dozen lashes, and the imperial judges invariably see this response as justified.

Parents leave their children in the capable hands of servants and mortal family members and otherwise leave them to their own devices within the boundaries set by those custodians. Most houses frown on public displays of affection toward children, and Dynast parents are perfectly comfortable with that.

Parents are expected to keep their children safe. Many Dynastic children have larger contingents of guards when leaving home than their parents do. The imperial courts fine a parent who cannot protect his underage children.

Even after a child comes of age, Dragon-Blooded parents have certain responsibilities. In the child's youth, they have a great deal of influence over the family's stipend-master and, through her, determining the size of the stipend the Exalted receives as a youth. The income comes ultimately from the house, not the immediate household, but the parents have a large say in determining how much the child gets. Parents often use this as a club to get their children to behave, though the generation's stipend-holder is the final arbiter in such matters and should take the house's interests into account as well as the parents.' It is a mark of maturity to have the power and influence to derive enough wealth from direct service to the Scarlet Throne that they can do without a stipend and, thus, exist independent of the house's and one's parents' direct influence.

If their Exalted children wish to stay with them, the parents must provide room, food and reasonable amenities at a moment's notice. They are expected to work to provide their children with a suitable marriage. They're also expected to use their contacts to help their children find work. Children are expected to support their parents in matters related to the house's prosperity, and vice versa. In short, they're expected to do occasional favors for each other at worst and to be political allies at best.

### Disownment

Because children's behavior is seen as reflecting on their parents, parents have high expectations for their children. Some do their best to cover over any indiscretions on their children's part in the hopes that the stigma will pass them over. Others make such indiscretions as public as possible and join in on any public disapproval. In both cases, this is in the hopes that their children will reform to avoid a repeat performance of this treatment and, in the latter case, in the hopes that their public disapproval of their children will help to keep their children's performance from reflecting badly on them.

There are two ways of "disowning" a child. The first is informal and is usually used when a child fails to live up to his duty to support his house. It may be done at any age after a child leaves primary school. This is often done to children who drop out of school, continue their travels well past a reasonable date without getting anything useful to the family out of them or fail to marry and at least attempt to produce children within a century. This might also be done to a child who repeatedly and publicly brings shame and humiliation upon her parents.

The parents simply go about creating a public fiction that the Dragon-Blooded in question isn't their child or in any other way a part of the family. They convince the house to halt the family income, they close their doors to their child, and they treat her as a stranger. This type of disownment is easy to reverse simply by accepting the child as a member of the family again, but traditionally, it is carried on for a span of at least 20 years. The assumption is that if the disappointment or humiliation was great enough to deserve informal disownment, then the child needs to learn a lesson that will last. If the disownment

#### Responsibilities to Human Children

Oddly enough, a parent's responsibilities to her unExalted children are greater than her responsibilities to her Exalted children. Mortal children are considered to be less capable than their Exalted sisters and brothers and, thus, in need of more care. They're also considered to be less of a burden because they lead such comparatively short lives. Dynastic mortal children are assured of always having a place to live, clothing and food. Their basic necessities will always be taken care of. They might even be given jobs around the family, such as tutoring young children. Of course, if they aren't helping to support the family in some way, then they'll be treated little better than servants, so there's an incentive to work hard.

Dynastic parents may only disown unExalted children who are convicted of committing a severe crime, such as the murder of an Exalt or treason. Under no other circumstances may they fail to provide for these children.

lasts for less time, then it's assumed to be frivolous and reflects badly on the parents.

A child who has been informally disowned may not inherit from her parents, and they are freed of any obligations to her during the period of her disownment. Usually, the process is not reversed until the child has proven that she can behave as a responsible adult and contribute to the well-being of the house.

There exists a formal, legal process by which parents may disown their children. It is almost never used. Whichever parent is Exalted must put the process into motion; both parents must agree if they are both Dragon-Blooded. The parents file a motion with an imperial court to have their child declared outcaste. They must have the approval of a senior member of the house to which the child officially belongs. The judge must decide whether or not the case has merit. If it does, then the Empress makes the final verdict — or, in recent years, the Regent does so. This is *never* done lightly, as the process is considered irreversible. It is only done if the child commits a grievous crime or betrays her house or the Realm in some great way.

## Retirement

Even the Dragon-Blooded age and grow tired. Even the Dragon-Blooded retire eventually.

### Retirement Age

There is no set retirement age, as the life span of the Dragon-Blooded varies greatly. It would be foolish to force retirement on one of the Dragon-Blooded before his usefulness to his house or the empire had ended.

Retirement is entirely voluntary, but there are incentives to keep Dragon-Blooded working on behalf of their houses. Once a Dragon-Blooded has retired, his family income will not be increased again, even if he continues to aid the house. For each decade of retirement in which he does not continue at least minimal activities to the benefit of the house, his family income will be reduced. In addition, the retired Dragon-Blooded will, of course, no longer receive a salary for the job he performed. Thus, Dragon-Blooded who have grown accustomed to a high lifestyle and haven't saved up often push back retirement as far as possible. The only thing besides the family income that the house is required to provide is land on which the Dragon-Blooded can live in the rare event that he has no land rights of his own. Particularly wealthy retired Dragon-Blooded might be able to lease land from the Throne on their own terms, without having to deal with the elders of their house, but this is rarely necessary — they've usually gotten favorable leases as a gift from the Empress long ago.

Some few Dragon-Blooded attempt to push their retirement back too far and become a liability to the very house that needed them. Different houses and families have different ways of dealing with this. The Dragon-Blooded



might be given more and more dangerous jobs, until he either gets himself killed through his own senility or decides to back down gracefully. He might be loaded up with more work in an attempt to push him into giving up. Or he might be quietly offered a severance bonus, an under-the-table payment to set him up happily in his retirement. It can be a gamble to try to push one's house into offering this payment, and houses have occasionally chosen to avoid the expense by hiring assassins.

By and large, however, Dragon-Blooded like to save up a bit for retirement and retire before they're entirely worn out. That way they can travel again, spend some time with old friends, study subjects they never got around to learning or get to know family members they never spent time with before. Approximately one-third of adult Dragon-Blooded actually live to retire. The number would be lower due to the dangerous lifestyle they lead, but some Dragon-Blooded retire young. These are usually Exalted who made their mark upon the world early and accrued a fortune for themselves. A decent fraction of these retire into religious service, joining the Immaculate Order and — in theory — divorcing themselves from worldly cares.

It is possible for a Dragon-Blooded to come out of retirement and back into an active life again. Most, however, stay retired unless they're offered a job that they cannot refuse.

### Retirement for UnExalted Dynasts

In theory, unExalted Dynasts may choose to retire any time after age 50. In practice, if they retire for any reason other than extreme illness, noticeable senility or the chance to help the house in newer and better ways, they are ill-treated by their family. UnExalted Dynasts are entitled to housing, clothing, food and a small allowance from their house once they retire.

## What to Do & Where

There is no set agenda for retirement, but there are certain expectations. Dragon-Blooded are expected to relax a little and enjoy themselves. They're also expected to continue using their resources to the benefit of their house. They aren't expected to work constantly at it the way they did before or to be the leaders when their families confront serious problems, but they are expected to maintain at least minimal contact with their allies and those who owe them favors and to use them now and then to the house's benefit. They're also expected to find little ways to use their new lifestyles to benefit their house. They might provide room in their home to wine and dine potential allies or perform introductions for a grandchild to important political figures.

For Dragon-Blooded who absolutely do not want to deal with their houses in retirement, joining an Immaculate monastery is considered one of the very few acceptable options. Others who are willing to do work for their houses from afar have gone traveling, acting as spies or agents, or gone monster hunting in their retirement. There are rare cases of entire sworn brotherhoods getting back together later in life and heading out again to find excitement. These usually consist of those Dragon-Blooded who retire early, for obvious reasons.

Some retirees simply slip gracefully back into the welcoming arms of society life. Their socializing can be considered helping the house, and they get to sit back, sip fine wine and enjoy themselves. Fresh, just-out-of-school Dragon-Blooded refer to these elders as "buzzards." The new adults either go out of their way to avoid the retirees or out of their way to take advantage of them. Some retired Dragon-Blooded enjoy stringing the inexperienced along. They play games with them, letting the young Terrestrials believe for a little while that they're getting what they want and then either ruining the schemes, taking their schemes over or otherwise getting the upper hand.

Other Dragon-Bloods retire to homes out in the country. They relax, breed horses or dogs, explore the countryside and hold lavish parties for old friends. They'll often agree to host and wield their influence at parties for the house in order to be able to keep their lives quiet and undisturbed otherwise. Some houses use visits to these relatives as cover for meetings they don't want discovered.

A few more civic-minded Dragon-Blooded retire in order to devote more time to helping their house in non-job-related ways. Some may retire in order to focus their attention on a promising protégée. This is usually a mixed blessing for the protégée. Her mentor now has more time to devote to her teaching and training, but her mentor also has more time to devote to poking his nose into her business. Such mentors often insist that their students devote as much time to their studies as their mentor devotes to teaching them, and up-and-coming young Dragon-Blooded rarely feel that they have this much free time.

Still other Dynasts retire in order to devote more time to secret or personal projects. They don't want their jobs to get in the way, or they want to work on things someplace where no one can keep an eye on them. These Dragon-Blooded often move out to the Wavecrest Archipelago, to very rural parts of the Blessed Isle or to Threshold provinces allied with the Realm.

## Death

Only about one-third of all Dragon-Blooded die of old age. The rest die in battle, assassination attempts, accidents and almost every other circumstance except illness. Like all Exalts, Dragon-Blooded are far more

### Retirees in the News

There are quite a few retired Dragon-Blooded who still hold a great deal of power in the Realm. Cynis Maral attends all the best parties in the Imperial City. He delights in playing the senile grandfather and letting unsuspecting young Dragon-Blooded scheme to take advantage of him. He still has a mind like a steel trap, and fully one-sixth of the younger Dragon-Blooded in the Imperial City owe him some sort of favor or debt from falling prey to his machinations. Few of those who know better bother to warn the younger ones — if they can't figure it out for themselves, after all, then maybe they need to learn the hard way.

Tepet Velis joined the Immaculate Order upon her retirement in Realm Year 701. She has spent the last six years traveling the Threshold, taking notes on the current state of various spirit courts — their activities, their structure and hierarchy and so on. Rumor has it the Mouth of Peace herself sent Velis on her mission. Velis is now noted as one of the foremost authorities on spirit courts, but her travels make it difficult to speak with her.

resistant to illness than mortals, and few of them die from it unless they're weakened by old age, magic or too-frequent childbirth.

## Funerary Rites

Funerary rites fall into two categories: the practical and the ostentatious. Practical funerary rites are those used when there is no good way to get the Dragon-Blooded's body home. These are usually performed when Dynasts fall in foreign battles. Ostentatious funeral rites are performed for those whose bodies are returned home to their houses. Such rites may also be performed without the body for Dragon-Blooded who died on foreign soil and could not be returned home.

The practical rites (called "field rites") involve, at the very least, saying prayers to the Immaculate Dragons. If the Dragon-Blooded's body could not be retrieved, then this, combined with an all-night vigil, is the entirety of it. If the body was retrieved but returning it home is greatly impractical, then the body is cremated to keep anyone from digging it back up again. The ashes are scattered into the Dragon-Blooded's element, and the vigil is held. Of course, the opportunity to do one or more of these things might not present itself. In this case, the Dragon-Blooded's companions do whatever possible and leave the rest out. They prefer the ritual of things, but survival comes first.

Dragon-Blooded whose bodies are returned to their homes are given lavish, expensive funeral rites. Many Dragon-Blooded gather together to mourn, and funeral rites can last up to a week. Somber pageants depicting great deeds performed by the deceased are performed. If the family knows a talented playwright, it will probably pay him to exaggerate the dead man's deeds; this is considered entirely right and proper to the occasion. Great speeches are given lauding the dead lord's character. It is believed that exaggerating the reputation of the deceased might somehow sway the opinion of the Dragons, causing him to be reborn into a better station in the next life. Additionally, everyone knows that flattering the animal soul helps satiate it and keeps it sleeping peacefully.

All-night vigils are held for the deceased, and some family members make a great show of staying up for days until they pass out from exhaustion, sometimes fasting as well. Funerals are considered a time for displays of piety, accomplishment and wealth. Like all Dragon-Blooded social occasions, they're also times to make contacts and manipulate political situations.

The funerary rites are important to sustaining the soul in its journey to a new life, and so, the Dragon-Blooded perform them for those they love. On a more selfish level, those Dragon-Blooded who devoutly maintain days-long vigils in honor of a deceased relative help to ensure their own places in the next life, and they help to ensure that they themselves will receive equally lavish memorials.

## Legends of Death

Officially, the Dragon-Blooded do not believe in an afterlife for themselves. The Immaculate Philosophy says that their higher souls will be reincarnated again and again, growing spiritually ever closer to the Immaculate Dragons.

In practice, there are all sorts of superstitions. There are little "what if?" questions that people quietly ask themselves. There are odd "normally we reincarnate, unless this, this and this all happen" cases that some of the Dragon-Blooded believe in. These superstitions vary from region to region.

Some Dragon-Blooded believe that it is possible for their spirit to merge with the currents of Essence within their Manse. Of course, this requires that they die there, are cremated there and have their ashes interred there. And no one seems to have an answer for the whispered question — what happens if the Manse is destroyed? There are all sorts of stories of half-glimpsed ghosts of old Dragon-Blooded in Manses — and tales of Essence flows that seem to have a mind of their own — but no proven visitations.

Others say that if a Dragon-Blooded is killed and then his body is taken control of by one of the Deathlords or their servants, his spirit enters a deep, dark underworld. There, he serves the dead gods, and his spirit is trapped forever, never to become one with the Dragons.

### Rites of the Brotherhoods

Members of sworn brotherhoods make each other a promise when they join together — that nothing except death will prevent them from retrieving each other's bodies and making sure that they receive at least full field rites. At one time, entire brotherhoods would be lost trying to retrieve their companions' bodies, leaving no one to return for their own. As a result, a second tradition developed. If a brotherhood had done everything in its power to retrieve its comrades' bodies and it was obvious that it could not succeed without being destroyed, it could, instead, perform a Passage Rite.

This rite requires that the remaining members of the brotherhood perform the basic field rites without the body as soon as possible. Then, they must journey to find a parent, child, spouse, lover or sibling of each deceased, preferably someone the deceased cared deeply about or at least spent a great deal of time with. To that person, they must present five jade talents, any personal items belonging to the deceased and one item of importance to at least one member of the brotherhood. In her presence, they swear to always fight in the name of their fallen comrade and to say a prayer for him at each temple or shrine they enter.

Dynasts who believe in this recent legend work particularly hard to retrieve their comrades' bodies in war. Several monks have heard the Mouth of Peace postulate that this particular tale was started by allies of the Deathlords themselves, in an attempt to spread fear.

Almost all Dragon-Blooded know that an unmourned and uncelebrated soul cannot move on. This is one of the reasons for the popularity of lavish and elaborate funerals. The larger the display, the easier it is for the soul to move on to its proper place. For this reason, some members of the Deliberative have recently suggested that a funeral should be held for the Empress. Otherwise, if she's dead, her soul will be unable to move on along its path.

## Dragon-Blooded Schooling

The key to a well-run empire is in making sure the people who run it do so competently. As such, the culture of the Realm places a huge emphasis on education, for while the Empress spent a great deal of time pitting her various servants against one another, she recognized that there might come a day when all of their efforts and talent would be needed. This ensures that there is a constant stream of well-educated, well-prepared young Dynasts ready to join the machinery of power — and to assure its continued smooth functioning.

However, education in the Realm also serves a social and political function as well. The schools serve simultaneously as badges of station — a graduate of *this* school in the Imperial City will lord it over a graduate of *that* school in Chanos — and as means of association. Given a choice, the graduate of the school in the Imperial City will socialize with classmates and fellow alumni, and the shared bond of time at a school serves as a means of introduction within the numerous agencies and organizations that serve the empire. Indeed, there are vast and ancient webs of alumni connections scattered throughout the Realm, with bonds between members nearly as strong as those between offspring of one of the Great Houses.

Schools also provide a place for the adults to politic as well. School functions provide an excuse for parents to meet and discuss the business of the Realm. Schoolyard friendships can grease the skids for alliances between parents. Prestige garnered by students reflects well on — and assists the aspirations of — their parents. The schools are inextricably woven into the fabric of politics and business in the Realm, and while everyone maintains a polite fiction otherwise, the truth is well-known.

Finally, the educational process provides valuable opportunities for the students themselves, not just to learn, but to practice the skills and techniques that will be used throughout their adult lives. Conspiracy, politicking, manipulation, alliance-forming, matchmaking — these are the meat and bread of the student experience at the schools of the Realm, and they are talents that even the dullest career bureaucrat will find useful.

### Competition at an Early Age

The political struggle of their parents informs the actions of the Dynasty's children. Every recitation and concert is rated on two entirely separate scales: How well did the child perform, and how well did she perform relative to the other children of wealth and privilege in the district? A near-perfect recital of a difficult third-century flute piece is worth nothing if, a week prior, a Ledaal girl in the Eye of Creation performed it absolutely perfectly. Suddenly, the near-perfect flautist's parents have nothing to brag about, no way to emphasize their child's superiority and increased likelihood of being Exalted and, thus, no way to use their child's accomplishments as a form of conversational leverage.

And make no mistake: In the salons and tea rooms of the Realm, the accomplishments and credentials of one's children are a conversational currency that is always accepted. While the Dragon-Blooded and their social



peers don't live exclusively through the deeds of their offspring, stories of what the little ones have accomplished lately do help set the social pecking order in uncertain situations. Woe betide the first proud parent who brings out the tale of how little Sextes did well at reciting a memorized passage of the Immaculate Texts. By doing so, he opens the door for other parents in the group to use *their* children's undoubtedly superior exploits as a means of establishing dominance.

The more remarkable the child's deeds, the better it reflects on the parent, so it's in each parent's best interest to trump the last anecdote. With the devaluation of a child's feat, so too does the parent lose standing. An entire vicious game of social climbing can be played out behind a bland discussion of precisely how far young Daana'd has progressed in her lessons. There is an art to knowing when to bring out the stories of one's offspring. Parents are almost comically eager to set forth their children as paragons but leery of doing so too soon and providing an opening for a story that can trump theirs.

Wiser — and older — parents know better than to make the first move in this game, and members of allied families usually refrain from playing at all. However, there's always a proud new mother who is entirely too eager to discuss her offspring's achievements — and who loses considerable face to her elders and betters as a result.

Children who don't provide sufficient material for their parents' discussion are often harangued and disciplined. "You have shamed the whole house by not doing as well as..." is a commonly heard refrain, one which almost inevitably inspires a powerful, lasting hate for the child one is being compared to. More than one centuries-old hatred between Dragon-Blooded has grown out of this sort of unpleasant childhood memory, often with disastrous consequences for the Realm as a whole.

## Early Childhood: Schooling in the Home

From the time they are old enough to speak until their ninth birthdays, children of the Dynasty (and those patrician families with delusions of grandeur or Exalted Blood) are schooled at home in most exacting fashion. Primary school begins at age nine, but a child entering school is already expected to be well-educated in numerous fields, ready to receive more advanced knowledge and to be molded properly into a young lady or gentleman of the Realm. Furthermore, competition to get into the best primary schools can be fierce, and so, it behooves parents to school their children as early and as energetically as possible.

Generally, schooling begins between a child's second and third birthdays, though some particularly aggressive parents (most notably in House Ledaal) try to

### But They're Just Kids...

The ability of a 10-year-old child to recite a 1,000-year-old poem might seem a flimsy hook to hang anything on, much less a step in the political maneuverings of a Great House. It is worth remembering, though, that every scion of a house belongs to that house. Every child is an asset to be used in the great political game. The slightest advantage gained now — even if it is because a V'neef child sang better at a banquet than a Cynis child did — can be exploited. A minister whose child is a disappointment may neglect his ministry ever so slightly to help "improve" that child's performance, leaving that ministry a fraction more vulnerable than it might have been to having its authority usurped by a house's favored minister elsewhere. So it goes, for children in the Realm belong not to themselves, but to their houses.

And, as more than one ancient Dynast is fond of reminding his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, it is never too early to start gaining an advantage on one's peers, for someday, they will not be peers, but rather, rivals.

start the process even earlier. The current vogue is to start reading lessons to unborn infants in hopes that the child will be well ahead of her peers from birth; evidence either way is lacking.

Once it is determined that a child is old enough to begin schooling, the instruction begins at the knee of a tutor. Most households have a single tutor for all of the children who are not yet of schooling age, and in some cases, several branches of a single family or several families in a remote district will pool their resources and share a single tutor. The goal from day one is to mold the children into tiny replicas of their parents, young Dynasts who will make their parents proud and be suitable additions to any school. Instruction continues year-round unless the head of the household decrees otherwise, but the inhabitants of the Realm regard the early years as the most important for schooling and are loathe to waste a single day on frivolous pursuits.

## The Site of Instruction

As noted previously, instruction of young children takes place in the home, and as such, every home of note is constructed with this eventuality in mind. A teaching chamber, complete with slates, desks and so forth, is often one of the first rooms situated when architectural plans are drawn up. Similarly, a section of the house's inevitable library is devoted to the texts, maps and reference materials that a tutor might someday need. Also de rigueur is a music chamber stocked with as many instruments as possible. Surely, no young scion of the Realm should be so uncouth as to be unable to play at least one instrument, and three is the sign of a truly enlightened upbringing.

Often these teaching chambers are stocked before any children are born to a family. Such foresight is considered laudable in Dynast social circles, as it indicates a proper concern for the future. Parents who do not begin preparing for their children's education before the first offspring is born are regarded with suspicion, as they are clearly short-sighted, self-centered and, worst of all, possibly too poor to invest their money into something they won't be using immediately.

Those family members lucky enough to dwell on long-held family estates have it even better, as they have access to the educational resources laid down centuries ago by their esteemed ancestors. If they are particularly lucky, those resources also include a family tutor, one who has been in the service of a particular house or one of its branches for decades and who has done sterling service in instructing the children of the line.

### The Pace of Change

If one were to take a student from three centuries prior and insert her into a modern classroom in the Realm, the odds are that she would acclimate very, very quickly. The reason is simple: In those three centuries, the curriculum has scarcely changed at all. The same classics (with a very few new additions — innovation in the arts is frowned upon) are studied, the same theories of war and history and theology propounded, and so on. Thus is the continuity of empire preserved. A 200-year-old bureaucrat can quote one line of a poem, and an aide 15 decades his junior can recite the rest. A fresh-faced young minister can reference a classic economic text, and the hard-bitten Dragon-Blooded officer at his table can refute his point by quoting commentaries on it. A common base of knowledge — and an established method of using that knowledge — is maintained and sustained, all for the sake of the Realm.

## Tutors

The role of pedagogue is a much-sought-after one in the Realm, though it is not without its risks. After all, doing an inferior job instructing a child of the Dynasty is liable to incur the wrath of the estimable child's estimable

parents, who are not likely to take the inadequate preparation of their most precious treasure lightly. Tutors have been branded, maimed and even killed for the crime of performing their labors poorly, though a flogging and a bad reference are more common penalties.

Still, being a tutor to a wealthy household's children can also be extremely lucrative. Grateful parents are liable to reward successful tutors handsomely, and in many cases, success with a single child leads to long-term employment in a fecund household. Even if there's no more work for a tutor in one mansion, however, a job well done means recommendations to relatives, friends and allies. In some instances, a reputable tutor's services can become the subject of a bidding war, and oft-repeated is the story of the poet Circling Crane, who was poisoned by an unsuccessful bidder for her labors to ensure that no one else had the benefit of her instruction, either.

No household worth its salt — or with the slightest concern for its children's upbringing — would even conceive of hiring a tutor who came without long years of experience and the proper references. Indeed, the most highly regarded tutors are passed from home to home within the Great Houses and the wealthiest patrician lines. Tutors who command this sort of loyalty have proved their worth by seeing to the education of some of the Realm's most upstanding and formidable young citizens, and a list of notable former students is worth its weight in polished jade.

Those who would teach the preschoolers of the Realm are required to know a great deal about many subjects, ranging from medicine (crucial if a child takes ill in class) to music to metaphysics. Being lacking in any one field is enough to hinder a tutor's chances for employment. Being found lacking in two is evidence that one should consider a new career.

Apprentices labor in exchange for time spent at a master's elbow, though the process of becoming an apprentice is a grueling one. While folktales may talk of poor boys by the roadside who are taken under prestigious teachers' wings, such cases are rare. More frequently, a would-be apprentice scrounges letters of recommendations and a sort of audition kit consisting of calligraphy samples and the like and then seeks out a teacher. Teachers seeking apprentices often leave word at the local Immaculate temple that they are looking for help, which both spreads the word and gives washouts from the Order a bit of an advantage on their competition.

Apprentices rarely teach classes, but they assist the pedagogues they labor under and do much of the menial work of teaching. Once a young tutor has completed her apprenticeship, she may then hang out her shingle and seek employment on her own. In such cases, the tutor's apprenticeship may be a great help, as those who have studied under a reputable master have some of their instructor's cachet and will find work more easily than those who worked in less illustrious circumstances.

A few tutors are trained instead in the Immaculate Order and then sent out into the world. These tutors are highly sought-after, as they are uniformly excellent, if a trifle humorless. The more conservative houses in particular will open their coffers for a pedagogue of this sort.

It is extremely rare for a tutor to have been Exalted. Such labors are regarded as a waste of a Dragon-Blooded's talents — secondary schools are a much more appropriate place for such. However, those rare Dragon-Blooded who do become tutors become legend. Their services are highly sought after, and the price of hiring them is steep, but the prestige that doing so brings is well worth it. Such teachers are among the sternest taskmasters in the Realm, but their pupils receive an excellent education — if they can keep up with their teachers' strict expectations. Merely human tutors can also acquire tremendous amounts of prestige, and it is not uncommon for the former apprentices of a particularly renowned instructor to take her name after her death, as a tribute and an honor.

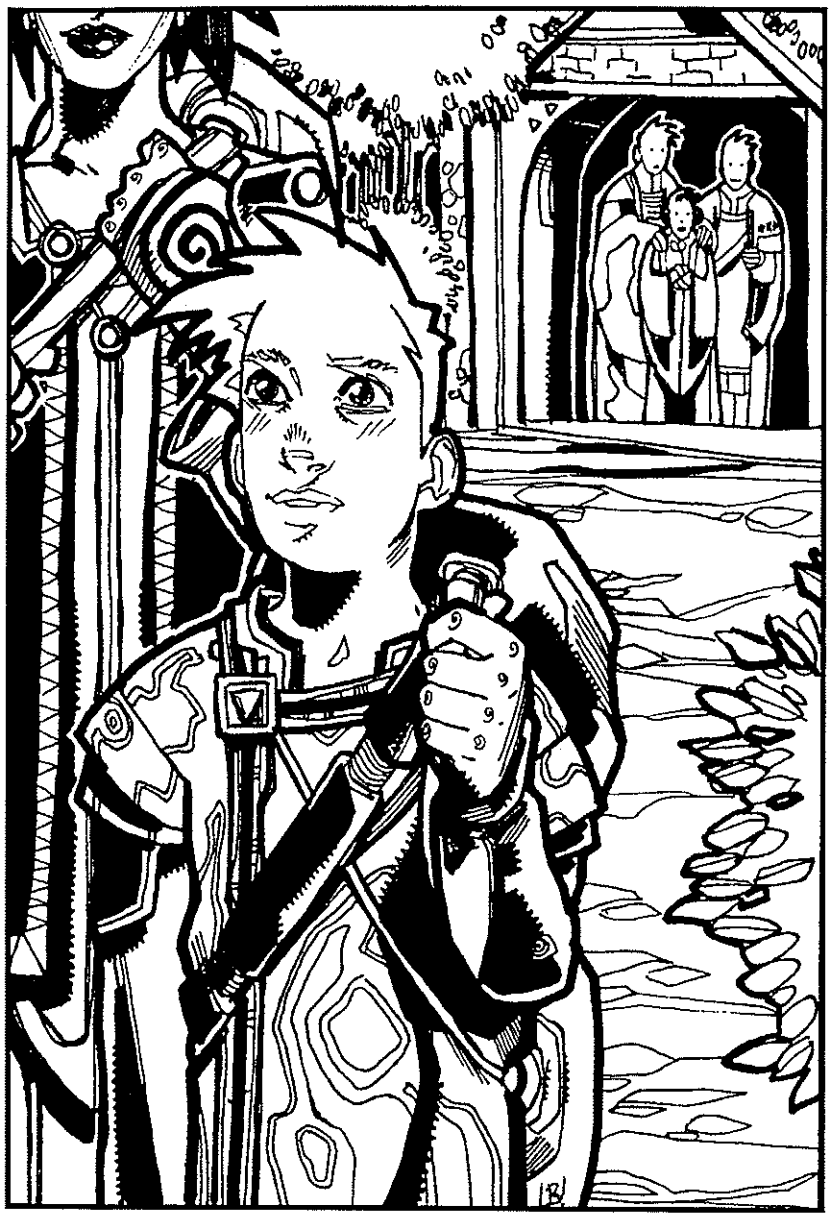
### Slave Tutors

Some houses, especially House Cynis, prefer to avoid the uncertainty that comes with hiring tutors and, instead, purchase them. Such slaves are treated quite well for their station and are afforded unusual privilege. Poor performance, however, is unflaggingly punished, and even the best-treated teaching slave knows that, ultimately, she can be replaced if she doesn't perfectly balance the demands of her owners and her charges.

The slave tutor's sole duty is to see to the education of the family's children by whatever means possible and to labor at this task through successive generations until death. Slaves of this sort are also expected to train their successors without hindrance, paving the way for their own eventual replacement.

## The Regimen

Teaching in the home is an endless series of drills, memorizations and recitations. What is important is not teaching the child how to think, but rather, what she should and must know. It is unimportant that a six year old know how to assess a situation and react. Rather, she needs to be able to demonstrate that she is well educated, schooled in the basics of imperial knowledge and, most of all, well behaved. The interminable drills and lists serve not only to imprint the vital facts and texts on the child's



mind, but also to give her discipline, a work ethic and respect for her superiors. A child of this age is expected to be obedient, respectful, quiet and able to perform on command. No more is asked of her, save that she prepare herself for primary school, so that she might bring honor and prestige to the family name.

### Preparation for School

The process of applying for primary school can begin as early as a child's first year, particularly if the family has a long-standing relationship with a particular school. Most children, however, do not have their fates decided until they are eight years of age. For when a child reaches the age of seven, the focus of his education shifts to getting him into a proper school. There are no formal examinations at this age by which children are measured, so, instead, the students are drilled on the sorts of questions a dominie might ask. They also have their performance skills honed, so that if called upon to play, sing or recite, they can do so on the spur of the moment. The name of the game is being able to respond to anything a demanding dominie might ask for and being able to do so without hesitation.

### Going Off to School

Children are bundled off to primary school after their ninth birthday. The occasion of departure for school is a festive one, highlighted by a performance from the guest of honor. Guests at these galas are expected to present the child with gifts related to their schooling, and a child of a powerful, wealthy or important family can expect to receive pretty much everything she needs through the end of primary school.

Then, once the festivities have ended, the child is sent off to school, often accompanied on the journey by at least one parent and a smattering of supplies, prized possessions and delicacies. Tutors and slaves are left behind, as the child is to be given over completely to the school's keeping. Besides, there are no doubt younger siblings or cousins on the way, and they, too, must be prepared.

During the trip, the child is expected to be properly stoic, to look forward to her new adventure rather than being distressed at leaving home for the first time. Those who show undue fear or regret are given a stern talking to. Such behavior is unbecoming and does not bode well for the future.

## Primary School

Primary schools provide the first opportunity for youngsters who will someday — hopefully — Exalt to be away from their parents, families and tutors. Scattered across the Realm, these institutions take in children and mold them relentlessly, schooling them in the basics of what every child needs to know to grow up a properly educated citizen of the Realm.

### Embarrassing Mommy and Daddy

Children of wealth and privilege, especially those of the Great Houses, are expected to behave in a manner befitting their rank and station. After all, they may be Exalted some day and, as such, should behave as someone destined for cosmic enlightenment should. More than one parent has told a misbehaving child that a continued tantrum may keep him from being judged worthy of Exaltation by the Five Dragons, and more than one parent has secretly believed it (much to the monks' quiet chagrin). And so, the children of the wealthy and powerful are molded into perfect little imitations of their parents — minus the drinking, debauching and other flaws that the adults believe their children are incapable of ever succumbing to. Whether they see those habits as flaws or not is debatable, but it is quite certain that wenching and drinking take time away from study and that most parents believe their children will pick up the finer arts of carousing without dedicating time or a formal curriculum to it.

However, children remain children, even those relentlessly badgered and punished if they show even the slightest bit of "improper" behavior. And so, the children who flub their flute or sanxian recitals, whose singing voices aren't sufficiently angelic, whose calligraphy or poetry recitation falters in front of Mother's friends from the Imperial City — these children are punished.

### Home Schooling

A tiny minority of parents refuse to send their children to primary school, electing, instead, to continue their education at home. The reasons for this are varied: a belief that an already-employed tutor can provide a better education, a fear of letting the children out of one's immediate control and even conspiracy theories about what is actually being taught. Children who are schooled at home generally miss out on the greatest benefit of the schooling system, namely, the ability to tap into school networks later in life. While they may be safer and, in some cases, better educated, being kept at home is ultimately a disadvantage. Even the children of the Scarlet Throne are sent without fail into the schooling network, lest they find themselves isolated in later life. In the past, the Empress often made a great show of placing favorites' children at particular schools, which resulted in great increases in prestige for those schools (and corresponding losses for the alumni of those schools not chosen). Without the Empress upsetting the apple cart, however, the schools have a settled into a rough pecking order. Those located in the Imperial City, unsurprisingly, rank highest.

## The Grounds

Primary schools are walled or fenced compounds, comprised of several buildings. There are dormitories for the students and staff, a central dining hall, offices, classrooms, a library, a chapel and at least one exercise yard. Precisely how these get divvied up into various buildings varies from school to school. What does stay the same, however, is the basic functionality. Wealthier schools often have additional resources — riding rings and paddocks, topiary gardens, more buildings — but ultimately, what each parent wants from the primary school is the continued molding of his or her children into future citizens of the Realm.

Armed guards patrol the perimeter, keeping out riffraff and guarding young Dynasts from kidnaping and assassination attempts. The exterior walls of the buildings are thick stone, with small windows that can be shuttered quickly in the face of arrows. Doors are thick and reinforced with steel, and new students quickly learn the drills for what to do in case of a disaster.

As stern as a school's external face can be, however, the internal face is a great deal more pleasant. If they have the resources, schools do spend extensively on gardens, pools and frescoes to decorate their grounds. Most schools are built around a central courtyard/exercise yard, one that is often paved in decorative bricks or patterns of colored sand, and have pennons and decorative kites flying from rooftops. Classrooms and dormitories open onto those courtyards, while administrative areas and the chapel are generally centered around a smaller courtyard adjacent to the first one.

## Duration

Primary school lasts six years, taking the students from childhood to young adulthood and, more importantly, to the cusp of secondary school. Students are never accepted younger than eight, and they are kept until age 14 or 15 at the latest.

### Sex, Drugs and Sanxian Recitals

Beneath the watchful eyes of teachers, administrators and servants, a seething hotbed of carnality, rebellion and defiance simmers constantly. On the surface, schools disapprove severely of student dalliances. In reality, they know there's nothing they can do to stop it, and as such, they make sure that the infirmary is stocked with contraceptives to make sure that there are no unanticipated alliances formed between houses because of unexpected pregnancies. Secretly, teachers often take pride in their students' cleverness, and they'll occasionally let the students know with sly praise in class.

Drugs and alcohol, however, are a slightly different matter, as they interfere with studying. While students are expected to be familiar with wines and other intoxicants, overindulgence is frowned upon, as it distracts students from their studying and tends to distract others around them, particularly in dormitories where there are no individual rooms.

As for more general forms of teenage rebellion, the dominies and teachers have long experience at dealing with this sort of thing and tend to channel it into harmless or even constructive areas when they can. A certain amount of practical joking, graffiti and so on is to be expected, and as long as it does not interfere with the school's real work — or the flow of money from students' parents — it is tolerated and even encouraged. Many schools have statues that are "traditionally" vandalized by all of the 12-year-old students, for example, or have perfectly safe rooftops that students are sternly warned against climbing up.

Genuine rebels, on the other hand, are either broken to the best of the school's ability or expelled. Often, expulsions can be rescinded with a sufficiently large cash gift to the school. In such cases, they are euphemistically described as "leaves of absence," generally to "go home to visit a dying ancestor."

## The Special Programs

Harsh experience, not to mention the insistence of the parents of the Dragon-Blooded that their children not mingle with the rabble, has taught primary schools to have separate quarters, programs and at least some schooling for the Exalted children in their midst. When a child Exalts (usually around the 11th birthday or so, though some have been known to Exalt as late as 17, and one child of House Ledaal Exalted while his overprotective mother was saying her goodbyes), she is immediately transferred to the other, smaller portion of the school.

While most primary schools do not have Dragon-Blooded on staff (except occasionally as senior instructors or dominies), those that teach Dynasts are experienced in dealing with Exaltations and their aftermath. A great many new Exalted are disoriented by the process and have no wish to leave their friends and peers for whatever reason, and they will lash out at anyone who attempts to remove them from familiar surroundings. However, a teenager, even one with the power of the Five Dragons in her, is no match for the nurses-cum-security guards. These handlers gently but firmly keep the other children at a distance, ensure the safety of the new Exalt and take her — by force, if necessary — to the other side of the school compound.

The Exalted compounds at primary schools are smaller, more compact and more stoutly constructed than the rest of the school. Most times, they are located at the center of the school proper, both to protect the newly Exalted children from prying eyes and to protect the surrounding area from the children. Some schools give the Dragon-Blooded children private chambers, while others prefer barracks-style sleeping arrangements so that the older children can support the younger ones as they realize what they have become. Same-aspected children tend to cluster together at these times, even though there is rarely a formal policy mandating such. They simply find themselves quarters near one another or swap bed assignments in a dormitory so that they can be near others of their own kind.

After a sufficient cooling-off period, which can last as long as two months in some cases, the new Dragon-Blooded are allowed the same run of the school as any other children. This means, inevitably, interaction between Dragon-Blooded and their former peers, which can be unpleasant for all concerned. In some instances, now-Exalted children use their powers to turn the tables on former tormentors, something facilitated by a word-of-mouth tradition whereby the older children teach their younger peers how best to use their new abilities for revenge. These informal academies solemnly hand down their teachings from year to year, inspired by memories of abuse at the hands of larger classmates who now have no defense.

In other cases, a lone Dragon-Blooded is liable to become a victim of mob tactics in the exercise yard, as numbers still tell. Particularly if the number of Exalted at a school is small, the Dragon-Blooded students can be outnumbered and overwhelmed as the other children gang up to get the "freaks." Overtly motivated by fear, these

attacks are also fueled by jealousy — jealousy that another child Exalted and they did not.

In either instance, the school staff does its best to end the violence as quickly as possible, and if a normal child gets in a fight with a Dragon-Blooded one, it's the normal child who bears the brunt of the discipline. No dominie wants to be the one to explain to a powerful V'neef noble why his precious, Exalted child had a half-dozen teeth kicked in, even if said child worked diligently to bring it on himself. As a result, the children get quite clever at finding ways to extract vengeance and inflict punishment in private, when the adults aren't around. Creating a distraction on the exercise yard to draw off adult attention from the real beating is one favorite; so is sneaking into a rival's room after curfew to administer a silent beating. However, even the victims of these assaults have one cardinal rule: They do not run to the dominie or any of the teachers. The question "What happened to you?" is always met with an answer such as "I fell down the stairs" or " I was exercising, and I fell." Adults are the enemy and a crutch. To ask for their assistance is to admit weakness, and to admit weakness is to concede that one has no business Exalting.

### Rituals of the Sacred Children

After having it drummed into their heads their whole lives, it is no wonder that most of the children sent off for schooling regard Exaltation as their deserved birthright. As such, they often indulge in bizarre-seeming rituals to try to encourage themselves to Exalt. These rituals range from the simple (beating up other students to establish superiority) to the laborious (reading everything one can about the Dragon-Blooded in hopes of proving themselves worthy) to the bizarre (becoming blood brothers with a Dragon-Blooded friend or cutting one in a scuffle and then licking up the blood). Such rites of childhood are utterly ineffective but quite serious to those performing them.

What's more, the rituals are never, ever spoken of to the adults at the school. To do so is to become pariah in the school community, a traitor to the sacred goal of becoming Exalted.

## The Daily Regimen

Life in the primary schools consists of two major elements: study and exercise. Students have been commended to the schools to be taught, to be trained and to be molded for secondary school and beyond. Playtime, such as it is, fits in around the edges.

### Devotion

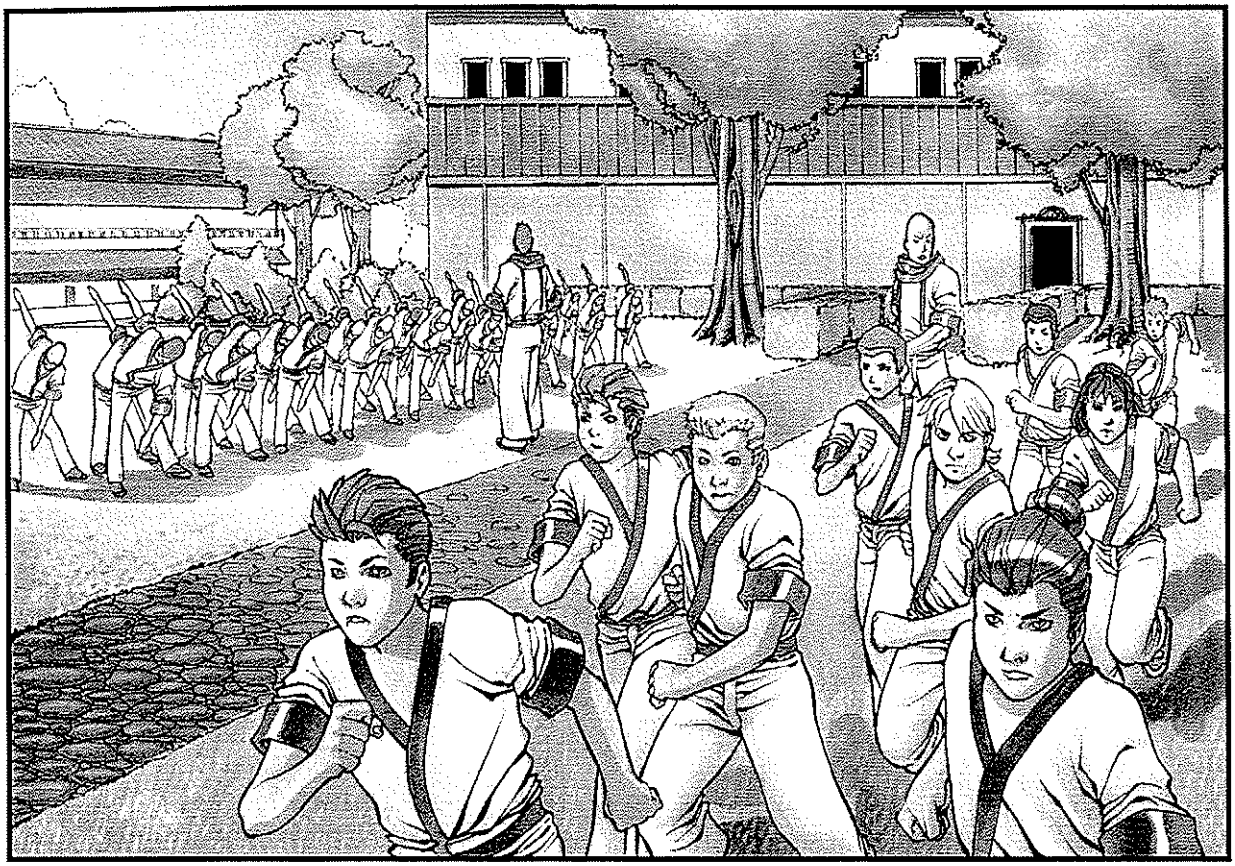
As the Immaculate faith is the official religion of the Realm, it is unsurprising that the future leaders of the empire are indoctrinated in it early. Each day before breakfast, students are expected to study a section of the Immaculate Texts. In some of the stricter schools, students are not served their meal until they can recite, perfectly, the day's passage. Those who cannot do so do not eat.

### Study

After breakfast, students march to their classrooms, there to be drilled on all the arts and sciences befitting a future noble of the Realm. Morning study includes mathematics, history, theology and proper etiquette. Such classes tend to be relatively large and to stay together throughout an entire morning's work. Generally, they are grouped by age — all of the first-year students (or as large a group as a classroom can support; larger schools have multiple sections) learn the same curriculum, and there are examinations at the end of each season to ensure that the lessons have been learned well. At the end of the examination period, the results are posted publicly, the better to encourage those who did well and humiliate those who did not.

The afternoon's labors, after a break for lunch, cover broader topics, such as musical instruction, poetry, singing, weapons, riding and public speaking. Afternoon classes are smaller and, within limitations (i.e., the nine-year-old freshmen are rarely thrown into fencing classes with the 15 year olds), are broken down into groups by interest and talent, though there are numerous instances where a parent insists on his offspring being taught something for which she has absolutely no natural aptitude. Additional course options are open to students who have Exalted: rudimentary sorcery, the art of controlling their powers and so on. While most schools mix in Exalted and unExalted students in at least the morning sessions, the afternoons are segregated, and so are the seating arrangements in common areas such as the dining hall. The Exalted children are never allowed to forget what they are, and neither are their peers.

After supper is mandatory study and recitation, which lasts an hour and is believed to aid in the digestion of both knowledge and the evening's repast. This is followed by the day's last formal instruction, which is in the natural and metaphysical sciences, as well as geography. Another hour's worth of study, with the treat of tea, caps the day, and then, curfew descends. Those who stay up past curfew to perform additional study are either lauded for their diligence or scolded for being too slow to learn their lessons in the allotted time.



### Cheating

Cheating is grounds for immediate expulsion. The price of expulsion is high, as it severely hinders one's chances of acceptance at another school and stands as a black mark on one's record for a very long time.

As always, however, the rules for this sort of thing are somewhat elastic, especially if the cheater's parents have in the past made or might make in the future a large donation to the school's endowment. In such cases, creative approaches to examination-taking are ignored, if not overtly applauded. A sufficiently clever and original approach to cheating can actually win the teachers' admiration, if carried off with sufficient panache. After all, the teachers reason, life is about *finding* answers as much as necessarily knowing them.

### Exercise

Every day between afternoon classes and supper, the students are herded into the exercise yard for mandatory physical training. The day's session begins with calisthenics and then proceeds to a combination of exertion (running, rope climbing, martial arts, sword and archery practice and so forth) and games. Such games are carefully supervised, especially if the school allows Dragon-Blooded and normal children to mingle. Some of the more prestigious and better-endowed schools have two exercise yards, one for the normal children, the other for their betters.

### Schedule

Six out of every seven days is devoted to the regular classroom schedule. The seventh operates on a slightly different timeframe. This is the day when parents are permitted to visit (and to take their children off the grounds). The morning is devoted to exercises or to special instruction in afternoon class material if a teacher deems a student worthy of the time. The afternoon sees the students left to their own devices, at least until suppertime, after which there is an extended study period and then a concert, recitation or other performance by either students or faculty. These unprogrammed afternoons are also when slower students receive their individual tutoring.

Primary schools operate almost the entire year round, with students entering and graduating from school seasonally. Officially, the school year starts at the beginning of Resplendent Air and lasts until the end of Ascendant Fire,

and the last official month of the school year is devoted entirely to final, comprehensive exams. The last week of any season's schooling is also devoted to examinations; the first to welcoming new students and setting class schedules. There are two days in between sessions for celebration, relaxation and the posting of test scores. Other than that, instruction proceeds relentlessly and without surcease.

### Failure

Officially, students do not fail their examinations, ever. For them to do so would be unthinkable, reflecting poorly on school, student and parents alike and shaming each. How fortunate it is, then, that every student is diligent enough to prepare and clever enough to pass each year's examinations.

However, certain students — generally those whose marks were somehow just barely acceptable — find themselves commended for their devotion to study and willingness to labor on their education's behalf and, thus, "voluntarily" spend their off months drilling on those subjects where their performance was "somewhat" disappointing. As always, adults put a pleasant face on this state of affairs, while students are well aware of what it means and are merciless in their verbal assaults on their unlucky classmates.

### Calibration

No classes are taught during Calibration. Instead, the schools turn the occasion into something of a carnival, with students instructing their teachers, deciding on the menu at meals and playing games of their own choosing. During such time, all school rules are suspended, and those students who have not been bundled off by their families run amuck.

In theory, no one can be held responsible for the pranks, indignities and debaucheries they commit during Calibration. In actuality, dominies and teachers tend to have very long memories if things get too far out of hand. The jokes and japes are supposed to be good-natured, but there are those students who decide to push the limits of Calibration's amnesty by arranging beatings of unpopular teachers, fires and the like. However, most of the play at Calibration is exactly that — play. Music, fragrant smoke and laughter fill the air, bonfires burn brightly, and the students dance and cavort as if each night might be their last.

## Going Home

At the end of the official school year, parents have the option of picking up their children for up to two months, plus Calibration. Instruction does continue during this time for children who have no wish to return home or whose parents elect to leave them at school. Some parents — never much higher than 20 percent — regard it as beneficial to keep their children at school for these months, as the entire staff is there but the student body is smaller, and more individual attention can be paid to each child. The majority of the parents feel it is more important to bring their children home, to learn their duties in the house and get practical experience beyond the bounds of the classroom.

## New Students

New students are generally not accepted without an interview in which the dominie of the school meets, speaks with and assesses the potential candidate. If the family has a long-standing relationship with the school, such interviews are often formalities or skipped altogether. The same goes if the parents make clear their intention to support the school generously, above and beyond the child's tuition.

Once a student has been accepted, she is expected to arrive during the previous session's examination week and to prepare for the beginning of her formal instruction without disturbing the other students. Her formal welcome comes after the end of examinations, during the two days between the end of the old session and the beginning of the new, but this process gives the new students time to settle in without being the immediate focus of attention. Most schools have temporary quarters for new students, where the latest additions to the student body can get their bearings before being moved into their permanent quarters with the other students.

It is exceedingly rare for a student to transfer into a school at an older age; such incidents are generally a sign of trouble somewhere along the line. For a student to transfer in mid-session is almost unheard of — and a topic of a great deal of speculation among staff and students alike.

## Graduation

Schools run a graduation at the end of each session, as appropriate. Some parents hold their children back a season in order to ensure they'll be graduating with a small class, the better to ensure more attention on each individual child. Graduations take place during the two days between exams and the new session and are as solemn an occasion as can be manufactured. Featuring speeches by the dominie and teachers, praise of each student's accomplishments (silence at graduation is one of the most humiliating fates a child can suffer) and a recital featuring each child. Whether it be a musical performance, participating in a drama, reciting a segment of the Immaculate Texts or something entirely different (though innovation

is frowned up), each and every child must take her place before the audience. Such moments are among the most pressure packed of the child's life. Flubbing a performance at graduation is a sure-fire way to humiliate one's parents and lose standing heading into secondary school, and a particularly awful show has caused some students to have their acceptances to the four academies revoked.

At graduation's end, the children's belongings are packed up, and the students are packed off. It is customary at this time for the child's parents to reward the dominie and teachers for the job they have done, and a great deal of jade changes hands as a result. Such rewards are also often bribes to take good care of younger children who will someday be coming through the school, and the teachers are well aware of this.

### Final and Rigorous Examinations

There is a lengthy series of exams each student takes before being permitted to graduate primary school. These are similar in form and content to the ministries' Nine Rigorous Examinations, and they serve, in part, as a set of credentials for those students going into Imperial Service without advancing to secondary school. The examinations are given far enough in advance that, if the student fails them, there is enough time to retake the troublesome ones and hopefully ensure a passing grade.

The tests themselves cover everything the student has studied during his time at the school, ranging from history to theology to swordplay. Each exam is given by a teacher in that particular subject after the day's official activities have ended and is observed by at least two other teachers to verify the results.

## The Staff

It takes a particularly strong bunch of individuals to deal with the cyclopean task of educating teenagers in the Realm, let alone teenagers with the powers of the Dragon-Blooded. The staff at a given school is a tight-knit bunch of wary professionals, fearful both of and for their charges but resolute in their determination to carry out their appointed task. The very intensity of the task of education in such a setting welds the staff into a cohesive unit, less a family than a general staff (though dalliances and marriages on staff are hardly uncommon). There is, however, a definite hierarchy within the staff members themselves, with administrators lording it over teachers, who, in turn, look down on everyone else. Surprisingly, this pecking order causes less friction than it might, in part because the guards and other staff see up close what the teachers put themselves through every day and night.

### Those Who Teach

The teachers are, unsurprisingly, the backbone of any primary school's staff. Some are Dragon-Blooded, and of those, many are in "working retirements" from powerful positions. The role of instructor to these children is a very important one, and as such, the teachers are very well compensated. In exchange, they are expected to achieve a resounding level of professional excellence. Instructors are Immaculate-trained at the very least, and graduates of a school often come back to teach there. They are expected to have encyclopedic knowledge of math, the natural sciences, the history of the Realm, music, theology — in short, anything that a student might be expected to learn. Most schools have rigorous examinations for their teachers in place, similar to those for entering the ministries, and a failure may doom a would-be instructor to a sudden and permanent career change.

Teachers have absolute control in their classrooms; this is one of the conditions understood when the child is accepted. No Dynast's heir, regardless of their parentage, is permitted to test the teacher's authority in the classroom. This is good training for later life, or so the theory goes; knowing one's precise place and rank is important in the Realm. In actuality, most teachers are well aware that someday their students will be among the great and powerful of the empire, and as such, the number of canings and so forth is kept down, save for the truly incorrigible.

Each teacher is also assigned a number of students or, in some cases, an entire dormitory hall, to oversee. Duties range from impromptu counseling to breaking up dorm fights to organizing group activities — mock battles against other halls/dormitories/age groups being a particular favorite.

Often, there is an Immaculate monk assigned to the school's shrine, to aid in the children's spiritual instruction. Not all schools go this far, but many of the monasteries actually encourage some of their younger members to take up tasks such as this, as preparation for later days when they'll be instructing initiates. These monks are provided only with room and board, and their pay goes to the temple from which they originate.

### Those Who Administrate

The administrative staff of each school is made up of a single dominie and those who labor under him. This includes scribes, an exchequer and, occasionally, a provost who sees to the school's supplies, texts and so forth. Most of these personnel are invisible to the students, with the exception being the dominie. It is the dominie who is the face of the school, who greets the parents and interviews the students and who sets school policies. In most cases, the dominie owns the school as well, though a few institutions have boards comprised of a mix of owners and wealthy patrons. While on school grounds, the dominie's

word is law, and even the wealthiest and most spoiled students are liable to learn this the hard way.

## Those Who Serve

Primary schools also have numerous staff members who are regarded by the students' parents as part of the site itself. The most important tend to the children — dressing and bathing them, grooming them and otherwise tending to their daily needs so that their young minds are freed for the demanding task of study. It is unthinkable that a student would make his own bed, lay out his own clothes for the morning or otherwise attend to such unimportant details. Most schools have one body servant for every five or so students, though in special cases (particularly those where additional funds have been allotted by doting parents) students get individual attention. Servants' quarters are near those of the students, though they are under strict orders not to enter the student areas after curfew. The staff is generally broken into those servants who work with Dragon-Blooded children and those who don't, and the social disparity between the two groups of servants reflects the rift between normal and Exalted students. The body servants who work with the Exalted children are also those who "rescue" the newly Exalted and, as such, are either fondly remembered or despised as a symbol of the time when everything changed.

Lower in the pecking order are the servants who tend to the grounds, as well as the cooks in the kitchen. Such are beneath the students' notice, as well as their parents,' but they are still carefully vetted by the school's dominie. Young as they are, the students at many of these schools are still players in the great game of empire, and the murder or abduction of a student could disgrace the facility. Groundskeeper, janitor, gardener — all of these provide perfect cover for a would-be kidnaper or assassin. Some schools use entire slave staffs, but this does little to alleviate the problem; it's as easy or easier to use a slave as an assassin — or to disguise a free citizen as one — as it is to use a free woman.

All schools employ a large staff of trained and armed guards. This is as much to protect the school from the children as it is to protect the children themselves. While there are not enough guards on hand to deal with an extended siege, they are numerous enough and well enough trained to deal with assassins or even a reasonably sized band of brigands. A school whose guards haul in an assassin often sees an increase in applications and prestige, as they've proved themselves capable of protecting their precious students.

## Discipline

The Realm's educational system is a firm believer in corporal punishment. Students who misbehave are frequently subject to canings or paddlings, often in front of their peers. Lesser or first offenses are generally punished by the removal of privileges, such as playtime, course selection or sweets at meals. The most severe penalty schools mete out, however, is expulsion, and this punishment is reserved for offenses such as cheating or grievously injuring another student.

The most important and commonly used weapon in the disciplinary arsenal, however, is humiliation. Embarrassing a student in front of her peers — calling on her repeatedly when she clearly has not done her homework, posting poor examination results, making her stand before the other students for an entire class — has a powerful effect, and teachers are well aware of it. The exercise yard competition does not escape their notice, and they are quite willing to use it to their advantage. Resisting a caning is a mark of honor among the children, after all; it gives them a badge of pride to hold onto if they endured. But there is no defense against humiliation, so long as a child cares what her peers think of her.

## Secondary School

There are only four secondary schools within the Realm, and they are prestigious, elite and reserved for those who combine the talent and the resources to secure entry for themselves. Fewer than 20 percent of the students graduating from primary school in any given year go on to secondary school, and approximately 90 percent of those

### Schools for the Incorrigible

There are a pair of schools on the Blessed Isle that cater to students that no other school will deal with. The House of Ancient Stone, in Lord's Crossing, and the Palace of the Tamed Storm, in the Imperial City, both take the children that other schools can't or won't any more. These two schools are both built more like prisons than academies, and they are run with an emphasis on the whip. By sending her child to one of these schools, a parent is admitting that her child is out of control and needs a sterner hand.

Graduates of these schools tend to come in three flavors. Those who adjust to harsh discipline almost uniformly excel later in life, and magistrates, generals and other luminaries who bear the mark of one of these schools are feared and respected. Those who at the first taste of the lash learn to behave out of the simple desire to go unnoticed are generally broken by the process and rarely venture beyond low-level ministry posts or family estates.

And every year, some of the students leave the House of Ancient Stone and the Palace of the Tamed Storm ceremonially garbed for their own funerals. Such is the risk of sending one's child to the most feared schools in the Realm.




are Dragon-Blooded. Unsurprisingly, most Dragon-Bloods go on to secondary school. Those who do not drift into the lower reaches of the legions and the Immaculate Order or drift off to tend their family estates and trades.

The secondary schools provide a more focused education than do the primary schools. Each of the four academies has a specialty, a core curriculum around which the school is centered. Graduates are highly polished professionals ready to step into their chosen fields and contribute immediately, and great things are expected of them.

## The Logistics

Entering secondary school is a highly formal event, and there are certain conventions to be obeyed and tests that must be overcome. Talent matters here — imperial connections will barely suffice to buy your child's place in one of these schools, and absolutely nothing will buy good marks.

### Acceptance

The process by which students are accepted to the four academies is convoluted and lengthy. There is a formal application process, during which the potential student's dominie, her teachers, her family and at least one reputable witness from outside the family proper must vouch for her. This, however, is only the start of the process. It merely establishes the student as someone worthy of consideration. What follows is a blur of interviews, examinations, under-the-table handoffs of cash and other favors and ruthless attempts by parents to sabotage the candidacies of other students. It is not enough that a child be qualified to enter an academy or that she be driven to excel at the school's specialties. It must also be demonstrated to the dominie's satisfaction that having the child as a student will also benefit the school. Usually, the benefit is measured by the size of the donation the prospect's parents will make, but on occasion, it also includes how much credit the child will bring to the school in the long run.

### Maintenance

Unlike the primary schools, the four secondary academies do not charge tuition or other fees. Instead, they expect donations, and the potential for substantial financial support is one of the criteria for a student's admission. Parents are expected to donate heavily in honor of their daughter's accomplishments and education, and this money allows the school to occasionally admit a stellar student who lacks the financial resources that would otherwise be necessary.

Schools also take donations from the houses and from rich patrician families. Often, these donations are laid out to smooth the path for future generations of applicants from that family and to make it look like later donations aren't obvious bribes.

Alumni support is important, as much for its symbolic value as for the jade it brings in. Being able to call upon noteworthy alumni to speak or to talk to their peers often helps loosen the purse strings of reluctant parents.

Finally, each school save the Heptagram has an official patron. Funds from the Scarlet Throne flow into the Spiral Academy and the House of Bells, and the Immaculate Order sees to the endowment of the Cloister of Wisdom. Officially, the Heptagram has no sponsor, though many believe this is just a smokescreen. Theories fly fast and furious (a popular one among alumni of the House of Bells is that Anathema actually run the school for their own nefarious ends), but until such time as the school's anonymous backers reveal themselves — if they exist — these theories will remain just that — theories.

## The Four Academies

The four secondary schools on the Blessed Isle each feed a different sector of the empire's society. The House of Bells caters to the military, the Spiral Academy to the bureaucracy, the Cloister of Wisdom to the Immaculate Order, and the Heptagram to the need for magic and sorcery. Each is relatively small; the largest has no more than 240 students, and the smallest 80. Instruction is intense and often on an individual basis, and the workload for each student is monstrous. Many students wash out of the academies, unable to cope with the brutal pace and fierce competition.

### The Cloister of Wisdom

A relatively small percentage of the students of the Cloister of Wisdom ever join the Immaculate Order, but all who study there benefit from the Immaculates' wisdom, experience and ability to train their students in new patterns of thought. In terms of the number of students enrolled, the Cloister is the second-smallest of the four academies, and it tends to let prospective students know they have been selected before they even think to apply.

The students at the Cloister are trained, first and foremost, in meditation and ways to manipulate Essence. All else, the staff believes, flows from these two. If a student can learn to master herself and master Essence, any other task in life can be accomplished by combining those two skills. That is not to say more mundane topics, such as the Immaculate Texts, mathematics and rhetoric are neglected, but rather, that they are viewed as adjuncts to the two core precepts. Students at the Cloister are actually expected to be better rounded than their counterparts at the other academies, as the theory is that their base grounding in these important techniques should enable them to learn all other skills more quickly.

Students at the school sleep, like monks do, on bamboo mats on the floor. They rise before the sun to make their devotions and then spend the entire day and evening in either study or meditation. The food here is plain and simple, as are the accommodations and amenities. The staff is comprised almost entirely of Immaculate monks, save for the occasional poet, playwright or martial artist invited to join the staff. Such invitations are both extremely rare and quite prestigious, and it is unheard of for one to be turned down.

> **An Unexpected Benefit**
>
> One of the positive aspects to attending the Cloister is the intensive training students receive in Immaculate-style martial arts. Graduates of the House of Bells may swagger over their prowess, but in single combat, it is usually the graduates of the Cloister who reign supreme.

The Cloister is located near the Palace Sublime in Incas Prefecture. Like the Palace Sublime, the Cloister of Wisdom is utterly indefensible, though no enemy would dare attack the school. The reputation of its martial arts instructors alone is enough to convince any earthly enemy to seek an easier target.

### The House of Bells

The House of Bells teaches the arts of war. Its curriculum is designed around training the finest officers for the legions and, to a lesser extent, the imperial navy. As such, its classes focus on tactics, strategy, military history and logistics. Afternoons in the exercise yard are spent in training in both unarmed and armed combat, maneuvers, battlefield sorcery and endurance. The sixth and seventh day of every week are devoted to recreating battles on the small scale, with older students (called cadets) maneuvering and ordering the younger ones. Wooden weapons are supplied for these encounters, so that the combat is appropriately fierce. Several times a year, locals are called in to act as soldiers when larger battles are reenacted, something which the school's extensive grounds and deep pockets make possible.

Located near the city of Arjuf, the House of Bells sprawls over several leagues. Its grounds include fields, two villages, a stretch of shoreline where amphibious assaults and naval combat are practiced and a stretch of rocky terrain that is often used to simulate battles. A low stone wall separates the House of Bells' grounds from the rest of the Realm, and the wall is pierced at five points with gates that allow students, supplies and so forth to enter. Students are not allowed to leave the grounds save by special permission of the dominie, and even then, those who request such permission tend to lose standing within their classes.

The staff also lives and stays entirely on the ground. Most of the teachers are retired legionnaires and have a vested interest in making certain that their students don't get their former subordinates killed. As a result, the curriculum is demanding, and mistakes are punished severely. At the center of the main compound is a whipping post, and a cadet who makes poor tactical decisions during an exercise, who wounds another student or who brings dishonor on the name of the House of Bells is tied to it and flogged.

The House of Bells has a relatively high mortality rate among its cadets because of the strenuous nature of its course material. Extended runs, sleepless vigils, hours of combat

and days spent in the wilderness without tools or weapons are all part of every student's experience, and some simply cannot handle it. Students are wounded or killed with some regularity, and there is a high dropout rate. Those who fail out of the House of Bells are barred by unwritten custom from ever holding an officer's post in the imperial legions.

Students at the House of Bells sleep in barracks. There is no individual space; all is dedicated to the success or failure of the group. Cadets are identified by year, and often, years are pitted against one another in competitions. Within each class, students are divided into individual squads, called scales in imitation of the legion unit. Each scale is only as strong as its weakest member, and they are graded on the performance of the whole. This creates tremendous pressure within the scales to raise everyone's performance — and sometimes results in weak links being "accidentally" injured so that a replacement can be called in.

When students graduate from the House of Bells, they generally acquire commissions in the legions or in private armies across the Realm immediately. A House of Bells graduate in good standing is welcomed in any army and given respect in a way that few new recruits are.

## The Spiral Academy

The Spiral Academy is where ministers and bureaucrats are born. An academic sweatshop par excellence, Students are relentlessly driven to excel at accounting, finance, oration, calligraphy and all of the other arts necessary to survive in the Imperial Bureaucracy. Poetry appreciation is taught here, the better for a student to be able to quote appropriate phrases in debate, but swordplay is not much favored.

### The Hunt

One of the House of Bells' great traditions is the Hunt. Several times a year, condemned criminals are given weapons and turned loose on the grounds with the promise that, if they can leave the school's property, they will be set free. Given a five-hour head start, the convicts are then hunted down by students as a test of their hunting and tracking abilities. Only the elite of each class are chosen to participate in the Hunt, and tremendous prestige is attached to recording a kill.

In all the years that the Hunt has been run, precisely three fugitives have actually reached the walls that separate the school from the outside world. Two were allowed to go free (and quietly killed shortly thereafter so they would not be able to describe the grounds to outsiders). The third was offered a position on staff teaching evasion and survival.

### Cheap Labor

The Spiral Academy has extensive business interests, both in trade itself and in hiring itself out to those who do trade. One of its greatest advantages in the latter market is the fact that its labor is essentially free. All of the Academy's work is tasked out to students in the form of "apprenticeships" and "experience-building," cutting its overhead tremendously. As a result, the Spiral Academy is one of the wealthiest institutions in the Realm, and its hoard grows larger every year.

Students entering the Spiral Academy lose all contact with the outside world for the duration of their study, with the exception of the never-ending flow of reports about rice production, shipping losses and the million other details that make up the business of the Realm. While the staff encourages apprenticeships with local ministers, most students find they learn more on the school grounds, drilled endlessly by ministerial taskmasters in the minutiae of commerce and record-keeping. Much of the work done in the classrooms is actual bookkeeping, either mirroring the work of others or (for older students) actually serving purposes outside the school walls.

Here, more than in any other school, competition between students is fierce. However, the Spiral Academy also builds the strongest student and alumni networks of any of the four academies. This is fueled in part by the low esteem in which graduates of the other three hold the bloodless, pen-pushing, bean-counting products of the Academy, and no doubt, this attitude has also fueled the antagonism between the branches of the Thousand Scales.

The Spiral Academy is physically the second-smallest of the four schools, though the largest in terms of enrollment. Its enclosure is walled, and its buildings are high, secure and heavily guarded. Courses are taught morning and afternoon, with nights reserved for intensive study. Teachers at the Spiral Academy are most often retired ministers or magistrates, but the Academy will pluck anyone it regards as potentially useful and stand them up in front of a classroom. What matters is usable knowledge, not its source.

Graduates of the Spiral Academy head into the Thousand Scales almost without fail, though some become private merchants or tend to their house's affairs. Representatives from the various branches of the Imperial Service often give guest lectures at the Academy, and while doing so, they cherry-pick the finest young talent for their particular offices. The Spiral Academy graduate who does not have a position waiting (officially or otherwise) for her upon graduation simply didn't look hard enough for one.

The Empress sponsored both the Spiral Academy and the School of Bells, and the Regent has taken up that

sponsorship. Enough of the great and powerful of the Realm passed through the Academy's doors to make continued support for it, even in these times, a forgone conclusion.

### The Heptagram

Located on a small, rocky island off the Blessed Isle's north coast, the Heptagram consists of a single tower and a few outbuildings. Home to no more than 80 students at a time, it is the finest academy of magic, alchemy, demonology and divination in the Realm, and it guards its secrets jealously. Bound demons patrol the sea lanes leading to the island and prevent unauthorized landings. Those who seek to visit the Heptagram without permission end up feeding the crawling things at the bottom of the sea with their corpses.

With nearly 40 teachers on staff, the Heptagram provides the most personal education of any of the academies. However, with instruction in demon summoning and the like, they also produce a higher rate of student casualties than even the House of Bells. Early on in their studies, students apprentice to a particular instructor and follow in her footsteps for the duration of their stay.

Students at the Heptagram sleep two to a room, and their quarters are relatively luxurious. Much of their time is spent in study in one of the school's libraries, of which there are seven. There is less classroom time and more lab work and independent study at the Heptagram, albeit all under the watchful eye of at least one instructor.

This does not mean, though, that more material teachings are neglected. Even the most powerful sorcerer is in a great deal of trouble if he can't function in a social setting, and thus, the importance of etiquette, dancing, mathematics, composition and so on is stressed heavily. The focus of the Heptagram remains firmly on magic, though, and from the dullest student to the dominie herself, all who dwell there are quite satisfied with this fact.

### Secret Societies

Even the elite have their elite, and in the secondary schools those elite belong to the secret societies. Even the Cloister has its share, and each school's societies are unique to that school alone.

It is the most senior students in the society who select which of their younger peers they will invite to join, though those students who have a family legacy with the group often get preferential treatment. Candidates are observed for several seasons, and those who pass muster are issued invitations. If a student discusses the invitation with anyone, it is instantly withdrawn.

Initiations vary from school to school and from society to society. Some involve making sacrifices to the Dragons; others are more benign and involve either cross-examination or debauchery. In any case, if a postulant passes, she is then initiated into the society, usually through a ritual expounding on the notions of death, rebirth and Exaltation.

### The Servants

The Heptagram is a dangerous place to work. As such, most of the servants are golems, automata, bound spirits or bound demons, as they're less fragile. And with student sorcerers causing the occasional catastrophe, having staff that doesn't require frequent replacement is a good thing.

When visitors come to the school, however, great care is taken to hide the more bizarre laborers from the public eye. While the previous dominie thought it did the school's image good to put the more obvious tokens of its power front and center, the present one favors a more subtle approach and saves the shocks for suitable moments.

Each secret society has a different identifying mark by which members can identify each other later in life. Often, the societies cut across aspect and house lines, and as such, they unintentionally do a great deal of work to unify the Realm. After all, a man is born into his house and Exalted by his blood, but he is chosen by a secret society, and that makes all the difference.

## Sorcery Among the Dragon-Blooded

Sorcerers are rare, even among the Dragon-Blooded. Sorcery is dangerous and requires extensive study. Even those who study sorcery over the course of many decades are unlikely to learn more than a dozen spells. Since sorcerers are so unusual, they hardly go unnoticed in Dynastic society. They learn a great deal of occult knowledge, much of it deliberately hidden from the eyes of society. They find that they are outcasts within most nobles houses. Their lives are not at all like those of their non-sorcerous peers, but they still play an important role in the Realm.

### Education

Most sorcerers learn their trade at the Heptagram, the secondary school for sorcerers on the Isle of Voices. The school teaches more than just spell casting, of course. There are many things considered valuable for a sorcerer to learn: spirit lore, sciences, architecture and languages.

### Spirit Lore

Spirits, elementals and demons are wrapped up in almost every aspect of sorcery. Sorcerers summon and bind these creatures. They take them as lovers. They use them to do their bidding. Sorcerers travel to pick up arcane bits of knowledge and ancient texts, so they often interact with and petition distant spirit courts. Spirits possess knowledge that sorcerers desire. Thus, the Heptagram teaches a great deal about the little gods and their cousins.



Sorcerers learn the rules of known spirit courts and general rules that can be applied to many spirit courts. They learn how to deal with these creatures, how to command them, how to convince them and how to handle them when they cause trouble. They learn of the Charms different spirits might display and make use of. They learn what knowledge the Dragon-Blooded possess about demons — their various circles, the differences between named and unnamed demons and the dangers of dealing with demons. They also learn the differences between elementals and spirits, and what each is useful for.

Not all of this information is correct. Some of it turns out to be outdated or to have been recorded, reported or translated incorrectly. But by and large, students of the Heptagram have a much easier time dealing with spirits than other Dynasts do. Some students who do not go on to become sorcerers become advisors to important politicians and military leaders who expect to deal with spirits.

## Engineering and Chemistry

Sorcery is the subject of unshakable natural laws. Just as Manse construction involves particular angles, repeating motifs and exact measurements, so do many other elements of sorcery. Knowledge of such sacred geometry and architecture is critical to successful magical workings. A knowledgeable Dynast has a much easier time when dealing with fellow sorcerers and Manse architects, as he can check their designs and preparations for himself. He might not be able to make sense of everything others do, but at least he can catch glaring errors. This has saved more than one Dynast from a treacherous contractor.

Chemicals, herbal preparations and drugs work the same way. Certain substances can be combined in repeatable ways to make poisons, healing drugs, tranquilizers, hallucinogens and fertility drugs. Many graduates of the Heptagram possess the knowledge and skill of pharmacists, healers and alchemists. Dynasts often prefer to see a doctor or healer who attended the Heptagram.

## The Extras

Sorcerers learn many languages while at the Heptagram. Spirits speak Old Realm, and sorcerous texts can be found in that language, and the instructions for the use of most First Age artifacts and weapons are as well. Other important knowledge could be in any language, and sorcerers often travel widely to further their studies. When incorrect pronunciation could set a bound demon free, it is in the sorcerer's best interest to know what he's saying.

Sorcerers also learn combat skills. Not only is such knowledge necessary for Dragon-Blooded in general, but sorcerers particularly find a great deal of use for it. When they've summoned an elemental and accidentally set it free, a little combat knowledge might mean the difference between life and death. The same goes for the use of Charms.

## How They're Seen

Sorcerers make almost everyone at least a little nervous. After all, the powers they wield are dangerous, and few outside of their little society understand even a fraction of those powers. They also tend to see the world and those around them in odd and unusual ways, and this makes people uncomfortable.

Some people resent sorcerers — they'd like to be able to do what sorcerers can, but they lack the talent, the patience or the ambition to learn all the ins and outs of the arts. Some lack the connections to get into the Heptagram or flunked out, or their families refuse to allow them to follow the sorcerer's way. Others fear sorcerers — the threat of a sorcerer's vengeance is not to be taken lightly, and no one wants a summoning or other experiment going wrong in their home. Still others look down on sorcerers and see them as twisted and power-hungry, a danger to themselves and others. Yet many Dynasts, regardless of their personal feelings about sorcerers, rely on their abilities and would hardly make a move without them.

Some bonded circles refuse to take sorcerers as members; others search far and wide to take one on, and in every generation, there are some circles made up entirely of sorcerers. Sorcerers have a reputation that far exceeds the abilities that most of them possess. Many Great Houses provide separate quarters for their sorcerous members, away from the rest of the family in case of a mishap. Some families are eager to marry their children off to sorcerers in the hopes of harnessing some of that power. Others refuse to marry their children off to those "monsters," though, of course, they don't voice such opinions within hearing distance of the Empress or her eldest and most magically adept child, Mnemon.

Although some people try to enhance their own reputation by pretending that sorcerers don't bother them, very few actually feel that way. The actions and mistakes that sorcerers take and make can have disastrous consequences. While Charms and Hearthstones can have great effects, these are seen as more natural things, a part of who the Dragon-Blooded are. Because sorcery is entirely learned, many see it as an unnatural activity.

### Making Friends

Those sorcerers who wish to be seen in a more positive light usually take one of two tacks. The first is to hide all reminders of what they are. They don't chatter about the mysteries of the First Age. They don't keep sorcerous texts lying around in plain sight. They keep their odd viewpoints and insights to themselves. They perform their experiments and spells well away from anyone else, often keeping homes in remote locations for the purpose.

The second tack is to do everything they can to make others see their powers in a positive light. They study the healing arts so that they can help those who are hurt. They take particular care to learn the precautionary measures of their art. They offer to use their knowledge and abilities to help their house, family and friends in any way they can.

Do any of these efforts pay off? On an individual scale, it sometimes helps. A Dynast whose life was saved by her brother the sorcerer is more likely to view him in a positive light. A Great House whose sorcerous members go to great lengths to be at its beck and call will appreciate them far more than they might scorn them as dangerous freaks.

A few sorcerers get by on an excess of charm and wit, their people skills overcoming the stigma associated with their activities. These are the sorcerers who prove the exception to the rule, who are invited to salons and slept with by handsome society lads.

## Society

Society rules that apply to the rest of the Dragon-Blooded have unspoken variations where sorcerers are concerned. These usually work against the sorcerer. Some Dynasts, however, in their fear of sorcery and possible retaliation for bad treatment, treat sorcerers better than other Dragon-Bloods, although the element of fear in such treatment makes it just as uncomfortable as its opposite. Thus, though opinions vary about magic, sorcerers are rarely comfortable anywhere.

Family income is close to that of the sorcerer's siblings. A slightly larger income may be an attempt to bribe the sorcerer into "behaving" or staying away from the family. A slightly smaller income is seen as a punishment for going into sorcery or a not-so-subtle hint that the sorcerer isn't wanted and should go seek his fortune elsewhere.

Marriage is also a problem for sorcerers. Many families don't want their children marrying sorcerers, so it is difficult for a sorcerer to find a good match. Sorcerers often settle for low-ranking mates.

It is rare for a sorcerer to be left out of a gala, but it does happen, and few Dynasts will fault the host for his decision or speak up on the sorcerer's behalf. A sorcerer is seen as a dampener on what might otherwise be a joyous occasion. Sorcerers are almost never just invited to small parties or salons.

While households are still obliged to host visiting sorcerers, many put such guests in distant quarters. Such households house sorcerers poorly, speak to them curtly and serve them inadequately. This is technically against tradition, but only those who are very secure in their station would speak up on the sorcerer's behalf, and even those only do so if the sorcerer has something the speaker wants.

### The Houses

House Cynis, with its mercenary views, tends to be more open to the presence of sorcerers at some parties. The house is also, however, perfectly willing to block sorcerers from any party at which they'd spoil the atmosphere for the other partygoers. Few members of House Cynis become

sorcerers — perhaps the long years of study fail to appeal to such a hedonistic house.

House Ragara is well known for inviting sorcerers to its Gateway tournaments. As Gateway is seen as a sport of the mind, there are a number of sorcerers who are very well versed in its strategies. Ragara values these skills, even if a sorcerer practices them. Sorcerers might, however, be kept out of some of the wilder parties held at these tournaments. Most families in House Ragara claim not to be bothered by sorcery and sorcerers, but a strong undercurrent of discrimination runs through the house. It's almost never overt, but it shows up in little ways.

Very few sorcerers are allowed into House V'neef's parties. V'neef values the sometimes wild, sometimes mellow, but always celebratory tone of its parties. It doesn't want to risk this mood by bringing in sorcerers. In other matters, V'neef isn't particularly prejudiced against sorcerers, either in the family or through marriage — it can't afford to be. It's too young a house to cut itself off from such a resource.

Nellens greedily courts any sorcerer it can find. The lack of Dragon-Blooded produced by this house leaves it with very few resources in this area. The house hopes that by courting sorcerers for marriage who are passed over by the other houses, it can infuse its bloodlines with more Exalted and gain the protection of the powerful sorcerers. Nellens tends to overestimate the abilities of sorcerers, however, having so little experience with them. This results in uncomfortable confrontations in the family and some unwarranted disappointment. Nellens likes to show off the sorcerers it courts and, thus, is perfectly willing to include sorcerers in its parties.

Tepet maintains a cool attitude toward sorcerers, neither overtly snubbing them, nor courting them. Family members are not encouraged to go to the Heptagram, but neither are they discouraged from it. Its family sorcerers are usually invited to parties when socially appropriate, but they aren't sought out for the purpose.

House Mnemon encourages its children to delve into sorcery, and thus, a high number of Mnemon possess skill with the art. Mnemon herself is a powerful sorceress, and her house likes to show off its sorcerers. House Mnemon's displays are subtler than Nellens.' Sorcerers are treated pretty much like any other member of the family, except that more work is put into finding them appropriate marriages and into placing them where they can do the most good. Mnemon parties include any relevant sorcerers. However, when the host deems that the presence of a sorcerer would damage a scheme or relationship, she might find something else for the sorcerer to do — a polite fiction that allows host and sorcerer to pretend that the sorcerer is not being excluded from the party.

House Ledaal's interest in history and knowledge causes it to treat sorcerers much more positively than the majority of houses, though sorcerers are not as embraced as Mnemon sorcerers are. Ledaal children are encouraged to follow dreams of learning sorcery, though a few conservative families do not agree with the greater house on this issue. Because Ledaal parties tend to be smaller affairs, whether or not a sorcerer attends depends more on any close attachments he has to the host and less on his status as a sorcerer.

House Peleps sees sorcerers primarily as tools to be used, not as family members or beloved siblings. Only children who are not valued, who are seen as damaged goods in some way, who have shamed their parents or whose parents have brought shame upon themselves are allowed to attend the Heptagram. Sorcerers are almost never invited to Peleps parties, unless it's a part of someone's strategy.

## Societies

Because sorcerers are, in many ways, cut off from normal Dynastic society, they tend to organize themselves into small societies. It's a way to feel comfortable among peers, it's a way to feel less alone or lonely, it's valuable networking, and it gives them parties to attend where they don't feel unwanted. It's also a manifestation of all the academic differences that pop up among those who study the natural laws of sorcery.

Many societies are broken up along lines of magical lineage — in other words, one society might consist of a teacher, his students and their students. Others are broken up along lines of study — a number of sorcerers who follow a certain viewpoint about sorcery might join together. Often, these two are the same, as a sorcerer usually passes a certain angle of study along to his students and theirs. Other societies are regional, involve members of a specific house or household or center around a sworn brotherhood or a group of friends who use their sorcerous studies as an excuse to spend time with one another.

Sorcerous societies come and go with great frequency. Lineage groups and bonded circles tend to last the longest, while those organized around a political cause form, break up and reform all the time. Societies espousing particular lines of study or belief usually last for at least a decade or two. By then, either their possibilities are exhausted, or they've lost their popularity, or they've gained enough of a following that they'll survive for quite some time to come. Regional or house-based societies tend to last, as they offer sorcerers benefits beyond just the sorcerous. Regional societies, however, rarely achieve much beyond information dispersal, a little networking and some fun parties, as they have few ways of commanding loyalty among their members.

Societies can be open or secret. All of the members might wear certain colors or a certain sash or bear a certain tattoo. Or members might go to great lengths never to be seen with one another, communicating only through intermediaries or through sorcery. Societies can also be large or small. Some consist of only two people. Others can be as large as 20 or 30 sorcerers, and many sorcerers belong to multiple societies. Usually, only house or regional societies are large, and the amount of bickering, politicking and dissension that goes on among this many sorcerers generally outweighs any advantage of numbers.

## The Mnemon Darik Society

This lineal society was brought together by Mnemon Darik, a sorcerer of some renown. He isn't particularly powerful, but he did have the ear of the Empress, and he knows a couple of unusual spells that most other sorcerers do not. He is generous with his time in terms of mentoring students. His detractors say that this is because he isn't good for much else. He has a warm, fatherly personality however, and his students have only good things to say about him. The society includes Darik's four original students and almost all of their students as well.

The society doesn't do much in terms of causes or goals. However, it does serve as a useful information network. Because Darik fosters such a familial atmosphere among his students most of them are still fond of him and are happy to pass on interesting tidbits of knowledge. Whenever something bad happens to someone in Darik's sorcerous lineage, he takes on her students as his own. Members of this group find it relatively easy to get help from the others during an emergency or when searching for a job.

Darik has a grudge against the Heptagram and prefers to teach those sorcerers who, for whatever reason, were unable to attend or graduate from the school. He himself washed out of the Heptagram and went on to sorcerous greatness.

## The Animists

The Animists are a group of sorcerers who believe that, since sorcery follows natural laws, the best place to learn about sorcery is in nature. They prefer to learn through observation of nature and studying with spirits. The Animists are largely ignored by other sorcerous societies and sometimes regarded as cranks. Most Animists are relatively unskilled, since they concentrate on learning things from the ground up, making the same mistakes that students of skilled sorcerers learn to avoid.

Those Animists who do become powerful sorcerers are impressive indeed, usually through combining the understanding they have gained through animism with some practical schooling. Animism seems to lend an intuitive feel for the laws of sorcery, but this needs to be paired with more traditional schooling to be of much use. Unfortunately for these skilled sorcerers, they're shunned by traditional sorcerers for their study of animism and by Animists for their study of traditional sorcery. This leaves them without any parties to attend and few allies in the world of sorcery.

## The Sorcerers of the Scarlet Throne

The Sorcerers of the Scarlet Throne is a regional group of sorcerers. Membership is open to any sorcerer who makes his primary residence in the Scarlet Prefecture. This group likes to lay claim to a fair amount of political power and made a large show of offering its services to the Empress whenever she needed anything. In reality, a group of sorcerers whose only commonality is that they live near the Imperial City rarely gets anything worthwhile done. Most of its members are connivers with political leanings, or they wouldn't live where they do. They put on a big show of solidarity to outsiders, but most of them stab each other in the back at every opportunity.

The Empress enjoyed making use of this group's desire for power and legitimacy. She called on it when she needed a sorcerer for something unimportant, playing up to the members' ambition by making the task sound vital. She helped to set them against each other by dropping further hints of betrayal and opportunity in their ears. Now that she has gone, most of this group has fallen to pointless squabbling. A small group, however, has independently approached "Prefect" Bata and quietly offered its support in case of a crisis. Bata is holding this card quietly in reserve in case the conflict for the Scarlet Throne becomes violent.

### The Empress and Sorcerous Societies

Certain societies are formed around a specific cause, purpose or obligation. The Empress took a perverse pleasure in causing a new such society to form whenever she thought that another sorcerous society was gaining too much power or doing something that she didn't like. She offered certain enticements and salaries to a hand-picked group of sorcerers — usually chosen to work well together and for appropriate political leanings — in return for their hard work toward a specific purpose (one that opposed the group that was gaining too much power). She particularly liked to snap up young, idealistic sorcerers who could be manipulated into throwing everything into whatever cause she had ready. She delighted in playing these groups off against one another.

## The Rings of Ledaal Catala

This secretive society bases itself in the Threshold. All of its members are descendants of the Catala bloodline of House Ledaal. Because of this group's distance from the Blessed Isle, its members often lack the resources of Realm sorcerers. However, they have access to a couple of old manuscripts that haven't made their way back to the Realm proper yet.

Certain members of this group have access to copies of *Oadenol's Codex*, *The Perfect Square* and a treatise on ancient theories of Manse construction entitled *The House of the Noonday Sun*, written by the legendary architect Kal Bax, which has been only partially translated. While members of this group share many of the same goals and work together relatively well, they're still cautious. Those who keep copies of sorcerous manuscripts often require a favor or some proof of good will before loaning them to a fellow, allowing him to read the book in their presence or making copies of certain pages for him.

The Rings of Ledaal Catala searches for any sorcerous means to combat or defeat the Deathlords, their deathknights and the Anathema. In this search, members eagerly follow any rumor or hint of spells, manuscripts or wonders from the First Age. They also engage in deep and dangerous periods of experimentation. The society's location in the Threshold enables it to find remote places to experiment and to get its hands on items and substances difficult to find covertly within the Realm. However, it also makes it more difficult for the sorcerers to obtain certain other items and substances.



## The Initiates of the Fourth Circle

The Initiates is a bonded circle of sorcerers who graduated the Heptagram together less than a decade ago. They're still young, but their friendship is rock-solid, and they've proven themselves to be skilled, honorable and intelligent. They've been traveling in the near parts of the Threshold for the past several years, but stories of their adventures have filtered back to the mainland now and then. Some of these stories are exaggerated, but others are entirely true.

One such story has it that the Initiates discovered that a satrap was hiring mercenaries to steal the tribute he sent to the Realm. He gave them a cut and took the rest for himself. The Initiates defeated the mercenaries by turning their own mounts against them and paid a Guild caravan with the sorcerer's own coin to take the tribute safely to the Blessed Isle. Another story tells of a mad water-spirit who demanded the sacrifice of children from unprotected peasants. The Initiates turned the spirit's river to blood, forcing it to flee, and remained behind for a time to be certain that it didn't return.

The Initiates seem to have made it the society's mission to bring a little order into the chaos that the Realm-controlled parts of the Threshold have become since the Empress' disappearance. Some laud the group's actions. Others shake their heads and predict early deaths. The ringleader of the group, a bold Mnemon scion named Lartel, ignores such predictions.

## The Watchers

The Watchers were specially commissioned by the Empress herself to investigate other sorcerers for diabolism. Summoning and binding demons is dangerous, but selling them your soul is treason. No one knows exactly which sorcerers belong to this group, and rumor has it that the membership rotates at least every decade so that if members are discovered, the group will still be effective.

The job of the Watchers is to mingle among their fellow sorcerers, keep watch over them and make sure that no one is breaking the rules. The Empress would sometimes dispatch them to investigate specific allegations, but in general they listened to rumor and picked their own targets. Unfortunately the Empress is the only one who knew the roster of this particular group — she was unwilling to give

anyone else that knowledge. Now that she is gone, no one knows who or where these Watchers are or what they're doing, and they haven't exactly come forward. The consensus has it that a few Watchers are part of the All-Seeing Eye, but those houses with tendrils in that spy organization have yet to ferret out any sorcerers within it.

Every now and then, packages of evidence still show up on the doorstep of the Deliberative, implicating a sorcerer in the practice of diabolism. Those familiar with past cases say that these packages do come from the Watchers. They're the bogeyman of sorcerous cliques and the reason for some of the paranoia associated with sorcerers. Everyone fears what this group might do with no one to oversee it. Now and again, the mysterious death of a sorcerer is attributed to this group and claims are made that the Watchers have taken matters into their own hands and started carrying out sentences on their own. The Deliberative has put the matter off because it has no idea what to do about the Watchers.

### How Many Know?

All told, about one in ten Dynasts knows sorcery. Many are older Dragon-Blooded who learn Emerald Countermagic and perhaps one or two other spells. One in 20 or 25 Dragon-Blooded is actually a sorcerer of notable power.

## Checks and Balances

The Empress knew that sorcerers could be a danger to her power. The ability to research and perform powerful and previously unheard-of spells was a threat. Because of this, she used several means to keep track of or control over the sorcerers within the Realm. The first is the Watchers, mentioned above, who investigate sorcerers for diabolism. But they are hardly the Empress' only hold over the Realm's sorcerers.

### The White Registry

The Empress required every Dragon-Blooded sorcerer who knew even a single spell to register as a sorcerer with an office of the Thousand Scales, the White Registry. They had to provide their house and affiliations, their primary place of residence, whether they'd graduated from the Heptagram and a brief idea of just how deeply they were involved in sorcery.

This was a half-hearted and half-forgotten program whose information was usually at least a few years out of date. The punishment for not providing one's information (or for providing incorrect information) is a relatively small fine. It's only a real problem if combined with some other sorcery-related offense. If a sorcerer engages in diabolism or uses his sorcery to perform other illegal activities, then the argument that he deliberately mislead the Realm by providing false information or failing to register is often used as "proof" of the sorcerer's ill intent. There are plenty of sorcerers who are unregistered, playing the gamble that, so long as they don't do anything illegal, it won't come back to haunt them.

There are some Dragon-Blooded who have used this against sorcerers in recent years, so there has been a resurgence of popularity for the program in past months.

### Obligations

The law of the Realm is that each sorcerer, upon graduation from the Heptagram or entry into the White Registry, owes the Realm a single Obligation. This means that the Empress or the Deliberative may, at any time, call upon a Dynastic sorcerer to perform a single task, great or small, for the Realm, without any promised reward or recognition. The sorcerer must then never speak of the form his Obligation took to anyone.

This Obligation usually took one of several forms. The Empress sometimes used it to take care of some matter that was bothering her or to discharge a debt she owed. She either tailored the Obligation to the skills of the sorcerer or, if she took interest in the sorcerer, used it to push him to greater feats of skill.

More often, however, she used the Obligation to make a point to the sorcerer. If she heard that the sorcerer had no respect for her position, she would choose a task that would demonstrate her power, her largess, her intelligence or anything else that would make him rethink his position. If the sorcerer was someone she wished to recruit for the Watchers, she might choose a task that would show him the horrors of diabolism. If she needed someone to take a position in a certain prefecture, she might choose a task that showed the sorcerer he was needed there.

### The Sidereals

Many of the teachers at the Heptagram are Sidereal Exalted. Given how closely the students work with their instructors, it's unlikely that many of them make it through school without knowing or at least suspecting the identity of their teachers.

The Sidereals take care of this by making use of what's right in front of them—spells. The oath that young students take in their first few weeks at the school, vowing never to reveal the secrets of the Heptagram to outsiders, is magically binding Celestial Circle magic, invulnerable to the students' countermagic. Even once those students learn of their professors' true nature, they are unable to discuss it in the presence of anyone not also subject to the same oath.

Reactions of the students to their Sidereal teachers range from suspicion and loathing to curiosity and fascination. Most students figure things out slowly, after they've had time to grow attached to or at least develop respect for their teachers, so they're more likely to be curious than upset.



"Scratch, scratch, scratch" went the broom against the stone floor. The bitter old man sighed as he cleaned the autumn leaves from the shrine. The sun was just peering over the horizon, and the old man could hear the braying of donkeys and the rattling of bells as the peasantry went to work in the fields. The peasants rarely came here — shrines were places for the gods, not places for men. Only monks stayed in such abodes, and this one had not had a regular priest for a very long time.

Now a demigod who played at priesthood had come and taken up residence. No one argued with him, certainly not the peasants, nor the terrified local spirit honored by the shrine. Both knew that elder Dragon-Blooded were best left to go about their business as they saw fit, for they were more force of nature than mortal phenomenon. The monk was certainly a force of nature — during his seclusion, his Essence had been growing. He often woke in the morning with a thin layer of glare ice covering his body and frost lingered on his long gray hair.

The old man put away his broom and brought cold rainwater from the stone barrel in the front of the temple. He drank some of the water, washed himself in some and used the rest to cook his breakfast of rice, lentils and some meat from a deer he had killed with his bow. The washing and the cooking took place in the same container, a metal helmet that Tepet Arada had brought along with him on retreat. All of it went slowly because the monk was hung over this morning.

In truth, the monk was hung over most mornings. In his more honest moments, Arada thought of himself as absent without permission, and like any soldier, he was a friend to the local brewer. The peasants didn't comment on the fact that the demigod-monk of their shrine was a drunk because he always paid for his beer in good coin and also because they feared for their souls and lives if they accidentally offended him.

The remains of his family considered Arada a disgrace, but he didn't really care any more. He had spent his life in the service of Realm and Dynasty, only to see his children and grandchildren murdered by a demon while his peers stood by to watch. He had had enough. Tepet Arada would go out to fight in the last battle with the rest of the Dragon-Blooded host, but until that time came, they would get nothing more out of him. In the meantime, Arada was praying because the Immaculate Dragons were more likely to rescue the Realm than its government.

This shrine, like most of the others, had a good view. That allowed Arada to see the messengers coming from some distance away. Whoever it was rode slowly and carried the Tepet colors. Arada's trained eye estimated a bodyguard of about 100 men. From this, he deduced that it probably wasn't news of his granddaughter's death. That rider would have been moving fast and alone.

Arada shrugged and shuffled back into the shrine. He gave equal odds to a party of his relatives pleading with him to come back into public life or a band of assassins sent by his own house or some other family to put him out of the way forever. He did not care — he had a sword and was not afraid to die. They could kill him, but they could not make him be a general again. Tepet Arada had given enough already, let someone else lead men to die.

# CHAPTER THREE
# CHARACTER CREATION

The Realm is a mighty empire, the greatest and most powerful state in recorded memory. But empires are not faceless monoliths, nor are they collectives of hive-minded drones. Like any empire, the Realm is made up of individuals, each with his own complex hopes, goals, dreams and desires. You are about to become one of those individuals. Not just any individual, though; you are one of the Terrestrial Exalted — the Dragon-Blooded. By virtue of blood and birth, you are one of the Realm's ruling elite. By virtue of spiritual enlightenment, you are literally a bodhissatva among men, an enlightened saint destined to rule because of your divine might and spiritual advancement.

This chapter provides the rules needed to create Dragon-Blooded characters. The process for creating one of the Terrestrial Exalted follows the same guidelines presented for Solars in **Exalted**. However, there are areas in which the Terrestrial Exalted differ from their fallen Solar cousins. The following material details these differences and is meant to supplement and customize the rules in **Exalted**.

### The Storyteller

During character creation, it is important for the Storyteller to work with her players, and vice versa. Ultimately, gaming is a team effort, and the closer everyone works together, the more fun everyone will have. This is especially true for the Dragon-Blooded, who were created by the gods to be more powerful as a group than they are as individuals. Storytellers should discuss with their players the type of series they want to run, and players should work to create character concepts that fit that type of series. Players should also work at making their characters fully developed personalities, with histories and goals. The more raw material a Storyteller has to work with, the more story hooks she can provide for that character.

## Step One: Character Concept

This is the single most important step in creating your character. Without it, your Traits are nothing but random dots on a sheet of paper. The stronger your concept is, the stronger your final character will be, and the easier it will be to flesh him out. For the Dragon-Blooded, there are several important social issues that must be taken into account when deciding upon a character concept.

### The Perfected Hierarchy

The Immaculate Order teaches that the Dragon-Blooded, most blessed by the Immaculate Dragons, are spiritually

superior to mortal men and, as such, are suited to rule over the unExalted. But while they stand at the top of the Perfected Hierarchy, expectations demand that Dragon-Blooded maintain their positions within certain portions of society.

• **The Dynasty:** At the pinnacle of the social strata are the 10 Great Houses, each descending from the Scarlet Empress. Also included is House Nellens, whose members descend from one of the Empress's consorts. At least 90 percent of all Terrestrial Exalted are born among the families of the Dynasty, and they are the elite of the Realm. The Dynasty is a divine aristocracy whose members are born and raised knowing that one day they will assume their rightful place as leaders within the greatest empire in all Creation.

• **The Order of the Immaculate Dragons:** Keepers of the Realm's state religion, the Order is home to more Dragon-Blooded than any group save the Dynasty itself. It is both a place of refuge for those members of the Dynasty seeking escape from the pressures of family politics and a path of power for those lowborn Dragon-Blooded seeking to advance their place within the Perfected Hierarchy.

• **The Thousand Scales:** The bureaucratic web that governs the Realm, the ranks of the Thousand Scales are largely filled with unExalted. Those Dragon-Blooded among the Imperial Service are primarily members of the legions, agents of the All-Seeing Eye, magistrates or high-ranking members of the ministries. Dynastic and patrician houses place Dragon-Blooded members within the Thousand Scales, and many born outside the Dynasty find the legions and the magistrates an easy path to power and influence.

• **Outcastes:** Those Dragon-Blooded who turn their backs on the Realm or who are born outside of the Realm and show no desire to take their proper place within the Perfected Hierarchy are considered vile deviants, little better than the Anathema. Any Dragon-Blooded who is not part of a Dynasty household or a member of the Order of Immaculate Dragons or the Thousand Scales is considered outcaste.

## House

All Dragon-Blooded born among the Dynasty are part of one of the 11 Great Houses. Even an Exalt who enters the Immaculate Order retains her place in her house. The Great Houses are sprawling clans, each made up of countless extended families intertwined through a web of marriages and adoptions, and each contains a number of prominent sublines. A character's house is her family. She didn't choose it, and it's virtual suicide to disown it. Whether she embraces it or rebels against it, her house influences the sort of environment she grew up in, the values she learned, the type of social behavior she considers acceptable and the sort of duties and interests she's expected to pursue.

Those Dragon-Blooded born outside the Dynasty typically enter the Great Houses through marriage. Some choose their spouses when they choose to align with one house or another. Some do so out of loyalty or love; most do so out of political expediency. Those non-Dynasts among the Immaculate Order or the Thousand Scales are under no compulsion to join one of the Great Houses, but little stands in the way of those who wish to do so.

For full details on the Great Houses, see Chapter Two: The Dragon-Blooded.

### On the Outside Looking In

Not every Dragon-Blood is born to her natural place within the Perfected Hierarchy. Those born outside the hallowed bloodlines of the Dynasty must find their way in, be it by hook or by crook. Those born among the patricians often find themselves thrust to positions of prominence within their families. If his family is one of the Realm's wealthier lines, such a Dragon-Blood should have little trouble arranging an alliance — often through marriage — with one of the Dynastic houses. Sometimes, the Dynasts pay for a poorer child's proper education contingent on good performance and continued eligibility for marriage, while, in other cases, the patricians can afford to educate their child properly out of their own pockets. Dragon-Blooded from the poorer and less politically connected patrician houses frequently join the legions or the Immaculate Order, though some are well educated enough to enter the Thousand Scales. Those born of citizen, peasant or disenfranchised stock who are Exalted by pure chance of heredity almost invariably join the Immaculates, though some few join the legions. The rest become outcastes.

## Elemental Aspect

Unlike the debased Anathema, whose dark patrons divide their lackeys into castes, the virtuous Dragon-Blooded are divided into five elemental aspects. These aspects correspond to the Five Elemental Dragons (Air, Earth, Fire, Water, Wood) who empowered the Dragon-Blooded so that they might destroy the Anathema and lead others toward spiritual enlightenment. A character's elemental aspect determines which one of the five terrestrial elements her soul is oriented toward. This spiritual bond with her chosen element influences the character's appearance, powers and which skills she has a natural affinity with.

It is important to note that, while a character's elemental orientation will subtly influence aspects of her personality, it does not dictate her behavior. Among followers of each element, there exists a vast diversity of personalities and behavior patterns.

### Gender Roles

In the Realm, gender takes a back seat to position within the Perfected Hierarchy. Terrestrial Exaltation occurs with equal frequency to both men and women, and the Dynasty sees to it that children are trained in any and all necessary aspects of rulership, regardless of gender. Likewise, neither the Order of the Immaculate Dragons nor the Thousand Scales discriminate between genders. Even slaves are trained for whatever role their masters deem most suitable, regardless of sex. There is some persistent discrimination against men, but it's more of a glass ceiling than a genuine limit — men are generally paid slightly less, promoted less frequently and treated as somewhat irresponsible, but individual circumstance often differs from the norm. Ultimately, the fact that a character is one of the Dragon-Blooded will have a much greater impact on his role in Realm society than his gender.

### Anima Effects

Just as the Anathema are able to channel their corrupt power through their anima banners to create horrific effects, a Dragon-Blooded can attune her anima to her aspected element to generate miraculous effects. In addition to the abilities unique to their aspects, all Dragon-Blooded can spend a single mote of Essence to:

- Cause the skin tint natural to her aspect to deepen and become slightly luminescent for a scene (clearly marking the character as one of the Chosen of the Elemental Dragons).
- Cause her anima to glow brightly enough read by for a scene.
- Know her exact location in relation to her aspect's corresponding elemental pole (enabling a Dragon-Blooded character to subtract 1 from the difficulty of a roll to navigate or orient herself).

## Nature

Nature functions identically for Terrestrial Exalted as it does for Anathema. A number of Dragon-Blooded possess Natures that are somewhat common among their elemental aspects. Others hold Natures that seem radically at odds with common stereotype. Your character may have any Nature you wish.

### Of House & Aspect

Ten of the 11 Great Houses of the Imperial Dynasty are oriented toward one of the five holy elements, and these elemental affinities have some connection to each house's temperament and place within the Realm. Each house affinity represents the elemental aspect of the house's founder, and many of the house elders share this affinity. However, not all — or even most — of a house's newly Exalted Dragon-Bloods match their house's elemental affinity. Centuries of arranged marriages, romantic dalliances and adoptions have ensured that each house includes a sizable number of Dragon-Blooded representing each element. From time to time, house elders and the leaders of the Immaculate Order debate just what, if anything, this portends.

And what does this mean for your character? Simply that you can play a character of any elemental aspect from any house you wish. Houses and aspects are meant to provide character options, not limitations.

# Step Two: Choosing Attributes

As with all characters, Dragon-Blooded begin with each Attribute at one dot. Being spiritually advanced beings, Dragon-Blooded have much more potential than mundane mortals. However, they are somewhat weaker than the accursed Anathema, who draw their unnatural strength from the forces of corruption.

A Dragon-Blooded character has seven (7) dots to divide among her primary Attributes, six (6) dots to divide among her secondary Attributes and four (4) dots to divide among her tertiary Attributes. Characters are

### Paragons of Virtue

One Nature deserves special attention. For many Dragon-Blooded, especially those who are members of the Order of the Immaculate Dragons, the Paragon archetype reflects a striving to embody the ideals espoused by the Immaculate Dragon the character wishes to emulate. The archetype functions the same as it would for any other character. The Realm's culture simply has a very specific idea about what the heroic ideal is. See page 51 of the **Exalted** main rulebook for a description of the Five Dragons and their ideals.

not limited in how many dots they may assign to each Attribute. Attributes may not be raised above five dots.

## Step Three: Choosing Abilities

Abilities begin with a rating of zero and are divided according to which element each skill is attuned to.

• **Air Abilities** are skills related to subtlety in both thought and motion. They are Linguistics, Lore, Occult, Stealth and Thrown.

• **Earth Abilities** are skills that relate to solidness, stability and creation. They are Awareness, Craft, Endurance, Martial Arts and Resistance.

• **Fire Abilities** are skills devoted to energy and passion. They are Athletics, Dodge, Melee, Presence and Socialize.

• **Water Abilities** are skills that involve mystery and fluidity of both mind and body. They are Brawl, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Sail.

• **Wood Abilities** are those skills devoted to life and nature. They are Archery, Medicine, Performance, Ride and Survival.

Every Dragon-Blooded has a natural affinity with her element's Abilities. This affinity is represented by the easier time a character has in raising her *Aspect Abilities* through both bonus and experience points. See the table on page 153 for the bonus point costs.

Dragon-Blooded also have an affinity with certain Abilities outside of their Aspect Abilities. A character selects three (3) Abilities to be her *Favored Abilities*. These abilities receive the same bonus and experience point discounts as her Aspect Abilities. You may not "double up" and increase your discount by choosing Aspect Abilities as Favored Abilities.

Young Dynasts are pressured throughout their young lives to learn and are phenomenally skilled compared to the average person. You have 13 points to spend on a Dragon-Blood's Aspect and Favored Abilities and an additional 22 points to spend on any Abilities you wish. Characters do not have to possess any dots in their Aspect Abilities. The potential to easily learn an Ability does not necessarily mean a character has devoted any time toward learning it. However, a character must possess at least one dot in each of her Favored Abilities. One of the reasons it is a "Favored" Ability is that you have devoted some time toward learning it.

You may not assign more than three dots to any Ability, but you can increase Abilities to four or five dots with bonus points. Bonus points may also be used to purchase Ability specialties in the same manner as detailed in **Exalted**.

If characters have been raised outside the Dynasty, they should be given only the regular 10 points of Aspect and Favored Abilities and 15 points of other Abilities. Note that this is an extreme disadvantage if these characters are in the same game as Dynastic Dragon-Blooded, and a Storyteller probably shouldn't combine Dynastic and non-Dynastic Dragon-Blooded unless he and all the players are comfortable with it.

All Dynasts *must* have an *absolute minimum* of Archery •, Brawl or Martial Arts •, Melee •, Performance •, Presence •, Ride •, Lore •• and Socialize ••, to represent the basic training in martial matters and social skills that forms the underpinnings of their culture. Most will have *all* these Abilities at •• or more, and those who do not will generally be regarded by their peers as deficient in critical life skills. Characters raised outside the Dynasty are not required to meet these minimums.

## Step Four: Advantages

Because of the immense opportunities and resources made available to the Dragon-Blooded of the Realm, players have 12 dots to spend on Backgrounds. In addition, the complex culture of the Dynasty gives Dragon-Blooded characters access to a wider selection of Backgrounds from which to select. See page 156 for full details on these new and altered Backgrounds.

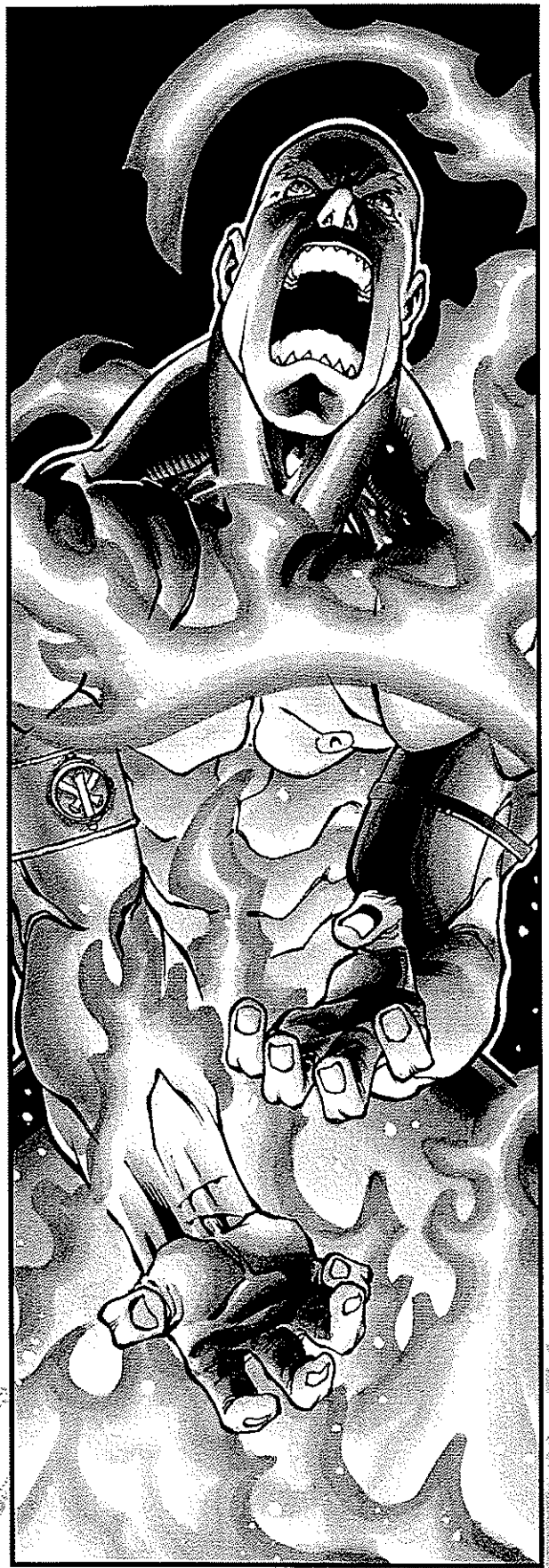
The spiritually advanced nature of the Dragon-Blooded gives them access to powers above those of mortals. However, some Dragon-Blooded have undergone the spiritual training needed to refine their souls even further and allow them to master the sacred war arts of the Elemental Dragons.

• **Traditional Dragon-Blooded:** Select seven Charms from among the list of Dragon-Blooded Charms, as detailed in Chapter Five: Charms. At least four of your character's Charms must be selected from her Aspect or Favored Abilities.

• **Members of the Order of the Immaculate Dragons:** Characters who were raised as immaculate monks or who attended the Cloister of Wisdom instead select five Charms from the Immaculate martial arts styles, as detailed in Chapter Six: Martial Arts. Note than you cannot learn Martial Arts Charms from a new style until you have learned all the Charms in a previous style.

As with all people who live in the world of **Exalted**, the Dragon-Blooded are driven by desire and emotion. In addition to a starting rate of one dot in each Virtue, your character has five additional dots to divide among the four Virtues — Compassion, Conviction, Temperance and Valor. You cannot raise Virtues above 3 without the use of bonus points.

In addition, the Dragon-Blooded — like all Exalted — suffer the effects of the Great Curse. Note the character's highest Virtue. This Virtue is the one the Curse affects. If the character has multiple Virtues of the same value, then the player can pick which one the Curse focuses on. If the character's highest Virtue changes, then the new highest Virtue becomes the focus of the Great Curse.



### The Great Curse

The Dragon-Blooded do not generally know of the Great Curse, and those that do know of it believe, in the fashion of the Sidereals, that the Great Curse has targeted the Solar Exalted alone. This is not precisely the case. The Dragon-Blooded are not so directly subject to the Great Curse, but they do suffer from it to an extent.

A Dragon-Blooded character who reaches zero temporary Willpower and who has spent any Peripheral Essence recently enough that his anima banner is showing (that is, more than 3 Peripheral motes over 20 or so minutes) will become possessed by the power of his elemental aspect.

This is similar to, but generally more violent and destructive than, the standard Nature-related Compulsion characters are required to fulfill. Dragon-Blooded characters will indulge in elemental behavior dictated by their aspect and their highest Virtue for at least the rest of the scene and possibly for several hours afterward. They will spend Essence freely and indulge their elemental nature as fully as their Essence permits — this usually means activating their anima and also often involves immersion in their element of aspect. Normally, Storytellers should let the player keep control of the character, but these episodes can be quite destructive, and if the player is pulling his punches, the Storyteller can take control of the character.

Dragon-Blooded are also subject to Compulsion. Not only will her actions be elemental and ill considered, they'll also be self-indulgent. The two-page spreads for each of the aspects in Chapter Four: Traits contain suggestions for the behavior of each elemental aspect when ruled by a given Virtue.

## Step Five: Finishing Touches

Calculate a Dragon-Blooded character's starting Willpower by adding together her two highest Virtues. Terrestrial Exalted, like all Exalted, begin with an Essence of 2. Each of these Traits may be increased using bonus points.

As with all Exalted, Dragon-Blooded channel their Essence into both Personal and Peripheral Essence. Effects created using Personal Essence are subtle, while effects generated using Peripheral Essence are awe-inspiring demonstrations of a character's elemental might, causing her elemental anima banner to flare.

Personal Essence pool is calculated by adding your Essence and Willpower ratings (Essence + Willpower), plus any additional points granted by the Breeding Background (see page 158 of the Traits chapter).

Peripheral Essence pool is calculated by multiplying your Essence Trait by four and then adding the sum of your Willpower and your two highest Virtues [(Essence x 4) + Willpower + (the sum of your two highest Virtues)], plus any additional points granted by the Breeding Background.

Dragon-Blooded characters posses the normal mortal seven health levels — a -0 health level, two -1 health levels, two -2 health levels, a -4 health level and an Incapacitated health level — plus any additional health levels gained from the Ox-Body Technique.

Dragon-Blooded characters have 15 bonus points that may be spent at any time during character creation. See the chart on page 153 for the point cost of raising each Trait.

## The Spark of Life

Now come the final touches. Answer the same questions for your Dragon-Blooded character that you would for any other Exalt: What does she look like? What are her habits and quirks? Who is she close to? Who are her enemies and rivals? What was her childhood like? When did she first Exalt? What motivates her to do the things she does?

In addition, there are other questions to answer.

• **Family Life:** How does her immediate family regard the character? This means both her parents and also the household she's living with. What does the rest of her house think of her, if anything? Has she done anything to attract the house elders' attention (for good or ill)? If so, what was it? Is anyone else in her immediate family one of the Dragon-Blooded, or is she the first in recent generations? Have any of her unExalted relatives attempted to attach their fortunes to hers?

• **Marriage:** Most Realm marriages are arranged affairs, often planned while the couple is still very young. Is your character married yet? How does she feel about her spouse or spouse-to-be? Do the two have any feelings for each other or is it strictly a burden they undertake as part of their duty to their family and their empire? Is your character even attracted to the opposite sex? Is her spouse? If the character is married, does either she or her spouse keep lovers or concubines of either gender? Does your character have any children? Does she have any feelings for them?

• **Social Status:** The Realm — and especially the Dynasty — is a cutthroat social pecking order. A person's social fortunes (and with them, her political and economic ones) can rise and fall with the rising and setting of the sun. Is your character part of "the in crowd"? Does she know any of the movers and shakers within the Realm? If so, who are they, and how did she come to know them? What do the people in power think of your character? Is your character considered a troublemaker, a bootlicking toady or someone with the potential for greatness?

## Character Creation Summary

### Character Creation Process

#### • Step One: Character Concept

Choose concept, aspect, house (if any) and Nature.

Note the anima powers provided by the character's aspect.

#### • Step Two: Select Attributes

Note that all Attributes start with one dot before you add any.

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (7/6/4)

Choose Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Choose Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Choose Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

#### • Step Three: Select Abilities

Note Aspect Abilities.

Select Favored Abilities (3; may not be the same as Aspect Abilities).

Choose Abilities (35 — at least 13 must be from Aspect or Favored Abilities; at least one must be in each Favored Ability; none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points. Dynastic characters must have a *minimum* of Archery •, Brawl or Martial Arts •, Melee •, Performance •, Presence •, Ride •, Lore •• and Socialize ••. Characters who are not raised as part of the Dynasty receive only 25 points of Abilities. Of these 25, 10 must be spent on Aspect or Favored Abilities.).

#### • Step Four: Select Advantages

Choose Backgrounds (12 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points), Charms (7 taken from Dragon-Blooded Charms OR 5 taken from Immaculate Order Charms — at least 4 must be from Aspect or Favored Abilities if the character is not learning Immaculate martial arts. If the character is an Immaculate martial artist, all the Charms must be part of the same elemental tree.), Virtues (5 — none may be higher than 3 without spending bonus points).

# Character Creation Summary

### • Step Five: Finishing Touches

Record Essence (2), Willpower (add the total of two highest Virtues — may not start at higher than 8 unless at least two Virtues are 4 or higher), Personal Essence pool (Essence + Willpower, plus any gained from Breeding), Peripheral Essence pool [(Essence x 4) + Willpower + (the sum of your two highest Virtues), plus any gained from Breeding] and health levels (7, plus any gained from Charms).

### • Bonus Points

Bonus points (15) may be spent at any time during character creation.

## Elemental Aspects

• Air:

Creatures of thought and dreams. These characters are as subtle as a gentle breeze and as dynamic as a thunderstorm.

**Aspect Abilities:** Linguistics, Lore, Occult, Stealth and Thrown.

**Anima Powers:** May triple his leaping distance, and takes no damage from falls.

• Earth:

Embodiments of endurance and stability, these characters are the bedrock upon which the Realm sits. Durable as a mountain, they are as unstoppable as an avalanche.

**Aspect Abilities:** Awareness, Craft, Endurance, Martial Arts and Resistance.

**Anima Powers:** May soak lethal damage with her entire Stamina.

• Fire:

Passion and energy incarnate, these Dragon-Blooded are as brilliant as a bonfire and as dangerous as a wildfire.

**Aspect Abilities:** Athletics, Dodge, Melee, Presence and Socialize.

**Anima Powers:** May burst into flame for a scene, doing lethal damage and becoming immune to fire damage.

• Water:

Mercurial and fluid-minded masters of adaptation, Aspects of Water are as deep as the ocean and as relentlessness as a flood.

**Aspect Abilities:** Brawl, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Sail.

**Anima Powers:** A Terrestrial Exalted aspected to Water can gain free movement in water. For the rest of the day, she can breathe underwater and operate as freely as if she was in air.

• Wood:

Wood-aspected Dragon-Blooded are attuned to cycles of life and nature. These Exalts are as solid as oaks, as beautiful as orchids and as deadly as hemlock.

**Aspect Abilities:** Archery, Medicine, Performance, Ride and Survival.

**Anima Powers:** May add dice to Dodge or Athletics actions and ignore bashing damage.

## Archetypes (Nature)

- **Architect** — You want to leave a lasting legacy.
- **Bravo** — Might makes right.
- **Bureaucrat** — Rules keep the world from collapsing into chaos.
- **Caregiver** — You are a wellspring of compassion.
- **Conniver** — Brains over brawn.
- **Critic** — Pointing out flaws makes it possible to correct them.
- **Explorer** — Life is a never-ending adventure.
- **Follower** — You look for someone else to take charge.
- **Gallant** — You seek to be the center of attention.
- **Hedonist** — Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die.
- **Jester** — Laughter can heal and teach.
- **Judge** — Balance, truth and justice are your quest.
- **Leader** — You are the one others turn to in times of crisis.
- **Martyr** — You are ready to give everything for what you believe.
- **Paragon** — You strive to be the noble ideal of a hero.
- **Rebel** — You constantly seek to challenge authority.
- **Savant** — Any problem can be solved with logic and deduction.
- **Survivor** — You withstand anything that the universe throws at you.

# Character Creation Summary

- **Thrillseeker** — Life is not worth living unless its on the edge.
- **Visionary** — You see the world for what it could be, rather than what it is.

## Houses

- **Cathak (Fire)** — Generals, strategists and martial philosophers.
- **Cynis (Wood)** — Decadent hedonists and slave traders.
- **Iselsi (Water)** — A dying house with agents spread throughout the Realm.
- **Ledaal (Air)** — Scholars and historians preparing for the Realm's turbulent future.
- **Mnemon (Earth)** — One of the Realm's mightiest pillars of strength.
- **Nellens (None)** — The Bastard House, with few Dragon-Blooded, working to consolidate its political and economic strength.
- **Peleps (Water)** — Leaders of the imperial navy and master politicians.
- **Ragara (Earth)** — The cornerstone of the Realm's economy.
- **Sesus (Fire)** — Consumed with burning political ambition.
- **Tepet (Air)** — A fallen house that dreams of a return to its former martial glory.
- **V'neef (Wood)** — Merchants and traders, growing rapidly in influence.
- **Outcaste** — Those who have turned their backs on the Realm or else never had a place in it to begin with.

## Virtues

- **Compassion** — Empathy and forgiveness.
- **Conviction** — Emotional endurance.
- **Temperance** — Self-control and clear-headedness.
- **Valor** — Courage and bravery.

## Backgrounds

- **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- **Artifact** — Weapons and tools crafted from the Five Magical Materials, including wonders of the First Age.
- **Backing** — Standing and rank in an organization of power and influence.
- **Breeding** — Your lineage, reflecting how strongly your blood resonates to your chosen element.
- **Command** — Authorization to lead soldiers.
- **Connections** — Information sources and friends in useful places that give you pull in the world around you.
- **Familiar** — An animal companion.
- **Henchmen** — Agents who do your bidding.
- **Manse** — A place of power and Essence that you have access to.
- **Mentor** — A patron and instructor.
- **Reputation** — How society views you and your actions.
- **Resources** — Material goods and money.
- **Retainers** — Mortals who serve you.
- ***Family*** — *Notable family members. Optional, see page 279 of Chapter Seven: Storytelling.*

### Bonus Points

| Trait | Cost |
|---|---|
| Attribute | 4 |
| Ability | 2 (1 if a Favored or Aspect Ability) |
| Background | 1 (2 if the Background is being raised above 3) |
| Specialty | 1 (2 per 1 if in a Favored or Aspect Ability) |
| Virtue | 3 |
| Willpower | 2 |
| Essence | 10 |
| Charm | 7 (5 if in a Favored or Caste Ability) |
| Immaculate Charm | 10 (7 if in a Favored or Caste Ability) |



Millennia were a long time, Chejop Kejak reflected, yet they could speed by at the merest blink of an eye when the crises piled one on top of another. The Empress' reign had been something of a vacation for Kejak. The Sidereal reflected on this, wondering if perhaps the time would have been better spent building up the might of the Dragon-Blooded rather than maintaining the status quo.

Kejak put such thoughts aside, as he put aside most self-doubt. The past was an immutable, concrete certainty, while tomorrow was still in flux. Guessing what sort of decision one should have made yesterday was the most futile of gestures. The eternal now was the point of flexibility, where prophecy and destiny entered Creation and became its history. To control the now was to shape tomorrow, and Kejak had spent too many centuries with his hands on the reins of the moment to waste time reflecting on what had already come to pass.

All this, Kejak thought in the space between blocking one of Holok's blows and returning his own attack. Time seemed to flow at a crawl as the two exchanged punch, block and counterpunch. Suddenly, the match was over. Kejak stood, his strike well short of his fellow Sidereal's breastbone. Both knew the attack would have landed — such was the gift of their nature and their years.

Kejak shook his head and wiped the sweat from his brow, "You're stiff, Holok."

Holok nodded his shaggy head. "From the Exalts in the Scavenger Lands, yes. The arm especially."

Kejak nodded, "So you don't think she was a nemissary, eh?"

The larger man shook his head. "No nemissary can fight like that. She was young and still training, but she was still a challenge. She was a deathknight, and she was Exalted."

"So, now that you've fought one, what do you think? We're alone — you can speak freely."

"I think it was once one of the Solar Exalted. I fought a Solar soon enough afterward to compare the two."

Kejak accepted that with a slight nod of his head. Holok had come to expect this from Kejak — he hadn't even looked startled when informed of the Great Contagion. Holok went on, "I think they've managed to open the prison somehow and free their fellows. They're not as powerful as the Deathlords, but they're very similar."

"And the other Solars, the ones that don't fight in the name of the Underworld?"

"The boy didn't say anything, so I can only speculate. Maybe they escaped or rejected the Deathlords' blandishments, or maybe, the Deathlords couldn't use them and, so, turned them loose to vex us. I don't know for certain, but whatever explains one is certain somehow to explain the other."

"How didn't we see it, Holok?"

"I don't know, Kejak, but we missed the Contagion as well. The Deathlords are hard for us to prophesy — possibly, their destines are spoken of in the stars of the Underworld, or perhaps, they have no fates at all. But if we did not foresee this, what else have we missed?"

Kejak nodded and brushed his gray hair backward. "I don't know, Holok, but I have a feeling we'll find out soon enough."

# CHAPTER FOUR
# TRAITS

Most of the Traits used in **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded** are identical to the ones used in **Exalted**. Virtues, Abilities, Attributes, Willpower, Essence and the like are all handled identically or nearly so. For the rules governing these Traits, see the Traits chapter, beginning on page 112 of **Exalted**.

## Expanded Backgrounds

The Realm is home to the wealthiest and most complex society in Creation. The Dragon-Blooded are able to take advantage of that complexity in a way few others can, achieving staggering amounts of societal influence, personal connections and material wealth. As a result of the Realm's unique culture, several Backgrounds work differently for Dragon-Blooded characters than they do for Anathema. In addition, there are several new Backgrounds exclusive to Dragon-Blooded characters.

## Altered Backgrounds

As stated, the complexities of Realm society require the redefinition of certain Background Traits. While some require only notes on how they apply specifically to the culture of the Realm, others work very differently. Unless mentioned below, existing Backgrounds work just as they do in **Exalted**.

## Artifact

As lords of the Realm, the Dragon-Blooded have inherited a sizable portion of the remains of the First Age's infrastructure, as well as almost the entirety of its arsenal of jade artifacts and wonders. The result of this is that Dragon-Blooded characters have a much easier time acquiring artifacts than the fallen Anathema (or anyone else, for that matter). The Artifact Background grants Dragon-Blooded twice the number of dots worth of artifacts as normal.

For more on Artifacts, see Chapter Nine: Wonders and Equipment in **Exalted** and also **The Book of Three Circles**.

| | |
|---|---|
| X | A single level 1 artifact of the Storyteller's choice. |
| • | A pair of level 1 artifacts. |
| •• | A level 2 artifact, and a pair of level 1 artifacts. |
| ••• | A level 3 artifact, and three dots worth of level 1 and 2 artifacts (either a level 2 artifact and a level 1 artifact or three level 1 artifacts). |
| •••• | A level 4 artifact, and four dots worth of level 1 through 3 artifacts (a level 3 artifact and a level 1 artifact, a pair of level 2 artifacts, etc.). |
| ••••• | A level 5 artifact, and five dots worth of level 1 through 4 artifacts (a level 4 artifact and a level 1 artifact, a level 3 artifact and a level 2 artifact, a pair of level 2 artifacts and a level 1 artifact, etc.). At the Storyteller's discretion, the character may also have access to the Realm's arsenal of First Age war machines (not that this mean's he'll actually own one, but he may be able to get permission to use one). |

## Contacts and Influence

Dragon-Blooded characters do not use these Backgrounds. Instead, they use Connections (see below).

## Followers

Dragon-Blooded cannot take the Followers Background. Dragon-Blooded who have troops or other legions of moderately talented but largely similar servants at their command should take the Command Background. Characters who have small numbers of highly skilled servants should take the Henchmen Background.

## Manse

In contrast to the chaotic and savage Threshold, the Realm is a place of (relative) order and stability, and imperial forces have managed to locate and claim all known Manses located on the Blessed Isle. Because various Great Houses or the Immaculate Order already hold these Manses, it's exceedingly difficult for a Dragon-Blooded character to claim one as her own personal property. Most households and estates are built around Manses, and being able to purchase the rights to one is essential in starting a household or line. Rather than representing a single Manse that the character has claim on, the Manse rating of a Dragon-Blooded character indicates generally how many Manses she has been attuned to. Characters who carry the Hearthstone from a Manse probably don't actually own it, instead holding it on extended loan. In case of family emergency, the stone may be recalled. This is especially true with powerful Hearthstones. Level 1 and 2 Manses are very common in the Realm and are used as weekend and vacation manors, hunting lodges, strongholds to defend small estates and the like. It's unlikely anyone is going to urgently send for her Hearthstone unless the Realm is at war.

| | |
|---|---|
| X | The character is not welcome in any of the Realm's Manses. Why? |
| • | The character is allowed to enter and has been attuned to several level 1 and 2 Manses. She may have one Hearthstone of level 1 or 2. |
| •• | The character is allowed to enter and has been attuned to several weak Manses. She has a couple of level 1 or 2 Hearthstones (no more than three levels, total). |
| ••• | The character is allowed to enter and has been attuned to some fairly powerful Manses. She has a level 3 Hearthstone and several level 1 and 2 stones (no more than six levels, total, including the large stone). |
| •••• | The character is allowed to enter and has been attuned to some very powerful Manses, probably among the best her house possesses. She has a level 4 Hearthstone and several of level 1 or 2 and possibly even one of level 3 (no more than eight levels, total, including the large stone). |
| ••••• | The character is allowed to enter and attune herself to the Realm's most powerful Manses and has even been entrusted with the Hearthstone of one of these cathedrals of the Exalted. She has a level 5 Hearthstone and several others of level 1-3 (no more than ten levels, total, including the large stone). |

### "I use my Grand Daiklave +12 of Anathema-Slaying!"

Clearly, Dragon-Blooded characters can quickly amass a small arsenal of artifacts, making it far too easy to take such items for granted. A character's grimcleaver can come to be looked upon as just another great axe, easily replaced at the marketplace if lost or broken.

Try to avoid falling into this trap.

Every artifact has a story behind it, including how the character just happened to come into possession of it. That grimcleaver is a family artifact, passed down from mother to daughter since the days just after the Great Contagion, always with the intent that it be used in the defense of the Realm. If the character's mother died in combat, he may have even had to travel out into the Threshold to avenge her death and reclaim his birthright from the bandits who stole it. If it isn't ancient, then it's been specially commissioned from the handful of sorcerer-smiths that can still make them and bought at astronomical cost. It is not a weapon that can simply be replaced if lost or destroyed. It's an intimate part of the Dragon-Blood's heritage and her history. Every daiklave is named and treated as an honored companion for a reason.

Every artifact should be this way. These things are called wonders for a reason. Each is unique and special and should be treated as a one-of-a-kind treasure. Players should work to come up with the story behind each and every artifact their characters own. Not only will this increase the depth of your character, but it gives the Storyteller additional plot hooks for your character as well.

### Purchasing Artifacts

Artifacts can be bought and sold. Elder members of the Dynasty do it all the time. Generally, the wonder costs a number of Resources dots equal to its Artifact rating +1 or +2. Prosaic items will be worth their rating + 1, while anything with agricultural, industrial, construction or military applications will be valued the wonder's rating + 2. This includes significant taxes and duties, and buying or selling powerful military hardware is illegal without government permits and permission.

Also, keep in mind there is no open, constant market for buying and selling these goods. They're too expensive, and too valuable, for anyone to keep them in stock. There are merchants who specialize in wonders and artifacts, but they sell what they have, not what their customers want. The Artifact Background doesn't just represent what the character has inherited or been given. It also represents the opportunities prior to the start of play that the character has seen and seized to purchase artifacts. If the player wants to pick something specific to own at the start of play, he should pay points. Otherwise, they're left up to the vagaries of the market, meaning the mercy of the Storyteller. *The Storyteller is under no compulsion to allow high-Resources characters to save on Backgrounds by buying artifacts just as play begins.*

## New Backgrounds

In addition to the standard Backgrounds presented in Exalted, the Dragon-Blooded have several additional Backgrounds from which to choose.

### Breeding

The Terrestrial Exalted stand alone as the only Exalted capable of passing their powers and gifts down to their offspring. This has given rise to generations of bloodlines and extended families, culminating with the Great Houses of the Dynasty. But the impact of this power goes much deeper. Centuries of arranged marriages and careful breeding have resulted in Dragon-Blooded with greater numbers of Exalted among their ancestry and, as a result, a greater concentration of the holy blood of the Elemental Dragons. On a metaphysical level, the more pure a character's bloodline, the more powerful his connection to the elemental force of his aspect. This elemental resonance manifests in both the character's appearance and his spiritual strength. The higher his Breeding Background, the more obvious his elemental markings and anima banner, as well as the higher his Essence pools.

X — Your family tree is unremarkable. Perhaps you were Exalted from the plebian classes?

• — Good blood. +1 to your Personal Essence pool; +2 to your Peripheral Essence pool. Although your parent may not be Exalted, your family line has spawned Dragon-Blooded recently.

| | |
|---|---|
| •• | Very good blood. One of your parents is certainly an Exalt. +2 to your Personal Essence pool; +3 to your Peripheral Essence pool. |
| ••• | You are the child of an excellent line, probably with numerous Dragon-Blooded in your immediate family, with almost all of them sharing your elemental aspect. +3 to your Personal Essence pool; +5 to your Peripheral Essence pool. |
| •••• | Impeccable pedigree. The connection both you and your family have to your chosen element is undeniable. +4 to your Personal Essence pool; +7 to your Peripheral Essence pool; –1 mote from the cost to activate your anima banner; +1 on the roll to see if your child Exalts (see "Multigenerational Series" on p. 282 of the Storytelling chapter of this book). |
| ••••• | Your bloodline is impeccable and includes numerous Exalted of great fame. You may be directly related to the Empress. Your aspect markings are unmistakable, making it clear to all who see that you are far more than a mere mortal. Add +5 to your Personal Essence pool; +9 to your Peripheral Essence pool; –2 motes to the cost of activating your anima banner; +2 on the roll to see if a child of yours Exalts. |

### Optional Background: Family

Some Storytellers may choose to allow players to take an optional background, called Family, that represents the quality of the character's family and the number of famous or infamous relatives they have. This Background uses rolls on a random table and may not be appropriate for all games. It is described on page 279 of Chapter Seven: Storytelling. If Storytellers do use this Background, they should probably give players 1 or 2 more points of Backgrounds, so that the addition of a new Background doesn't make characters less competent overall.

## Command

Be it through personal financing, family connections or actual military skill, the character has earned the right to command soldiers. The troops may be members of the legions, or they may be part of his house's private army. They are under the character's direct command, and unlike military forces gained from the Backing Background, they don't have anything to do other than take the character's orders. These soldiers do not accompany the character everywhere he goes (that's the job of Henchmen), but they will typically remain close by and can be brought on risky endeavors. If the character loses his soldiers, they will generally be replaced, but if they die due to incompetence, he'll probably be removed from command instead.

The loyalty of these soldiers depends upon their treatment. An officer who wastes his men's lives or abuses their trust will find those he commands less than enthusiastic about following his orders or coming to his aid in times of trouble. Keep in mind that characters whose soldiers occupy government buildings or use their troops to depose the local prefect will generally be considered to be participating in an armed insurrection and may very well get the character executed, disowned or both.

Troops that come from this Background use the Elite Troops template found on page 278 of **Exalted**. They are considered to be extras.

| | |
|---|---|
| X | None; you either haven't earned the right to lead troops or you have no interest in doing so. |
| • | You command a single fang (five soldiers). |
| •• | A scale (25 soldiers). |
| ••• | A talon (125 soldiers). |
| •••• | A wing (250 soldiers). |
| ••••• | An entire dragon (500 soldiers) fights under your personal banner. |

## Connections

The Realm is a complex web of institutions and cliques. The ability to use those webs for one's personal benefit is a powerful one. Characters with connections can guide society in the direction they wish it to move and grow, protecting their assets or gaining special favors. However, such ability also requires a serious investment of time and resources. Because of this, Dragon-Blooded must focus their attentions on certain areas of influence in order to fully manipulate any of the Realm's labyrinthine social structures.

When purchasing the Connections Background, you must select one of the areas of influence detailed in the sidebar on pages 162-163. Each area effectively counts as a separate Background; thus, you may have

Connections (The Legions) 4, Connections (House Cathak) 3 and Connections (Outlaws) 2 or Connections (The All-Seeing Eye) 5 and Connections (The Immaculate Order) 5.

You cannot manage more points of Connections than the sum of your character's Physical, Social and Mental Attributes combined. For starting characters, this means the total number of dots in Connections may not exceed 27 (unless you've spent bonus points toward Attributes). There is only so much one can do in a day, and exceeding that amount taxes the character's mind and body beyond its limits.

Note that this Background serves the same function as both the Contacts and Influence Backgrounds in Exalted.

| | |
|---|---|
| X | None; you lack any ties to the group in question. |
| • | You possess at least one major contact (and a handful of minor ones) among the group and are moderately influential on a local level. |
| •• | Two major contacts and several minor ones within your area of influence, giving you a great deal of pull in your city. |
| ••• | Three major contacts and a large number of minor ones, making you a person of importance within your region. |
| •••• | Five major contacts and a horde of lesser ones. You are one of the most influential persons in the Realm. |
| ••••• | You know all of the major power players in your area of influence, and more importantly, they not only know who you are, but listen to you as well. |

## Henchmen

One or more unExalted characters of note have sworn oaths of loyalty to the character. The type of henchmen will depend greatly on the concept of the character that buys this Background. An Immaculate monk might attract several acolytes, and a military commander might count those officers who serve under her as companions, while a powerful slave trader might call his trusted accountant his henchman. Likewise, the world of the Dragon-Blooded is one of duplicity and treachery, and it behooves a lord of the Realm to have agents who can take care of unpleasant tasks. Imperial magistrates often employ archons, harnessing the anti-social tendencies of criminals for the good of the empire, and Immaculate inquisitors often operate with mortal assistants. Be they murderers, bodyguards or a trusted personal secretary, all these individuals are henchmen as far as the rules are concerned.

Henchmen are created using the rules for mortal characters on page 103 of Exalted. It is highly recommended that henchmen be allowed a Favored Ability (such as Martial Arts for Immaculate acolytes or Socialize for skilled socialites). Henchmen are loyal to the character unto death, though they may abandon him if they realize they have been deliberately betrayed. Characters who want legions of fanatical assassins should take the Command Background and work with the Storyteller on statistics for members of their kung-fu cult, while characters who want legions of spies and agents should take a high Connections score in the area they wish to have infiltrated.

| | |
|---|---|
| X | None; you have no companions. |
| • | One companion. |
| •• | Two companions. |
| ••• | Three companions. |
| •••• | Five companions. |
| ••••• | Eight companions. |

## Reputation

The society of the Dragon-Blooded, especially among the Dynasty, is tightly knit, even incestuous, with news and gossip traveling at lightning speed. The result of this is that a character's notable exploits — at least those she doesn't take pains to conceal — will soon become well known by both her peers and the Dynasty or even the Realm as a whole. This reputation can be positive or negative (or even both at once), and it will affect the way others view your character. In situations the Storyteller deems it appropriate, a character may add his Reputation rating to his dice pool when making Social rolls. In situations where the reputation is a liability, the character subtracts an equal number of dice.

It is important for the player and the Storyteller to work together to create as much detail as possible for the character's reputation, as these details will influence how and when the Background comes into play. If a character has a reputation for bedding every Dragon-Blooded, male and female, in the city, it may help get him invited to important social gatherings, but it's not going to help him during negotiations to buy a sailing ship. A general with a reputation for offering fair treatment to foes who surrender without a fight will find it easier to negotiate the surrender of opposing forces, especially if she also has a reputation for merciless brutality against any who dare stand against her. A reputation may not even be true. A coward may luck into becoming known as a war hero, while a shady

swindler could have a reputation as the most honest merchant in the city.

| | |
|---|---|
| X | You have yet to make a name for yourself. |
| • | You're well known in your set. |
| •• | Your name is bandied about in your part of the Dynasty. |
| ••• | Everyone in the Dynasty knows well your legend. |
| •••• | Tales of your exploits have spread across the Realm. |
| ••••• | Your legend has preceded you even to the far corners of the Threshold. |

# Other Rules

There are a number of other, minor rules regarding the Dragon-Blooded that are presented here. Where not specifically contradicted by these rules, Dragon-Blooded are otherwise treated exactly as any other sort of Exalted. This includes but is not limited to the rate at which they heal, their resistance to poison and disease, their ability to suppress bleeding, the speed at which they regain Essence, the visibility and size of their anima banner and the rate at which it dissipates and all the other characteristics that distinguish Exalted from mere mortals.

## Anima Flux

Dragon-Blooded have very powerful elemental animas. While those of the other Exalted can be so intense as to be unsettling or mildly discomfiting, those of the Terrestrial Exalted are so raw and powerful as to actually inflict damage. This is the reason the Dragon-Blooded do not ride horses to war. The damage varies, and may seem to come from biting winds, scratching thorns or burning flame, but the source is the same — the raw elemental power of the character's Essence.

If the Dragon-Blooded's anima is at the 8-10 motes level, then it will do one die of lethal damage for every minute of contact. Characters that can soak lethal damage with their Stamina are hardy enough to resist this damage with their supernatural constitutions, but roll one die for every minute of contact with the anima by a mortal creature.

If the Dragon-Blooded is at the 11-15 motes level of anima display, then she will do one die of lethal damage every three turns (10 seconds) of exposure. This damage is rolled normally, as above. Again, characters who can soak lethal damage with their Stamina are immune, but even they are unlikely to find the exposure comfortable.

During any turn in which the character is at the 16+ level of anima display, anyone in contact with the Exalt's anima must soak one die of lethal damage per turn. Aspects of Fire who have activated their anima power add this to the anima banner, while other Exalts simply do one per turn. This damage is soaked normally, but even Exalted and other magical beings can be injured by the display.

The negative effects of the Dragon-Blooded aura do not apply to the Dragon-Blooded's gear, but they radiate from the Exalt a number of feet equal to the character's permanent Essence. It can and will damage beings within its radius and will also have detrimental effects on the scenery. This is especially dangerous for Aspects of Fire, who can accidentally burn down forests and cities, but all Dragon-Blooded animas will destroy cloth and soft wood within a minute. It is for this reason that the Terrestrials favor sturdy stone construction in places where their anima banners may flare.

## Sworn Brothers' Oath

**Cost:** 10 motes +1 mote from each Exalted bound by the spell

This Terrestrial Circle sorcery spell binds the Essence of two or more Exalted together and is the one used in the creation of sworn brotherhoods. The ritual takes an hour to perform upon two Exalted, and one additional hour for each Exalt beyond that. The sorcerer does not have to be one of the Exalted bound by the spell. Once the spell is cast, the sorcerer's player makes an Intelligence + Occult roll. The number of successes scored on this roll indicates the level of the sworn brotherhood. The bound Exalted are now connected on a spiritual level, resulting in several effects.

• **Loyalty:** In order to take an action she knows will harm — mentally, emotionally or physically — her sworn brother, a character's player must make a Conviction roll (which can be an extended roll) and score a number of successes equal to the level of the sworn brotherhood. So, if the sorcerer gained 6 successes while casting the spell, the player must score 6 successes to break her character's oath of brotherhood.

• **Devotion:** When a character undertakes an action with the deliberate purpose of aiding her blood-brother, her player may add additional dice to her dice pool for that action. This devotional dice pool is equal to the character's oathbond rating. The dice from this pool are only available once per story but do not need to be spent all at once.

• **Familiarity:** The sworn brothers remain acutely aware of each other's immediate location. As long as an oath-sister is within the (brotherhood's rating x 10) yards of the character, he knows exactly where his sister is. If the blood-sister moves beyond that range, the character's player can make an Essence roll at standard difficulty to get an idea of which direction the character's sworn sister lies in. The greater the number of successes, the more detail the character can sense about the sister's location.

### Areas of Influence

• **The Academies:** The four academies — the Cloister of Wisdom, the House of Bells, the Spiral Academy and the Heptagram — help shape future generations of Dragon-Blooded, giving them great influence over the shape of the Realm. Academic connections allow characters to influence the curriculums, create special projects oriented toward that academy's specialty and draw upon the expertise of instructors and scholars. Because the four schools jealously guard their independence, each academy counts as a separate area of influence.

• **The All-Seeing Eye:** Information is power, especially in the Realm. Connections within the All-Seeing Eye represent collaborators and insiders in the realm of imperial spies, troubleshooters and assassins. By calling upon those connections, a character can have rivals investigated, access the Eye's secret archives and become privy to some of the Realm's most dangerous secrets.

• **The Deliberative:** The Realm is ruled by the Dragon-Blooded, as evidenced by the Dynasty's control over the Deliberative. A character with connections within the Deliberative can see to it that legislation favoring her interests is proposed and received favorably, gather favors from patricians and other houses in exchange for her political support and possibly even get herself appointed to the Greater Chamber.

• **Finance:** The economy of the Realm is complex and dynamic and the source of the Dynasty's great wealth. Dragon-Blooded freely use their positions to manipulate markets and save or destroy businesses, all in the name of lining their house's pockets. Though a character's actual available money is a function of Resources, he can use financial connections to start or smother businesses, gain lines of credit for plausible endeavors, crush or support banking institutions and alter credit records. Clearly, such power over money is not to be trifled with — fortunes are made and destroyed with this sort of pull.

• **The Guild:** If there is a single power in Creation that comes anywhere close to matching the Realm in influence, it is the Guild. With economic ties to both the Realm and to countless Threshold kingdoms and the wealth to buy its own armies, the Guild is a powerful — and dangerous — tool. Guild connections give a character influence over regional and even international trade, access to illegal goods and services and lucrative economic contacts. Characters should be aware that their Guild contacts perceive them to be similarly useful.

• **High Society:** The Dragon-Blooded sit at the pinnacle of Realm society, moving in circles of wealth and elegance. Many Dragon-Blooded find a life of pleasure alluring, and so, they indulge in the passions of the wealthy and powerful. Access to social movers and shakers, Realm celebrities and the idle rich grants a certain sway over fashion trends, who does (and doesn't) get invited to the top parties, and the reputation of friends and rivals. Combined with Reputation, a moderate number of high society connections turns a Dragon-Blooded into a debonair darling of the most exclusive social circles.

• **The Houses:** Without a doubt, the 11 Great Houses of the Dynasty rule the Realm. Wielding influence over one or more houses gives a character tremendous input into the shape of imperial politics, economics and military activity. Note that each house counts as a separate area of influence, and connections with each come with their own strengths and weaknesses.

• **Industry:** The grinding wheels of labor fuel the economies and markets of the Realm. Farmers, ranchers, miners, lumberjacks, blacksmiths, stonemasons, tailors and other workers endlessly churn out the staples of everyday life. Industrial connections can guide a character to profitable insider deals, sway the location of work projects, engineer material shortages and work stoppages and see to it that the Realm has the raw materials necessary for growth.

• **The Legions:** The character can sway the imperial legions. A few careful inquiries and a character can uncover military operations; some pulled strings and traded favors let the character requisition special equipment and alter procurement procedures. Though their newly developed house allegiances can make the legions a dangerous pawn, the legions of the Realm could still bring all the houses' private forces to heel in an afternoon. The idea that some would-be Empress might engineer a military coup is a threat every house elder has considered.

This means that using legion connections for anything smacking of insurrection is quite risky. Their new masters closely monitor the legions, and unusual activity from politically suspect officers will alarm people in places of power. On the other hand, if the character simply wishes to line his pockets selling substandard hardtack or to employ soldiers for cheap manual labor, it's unlikely to cause problems.

• **The Magistrates:** In the Realm, the Dragon-Blooded are the law. The magistrates enforce the rule of the Dragon-Blooded and the Empress, acting as judge, jury and even executioner. Having friends among the magistrates can shield characters from investigation or see to it that rivals find themselves under suspicion. Connections with the magistrates can be used to clamp down on (or aggravate) public disorder, commandeer necessary resources or even have enemies executed. The magistrates aren't what they used to be, but their personal power is still enough to make them feared.

• **Merchant Marine:** The wealth and power of the Realm is meaningless without the means to move men and material from one part of Creation to another. Food, raw materials and trade goods must be transported to market. The imperial legions need ships to carry them across the Inland Sea. With ownership of sea vessels and command over ship's crews comes the power to decide how and when people will eat, buildings will be built, armies will be deployed and contraband will be smuggled. While houses V'neef and Peleps have the Realm's military navy well in hand, the merchant marine is just as important, and it's up for grabs.

• **The Order of the Immaculate Dragons:** The Immaculate Order is one of the most powerful institutions in the Realm, and its policies exert considerable influence over the direction of imperial politics and society. Knowing the appropriate Immaculate allows insight into doings of the Order, and the use of Immaculate connections can alter religious policy, affect the assignment of Immaculate lectors, lead to the denouncement of rivals as heretics and allow access to secret societies within the Order.

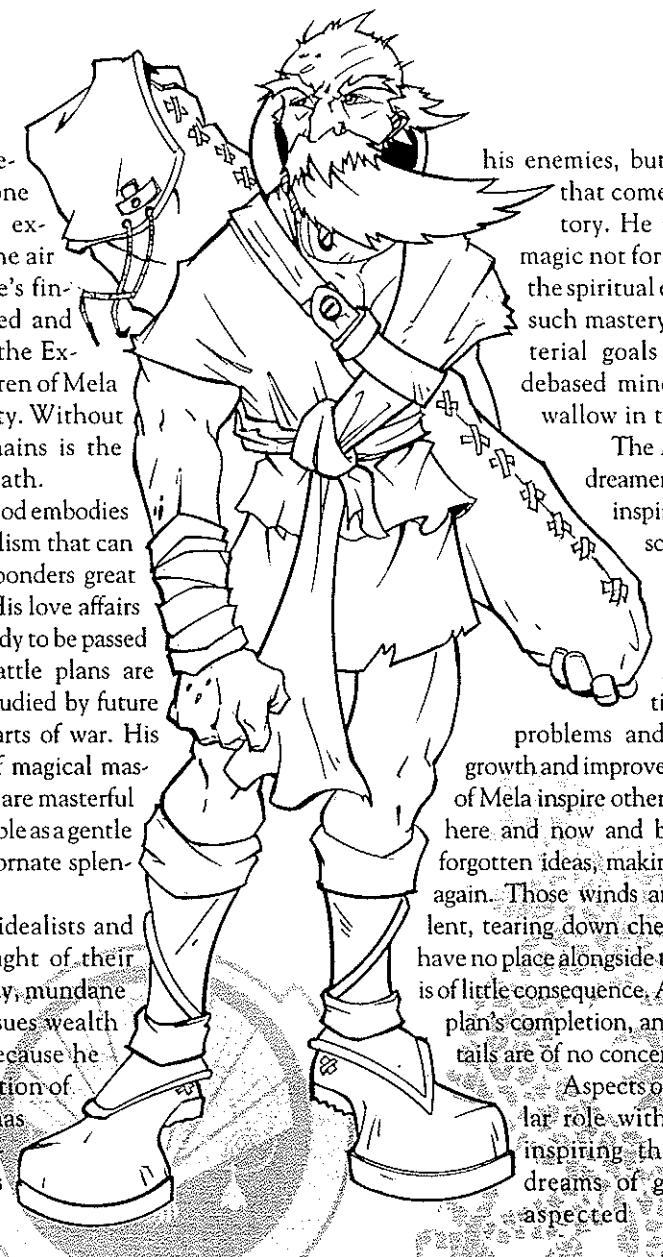
• **Outlaw:** With the Scarlet Empress's "reclusion," the Realm — indeed, all of Creation — has become a more chaotic place. Gangs of bandits and pirates prey upon the tributary states of the Threshold, while, among the cities of the Realm, disenfranchised criminals stalk the shadows seeking to abuse their betters. Such misanthropes live beyond the rule and the protection of the law and as such, may be hunted down with impunity. For a merchant, the ability to ensure that trade ships and caravans won't be attacked by raiders can mean the difference between success or failure; for a ruthless politician, the ability to ensure that a rival's assets are attacked and pillaged can be an invaluable weapon. Characters with outlaw contacts will know and have a reputation with powerful outcaste bandits and criminal organizations such as the Lintha Family.

• **The Thousand Scales:** You have powerful allies in various imperial agencies and bureaus. By dealing with public servants, you can cut through red tape, bypass rules and regulations or twist bureaucratic regimentation to your advantage (or use such things to attack rivals). Connections with the Thousand Scales are useful for operating or shutting down businesses, forging or acquiring permits and imperial seals and manipulating or gaining access to imperial facilities.

Note that because they are already heavily infiltrated by other Dragon-Blooded and their servants, the All-Seeing Eye, the legions and the magistrates each constitute their own areas of influence and are not covered under this area. Storytellers running games with a focus on the Thousand Scales will probably want to make each bureau or ministry a separate contact area.

• **The Threshold:** Beyond the shores of the Blessed Isle, the Realm's power is tenuous at best. Characters who have connections among the petty kingdoms of the Threshold should tread carefully. Influencing the affairs of other states and regions requires a delicate touch (or at least the martial might to back up demands). Threshold connections allow characters to encourage political alliances, push over local potentates, flush out heretics and Anathema, reestablish the Realm's sphere of influence and secure favorable mercantile interests.

# Aspects of Air



Air is. It is an ethereal element, easily overlooked until one notices its absence or when it explodes into tempestuous fury. The air can be felt, wafting through one's fingers, but it can never be grasped and held. It is an ideal with which the Exalted of Air resonate. The Children of Mela are beings of thought and subtlety. Without thought and idea, all that remains is the empty void of ignorance and death.

An Air-aspected Dragon-Blood embodies the boundless creativity and idealism that can only exist in pure thought. He ponders great ideas and dreams grand dreams. His love affairs are epic tails of romance and tragedy to be passed down through the ages. His battle plans are inspired strategies that will be studied by future students seeking to master the arts of war. His sorceries are intricate displays of magical mastery. For some, these lofty designs are masterful exercises in subtlety, as unnoticeable as a gentle spring breeze. Others prefer the ornate splendor of a raging lightning storm.

The Children of Mela are idealists and elitists, loathing the very thought of their grand ideas being wasted on petty, mundane pursuits. An Aspect of Air pursues wealth not for the money itself, but because he needs it to finance the construction of the magnificent cathedral he has designed for the Order of Immaculate Dragons. He masters the art of war not to merely crush his enemies, but to earn the glory that comes with martial victory. He masters the arts of magic not for base power, but for the spiritual enlightenment that such mastery brings. Crass, material goals are left to those debased minds whose thoughts wallow in the earthly muck.

The Air-aspected are the dreamers of the Realm, their inspired ideas and grand schemes becoming the causes other Dragon-Blooded work to carry out. Aspects of Air put forth solutions to the Realm's problems and present plans for growth and improvement. The Children of Mela inspire others to look beyond the here and now and blow the dust off of forgotten ideas, making them appear new again. Those winds are sometimes turbulent, tearing down cherished things which have no place alongside the new idea, but this is of little consequence. All that matters is the plan's completion, and such mundane details are of no concern to great dreamers.

Aspects of Air perform a similar role within bonded circles, inspiring their circlemates to dreams of grandeur. An Air-aspected Dragon-Blooded

doesn't see the sworn brothers as they are, but rather how they could be.

**The Immaculate Dragons:** Air-aspected Dragon-Blooded who follow the way of Mela are often staunch perfectionists, endlessly refining their elaborate plans until they reach perfection. They are often among the Realm's premiere military strategists, scholars and sorcerers. Followers of Sextes Jylis direct their dreams toward the improvement of the Realm, and these Chosen are often willing to consider the impact their schemes may have on others. Emulators of Pasiap focus their thoughts toward spiritual enlightenment, both for themselves and others. Air Exalted seeking the path of Hesiesh are among the most elitist of their kind, reserving their thoughts for matters of great importance. Those who emulate Daana'd push their minds to the limit, striving to master the most esoteric or even dangerous forms of knowledge.

**Aspect Markings:** Aspects of Air are typically thin and lithe. Their skin has a natural bluish or whitish tint. Blue tones are most pronounced among those with high Breeding. As their Essence increases, Air-aspected Dragon-Blooded begin to be surrounded by a continuous gusting breeze, which increases in intensity when they are angry or agitated. This wind may be stilled through concentration but returns if the character's mind becomes preoccupied (such as by combat, an argument, deep focus on a manuscript or sex). Elders are often characterized by their ice-cold skin and by the scent of fresh breezes or thunder.

**Aspect Anima:** When an Air-aspected Dragon-Blooded spends Peripheral Essence, his anima radiates outward into a shimmering aura of pale blue and white, swirling in patterns that remind one of rolling clouds or gusting winds. Truly grand displays include phantasmal whirlwinds, lightning, air dragons or swarms of snowflakes, while the sounds of roaring thunder or screaming wind echo around the character.

An Aspect of Air can spend 5 motes to attune his anima to the nearby winds, allowing them to bear him aloft. For the rest of the scene, he may triple his leaping distance and takes no damage from falls.

**Aspect Abilities:** Air Exalted are creatures of thought and dream, excelling in areas of scholarship and subtle motion. They have a natural affinity with the Abilities of Linguistics, Lore, Occult, Stealth and Thrown.

**Common Natures:** Architect, Bureaucrat, Conniver, Explorer, Gallant, Judge, Leader, Paragon, Rebel, Savant, Thrillseeker, Visionary

**The Great Curse:** Aspects of Air whose curse lies in their Compassion often hold idealistic views of how the world should work and react poorly when confronted with how cruel society can be. Those whose curse derives from Conviction often become so fixated upon their dreams of the future that, like blizzards, they become deaf to the cries of the present, enabling them to reach great heights of cruelty in pursuit of their schemes. Temperate Air Exalted are like calm breezes, tending to be moral idealists. When they find themselves or others unable to live up to their own lofty dreams of purity, they frequently vent their frustrations with all the fury of a lightning storm. Those who suffer curses of Valor often take excessive pride in their own mental facilities and will react with tornado-like violence to having their skills questioned or trust in their own plans and abilities to the point of recklessness.

**Associations:** The color blue, the Maiden of Serenity, the season of Air and the northern direction

**Sobriquets:** Children of Mela, Tempestuous Knives, Azure Dragons

**Concepts:** Scholar of the forbidden, idealistic monk, daring sorcerer, political puppetmaster, languid dreamer, philosopher-general, earnest bureaucrat

*Did you think that you*
*could outwit a child of the sky?*
*Our thoughts are like lighting,*
*and our anger shakes the ground*
*like thunder. Begone.*

# Aspects of Earth



Earth endures. Mountains stand unchanging throughout the lifetimes of individuals and even empires. Earth is the ever-enduring fundament that supports all Creation. The Exalted of Earth reflect this enduring nature. The Children of Pasiap intuitively understand the importance of enduring tradition and how it provides a bulwark of stability against the forces of chaos. Things become ritual and tradition because they are important — because they work — and that which serves no purpose passes into oblivion.

An Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded is a living embodiment of endurance and stability, consistently adhering to those methods that have proven successful in the past. She carries out elaborate courtship rituals because she believes these rites are guaranteed to produce stable relationships. She follows the teachings of the Immaculate Dragons because they are the tried and true methods of gaining spiritual enlightenment. She undertakes the rigid discipline of the martial arts because it is a proven pathway to both personal development and victory in battle. She is meticulous in the preparation of sorcery rituals, knowing that to deviate from time-tested formula is to invite disaster. For some Aspects of Earth, consistency is like clay, shaping itself to fit the present circumstances but remaining true to its core ideal. For others, it is like solid granite, unmoving and unchanging across the decades and the centuries.

A Child of Pasiap places importance on those things that, like tradition, will endure. Lasting relationships are more important than fleeting dalliances. Long-term economic growth is more important than short-term profit. Magic that has been proven reliable is preferable to experimental sorceries. The total elimination of one's enemies is more important than temporary victory. Spiritual enlightenment — the only thing truly eternal — is more important than material matters. Trivial frivolities and passing fancies may have their place, but such divertissements are meaningless when compared to matters of lasting importance.

Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded are the stony soul of the Realm, with their unwavering commitment to that which they believe is right

providing a stable foundation for Dynastic society. Staunch supporters of tradition, Aspects of Earth believe that which once allowed the Realm to prosper will help it grow strong again and stubbornly defend those institutions in which they believe. That which they consider important remains worthiest of protection, they reason, and all else deserves whatever fate befalls it. If something new can endure on its own, then it may be worthy of support. If not, then it was of little consequence to begin with.

Aspects of Earth perform similar duties within sworn brotherhoods. Their iron wills provide a pillar of strength from which the brotherhood may draw support, and their firmness in their convictions ensures that the brotherhood carries out any action it commits to. The tradition of the bonded circle is one with long and distinguished history. An Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded will be very cautious about committing to such a group, but once sworn, her dedication to the brotherhood is unshakable.

**The Immaculate Dragons:** Earth-aspected who follow Pasiap are among the Realm's greatest builders, not just of grand cathedrals that demonstrate the enduring glory of spiritual enlightenment, but also of political coalitions, economic empires and stalwart armies. Those who walk the path of Hesiesh are among the Realm's staunchest upholders of tradition, often ignoring or even mistrusting anything contemporary or untested. Earth Exalted who follow Daana'd attempt to push their own endurance to its limits, using exhaustive martial arts rituals, strenuous asceticism and challenging sorceries to refine and purifying their Essence. Emulators of Mela demand nothing less than perfection in themselves as they maintain the traditions of the past. They seek excellence in all aspects of Realm society, quoting from the Immaculate Texts and ancient treatises on the arts of war, courtship and politics with equal ease. Those who follow Sextes Jylis often travel the Realm, teaching the importance of adhering to tradition, while relentlessly hunting down heretics.

**Aspect Markings:** Aspects of Earth are frequently compact or stocky. Their skin has a brownish or gray tint that is even darker among those of good breeding. As Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded age, their skin begins to harden, taking on a stone-like texture that ranges from smooth marble to rough sandstone. Elders often smell of freshly turned soil, moist clay or dry sand.

**Aspect Anima:** When an Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded spends Peripheral Essence, her anima erupts into a mantle of white and yellow light, shifting like rolling sand or glimmering like a perfect diamond. Awe-inspiring uses of Essence produce phantasmal images of badgers, bulls, stone pillars, the Imperial Mountain or earth dragons, as the character is surrounded by a thunderous roar such as that produced by an avalanche, volcano or earthquake.

An Aspect of Earth can spend 5 motes to attune her anima to the nearby stone, taking on the durability of the earth itself. For the rest of the scene, she can soak lethal damage with her entire Stamina.

**Aspect Abilities:** Aspects of Earth are living embodiments of stability, with a keen insight into the importance of tradition, ritual and that which endures. They excel at shaping things that last, be it buildings and tools or their own bodies and souls. Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded possess a natural affinity with the Abilities of Awareness, Crafts, Endurance, Martial Arts and Resistance.

**Common Natures:** Architect, Bravo, Bureaucrat, Caregiver, Critic, Follower, Judge, Leader, Martyr, Paragon, Survivor, Traditionalist, Visionary

**The Great Curse:** An Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded whose flaw involves Compassion will often orient her empathy toward those institutions she cherishes and protects, reacting with earthshaking anger or despair when people who are part of that institution are jeopardized. One who manifests a Conviction flaw is often willing to go to extremes of cruelty and sadism in order to uphold traditions and ideals — and to punish those who violate them. A Temperate Earth Exalted frequently seeks to focus her existence on only important matters and seeks to destroy those who cannot match her own fanatical level of devotion. If the flaw is one of Valor, she likely reacts with volcanic anger when cherished traditions are challenged or else becomes willing to engage in extremely dangerous undertakings with the belief that tried and true methods will undoubtedly see her through to success.

**Associations:** The color white, the Maiden of Battle, the season of Earth and the central direction

**Sobriquets:** Children of Pasiap, Stone Fists, Ivory Dragons

**Concepts:** Master architect, military strategist, wandering monk, dedicated magistrate, Realm historian

*The mountain watches, stone waits, and when the earth finally moves, nothing can stand before it. I have been planning decades for this day. Did you think I would not anticipate your treachery?*

# Aspects of Fire



Fire burns. This is the very nature of its being — when an object ceases burning, the fire is not sleeping, but dead. And so it is with the Exalted of Fire. Their hearts burn with a passion few others will ever match. To the Children of Hesiesh, passion is everything, and one who no longer feels or believes is no longer alive at all.

A Fire-aspected Dragon-Blood is passion incarnate. When she loves, she loves with all her heart. When she believes, she believes with unsurpassed zealotry. When she hates, she hates with the burning intensity of the Southernmost flames. For some, passion burns like a slow, smoldering bed of coals, quiet and almost unnoticeable until one gets close enough. The hearts of others burn with the raging power of an inferno, visible for all to see and blasting anything that stands before it.

No action is ever meaningless to a Child of Hesiesh. The Aspects of Fire enact religious rituals because they truly believe in their faith. Conflicts — be they martial, political or social — are undertaken because they truly believe in the cause (or at least in the people involved). When they love, the objects of their ardor are their heart's singular fixation, even if only at the times of consummation. Trite, empty activities are for colder, more timid souls. The Fire-aspected are the driving force behind Dynastic society, as their passions often spark flames in the hearts of others. Aspects of Fire challenge complacency, attacking hallowed traditions to remind people why they follow those traditions in the first place and playing devil's advocate so that ideas and beliefs are reexamined and perfected. That which cannot withstand or be strengthened by the Children of Hesiesh's scrutiny is simply burned away to make room for something more meaningful.

Aspects of Fire serve similar roles within bonded circles, reminding comrades of their purpose and challenging their assumptions. A Fire-aspected Dragon-Blooded's loyalty to her circle is unquestionable; her passion will not allow for anything less.

**The Immaculate Dragons:** Aspects of Fire who follow Hesiesh work to reserve their passion for those things that are most important, thereby making that which they care about all the more meaningful. Those who emulate Daana'd seek out challenges to help focus and purify their passions, as well as to inspire passion in the hearts of those they challenge. Aspects of Fire who follow Mela strive for perfection in all things — especially war, often becoming some of the Realm's most-zealous warriors. Those who seek the path of Sextes Jylis

focus their passion upon the Realm itself, working to strengthen the empire and those who dwell within it. Finally, those who emulate Pasiap direct their passions toward spiritual enlightenment, frequently sharing their passion with others as priests and instructors.

**Aspect Markings:** Aspects of Fire are marked by a obvious reddish tint to their skin. This tint is even more noticeable among those with high Breeding and becomes darker as the Dragon-Blooded ages — well-bred elders are often a deep and fiery crimson. It is not uncommon for older Dragon-Blooded of this aspect to emit puffs of smoke from their mouths as they speak or from their noses as they breath. Some elders even radiate heat from their skin, making them extremely warm to the touch.

**Aspect Anima:** When a Fire-aspected Dragon-Blooded spends Peripheral Essence, her anima ignites into a lambent aura of reds, oranges or yellows, shimmering and blazing like a bonfire. High Essence expenditures result in spectacular eruptions and flickering images of tigers, firebirds and fire dragons and the crackling roar of a forest fire or the dull scream of a stoked blast furnace.

A Fire-aspected Dragon-Blooded can spend 5 motes to ignite her anima. For the rest of the scene, she is immune to fire damage, and anyone striking her without a weapon or wrestling with her takes a number of dice of lethal damage every turn equal to the Chosen's Essence. If the character succeeds with an unarmed attack or wrestles with a character, her opponent takes a like amount of damage. This damage is applied separately from any damage the character does with an attack, and armor applies to it.

**Aspect Abilities:** As living embodiments of passion, Fire-aspected Dragon-Blooded possess an overabundance of personal energy, both physical and emotional. They excel at physical activity and social interaction, giving them a natural affinity with the Abilities of Athletics, Dodge, Melee, Presence and Socialize.

**Common Natures:** Bravo, Caretaker, Critic, Explorer, Gallant, Hedonist, Jester, Leader, Martyr, Paragon, Rebel, Survivor, Thrillseeker, Visionary

**The Great Curse:** A Compassionate Aspect of Fire is often driven by her love for those under her care or simply a deep passion for the concepts of justice and righteousness. When that which she cares deeply about is harmed or threatened, her passion overwhelms her and drives her to despair, self-sacrifice or righteous fury. If her flaw derives from her Conviction, her burning devotion to the cause she fights for makes it possible for her to inflict great suffering in the name of her passion. Although Temperate Fire Exalted might seem like a contradiction, they are quite common. Such a character will likely orient her passions toward self-perfection and enlightenment and direct scorching hatred toward those that cannot live up to her standards, herself included. Valor flaws often drive a Fire-aspected Dragon-Blooded to become a burning engine of destruction, as her passionate hatred for her foes overwhelms her.

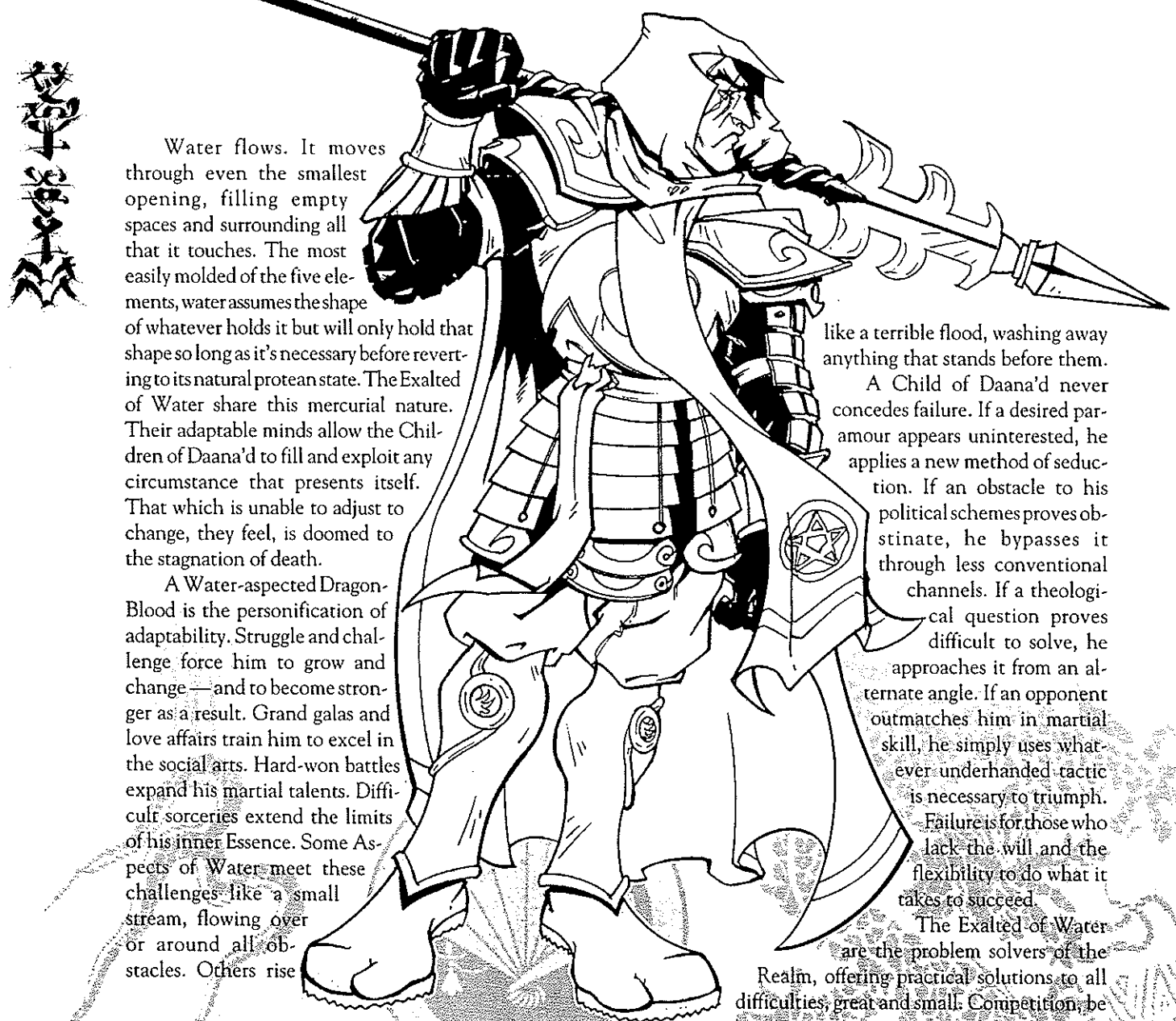
**Associations:** The color red, the Maiden of Journeys, the season of Fire and the southern direction

**Sobriquets:** Children of Hesiesh, Burning Swords, Crimson Dragons

**Concepts:** Righteous crusader, contrary social critic, legion commander, irrepressible socialite, devoted scholar

*You may escape this time, but eventually, fire will come to you and consume you, and you will be naught more than ashes. I will not forget.*

# Aspects of Water



Water flows. It moves through even the smallest opening, filling empty spaces and surrounding all that it touches. The most easily molded of the five elements, water assumes the shape of whatever holds it but will only hold that shape so long as it's necessary before reverting to its natural protean state. The Exalted of Water share this mercurial nature. Their adaptable minds allow the Children of Daana'd to fill and exploit any circumstance that presents itself. That which is unable to adjust to change, they feel, is doomed to the stagnation of death.

A Water-aspected Dragon-Blood is the personification of adaptability. Struggle and challenge force him to grow and change—and to become stronger as a result. Grand galas and love affairs train him to excel in the social arts. Hard-won battles expand his martial talents. Difficult sorceries extend the limits of his inner Essence. Some Aspects of Water meet these challenges like a small stream, flowing over or around all obstacles. Others rise like a terrible flood, washing away anything that stands before them.

A Child of Daana'd never concedes failure. If a desired paramour appears uninterested, he applies a new method of seduction. If an obstacle to his political schemes proves obstinate, he bypasses it through less conventional channels. If a theological question proves difficult to solve, he approaches it from an alternate angle. If an opponent outmatches him in martial skill, he simply uses whatever underhanded tactic is necessary to triumph. Failure is for those who lack the will and the flexibility to do what it takes to succeed.

The Exalted of Water are the problem solvers of the Realm, offering practical solutions to all difficulties, great and small. Competition, be

it a petty personal rivalry or a war that engulfs all Creation, is an opportunity for the Realm to grow and mature. The Children of Daana'd nurture the Realm during these periods of conflict, helping the empire to navigate its way toward new outlets of power and strength. Without conflict to challenge it to change, the Realm will simply stagnate in its complacency.

Aspects of Water perform similar functions within their sworn brotherhoods, tailoring their actions to compliment the strengths and counter the weaknesses of their sworn brothers. A Water-aspected Dragon-Blooded nurtures his brotherhood, helping the members adapt and grow stronger in the face of adversity.

**The Immaculate Dragons:** Water-aspected Dragon-Blooded who emulate Daana'd are the most devoted adherents to the ideals of self-sufficiency and growth through adversity. They challenge themselves to excel in all arenas — martial, social and spiritual. Those who follow Mela strive toward adaptability and flexibility, especially in the arts of war. They are proficient masters of unconventional tactics, including assassination, guerilla warfare and terrorism. Aspects of Water who follow the ways of Sextes Jylis nurture those in need, offering unique solutions to their troubles. They also prove among the most adept at hunting down and eliminating heretics. Emulators of Pasiap's work focus their fluid minds on the goal of enlightenment, often becoming skilled theologians and religious instructors. Followers of Hesiesh are staunch traditionalists and often reserve their mercurial talents to nurture and protect that which they hold dear.

**Aspect Markings:** Aspects of Water move with an almost hypnotic grace, and their skin has a slight blue-green tint. This aqua tone is most noticeable in members with high Breeding, and the coloration only deepens with age. Well-bred elders are often deep green-black or ebony in color. They smell of fresh water, either of running streams or the open sea.

**Aspect Anima:** When a Water-aspected Dragon-Blood spends Peripheral Essence, his anima bursts forth as a bright blue-green or green-black glow, rippling like a pool of water or rolling like the ocean waves. Truly impressive displays include phantasmal whirlpools, waves, waterspouts and water dragons accompanied by the roar of crashing waves or the alien silence of the ocean depths.

An Aspect of Water can spend 5 motes to attune his anima with the surrounding water. For the rest of the day, he can breathe underwater and operate as freely as if he was in air, including firing bows and the like.

**Aspect Abilities:** Their fluid minds grant Water Exalted an intuitive shrewdness. They excel in navigating their way through situations of unfathomable complexity and at improvising their way around or through obstacles. Aspects of Water possess a natural affinity with the Abilities of Brawl, Bureaucracy, Investigation, Larceny and Sail.

**Common Natures:** Caregiver, Conniver, Critic, Explorer, Follower, Jester, Judge, Leader, Paragon, Rebel, Savant, Survivor, Visionary

**The Great Curse:** A Water-aspected Dragon-Blood whose curse lies in his Compassion is typically one who focuses on nurturing others. He'll go to extreme lengths to protect that which he nurtures, sometimes drowning it in the process. One whose curse comes from Conviction is like a great flood, willing to wash away anything that stands before its efforts. Temperate Aspects of Water often become like deep, still pools, but react poorly if that tranquility is disturbed. Those whose curse derives from their Valor often become like tidal waves, believing there is no problem they cannot batter through or wash away.

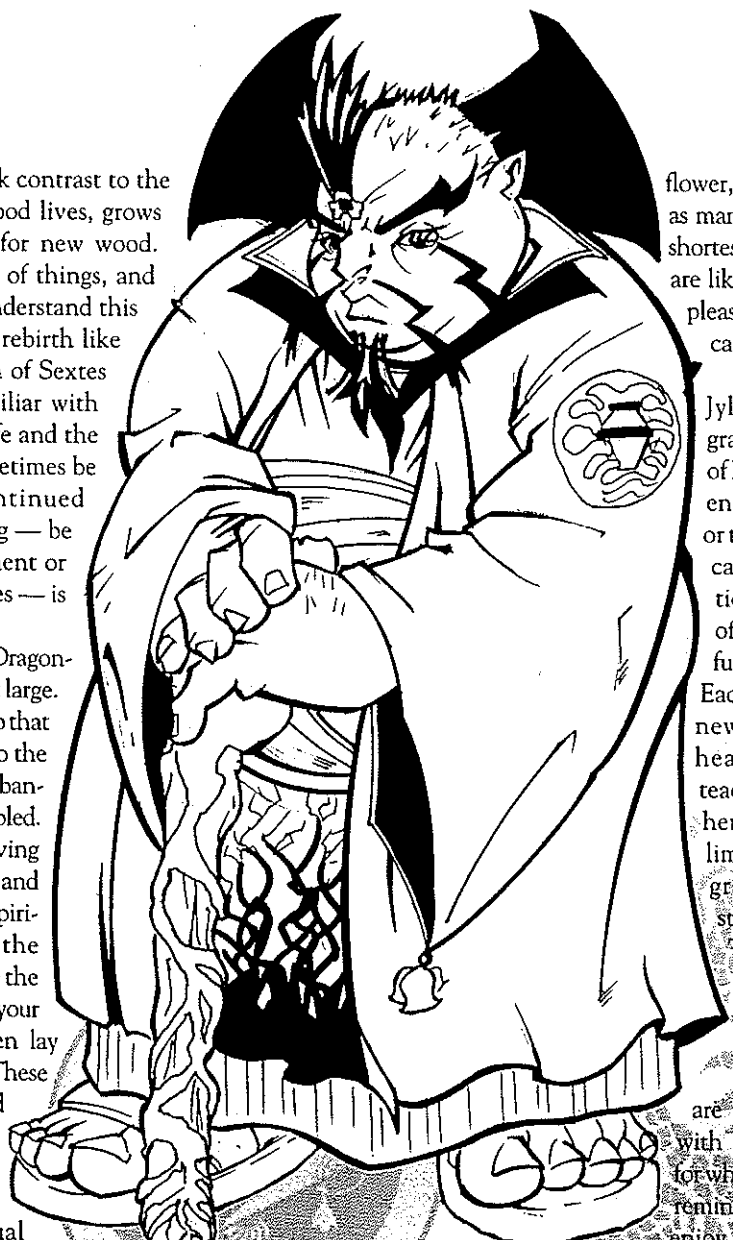
**Associations:** The color black, the Maiden of Secrets, the season of Water and the western direction

**Sobriquets:** Children of Daana'd, Drowning Hands, Ebon Dragons

**Concepts:** Ruthless magistrate, agent of the All-Seeing Eye, political fixer, diplomat to the Threshold, dilettante artist

*As the water wears away the stone,*
*thus does patience solve all things.*

# Aspects of Wood

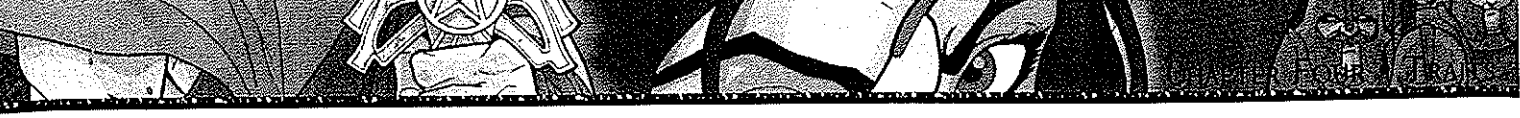


Wood lives. In stark contrast to the other four elements, wood lives, grows and dies, making way for new wood. This is the natural way of things, and the Exalted of Wood understand this cycle of life, death and rebirth like no other. The Children of Sextes Jylis are intimately familiar with the fleeting nature of life and the sacrifices that must sometimes be made to ensure continued growth. To stop growing — be it in power, enlightenment or in number of experiences — is to stop living.

A Wood-aspected Dragon-Blooded is sensuality writ large. What she does, she does so that she may experience life to the fullest. Life is an endless banquet of pleasures to be sampled. The contentment of having flavorful food, fine wine and excellent sex. The joy of spiritual enlightenment, the exhilaration of feeling the blood of your enemy stain your hands, while his children lay enchained at your feet. These are what is best in life and should be enjoyed as often as possible. Some Dragon-Blooded seek the sensuality of an annual flower, attempting to squeeze as many experiences into the shortest time possible. Others are like trees, stretching their pleasures out over years, decades or even centuries.

A Child of Sextes Jylis takes nothing for granted. Every moment of life is a learning experience; every person, place or thing is something that can offer a new sensation. Each glass of wine offers her the chance to further refine her pallet. Each love affair teaches new lessons about her heart. Each conflict teaches harsh truths about her own strengths and limitations. Each death grants greater understanding of life's cycle. Those fools who blunder blindly through existence miss life's true wisdom.

The Exalted of Wood are the Realm's gardeners, with their fine appreciation for what the world has to offer, reminding others to stop and enjoy the pleasures of life.



Wood-aspected Dragon-Blooded tend to the tasks that help the empire grow strong, nurturing those people or places that need it. The Aspects of Wood support the generals, politicians and priests they feel will help the Realm grow in the pattern they finds most pleasing and weed out those who might corrupt their design.

An Aspect of Wood takes on similar roles in bonded circles. She works to shape the circle into a thing of beauty, nurturing those of her circlemates' traits she finds pleasing and pruning those that might threaten the healthy growth of her circle.

**The Immaculate Dragons:** Those Wood-aspected Dragon-Bloods who follow Sextes Jylis are among the greatest nurturers within the Realm, famous as healers and protectors. Emulators of Pasiap work to guide their charges toward deeper spiritual enlightenment and often become relentless pruners of heresy. Followers of Hesiesh are conservative when choosing sensations to experience, often attempting to extend each event as long as possible. Aspects of Wood who walk Daana'd's path often seek out extreme experiences, endeavoring to spiritually test both themselves and others. Those who follow the way of Mela strive to become perfect poison flowers, beautiful in appearance and deadly in the arts of war.

**Aspect Markings:** Aspects of Wood are marked with a slight greenish tint to their skin. Among those with high Breeding, this tint becomes almost emerald in color. As they age, Wood-aspected Dragon-Blooded often grow a light layer of bark on their skin, typically along the back and shoulders. Well-bred elders sometimes sprout flowers in their hair. Many produce a natural musk reminiscent of flowers, pine, fresh fruit or other forms of plant life.

**Aspect Anima:** When a Wood-aspected Dragon-Blooded spends Peripheral Essence, her anima blossoms into a bright green glow, waving like a field of grass or the leaves of a tree. Large expenditures of Essence result in phantasmal representations of trees, tangles of thorns, giant flowers or wood dragons. The sound produced is like that of a strong wind moaning through a dense forest of towering trees.

A Wood-aspected Dragon-Blooded may spend 5 motes to attune her anima to the local flora, becoming as flexible as a sapling in the wind. For the rest of the scene, she may add her Essence in dice to a single Dodge or Athletics action once per turn. This power is reflexive, not supplementary, and so, the character can either add to a dice action or gain a free Dodge or Athletics action with a dice pool equal to her Essence.

**Aspect Abilities:** Aspects of Wood are intimately tied to the cycle of life. In addition to their desire to live life to it's fullest, they have a natural connection with living things — both animal and plant — and those objects crafted from them. They possess an affinity for the Abilities of Archery, Medicine, Performance, Ride and Survival.

**Common Natures:** Architect, Caregiver, Conniver, Critic, Explorer, Gallant, Hedonist, Jester, Leader, Paragon, Rebel, Thrillseeker, Visionary

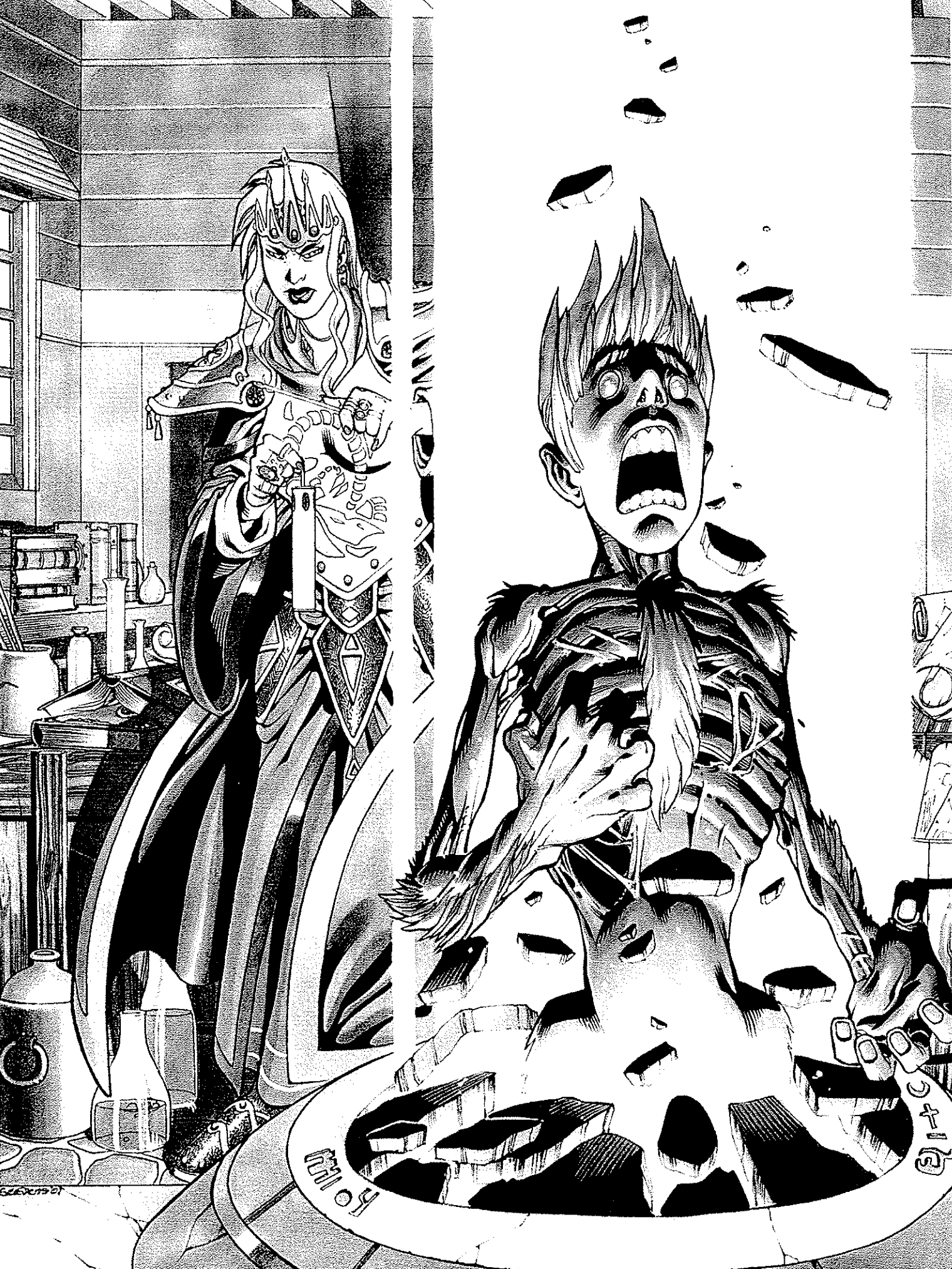
**The Great Curse:** A Wood Exalted whose curse derives from her Compassion will often be one who focuses on the nurturing aspect of life. When she is elementally possessed, she will attempt to protect the things she guides and nurtures. In contrast, one whose curse derives from her Conviction will likely focus on "pruning" and become more cold-hearted and cruel as she carries out her grim tasks. A Temperate Aspect of Wood is likely given to bouts of hedonism and will either go on wild binges or feel remorse and regret at her lack of control. If the Wood-aspected Exalt's curse derives from her Valor, she may be in the habit of seeking out extreme and even dangerous experiences, heedless of whatever jeopardy she places her life in.

**Associations:** The color green, the Maiden of Endings, the season of Wood and the eastern direction

**Sobriquets:** Children of Sextes Jylis, Ashen Bows, Emerald Dragons

**Concepts:** Cunning courtier, professional assassin, Immaculate inquisitor, master healer, meticulous merchant prince

*There is nowhere life's cycle is not obeyed, nowhere that living things do not find a foothold. From adaptability and perseverance spring strength.*



The delicate, lingering tone of a jade chime filled the silent room. Outside, the gentle warmth of a late summer night filled the air. The windows of the workroom were open, and the soft breeze made the air seem fresh even through the haze of incense that filled the room.

The floor of the sorcerous workroom was a single slab of white jade, selected and quarried by Dragon-Blooded and Mountain Folk craftsmen for its flawless perfection. In it had been painstakingly incised the symbols of a circle for the summoning of demons. Mnemon tapped the chime again, and time within the sorcerous workroom seemed to stop. The breeze vanished, and the smoke from the incense curled sluggishly upward. The summoning circle seemed to fold in on itself, the jade between the diagrams slipping seamlessly into the orichalcum and moonsilver runes, now glowing brilliantly under the influence of the magic.

"Rise," she said, "rise by the oaths your creators made upon their own names at the beginning of time. Rise, demon 'Istar,' one of those who placed your black masters in chains of jade and heart's iron calls you forth to pay the penalty of their defeat."

Her voice was rolling, and the black place below the summoning circle became a burning green-lit vortex. Down endlessly through the nonspace of Elsewhere it stretched, joining Creation with the prison of the Yozis. And plucked from that darkness was Istar, one of the Princes of the Second Circle. In a blaze of white lightning, it appeared, hovering above the glowing summoning diagram.

It had the body of a man and the legs of a goat, and it was emaciated to the point of mummification, save for the beautiful, serene boy's visage and flawless hands that graced its face and arms. It was robed all around in cloth of gold, and a rune of power flickered between its spired horns.

"You may not call me, by-blow of the Dragons, for I am mightier than your magic. How is it that you bring me here from my palace?"

"I command you by the power of the emerald thurible, demon 'Istar.'" Mnemon smiled and plucked an object on a long gold chain from her belt. It was a censer the size of a large man's thumb carved from a single emerald and chased with hammered black iron. Within it smoldered a mixture of saffron and the spirit drug called "bright morning" in the East. The creature's eyes hardened, and it fixed Mnemon with its gaze.

"You may be able to draw me forth from Malfeas, Dragon-Blood, but I shall consume your limbs and sate my lusts on your still-living torso, as is my way."

Istar fixed Mnemon with its hateful boy's eyes, and the room filled with the charge of supernatural wills in conflict. The diagram dimmed and glowed red, and glass and metal objects around the room cracked and shattered. Istar's horns flared with power, and his eyes glowed the green of the Autochthonian sun. Yet mighty as Prince Istar was, Mnemon was mightier. Her skin glowed with the imperishable white perfection of alabaster or unseasoned meerschaum. The stars were in league against him, and the power of the elder Exalt was a mighty thing indeed. In an instant, Istar broke, bending to one knee before her.

"I am yours to command, sorcerer, in payment of my lords' forfeit."

"Then, demon 'Istar,' I will name your service. You shall tell me of the Ebon Dragon and of the marriage that I know he plans even now."

The demon's eyes were empty as it canted out the knowledge that its Exalted master commanded.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# CHARMS

The Terrestrial Exalted's magic is perhaps less powerful than that of the Anathema, but the children of the Five Elemental Dragons should not be underestimated. Reduced though they may be, their empire still encompasses almost the entire civilized world. This section describes the Charms that form the backbone of the Dragon-Blooded's arsenal.

## Elemental Attunement

Much as the magic of the Solar Exalted is divided up between the different castes, Terrestrial Exalted Charms are divided up along elemental lines. This doesn't mean that Dragon-Blooded of a various elemental attunements can't learn each other's Charms. Quite to the contrary, all living things contain all of the Five Dragon Elements to some degree. Controlling an element other than one's own is just a bit more difficult, requiring a greater expenditure of Essence. The elemental attunement of a Dynast determines in great part what magic she excels at, but it in no way restricts what she can learn.

**The game effect of this is that Dragon-Blooded wielding Charms of a different element than their aspect must always pay one more mote of Essence than the Charm would normally require. This is a flat fee of 1 mote. If a Charm is used multiple times in a single turn, the extra mote need be paid only for the first activation of the turn.** If using in a Combo, the character must pay the 1 mote surcharge once for each Charm of an element different from her own. The Combo surcharge is payable immediately upon activation of the Combo.

For Example: A Wood-aspected Dynast uses a Combo containing Wood, Fire and Water Charms. She must pay a 2 mote surcharge upon activating the Combo; 1 mote for Fire Charms, 1 mote for Wood Charms. This is on top of any costs to activate the individual Charms and the 1 temporary Willpower to activate the Combo.

Members of the Eclipse Caste who learn these Charms have no element and, thus, have no Charms for which they do not pay the surcharge.

## Dice Pools and Committed Essence

Terrestrial Exalted follow a more restrictive rule concerning dice pool maximums than do their Solar enemies. **Dragon-Blooded Charms can only double a character's Ability, not her Attribute + Ability. However, unlike Solars, Dynasts can double their specialties as well. Like Solars, the Dragon-Blooded are unable to spend fractional motes of Essence. If one of the Terrestrial Exalted uses a Charm that gives her two or more dice per mote spent and cannot utilize one of the dice due to pool-doubling restrictions, then that die is lost.** The guidelines for committed Essence are handled exactly the same for Dragon-Blooded heroes as for Solars. It should be made clear that bonus dice a character receives

toward an Ability for an extended duration as part of the effect of a group-aid Charm are counted against the maximum number of dice that can be added to the Ability. Thus, the character cannot more than double her Ability + specialty through any combination of group-aid Charms and dice adds.

### Dragon-Blooded Vs. Solar Magic

A few factors have influenced the way that Dragon-Blooded magic has evolved, and it's probably a useful exercise to contrast the two magical styles a little, to give the reader a better grasp of the different flavor of Dragon-Blooded Charms.

**Efficiency:** Dragon-Blooded Charms have been developed with efficiency in mind: big bang for as little Essence buck as possible. The Terrestrial Exalted have less Essence to work with, so it only makes sense that they have engineered their Charms to the highest possible efficiency.

**Group Effects:** As an outgrowth of this lower power level, it's a simple fact that, in a *mano y mano* fight, the average Anathema will leave the average Dragon-Blooded lying in a pool of his own Exalted blood. In magic, as with everything else, taken one by one, the Dragon-Blooded are just not in the same league as the Solars. So why haven't the returning Solars already toppled the Realm? The advantage the Dragon-Blooded have on their side isn't just numbers, it's also the ability of those numbers to work together. The magic wielded by the children of the Five Elemental Dragons reflects this concept of group action.

## Presentation Format

The Charms presented below use the same format as in the main **Exalted** book. Cost, Duration, Type, Minimum Skill, Minimum Essence and Prerequisite Charms all are presented and function just as with Solar Exalted Charms.

**An important note to remember: Unlike Solars, Dragon-Blooded can use Reflexive Charms in the same turn as other Charms without the need for a Combo.** This means that Dragon-Blooded need not spend Willpower to use defensive and offensive Charms in the same turn; a significant advantage.

# Air

## Linguistics

### Language-Learning Ritual

**Cost:** 5 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One week
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Linguistics:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

Dragon-Blooded embarking on diplomatic missions often invoke this Charm. By spending an hour meditating and listening to a native speak the language to be learned, the Exalt absorbs the knowledge of the language into her mind. The character needs some sort of focus to meditate on, usually a cultural object related to or a book written in the language to be learned. For the Charm's duration, the Dragon-Blooded is completely fluent and naturally conversant in the language, without even a trace of an accent. The character may also read and write the language. Once the duration expires, the knowledge fades immediately.

### Thousand Tongues Meditation

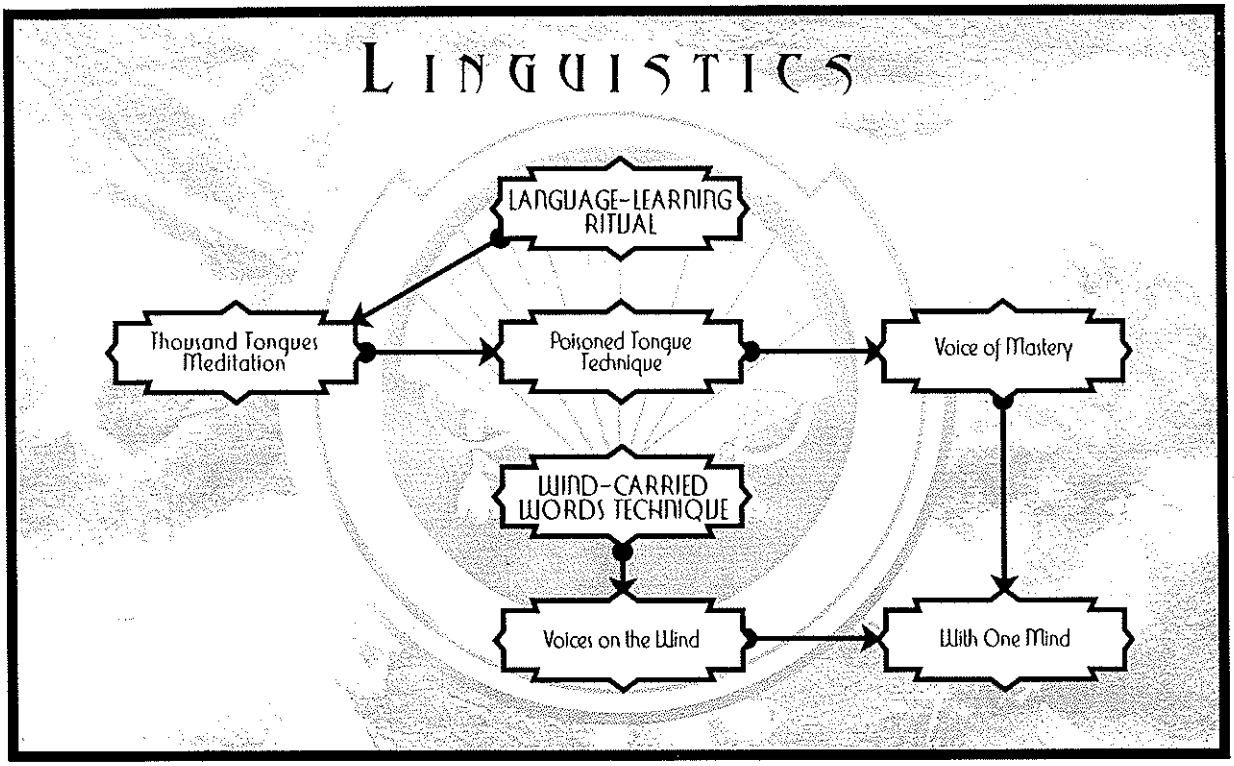
**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Linguistics:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Language-Learning Ritual

The far-ranging colonial interests of the Dragon-Blooded combine with the Air-aspected Exalt's close affinity with communication to make this Charm a common one.

The character speaking in tongues can easily speak and understand any spoken language for the duration of the Charm. If speaking to beings each speaking a different language, the character can understand them all, and they can all understand the character — but they will still be unable to understand each other. The maximum number of beings that an Exalted may speak in tongues to at once is equal to the character's permanent Essence.

This Charm just allows the most basic of communication — the equivalent of baby or pidgin speech. Any sort of social or communicative actions attempted by the character are at -4 to her dice pools. Each point of permanent Essence that the Dragon-Blood possesses over the minimum requirement reduces this penalty by –1.

This Charm only works on actual speech. Sign language cannot be understood through the use of the Thousand Tongues Meditation.




### Poisoned Tongue Technique

**Cost:** 2 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Concentration
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Linguistics:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Thousand Tongues Meditation

This Charm allows an Exalted to "hijack" another's conversation. The effect is subtle, but it can be deadly if applied correctly. The Exalt must be able to hear the conversation to twist it, but need not actually be present. Eavesdropping through Charms such as Voices on the Wind is perfectly permissible, but the range of this Charm cannot be extended past 100 feet x the Exalt's permanent Essence.

To twist a conversation, the character's player must roll Manipulation + Linguistics. The number of successes indicates the degree to which the Dragon-Blooded can twist the conversation. A single success would allow her to send someone away from a conversation confused, aroused or with a sour taste in his mouth. Three or more successes are enough to make a speaker seem heroic, amorous, ruthless or offensive. Five successes allow the Dragon-Blood to completely hijack the conversation, changing or amending anything said by any party.

The participants in the conversation each get a reflexive Wits + Perception roll at a roll to notice the use of this Charm. The difficulty of the roll is the Essence of the Exalt using this Charm. If this roll fails, the character doesn't realize that what he means to say and what he's actually saying doesn't match and has no way of knowing the conversation was altered. If the roll succeeds, he realizes the conversation is being manipulated and can indicate this through nonverbal means (normally a chopping motion at one's own throat). Use of this Charm in a criminal fashion is a serious offense in the Realm and can bring with it a death sentence.

### Voice of Mastery

**Cost:** 5+ motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Linguistics:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Poisoned Tongue Technique

With more complete mastery of the Air element, the Dragon-Blooded can use this Charm to enhance the effect of his spoken words. His words seem to resonate with listeners, seeming more persuasive, threatening, seductive — whatever the Dragon-Blood wishes.

For the duration of this Charm, the character may add his Essence dice to his dice pool for any interaction involving speech, whether it is seduction, persuasion or intimidation. The Charm normally affects only one listener. Each additional mote doubles the number of people affected by the Charm. The character must be able to speak the target's language, either naturally or through the use of Charms.

## Wind-Carried Words Technique

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per sentence, plus distance |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Linguistics:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

The wind carries many things, and sound can be one of them. A Terrestrial Exalted can set his words on the currents of the wind, sending them through the air to the ear of the one he wishes to hear his message.

For the base Essence cost, a character may send on single sentence to the ear of any other person in range. The character does not actually have to speak what he wishes to say out loud, but he does at least have to vaguely mouth the words he wishes to send.

The difficulty of sending words on the wind increases over distance. The further away a character wants to send a message, the more difficult the Charm becomes. For a single mote of Essence, a character can send a single sentence to roughly 100 feet away. This distance is modified by the permanent Essence of the character and by the expenditure of additional motes of Essence. Multiply the 100-foot range by the character's permanent Essence score. In addition, by doubling the amount of Essence spent on the Charm, this modified base range can be increased by a factor of 10. An Air-aspected Dynast with an Essence of 4 could send a single sentence 400 feet for 1 mote, 4,000 feet for 2 motes, 40,000 feet for 3 motes and so on.

The sending character must have a general sense of the target's direction, but need not see her. This Charm has become essential to the Realm's military operations, as it gives the Terrestrial Exalted the ability to communicate quickly over long distances on the battlefield. Most Dragon-Blooded of military inclination know the Charm.

## Voices on the Wind

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes, plus distance |
| **Duration:** | One minute |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Linguistics:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Wind-Carried Words Technique |

Speech requires breath, the very air of life. Some Dynasts of Air can extend their senses through the air and so listen to what people far from them say. The further away a character wants to eavesdrop, the more expensive the Charm becomes. For the basic cost, an Air-aspected Dragon-Blood can clearly hear normal speech from 100 feet away. The character also gets a general sense of the target's direction (assuming he doesn't know already). As with the Wind-Carried Words Technique, the cost of using this Charm increases over distance. The further away a character wants to eavesdrop, the more expensive the Charm becomes. For a single mote of Essence, a character can listen in on speech roughly 100 feet away. This distance is modified by the permanent Essence of the character and by the expenditure of additional motes of Essence. Multiply the 100-foot range by the character's permanent Essence score. In addition, by doubling the amount of Essence spent on the Charm, this modified base range can be increased by a factor of 10.

This Charm has some limitations. The character must specify a single person he wants to spy upon: He cannot, for instance, declare that he will "listen for people plotting against me." At most, he can make a list of suspected enemies and eavesdrop on them one by one. The character also cannot hear anything spoken in an airtight chamber. Many of the powerful Dynasts build such chambers for their privy councils, specifically to defeat this Charm. Finally, listening to a person from so far away demands total concentration — the character cannot perform any other action while listening to Voices on the Wind.

## With One Mind

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes per dot of increase |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Linguistics:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Voices on the Wind, Voice of Mastery |

A Dynast of Air can enable a group of people to know each other's surface thoughts. What one sees, all the others see as well. Her tactical decisions are an open book to her allies. As a result, a group that fights using With One Mind displays uncanny coordination. They trade off opponents without a hitch; one fighter parries a blow aimed at another; an enemy seen by one cannot hide from any.

For each 2 motes that the Dragon-Blooded character spends, the recipients gain one dot each of Wits, Perception and Melee, up to the Dragon-Blooded character's own Linguistics rating. In addition, any of the linked characters can parry or abort to parry an attack against any other character in the group, provided he is close enough to plausibly do so. If multiple characters parry a given attack, subtract all their successes from the attack roll.

The initiating character can link as many people using With One Mind as she has dots of Essence, but all those linked must have the same level of linkage, and the Exalt must pay to enhance each of them. The linked group must include the character herself, and there is no benefit to be gained from using this Charm unless at least two people are linked with it. Dynasts typically use this Charm to magnify the fighting prowess of their bodyguards or minions.



Characters linked by this Charm must have trained together for at least a week. They must spend a turn on a shared breathing exercise and war-shout to initiate the link. The characters must also stay within 50 feet x highest Essence of the participants of one another. If any character moves beyond that range, the link breaks, and the Charm ends.

This Charm also has non-combat uses, allowing instantaneous nonverbal communication between the linked group for the duration.

## Lore

### Elemental Concentration Trance

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | One day |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Lore:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

This Charm is the most basic of Lore techniques known by the Dragon-Blooded. Through the use of this Charm, the character concentrates on her aligned element, centering herself and opening her mind. The Exalt can compact a week's worth of learning into a single day, assuming she has access to all the necessary materials. This Charm can be used on sequential days, but use of it for more days than the character's Lore skill causes one level of unsoakable lethal damage per day. This damage can only be healed by time, and it does not begin healing until one week after the characters suffers it.

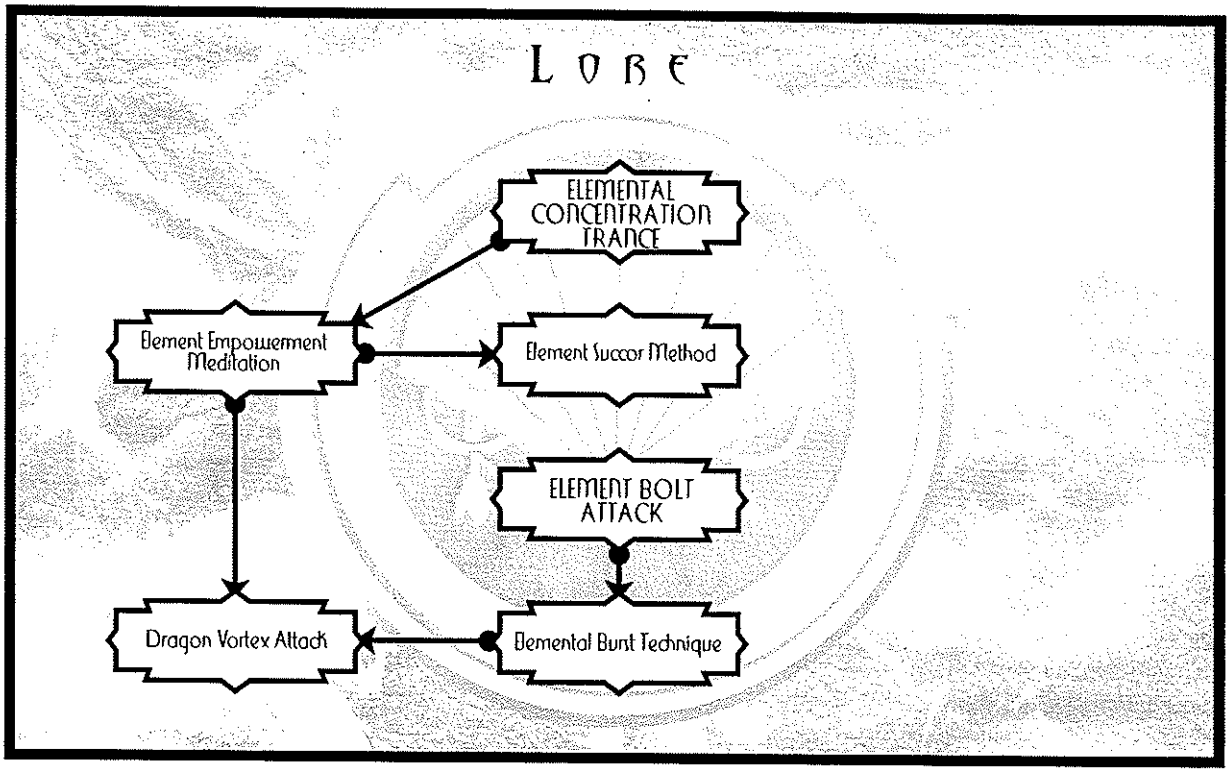
### Elemental Empowerment Meditation

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1+ Willpower |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Lore:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Elemental Concentration Trance |

Proper knowledge of the Elemental Dragons allows a Dynast to draw energy directly from an elemental source, restoring depleted reserves in times of crisis.

The Elemental Empowerment Meditation requires the character to spend Willpower points while in contact with her aligned element. The character must be able to physically touch the element she is aligned with to draw Essence from it. For every point of Willpower spent in this way, the character instantly gains Essence motes equal to her Lore. These motes can be spent normally.

There is a price to be paid for handling elemental energy in such a raw fashion. If a character spends more Willpower in a single day to draw elemental energy than her permanent Essence score, each additional use of Will-




power to increase her Essence causes one unsoakable level of bashing damage.

### Elemental Succor Method

**Cost:** 5 motes and 1 Willpower per lethal health level, 2 motes per bashing health level
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Lore:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Elemental Empowerment Meditation

In addition to providing raw energy, a Dynast's connection to the Elemental Dragons can be a source of great resilience and strength in desperate times. Elemental Succor Method lets a Dragon-Blood tap into the elemental energy of the Dragons to restore her body, healing her injuries. That character must be able to immerse herself in her favored element to the greatest degree possible (standing in a burning fire, submerged in water, etc.) and must spend 5 motes and 1 Willpower for every lethal health level to be healed or 2 motes per bashing health level to be healed. The Elemental Succor Method will not restore lost limbs or repair other such mutilations.

### Elemental Bolt Attack

**Cost:** 1 mote per 2L damage
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Lore:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The character extends her hand, and a bolt of elemental force flashes forth from it — a shaft of ice, a blast of fire, a barbed wooden javelin, a stroke of lightning or slashing shards of crystal. The character's player rolls Dexterity + Athletics or Archery (whichever she prefers) to hit. This attack has a range of 20 yards x the character's permanent Essence, and it does a base damage of 2L for every mote of Essence spent. The accuracy of the attack is equal to the character's Essence. A character cannot spend more motes on this Charm than her Stamina.

### Elemental Burst Technique

**Cost:** 1 mote per 1L damage
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Lore:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Elemental Bolt Attack

This Charm has effects similar to Elemental Bolt Attack, but it creates a blast of elemental power rather than hurling a bolt. The character's player rolls Dexterity + Athletics or Archery (whichever he prefers) to hit,

with an accuracy bonus equal to the character's permanent Essence. This attack has a range increment of 20 yards x the character's permanent Essence. The Elemental Burst Technique affects a circular area with a radius equal to the character's permanent Essence in yards. Anyone in that area who fails to dodge or parry the attack takes a base damage of 1L for every mote the Dragon-Blooded invested in the Charm.

Max motes = permanent Essence

### Dragon Vortex Attack

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 10 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Lore:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 4 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Elemental Empowerment Meditation, Element Burst Technique |

Rather than just summoning a temporary damaging burst of elemental energy, this Charm creates a deadly maelstrom of the character's elemental aspect. Whether it is a sudden rain of fire, a roiling whirlwind of air or a grinding cloud of stone and earth, all within the area of effect suffer the character's wrath.

Anyone in the area of the Dragon Vortex Attack, other than the character who summoned it, takes lethal damage equal to the character's Essence every turn, as she is battered by flying shards of stone, sliced by razor-thin ice crystals, burned by swirling gouts of flame, and so on. This damage cannot be dodged or parried. The Dragon-Blooded who created it is exempt from these effects, and may act normally in all respects. The Dragon Vortex extends 10 feet from the character per point of his permanent Essence. It is stationary once invoked, and not even the character can voluntarily terminate it before its duration expires, although killing the character will end it.

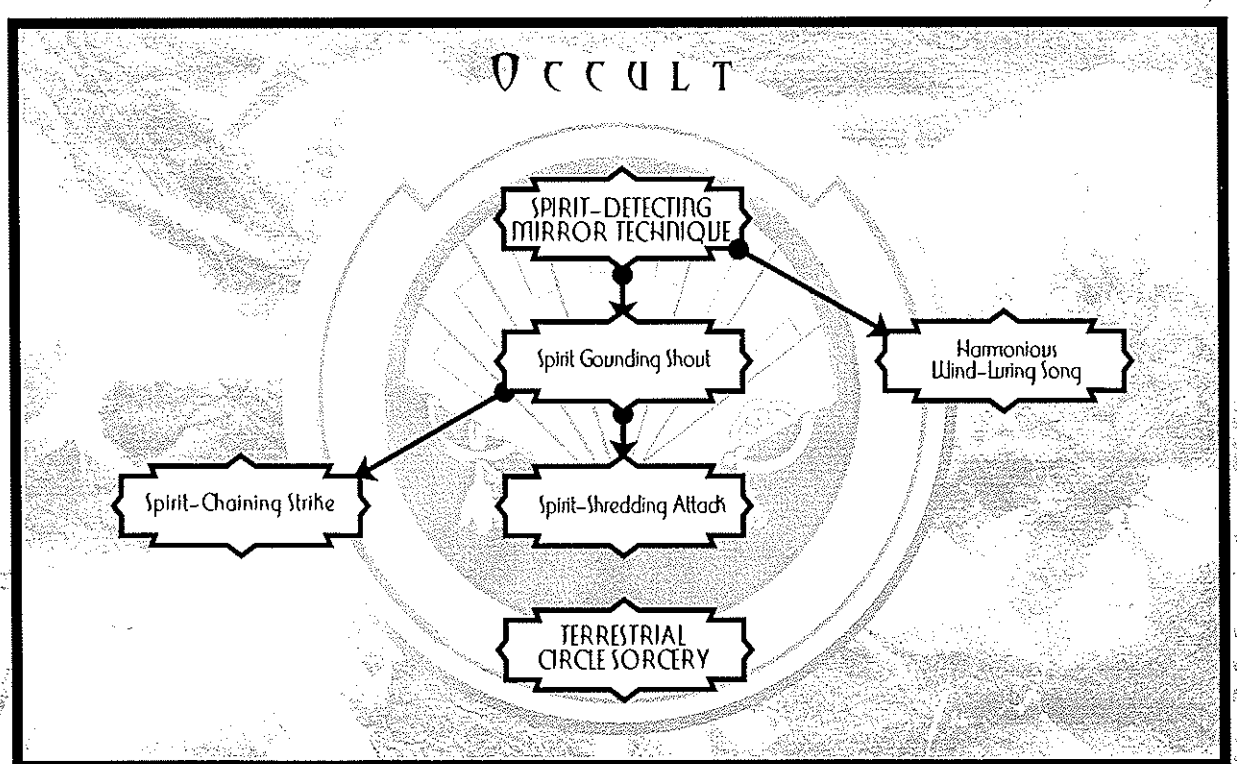
## Occult

### Spirit-Detecting Mirror Technique

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Occult:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

Air is the most closely connected to the spirit world of all of the five elements. As such, it is easier for the Aspects of Air to pierce the veil and see the unseen.

To invoke a Spirit Mirror requires an ordinary mirror, a piece of polished metal or some other reflective surface. Even a pool of still water will suffice. For the remainder of the scene, the Exalt using this Charm can see nearby spirits reflected in such surfaces and, if they are reflected, hear what they say. A clever Dragon-Blood might even do this without the spirits noticing — for instance, by using a goblet of water and taking a sip now and then or by polishing a sword blade.



### Harmonious Wind-Luring Song

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes |
| **Duration:** | One hour |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Occult:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Spirit-Detecting Mirror Technique |

The Dragon-Blooded are not born occultists and magicians like some Celestial Exalted, but a number of them study the supernatural lore of their favored element. Many Air-aspected Dragon-Blooded learn the ways of the spirits who create the weather through their dances and processions in the sky. Exalted who know the ways of the sky-spirits can call them to direct the wind. To do so, the Exalted must speak to the elementals in their own tongue: the sounds of wind sighing over stony crags and through treetops, and the rumbles of thunder. Some Aspects of Air imitate such sounds with their voice and a bull-roarer. Others might play a flute or position a harp so that the wind plucks its strings. Whatever the method used, inviting the winds to blow takes five minutes.

This basic Charm evokes nothing more than a stiff breeze — still enough to interfere with archery or send a sailing ship scudding through the waves at a good speed. During the hour of the Charm's effect, the character can control the magic wind's direction by singing for a turn.

### Spirit-Grounding Shout

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Occult:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Spirit-Detecting Mirror Technique |

The Dragon-Bloods must protect the common people of the Realm from the various supernatural beings that roam the landscape. Often, the most effective method of accomplishing this task with regard to spirits is to simply force them into the physical world and defeat them there. This Charm aids greatly in that tactic. The character utters the Spirit-Grounding Shout, and reflexive opposed Essence rolls are made for both her and the target spirit. If the Exalt wins, the spirit is forced to materialize. If she loses, the spirit may remain dematerialized.

A successful Spirit-Grounding Shout forces the spirit to manifest itself for no less that the Exalt's permanent Essence in minutes. The Essence for this materialization (assuming the spirit is naturally immaterial and must pay to materialize) is first drained from the spirit's reserves, but any remaining cost is drained from the Exalt uttering the shout. If there is not enough Essence between the spirit and the character to pay for the manifestation, the spirit remains immaterial, but the Essence is still lost.

This Charm has no effect on spirits with permanent Essences higher than the Dragon-Blood's.

### Spirit-Chaining Strike

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | 5 minutes |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Occult:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Spirit-Grounding Shout |

This Charm allows the Dragon-Blooded to immobilize spirit beings, which is often the first step toward eliminating them.

The character must strike the spirit with an attack, and then his player immediately makes a reflexive Intelligence + Occult roll with a difficulty equal to the spirit's Essence. Each extra success imposes as a one-die penalty to any and all actions taken by the spirit. If the penalty exceeds the spirit's Essence rating, it is immobilized and unable to act for the rest of the scene. Subsequent uses of this Charm are additive, so long as the Charm never lapses. Additionally, Spirit Chains used by other Dragon-Blood are additive as well.

Spirit Chains affect a spirit whether it is manifested or not, but the character must be able to perceive and strike the spirit to bind it. Spirit-Chaining Strike is explicitly permitted to be made part of a Combo with Charms of other Abilities.

### Spirit-Shredding Attack

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 4 motes |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Occult:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Spirit-Grounding Shout |

Sometimes, restraining a spirit is not enough, and destruction becomes necessary. The Spirit-Shredding Attack is an effective tool for this. Invoking this Charm requires a successful physical attack against a Spirit. This means that the spirit must be materialized and/or the character must have some method of actually affecting the spirit, whether it is a weapon or an attack that can affect incorporeal beings.

A blow struck with this Charm does its normal damage to spirits. In addition, the attacking Exalt's player reflexively rolls his character's Willpower + Essence against a difficult of the spirit's Essence. Each extra success reduces the spirit's temporary Essence by an amount equal to the Dragon-Blooded character's permanent Essence. The character does not absorb the Essence — it just dissipates. If a spirit is destroyed by a Spirit-Shredding Attack, it is irrevocably gone.

This Charm is explicitly permitted to be part of a Combo with Charms of other Abilities.

### Terrestrial Circle Sorcery

**Cost:** 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Occult:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

Handling the mysteries of sorcery is a much more difficult endeavor for Terrestrial Exalted than for the Anathema. The enchantments of the Celestial and Solar circles are far beyond the grasp of the Dragon-Blooded. However, sorcery of the Terrestrial Circle is available to them, assuming this Charm is learned.

Note that invoking this Charm only enables the character to cast a single Terrestrial Circle sorcery spell. The actual spell itself has an Essence cost, often very high, that the character must pay to actualize it. This cost is listed in the spell's description. Terrestrial Circle Sorcery can never be part of a Combo.

## Stealth

### Feeling-the-Air Technique

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Stealth:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

Invoking this Charm allows a Dragon-Blooded to sense her surroundings through minute eddies and currents in the air. The character may move and act in total darkness or with her vision fully impaired with no penalties, but obviously, she cannot read, tell colors or otherwise discern information that requires vision rather than perfect spatial awareness. While this sense is not precise enough to be completely effective in combat, but it does reduce the penalties for fighting blind by half.

### Soundless Action Prana

**Cost:** 1 mote per minute
**Duration:** Varies
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Stealth:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Feeling-the-Air Technique

This Charm eliminates the noise of any action taken directly by a character under its influence. Gravel crunches silently underfoot. A sword swung by the character would glance off an opponent's shield with no sound. This effect lasts for one minute per mote of Essence invested. This Charm provides no direct benefit to Stealth rolls, but many actions will no longer have any chance of attracting attention, and there should be no difficulty penalties for moving through areas full of potential sources of accidental noise.

Keep in mind that the noise suppression only applies to those actions directly taken by a Dynast. She could put her fist through a window with no noise being created by the breaking glass, but the glass would tinkle as it fell to the floor, and if she instead threw a rock at it, the crash would be clearly audible.

The individual under the influence of this Charm is unable to speak while Soundless Action Prana is in effect. She may communicate through any other method, however.

### Zone of Silence Stance

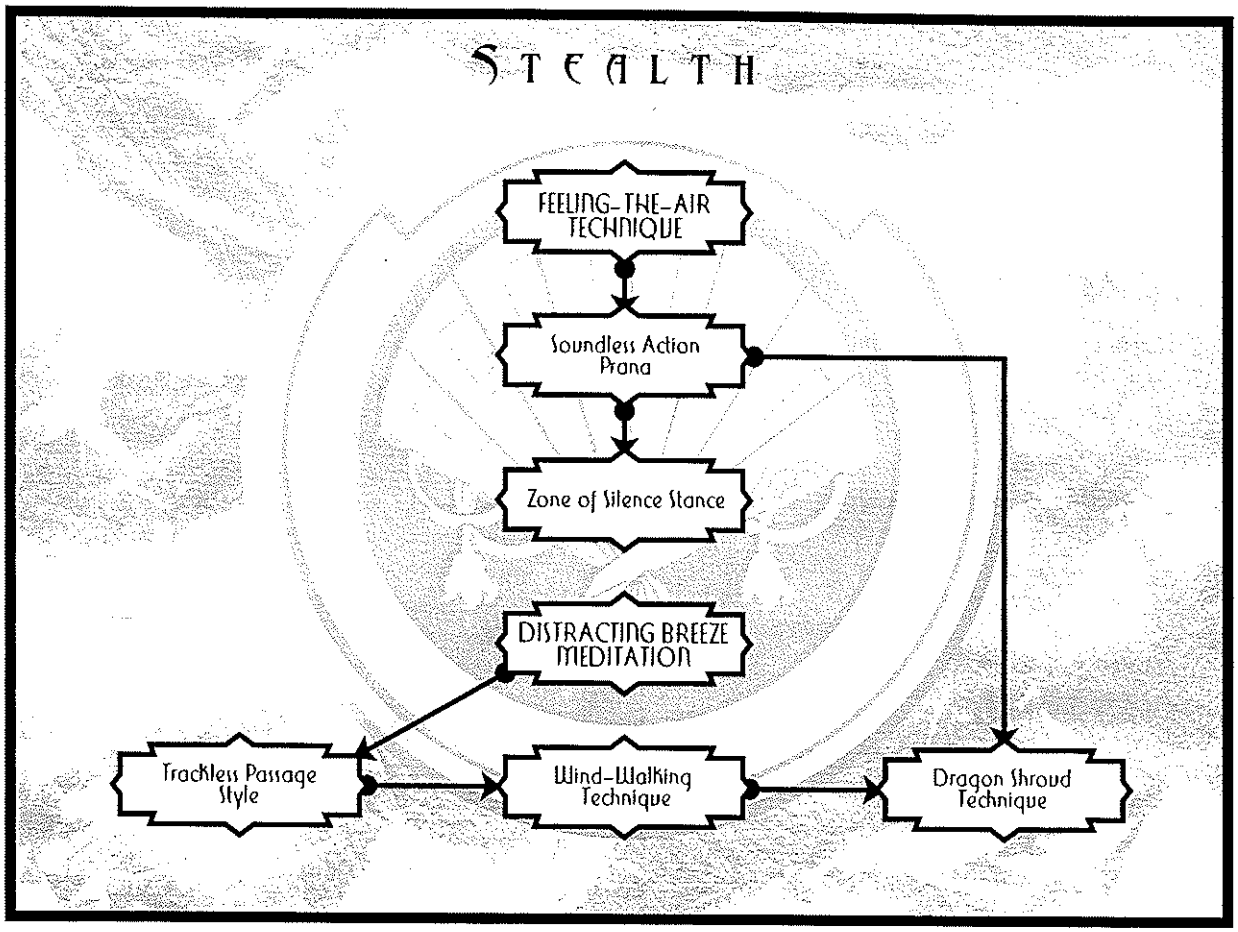
**Cost:** 4 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One minute per point of permanent Essence
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Stealth:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Soundless Action Prana

By stilling the air to the point where it ceases to transmit sound at all, an Air-aspected Exalt may ensure that whatever mayhem ensues, the sounds of it will not reach the ears of others. A Zone of Silence suppresses all sound at all within its reach, be it the ringing of blades or the desperate cries of wounded enemies. One could vivisect a yeddim with a dull hatchet and someone standing a few feet away would be none the wiser — or at least their ears would not inform them of the deed. The character invoking the Charm is advised to say anything she feels necessary before the Charm is invoked, since no normal sound communication can take place within a Zone of Silence. Dynasts favoring this Charm are advised to learn sign language or a Charm such as With One Mind instead.

The Zone of Silence extends a number of yards equal twice the Exalted's permanent Essence. Each extra mote of Essence invested into the Charm increases the radius of effect by a single yard, but a character cannot spend more motes of Essence to increase the area of effect than her permanent Essence. Burglars and assassins often invoke this Charm to suppress sound in an entire dwelling, so they may work without worry of an alarm being raised. The Zone of Silence moves with the character.

### Distracting Breeze Meditation

**Cost:** 1 mote per two successes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Stealth:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None




With this Charm, the character uses the wind to cause minor disturbances and distractions to those who might observer her passage. Whether it be a tickling wind in the ear, a suddenly guttering torch or a knocked over spear, this minor enchantment can ensure a Dynast slips by even the most observant eyes without being spotted.

Every mote of Essence invested in this Charm acts as 2 automatic successes against a single target that might detect the Exalt's presence. The Charm can be directed at more than one target at once, so long as the proper amount of Essence has been paid.

For Example: Cynestia, an Air-aspected Dynast, wishes to sneak past a cave entrance occupied by three Wyld barbarians. Her player spends 3 motes of Essence to give her two automatic successes in her Dexterity + Stealth rolls for Cynestia to avoid notice by all three barbarians. If Cynestia encounters other characters during the scene, her player can give the character two additional dice to evade their notice as well, but cannot distract more than three characters at a time. If the player had spent 4 motes, Cynestia could distract an additional barbarian, but could not give herself four automatic successes to avoid notice by one of them.

The character must not be visible or otherwise easily detectable when this Charm is activated. However, even a moment out of sight is long enough to invoke it and gain the benefits. This Charm does nothing to conceal a Dynast's passage, and she maybe tracked as normal. A character cannot spent more motes on the use of this Charm than her permanent Essence.

### Trackless Passage Style

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes per being per mile |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Stealth:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Distracting Breeze Meditation |

Simply avoiding guards is often not enough to remain truly undetected. This Charm summons up subtle but useful air currents that conceal the traces of the passage of the character and his associates, obscuring footprints, obliterating scents and sweeping away telltale broken branches and twigs.

Every two motes invested in this Charm completely obliterate all traces of one being's passage for a distance of one mile, including scent. Non-supernatural attempts to track the character fails automatically, and supernatural tracking attempts are subject to a standard tracking

contest. The Dragon-Blooded invoking the Charm may extend it to protect as many beings as he has points of permanent Essence.

### Wind-Walking Technique

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Until broken
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Stealth:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Trackless Passage Style

By invoking this Charm, the character gains the ability to move normally along any roughly horizontal surface — even those normally impossible to cross. Walking across mud, quicksand, even water is easy with this Charm in place. The Charm also instills perfect balance and excellent timing, giving the character the facility to easily scamper across ropes, poles, beams, scaffolding and the like with no movement penalties.

The wind walker may move normally in all respects across such surfaces, including jumping, rolling, crawling — however he wishes to move. However, the character must keep moving. If even a single turn is spent standing still for whatever reason, the Charm's magic is broken. The hero can carry all of his normal gear and up to his own weight in additional burdens. Any greater weight also immediately breaks the Charm.

### Dragon Shroud Technique

**Cost:** 6 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Stealth:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 4
**Prerequisite Charms:** Soundless Action Prana, Wind-Walking Technique

With true mastery of the art of stealth comes the power to almost completely shroud oneself from the eyes of others. Invoking the Dragon Shroud wraps the air itself around a character, concealing her even in broad daylight. While Dragon Shroud does not render a character truly invisible, her form is blurred and indistinct. Light seems to bend around her, making her much more difficult to see even if the observer knows she is there — and nearly impossible if he does not. The Dragon Shroud also muffles sound, masks scent, suppresses body heat and generally does its best to foil any attempt to clearly view the Dynast. This is not true invisibility, however. A careful (or lucky) observer can still spot a blurry disturbance in the air where the Dragon-Blood stands.

Every 3 motes invested in this Charm act as one automatic opposing success to any action taken against a character that requires that she be seen, heard or perceived with any of the five senses, including attempts to attack the character or to spot her when she is sneaking. It also quite effectively masks a Dragon-Blooded's identity. The Charm has no lingering effects, however, and the character can be tracked as normal.

This Charm gives flat +2 difficulty bonus to attempts to spot the Dragon-Blooded

## Thrown

### Seeking Throw Technique

**Cost:** 1 mote per two dice
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Thrown:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

Close alignment with the element of Air considerably simplifies the task of hurling deadly objects at opponents. With an infusion of Essence, the Dragon-Blooded forges a path through the air to her target, ensuring her missile's true and deadly flight. For each mote of Essence spent on the Seeking Throw, the player may add two dice to a Thrown attack roll. This cannot increase the character's dice pool by more than her Thrown Ability rating. The player must declare how much Essence she is infusing into the Charm before making the attack roll.

### Loyal Weapon

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Thrown:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Seeking Throw Technique

This Charm allows an Exalt to ensure that a particularly valuable weapon (or weapons) will return safely to her hand. When she first hurls the weapon, the Dynast attaches an invisible rope of wind to it, pulling it back to her hand when it's path is spent. Whether it hits its target or not, a Loyal Weapon instantly flies back through the air to the character's hand, available for use next turn.

This Charm works on any weapon at all, not just those usually thrown. A daiklave may be hurled as easily as a group of shuriken. Melee weapons thrown using this Charm have the same accuracy, speed and damage as they would if melee weapons and a range in yards equal to 10 times the character's Essence, but they use the character's Thrown Ability, rather than her Melee.

Anyone in the weapon's path, other than the target, may attempt to grab the weapon as his action, assuming that he has an action available. The weapon can be caught with a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll, but the player of the character catching the weapon must succeed at an immediate, reflexive opposed Strength + Athletics roll with the Loyal Weapon's master's player, or fail to stop the weapon's progress.

### Persistent Hornet Attack

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes |
| **Duration:** | Essence in turns |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Thrown:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Loyal Weapon |

Currents of elemental Air can be used to sustain a thrown missile's deadly flight long after its energy would normally be spent. The character infuses the Essence of air into an item and hurls it at his opponent as normal. But unlike a normal hurled attack, this thrown weapon takes on a life of it's own, continuing to circle and attack for a number of turns equal to the attacking character's Essence.

A weapon or item enchanted with Persistent Hornet Attack strikes a single target each turn with the attacking character's Perception + Thrown skill. The weapon acts on the same initiative as the character's each turn. Once a weapon has been assigned a target, the character can't change the target. The weapon can be attacked as if it was a normal character, but the difficulty to hit it is the throwing character's Essence. If struck, the weapon does not soak — it is immediately knocked from the air and become inert.

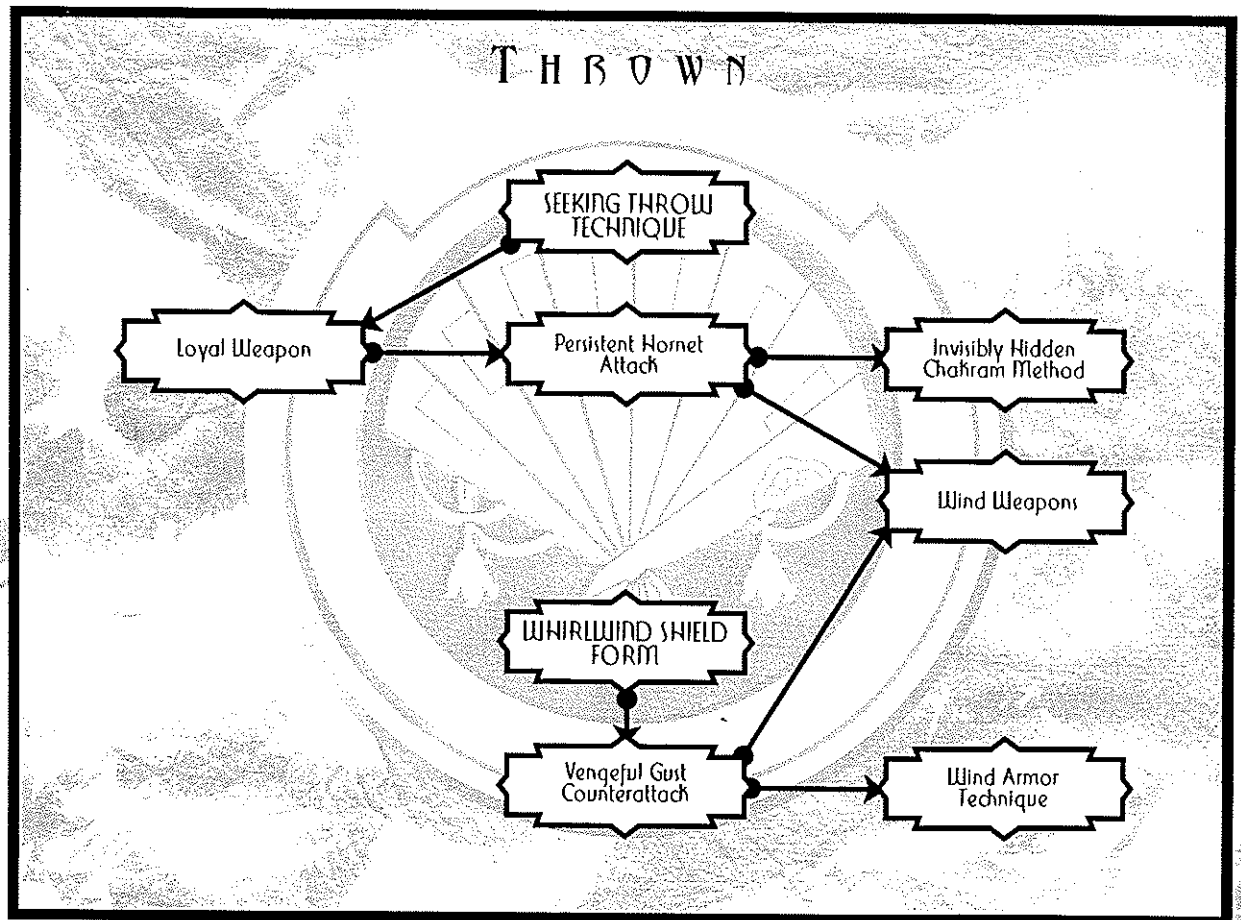
The character must declare he is invoking this Charm when he first throws the weapon it is used on. If the attacker uses Persistent Hornet Attack as part of a Combo, the daggers must repeat the use of the other Charms in the Combo *exactly*. The character should pay the cost of the additional Charms each time the dagger uses them, but need not pay the Willpower every turn.

### Invisibly Hidden Chakram Method

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 10 motes per weapon and 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Thrown:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Persistent Hornet Attack |

To invoke this potent Charm, the character simply tosses a weapon (or weapons) into the air and sends it Elsewhere for later use. At a later time, the Exalted can release the weapon back into the material world. The weapon must be designed to be thrown and be of a type that the Dragon-Blooded is actually familiar with and skilled in throwing himself.

Attacking with one or more of these waiting weapons is a reflexive action that must be done at the same time that



the character takes his regular action, and it can be done in conjunction with any other normal simple action.

Aside from that fact, it is a normal, reflexive Dexterity + Thrown attack, which can be modified by Charms as usual. The waiting weapons may be used as part of a Combo, but the Combo can only apply to the hidden weapons, cannot include an Extra Attacks-type Charm and must include every hidden weapon called up in the turn.

There is no limit to the number of weapons concealed by the Invisibly Hidden Chakram Method that a Dragon-Blood can release in one turn, and each is thrown with the Exalt's full Dexterity + Thrown pool at the time of its appearance. The hidden weapons originate from the character's location and are clearly part of an attack on that character's part. A Dragon-Blooded character can maintain as many invisibly hidden weapons as his Essence Trait x 2. These weapons are as impossible to sense as anything hidden Elsewhere.

### Whirlwind Shield Form

**Cost:** 3 motes + 1 mote for each additional person protected
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Thrown:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

Whirling currents of air surround the Exalt, deflecting ranged attacks aimed at her. Each time a ranged attack is directed at a character using Whirlwind Shield, the character's Essence acts as a number of automatic successes that are subtracted from any attempt by an attacker to make a ranged attack roll against the target.

This Charm can be used upon a group if the character so wishes, but characters so protected must remain within range of the character's perception. The Exalted must commit an additional mote per companion so protected.

### Vengeful Gust Counterattack

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Thrown:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Whirlwind Shield Form

Beyond just deflecting an enemy's attack, Vengeful Gust Counterattack lets a character strike back at the one assaulting her. Upon being made the target of a ranged attack that she is aware of, the player of a character that knows this Charm may make an immediate Dexterity + Thrown check as an opposed defensive roll in place of a dodge or parry attempt.

If this roll exceeds the attacker's roll, the missile's path is reversed. It is hurled back to its point of origin, striking with a number of successes equal to the extra successes on the defending character's player's Dexterity + Thrown roll.

This Charm is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Even if the defender fails to score extra successes on her Dexterity + Thrown roll, she still subtracts the successes she got from the attacker's roll, just as if the character was dodging or parrying the attack.

If the Exalt has Whirlwind Shield Form active when she activates Vengeful Gust Counterattack, the character's Essence is subtracted from the attack before the results of the Dexterity + Thrown roll are applied to it, allowing stronger counterattacks. If the character is the target of an area-of-effect attack such as the Death of Obsidian Butterflies, the Whirlwind Shield Form protects only her own person, but the attack can still be deflected. This means that, for example, a sorcerer who targets multiple Air-aspected Dragon-Blooded with such a spell may be struck multiple times with its effect due to this Charm.

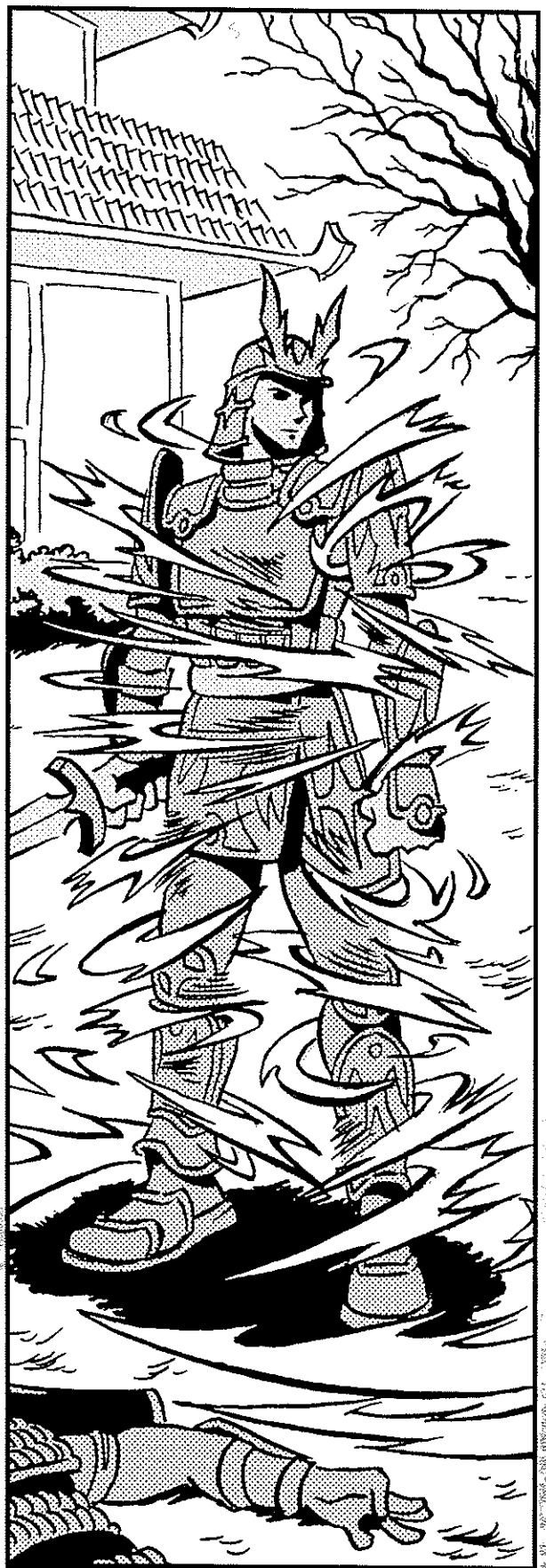
### Wind Weapons

**Cost:** 3 motes per weapon
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Thrown:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Persistent Hornet Attack, Vengeful Gust Counterattack

Once sufficient connection with the Air Dragon has formed, the skilled Dragon-Blooded can move beyond even the need for a weapon to throw at his opponent. By infusing the air itself with Essence, the character solidifies it, forming indistinct yet glittering patterns of icy wind — weapons from the very substance of air itself. Such insubstantial weapons are too unstable for melee combat, but they are eminently suited for ranged attacks.

A wind weapon has a base damage and accuracy equal to the character's permanent Essence and a range equal to 10 times this value. It is also possible to create more than one wind weapon at once, so long as the Essence cost is paid for each. The maximum number of weapons that can be created in a single turn with this Charm is equal to the character's permanent Essence.

Once created, the wind weapon is thrown as a reflexive action, using the characters Dexterity + Thrown, plus the accuracy of the weapon and any appropriate modifiers for a ranged attack. If multiple weapons are created, they are all thrown at once and can be thrown at one or at multiple targets. The wind weapons can't be handed to anyone else or used in melee combat. This Charm cannot be put in a Combo with Extra Action type Charms. If the character throws multiple wind weapons, each is thrown at his full dice pool.



Wind Weapons have real substance for the Charm's short duration and can be used for purposes other than simple attacks. For instance, a wind knife can sever a rope or knock an item out of someone's hand as easily as any other thrown knife can.

### Wind Armor Technique

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per 1B/1L |
| **Duration:** | One scene per point of permanent Essence |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Thrown:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Vengeful Gust Counterattack |

By further refining the control needed to form a Whirlwind Shield, the character learns to form invisible armor from the surrounding air. While a Whirlwind Shield only protects against ranged weapons, Wind Armor Technique forms a barrier to any assault upon the character.

The Wind Armor has a 1B/1L soak rating for every mote of Essence committed to it and has no mobility penalty or fatigue value. Wind Armor appears as a cocoon of violently swirling winds surrounding the character invoking it. The maximum rating of this armor is the character's permanent Essence. This armor is fully compatible with and additive to physical armor.

Wind Armor Technique can also be used on others, but they cannot move farther than 5 x the Exalt's permanent Essence in yards away, or the effect immediately fades. The use of this Charm on others is at the normal price — one mote per 1L/1B of the armor — and must be spent for every target armored.

## Earth

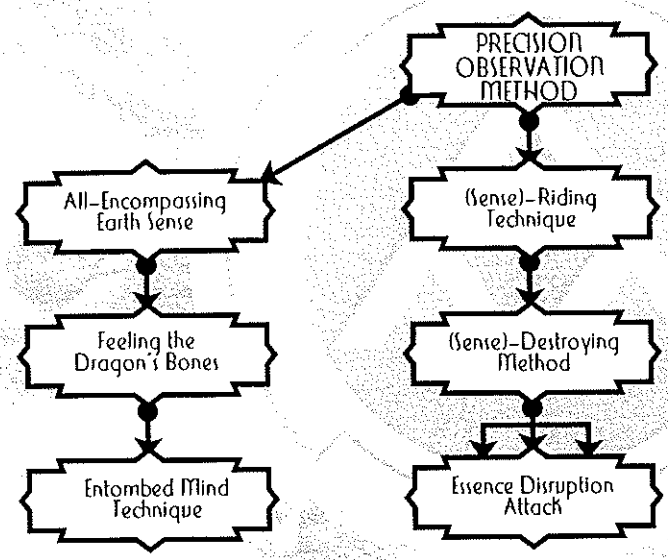
## Awareness

### Precision Observation Method

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per two dice |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Reflexive |
| **Minimum Awareness:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

Everything that walks, flies or swims is in some way connected to the earth, and the elements of air and water both rest upon the firmament. By grounding her Essence into the earth, a Dragon-Blood can greatly increase her sensitivity to things around her. Each mote invested in this Charm enhances the character's Awareness by two dice for a single roll only. The character cannot more than double her Awareness with this Charm.

## Awareness




### All-Encompassing Earth Sense

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Awareness:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Precision Observation Method

While under the aegis of this Charm, the character cannot be surprised by any means, magical or otherwise. This doesn't make her able to see the invisible or anything of the sort. It just means that she cannot be struck by an attack she is not aware of.

This Charm can be extended to the character's companions by merely spending 2 extra motes per person to be so affected. All-Encompassing Earth Sense is not effective unless the character is standing on the ground. She need not be touching the earth itself — the Charm functions just fine inside structures, etc. — but may not be flying, swimming and so forth. Engaging in any of these activities breaks the Charm immediately.

### Feeling the Dragon's Bones

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Awareness:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** All-Encompassing Earth Sense

By taking a few moments to attune herself to the pulse of the Earth Dragon, the Dragon-Blooded invoking this Charm can sense the shape of things that sit upon the Earth Dragon's back, as well as those beings that walk upon it.

The Dragon-Blood's player rolls Intelligence + Awareness. With a simple success, the character instantly gets a complete but vague mental picture of the surrounding area, up to her Awareness x 25 feet distant. This mental picture includes living beings. Further successes refine the image. One success might yield, "The next room is about 10 x 10 with three humanoid beings in it." Three successes might impart, "The next room is obviously a guardroom, containing three Wyld barbarians, each carrying a large stone club." Five successes would yield all of the above information, plus estimates of the various strengths of the three barbarians, what armor they are wearing and exact details on where they are standing.

To be properly sensed, an object or being must actually be touching the earth or touching something directly touching the earth in some fashion. Objects floating in the air or immersed in water would not be affected for instance.

The range of this Charm is doubled for every additional mote of Essence spent. This Charm is especially effective underground or in all stone structures, since they are actually embraced by the earth. Double the range while using the Charm in such circumstances, and all details of the surrounding areas are perceivable.

## Entombed Mind Technique

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes |
| **Duration:** | Five minutes |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Awareness:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Feeling the Dragon's Bones |

Earth is the most static and quiescent of the elements, and while it's all encompassing nature enhances the awareness of the Earth-aspected Dragon-Bloods, it also allows them to suppress this awareness in others.

This Charm enables a Dragon-Blooded character to infuse some of stone's somnolent stasis into another person's mind, putting them to sleep. Some Dynasts work this Charm by speaking in a low, droning voice; others prefer to use a glittering gemstone, such as the jewel in a ring, to fix their victim's attention and convey the flow of Essence. The character can only bury someone's mind if she can keep them sitting still for five minutes, so this Charm calls for a fair bit of guile.

The Dragon-Blood's player rolls Manipulation + Presence, with a difficulty equal to the target's Essence. Simple success causes the target to sleep for an hour, and each extra success adds one hour to the total. During that time, nothing, not noise, light or movement, will awaken the victim. You could send the entire Red-Piss Legion past with clashing cymbals, and he wouldn't wake up. At the end of this period, the victim passes into normal slumber.

While in the grip of magic sleep, the victim dreams strange, still dreams of the caves beneath the earth and the mysteries within them. Once in a while, someone wakes up afterward knowing where to dig a well that never goes dry or the location of a deposit of ore.

## (Sense)-Riding Technique

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 4 motes |
| **Duration:** | Until disrupted |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Awareness:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Precision Observation Method |

A Dragon-Blood truly in tune with the world can project her sense into others, riding along and perceiving things from a great distance.

This Charm is actually three separate Charms, together encompassing all of the five senses. The target must be visible to the character when the Charm is activated but may leave the character's sight after the activation. The maximum range at which these Charms function is the character's permanent Essence in miles.

When activated, a roll is made, pitting the Dynast's Awareness + Essence against the target's in a reflexive opposed roll. The Dynast needs but a single success to invoke the Charm. If the Dynast ties the target, there is no effect. If the target is an Exalted and beats the Dragon-Blood, his player gets to make a reflexive Awareness roll with a difficulty of 3 to sense that someone was trying to Sense Ride him. Players of normal mortals get no such roll, and they remain unaware of the enchantment.

While Sense Riding, a character may not take any sort of disruptive action whatsoever. It is best to sit quietly and just observe the sense ridden. Simple actions such as sitting on a slowly walking horse may be possible at the Storyteller's option, but the character may be in danger of missing important details of what is being observed. If the target is injured (takes any health levels of damage) while being sense ridden, the character takes an unsoakable level of bashing damage, and the Charm is disrupted.

The effects of riding each sense are detailed below:

**Sight:** The character may perceive anything the target sees, including any magical enhancements that the target applies to his own senses while the character is "riding" him. The character may only observe through the ridden target's eyes. The character cannot use Charms or sorcery or otherwise affect the world around the target through the channel of the shared sense, though it might provide targeting information for some other sort of attack.

**Hearing & Touch:** The character may perceive anything the target hears or touches, including any magical enhancements that the target applies to his own senses while the Exalt is "riding" him. This perception does not give the Dragon-Blooded the ability to understand languages she doesn't know, even if the person being ridden understands them.

**Smell & Taste:** This Charm is probably the least used of the three, but a truly thorough Dynast may wish to learn it. When combined with the other three Charms, it provides a complete picture of the target's environment and surroundings. As with the other (Sense)-Riding Charms, the character may perceive anything the target does with his sense of smell and taste, including any magical enhancements that the target applies to his own senses while the character is "riding" him.

## (Sense)-Destroying Method

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3+ motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | One turn per point of permanent Essence |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Awareness:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | (Sense)-Riding Technique for the appropriate sense |

This Charm is a cluster of three Charms just like (Sense)-Riding Technique, and it functions in much the same way. However, instead of tapping into the target's senses, the character simply shuts them down. When this

Charm is activated, the Dynast's player makes an Essence + Awareness roll with a difficulty equal to the target's Perception. The effects for each sense are detailed below.

**Sight:** Each extra success subtracts one die from the target's Awareness rolls relating to sight and adds a –1 penalty to any task involving sight. If the character's extra successes exceed the target's Perception, the target is blinded completely for the Charm's duration.

**Hearing & Touch:** Each success subtracts one die from the target's Awareness rolls relating to these senses and allows him to ignore one level of wound penalties. If the character's roll exceeds the target's Perception, the target is rendered completely deaf but also suffers no wound penalties for the Charm duration. Some enterprising Dynasts use this Charm on their minions before sending them into combat — but are careful to give them explicit instructions before doing so.

**Smell & Taste:** Each success subtracts one die from the target's Awareness rolls relating to these senses. If the Exalt gains more successes than the target's Perception, he is rendered completely unable to smell or taste for the Charm's duration.

A Dynast may not use this Charm on herself.

### Essence Disruption Attack

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3+ motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | One turn per dot of permanent Essence |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Awareness:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 4 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | All three (Sense)-Destroying Method Charms |

After perfecting the art of suppressing another's physical sense, a truly skilled Earth-aspected Dynast can actually use his own Essence to suppress his victim's ability to perceive and manipulate Essence. The character must pay the base cost of the Charm, plus any additional motes. The maximum number of additional motes that the Exalt can spend is equal to her permanent Essence.

Her player then makes an Awareness + Essence roll with a difficulty of 3 for the Exalt to correctly judge the patterns of Essence around the target, who must be in sight and no farther away than 10 x the character's permanent Essence in feet. If the roll succeeds, the player makes a Willpower + Essence roll against a difficulty of the target's Essence. Each extra success on this roll adds 1 mote to the cost of all Charms and sorcery used by the target, to a maximum penalty equal to the amount of extra Essence the character spent activating this Charm.

This surcharge applies to every activation of a Charm, meaning it may be paid multiple times per turn if an Exalt, for example, uses reflexive defensive Charms. If Combos are involved, then the surcharge is applied to every Charm in the Combo, every time one of those Charms is activated. The effects of the Charm linger for a number of turns equal to the Exalt's permanent Essence.

## Craft

### Shaping Hand Style

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes |
| **Duration:** | One hour |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Craft:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

The Terrestrial Exalted's basic and close connection with the things of the earth gives them great facility in manipulating the rude stuff that makes up the world. The most basic trick any Exalted craftswoman learns is that tools are, to a large extent, an illusion. It is the force of will that drives the act of creation, not the material items one uses to shape things.

This Charm bears that out. While the Charm is in effect, one of the character's hands may perform the function of any one normal tool. The character must decide what tool he wants to emulate when the Charm is activated. Whether it be a pick axe, hatchet or hammer, the Dragon-Blooded's bare hand fulfills the function quite nicely. The character takes no damage that a normal tool would not normally endure and can perform any normal function the tool is capable of — and can use her hand normally as well. The Exalt's hand does not take on the appearance of the tool in question.

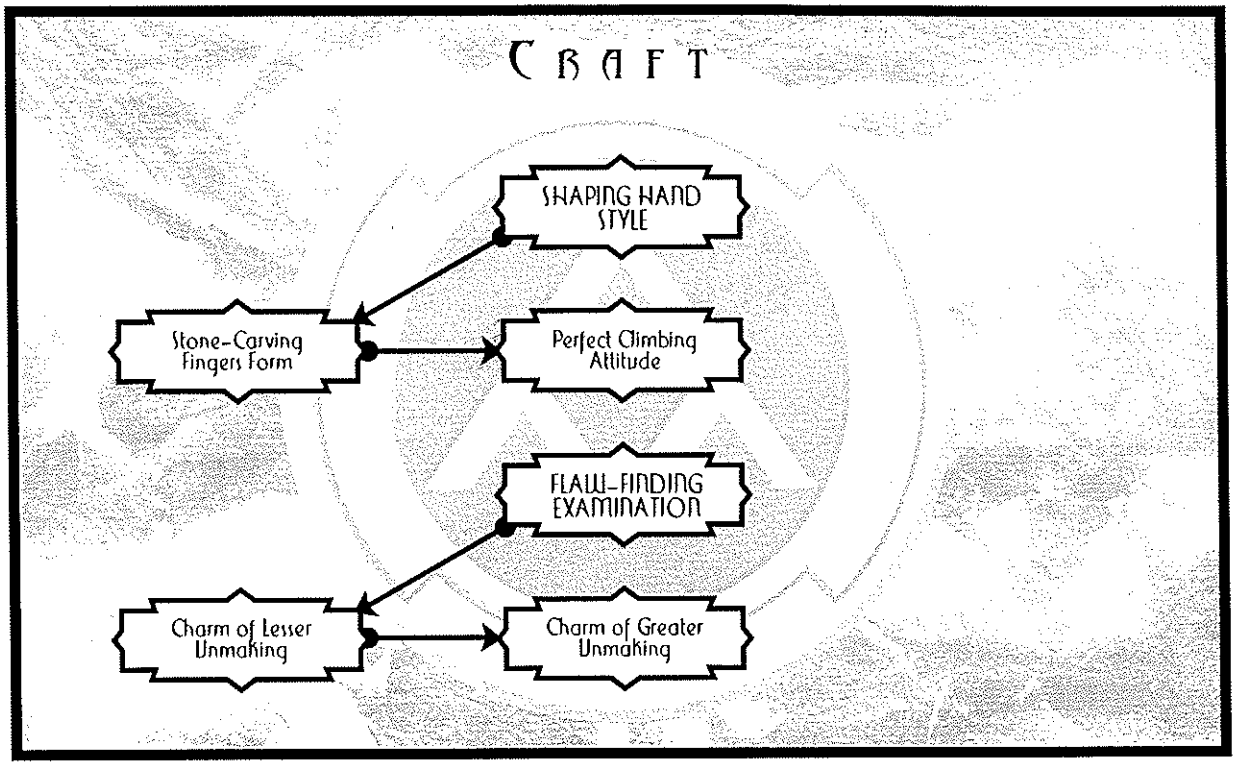
The shaping hand only emulates the selected tool. If the character wants to switch functions, she has to activate the Charm again. Both hands can be enchanted separately using this Charm.

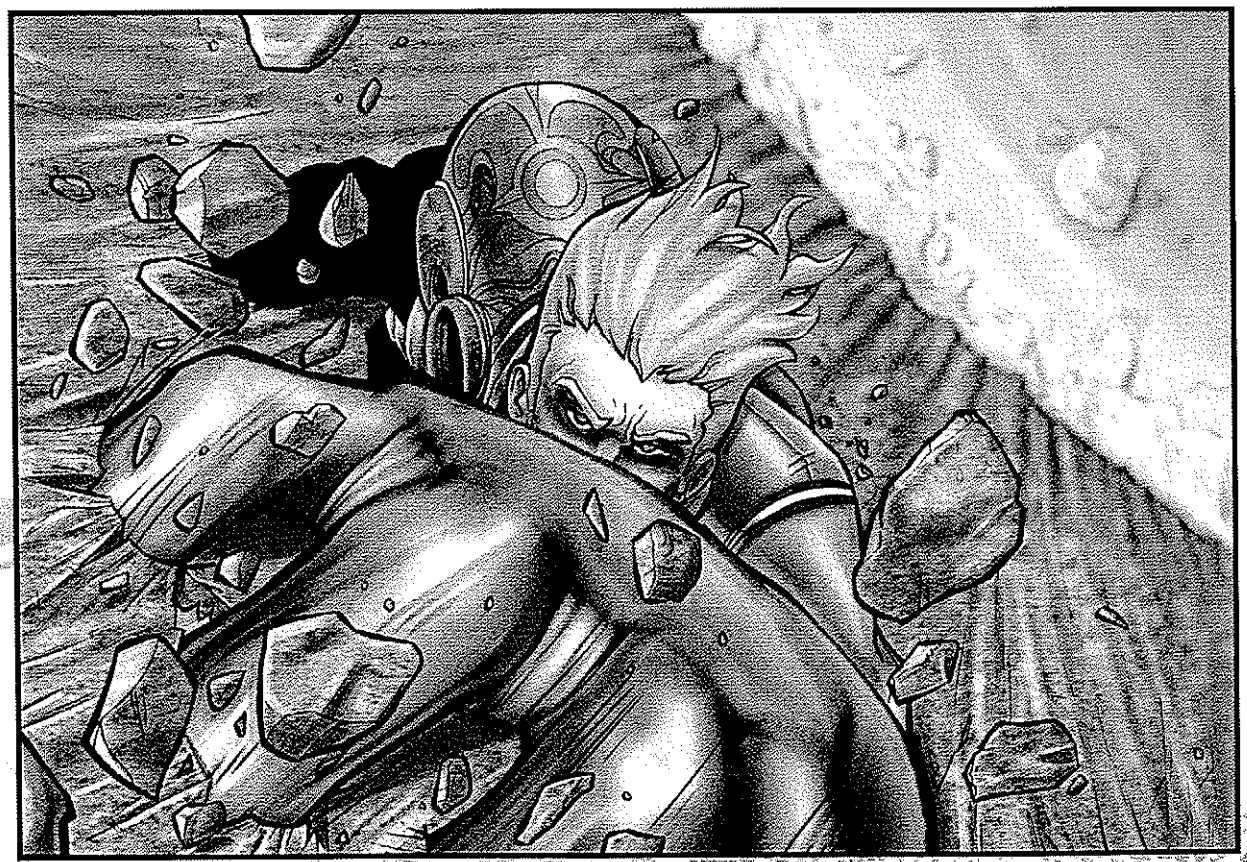
### Stone-Carving Fingers Form

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per cubic foot |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Craft:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Shaping Hand Style |

This Charm is extremely popular with Earth-aspected Exalts because it forms the prerequisite for so many others. It enables the character to split stone with uncanny precision. Aside from its usefulness in siege craft — breaching walls and the like — the character can make all manner of useful items out of stone.

The character must spend at least a full minute carefully striking at the stone. Most characters will use a hammer, pick or chisel, but a sword pommel or another rock will do just as well. Characters trained in martial arts might strike with their bare hands. At the end of the minute, the character strikes a final blow — and the excess rock shatters, leaving behind the shape the character wanted.


Craft
Shaping Hand Style
Stone-Carving Fingers Form
Perfect Climbing Attitude
Flaw-Finding Examination
Charm of Lesser Unmaking
Charm of Greater Unmaking



Roll Wits + Craft. With a simple success, a character can quarry stone blocks ready for use in building or knock a doorway in a wall. With three successes, she can craft an obsidian vase, already hollowed out. With five successes, she can produce a portrait statue so realistic that a person might mistake it for the actual person, turned to stone.

The Essence cost of this Charm depends on the volume of the finished object: 1 mote of Essence per cubic foot of stone.

### Perfect Climbing Attitude

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Craft:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Stone-Carving Fingers Form |

The Dragon-Blooded of Earth include some superb mountaineers and rock-climbers, many as a result of this Charm. Not only may a character using this Charm cling to a rock face like a limpet, she leaves indentations in the rock that other people can use as hand- and footholds, making the climb easier for them. The Earth-aspected Exalt literally crafts a ladder out of a sheer rock surface as she climbs it.

The character can climb a sheer stone wall at a rate of 10 feet per turn, 20 feet or more per turn up a rough cliff-face (or a surface where someone already made handholds in the rock). No Ability roll is needed. Those following the character up the cliff face are considered to have two automatic successes for any climbing check.

Surfaces that are worse than sheer, such as overhangs, call for multiple successes.

### Flaw-Finding Examination

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote for touch, 3 for sight |
| **Duration:** | One minute |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Craft:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

By simply studying any crafted or created item, object or structure, a Dragon-Blooded using this Charm may determine that item's weakest point. This knowledge can be used to locate and eliminate flaws — or exploited to destroy the object.

To use this Charm, the character must study the object in question for at least a full minute. If the Exalt is able to handle or touch the thing being studied, the Charm costs only a single mote. Studying an object from a distance costs 3 motes.

Once the flaw has been determined, the character has two options. If the Dynast wants to try and eliminate the flaw, roll her Intelligence + Craft score and spend a point of Willpower. If the roll succeeds, the object is repaired — this Charm can effect the most serious repairs without tools, though something badly broken may have many flaws.

If the character wants to damage the thing in question, the Flaw-Finding Examination is much simpler. The next successful physical attack the character makes on the target does double normal damage. If the Exalt is targeting something such as armor or a weapon, treat it as doubling the extra successes of a disarming attempt. If the disarming attempt succeeds, the weapon or armor is destroyed.

### Charm of Lesser Unmaking

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Craft:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Flaw-Finding Examination |

The Charm of Lesser Unmaking allows a Dynast to disassemble an object or structure without actually damaging any of its components. An item affected by this Charm is broken down into its component pieces.

For instance, if a Dragon-Blood was to use the Charm of Lesser Unmaking on a heavy wooden door bound in steel bands, the end result would be a stack of timbers, some hammered steel bands and a small pile of rivets. Items disassembled in this manner are rendered useless until put back together. Enchanted items are neutralized until reconstructed, but the Charm does not permanently disrupt such enchantments.

When the Charm of Lesser Unmaking is invoked, the character's player makes an Essence + Craft roll. The difficulty for this roll is 1 for simply constructed items (crudely made stone hatchets, huts lashed together with vines), 3 for sturdily or competently made items (a well-constructed sword, iron chains, the aforementioned door) and 5 for intricately or masterfully made items (a finely crafted piece of jewelry, a finely forged weapon). If the item in question is enchanted in any way, add 1 to the difficulty, meaning most enchanted items are difficulty 6 to disassemble. The maximum volume that a Dynast can affect with the Charm of Lesser Unmaking is equal to her Essence in cubic yards.

Unmaking will not work on any item that is made in one piece (i.e., a vase, stone carving or the like). However, it will undo knots and reduce chains to their component links. Lesser unmaking is a somewhat time-consuming process. The Exalt must also remain in contact with the item for a number of turns equal to the unmaking difficulty, and it cannot be done as a combat maneuver.

### Charm of Greater Unmaking

**Cost:** 10 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Special
**Minimum Craft:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 4
**Prerequisite Charms:** Charm of Lesser Unmaking

This Charm functions much like Lesser Unmaking but with much more dramatic effects. Rather than just being taken apart, an item affected by Greater Unmaking is actually reduced back to its raw materials. Sword blades melt into hunks of raw iron. Timbers turn to freshly cut logs. Glittering gemstones return to their uncut state. Fine pottery melts to clay.

When the Charm is used, roll the character's Essence + Craft. This roll is difficulty 1 for normal items constructed through standard methods, but difficulty 3 for exceptionally crafted or constructed things and 5 for items forged from the Five Magical Materials. The Exalt must also remain in contact with the item for a number of turns equal to the difficulty. The maximum volume that a Dynast can affect with the Charm of Greater Unmaking is equal to her Essence in cubic yards. This Charm is only effective against items made of materials in some way derived from the earth.

Items that are unmade are completely destroyed, reduced to their component materials. Whatever is unmade must be remade from scratch. The raw materials retain any inherent value, of course.

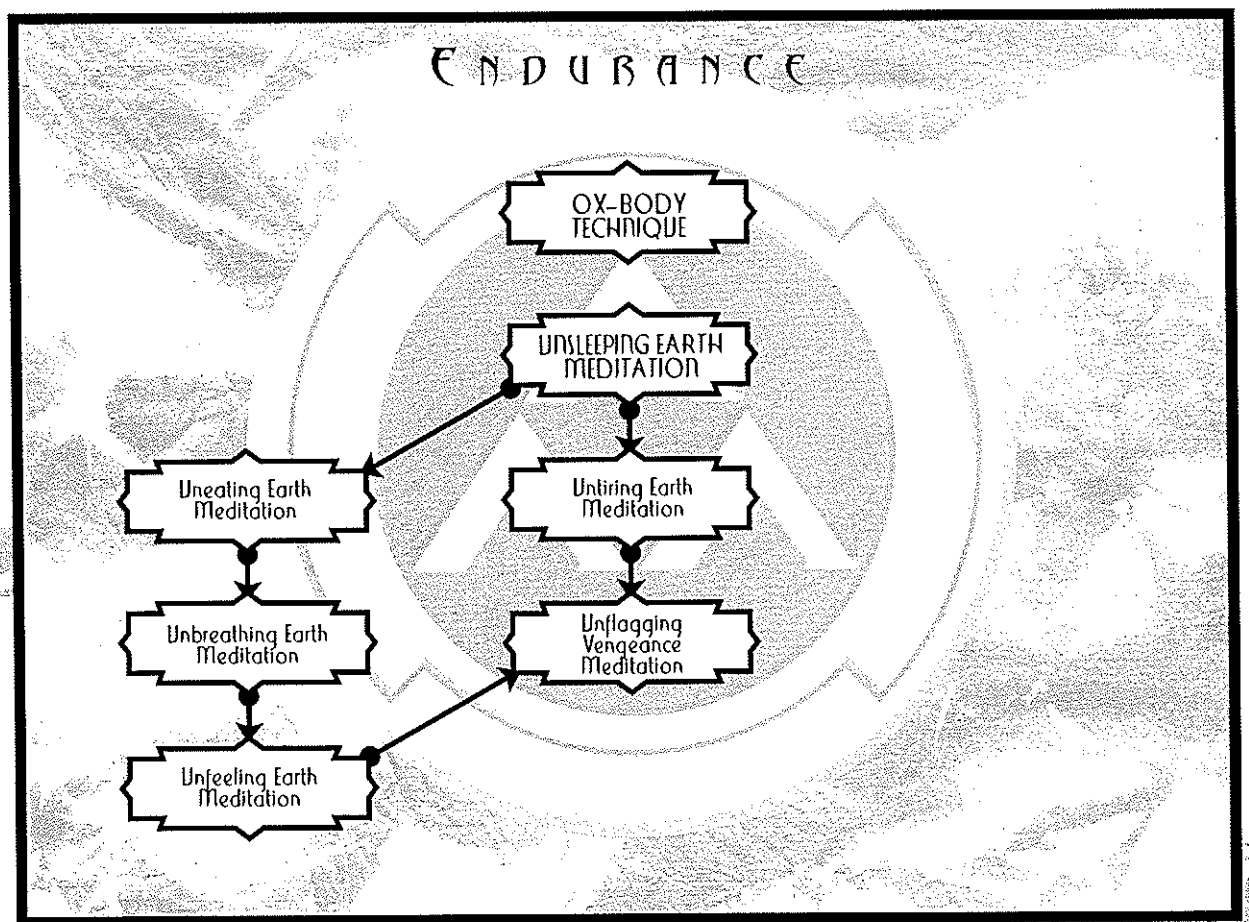
## Endurance

### Ox-Body Technique

**Cost:** None
**Duration:** Permanent
**Type:** Special
**Minimum Endurance:** Varies
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The Terrestrial Exalted may not be quite as resilient as the Anathema they oppose, but they can still take a good deal more punishment than normal humans. Like their Solar enemies, the Dragon-Blooded may buy extra health levels as if they were a Charm.

Each level of the Dragon-Blooded Ox-Body Technique provides one –1 and one –2 health level. Characters cannot take Ox-Body Technique more times than they have points of Endurance.



### Unsleeping Earth Meditation

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote |
| **Duration:** | One day |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Endurance:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

By simply invoking the strength of the Earth Dragon, a Dragon-Blooded using this Charm is able to go without sleep for 24 hours without ill effect. The character suffers no penalties of any kind during this period due to fatigue from sleep and is fully alert. The character still has to rest from physical exertion.

Using this Charm for more than the character's Essence + Endurance days is not recommended. For every day past that point, the Exalt loses one temporary Willpower per day. This Willpower cannot be recovered until he has had at least 24 hours of uninterrupted sleep.

### Uneating Earth Meditation

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes |
| **Duration:** | One day |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Endurance:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Unsleeping Earth Meditation |

Stone does not need nourishment, and with this Charm, neither do the Dragon-Blooded. A character under the influence of this Charm does not need to eat or drink. The Exalted functions perfectly well with no nourishment whatsoever and suffers none of the penalties associated with hunger.

Using this Charm for more than the character's Essence + Endurance days is remarkably hard on the body. For every day past that point, the character loses one bashing health level per day, which cannot be healed until use of the Charm is discontinued. Most Terrestrial Exalted using this Charm for extended periods tend to go without its effects for a day or two before reinvoking it.

### Unbreathing Earth Meditation

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Endurance:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Uneating Earth Meditation |

The mountains do not breathe. Neither need a Dynast who has mastered this Charm. For the rest of the scene after activating this Charm, the Dragon-Blooded does not breathe. She can survive under water, in clouds of poison gas and in other asphyxiating environments with no ill effects whatsoever.

Keep in mind that, for the duration of the Charm, the character is incapable of breathing. This also means that speech is out of the question, since the noise of it is caused by expelled air. This Charm can be used on others, if they are willing. All the character need do to affect a voluntary target is to simply touch him.

### Unfeeling Earth Meditation

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | Varies |
| **Type:** | Reflexive |
| **Minimum Endurance:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Unbreathing Earth Meditation |

The pain and frailty of mortal flesh may be avoided for very short periods of time by the invocation of this Charm. Once active, the character may ignore all wound penalties for a number of turns equal to his Stamina + Endurance. This Charm does nothing to actually protect the character from damage — it only temporarily alleviates the symptoms of injury.

### Untiring Earth Meditation

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | One day |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Endurance:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Unsleeping Earth Meditation |

This Charm roots the Dragon-Blooded's Essence down into the elemental Earth, magically sustaining him. As long as the Dragon-Blood's feet touch the earth once every two turns, he incurs no fatigue whatsoever from any source, whether it be armor, encumbrance, great physical exertion or magical effect. This Charm does not relieve fatigue already present when it is invoked, however. The Dynast under the influence of the Charm also may ignore wound penalties up to his permanent Essence rating. If the character does not touch the earth at least once every two turns, this Charm is instantly disrupted.

### Unflagging Vengeance Meditation

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes + 1 Willpower per person |
| **Duration:** | Until satisfied |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Endurance:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 4 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Unfeeling Earth Meditation, Untiring Earth Meditation |

As well as protecting an Exalted's flesh from harm, the steady strength of the Earth Dragon can be used to fuel the inner flame of vengeance. This Charm is invoked through speaking aloud the terms of the vendetta, to which the character commits himself with all his soul. The goal must be a simply stated purpose such as "Find the person who killed my

father" or "Avenge the stain to my honor inflicted upon me by the cowardly vassal of the Lord of Singing Birds."

Until the terms of the vendetta are fulfilled, the Exalted does not need to eat, sleep or rest, so long as he remains in pursuit of the vendetta. The character incurs no penalties from any sort of fatigue, whether it be magical or natural. He will walk tirelessly and fight tirelessly in pursuit of his aim and takes no fatigue from armor. He may soak both lethal and bashing damage with his Stamina, and he adds his Endurance to both his lethal and bashing soaks.

Unflagging Vengeance Meditation can be sustained without ill effect for up to the Exalt's Essence in days. After that, the character begins losing one health level of unsoakable bashing damage every time his Essence in days passes. The Exalted grows pale and draw, his face set into a mask of vengeance. These health levels may be healed only after the Charm is allowed to lapse. Healing damage taken from this effect of the Unflagging Vengeance Meditation takes twice as long as usual.

A number of additional characters can join the vendetta equal to the Essence of the character initiating the oath. Other characters involved must each pay a point of temporary Willpower to take the oath. Unflagging Vengeance Meditation ends when either the vendetta is satisfied or the individual who invoked it consciously stops it. If anyone involved terminates her part in the oath prematurely, she takes a number of unsoakable levels of lethal damage equal to sum of the permanent Essences of the characters involved. This damage may not be reduced in any fashion, either with armor or natural protection.

## Martial Arts

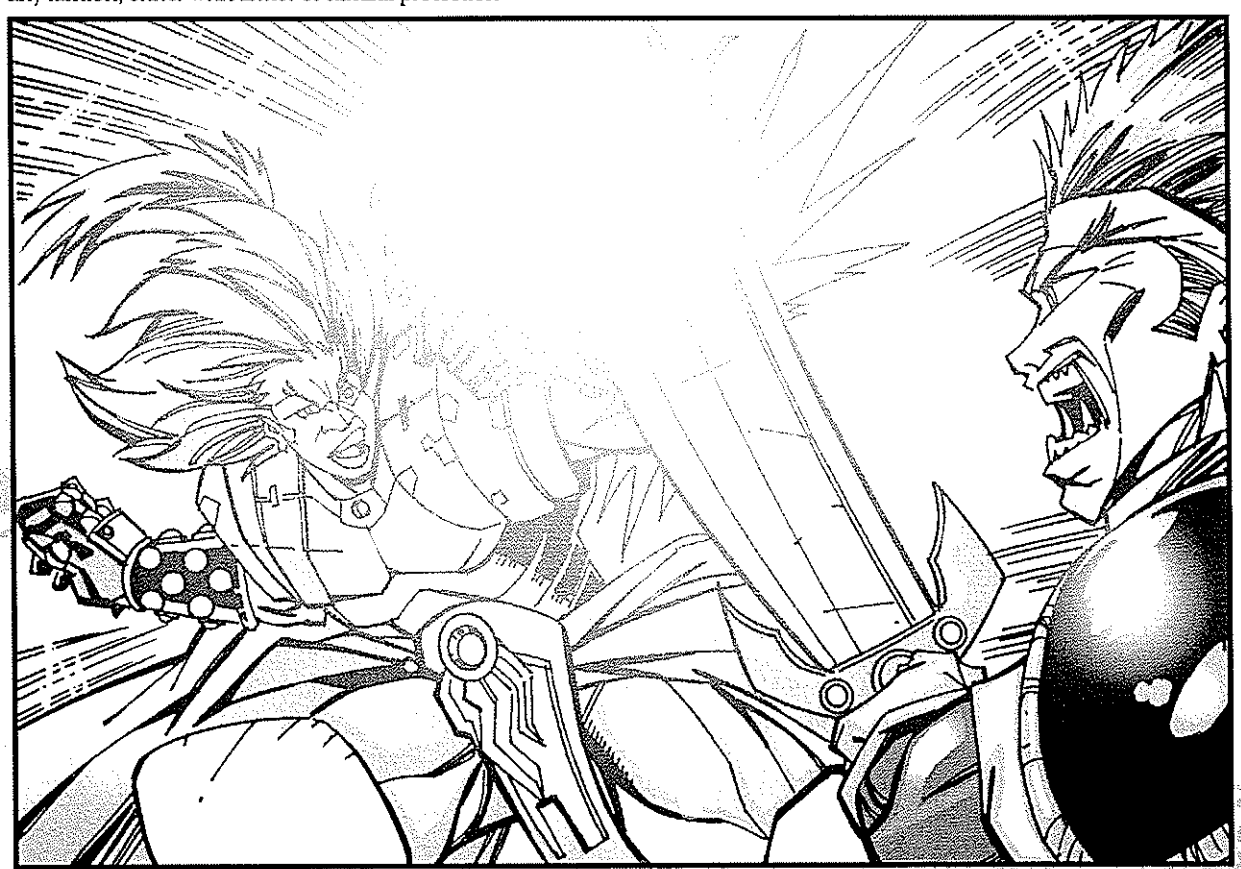
### Five-Dragon Fortitude

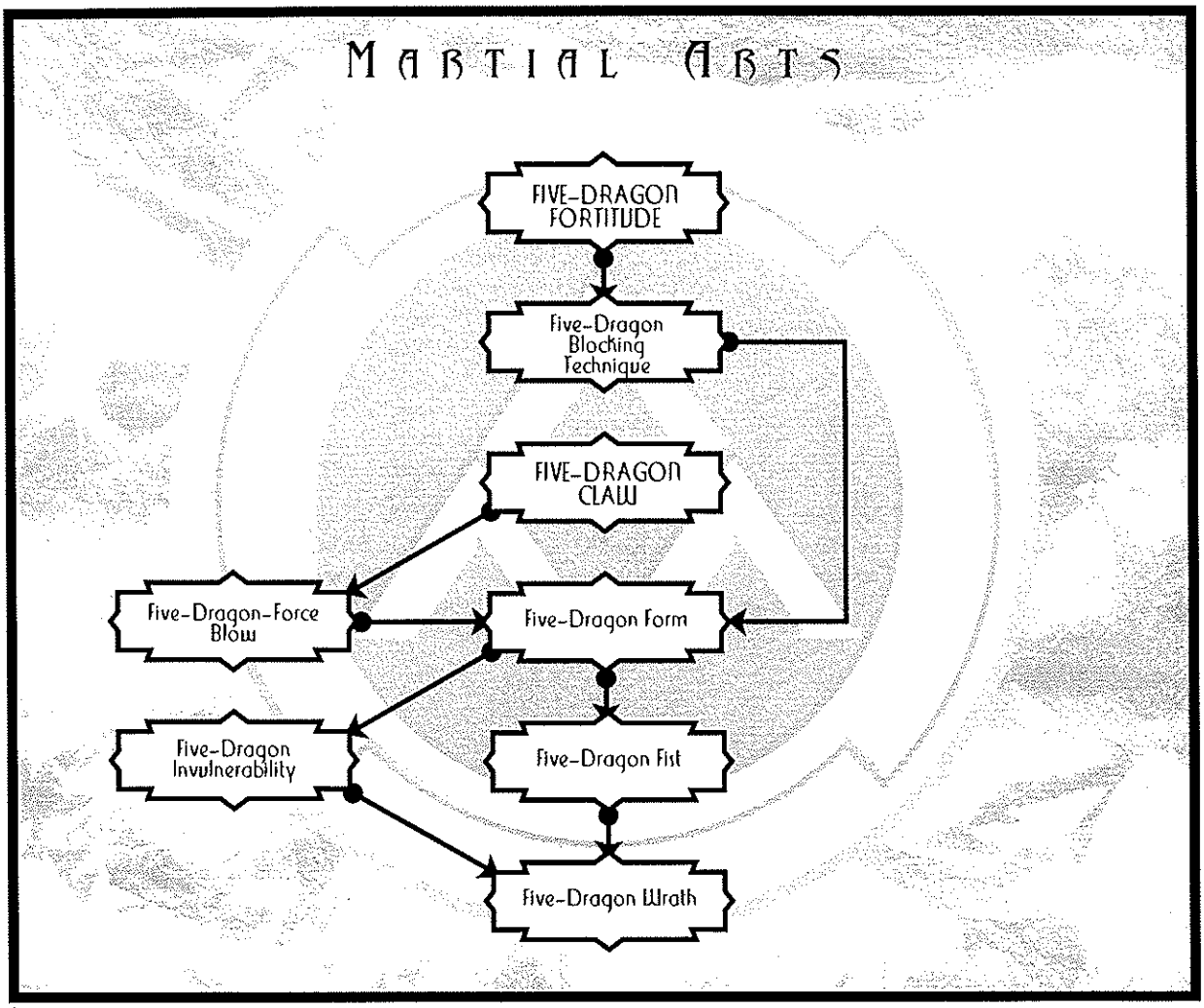
**Cost:** 1 mote per 2B or 1L
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The armored scales of the Elemental Dragons can afford great protection to their disciples. The Dragon-Blooded using this Charm may invoke the colossal stamina of the Dragons and soak the damage from one particular attack by paying Essence. Soaking bashing damage costs 1 mote per two health levels of raw damage reduced. Lethal damage costs 1 mote per health level of raw damage. This soak is applied before damage is rolled and is compatible with the use of armor.

### Five-Dragon Blocking Technique

**Cost:** 4 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Five-Dragon Fortitude






The powerful claws of the Elemental Dragons easily bat away attacks upon them. This Charm lets a Dragon-Blood emulate this ability, boosting parry prowess with a weapon or allowing the Exalt to turn attacks aside with his bare hands. For the remainder of the scene, the Dragon-Blood may add his permanent Essence to all parry rolls, even those made with Abilities other than Martial Arts. This bonus is applied to parries made with split dice pools after the multiple action penalty is applied, and the Charm also allows the character to make reflexive parries at his permanent Essence if he has no other way to parry an attack. If he is unarmed, the character may parry lethal damage without a stunt.

### Five-Dragon Claw

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The power of the Five Elemental Dragons can empower a Dragon-Blooded's blows with deadly force. The character does lethal rather than bashing damage on an unarmed attack.

### Five-Dragon-Force Blow

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Five-Dragon Claw

The character makes a normal martial arts attack, but he does double the normal base damage (extra successes do not double). In addition to the normal damage of the attack, roll the character's Strength + Martial Arts in a reflexive opposed roll against the target's Strength + Resistance. If the character wins, the target is knocked down and must spend an action clearing her head and getting back to her feet. See the knockback and knockdown rules on pages 234-235 of the Exalted main rulebook.

### Five-Dragon Form

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Five-Dragon Blocking Technique, Five-Dragon-Force Blow

Once a Dragon-Blooded has mastered the basic of the Five-Dragon Path, she may master the physical emulation of the Five Dragons. The Dynast tries to take on the aspect and attitude of the Elemental Dragons. Her demeanor becomes haughty and arrogant, her movements swift, graceful and lethal.

This lethality is exhibited in her combat prowess. For the remainder of the scene, the character may do lethal damage with her martial arts attacks instead of the normal bashing damage, and she may also soak lethal damage with her bashing soak. She also adds her permanent Essence to her Dexterity or Strength when determining her running speed, jumping distance or the amount she can lift or carry.

Characters cannot use more than one martial arts form-type Charm at a time. Using a form-type Charm ends the effects of any other form-type Charm the character was previously utilizing.

### Five-Dragon Fist

**Cost:** 6 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 health level
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 4
**Prerequisite Charms:** Five-Dragon Form

With a mighty effort, the martial artist channels some of the raw fury of the Five Elemental Dragons. The Dynast makes a punch or kick attacking using his Dexterity + Martial Arts, as usual. This attack does aggravated damage. The Five-Dragon Fist cannot be placed in a Combo or used by a character wielding a weapon — the energy of the Five Elemental Dragons must be channeled purely.

### Five-Dragon Invulnerability

**Cost:** 5 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Five-Dragon Form

Invoking this Charm allows the Exalt to completely ignore damage from any single non-magical attack. If the attack is made with a weapon of the Five Magical Materials, caused by sorcery or boosted with Charms, then the character only receives a soak bonus to his lethal and bashing soak equal to his permanent Essence.

### The Five Glorious Dragon Paths

The Immaculate Dragon Mela realized that not every one of the Terrestrial Exalted had the commitment or fortitude to endure training in one of the Five Glorious Dragon Paths of the Immaculate Order. To that end, she created her famous treatise *Five Dragons Fight as One*. In it, she detailed a less powerful but more accessible form of personal combat — one that it was possible for any Dragon-Blooded to learn. The resulting art, called the Five-Dragon Style, does not contain the true secrets of Dragon-Blooded martial arts prowess. It is what is learned by the common Terrestrial Exalted — those without the fortitude to endure the training of the Immaculates.

While the Five-Dragon Style is distinctly less powerful that the Five Glorious Dragon Paths, the Martial Arts Charms presented should not be underestimated. Combined with the other Charms available to the Terrestrial Exalted, they represent a powerful weapon in any Dragon-Blooded's arsenal. Still, these Charms pale in comparison to the powerful combat techniques the Immaculates practice. For more information on the Five Glorious Dragon Paths, see page 236.

### Five-Dragon Wrath

**Cost:** 1 mote per attack, 1 health level
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Extra Action
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 4
**Prerequisite Charms:** Five-Dragon Invulnerability, Five-Dragon Fist

Suffused with the energy of the Five Elemental Dragons, the Exalted explodes into a flurry of action. His hands and legs become a blur of motion, and he unleashes an unbelievable amount of devastation in the blink of an eye.

After invoking this Charm, the Dragon-Blooded may make an extra attack per mote spent, all against a single target. All of these attacks are rolled as normal. If the target dodges or parries, she makes one roll that is compared to all the attacks. The maximum number of extra attacks a Dynast can make is equal to his Essence.

## Resistance

### Strength of Stone Technique

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes per person |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Resistance:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

One of the most notable traits of the element of Earth is its strength and resistance to damage. Through this Charm, a Dragon-Blooded can take on some of the strength and hardness of stone and share it with other people.

After a short meditation spent holding and concentrating upon the Essence within a pebble, the character becomes stronger and tougher, gaining one dot each of Strength and Stamina for the next five minutes. If the Dragon-Blooded character wants to include other people in the Charm, they must all hold hands in a circle with a pebble between each pair of palms. A character can only benefit from one application of Strength of Stone Technique at a time.

### Impervious Skin of Stone Meditation

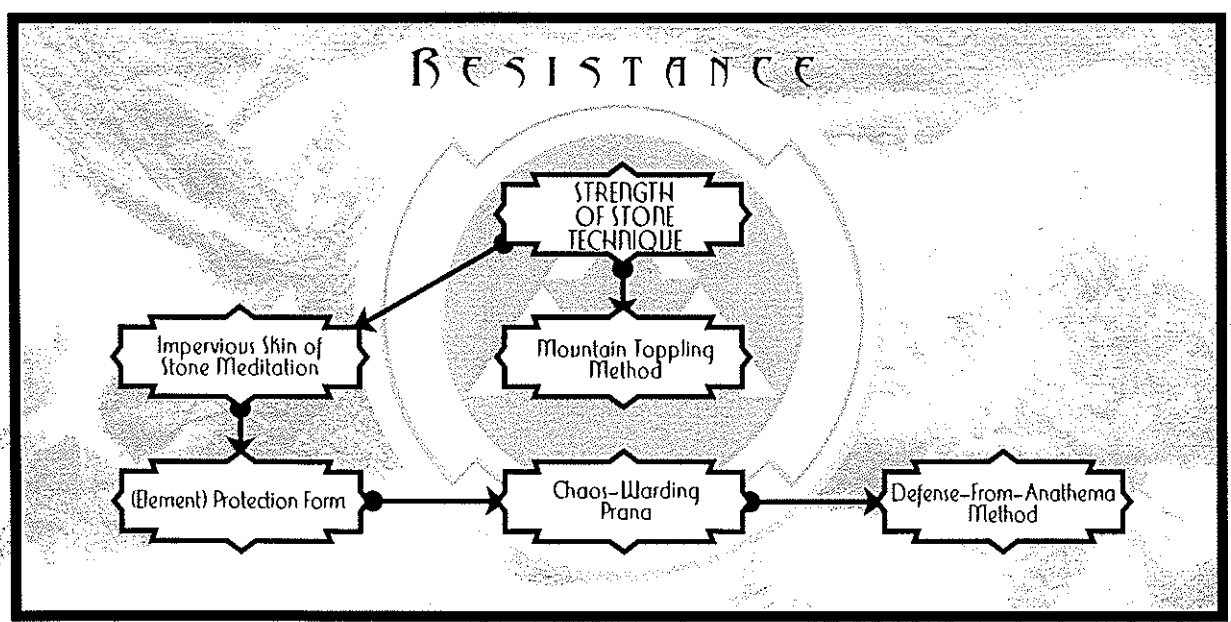
| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per 2L/2B soak |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Resistance:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Strength of Stone Technique |

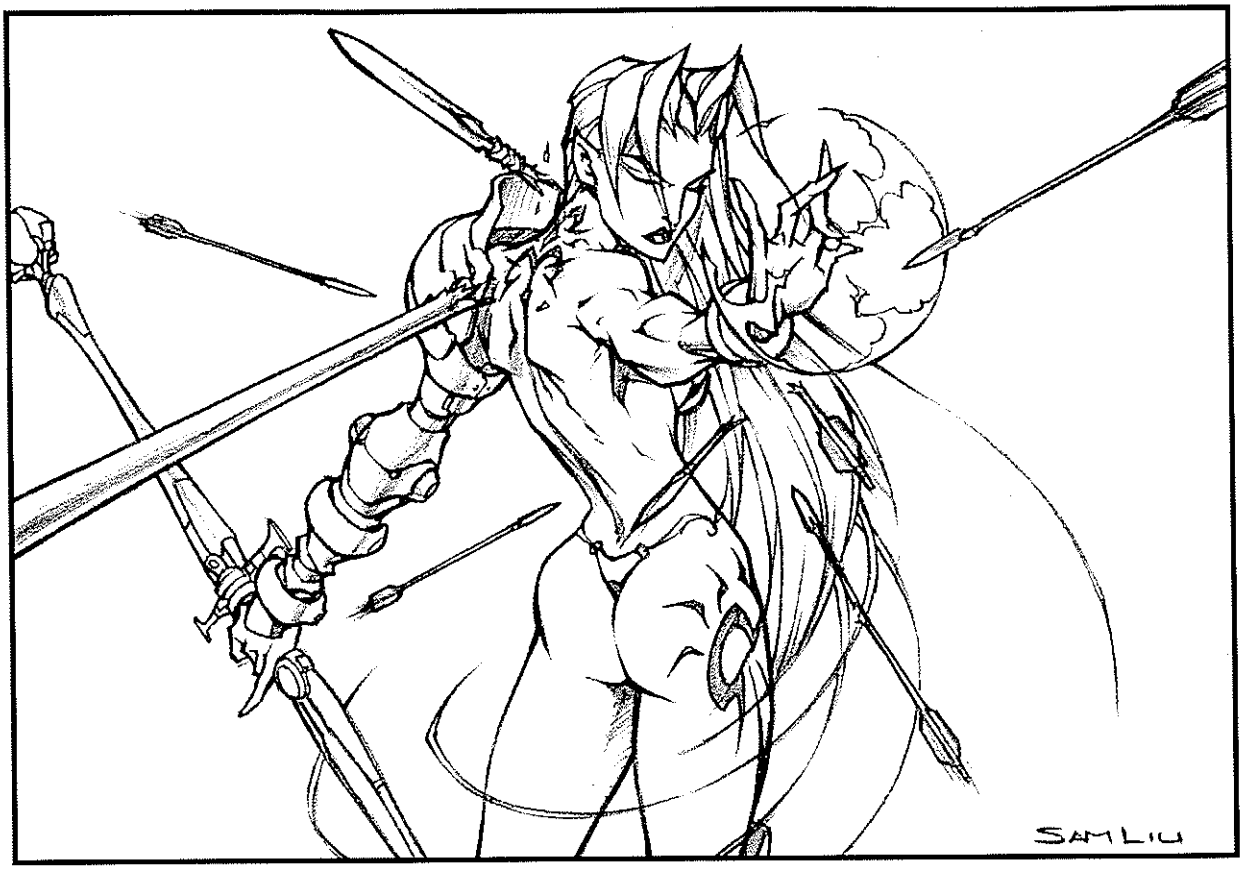
With this Charm in effect, a Dragon-Blood's skin gains the toughness of the native rock of the earth itself. Swords and arrows glance from her skin as if off a cliff face. Every mote of Essence invested in the Charm give the character two points of additional soak against lethal and bashing damage. The bonus to soak cannot be greater than the character's Essence. This Charm is weak against Essence and does not apply to damage caused by sorcery or by attacks enhanced with Charms.

### Mountain Toppling Method

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 4 motes |
| **Duration:** | One turn |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Resistance:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Strength of Stone Technique |

Through this Charm, a Dragon-Blooded character links his own Essence to the Essence within any great mass. By *inverting* the principles of resistance against the mass, it enables him to exert vastly magnified strength. After a moment's concentration, the Dynast can hurl boulders, topple pillars, stomp on the edge of a cliff to start a landslide or perform other momentary feats of superhuman strength. In game terms, for one turn, the character's Strength increases by 5, but he can only apply that extra Strength to objects made of earth or stone. This heightened Strength may be used in an attack (for instance, throwing a boulder at an opponent for Strength-based damage), and jade-alloy weapons such as daiklaves are "stone" enough to benefit from the effects of this Charm.






### (Element) Protection Form

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Resistance:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Impervious Skin of Stone Meditation |

This is actually a cluster of five separate Charms, each offering protection from the harmful effects of the element of one of Five Immaculate Dragons. While this Charm in effect, the character gets a bonus to lethal and bashing soak equal to her Essence when attacked by an appropriate source of elemental damage. This soak applies to attacks as well as to environmental damage (from say drowning, crushing rock or molten lava). For the purposes of this Charm, metal is earth and fists, teeth and other natural attacks are wood. As with Impervious Skin of Stone Meditation, this protection is brittle and offers no additional resistance against attacks enhanced with Charms or against damage caused by sorcery.

These Charms must be each bought separately. A character may apply the discount for buying Charms of her own elemental attunement when learning the protection technique for her element.

### Chaos-Warding Prana

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Resistance:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | (Element) Protection Form |

The disruptive predations of beings and creatures of the Wyld are a constant danger to the Realm. Naturally, the Dynasts of Earth — paragons of stability — have developed methods for combating these roiling energies. For the remainder of the scene after invoking this Charm, a Dynast may ignore the warping effects of the Wyld. Both his person and his gear are protected and cannot be mutated or changed by Wyld effects. The character can extend this protection to others by paying the full cost of the Charm and touching them.

### Defense-From-Anathema Method

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 6 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Resistance:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 4 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Chaos-Warding Prana |

The most powerful of the Terrestrial Exalted know methods to shield themselves from the powerful magic of the Anathema. For the remainder of the scene after invoking this Charm, a Dynast may add her Essence to the difficulty of magical attacks made against her by the Anathema. This includes both Charm-enhanced attacks and sorcery. These are effective automatic successes to avoid the attack and are additive with dodges and parries. This Charm offers no protection against more subtle effects, such as mind control.

# Fire

## Athletics

### Effortlessly Rising Flame

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Athletics:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

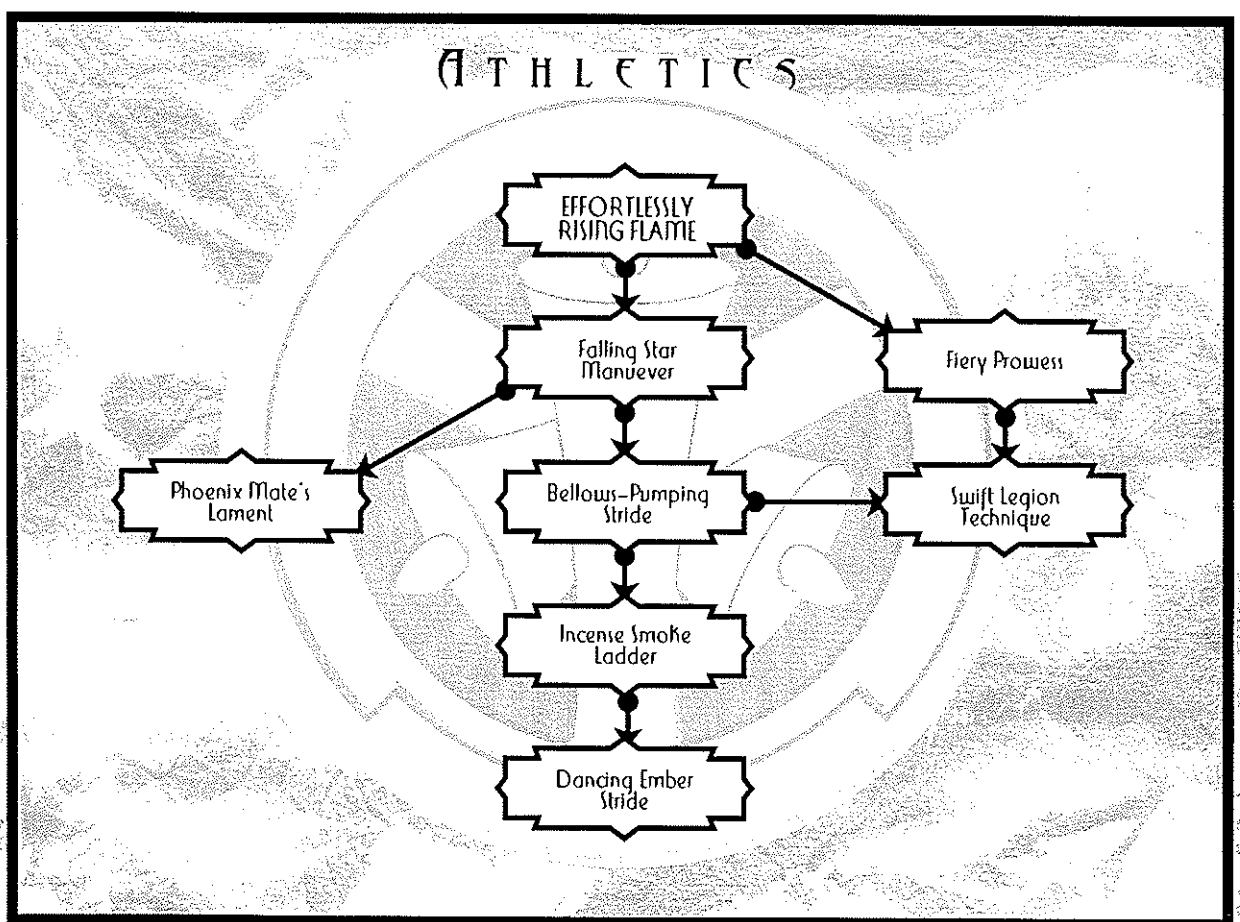
Fire does not oppose Earth in the same way that it opposes Water, but a glance at a bonfire shows the obvious: Fire abhors Earth. With this Charm, a burst of fiery energy propels the Exalt from the earth's surface in as much time as it takes a man to take just a single step. The Dragon-Blooded may rise from a prone or supine position without taking an action to do so. This Charm can also be used to add two dice to the Exalted's Athletics for the purposes of determining how far she can jump.

### Falling Star Maneuver

**Cost:** 1 mote per two dice
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Athletics:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** Effortlessly Rising Flame

Fire lifts the Exalt's every footstep. The Dragon-Blooded with Falling Star Maneuver may jump, tumble, roll or outrun a foe in hand-to-hand combat gaining a positional advantage that allows him to strike devastating blows.

Mechanically, this Charm add two dice per mote expended to the damage of an attack. No more motes can be spent than the character's permanent Essence rating. This damage is added before soak is applied. Normally, this Charm can be used only with hand-to-hand attacks, but with a stunt, the Charm can even be used to gain a bonus to the character's Thrown or Archery damage. However, this generally only happens when a target has left himself wide open to attacks from the sides and the Exalt can reach his flank swiftly. This Charm can explicitly be used in Combos with Charms from other Abilities.



### Bellows-Pumping Stride

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Athletics:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Falling Star Maneuver

The Exalt can double his movement rate for the scene with this Charm. As he does so, he leaves fiery footprints in the ground behind him. At a full sprint, he leaves a trail of fire — this is normal fire and can cause problems in flammable areas.

To his own perceptions, he is not moving any faster; walking is still walking, and running is still running. However, his walk is twice as swift as normal. Resultingly, he can move up to (Dexterity + 12) yards and still act in a turn and up to (Dexterity x 5) + 25 yards as his only action for the turn. This Charm does not increase the character's attack speed; it only affects his movement.

### Incense Smoke Ladder

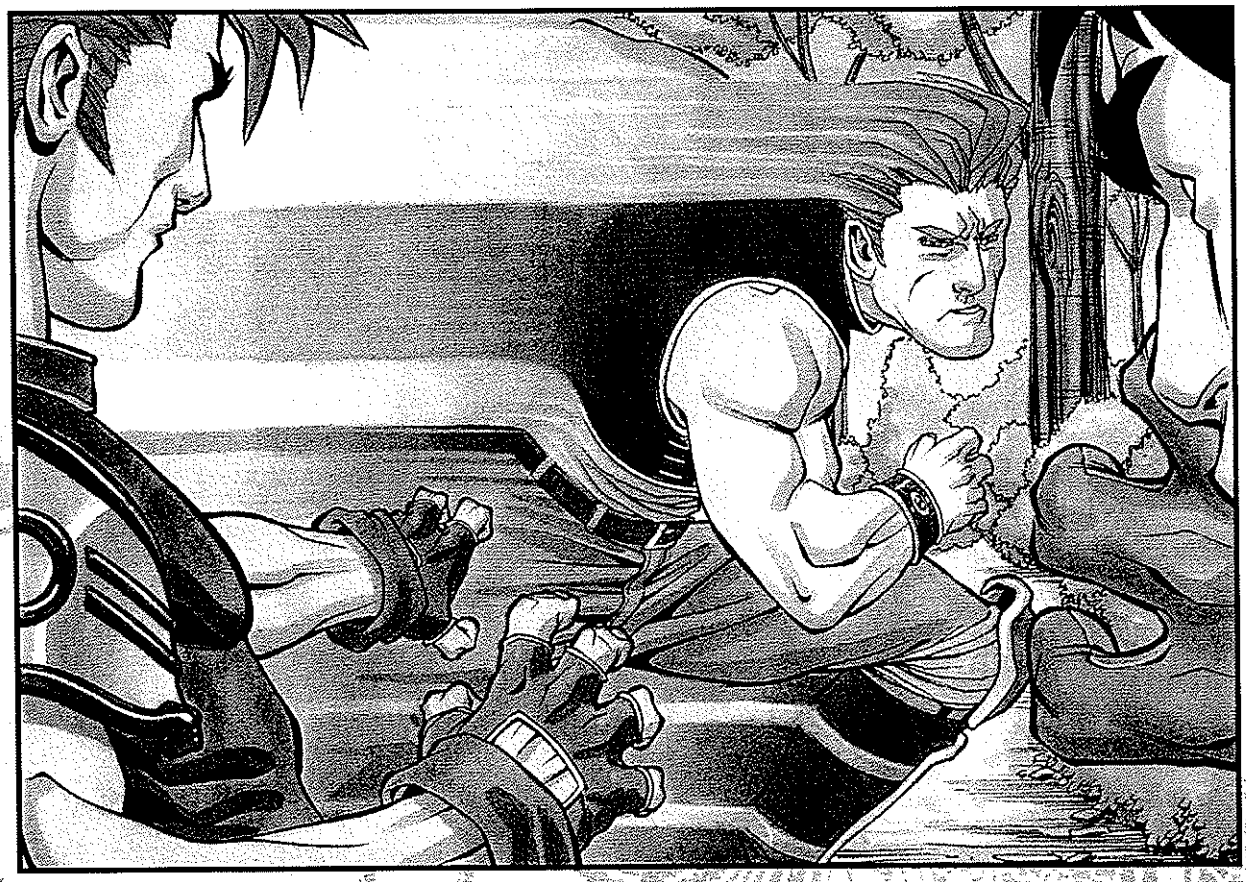
**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Athletics:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Bellows-Pumping Stride

Like a burning ember, the Exalt is propelled away from the ground beneath him, so long as he has a surface to guide his feet. During any turn this Charm is active, the Dragon-Blooded can run up walls, trees and other vertical surfaces as easily as across an open courtyard. This is not a casual shuffle — the Exalt must get a running start of at least two steps and then run up the wall, using his relationship to the rising element of fire to push himself away from the earth below. The character's feet do not stick to the wall, and he cannot stand on the wall's surface — he can only run up it. Similarly, the Dynast may run across the surface of water while this power is active, though he cannot stop. If he should attempt to run across the surface of dangerous liquids, such as lava or acid, he will stay on the surface, but his feet may be burned badly.

### Dancing Ember Stride

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Athletics:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Incense Smoke Ladder

The character drifts upward, buoyed by a hot updraft. He may move a distance up to twice his ordinary movement rate upward, or once he is in the sky, he can move horizontally as if he were standing on the ground or ascend or descend as he wishes. As with many of the other Charms in this cascade, the



only restriction is that the Exalt must keep moving; he cannot remain still, or he will plunge to the ground. The Dragon-Blood can carry as much weight as he can normally lift while using this Charm, as determined by his Strength + Athletics.

### Phoenix Mate's Lament

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per 2 soak |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Reflexive |
| **Minimum Athletics:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Falling Star Maneuver |

The character's affinity for fire's movement continues to grow as he learns this Charm. So long as the Exalt maintains at least a jog — that is to say, moving at least half of his maximum running speed — he can largely ignore many environmental hazards. These include open natural flame, poisonous gas, falling rocks and so on. The Dragon-Blood may add 2 to his soak against nonmagical environmental hazards for every mote spent, up to a maximum of his Athletics score. This ability does not protect against magical effects or Charms; however, strong elemental effects that come as a result of a character's proximity to an elemental pole are considered natural environmental hazards and are therefore protected against. This ability acts in addition to any anima effect, Charms, sorcery or other protections the character may enjoy.

### Fiery Prowess

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per two dice |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Athletics:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Effortlessly Rising Flame |

The Exalted feels a burning in his veins as he pushes his body to its limits. Using this Charm, the Dragon-Blooded can improve his Athletics Ability by two dice per mote of Essence spent. However, he cannot increase his Athletics to more than double its base value. Extra Essence spent is lost.

*For Example: If Targan has Athletics 3 and spends 2 motes on Fiery Prowess, his effective Athletics becomes 6, not 7.*

The increase in Athletics lasts for a full turn, and the character's Athletics dice pool can be split normally while under the influence of this Charm.

### Swift Legion Technique

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes per subject |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Athletics:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Bellows-Pumping Stride, Fiery Prowess |

The Dragon-Blood with Swift Legion Technique can greatly increase the swiftness of his traveling companions or allies and himself. The fire at the core of his being invigorates and rejuvenates his companions as they move. He must choose the subjects of this Charm when he activates it and spend 2 motes of Essence for each of them (including himself). For the rest of the scene, those characters all double their basic speeds, as per Bellows-Pumping Stride, above. Because of the malleable nature of time in the Exalted system, this Charm can aid long-distance travel. A day's travel is usually a single scene. However, if the characters' travel is interrupted, the Dragon-Blood would have to activate the Charm again. A character cannot aid more companions with this Charm than his permanent Essence.

## Dodge

### Threshold Warding Stance

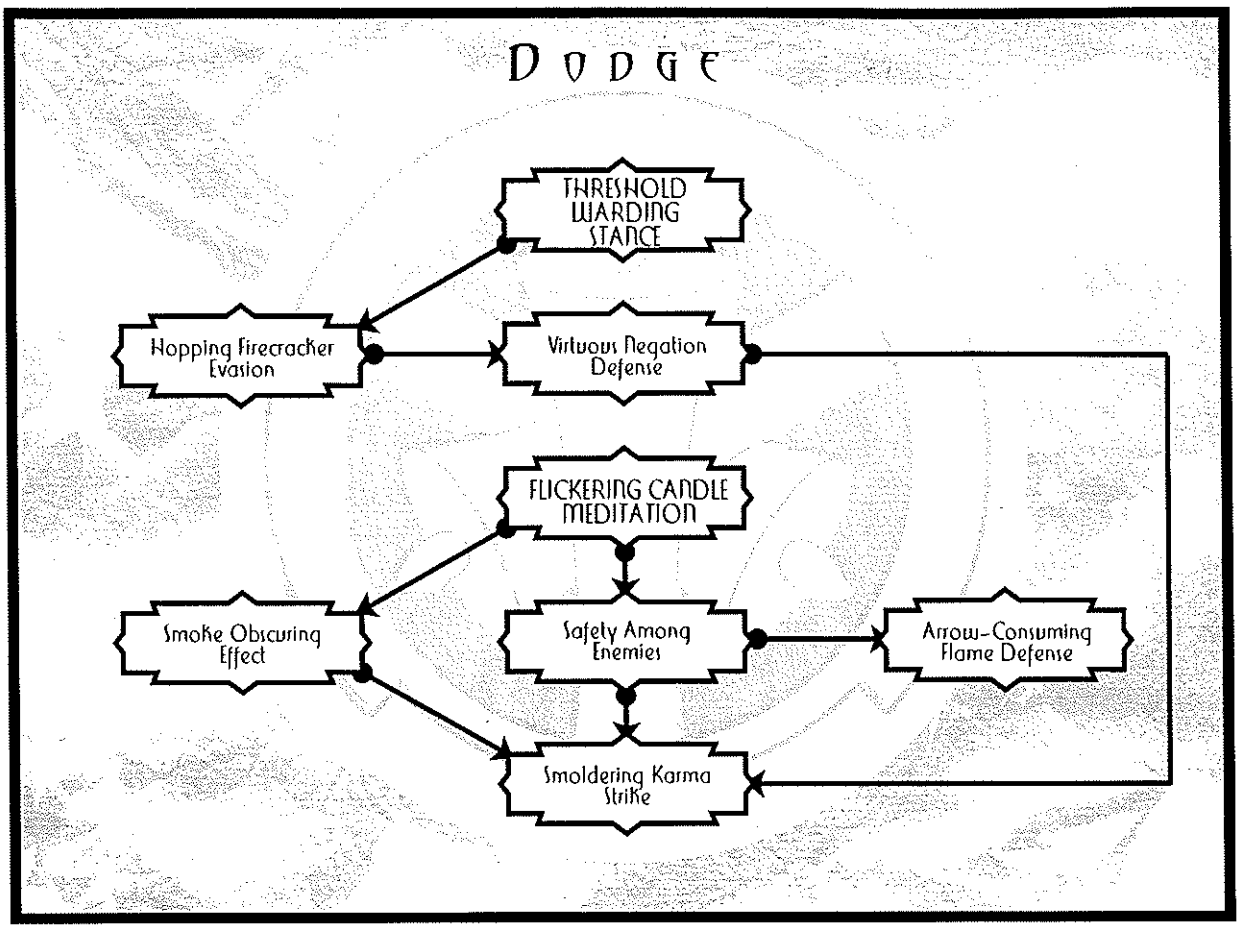
| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Reflexive |
| **Minimum Dodge:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

Ordinarily, when dodging an attack, the defender must have ample space in which to move around. The character using the Threshold Warding Stance can dodge attacks while keeping his balance and leaving his feet in one place; as he does so, his torso, arms and legs flicker back and forth like a candle flame exposed to high wind. The Dragon-Blooded cannot dodge attacks when he is entirely immobilized, but so long as he has some degree of freedom to move, he can use his full Dodge dice pool. This Charm works whether the character is standing on a tree limb, is hemmed in by walls on three sides, is up to his shins in quicksand or is dangling by his arms from a great height.

### Hopping Firecracker Evasion

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Reflexive |
| **Minimum Dodge:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Threshold Warding Stance |

When this Charm is activated, the Dragon-Blooded's dives to avoid attack become truly pronounced. The Exalted with Hopping Firecracker Evasion can move more than just a few steps as he avoids attacks. He can leap, dive or tumble up to his normal running pace, which is half of (Dexterity + 12) yards, when he succeeds in dodging an attack. If he is in hand-to-hand combat, this is likely to take him out of hand-to-hand combat range after a single attack, unless the attacker is able to move and continue attacking. This effectively allows him to evade the effects of many multiple-attack Charms.




### Virtuous Negation Defense

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Dodge:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Hopping Firecracker Evasion

This altruistic Charm allows its wielder to move his allies out of the way of incoming attacks. When he notices an attack coming toward a companion, the Dragon-Blood can dive toward that friend and shove him out of the way of the attack. The companion must be within leaping distance — 5 yards, ordinarily — for the Exalt to interpose himself.

The attack almost always misses the character's companion; the Dynast's player should now roll his character's own dodge against the attack as though he were its original target. If he does not receive enough successes to make the attack miss outright, it hits the Exalted rather than his original target. However, if the Exalted rolls no successes on his dodge, the attack strikes its original target.

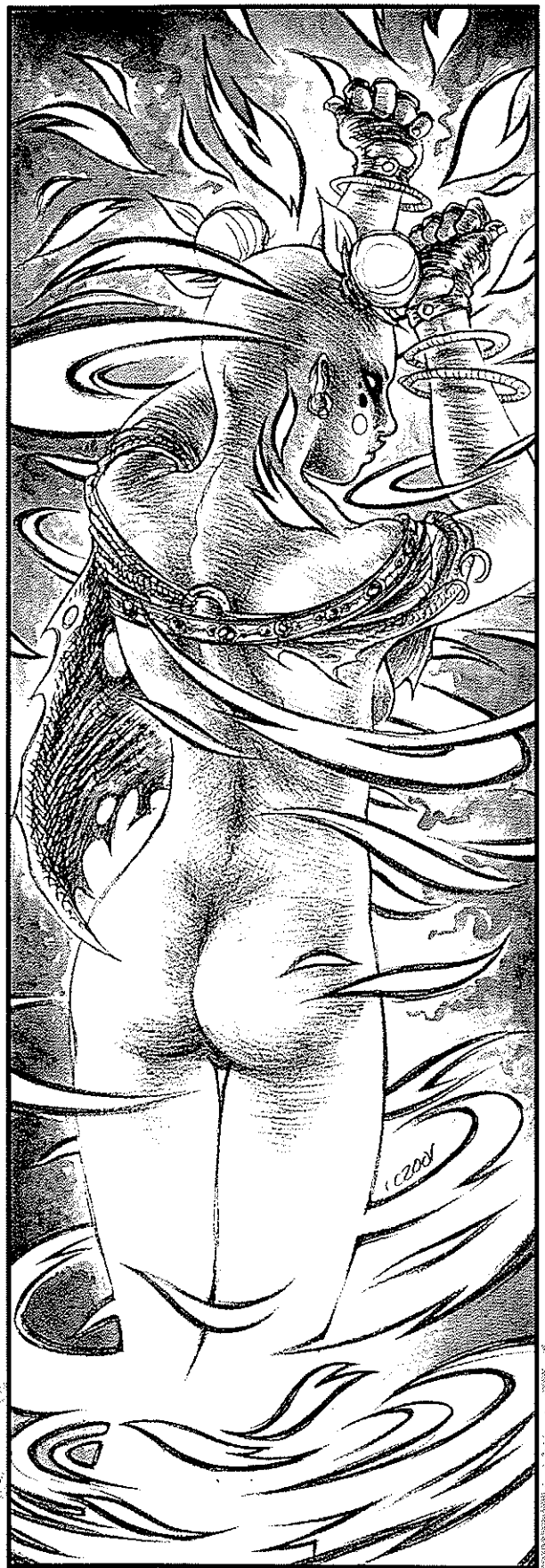
### Flickering Candle Meditation

**Cost:** 1 mote per two dice
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Dodge:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The character's outline and form become more difficult to perceive as his movements accelerate and blur. The Exalted can improve his Dodge dice pool with this Charm, at a cost of one mote Essence for every two dice added to his Dodge dice pool for this dodge attempt. As with most Charms of this type, no more dice can be added than the character's Dodge Trait.

### Smoke Obscuring Effect

**Cost:** 1 mote per two dice + 1 mote per ally
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Dodge:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Flickering Candle Meditation



The Exalted conjures up a visual distraction for his enemies, allowing his allies to more easily avoid their blows. This effect might be smoke, as the Charm's name suggests, or it might be the flaring up of a nearby campfire; anything to distract opponents and give allies a bonus to dodge. The Exalt expends 1 mote of Essence per ally that he wishes to subject to this power, plus 1 mote per two dice to be added to the allies' Dodge pools. The Dragon-Blood may not contribute more dice than he has dots in the Dodge Trait, and his allies cannot do more than double their own Dodge Abilities, regardless of how many dice are contributed. A character may not use this ability on more allies than he has Essence.

For Example: Plana has Dodge 3 and Smoke Obscuring Effect, and his allies Orbro and Tamota are in a combat with him. Orbro has Dodge 2; Tamota has Dodge 5. Plana must spend 4 motes of Essence to activate Smoke Obscuring Effect (two allies, plus 2 motes for all three of Plana's Dodge dice). Orbro receives two bonus dice to his Dodge (since he cannot more than double his Dodge Trait), and Tamota receives three bonus dice (since that is all that Plana can donate).

### Safety Among Enemies

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Dodge:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Flickering Candle Meditation

In a fashion similar to Virtuous Negation Defense, the Dragon-Blooded moves toward another person as an attack is incoming. However, unlike Virtuous Negation Defense, this maneuver is intended to cause an attack aimed at the Exalted to strike another person — presumably an enemy, since the best use of this defense is to let a well-armored foe absorb blows on the Exalt's behalf. The new target must be within three yards of the Exalted for this Charm to work. Rather than rolling a standard dodge, the player should roll Dexterity + Dodge, with a total of four successes needed. If the roll succeeds, the new target is struck by the attack, and the user of this Charm avoids it. Treat the attack as though it had been aimed at the new target all along. The new target can attempt a dodge himself if he's able to. A character cannot force an enemy to attack himself.

### Arrow-Consuming Flame Defense

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Dodge:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Safety Among Enemies

This Charm creates a coruscating aura of fire that radiates for a few feet around the Exalted who activates it. The aura destroys any wooden projectiles, such as arrows,

that approach the character; it also weakens the blows of other weapons intended to harm him.

Arrows automatically fail to harm the character, as the shaft of the arrow is consumed by fire before the arrow can reach him; at most, a harmless arrowhead might bounce off the character's clothing or armor. Additionally, the Exalted receives +2 to his soak against metal and wooden weapons — be they hand-to-hand or ranged attacks — as the blows are weakened by their passage through the Arrow-Consuming Flame Defense. Only hard stone weapons and gear made from the Five Magical Materials are unaffected by this Charm. Anyone attempting to make an unarmed against a Dragon-Blooded with this Charm active takes 3L fire damage each time she attacks, soaked normally.

### Smoldering Karma Strike

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Reflexive |
| **Minimum Dodge:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Virtuous Negation Defense, Smoke Obscuring Effect, Safety Among Enemies |

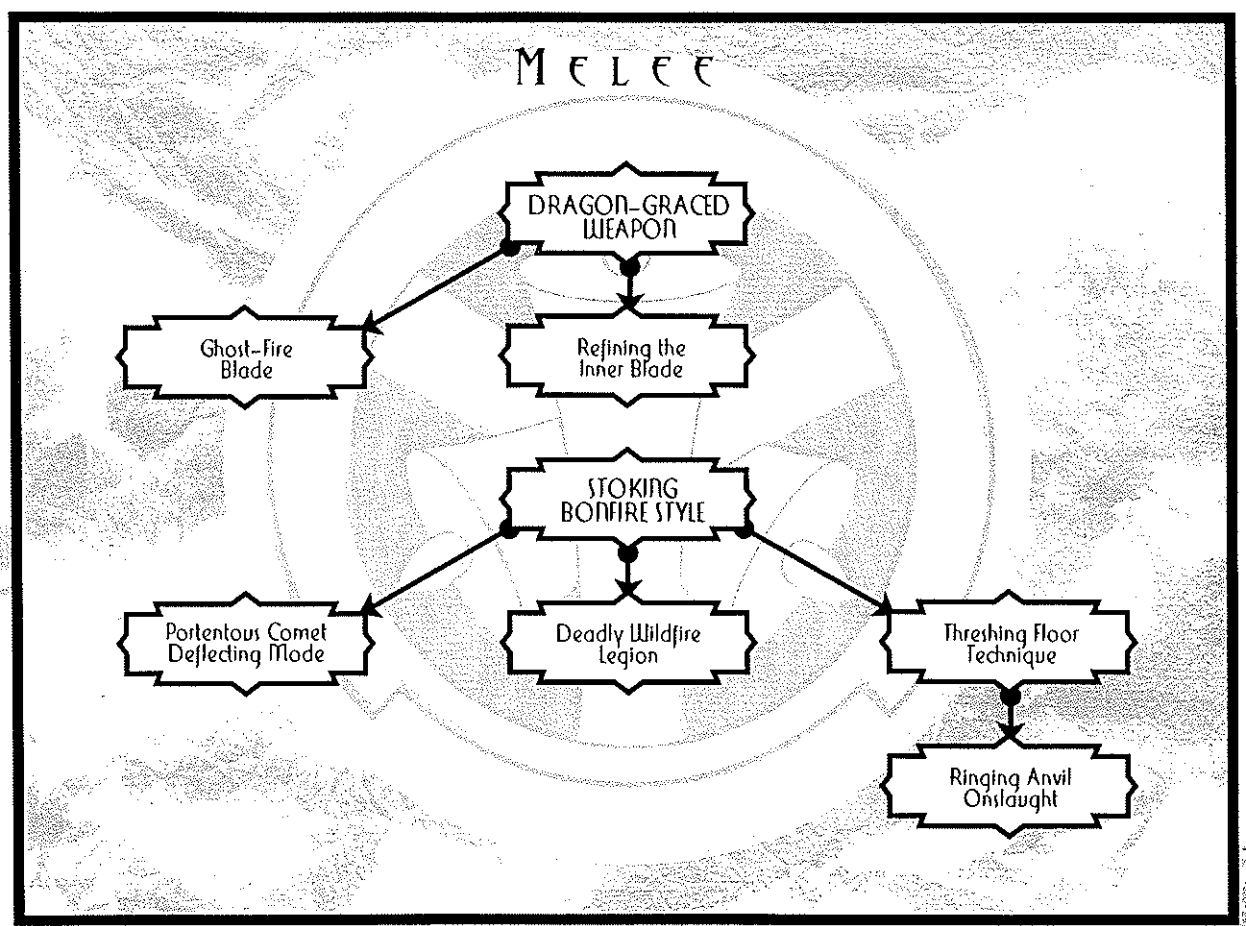
The character's talent at avoiding attack and placing himself to take advantage of a foe's weakness has been honed by this point to allow him to instantly strike back at any enemy whose hand-to-hand combat attack he has successfully avoided. When attacked at such close range, if the attacker fails to achieve any net successes on his attack roll (that is, when he either cleanly misses on his own or the defender's dodge successes reduce his attack to a miss), the defender with Smoldering Karma Strike can spend Essence and immediately make reflexive hand-to-hand attack at his full dice pool. This Charm cannot be used to respond to a counterattack launched with this or any other Charm.

## Melee

### Dragon-Graced Weapon

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Melee:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

The character with Dragon-Graced Weapon can impart special properties to the melee weapon in hand by



merely concentrating for a moment. The effect on the character's weapon is based on his elemental aspect, as described below. This effect is instantaneous; the Exalt must pay Essence for every attack, and he must do so before making his attack roll.

**Air:** Fierce winds surround the weapon, knocking your foe off his feet. A successful hit means the enemy takes normal damage and her player must succeed at a Dexterity + Athletics roll at difficulty 2 or have her character knocked prone.

**Earth:** A thunderous shaking of the earth accompanies the weapon's strike. The enemy loses two dice from all dice pools for physical actions until he's done with his next turn.

**Fire:** The target bursts into flames and, on his next action, must soak another 4L damage from fire. This damage is separate from the normal attack and without any extra successes added. The fire gutters out after one turn.

**Water:** The target is gripped in a drowning embrace. Next turn (or this turn, if he hasn't acted yet) subtract 3 from his initiative total as struggles to clear water from his lungs and throat.

**Wood:** Thorns cover all the striking surfaces of the weapon, and it increases the damage of the attack by +2L.

### Ghost-Fire Blade

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Melee:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Dragon-Graced Weapon

Ghosts and dematerialized spirits cannot be hit by ordinary weapons. Though many powerful weapons can strike those immaterial beings, warriors caught without that kind of armament are in great danger when facing spirit foes. This Charm allows a Dragon-Blooded warrior to call upon the Dragon of Fire to enchant his weapon, allowing it to strike immaterial creatures normally. The character must spend the Essence and activate the Charm before making her attack, and her player must still roll to hit the creature as if it were material. This Charm provides no additional bonus beyond allowing the character to hit dematerialized spirits.

### Refining the Inner Blade

**Cost:** 3 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Melee:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Dragon-Graced Weapon

With a few seconds' concentration, the Exalted can conjure up a weapon created entirely from his favored element. This weapon has the same qualities as an ordinary weapon of its type; it also has the qualities of a weapon enchanted by the Dragon-Graced Weapon Charm (see above). As the weapon is created out of raw elemental matter and Essence, it does not last for long, but a combatant can be sure that it will remain intact until the end of his current battle. When the scene ends, the elemental weapon dissipates, evaporating into a sparkle of light and a whiff of the character's aspected element. The conjured weapon can be any sort of melee weapon.

### Stoking Bonfire Style

**Cost:** 1 mote per two dice
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Melee:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The Exalt with this basic Charm learns how to lend the ferocity of fire to his weapon's blows. His hand becomes steadier, and his strike truer. Add two dice to the character's Melee dice pool for every mote spent; however, a Dragon-Blood cannot more than double his Melee Ability with this Charm. The player must declare that his character is using this Charm and spend the Essence before making the attack roll.

### Portentous Comet Deflecting Mode

**Cost:** 3 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Melee:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Stoking Bonfire Style

This particularly costly Charm is also particularly effective. Fiery sparks leap from the Exalted's weapon, interposing themselves between the Exalt and a potentially deadly blow. Spend the necessary Essence and roll Dexterity + Melee after an opponent's hand-to-hand attack. If even one success is achieve, regardless of how many successes the Dragon-Blood's opponent achieved, the attack is blocked completely. The Charm may be invoked after the opponent's player makes his attack roll. This Charm provides no protection against sorcery or attacks enhanced by Charms.

### Deadly Wildfire Legion

**Cost:** 1 mote per 2 dice + 1 mote per subject
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Melee:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Stoking Bonfire Style

With this Charm, you briefly empower a group of your allies to attack at greatly improved effectiveness. They are surrounded by a fiery halo when this empowerment occurs,

and the tips of their weapons scorch the air as the blades cut through their opponents' defenses. You may ensorcel one ally per mote spent, to a maximum of your Essence Trait; you must spend additional Essence to improve their Melee Ability, by two dice per mote spent. You cannot add more dice to your allies' Abilities than you have in Melee, nor can you more than double their effective Melee.

### Threshing Floor Technique

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes + 1 mote per targeted ally |
| **Duration:** | One turn |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Melee:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Stoking Bonfire Style |

There is a practical limit, imposed by geometry and space, on the number of people that can attack a single target at once. Although it is unlikely that a Dragon-Blood has ever participated in grain threshing, this technique was so named due to its similarity to that activity. Only five foes can possibly effectively attack a single target simultaneously, and that number is greatly reduced should a target find himself in a defensible position — his back against a wall, for instance, or standing between two trees. With Threshing Floor Technique, the only limit to the number of attackers that can assault a single foe in one turn is the amount of Essence the Dragon-Blooded spends. The Exalt designates a target and spends 2 motes of Essence to activate the Charm and 1 mote of Essence per attacker. Then, so long as an attacker is within her ordinary movement distance from the target (that is, [Dexterity + 12] ÷ 2 yards), she may make a melee attack at the designated target on her normal action; she dashes in, makes an attack normally and then pulls back to her previous position. Characters so empowered are not required to attack the target on their action, though, if they do not, the Essence spent to enable them to do so is still lost. Likewise, if the target is slain, Essence spent to empower characters who never got their shot is also still lost.

### Ringing Anvil Onslaught

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 8 motes |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Extra Actions |
| **Minimum Melee:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Threshing Floor Technique |

With this Charm, a Dragon-Blooded character can keep a foe entirely off-balance until he is slain, if his skill is sufficient to the task. The Exalt using Ringing Anvil Onslaught designates a single target, and his player rolls the character's Melee Ability (no Attribute is added). For each success, the Exalted gains an extra attack against the target this turn. The Dynast cannot gain more extra attacks than his Melee.

## Presence

### Phantom Fire-Warrior Horde

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per two dice |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Presence:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

When activating this Charm, the Dragon-Blooded appears to be surrounded by a group of fiery warriors. These individuals are not visible when looked at directly; they are only visible through the target's peripheral vision, for indeed, they are only phantoms. The phantoms are intimidating, however, and they serve to increase the Exalted's intimidation abilities and make his presence more imposing. The character using this Charm can add two dice to his Presence for every mote spent but can no more than double his Presence Ability.

### Blazing Courageous Swordsmen Inspiration

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per subject |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Presence:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Phantom Fire-Warrior Horde |

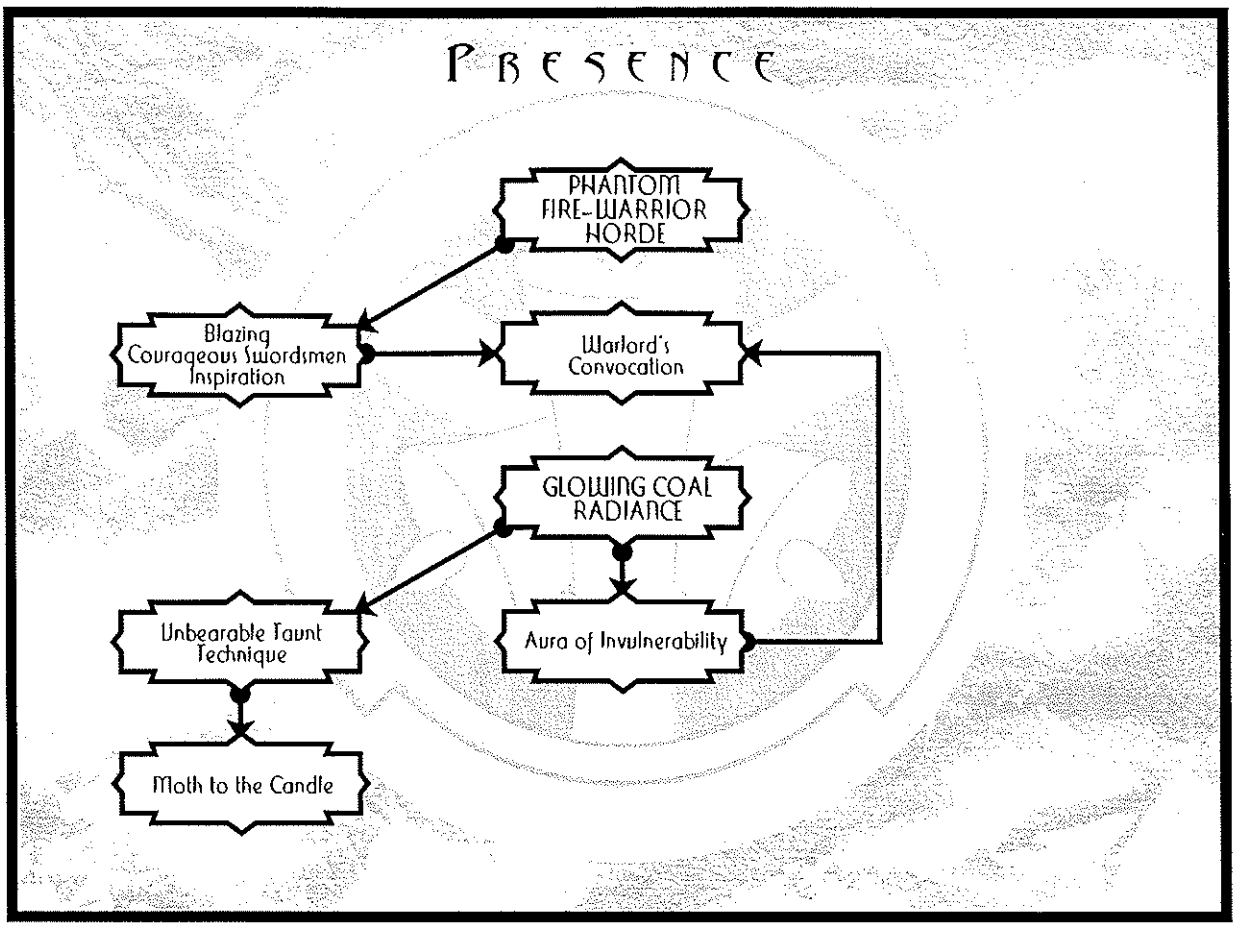
The Exalted calls up a fiery passion in soldiers under his command, and they charge to the offensive, heedless of personal danger. The Dragon-Blood spends one mote of Essence per warrior that he commands, to a maximum of twice his Essence, and each of those warriors receives a single temporary Bruised health level. This temporary level is the first one lost when damage is taken, and it cannot be healed back even if curative magic is somehow applied to the soldier during the same scene that the Charm is activated.

If the soldier is undamaged when the scene ends, the bonus health level fades; if he is damaged, the lost health level disappears with no further ill effect. This Charm can only be used on soldiers that the Exalted directly commands (typically those purchased with the Command Background): While it can be used on other players' characters, any subject of the Charm loses the bonus health level immediately if he does not act as part of a unit under the Exalted's command. A given individual can only benefit from one application of this Charm in a scene.

### Glowing Coal Radiance

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes |
| **Duration:** | One turn |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Presence:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

A nimbus of fire encircles the character's head and torso, making it difficult for others to so much as look at him, much




less attack him directly. The player of any foe that wishes to attack the Exalt in hand-to-hand combat any time before the character's next turn must first succeed at a reflexive Willpower test. One success allows the enemy to act normally. Enemies may attack the Exalted at range without concern.

### Aura of Invulnerability

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Presence:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Glowing Coal Radiance

The character's overwhelming force of personality takes on a life of its own, as he can stare down even the strongest foe, causing enemies to flinch slightly before their weapons hit him. The Dragon-Blooded gains a point of soak and three temporary Bruised health levels, which last for this scene only. Those health levels are the first lost when the character takes damage, and they cannot be healed back, even if magics are applied which would ordinarily restore lost health levels. When the scene is over, the three health levels fade, whether they have been lost to combat or not; the fading has no other ill effects on the character. A character cannot benefit from this Charm more than once per scene.

### Warlord's Convocation

**Cost:** 8 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene or instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Presence:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Blazing Courageous Swordsmen Inspiration, Aura of Invulnerability

The Exalt's aura of might and his overwhelming charisma combine to sway the loyalty of nearly any character. The Exalt can spend 8 motes and 1 Willpower to attempt to gain a Storyteller character's loyalty. Roll Manipulation + Presence; the target of the Charm reflexively resists with his Willpower. For every net success the Dragon-Blood achieves, the target will serve him as a loyal servant for one week; at the Storyteller's discretion the Exalted can extend that period by asking only minor or trivial tasks of the target.

If the Exalt achieves five or more successes, the target will serve him for the long term; characters swayed to serve the Exalted for the long term essentially become Henchmen. However, they do need to be treated well, or they may eventually overcome the effects of the Charm.

### Unbearable Taunt Technique

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Exalt's Essence in turns
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Presence:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** Glowing Coal Radiance

The Dragon-Blood becomes adept at getting another person's attention and, in so doing, making that person look foolish. In combat, this Charm can get the attention of an enemy within 20 yards. The target loses two dice from his dodge and parry dice pools when fighting anyone other than the Exalt who targeted him with this Charm due to distraction.

Unbearable Taunt Technique can also be used outside of combat, in which case a successful Manipulation + Presence roll and a suitably cutting comment are all that is needed to make the target look foolish in front of an assembled crowd. Obviously, the social use of this Charm may prove dangerous; the wise Dragon-Blooded is advised to use it sparingly — and only in front of a friendly crowd.

### Moth to the Candle

**Cost:** 4 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Presence:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Unbearable Taunt Technique

The character using this Charm becomes an irresistible target to the Charm's subject. The target of this Charm will cross through hazards and place himself into great danger in order to get off a hand-to-hand combat attack against the Exalt who uses it. The Dragon-Blood must spend the required Essence to activate this Charm; her target, who must be within 10 yards and have an Essence lower than the Exalts, must use his next action to approach the Exalted and attack her (if he can), regardless of the intervening hazard or the danger in doing so. Characters cannot be compelled to obvious suicide through the use of this Charm (they will not, for example, leap into a chasm), but they will attempt to cross damaging hazards such as fires and raging rivers to reach the Exalt.

## Socialize

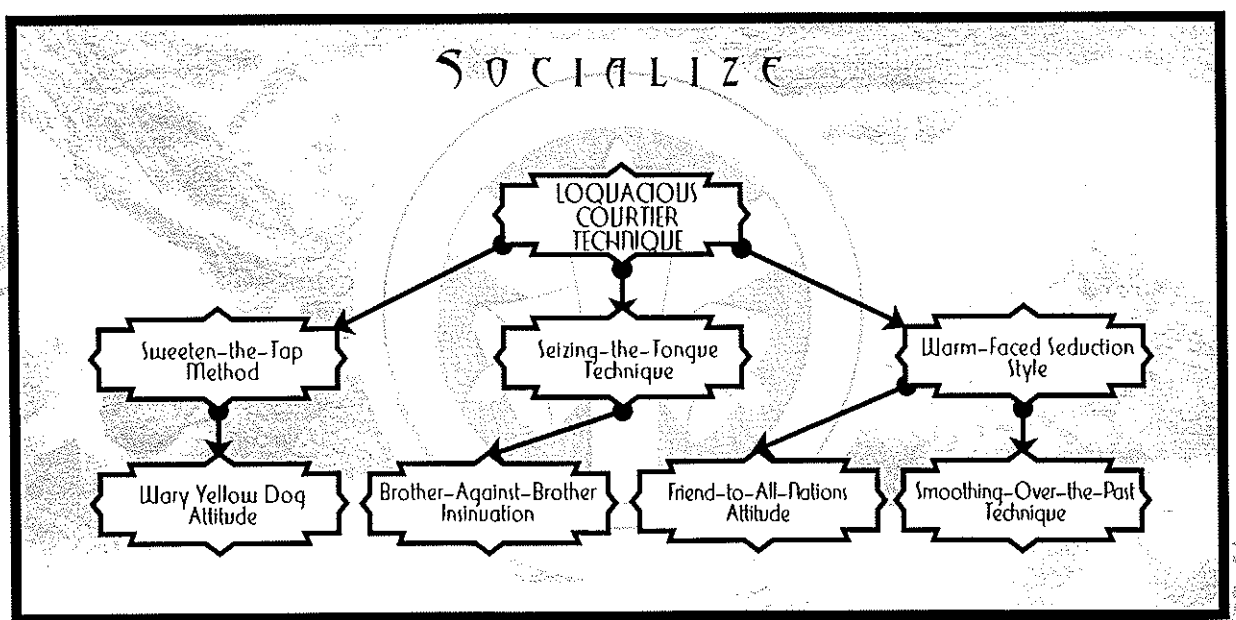
### Loquacious Courtier Technique

**Cost:** 1 mote per two dice
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Socialize:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The character's stories and idle chitchat become more entertaining to those around him. Her every turn of phrase becomes wittier, her every comment more topical. Mechanically, this Charm allows the character to add two dice to her Socialize Ability for the scene for every mote she spends; she can add no more dice than he has dots in Socialize.

### Sweeten-the-Tap Method

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Socialize:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** Loquacious Courtier Technique



Nearly any gathering of Terrestrial Exalted involves the consumption of alcohol, often in great quantity. A Dragon-Blood can use the Sweeten-the-Tap Method while near a quantity of alcohol — he expends a minimum of Essence, and the drink noticeably improves in quality, strength and taste. This will usually improve the general mood of the room, reducing by 1 the difficulty of all Socialize rolls for anyone present and imbibing for the rest of the evening. However, should anyone botch a Socialize roll during the rest of the scene, an overreaction is more likely to take place — possibly tempers will fray, or characters may make ill-advised seduction attempts. This side effect has no particular game mechanic; the Storyteller's judgment should be the guide.

### Wary Yellow Dog Attitude

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Socialize:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Sweeten-the-Tap Method

When the Dragon-Blooded who knows this Charm is caught in a social situation that unexpectedly turns violent, she can quickly focus. During an unexpected combat — that is to say, not a military battle or one that comes at the end of a search-and-destroy mission for some hinterlands monster — the character can add activate this Charm to add 3 to her Initiative roll. This Charm can only be used during the first three turns of an unexpected combat.

### Seizing-the-Tongue Technique

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Socialize:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Loquacious Courtier Technique

In a social situation, a quick-witted Dragon-Blooded can often nimbly step out of a verbal pit and reestablish the grounds of a conversation without giving offense to another party. By expending the necessary Essence, the Dragon-Blood's player can immediately reroll any Socialize roll. She must accept the second roll even if it is worse than the first, and she cannot spend additional Essence to make subsequent rerolls after the first. Additionally, if Seizing-the-Tongue Technique is part of any Combo, then Essence must be spent to reactivate all the other Charms in that Combo when the reroll takes place; if those Charms have separate dice rolls associated with them, they are not rerolled.

### Brother-Against-Brother Insinuation

**Cost:** 4 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Socialize:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Seizing-the-Tongue Technique

The personal connections between arrogant and aggressive beings such as the Dragon-Blooded are often tenuous; it barely takes a spark to destroy the connection between two such individuals for a short while.

To activate this Charm, both the target individual and the character she is to be set against must be present. The Exalt spends the necessary motes of Essence and makes a simple comment to one individual about the other — "I hear he's got plans that don't include you" or the like works well enough. That is sufficient to weaken the bonds of friendship or love between the two characters for the remainder of the scene. The characters' reaction to this conflict is up to the Storyteller, of course; it may be both parties stomping off to cool their heads or engaging in a vicious argument or even coming to blows.

Neither party immediately remembers the character who started the disagreement between them, though other parties present may notice the character's activity. When the scene is over, cooler heads prevail, and both characters remember the strength of their friendship. Unless something horrifically bad happened between the two (again, a matter for the Storyteller's discretion), they will return to their previous relationship.

When the Charm ends, the character who was the original target of the Charm may remember the Exalted's well-timed turn of phrase (requires a successful Intelligence + Socialize roll with a difficulty equal to the Manipulation of the Exalt who used this Charm). This Charm is well-known in the Realm, and those who use it in social situations can be brought up on charges or disgraced.

This Charm does not work if either target character has an Essence higher than that of the Exalt using the Charm.

### Warm-Faced Seduction Style

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Socialize:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Loquacious Courtier Technique

The Exalted coaxes the seductive aura of a flickering candle in the dark to coalesce around her face, and she briefly becomes far more attractive to a character that she is attempting to seduce. The Dragon-Blood who uses this Charm momentarily increases her Socialize dice pool by up to five dice, solely for the purpose of seducing the Charm's target. Warm-Faced Seduction Style cannot increase the character's Socialize Trait to more than double its base value.

### Friend-to-All-Nations Attitude

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Socialize:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Warm-Faced Seduction Style

The Dragon-Blooded with Friend-to-All-Nations Attitude finds herself to be equally at home on the Blessed Isle, in the Scavenger Lands or even in the barbaric reaches of the Wyld. While this Charm is active, the Exalt suffers no penalties to her Socialize Ability for being in a strange land, so long as she speaks the local tongue. If she does not, she may suffer a penalty at the Storyteller's discretion, but even so, that penalty will be relatively minor, as she instinctively knows all of the mores and basic manners of the culture into which she immerses herself.

Strangely, this Charm is somewhat less effective in melting-pot cultures such as Nexus, as the character picks up on cultural standards from several groups simultaneously. Thankfully, people in such melting pots are, on average, more tolerant of cultural differences, so the net effect of the Charm is the same.

### Smoothing-Over-the-Past Technique

**Cost:** 3 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Socialize:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Warm-Faced Seduction Style

This Charm enables the Dragon-Blood who uses it to cause a target's mind to temporarily skip over a past event involving the Exalted that would reflect poorly on the current discussion. That is to say, she makes the target forget about a single event in the past — an event that must have included the Exalt herself — just for the current scene. She can cause the target to forget about multiple events if she wishes, but that requires multiple uses of this Charm, just as with any other reflexive Charm.

When the scene is over, the target will be aware of what has happened to her, and she is likely to be quite unhappy about any bargains reached while she was not quite herself. That means that future uses of this Charm on the same individual will require the Exalt to first use the Charm to smooth over the target's memories of having been previously fooled through the use of Smoothing-Over-the-Past Technique. Covering up for careless use of this Charm can quickly become impossibly expensive in Essence.

This Charm does not work on characters whose Essence Traits are higher than that of the character using the Charm.

## Water

### Brawl

#### Drowning Embrace

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Brawl:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The victims of this Charm drown on dry land, locked into a fierce clinch with the Exalt. Survivors of the assault actually cough up water from their lungs. This Charm must be used in conjunction with a clinch attack against the target. The Dragon-Blooded's clinch does lethal rather than bashing damage. For each successive turn the clinch is maintained and this Charm is invoked, the clinch does an additional +1L damage. Stopping the use of this Charm for even a turn will reset the damage of the clinch to normal.

#### Riptide Method

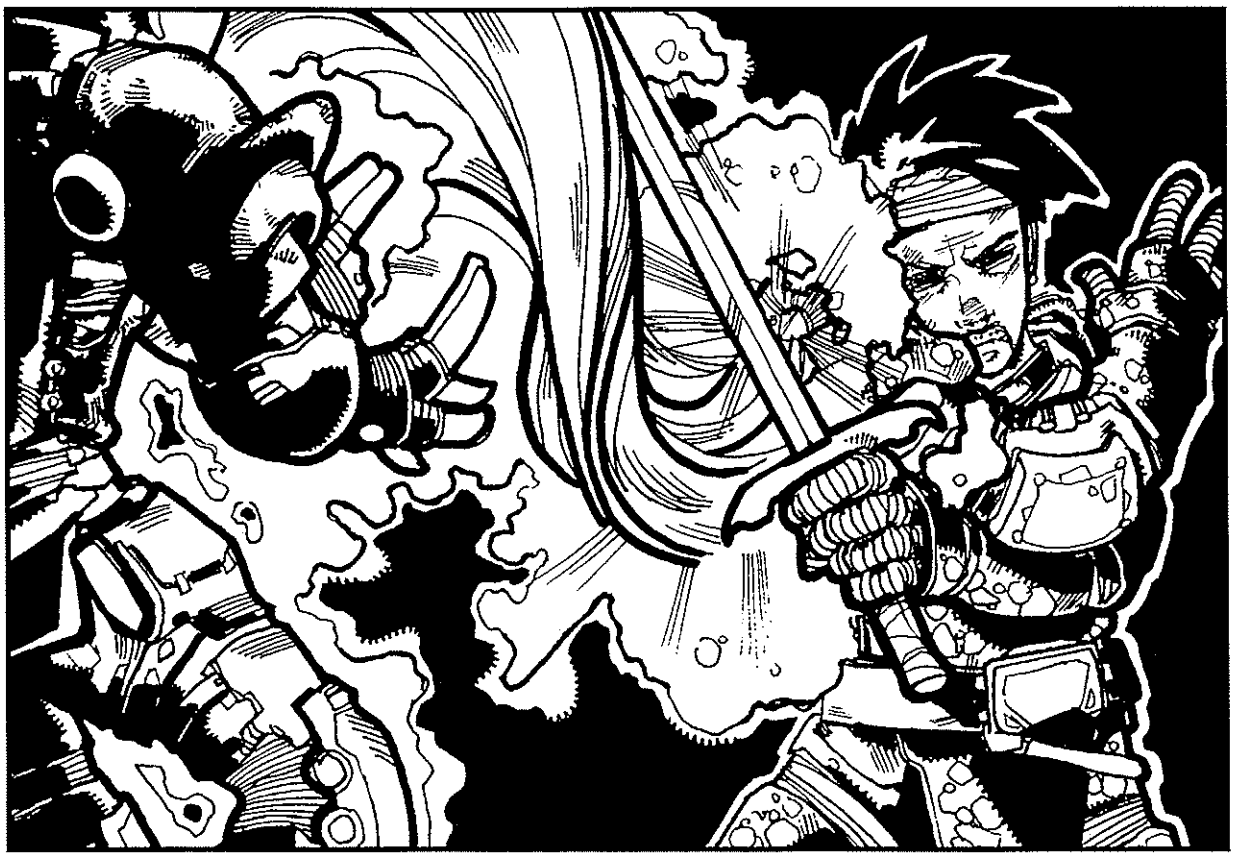
**Cost:** 1 mote per attack/foe
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Extra Action
**Minimum Brawl:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Drowning Embrace

A brawler using this Charm is capable of wrestling up to four opponents at once — theoretically, one for each limb, though combatants of particularly large girth may simply immobilize opponents with their bulk.

The Exalt's player makes Dexterity + Brawl rolls to initiate the attacks, which must be clinches or holds. Each attack costs a single mote, each must be made against a different target, and the Exalt may not make more than four such attacks. The targets may dodge or parry as normal, meaning that some may escape while others may not.

In subsequent turns, the Dragon-Blood may, after initiative is rolled but before anyone acts, spend Essence to keep this Charm active. Again, the cost is 1 mote per already-restrained victim per turn. If the character has less than four victims and others are still within reach, then on his action, he may pay more motes and attempt to put them in clinches or holds.

If the Exalt does not pay the motes of Essence each turn to maintain the assault, then he must let some of the grappled opponents free. The Dragon-Blood may not move while using this Charm after the initial assault — his victims must come to him.



### Pounding Surf Style

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Brawl:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** Drowning Embrace

Not even the Blessed Isle is immune to the inexorable power of water, as it is slowly shaped over the eons by the pounding of the waves. A Dragon-Blood emulates the repeated crashing of the surf with this style, wearing down the protection of his foe's armor with a flurry of blows. The Exalt makes a Brawl attack. Damage for the first such attack that lands ignores one point of the target's soak. If the character uses this Charm and strikes the target again later in the scene, each successive such blow ignores a an additional point of soak. Thus, on the second successful attack, the character would be at -2 soak, and on the third attack, -3. The target's armor is not physically damaged, just temporarily compromised to the benefit of the attacking Dragon-Blood — no other attackers gain this benefit, and the armor penalties do not last past the end of the scene.

### Fist-Spinning Maelstrom

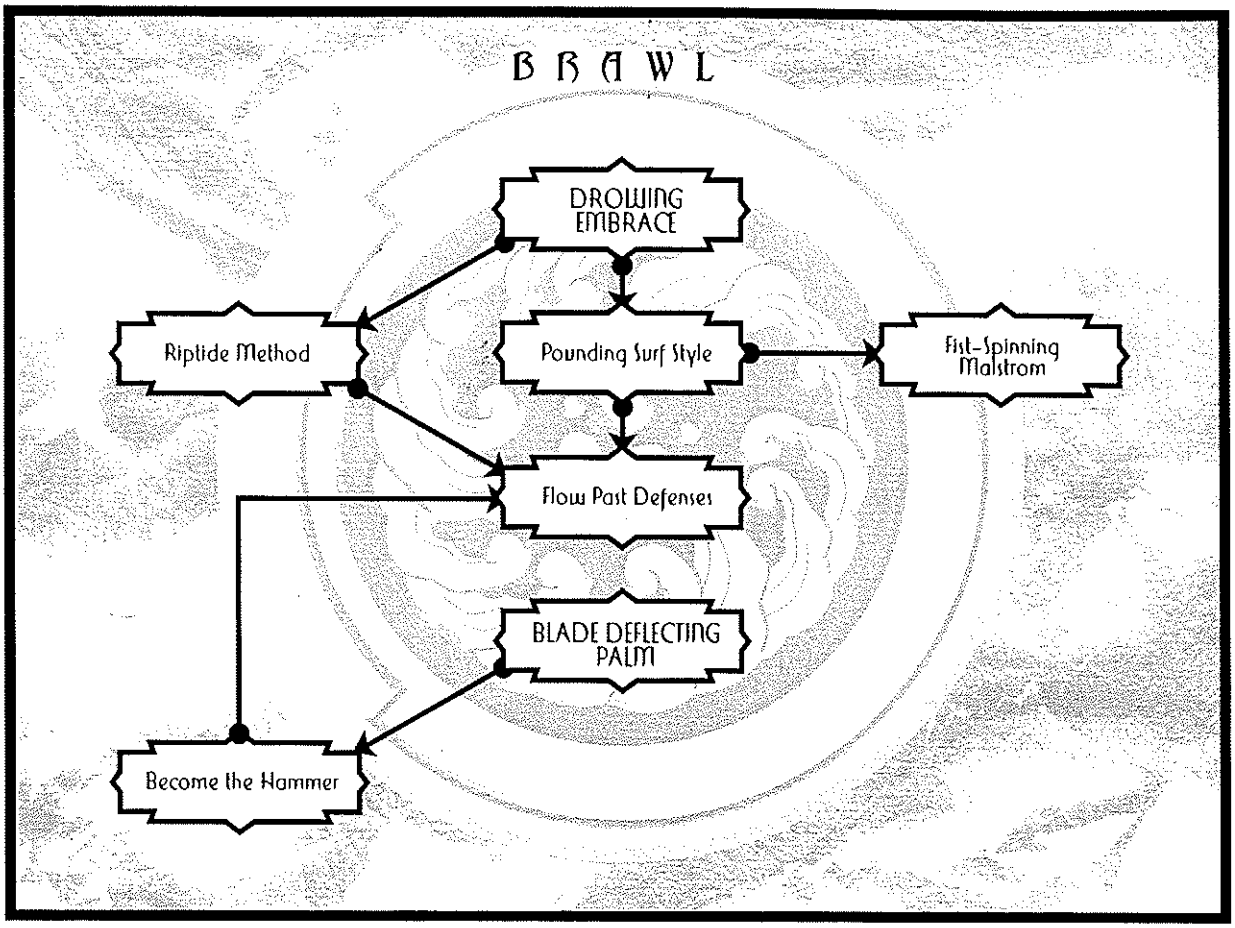
**Cost:** 2 motes per attack, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Extra Actions
**Minimum Brawl:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Pounding Surf Style

A Dragon-Blood using this Charm attacks her enemies to all sides with lightning-quick, accurate strikes. Each extra attack costs 2 motes. The Exalt must be facing multiple opponents, and she must attack each opponent at least once. She cannot launch more attacks in a turn than she has dots of Brawl.

### Blade-Deflecting Palm

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Brawl:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The average street brawler quickly falls back before any sharp pointy object waved at him. A true student of the art, however, can turn aside armed blows without dismay. Upon activating this Charm, the user may parry any incoming brawl, martial arts or melee attacks with his Brawl, including specialties, and with no penalty or harm for fighting unarmed.




### Become the Hammer

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Brawl:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Blade-Deflecting Palm

This Charm turns the Dragon-Blood's brawling strikes into deadly, crushing blows that are extremely difficult for an unarmed opponent to turn aside. A punch or kick delivered with this Charm does lethal damage rather than bashing and is treated as an attack with a weapon for the purpose of parrying. As usual, additional strikes made using this Charm during the same turn require that the Essence cost of the Charm be paid again.

### Flow Past Defenses

**Cost:** 2 motes + 1 mote each additional turn
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Brawl:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Riptide Method, Pounding Surf Style, Become the Hammer

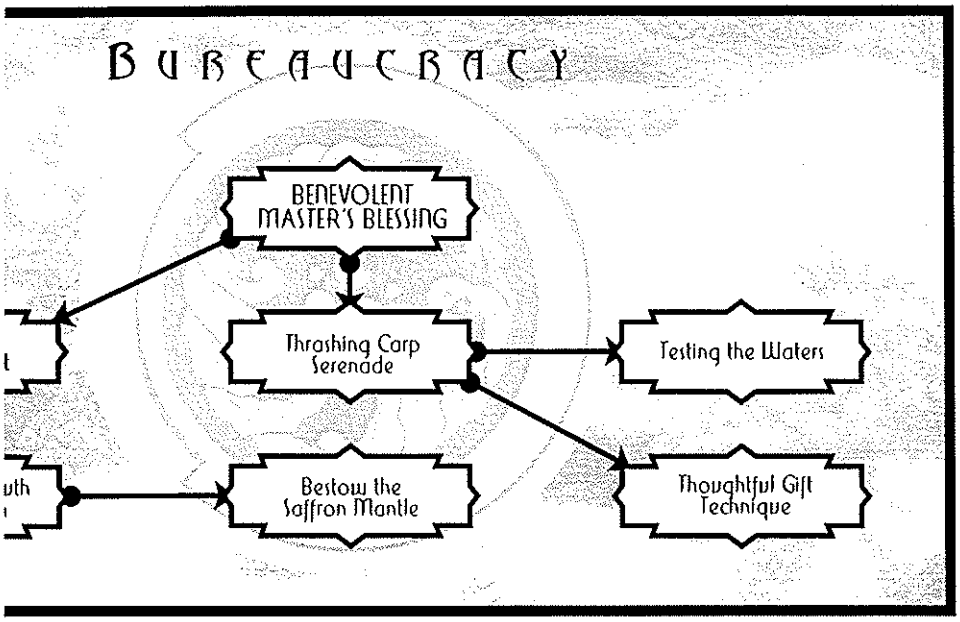
A master brawler unafraid to go toe to toe with a powerful enemy can use this Charm to aid her allies' attacks. While applying a hold to her foe, she exposes him to greater harm while keeping her own limbs more or less out of the way.

After the Exalt makes a successful hold attack, she may use her extra successes on that roll to reduce her enemy's lethal and bashing soak totals by that amount until her next action or until the enemy breaks the hold. The result may be maintained through additional turns by paying two additional motes. Once each turn the hold is maintained, the Dragon-Blood's player may roll her character's Essence. Every success on this roll further reduces the target's soak by a point. The Exalt is not normally harmed by attacks aimed at the held foe, although a botched attack may still injure her.

## Bureaucracy

### Benevolent Master's Blessing

**Cost:** 1 mote or 1 mote per two dice
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Bureaucracy:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None




Dragon-Blood administrator can
ın echo of his own innate grasp of
bureaucrat may grant one trusted
e per point of Essence spent. The
ı double her Bureaucracy, and the
Ability than he has.
1 mote of Essence, the Dynast may
en the soul-dead victims of the Fair
y help by splitting his Bureaucracy
; a maximum of one point to each.
supervision — the assistants will
annot find the Dragon-Blood to ask
ıarm fails. While supervising, the
y has no Bureaucracy, and can do
harges. Temporary assistants must
ɔ dots in Bureaucracy.

### ANT THOUGHT

2 motes
One scene
Simple
**acy:** 3
2
**s:** Benevolent Master's Blessing

ıcracy is the same everywhere —
ousehold or mercantile establish-
eddy in predictable patterns no
le the scale. An Exalt may use this
eaucracy around her and under-
ıd some specifics of its operation,
documents are kept or who is
ts of administration. This Charm
access to guarded or locked areas,
on-Blood to use her Bureaucracy

Ability in place of her Socialize Ability for purposes of dissembling about paperwork, permissions and passage.

### GEESE-FLYING-SOUTH ADMINISTRATION

**Cost:** 5 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One task
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Bureaucracy:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Confluence of Savant Thought

An administrator with this Charm can bend her entire bureaucratic apparatus to expedite a designated task: tax collection, troop recruitment or selling merchandise, for example. Her followers perform their duties exceptionally well for the duration of the task, serving with the utmost dedication. At the completion of the task, the Dragon-Blood reaps additional benefits. Monetary profits increase by one percent per success on an Intelligence + Bureaucracy roll. If the end result is goods rather than coin, the amount is increased by two percent per success. Conscription and other recruitment are improved by two percent per success on a Charisma + Bureaucracy roll. The Storyteller is responsible for determining the base result of any such endeavor, before the improvements granted by this Charm. These improvements are strictly magical and do not actually improve the bureaucracy in the long term.

### BESTOW THE SAFFRON MANTLE

**Cost:** 1 mote + 1 mote per dot lent
**Duration:** Special
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Bureaucracy:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Geese-Flying-South

This Charm is priceless to Dragon-Blooded who must el but cannot bear to leave their affairs in the hands of rs. Before leaving on a journey, a Dragon-Blood knowing Charm may designate a proxy to make decisions on his lf (most give a token of some kind, perhaps a seal, scroll rment). The designee administers precisely as the Exalt ld have were he present, making decisions and placing rces with her master's remarkable skill. Dusty legends lar only among scribes tell of assassinated Dynasts who h out from beyond the grave to wreak havoc on the affairs eir murders by way of their faithful servants.

The Charm is effective for a number of weeks equal to uccesses scored on a Perception + Bureaucracy roll, but exact duration is not obvious to either the proxy or the gon-Blooded, who must simply trust in his abilities. The gon-Blood may end the Charm sooner if he wishes. If he so, the committed Essence begins returning normally.

### RASHING CARP SERENADE

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Bureaucracy:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** Benevolent Master's Blessing

There is an art to impeding the flow of a bureaucracy. Thrashing Carp Serenade is only the beginning of that By means of this Charm, an Exalt may slow administrative and productive deliberation in the area within the sound s voice to a near standstill. In order to make any progress, layer of the opposing bureaucrat must best the wielder of Charm's player in an opposed Stamina + Bureaucracy Any Water-aspected novice can hold a roomful of aged es at bay, but only the experienced or rash use this nique in an august body such as the Deliberative.

### OUGHTFUL GIFT TECHNIQUE

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Bureaucracy:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Thrashing Carp Serenade

Presenting an appropriate gift can take the edge off an mfortable social gathering or gain favors and access would otherwise seem unattainable. Using this Charm, agon-Blood intuits what would make the perfect gift, for ic presentation, or the perfect bribe, for private deal- Specifying gift or bribe, the Exalt's player rolls Perception reaucracy. The Exalt must know the intended recipi- knowing him by reputation raises the difficulty of the by 2. This Charm does not provide the gift — or even access to it — it merely provides the information. The ish administrators of the tributary lands may be fondest of gifts of wealth, but the nuanced tastes of the Dynasts may require that the would-be gift-giver acquire unusual items such as a lock of hair from a vain rival or a sapphire exactly the color of a favored mistress's eyes.

### TESTING THE WATERS

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Bureaucracy:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Thrashing Carp Serenade

The quickest path to disaster for a political gambit is to call a vote before knowing how the votes will fall. Armed with this Charm, a master bureaucrat can safely avoid that pitfall. With but a moment's consideration, the Exalt knows how many votes yea, nay or abstaining would result should the matter under discussion be called to a vote. It does not reveal by whom the votes would be cast. The Dragon-Blooded do not only use this Charm to pass their own agendas. They also hurry their rivals' plans to failure or simply judge where their vote will bring the highest price. Note that this Charm can only be used on groups of seven or more; it simply fails if used on a smaller group.

## INVESTIGATION

### INDISPUTABLE PHYSICAL ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

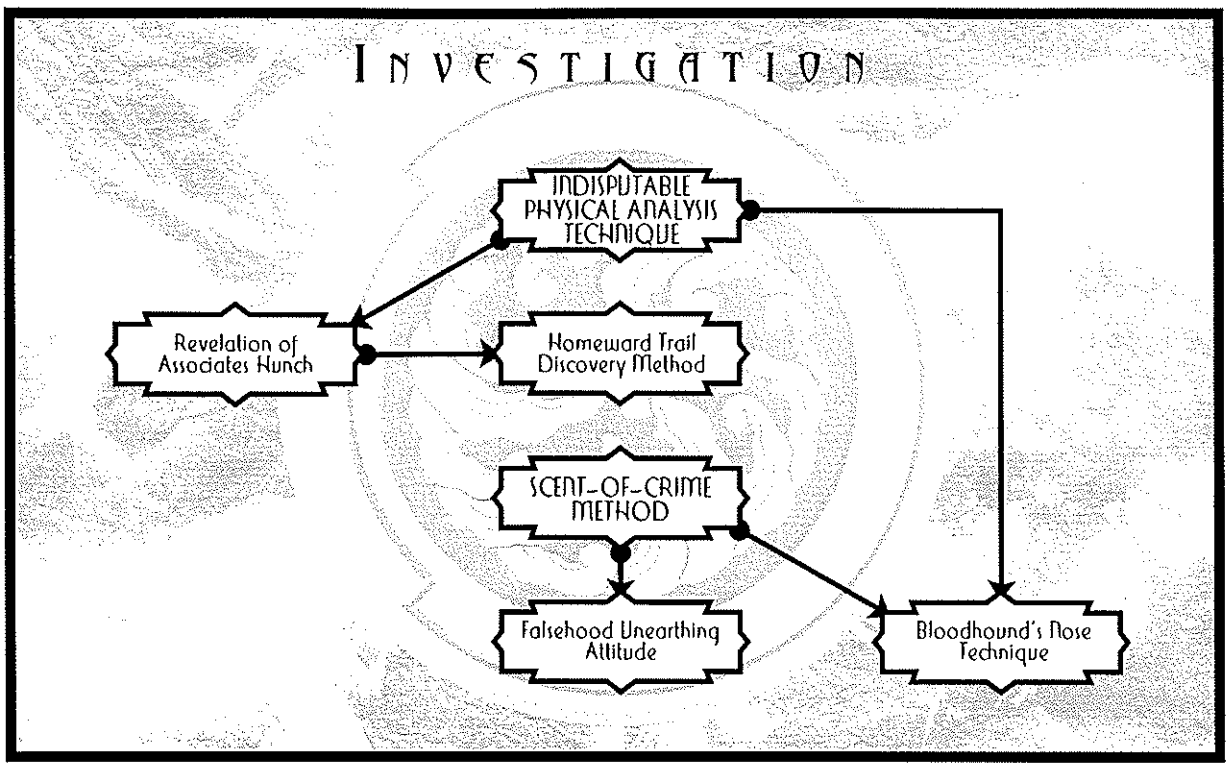
**Cost:** 1 mote per two dice
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Investigation:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The magistrate or investigator with this Charm learns the myriad ways of the criminal; his eye is better able to connect seemingly disparate clues, and his intuition greatly improves. The character can improve his Investigation dice pool by two dice for every mote of Essence spent. The character cannot do more than double his Investigation Trait with this Charm, and he must pay the full motes of Essence even if he needs to raise a Trait by only one die.

### SCENT-OF-CRIME METHOD

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Investigation:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

A good investigator quickly learns to discern the nervous habits, tics and mannerisms of people suffering under a load of guilt. Since most guilt is associated with a crime, the character becomes better able to discover a criminal among a group of people. After spending Essence, the character's




player should make a Manipulation + Investigation roll. A success here will point the investigator to the character within eyesight currently suffering from the greatest load of guilt. This is purely subjective, of course, and mostly left in the hands of the Storyteller. Additionally, characters who commit heinous crimes without a shred of conscience might feel no guilt whatsoever from the acts they perform, making this Charm useless in finding them.

### Falsehood Unearthing Attitude

**Cost:** 5 motes + 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Investigation:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Scent-of-Crime Method

The Exalted's ability to sense dishonesty finally reaches supernatural levels when he learns this Charm. With it, he can ferret out false statements in conversation, helping him find the truth of a situation. This Charm does not detect evasions or half-truths; it only points out statements that the speaker knows to be false. The Exalted must pick a target and spend the Essence and Willpower necessary to activate this Charm; for the rest of the scene, falsehoods spoken by that target will trigger a tingling sensation on the back of the character's neck. If the target is aware of the scrutiny he is under, he may conceal lies by spending 1 point of Willpower per statement. This Charm has no effect if the target's permanent Essence is equal to or higher than the Essence of the Exalt using this Charm.

### Bloodhound's Nose Technique

**Cost:** 6 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Investigation:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Indisputable Physical Analysis Technique, Scent-of-Crime Method

The Exalted spends around 10 minutes walking around the scene of a crime (or any event he wishes to investigate); his player must then make an ordinary Investigation roll for the Dynast to find ordinary pieces of evidence (footprints, stray hairs, blood, etc.). This Charm uses a touch of sympathetic magic to trace that evidence back to its creator. Roll Intelligence + Investigation after spending the necessary Essence to activate the Charm. With one success, the character receives an impulse — a mild tugging — that pulls him in the direction of the culprit. With three or more successes, the character receives that impulse along with a fleeting glimpse of the culprit as he appeared at the time of the crime.

### Revelation of Associates Hunch

**Cost:** 4 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Investigation:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Indisputable Physical Analysis Method

By simply meeting a person and coming within a few yards of him, the Exalted can sense the identities of his closest associates. Typically, these will be the character's family members, business associates and members of any sworn brotherhoods the Exalt belongs to, but they can also be characters delineated by certain Backgrounds. Roll Perception + Investigation; every success gives the name and one-sentence description of two of the target's compatriots or servants. Even if the roll fails, the Dragon-Blood will still learn information about one of the target's associates. Associates are revealed in roughly the following order: family members, members of sworn brotherhoods, allies, mentors, connections, henchmen; the Storyteller can change that order as he sees fit.

### Homeward Trail Discovery Method

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Investigation:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Revelation of Associates Hunch |

By simply meeting a person and coming within a few yards of him, the Exalted can determine the place that the person calls home. Usually, this is the character's primary residence, but in the case of the Dragon-Blooded, who might have several residences, it is the place that the subject truly considers to be his home. If the subject has any dots in the Manse Background, the Charm is almost certain to point directly at his Manse of primary residence. If the subject or one of his allies is a sorcerer, his home may be warded against such divinations. In that case, this Charm will point to another of the character's residences. The Charm will only identify a building, not a particular apartment or room within that building — and in the case of longtime travelers or the impoverished, the Charm will simply indicate that the subject has no true home.

## Larceny

### Observer Awareness Method

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Reflexive |
| **Minimum Larceny:** | 2 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

This simple Charm allows a Dragon-Blood to know if he is being observed. It was developed in the days before the Realm proper, when it was conceivable that one of the noble Terrestrial Exalted could act in a criminal capacity. In these dangerous days, the Charm sees use among those Exalted who might act as spies or who wish to speak to a confidante unobserved. Simply spend the



necessary Essence and roll Perception + Larceny; a single success tells the Exalted whether he is being observed. Each additional success points out the location of an observer, starting with the closest.

### Trackless Walk Style

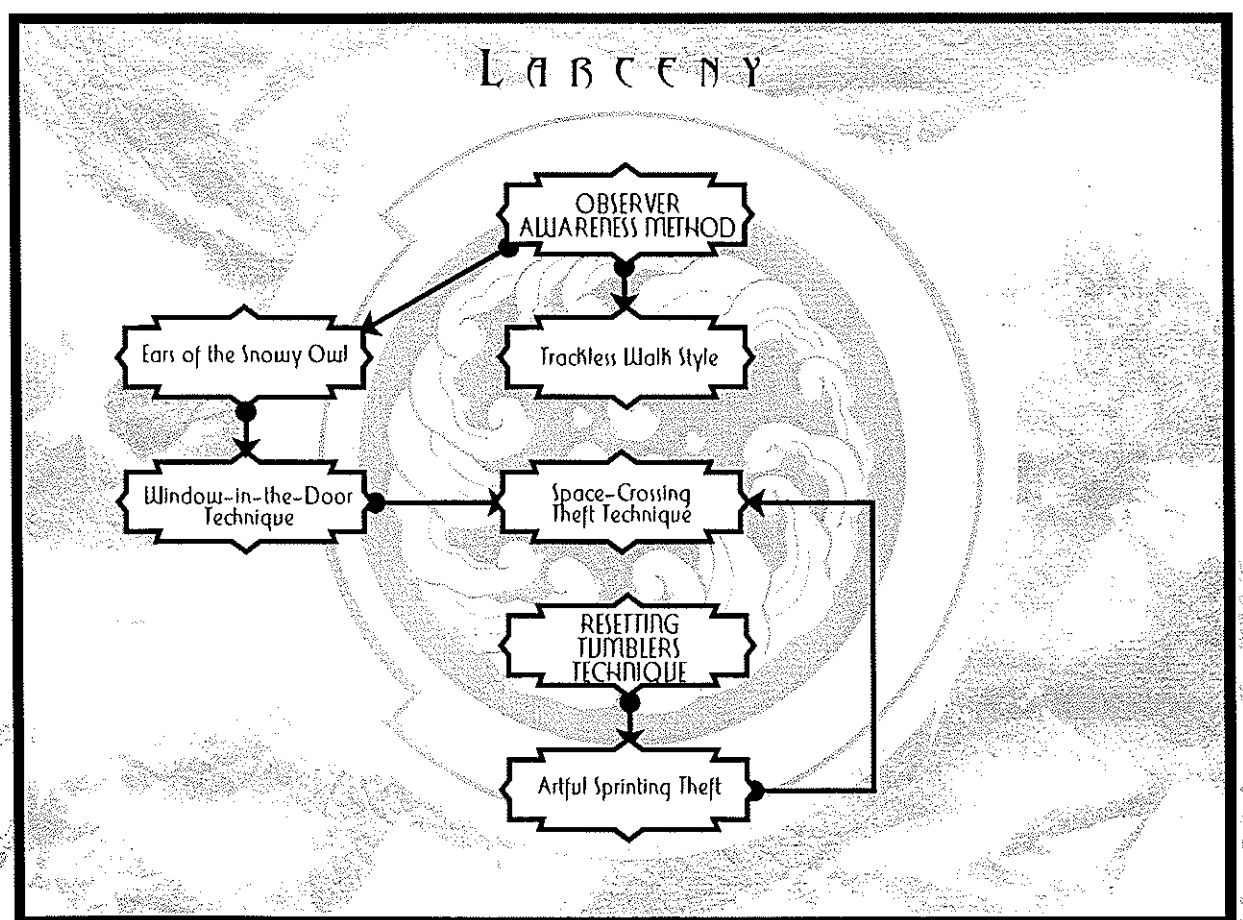
**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Larceny:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Observer Awareness Method

The greatest spies and thieves of the Realm know that the best way to avoid detection in their efforts is to leave as little evidence as possible of their passing. However, those spies and thieves know full well that the most talented magistrates and house investigators can learn a great deal from a trace as innocuous as a single hair. By activating this Charm as he enters a location, a Dragon-Blood prevents himself from leaving inadvertent evidence. This Charm does *not* prevent the character from being observed; it merely prevents him from leaving behind clues to his identity, such as footprints. Also, this Charm does not prevent the character from deliberately leaving behind evidence of his presence (if, for instance, he is a romantic master thief and always leaves a rose at the scene of a crime, this Charm does not prevent him from doing so). Characters using this Charm cannot be tracked except by supernatural means, but the Charm's short duration means that it is an expensive way to conceal ones passage for a long while.

### Ears of the Snowy Owl

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** One minute
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Larceny:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Observer Awareness Method

This Charm, quite useful when sneaking about in places one shouldn't be, allows a character to hear conversations and movement in other rooms as clearly as if the walls between him and those spaces weren't there. By spending the necessary Essence in conjunction with a listen-oriented Perception roll, the player can eliminate any penalties to that roll that might come as a function of obstacles between his character and the thing he's listening to. The Charm does not eliminate penalties due to distance, just physical obstructions.



### Window-in-the-Door Technique

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Larceny:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Ears of the Snowy Owl

Many a time has come when a mortal thief or spy has wished for the ability to see what lies beyond a doorway or inside a chest without risking the opening of a latch or lock. Spies among the Terrestrial Exalted do not merely wish for this ability; this Charm allows them to do precisely that. The character simply spends the necessary Essence, and an area roughly two feet square before his eyes becomes transparent. That area doesn't move — once the character has used this Charm, the area that was in front of him when he spent the Essence remains transparent to him for a full turn. The Dragon-Blood can only see through about a three-inch thickness of stone — perhaps twice that of wood and half that much iron or jade. The material is only transparent to the Exalted using this Charm; others cannot see through it. Walls, doors and containers can be enchanted to prevent this kind of voyeurism.

### Resetting Tumblers Technique

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Larceny:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

With this ability, the Exalted can immediately discard a failed break-in attempt or other Larceny action and try at once to remedy the situation. A player may spend the required Essence and then immediately reroll the dice pool for the most recent Larceny action his character performed; this must take place right after the roll is made and before the Storyteller describes its success or failure. The Exalted must accept the result of the second dice roll, even if it is worse than the first one. Additionally, if the Larceny action and this Charm are part of a Combo, then using the Charm forces the Exalted to re-spend all of the necessary Essence to activate the other Charms in the Combo, even if he does not need to reroll or reactivate them.

### Artful Sprinting Theft

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Larceny:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Resetting Tumblers Technique

The occasional orphaned Dragon-Blood on the streets of hinterland cities such as Nexus might grow up to learn this Charm; ordinarily, noble Terrestrials of the Realm will have nothing to do with it, save possibly for its application to later Charms. Ordinarily, even the simplest Larceny actions — pocket-picking and bag-snatching — require the character to slow down slightly, using only half of his maximum movement (which would be his Dexterity + 12 yards) on the turn he uses Larceny. With this Charm, the character may use his full dice pool on a simple Larceny action (one that would ordinarily take just one turn) while running flat-out. The action can take place at the beginning, middle or end of this movement.

### Space-Crossing Theft Technique

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Larceny:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Window-in-the-Door Technique, Artful Sprinting Theft

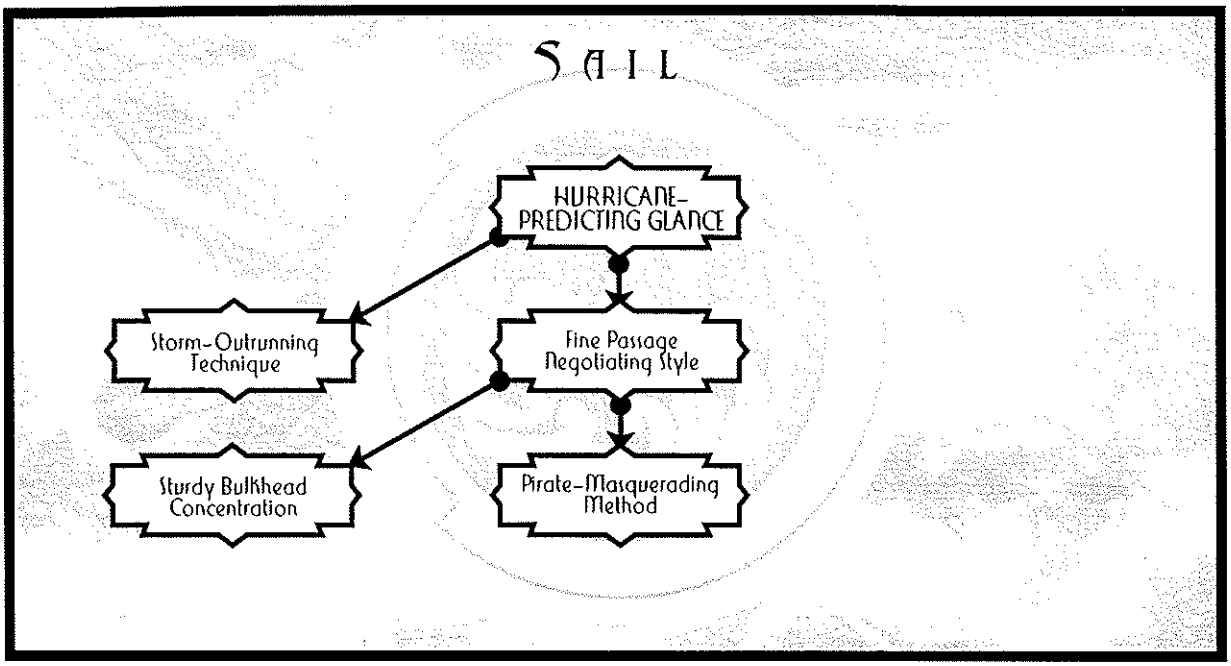
With this Charm, the Exalted can cause an object to disappear from its current location and reappear in his hands without crossing the intervening space. The character must be able to see the object clearly — if it is within a locked chest, he must use Window-In-The-Door Technique (see above) to see it before he can use Space-Crossing Theft Technique to grab it. However, if he can see it, he only needs to expend the Essence and off it goes, as long as it weighs less than about 15 pounds (the Storyteller's judgment is final as to what can be taken and what can't). This Charm does not work on items held by a sentient being (a mortal, Exalted or spirit), but it will work on items they are merely wearing: the Exalted could snatch a sheathed sword but not a sword in a foe's hand.

## Sail

### Hurricane-Predicting Glance

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Sail:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

With a look at the sky, the Exalted can predict the weather for the next day or so; his empathy with the currents of the ocean and air give him real prescience regarding the weather. The Charm will fail if the local weather is changing in response to a magical event or sorcery; this Charm only describes to the character




what the natural weather will be if nothing unusual takes place. Perceptive Dragon-Blooded can sometimes use this Charm to predict events other than the weather: If, for instance, Admiral Potan's fleet is preparing to sail on a rebellious prefecture as soon as a storm breaks, the user of this Charm can predict exactly when they will set sail. And impossibly heavy clouds appearing out of clear blue skies might be a harbinger of an impending volcanic eruption. This Charm only works when the character is on the water; it fails when the Exalted's feet are on land.

### Storm-Outrunning Technique

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Sail:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Hurricane-Predicting Glance

When time is of the essence and getting a ship into safe harbor is more important than the crew's rest and safety, a captain or pilot with Storm-Outrunning Technique is essential to survival and success. This Charm allows a ship's officer to double that ship's rate of movement for the current scene. This may enable a small ship to beat an enemy fleet to a friendly port, giving the city some warning; it may let a ship beat a storm to safety; or it may let a crew of merchants beat a rival to a choice port. To activate the Charm, the Exalt need only spend the necessary Essence. The greatly increased speed may require one or more Sail rolls, especially if the ship cruises through hazardous waters at double normal velocity. Also, note that if this Charm is used from the deck of a becalmed sailing ship it will have no effect, as a speed of zero, when doubled, remains zero.

### Fine Passage Negotiating Style

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Sail:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Hurricane Predicting Glance

The finest captains and pilots can thread their ships through the most dangerous patches of sea, avoiding submerged hazards with flair and panache. This Charm is the source of more than one pilot's reputation. With it, an Exalt gains an instinctive knowledge of any submerged hazards within five miles of the ship's current location, as well as the prevailing current, danger spots and safe channels in the same radius. The net effect of this knowledge is that the pilot's Sail dice pool improves by three dice for the remainder of the scene for the purpose of avoiding hazards. This Charm does not directly protect the ship from such hazards: If the pilot makes a bad mistake, the hull might still be rent asunder. It also does not give its user any special awareness of the activities of other characters: It cannot point out an ambush in a narrow passage or the impending arrival of an enemy vessel.

### Sturdy Bulkhead Concentration

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Sail:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Fine Passage Negotiating Style

A Charm favored by Wood-aspected sailors, Sturdy Bulkhead Concentration enhances the strength of a ship's hull without making it heavier. When this Charm is active, the hull gains three additional health levels and 2 additional soak. The benefit only remains as long as the Exalted who activated the Charm remains aboard the vessel. To activate the Charm, the character needs only to spend the necessary Essence while aboard the ship.

### Pirate-Masquerading Method

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Sail:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Fine Passage Negotiating Style

Whenever a ship under the command of a Dragon-Blooded with this Charm comes into contact with hostile ships of any stripe, it is temporarily camouflaged as a ship of that allegiance: The ship appears to be a merchantman to those aboard merchantmen; it looks as a pirate ship does to pirates; and so on. The Charm is largely a visual illusion — the vessel's flag changes its appearance, and the crew appears, from a distance, to be the appropriate sort of crew for a ship of its type. The Charm does not change the line of the ship itself, so one cannot, for instance, hide an imperial dreadnought among fishing smacks and expect to go unnoticed. The Charm also fails should any viewer set foot upon the ship; visitors and raiders see the ship as it really is, once they are aboard it.

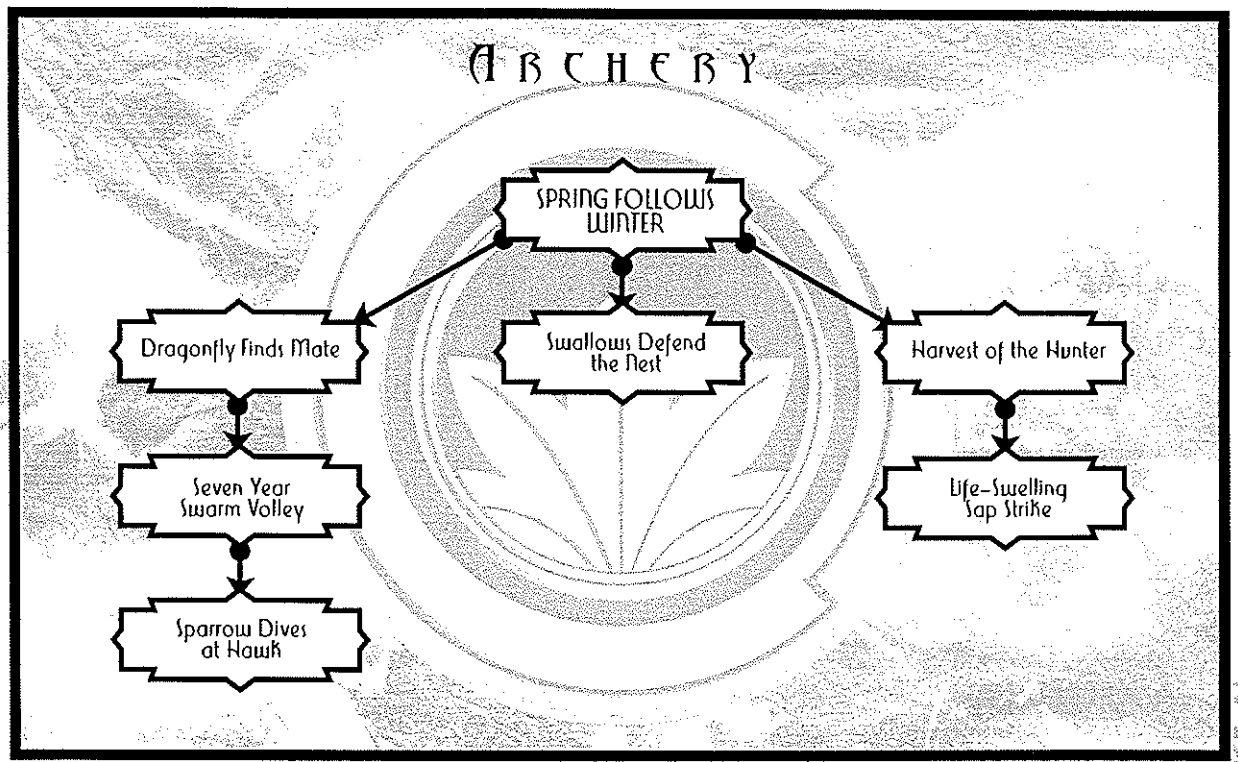
# Wood

## Archery

### Spring Follows Winter

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Archery:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

Just as green leaves will bloom after the harshest winter, so a Dragon-Blood with this Charm will always strike her target. After spending the 2 motes of Essence, the archer's player may reroll the character's Dexterity + Archery completely. She must accept the second result. If this Charm is included in a Combo, the Essence cost for all other incorporated Charms must be paid again as if for a second shot, but only one (hopefully accurate) arrow is actually fired.



### Swallows Defend the Nest

**Cost:** 1 mote per arrow
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Extra Actions
**Minimum Archery:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Spring Follows Winter

The physical limitations of wood and sinew are overcome by this Charm, allowing the Exalted archer to launch a flurry of arrows at his foe. Each arrow fired after the first costs 1 mote of Essence, but is fired using the archer's full dice pool. The Dragon-Blood is limited to firing his permanent Essence rating in arrows per turn, and he may not split his dice pool for extra actions.

### Harvest of the Hunter

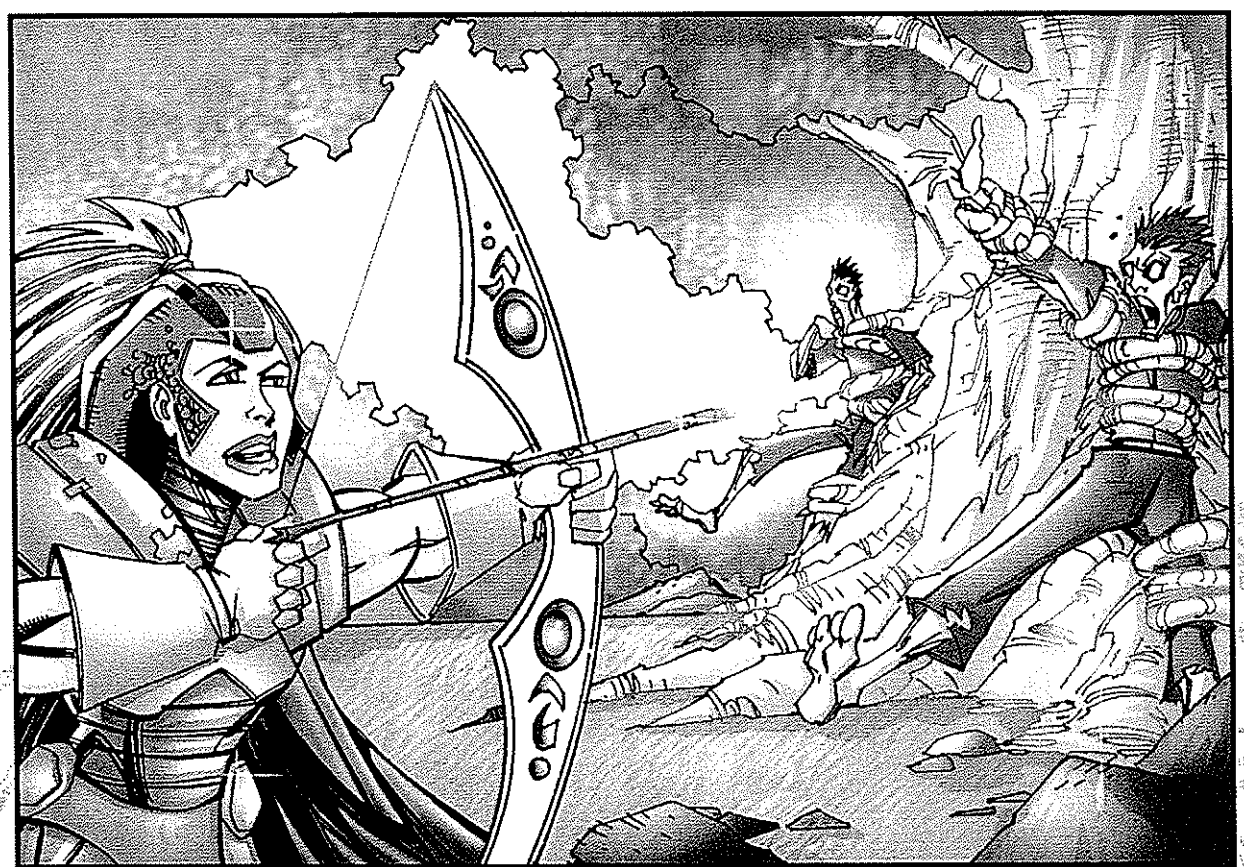
**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Archery:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Spring Follows Winter

A Wood-aspected Dragon-Blood may go to hunt with an empty quiver yet never lack for arrows. Anything that grows will yield up appropriate ammunition to the archer's gathering hands. The chosen plant — even something as odd as a desert cactus or a marsh reed — sprouts a number of arrows equal to the Exalt's permanent Essence in response to her desires. The archer may specify the type of arrow she desires, and the arrows may be shared with others — they are perfectly normal (if often somewhat odd-looking) arrows.

### Life-Swelling Sap Strike

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Archery:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Harvest of the Hunter

In the hands of the Dragon-Blooded, an arrow is not merely a pointy stick — it is a extension of the living tree from which it came, and as such, it is inimical to the undead. As soon as it is fired from the bow, an arrow imbued with this Charm begins to bolt leaves (without interfering with the arrow's flight). Upon striking an undead creature, it erupts into full bloom, wrapping the foul creature in blossoms and leaves and causing aggravated, rather than lethal, damage. This Charm has no effect on living creatures. The Charm has no effect on the Abyssals and their Deathlord masters, but it is as effective on materialized ghosts and nemissaries as it is on hungry ghosts and the walking dead.



### Dragonfly Finds Mate

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Archery:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Spring Follows Winter

Dragon-Blooded students of the bow have learned, through hard practice, to track the expected path of a projectile. Using this Charm, an Exalt at the sharp end of an arrow's flight may attempt to turn it aside before impact with a missile of his own. If the attempt's Dexterity + Archery total, including any penalties for multiple actions, equals or exceeds the attacker's successes, the incoming missile is deflected. A partial parry is not possible; this is an all or nothing attempt. Not just arrows, but any projectile may be turned aside, including knives, axes, chamber pots, shoes and other oddments.

### Seven-Year Swarm Volley

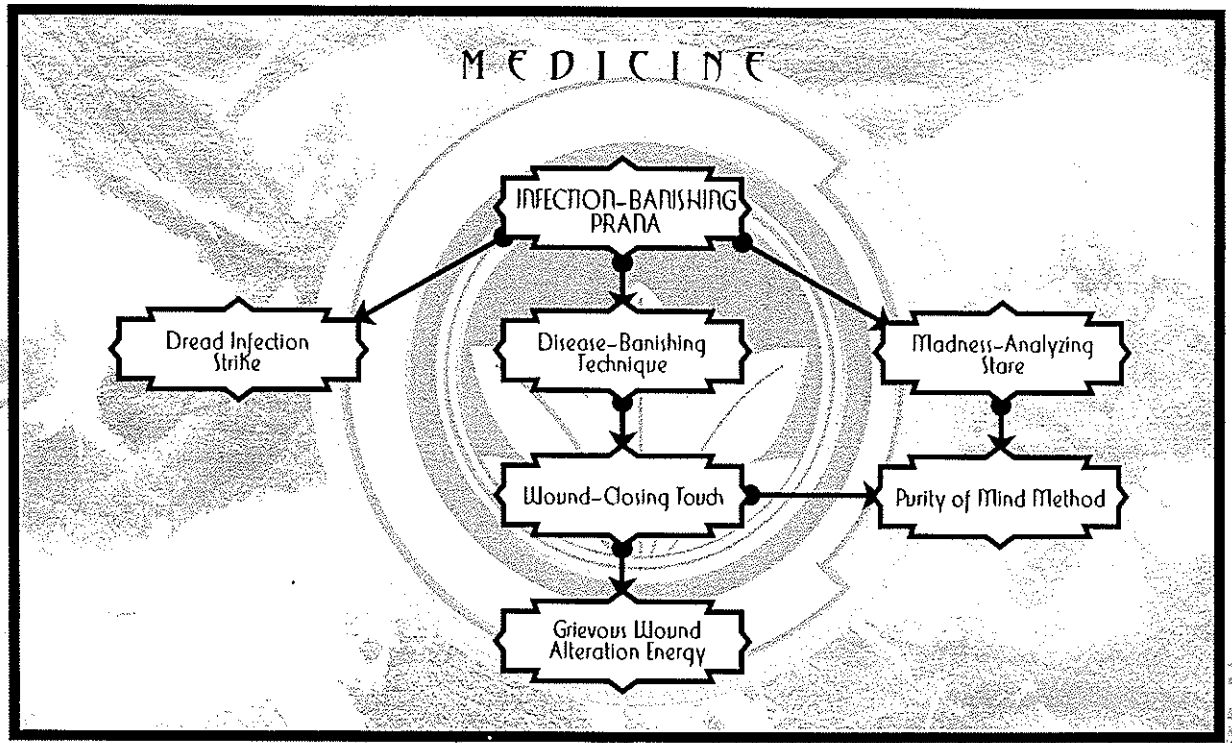
**Cost:** 3 motes, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per person defended
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Archery:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Dragonfly Finds Mate

An Exalt with this Charm is now a master of the arrow's flight. By filling the sky above her allies with a barrage of arrows, the archer may defend her companions from ranged attacks. The archer must have and fire two arrows per protected ally, which can include himself. The character's player then makes a Dexterity + Archery roll. Until the character's next action, compare any ranged attack against a protected character to the result of this Dexterity + Archery roll. If the number of successes equals or exceeds those generated by the attacker, the attack is foiled. If it is less, the successes subtract from the attack as the missile is turned aside. The Exalted archer may not split her dice pool or take any other actions during the time she protects her allies, or the protection ends immediately.

### Sparrow Dives at Hawk

**Cost:** 5 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Archery:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Seven-Year Swarm Volley

Using this Charm, a Dragon-Blooded archer may imbue an arrow fired from his bow with enough Essence and will that it will turn aside any assault within the range of his bow. The archer's player rolls Dexterity + Archery; successes on this roll subtract from the successes of the attack the archer is attempting to deflect. If the archer exceeds the attacker's successes, immediately apply the remaining successes as an archery attack against the character who launched the assault against which the Exalt is defending. The archer may not use any other Charms during the turn in which he executes Sparrow Dives at



Hawk; although the action is complete in the blink of an eye, it requires intense spiritual concentration.

## Medicine

### Infection-Banishing Prana

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Medicine:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

Nearly any Exalted with the Medicine Ability can tell at a glance whether a wound has been infected. Infections rarely strike the Exalted themselves, but their servants, henchmen and bodyguards often suffer from such maladies in the hours and days following battle. Regardless of the nature of the character suffering from infection, Dragon-Blooded with this Charm can remove the infection with just a touch and the expenditure of a mote of Essence. Removing the infection does not eliminate damage already done, but it removes the source of infection and prevents it from recurring to this injury — even if the Charm's subject does something foolish, like enter the sewers of Nexus with an open wound. So long as the wound has been treated with Infection Banishing Prana, it will not become infected. Note that Infection Banishing Prana only works on infections caused by physical injury; ordinary and magical plagues are unaffected by it.

### Dread Infection Strike

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Medicine:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Infection-Banishing Prana

The character's knowledge of the medicinal arts and the sources of infection has grown to such levels that he can magically infect his own weapon as he strikes; if he does at least one lethal wound to the target, the wound is much more likely to become infected. The difficulty of the Stamina + Resistance roll to avoid infection from the attack goes up by +2, even for Exalted. Frequent use of this Charm is sure to win the character enemies, as there is no more hated weapon than disease. The Essence must be spent to activate this Charm before the character makes his attack roll, and if the attack does not do at least one lethal wound, the Essence is wasted. This Charm can explicitly be used in a Combo with Charms of other Abilities.

### Disease-Banishing Technique

**Cost:** 4 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Medicine:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Infection-Banishing Prana

With this technique, the Dragon-Blood becomes like a healer out of legend. He can remove all but the most powerful magical plagues from his allies with a touch of his hand. The Exalt must make an ordinary diagnosis with his Medicine Ability at some time before using Disease-Banishing Technique, as it is necessary to know what plague it is the character intends to eliminate. If the diagnosis roll is successful, however, then the simple expenditure of a few seconds' time, the touch of the Exalted's hand and the expenditure of the necessary Essence combine to violently purge the disease from the subject's body. The subject is likely to convulse and expel some foul substance from her mouth and nose as this Charm takes effect, costing her his next turn if one had been available. Should the subject suffer from multiple plagues — a terrible fate indeed! — then this Charm must be used multiple times. Disease-Banishing Technique does work on battlefield infection — however, Infection-Banishing Prana is a far more effective tool for such things. This Charm, like so much other magic, is powerless against the Great Contagion.

### Wound-Closing Touch

**Cost:** 2 motes per health level converted, plus 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Medicine:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Disease-Banishing Technique

With this simple Charm, the Exalted can rapidly close open and bleeding wounds on his body, allowing himself to heal those wounds far more quickly than a mortal could. The Charm leaves only bruises and sprains behind, rather than life-threatening injury. So long as at least 1 mote of Essence is spent, any bleeding wounds automatically close. In addition, every 2 motes of Essence spent turns one lethal wound level into a bashing wound level instead. The character does not have to convert all of his lethal wounds into bashing wounds if he does not wish to do so. This Charm can also be used on other characters.

### Grievous Wound Alteration Energy

**Cost:** 3 motes and 1 Willpower per health level converted
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Medicine:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Wound-Closing Touch

This complex Charm allows the Exalted to turn truly horrific injuries, such as those inflicted by supernatural sources, into mere lacerations and broken bones. By spending 3 motes of Essence, he can convert an aggravated wound level into a lethal wound level. The Dragon-Blooded does not have to convert all of his aggravated wounds to lethal wounds if he does not wish to do so or cannot afford the Essence. This Charm also automatically closes any bleeding wounds from which the character suffers. Aggravated wounds converted to lethal wounds with this Charm can later be converted to bashing wounds with Wound-Closing Touch, above. This Charm can also be used on other characters.

### Madness-Analyzing Stare

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Medicine:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Infection-Banishing Prana

This Charm allows a Dragon-Blood to analyze another character and see what external influences there are over his mind; this includes low-Willpower compulsions, mind-affecting sorcery or Charms and/or derangements. A Perception + Medicine roll is called for here, with a difficulty of 2. Should this roll be successful, the Exalt can detect any external influences on the target. With four or more successes, she can trace magical influences backward to their source. The Exalted cannot use this Charm on herself, as one's mind often proves too nimble for cogent self-analysis. This Charm cannot diagnose or help in the treatment of the Great Curse.

### Purity of Mind Method

**Cost:** 5 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Medicine:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Wound-Closing Touch, Madness-Analyzing Method

With a strike of the palm and a touch of the lips, an Exalted with this level of mastery over the medicinal arts



can remove the pain of insanity or external influence from the Charm's subject. The Dragon-Blood must have first used Madness-Analyzing Stare to learn the source of the subject's mental problems — whether it be madness, compulsion or sorcerous meddling. This Charm must be used repeatedly if its subject suffers from multiple sources of mental influence. Purity of Mind Method works to counteract only sorcery spells of instant duration — ones whose effects are still ongoing must be targeted with Emerald Countermagic. Like Madness-Analyzing Stare, this Charm is powerless in the face of the Great Curse.

## Performance

### Memorable Performance Technique

**Cost:** 1 mote per two dice
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Performance:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The Exalt can call upon her own Essence to draw truly outstanding performances from within. Whether the performance is music, theater or another performing art, the character enhances her talent with this Charm. The character can add two dice to her Performance dice pool for every mote of Essence spent. She can no more than double her Performance Ability with this Charm, and if she wishes to add just a single die (for example, if she has an odd Performance score) she must spend a full mote to get it.

### Talented Improvisation

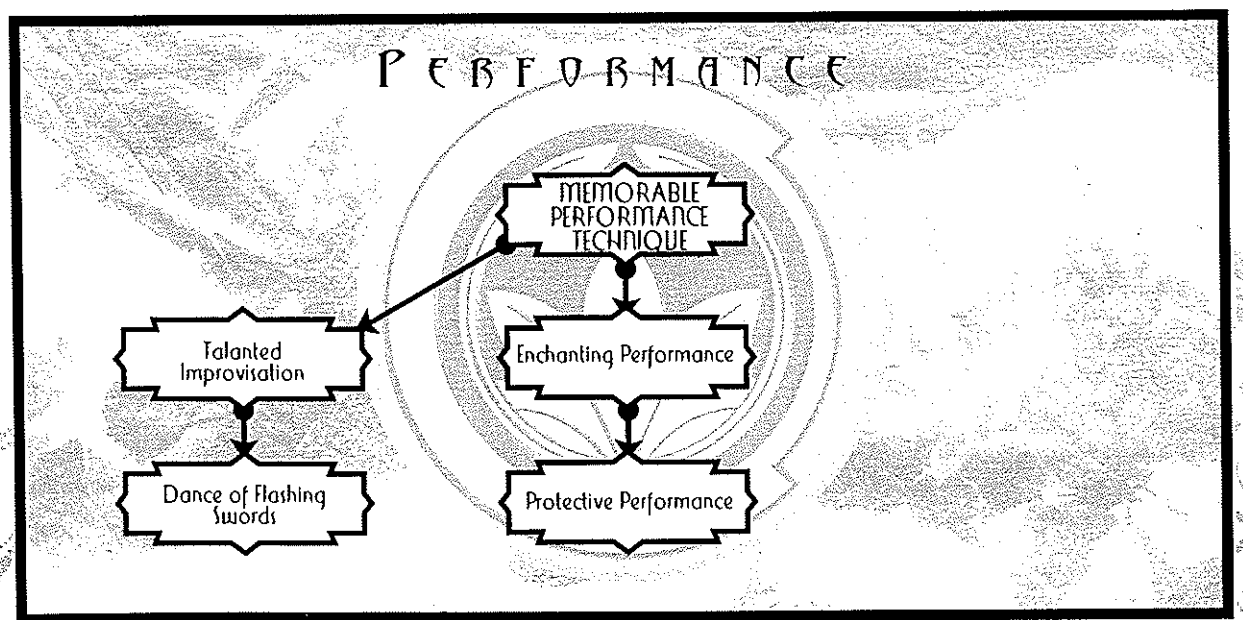
**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Performance:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Memorable Performance Technique

The character with Talented Improvisation can catch herself in a misstep in any performance and work her way out of it. Whether turning a bad note into an unexpected chord or moving from a forgotten line into an unforgettable soliloquy, the character is never in serious danger when performing onstage. If the player spends the necessary Essence immediately upon making a Performance roll, she can reroll it at once. This must be done before the Storyteller describes the general success or failure of her attempt. She must take the second result, no matter what it is. If this Charm is part of a Combo, the other Charms in the Combo must be paid for a second time when Talented Improvisation is used, but if they require dice rolls, those rolls cannot be remade.

### Dance of Flashing Swords

**Cost:** 2 motes, 1 Willpower, +1 mote per extra enemy
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Performance:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Talented Improvisation

Occasionally, a Dragon-Blooded warrior has no choice but to engage in combat in a crowded area or finds himself in another situation in which he does not want to be seen fighting: Perhaps an ally's mind has been subverted by an evil



sorcerer, and the Exalt must subdue the ally without letting political enemies know of his circle's internal strife. Regardless of the reason, this Charm lets a combatant hide his actions and those of a foe within what appears to be stage combat. Simply spend the necessary Essence to activate this Charm, and most observers will not realize that the ongoing battle is not for show alone, no matter how implausible the circumstances seem. If the Exalted faces many enemies simultaneously, he can extend this cover to include them so long as they are extras: He spends one additional mote per extra. He cannot extend such cover over a group of characters that are not extras, nor can he extend his cover to protect any allies of his that show up. This Charm will not fool characters with Essences higher than the character using the Charm.

### Enchanting Performance

**Cost:** 8 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Performance:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Memorable Performance Technique

At this level of mastery, the Dragon-Blood's performances become so awe-inspiring, so staggeringly beautiful, that she can insinuate minor suggestions into audience members who behold them. If the suggestions violate individual audience members' Natures, then those viewers will not obey them; more generally, the suggestions must be the sorts of things that won't bring the audience to any real harm. They might find themselves more willing to travel to a particular part of town at a particular time or to buy their goods from a particular merchant or to trust a particular leader more than they would otherwise. Only one sort of performance can violate the rule against bringing audience members to obvious harm, and that is a performance designed to incite a riot. Perhaps obviously, this is just as dangerous to the Exalt as it is to the audience members and should not be attempted lightly.

The player must spend the necessary Essence and Willpower to enact this Charm, and she must also roll Charisma + Performance. With a basic success, the character can instill a simple suggestion into a small crowd; the group will remember where they got the idea. For each additional success, the crowd can be somewhat larger: Three successes implies a crowd of hundreds and five a crowd of thousands. Additionally, if the character sacrifices one success, the crowd will not remember where they received the suggestion that spurred their mass activity.

### Protective Performance

**Cost:** 8 motes
**Duration:** Until performance ends
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Performance:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Enchanting Performance

This performance lends a bit of defensive magic to an entire crowd of viewers. This magic can be used to protect the crowd from hostile or mind-affecting sorcery or from impersonal ranged attacks such as volleyed arrow fire. The Charm provides no protection against hand-to-hand attacks. To activate the Charm, the character must spend the necessary Essence. All those watching the performance in question receive the following benefits so long as the performance continues:

- Treat their Essences as being one higher than it is for the purposes of withstanding mind-affecting powers.
- Add two additional soak, both lethal and bashing, against ranged attacks.

## Ride

### Scattered Pearl Hoof Falls

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Ride:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The hoofbeats of a steed whose rider employs this Charm strike the ground as quickly and lightly as pearls falling from a broken necklace. The mount's speed for the turn is increased by the rider's Ride Ability in yards. Additionally, the rider receives two additional dice for Ride checks, as his Essence-enhanced steed handles obstacles with ease. These bonus dice do not raise the Ride Ability for purposes of attacking while mounted.

**Mount Speeds**

| Animal | Average Movement in Yards Per Turn |
|---|---|
| Horse | 60 |
| Donkey | 50 |
| Elephant | 35 |
| Ox | 25 |

### Heaven-Gracing Leap

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Ride:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Scattered Pearl Hoof Falls

With the aid of this Charm, a rider and steed pair can clear prodigious distances with a single jump, safely landing leaps that seemed if not impossible, then certainly unwise. With room to run, two successes on a Charisma + Ride roll

will let the mount safely jump one half its movement for the turn when jumping for distance. Standing jump, or jumping vertically, either up or down, will modify both distance and difficulty at the Storyteller's discretion.

### Cloud-Harnessing Method

**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Ride:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Heaven-Gracing Leap

A mount emboldened with this Charm does not actually take to the skies, but its feet barely brush the ground. So quickly does the beast move that it is capable of running over water, deep snow, loose sand or sharp, scree-covered slopes without the slightest difficulty. Rapid ascent and descent are also made trivially easy and may be done at the mount's full speed. A successful Dexterity + Ride roll is necessary to invoke the Charm. The mount's movement rate for the turn is doubled, and no environmental Ride check penalties apply. Both mount and rider will still take damage from harmful local environments, such as riding over a pool of lava.

### Ebony Spur Technique

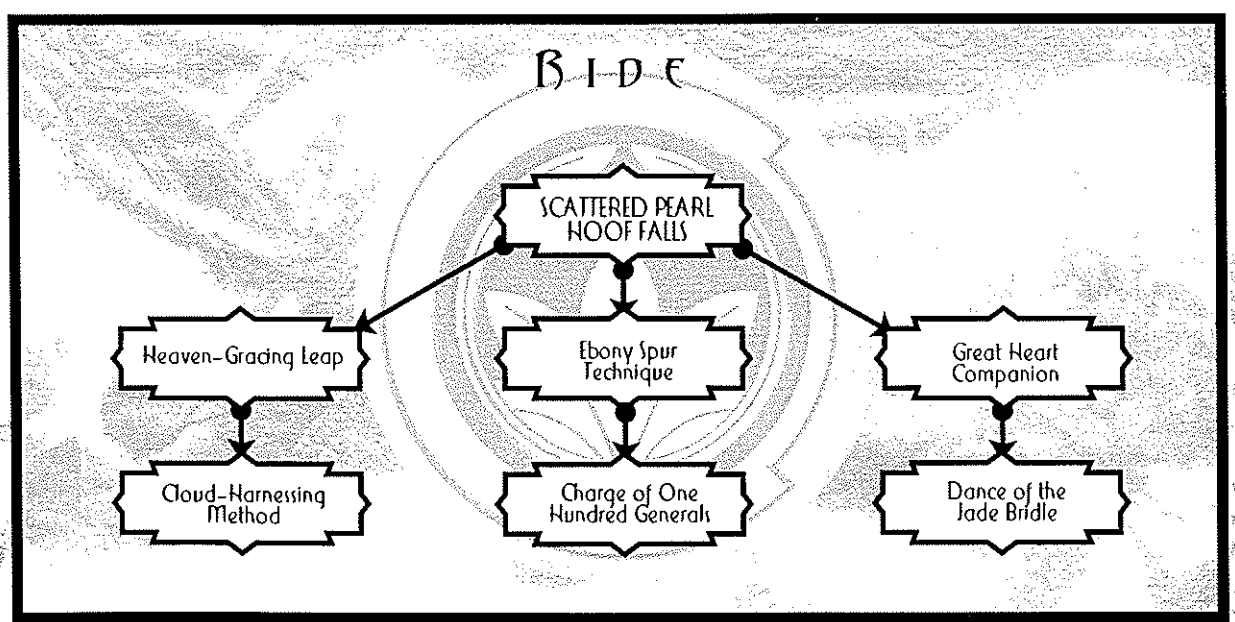
**Cost:** 1 mote per two damage dice
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Ride:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Scattered Pearl Hoof Falls

The simple advantages of height and mobility enjoyed by a mounted swordsman wreak havoc on the battlefield. Exalted cavalry are even more terrifying, translating their mounts' great speed and strength into carnage in the opposing ranks. With a successful Dexterity + Ride roll, the Dragon-Blooded rider can add up to his Ride skill in extra damage dice to hand-to-hand attacks. Archery and Thrown attacks are not affected by this Charm. This Charm can explicitly be included in Combos with Charms of other Abilities.

### Charge of One Hundred Generals

**Cost:** 1 mote per mount/rider pair, plus 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One charge
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Ride:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Ebony Spur Technique

Only the Exalted dare to stand and meet this deadly charge with any hope of success. The Dragon-Blooded rider gathers cavalry to her side, pays the Essence cost of 1 mote per ally and mount (including herself and her steed) and forges the unit into a thunderous charge that moves across the field of battle as one. Where the charge hits enemy lines, pikes snap, shields crack and defenders fall while the charge rides through unscathed. Every member of the charge attacks on the leader's initiative, and the charge's attacks are resolved before any delayed attack actions on the part of the defenders. Any defender who suffers damage but is not knocked unconscious or killed must immediately make a Ride or Athletics check to avoid being dismounted or knocked down. Defenders who retain their lives and their feet may then attack normally. The



Exalt must ride with the group, which cannot number more than 5 x the character's permanent Essence.

### Great Heart Companion

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One turn per success
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Ride:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Scattered Pearl Hoof Falls

The beasts typically chosen for mounts are (with the possible exception of the ass) generally considered to be brave, solid creatures. Still, even stout courage may not be enough when the mount comes face to face with the dangers a Dragon-Blood will invariably encounter fulfilling her duties as a Prince of the Earth. Using this Charm, an Exalt rider can bolster her mount's natural bravery with her Essence, spiritually blurring the line between rider and steed. The Exalt's player makes a Charisma + Ride roll; each success guarantees a turn during which the mount will not bolt or flee no matter the danger unless commanded to do so by her rider. The Dragon-Blood also does not need to devote an action to controlling the mount. No matter the provocation, the beast responds exactly as trained, without hesitation. Finally, during the Charm's duration, the rider cannot be removed from her steed's back while the Charm lasts by force or by accident. A failed or botched Ride check may result in the loss of actions, but the Exalt will remain on her mount's back unless she chooses to dismount — thereby ending the Charm.

### Dance of the Jade Bridle

**Cost:** 10 motes + 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Special
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Ride:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Great Heart Companion

The great beastmasters of the Dragon-Blooded do not restrict themselves to average mounts. Fierce bears, big-toothed cats and even river dragons have served as steeds to the Elemental Dragon of Wood's children. Such impressive creatures are never broken without an epic battle of will, magic and stamina, however. Activating this Charm allows the Dragon-Blood to distill what would be painstaking days or weeks of training into one tumultuous encounter. The Exalt's player rolls Charisma + Ride, while the intended mount resists with its Stamina + Willpower. The Storyteller sets the specifics of the task at his discretion, but expect an extended, difficult test and a few bruises or worse along the way. Breaking a flying creature such as a hybroc or a notoriously vicious one such as a tyrant lizard in this manner carries the very real possibility of a messy end. Nevertheless, once the test is won, the creature is immediately compliant and trainable (by the Dragon-Blood at least). A final note — this Charm



does not protect the rider from a beast who rebels after a period of mistreatment. Such fierce-natured beasts may fight to the death rather than submit again to a cruel master.

## Survival

### Wild-Wandering Forester Charm

**Cost:** 1 mote per 2 dice
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Survival:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The Exalt using this Charm calls upon his superior knowledge of the wilderness and uses his Essence, and his relationship to the Elemental Pole of Wood in particular, to improve his chance of survival in hostile environments. The Dragon-Blood can improve his Survival dice pools by two dice for every mote of Essence spent, but can no more than double his Survival Ability. The character must spend a full mote of Essence even if he wishes to add just a single die (as might be the case if he has an odd Survival score).

### Forgiveness-of-Nature Invoking Prana

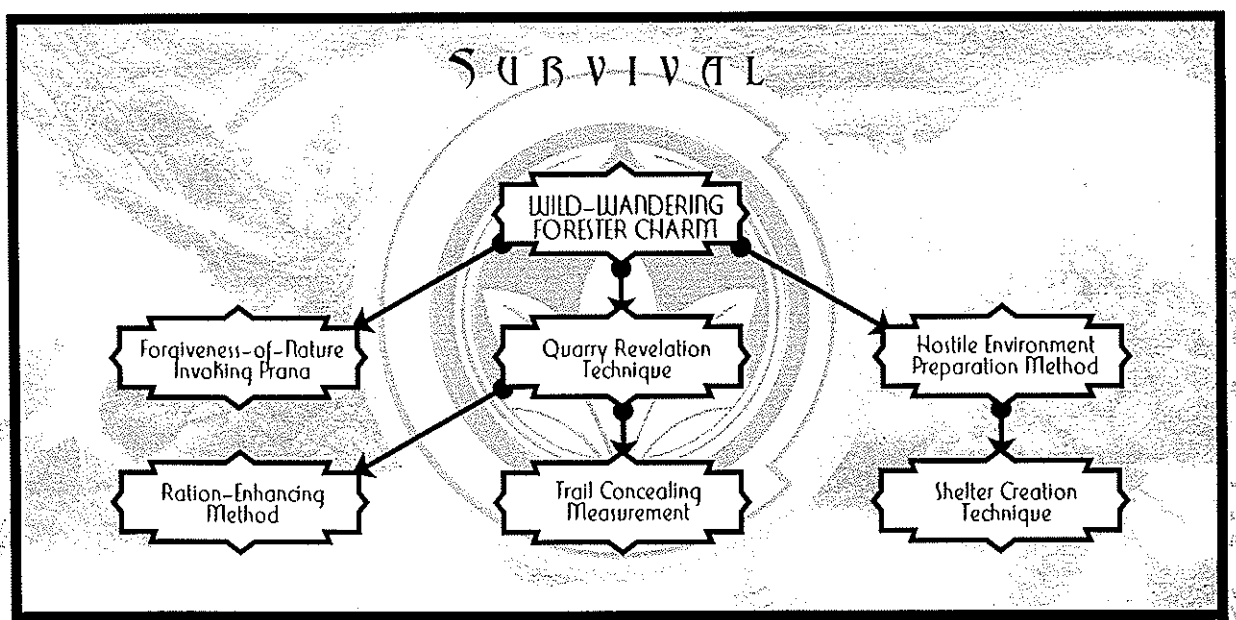
**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Survival:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Wild-Wandering Forester Charm

The Exalt with this Charm is able to beg a brief favor of the spirits of the natural world when he has given offense or behaved in an inappropriate manner before them. In so doing, he may be able to correct prior mistakes, although there is always the chance that he will instead give further offense. Immediately after a Survival roll, the Dragon-Blood's player may spend 2 motes of Essence and reroll. He must accept the second roll. If this Charm is part of a Combo, the character must pay all the Essence necessary to activate associated Charms again, even if they do not contribute to the rerolled pool.

### Quarry Revelation Technique

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One day
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Survival:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Wild-Wandering Forester Charm

With this Charm, the Exalted can track the passage of nearly any creature that is not using magic (such as Trail Concealing Measurement, below) to hide signs of its passing. The character needs only to spend the required Essence, and signs of his quarry's passage stand out to the character's eyes: Animal tracks and spoor become much more prominent, and the broken twigs and other signs that reveal a human's passage are quite clear. The tracker's player must make a simple Perception + Survival roll and acquire only a single success to keep on his prey's trail, regardless of the conduciveness of the local terrain and weather to tracking. The character cannot follow a trail more than a week old with this Charm. If the target is using Trail Concealing Measurement or some



other wilderness Charm that makes her untrackable without magical aid, then this Charm counts as such aid. Under such circumstances, the tracking Exalt's player may make a normal Survival roll to track the target but does not gain this Charm's normal mechanical bonus.

### Trail Concealing Measurement

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One day
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Survival:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Quarry Revelation Technique

The Exalted using Trail Concealing Measurement knows instinctually how to hide signs of his passage. He does this so skillfully that mortal trackers and those without Quarry Revelation Technique (above) or other magical means of tracking him are unable to do so. Players of beings with magical means to pursue the character make normal rolls to track the character. It is rumored by those who have traveled close to the Wyld that the Lunar Exalted are not fooled by this Charm at all when they wear animal shapes.

### Ration-Enhancing Method

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One hunt
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Survival:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Quarry Revelation Technique

Ration Enhancing Method doubles the effectiveness of any hunting expedition the character takes part in during the scene that it is active. Whether alone or as part of a group, when the Dragon-Blood with this Charm sets off to find food, he (and his group, if applicable) will find twice as much food as the level of success on their Survival rolls would otherwise imply.

### Hostile Environment Preparation Method

**Cost:** 3 motes + 1 per companion
**Duration:** 1 Day
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Survival:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Wild-Wandering Forester Charm

This Charm enables an Exalt and his companions to avoid the worst effects of hostile environments. In a hot environment, the Exalted leading the group uses this Charm to make sure he and his fellows remain out of the worst heat of the sun and conserve water. In a cold environment, he makes sure they conserve body heat as well as possible and remain moving to avoid frostbite. When Hostile Environment Preparation Method is active, the group can be assumed to be unharmed by any environment that would ordinarily require three or fewer successes on a Survival roll. Environments that would require four or more successes now require three fewer successes, so even the most hostile natural environment only requires two successes on a Survival roll. The Charm's base 3 motes cost protects the Exalt. Every additional mote spent protects a single traveling companion. An Exalt cannot protect more individuals with this Charm than his permanent Essence.

### Shelter Creation Technique

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Survival:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Hostile Environment Preparation Method

The character calls upon helpful spirits of Wood (and, if appropriate, other elements) to help him build a remarkably robust, protective and comfortable shelter even in the worst environment. For a group traveling in the forest, the Exalted can create a wooden hut in a matter of about 30 minutes. Those traveling in the desert can find themselves in a sheltered outcropping, shaded from above and with plenty of room for wind to flow through. A character in the Far North may build an igloo or other hard-packed snow shelter in about 30 minutes. These shelters will last no more than a day, as they are somewhat magical in nature. Generally, the shelter the character builds can hold around six human-sized creatures; if the Exalted wishes to build a larger shelter, he must spend an additional mote of Essence per person to be accommodated within it.



Sesus Ajusa put a foot forward, shifted her weight and brought her lead foot up in a vicious crescent kick, trailing streamers of smoke. Deled caught it casually. Ajusa's face paled, as she saw the ease with which her foe countered one of the deadliest moves in her style. Peleps Deled smiled, still holding Ajusa's ankle, and twisted sharply. Ajusa's Exalted bones broke like kindling under the crushing pressure of Deled's wrist and fingers.

Deled released his opponent's broken ankle, and she hopped backward, on one foot, her face a mask of determination and pain. Deled smiled and stepped forward before she could recover her guard, smashing his fist into her face and knocking her down. With a quick kick, he slammed her to the floor, and then, he dropped his elbow onto her windpipe with the force of an avalanche, smashing her trachea and breaking her neck. The watching monks gasped in alarm.

"The Exaltation is not from the Dragons, bitch, but of them," he laughed into her ear as they pulled him from her body. He stared into her already-dimming eyes and knew that she had heard his words as the blackness of death descended upon her. Let her linger as a ghost to haunt him, then. Deled knew techniques to make short work of such spirits, and her defiance of the natural order would be added to her unorthodoxy when the Dragons weighed her sins. Deled hoped that they saw fit to reincarnate her as a beaten dog, so that she would learn the state of obedience that was the natural condition of the lower orders.

"I tripped," he said to the elder monk overseeing the match, barely concealing his smirk. The elder nodded — Deled had had a number of such accidents when fighting theological opponents. In truth, it was not unusual when matters of doctrine or internal policy were the crux of the dispute. Yet, this was savage, even beyond the call of religious infighting, and Elder Sister Plum was glad that Deled and his temper would not trouble her monastery any longer.

"When you are done cleaning yourself up, Deled, your fellows are waiting."

The killer's face was blank — he had expected no visitors. He had little contact with his family, and aside from them, no friends outside the Order.

"The Wyld Hunt, Deled. They have asked to second you, and I have loaned you to them indefinitely as a favor to the Throne. It is good that they arrived earlier today, before your accident. You can leave with them tonight. We will not even have to account for the strange circumstances of your sparring accident. I suggest you go to your cell and pack what things you may be taking with you."

Deled's eyes flicked from face to face, seeking support for some sort of immediate action. He and everyone in the room realized he was trapped — already legally obligated and now threatened with a real investigation into a murder if he refused. Deled cursed inwardly — even if he was willing to decline the assignment and try to fight it, despite the murder charge, he could not bear to. Riding with the Wyld Hunt and crushing the Anathema, those vile, twisted insults to the natural order, was the bright and burning passion of his existence. A passion that had just been used against him. From Elder Sister Plum's face, he could tell that she had not acted alone. Damn the elders, too worried for their jade and their choirboys to follow the true Immaculate Philosophy.

The monk spun sharply and left the room in silence. He padded to his cell, dreaming of vengeance on Elder Sister Plum. Who was she, to stand against his will, against Peleps Deled, the most beloved servant of the Immaculate Daana'd? He gathered his few books and the manuscripts of the sermons he had been writing. The Order could send him to war and silence him for now — but only for now. They would not be able to silence the voice of righteousness forever — no man can.

# CHAPTER SIX
# MARTIAL ARTS

The simple strikes, jabs and kicks of the common Dragon-Blooded are of a much more pedestrian variety than those practiced by the Realm's true masters of the martial arts, the Immaculates. Exalted students venturing within the walls of the Cloister of Wisdom are exposed to a much deeper and more consuming brand of combat magic — that of the Fivefold Dragon Methods.

The Fivefold Dragon Methods are a comprehensive system of mental discipline, meditation and martial arts, designed not just to provide a means of self-defense (and offense) to an Immaculate, but to help her attune herself more fully to the Elemental Dragon to which she is aligned.

Every student entering the Cloister of Wisdom is schooled in the basics of the Dragon Methods, usually in the form aligned with their elemental aspect. It is a crucial part of the training of a priest of the Five Elemental Dragons, and even the least athletic of initiates is expected to master the basics of her Path. But not every Dragon-Blood who enters the Cloister takes more than a few tentative steps along their designated Dragon Path. Only the truly dedicated ever go beyond the basics of the art, progressing on to the higher mysteries. Those that do are some of the most powerful warriors the Realm can muster.

## Fear and Respect

Training at the Cloister of Wisdom is often not the first career choice that a noble of the Realm may wish for her progeny — even unExalted progeny. Most houses would be much happier to have a child join the military or go into politics. While there is certainly respect and prestige associated with having a member of the family in the Immaculate Order, it comes with negative effects as well. Monks do not bear heirs, and disciples of the Order are largely beyond the reach of their families.

While the practitioners of the Fivefold Dragon Methods are treated with a great deal of respect, it is inevitably tempered by wariness — and often a hint of fear. This trepidation stems largely from the Fivefold Dragon Method itself and the mysterious methods of instruction that are practiced within the Order. The martial arts tap Essence in a different manner than the standard Charms of the Terrestrial Exalted. Even those Dynasts who call a practitioner friend may still feel a hint of apprehension when they see the feats that their companion is capable of.

Naturally, the normal people of the Realm hold Immaculate warriors in even more awe than their Exalted brethren do. The warrior priests of the Immaculates are respected and, yes, feared — but it is a fear borne from the

hidden nature of their ways, and it is tempered with the knowledge that the Immaculates are often on the side of the common man against the Dynasty.

## The Purpose of the Paths

The Five Glorious Dragon Paths are an integral part of the training of an Immaculate, and they serve as much more than just a system of personal defense. The major function of the Fivefold Dragon Method is to bring the student into closer touch with her element — to forge a bond between the Elemental Dragon and the Dragon-Blooded. This link is essential for the student to be able to focus the Essence that the Dragon Paths require. Once this link is forged, the Terrestrial Exalted can tap into her Essence in a very different way than most.

The Fivefold Dragon Method also prepare the Immaculates for spiritual combat. Ethereal beings are a fairly common threat to the tranquility of the Realm. The Immaculate Dragons serve as metaphysical exterminators, protecting the masses from slaughter or domination by supernatural beings.

This is all in addition to acting as the spiritual glue that holds the Realm together — and the Fivefold Dragon Method serves a purpose here as well. It is important for the Immaculates to remain strong so they retain the respect and faith of the people. It would not do for the greatest society that has ever graced the world to have weaklings in charge of its spiritual well-being. The strength of the Immaculate Dragons is a visible demonstration of the correctness of the spiritual path that they exhort.

## First Steps on the Five Glorious Dragon Paths

As discussed in Chapter One, any Dynast entering the Cloister of Wisdom is in for a rigorous regimen of training, no matter the elemental path with which he is aligned. The specific training methods of each Dragon Path are discussed later, but suffice it to say that they are all grueling.

The purpose of this is various. First, the training is an important spiritual devotion. Secondly, it weeds out the weak. The Immaculate Dragons have not maintained the awe and respect of the people by suffering fools and sluggards to stay within the ranks of their order. Thirdly, this is a de facto method of keeping the Dragon-Blooded firmly in control of the Immaculate Order. While normal mortals are trained in the Immaculate martial arts, they are unable to advance beyond the so-called Lesser Forms.

For their first year in the Cloister of Wisdom, the life of a student is a tough one. Students are awakened early in the morning and go to bed late at night. Far from learning the secrets of the martial arts, they spend their days cooking, cleaning and running errands for their masters, in addition to their studies and religious devotions. This is paired with a rigorous physical training regimen and spiritual teachings on the wisdom of the Five Elemental Dragons.

For the purposes of life within the Cloister, the Immaculate teachers hold the power of life and death over students — a fact an Immaculate acolyte can be expect to be reminded of on an almost constant basis. Living conditions are not easy on students either. Obviously, this doesn't go over so well with some of the students who have known a rather more indulgent and decadent upbringing. The first couple of months usually see crying, complaining and plaintive notes to families decrying the "inhumanely harsh" conditions within the Cloister. These bellyachers are often surprised when their parents don't even dignify their offspring's letter with a reply.

This is all part of the necessary training of the Immaculates. The distinctions of class that may separate the acolytes from one another must be stripped away and replaced with a feeling of camaraderie. Acolytes learn together, eat together, work together and sleep together, regardless of social station. Even the daughters of the Great Houses find themselves sleeping shoulder to shoulder on rough straw mats with individuals of the lowest station. After a few months of communal living, the differences begin to fade, and the monks become part of the Immaculates, with a new role in the Perfected hierarchy, rather than being members of their old social classes.

### The Inner Quest of Elemental Knowledge

More complete details on the education and day-to-day life in the Cloister of Wisdom can be found elsewhere in this book. Suffice to say that a student's every day is a full and busy one. Training in the Fivefold Dragon Method is a direct component of the spiritual education provided by the Cloister.

It is the training methods of the Dragon Paths that are of direct interest here. Presented below are the basics of each of the Five Glorious Dragon Paths.

### The Five Paths to Mastery

Reflecting the Five Elemental Dragons that lie at the center of the belief system of the Realm, there are five different paths of training taught within the walls of the Cloister of Wisdom. Each path complements the inborn elemental abilities of the Dragon-Blooded aligned with it, as well as bringing the untrained into line with the thinking and philosophy of the path.

As the students learn more of their Dragon and strengthen their connection to it, incredible feats become possible. Each Dragon-Blooded learns a whole new way to tap his Essence and mingle it with that of the Elemental Dragons, channeling it through his body and into reality.

The lynchpin of each of the Dragon Paths is the Elemental Dragon Form maneuver for that path. The Dragon Form move is the one that separates the students

### The Hand of the Sidereals

As noted in the **Exalted Storyteller's Companion**, the Bronze Sidereals don't directly control the Immaculate Order. There was a time that they did, but that was long ago. The Sidereals may have initially created the Order, but it has grown quite beyond their ability to *directly* manipulate. This is a matter of growing concern with the return of the Solar Exalted. The Bronze Sidereals have a lot to lose if the Solars topple the Realm, and the reappearance of the Gold Sidereals has only heightened their concern.

With that in mind, the Bronze Sidereals have started to take a more direct hand in the Immaculate Order than in millennia. While they may not fully control it any more, the Sidereal Exalted do have a great deal of influence with the Dragon-Blooded that do control the Order — and they have started to exercise it. With carefully whispered words, "previously unknown" tomes of information on the Anathema threat and careful cultivation of the paranoia of the masters of the Order, the Sidereals are honing their best weapon against the return of the Solars. Due to the Sidereal influence, the Immaculate Order is keeping a ready eye out for both the diabolical Anathema of its legends and those mysterious demons that aid and abet them (the Gold Sidereals).

As one would expect, the Bronze Sidereal's are not fools, and they realize that the masters of the Immaculate Order aren't either. Quite rightly, the Sidereals view their influence within the Immaculate Order as currency — currency that must be carefully saved and invested, spent only when totally necessary. Correctly managed, their influence over the Immaculates remains strong and only gets stronger. Recklessly exercised, it will diminish precipitously.

The Bronze Sidereals try not to think about what might happen if the masters of the Immaculate Order learn the truth about the fate of the Solars and the founding of Realm. Needless to say, the Sidereal Exalted will go to any lengths to preserve their secrets.

from the masters of the martial arts. Some say that the move opens the soul to the full presence of the Elemental Dragons, and those that cannot achieve it never know the true meaning of becoming one with the elements.

### Air Dragon Style

The training regimen of the Air Dragon Dynasts emphasizes acrobatic training and awareness of how the body moves. Acolytes go through intense training in gymnastics, leaping, balancing and tumbling. All of the training is designed to instill the Air Dragon's speed and mercurial movement into the students, to help them move like the Dragon they are devoted to.

The most acrobatic of the Five Dragon Methods, Air Dragon fighting style is characterized by fast movement, dramatic dodging maneuvers and prodigious leaping and kicking. The Air Dragon practitioner strives to *be* the wind itself; hard to see, hard to hold, everywhere at once, and devastating in its fury. Air Dragons are also schooled in concealment and silent movement. This echoes the secret nature of what lies in the roiling coils of the Air Dragon. The students of the other Dragon Paths would be less than pleased to learn that one rite of passage for Air Dragon Immaculates consists of learning a secret of one of their fellow Immaculates. Of all the Immaculates, Air Dragon Immaculates speak the least but often know the most.

Many Immaculates of the Air Dragon eschew melee weapons entirely, relying on their own martial skills and a wide variety of thrown weapons to see them through. The hand weapons of choice for those that walk the Dragon Path of Air are a variety of segmented staff-type weapons, along with chain and flail-like implements of mayhem. Unlike the disciples of Earth, Air Dragon Immaculates use these weapons to entangle and trip up their opponents, rather then relying on battering force.

However, the signature weapon of the Air Dragon is not a hand weapon at all. It is the lowly chakram. The Immaculates of the Air Dragon often seem able to produce blizzards of the things from their fingertips, filling the air with whirling steel. The chakrams come in a dizzying variety of shapes, and it is not unusual for an Air Dragon to chose a particular type and style as her "signature."

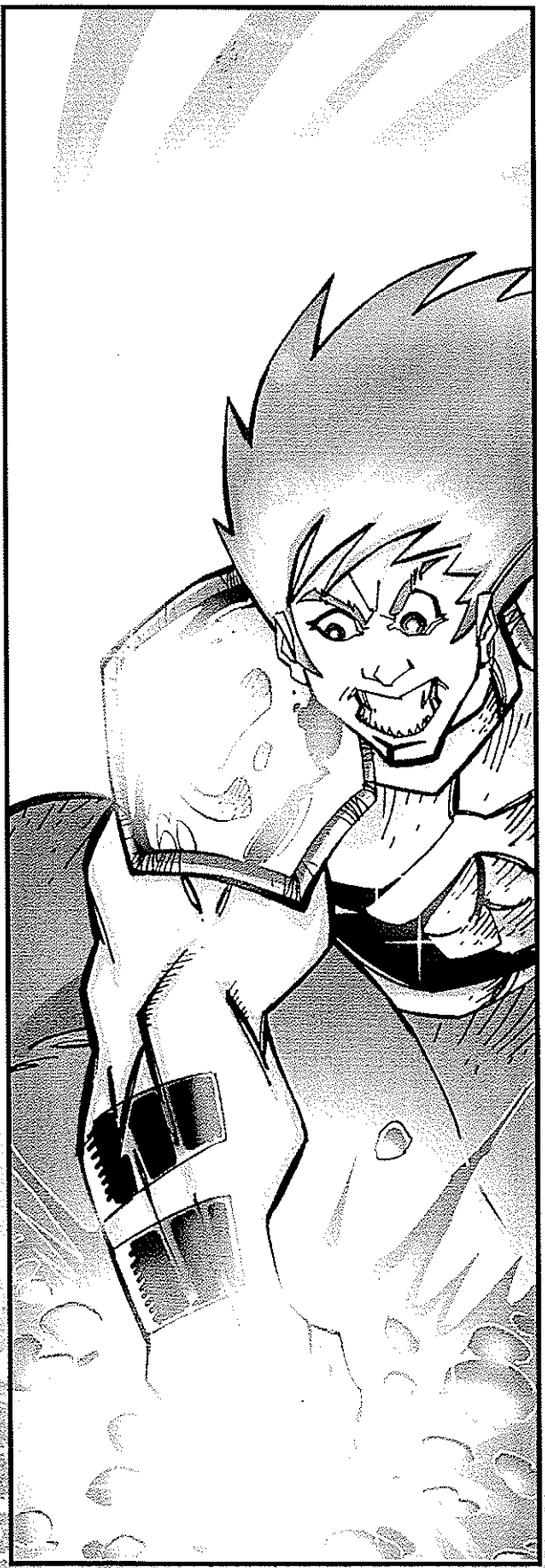
### Earth Dragon Style

Earth Dragon training is the most nakedly brutal of all the Dragon Paths, centering as it does around strengthening the body and inuring it to pain. Acolytes harden their fists by punching them into barrels of gravel, stand naked on mountaintops in blizzards, strike each other with seven-section staffs and generally do their best to make sure their bodies are familiar with every brand of physical hardship and how to resist it. The Earth Dragon Immaculates learn pain-control techniques and ways to resist the forces of the world that might require that they move aside.

The masters of Earth are also trained in stillness. The earth is quiescent most of the time, and it is through adopting the stillness of the firmament that the Earth devotees bring themselves closest to the Dragon's way. Their stillness combines with their prodigious strength

and their endurance training to create warriors truly worth to serve the Earth Dragon. The Earth Dragon fighting style concentrates on resistance and strength, not agility and speed. Fists and feet are used to pummel opponents into submission, powerful holds pop joints from sockets and crush ribs. A blow from an Earth Dragon Immaculate often feels like the impact of an avalanche, and striking one skilled in this art can be like striking the face of the Imperial Mountain.

Large blunt weapons are the preferred instruments of mayhem for disciples of the Earth Dragon, and the signature weapon of the Earth Dragon Path is a massive club, studded with iron knobs. Students are encouraged to craft their own, and no two Earth Immaculate's signature weapons ever looks the same. Few among the warriors of the Realm are more adept at wielding this battering weapon.



### Walking the Five Ways

It is rare indeed for a Dragon-Blood to walk more than one of the paths of the Glorious Dragons—but it does happen. Those who have the strength and dedication to do so are highly valued by the Order. Their versatility makes them potent weapons in the war against the Realm's enemies.

Rarer still are Dragon-Blooded strong enough to walk all five Dragon Paths. There are only three living Immaculates who have managed this feat of endurance and elemental dedication.

See page 243 for additional information on walking more than one Dragon Path. It is a tough and expensive process, requiring a character to learn Charms from multiple Dragon Paths. While it is not a short-term prospect for any Exalted, the rewards can be more than worth it for those willing to take the time.

## Fire Dragon Style

The training regimen for Fire Dragon practitioners is not the most physically brutal; that honor belongs to the Earth Dragons. It is the cruelest of all five styles, however. Most Fire Dragon Immaculates bear both the physical and mental scars of their training.

The most famous of the Order's rites of passage consists of actually setting the student on fire and forbidding him from using anything other than his own willpower to resist the pain and remain silent. Such students sit quietly, feeling their own flesh charring from their bodies, the smell of their own burning fat filling their nostrils. When a student can endure it no longer, he

need only cry out, and the flames are immediately doused and powerful healing Charms applied. It is a generally accepted fact that the longer a student remains silent, the more powerful a warrior he will be. It is a tribute to the rigorous training methods of the Cloister of Wisdom that not a single Dragon-Blooded acolyte has walked away from this test with anything more than a mild fever in more than 1,000 years.

The fighting style of Fire Dragon disciples is as violent and unpredictable as one might expect — but not foolishly so. Mastery of the Path of the Fire Dragon requires control. If fire is not controlled, it consumes all around it indiscriminately. The Fire Dragon warriors learn the lesson of their element well and control their own fires. Yet, the form's disciples still leap and strike like a dancing inferno.

The Fire Dragon Path signature weapon is paired short blades, wickedly curved inward — treat these as short swords. The shimmering blades of the Fire Dragon acolytes are said to emulate the flickering flames of their patron element.

### Water Dragon Style

Water Dragons combine the crashing strength of ocean waves, the placid calm of a mirrored lake surface and the cold grinding force of an icy glacier. The training methodologies of the Water Dragon emphasize flow — learning when to yield to opposing forces and how to turn those forces back upon opponents.

Long hours are spent in contemplation of the nature of water in all its forms; the slashing edges of ice, the liquid nature of water, the torrential downpour of rain and the gentle but ultimately deadly fall of snow. Swimming and watercraft are an obvious part of training, but these monks are also schooled in the art of social interaction. They can perceive the way that interpersonal ties flow, much like the currents of the ocean. While this does not help a Water Dragon Immaculate directly in combat, sensing the social current can often help her avoid confrontations altogether.

In combat, Water Dragon Immaculates seem to melt out of the way of opponents' blows, running through grasping fingers like the waters of a stream, then rearing back to strike with the force of a tidal wave. These martial artists wear their opponents down with a constant stream of eroding strikes and kicks.

The signature weapons of the Water Dragon Immaculates are the "dragon's claws," a set of steel talons that strap onto the Immaculate's hands. Immaculates skilled in these savage weapons create slashing walls of glittering steel, as hypnotically beautiful as ripples on a still pond, but of deadly consequence.

### Wood Dragon Style

Most mysterious of an already mysterious group, the followers of the Wood Dragon often baffle even their Immaculate brethren. The element of Wood encompasses much more than the literal wood of trees. The currents of life and death itself are within the Wood Dragon Immaculates' purview, and this confuses the other more literally minded members of the Order.

The training that Wood Dragon disciples go through is the least physically grueling of all the five styles — at least in terms of raw physical exertion. While there is the usual regimen of basic physical training, the heart of the Wood Dragon discipline's training calls for bouts of extreme asceticism, including but not limited to food and water deprivation, masochism and the consumption of even greater quantities of hallucinogenic drugs than the usual Immaculate consumes. All this leads the Wood Dragon Immaculates into a close examination and relationship with the Wood Dragon and the forces of life and death that make up the world.

To those who judge strength only by the force of blows and the speed of fists, the Wood Dragon Immaculates may seem weak. This is a foolish belief. The fortitude cultivated by the Wood Dragon warrior is one of spiritual and mental strength, not just physical power. Although it is the least openly destructive and violent of the five elemental styles, those who master the Path of the Wood Dragon can gain power over life and death itself. Their blows can hurt or heal, and they may even sever or restore the soul's connection to the body. Those who know better tread lightly in the presence of the Immaculates of Wood.

The signature weapon of the Wood Dragon Path is the bow. Wood Dragon acolytes are instructed in all aspects of fletching and bow construction, and each is expected to create his own bow as a rite of passage. These weapons are prized possessions, and a Wood Dragon Immaculate will go to great lengths to retrieve her personal bow if it is lost or stolen.

## Spirit Mastery

While each of the Dragon Paths differs in its exact approach to the martial arts, all five do have one common facet of training — instruction in dealing with and combating spirits. In a land as magically charged as the Realm, it would be impossible for the Dragon-Blooded to maintain control if they couldn't deal with the spirits that suffuse the place. Before a student is permitted to walk one of the Dragon Paths, she must master the skill of Spirit Walking. Spirit Walking is a method of perceiving and interacting with the immaterial world. A Spirit Walker can actual affect the spirit world as well as the material one. The hands, weapons and magic of a Spirit Walker are as lethal to spirits and incorporeal beings as they are to mortals.

### Martial Arts and the Exalted

Like sorcery, supernatural martial arts are universal among the Exalted. Provided they have a tutor, Exalted of any type can learn the martial arts of the Five Dragon Paths of the Immaculate Order (or even the inferior Five-Dragon Style of the Dragon-Blooded). Likewise, if taught, the Dragon-Blooded could master Snake Style, Tiger Style or any of the other styles more commonly practiced by the Anathema.

Storytellers should decide what an appropriate tutor is. Normally, Exalted who "naturally" or "commonly" practice a supernatural martial art (for example, animal styles among the Solar Anathema) don't need tutors according to the rules, but a Storyteller who wants to be a stickler or to use them as a plot device may require such a tutor for Charms higher in the tree than the style's Dragon Form Charm. Characters who don't naturally practice a given art will probably either need to start the game knowing it due to backstory or else need to find a tutor during play. The Storyteller may waive this due to story needs or may require tutors for *all* supernatural martial arts, to reflect their power and special nature.

Through the use of intensive meditation, fasting and no small quantity of hallucinogenic drugs, Immaculate students struggle to shift their perceptions so that they are in tune with the spirit world. This technique is not easy to get the hang of, and the break-though moment when the Immaculate first pierces the veil and looks into the realm of spirits is almost always a traumatic one. The instant of that perceptual shift is known as the Shattering of the Veil by the Immaculates, and more than a few Exalted awaken in the middle of the night in a cold sweat years afterward, that moment of terrible clarity fresh in their mind.

Once a student has managed to take her first Spirit Walk, the technique quickly becomes almost second nature. Initiates learn first to merely perceive the incorporeal world around them, then to interact with and affect it. It is only after an acolyte is judged ready by her teachers that she meets her first spiritual threat. The teachers of the Cloister keep a selection of small but malevolent bound spirits on hand. Most every student passing through the Cloister gates remembers their first confrontation with one of these ethereal predators. The teachers of the Cloister ensure that none of their charges are permanently (physically) harmed by this experience, but it can be extremely harrowing nonetheless.

Although hallucinogenic drugs are not necessary to Spirit Walking after a student has mastered the method, many students continue use of the drugs anyway (though the Order strongly discourages abuse).

### The Dragon Paths And Elements

Dragon Path martial arts maneuvers are not Earth-aspected Charms the way Five-Dragon Style Martial Arts Charms are. For the purposes of determining the cost of using a Charm, the Dragon Path Charms are elementally aligned with the element they are aligned with — and *not* with Earth. Thus, Fire Dragon Path Charms cost only the listed Essence for Aspects of Fire to use, while Earth-aspected Dragon-Blooded who learned them would be required to pay the 1 mote penalty for using non-aspected Charms.

### Spirit Sight

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

As mentioned previously, a basic part of Immaculate training is that of interacting with the spirit world. The first step in this training is to comprehend how to perceive the spirit world. This ability is gained as part of the basic training of a Dragon Path, whether the Exalt becomes an Immaculate during character creation or joins the Order later in life. Possessing it is a requirement for learning the Charms on the Dragon Path.

The practical upshot of this is that by spending a single mote of Essence, an Immaculate can perceive spirits and incorporeal beings. Normally invisible spiritualized beings become visible to the Spirit Walker. This power lasts for an entire scene — or until the Exalt consciously reattunes herself to the normal world. Reattuning to the normal world is a dice action.

Tuning in to the spirit world does tend to distract one from the concerns of the material one though. The Exalt invoking this ability suffers a +1 to the difficulty of any activity relating to the corporeal world while using Spirit Sight.



### Spirit Walking

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Spirit Sight |

The Immaculates are widely known for their ability to interact with and combat spirits. By merely concentrating for a moment, a properly trained Dragon-blood can do more than just see the spirit world. She can "Spirit Walk," mystically attuning herself to the spirit world on a physical level.

This Charm allows the Immaculates who know it to interact with spirits as if they were normal corporeal beings. Physical damage dealt by a Spirit Walker that would normally pass right through a spirit's immaterial form affects it as if the spirit were flesh and blood, as do the Charms and abilities of the Exalted. The Immaculate is still in the physical world, however, and has to deal with any physical limitations that may apply. Also, unless the Immaculate uses Spirit Sight, she cannot see dematerialized spirits.

Spirit Walking puts the character truly in tune with both the spiritual world and the corporeal one. When Spirit Walking is used with Spirit Sight, the +1 penalty to difficulties for physical world action is negated.

## Signature Weapons

While most of the monks of the Immaculate Order approach weapon training much like any other Exalted, those showing special promise with their Dragon Path's signature weapons, the weapons that are sacred to the Elemental Dragons, are often given special attention. The use of these weapons is not just combat training — it is an act of devotion to the Dragons themselves.

The training that they are given allows Immaculate Dragons to use their path's signature weapon with their Martial Arts Ability and to apply any Charms that would normally affect a hand-to-hand martial arts attack. Additionally, each path has a small benefit that comes with the intense training.

Signature Weapon training comes "for free" with the first Charm of the appropriate Dragon Path.

### Air Dragon — Chakram

An Air Dragon Immaculate may throw up to his Martial Arts Ability in chakrams in a single attack. The Exalted must have the chakrams on her, and all must be thrown at a single target. Make a single attack roll and apply it to all of the chakrams, and apply the target's defense roll likewise.

### Earth Dragon — Tetsubo

Earth Dragon martial artists specialize in the tetsubo, a type of huge studded war-club. Use the stats for sledge in the Exalted main book to represent this weapon. Followers of the Earth Dragon Path may ignore the Strength penalty and Accuracy penalty for this weapon, and they may halve the Speed penalty.

### Fire Dragon — Paired Short Swords

Fire Dragons may use these weapons independently. They can attack or parry with both swords using their full pool. Attacks against separate targets must apply all normal penalties for two-weapon fighting. Attacking two or more separate targets subjects the character to a -1 penalty for her off hand. Otherwise, there are no penalties for using a weapon in both hands.

### Water Dragon — Tiger Claws

Water Dragons ignore the normal Speed and Accuracy penalties for these weapons when using them.

### Wood Dragon — Bow

In the hands of a Wood-aspected Immaculate, any arrow adds +2 to its damage bonus.

## Switching Paths

Most of the time, Immaculates are trained in the Dragon Path that fits the element that they are naturally attuned to. Fire-aspected Dragon-Blooded usually just naturally gravitate to the path of the Fire Dragon. Water goes to Water. Like attracts like.

And yet, there are those who want to walk another path. An Earth-attuned Exalt who, in some deep part of his soul, hears the murmuring call of the Water Dragon or a child of Air whose dreams are haunted by visions of the vernal forests of the Wood Dragon — these Exalted sometimes choose the road less traveled.

The masters of the Dragon Paths are reluctant to accept such students. There is a price for following a Path that does not fit in with a Dragon-Blooded's elemental attunement, and it is not a small one. Until they have mastered the Dragon Path they choose to walk, these disciples pay the 1 mote non-aspect surcharge for *all* Charms, even those of the Dragon Path they are studying and other Charms of their own element.

### The Path of Elemental Mastery

There is an exception to the rules listed above. Dragon-Blooded who have fully mastered one of the Dragon Paths and wish to walk another are a different story. The ascension to mastery of their first Dragon Path bonds the character firmly back to his nature. Not only does the character cease to pay the penalty for the Dragon Path Charms he's learned, but he overcomes any penalties for using any Charms of that element, even normal ones. Characters who learn all the Charms of multiple Dragon Paths can ignore the penalty for the multiple elements.

# The Fivefold Dragon Methods

## Air Dragon Style

### Air Dragon's Sight

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

To one fully in tune with the movements of the mercurial Air, sight is no longer a necessity. Immaculates learning this discipline attune themselves to the ebb and flow of their patron element. The awareness of the martial artist invoking this Charm become supernaturally acute, as the slightest eddy of current in the air speaks volumes to her. The minutest disturbance in the air warns her easily of any danger. For the remainder of the scene, the Immaculate cannot be surprised or ambushed and is considered aware of any attacks against her.

Outside of combat, this Charm is used as a focusing tool and has an additional benefit. In addition to all-around awareness, the character may add her Essence to any Awareness roll, as long as she takes a minute to stand perfectly still and feel the Dragon's breath.

### Wind Dragon Speed

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Air Dragon's Sight

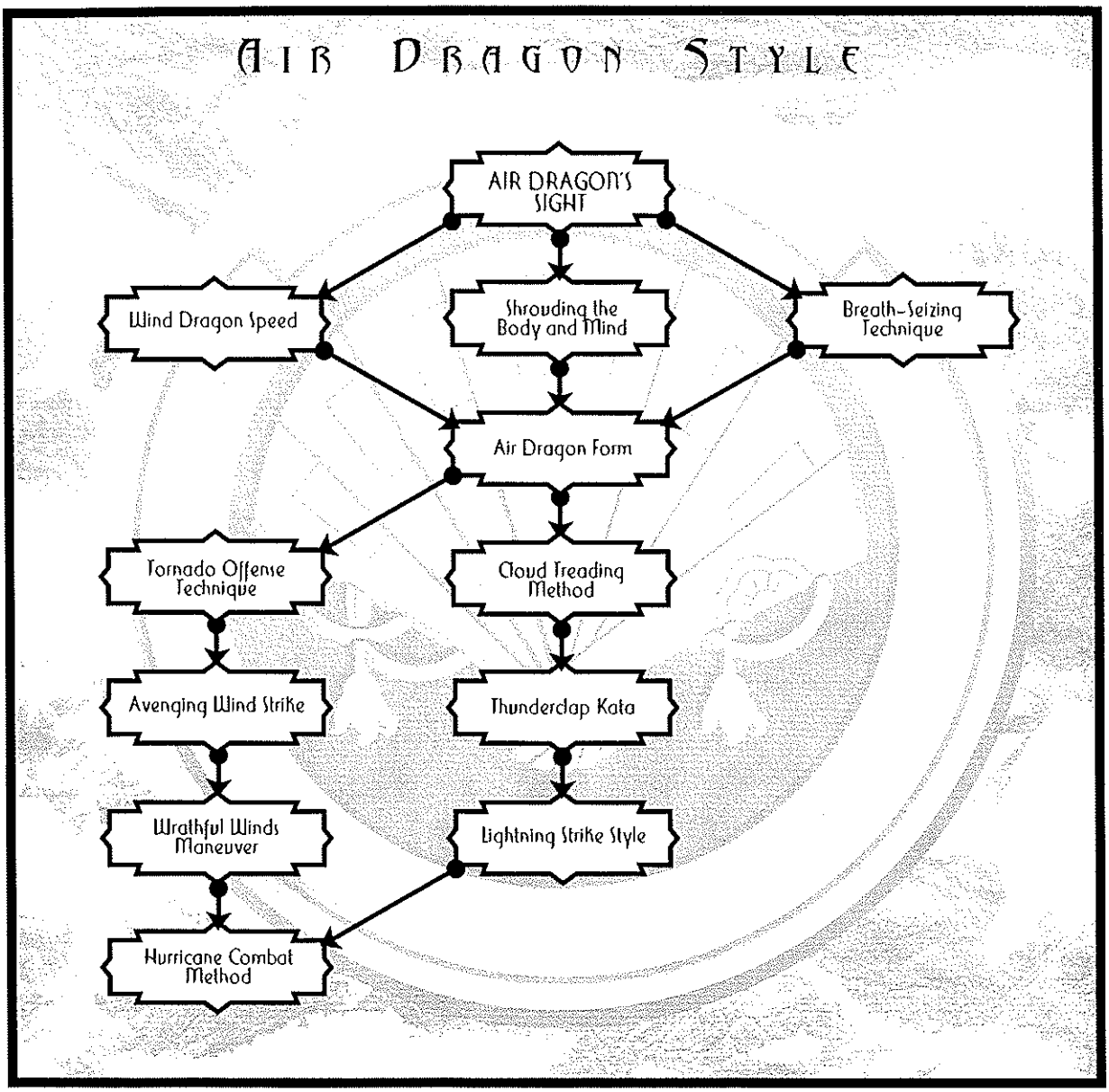
Bolstered by the wings of the Air Dragon, the Immaculate's speed increases greatly, and she moves with a speed that seems like a just a blur to the naked eye. For one turn, the Immaculate may add her Martial Arts rating to her initiative total.

### Breath-Seizing Technique

**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** Martial Arts in turns.
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** Air Dragon's Sight

Not every blow struck by the Immaculates is intended to kill. The disciples of the Air Dragon have a special

## Air Dragon Style




maneuver that rains a series of carefully placed blows down upon an enemy, actually driving the air from his lungs and potentially knocking him unconscious.

When this blow is struck, do not figure damage as normal. Instead, roll the Immaculate's Strength + Martial Arts against the target's Stamina + Endurance in a reflexive opposed test. Each success the Immaculate's player rolls gives his opponent a -1 penalty for a number of turns equal to the Immaculate's Martial Arts. The impairment inflicted by this Charm can accumulate over multiple applications. If the target's impairment from this Charm ever equals double her Stamina, she is rendered unconscious for the rest of the scene.

This Charm only works on creatures that must breathe to survive. Automatons, the undead, spirits and other beings without the need to breathe are totally unaffected by it, as are beings under the influence of magic that removes the necessity for breathing.

### Shrouding the Body and Mind

**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** Martial Arts in turns
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Air Dragon's Sight

The realm of the Air Dragon is the realm of hidden things, concealed secrets and quiet movement. By gathering the element of Air about her, an Air Dynast emulates the Air Dragon. The air itself wraps around the Immaculate, shrouding the Exalt from view. For the character's Martial Arts score in turns, she is rendered

invisible. It is possible to invoke this Charm while being watched — or even while in hand-to-hand combat! However, those watching may be able to guess where the character has gone. This Charm is best used while those looking at the character are distracted, and many Air Dragons carry a supply of flash bombs, blinding powders, etc. for just that purpose.

Enemies may attempt a reflexive Perception + Awareness roll each turn to spot the Immaculate. If the observer saw the Dragon-Blood disappear, spotted the Dragon-Blooded last turn or witnessed an attack launched by the character, the difficulty for the check is only 1. However, the difficulty increases by one every turn that the character remains undetected, to a maximum of 5. If the observer has some reason to believe that someone is around (a knocked over vase, footprints in the sand) the difficulty for spotting the character starts at 3 and scales up. Just casually looking for the shrouded Immaculate has a difficulty of 5. Even when spotted, any actions taken against the Dynast are at a +2 difficulty.

### Air Dragon Form

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Wind Dragon Speed, Breath-Seizing Technique, Shrouding the Body and Mind

With a quick series of hand movements cutting the air in front of him and a deep cleansing breath, the Immaculate Dragon matches his breathing to that of the Air Dragon itself. This Charm requires a successful Dexterity + Martial Arts roll, representing the successful execution of the form itself. If the roll fails, the Charm has no effect, and the motes invested in it are unspent, but the character's action is wasted for the turn.

If the invocation of the Air Dragon Form is successful, the Exalt may add her Martial Arts to her Ability total for any ranged attack or dodge attempt she makes for the rest of the scene. This can no more than double the Ability the Immaculate is using to make the ranged attack or dodge and is applied before any penalties for splitting her dice pool. If she wishes, the character may reflexively dodge attacks with her Martial Arts score. The above benefits are specifically cumulative with and independent of any other Charms or anima powers invoked by the Immaculate.

### Tornado Offense Technique

**Cost:** 4 motes per attack
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Extra Actions
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Air Dragon Form

The powerful force of tornadoes can be tapped by an Air Immaculate, turning her into a whirlwind of death — at least for short periods. For every 3 motes the Immaculate invests in this Charm, she may make an additional martial arts or ranged attack without any penalties. The maximum number of attacks a character may make in a turn is equal to her Martial Arts rating.

### Avenging Wind Strike

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Tornado Offense Technique

By infusing an attack with a tiny bit of the gusting breath of the Air Dragon, an Immaculate can send a target flying backward. An attack boosted by Avenging Wind Strike is rolled as a normal attack, and damage is figured normally — with one extra effect. After being hit, the target's player must immediately make a reflexive Strength + Athletics roll. The target is blown the Exalted's Martial Arts x 10 yards, -5 yards per success on the Athletics roll. This effect occurs whether or not the Immaculate's strike actually does any damage to the target. Obviously additional damage could occur of the victim is blown off a cliff, into a lava pit, etc.

This Charm can be used with hand-to-hand *or* ranged attacks. Many an opponent has laughed as a seemingly harmless chakram sped toward her, only to suffer the wrath of the Avenging Wind Strike.

### Wrathful Winds Maneuver

**Cost:** 5 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Avenging Wind Strike

With a mighty Essence-focusing shout, a savage blast of wind issues from the character's mouth, wreaking havoc on objects and beings caught in the gale. The wrath affects a 90 degree arc directly in front of the Immaculate, out to a distance of her Essence rating x 10 feet. The player of anyone standing even partially in the area of effect must make a reflexive Strength + Athletics



roll against a difficulty equal to the Exalt's Martial Arts. If the roll fails, the character is knocked off his feet. Any concentration is shattered, and his player must make a Wits + Resistance roll. A target whose player fails to get at least a single success is stunned for the next turn, his entire action taken up with clearing his head and regaining his balance.

By spending a point of Willpower when activating the Charm, the Aspect of Air can turn it into a much more precise weapon, focusing the Wrathful Winds to hit a single target. This target is automatically hit unless he has some sort of impenetrable defense with which to block the attack. The target takes the Exalt's Strength + Essence in lethal damage from the sudden blast of air, which can be soaked only with Stamina and other non-armor defenses. In addition, his player must make the regular reflexive Strength + Athletics roll for the character to keep his feet, but the difficulty is increased to the attacking Exalt's Strength + Essence. The range remains the martial artist's Essence x 10 feet.

### Cloud Treading Method

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Martial Arts in turns
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Air Dragon Form

The Air Dragon can lighten the tread of his disciples, opening paths to them that are closed to their earth-bound brethren. The Immaculate invoking this Charm can move like the wind itself, skirting obstacles with ease and grace.

For the character's Martial Arts rating in turns his movement rate is doubled, as is the distance that he can leap. Also, the character need not actually set foot on solid ground to continue moving. A cloud-treading Dragon-Blooded could easily scamper up a trail of smoke, across the surface of a lake or leap across treetops, his feet touching only the flimsiest branches.

The character must keep moving while crossing such delicate surfaces; if the Exalt pauses for even a moment, gravity takes over. This does not mean that a character must end each turn on a solid surface. As long as he continues moving into the next turn, a character may also immediately invoke Cloud Treading Method again without penalty, assuming he has enough motes to use the Charm again.

Cloud-treading heroes can take offensive and other actions during their movement as long as the normal penalties for attacking while moving are applied. The Storyteller may increase the difficulty of any action at her discretion, depending on circumstance.

### Thunderclap Kata

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Cloud Treading Method

The realm of the Air Dragon is the realm of the storm, and its disciples can tap into the force of this to belabor their opponents. After a moment of centering and a few deep breaths, the Immaculate brings her hands together. The resultant clap of thunder can stun and deafen those who hear it.

Players of those within the Exalt's Essence x 10 yards of the Thunderclap Kata must make a reflexive Stamina + Resistance roll with a difficulty equal to the character's Essence. Characters whose players get even a single success manage to cover their ears in time — but they lose any further action for the rest of the turn as a consequence. Those whose players failed take bashing damage equal to the Immaculate's Strength + Martial Arts, which can be soaked only with Stamina and other non-armor protection. In addition, they are also deafened for a number of turns equal to the Immaculate's Essence and, during that time, suffer a penalty to all actions equal to the attacking character's Essence from disorientation.

Obviously, this Charm does not affect those without the need to hear — with one very important exception. While normal beings are susceptible to the Thunderclap Kata, it has an even greater effect on spirit beings. All this Charm's effects are doubled against spirits, whether materialized or not. The Immaculate does not need to be Spirit Walking to gain this benefit and, in fact, does not even have to know that a spirit is present.

The Dragon-Blooded is also immune to her own Thunderclap Kata and may invest 1 extra mote per being to insulate her compatriots from its effects. Spirits can't be insulated in this manner.

### Lightning Strike Style

**Cost:** 4 motes, 1 health level
**Duration:** Martial Arts in turns
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Thunderclap Kata

When this Charm is invoked, blue and white flickers of electricity arc across the character's body, lighting his face in an eerie glow. When the character punches or kicks, brilliant strokes of lightening lance from his feet or fingertips, striking distant opponents as if the Immaculate was standing toe to toe with them.

For the Charm's duration, the character can make martial arts attacks out to a distance of his Essence x 10 feet, and the attacks do lethal damage equal to the character's Strength + Essence. Martial arts weapons add to the accuracy and damage of these attacks, as normal.

### Hurricane Combat Method

**Cost:** 10 Essence, 1 Willpower, 1 health level per turn
**Duration:** Martial Arts in turns
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 4
**Prerequisite Charms:** Wrathful Winds Maneuver, Lightning Strike Style

The Exalt becomes a whirlwind of speed and mayhem for the duration of the Charm. While using the Hurricane Combat Method, the Immaculate adds her Martial Arts total to her initiative and all dodge rolls (use her Martial Arts alone if she has no other dodge pool), triples her movement and doubles her possible jumping height. It also allows her to make at number of extra martial arts or ranged attacks equal to her permanent Essence rating every turn.

The health level cost of this Charm is not paid until the Charm has expired. The Willpower point and motes must be paid up front as normal. The character can end this Charm prematurely at the end of any turn. Obviously, care should be taken when invoking this Charm. Used by a weakened Exalt, the consequences can be deadly.

## Earth Dragon Style

### Force of the Mountain

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The power of the earth is massive indeed, bearing as it does the entire weight of Creation. Martial artists of the Path of Earth can channel some of that power through their bodies and into their opponents. The Exalted takes a moment to center himself, then unleashes a powerful blow. The Immaculate may add his Essence to the damage of the next Melee, Brawl or Martial Arts attack he lands. If the blow is with a weapon, the character must pay an additional point of Essence to channel the power of the earth through it — unless the weapon in question is the Earth Dragon's signature weapon, the seven section staff.

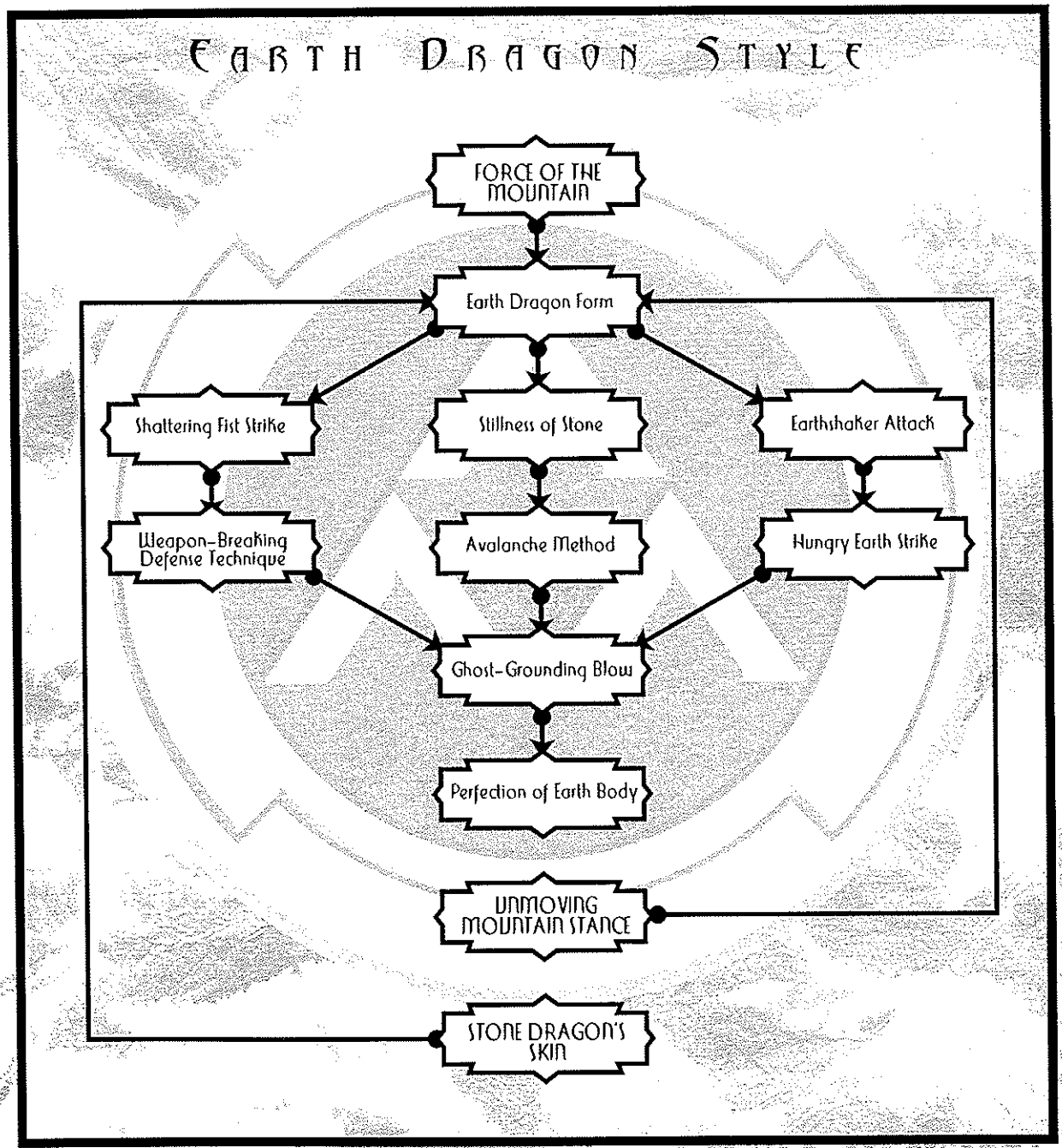
This attack can also affect dematerialized spirits as if they were material. Obviously, the character must be using Spirit Sight to see the spirit and thus attack it.

### Unmoving Mountain Stance

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes |
| **Duration:** | Martial Arts in minutes |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 1 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | None |

This Charm is a combination of martial arts move and meditative technique. The disciples of the Earth Dragon can often be seen standing as still as statues in the gardens of the Cloister of Wisdom, for while invoking this Charm, a martial artist's body takes on the very stillness and semblance of stone.

But aside from its meditative function, the Unmoving Mountain Stance has applications in combat. Displacing a monk invoking the stance is no easy task. For the purposes of the Immaculate holding his ground or keeping from being knocked down, treat her permanent Essence as



automatic successes in any contested roll to displace her. Fighting opponents using this Charm can be a disconcerting experience, as they simply refuse to be knocked off their feet no matter what sort of mayhem is applied to them. They are immune to all knockback or knockdown effects as well.

The Charm also has some non-combat advantages. If an Earth Immaculate is attempting to hide, the ability to remain absolutely still and silent can be a great boon. Assuming the Immaculate has found an appropriate hiding place and is totally still, any attempt to locate her by hearing, sound, body heat, etc. must overcome the character's Essence in automatic opposing successes.

### Stone Dragon's Skin

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

With the invocation of this Charm, the Exalt's skin briefly becomes as hard as the stony hide of the Earth Dragon. The Immaculate's Martial Arts Ability acts as armor against both lethal and bashing damage for the rest of the turn. The martial artist may also parry weapons with his bare hands without the use of a stunt. This Charm may only be used once per turn.

### Earth Dragon Form

**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Force of the Mountain, Unmoving Mountain Stance, Stone Dragon's Skin

By executing a series of katas, the Earth Immaculate comes into true contact with the Earth Dragon and can directly channel some of its power. For the remainder of the scene after successful invocation of the Earth Dragon Form, the Exalt adds his Martial Arts to his bashing and lethal soaks against any attack. This armor even applies to aggravated damage, which cannot normally be soaked.

Invoking the form also requires a successful Dexterity + Martial Arts roll. If the roll fails, the motes for this Charm are not spent, but the action is wasted. The above benefits are cumulative with any other Charms or anima powers invoked by the Immaculate. Only one Form-type Charm can be used at any one time. Invoking a Form-type Charm immediately terminates the benefits of any other Form-type Charm the character may have active.

### Shattering Fist Strike

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Martial Arts in turns
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Earth Dragon Form

The raw power of the elemental Earth is fearsome to behold. By channeling this power into his body, an Immaculate can create a great deal of destruction. This Charm doubles the Exalt's raw damage for the purposes of destroying objects. This boost lasts for the character's Martial Arts in turns. The Charm has absolutely no affect on the amount of damage that a character does to living things. The effect of Shattering Fist Strike stacks with other effects, such as a Slayer Khatar's, that increase a character's damage against objects.

Great care is taken in training disciples in how to use this Charm properly, as careless use can be dangerous. Even though the Charm does not affect living beings, improper application can cause damage to the character indirectly. For example, if an Exalt were to use Shattering Fist Strike on a pillar supporting the roof, he would probably be crushed. The Storyteller should apply appropriate damage in these situations.

### Weapon-Breaking Defense Technique

**Cost:** Special, plus 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Shattering Fist Strike

This maneuver can be attempted either bare handed or with martial arts weapons. Roll normally to parry an attack. If the roll succeeds, the character has successfully captured the weapon between her hands or with her weapon. Her player immediately makes a reflexive Strength + Martial Arts roll. This roll is difficulty 1 for normal weapons but difficulty 3 for exceptional weapons and 5 for weapons forged from the Five Magical Materials. If the roll succeeds, the weapon the character was attacked with is broken, shattered or otherwise rendered useless. Even if the Immaculate fails to break the weapon, the weapon's owner's player must succeed in a reflexive opposed Strength + Athletics test with the Immaculate player's or be immediately disarmed. The cost of this Charm is a number of motes of Essence equal to the difficulty of the roll to break the weapon, and is paid before the parry attempt is made.

Weapons affected by this Charm are not totally destroyed, just rendered immediately useless. They can typically be repaired or reforged given time and skill.

### Stillness of Stone

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Special
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Earth Dragon Form

With a precision martial arts attack, the Immaculate not only strikes at certain critical nerve junctures, she instill a small amount of Earth Essence into the target. The target is paralyzed and completely unable to act for one turn per health level of damage suffered in the character's attack. If an opponent is reduced below Incapacitated by such an attack, he is not only killed, but turned to stone. The character's body calcifies into rock, and he remains in that state forever, a ghastly trophy to the Immaculate's martial skill.

This attack cannot be channeled through a weapon. The character must actually hit the target with her bare hands.

### Avalanche Method

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** Until line of sight is broken or the character is incapacitated
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Stillness of Stone

The Exalted invokes this Charm as he makes a normal attack, raining a flurry of blows down upon his opponent, driving her to the ground — or at least into some inferior defensive posture.

If the character successfully strikes his opponent, make a reflexive opposed roll pitting the Immaculate's Strength + Martial Arts against the target's Stamina + Athletics. If the target exceeds the character's number of successes, she suffers normal damage but no additional effect. If the character ties or exceeds the target's successes, Earth Essence courses from him into his target's body, weighing her down as if beneath the crushing weight of an avalanche. For every success he gets, the target suffers a one die penalty to all physical tasks so long as the Exalt can maintain line of sight to the target. These successes are not cumulative if the target is subjected to the Avalanche Method on a subsequent turn — only the highest number of successes rolled applies.

If the Exalt accrues more points of impairment than the target has points of Stamina, the target is "buried," completely immobilized and unable to take any physical action unless released by the Exalt. The Earth Dragon Immaculate must maintain physical contact with the target to maintain this immobile state. The Exalted can take actions as normal, but all physical tasks are at +1 difficulty, reflecting the inconvenience of maintaining contact with the target of the Avalanche Method.

Earth-aspected Terrestrial Exalted are totally immune to this Charm, although they may suffer normal physical damage from the blow charged with it. This power cannot be channeled through weapons.

### Earthshaker Attack

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Earth Dragon Form

To use this Charm, the martial artist must be standing on the earth itself or on an earthen surface (stone, masonry, etc.). The Immaculate brings her foot down upon the ground with a mighty stomp, and the Earth Dragon heaves and tosses in response.

The players of everyone within the invoker's Essence x 10 feet must make a reflexive Dexterity + Resistance roll with a difficulty equal to the Exalt's Essence as the earth shakes and rocks beneath their feet. A character whose player fails the roll is thrown violently off his feet and into the air, taking one die of bashing damage per point of the Immaculate's Martial Arts. This damage is soaked as normal. See the rules on knockback and knockdown rules on page 234 of the **Exalted** main rulebook.

### Hungry Earth Strike

**Cost:** 5+ motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Earthshaker Attack

After a moment of focus, the Exalt crouches down and seems to simply strike the ground with an open palm. But far from being a simple strike, shockwaves ripple through the ground toward a target of the character's choice. The earth beneath opens up like a gaping maw — then closes back up again with immobilizing force.

The Immaculate's player should roll his character's Strength + Martial Arts in a reflexive opposed roll against the target's Wits + Athletics. The target's defense roll is reflexive. Each success the Immaculate gets causes the target a difficulty penalty of +1 for any physical activity, as well as adding one to the Strength rating of the grip of the earth. The impairment continues until the target breaks free, and until she breaks free, the target may not move from the spot at which the Hungry Earth struck her. The victim's player may make a Strength + Athletics roll with a difficulty equal to the strength of the earth's grip to free herself. This escape attempt takes a full action. If the target succeeds, she is free of the Hungry Earth.



If the character manages to actually exceed the target's Strength with the strength of the Hungry Earth, the target is sucked down into the ground. She may do nothing except try to free herself, and the Strength rating of the earth's grip is doubled.

Additional targets can be affected by the Hungry Earth Strike for the price of 1 mote per extra target. The Immaculate's player makes one Strength + Martial Arts roll, while each target's player gets her own Wits + Athletics rolls to evade the cracks. The maximum number of targets the Exalt can affect is double her Essence. Obviously, the subjects of this Charm must be standing on the ground to be affected.

### Ghost-Grounding Blow

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Weapon-Breaking Defense Technique, Avalanche Method, Hungry Earth Strike |

With a carefully placed melee strike, the Earth Dragon warrior infuses a bit of elemental Earth directly into a spirit's form, making it solid enough to be affected by his attacks.

To use this Charm, the Immaculate must first be Spirit Walking (see page 242). Upon making a successful martial arts attack on a spirit, the martial artist's player should roll his character's Wits + Martial Arts in a reflexive opposed contest against the spirit's permanent Willpower. If the martial artist loses the contest, the blow has no effect. If he wins this contest, the spirit takes no damage, but it is dragged into the material world. The spirit must first drain it's own Essence to pay for the materialization. If the spirit's Essence isn't sufficient, the remainder is drained from the character. If the Exalt doesn't have enough either, the Essence is still lost from both parties, but the spirit remains immaterial.

The spirit must remain materialized for a number of hours equal to the Immaculate's Martial Arts Ability. It is in all ways a normally materialized spirit that is prohibited from dematerializing and can use its Charms as normal, assuming it still has enough Essence to do so. Should the Immaculate and the spirit tie on the opposed roll, the spirit is driven into the material world but need remain for only a single turn.

No spirit likes to be forced into the material world, and most spirits are inclined to dramatically display this displeasure. Needless to say, Earth-aspected

Immaculates usually use this move as a prequel to destroying the spirit in question.

This Charm has no effect on spirits with permanent Essences higher than the Dragon-Blood's.

### Perfection of Earth Body

**Cost:** 10 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 5
**Prerequisite Charms:** Ghost-Grounding Blow

This Charm is the pinnacle of the Earth Dragon Path, representing the Immaculate truly becoming one with the Earth Dragon — if only for a short time. The martial artist drops to his hands and knees for a few moments, putting himself fully in contact with the elemental Earth. The Immaculate's body twists and shifts, his skin becoming rough and craggy, his body hardening and calcifying. The Dynast becomes a being of living stone for the rest of the scene.

The affects of this are quite dramatic. The character's Strength is doubled by the powerful Earth Essence coursing through his body, and blows from the character's fists become deadly weapons, with Accuracy, Parry and Damage ratings equal to the character's permanent Essence and a Speed equal to twice the character's permanent Essence. The character's unarmed attacks do lethal damage. The Immaculate's granite-like skin also gives enormous protection, increasing his lethal and bashing soaks by his permanent Essence score and allows him to soak lethal damage with his entire Stamina. This protection is incompatible with armor but works with any other defensive Charms that character may be using. The character also ignores the penalties of losing health levels. He still takes the damage normally but functions as if unwounded until incapacitated. If the character is wounded already when invoking Perfect Earth Body, those penalties are eliminated, although the damage is not healed.

## Fire Dragon Style

### Flash-Fire Technique

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The special training the Fire Dragon Immaculates undergo allows them to take action with the speed of a spark igniting bone-dry tinder. By spending 3 motes of Essence, a Fire Immaculate may reroll his initiative and use the best of the two results.

### Flame-Flicker Stance

**Cost:** 1 mote per +1 difficulty
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Flash-Fire Technique

After invoking the Flame-Flicker Stance, the character's body seems to shift and move like a burning flame. Until the martial artist's next action, all attempts to physically attack her are at a +1 difficulty per mote of Essence expended. A character cannot have more of a bonus active at any one time from this Charm than her permanent Essence.

### Searing Fist Attack

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The damage done by the Searing Fist Attack is not that terrible — but the pain is. An attack enhanced by this Charm leaves a deep burning sensation where it lands, distracting an opponent. The Fire Dragon Immaculate focuses his Essence and strikes his opponent, a slight scent of brimstone suffusing the air. Figure damage as normal for the martial arts attack. A target taking damage from the Searing Fist Attack suffers a –1 penalty to his dice pools for the rest of the scene. The character must actually do damage to his target to inflict this penalty. The effect of multiple Searing Fist Attacks is cumulative.

### Perfect Blazing Blow

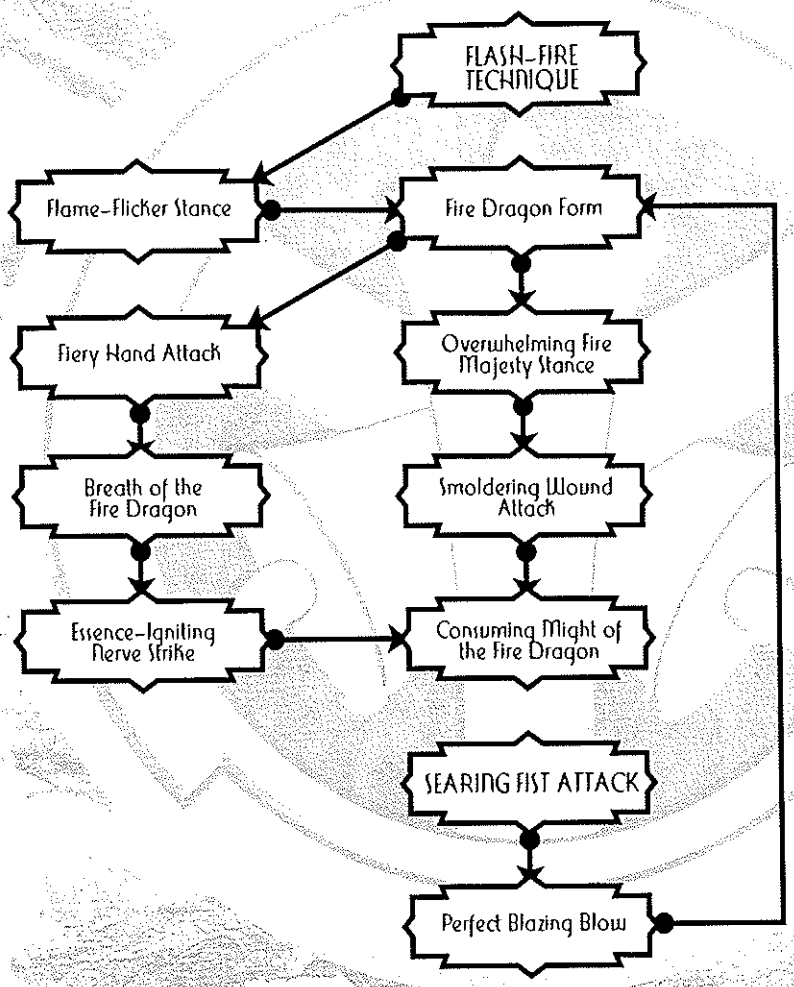
**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Searing Fist Attack

After the character attacks, but before the defense is rolled, the Immaculate's player can choose to reroll the attack and pick which result he wants to use. A character can only use this Charm once on any given attack.

### Fire Dragon Form

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Flame-Flicker Stance, Perfect Blazing Blow

## Fire Dragon Style




Flames seem to glow in the eyes of the martial artist as she completes a quick series of katas to invoke the strength of the Fire Dragon. The Dynast's movements afterward are more like the fire she seeks to emulate, and she seems to dance beneath attacks aimed at her with frightening ease.

For the remainder of the scene after successful invocation of the Fire Dragon form, add the Exalted's Martial Arts score as successes to any dodge rolls. This bonus is added to each dodge roll separately. The character cannot use these successes as a reflexive action — in order to dodge an attack, she must still either abort to a full dodge or have dedicated actions to dodging ahead of time.

Invoking the Fire Dragon Form also requires a successful Dexterity + Martial Arts check, representing the successful execution of the move itself. If the roll fails, the motes for this Charm are not spent, but the action is wasted. The above benefits are cumulative with any other Charms or anima powers invoked by the Immaculate but are not compatible with the use of armor.

Only one Form-type Charm can be invoked at any one time. Invoking a new Form-type Charm automatically ends the effects of any currently active Form-type Charm.

### Fiery Hand Attack

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 4 motes |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Fire Dragon Form |

A successful Firey Hand Attack does normal damage plus the character's Martial Arts rating, as the flaming touch sears his enemy. The attack does lethal damage, even if it wouldn't normally. Upon striking an opponent, the Immaculate's player also reflexively rolls the character's Strength + Martial Arts versus the target's Stamina + Resistance. A being magically attuned to water may add two dice to her roll when resisting this attack. If the target wins or ties, the attack has no additional effect on her beyond the damage. If a target loses, burning Fire-aspected Essence is unleashed upon her, and she bursts into flame.

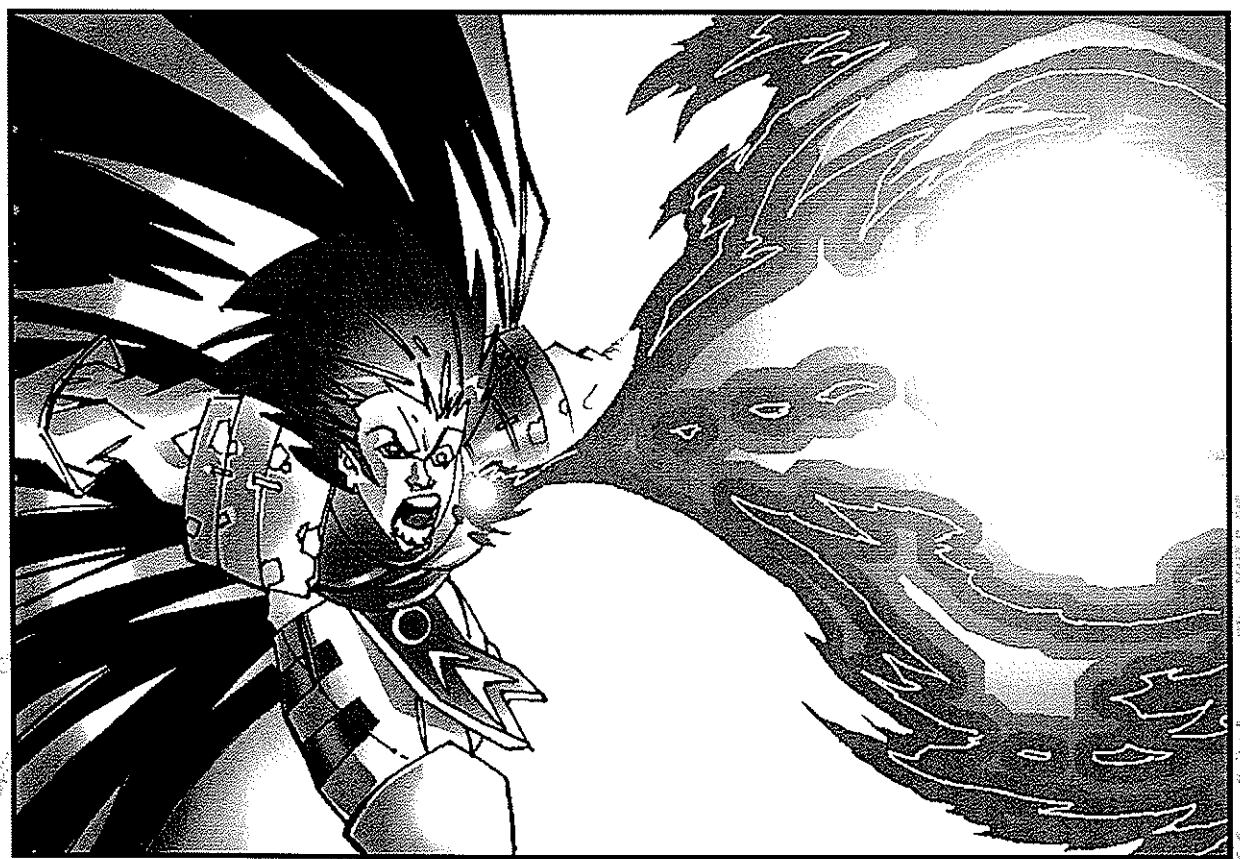
While it looks, smells and feels just like normal fire, the flames from a Firey Hand Attack are partially magical and can't be doused normally. Only magic or the expiration of the Charm kills the flames. If not doused, a target set aflame will continue to burn for the Exalted's Essence in turns. Treat the fire as a bonfire as per the environmental damage rules on page 244 of the main **Exalted** rulebook — every turn, the target's player must make a reflexive Stamina + Resistance roll at difficulty 3, the character taking 2L damage if the roll succeeds or 6L damage if it fails. This damage is soaked normally.

### Breath of the Fire Dragon

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 1 mote per Essence lethal damage |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Fiery Hand Attack |

With a momentary centering kata, a Fire Immaculate can spit a gout of fire up to his Essence in yards. To attack, roll the Immaculate's Perception + Martial Arts, with his Essence rating acting as automatic successes. This fiery breath does the character's Essence in lethal damage per mote the Fire Dragon Immaculate invests in the Charm. A character cannot invest more motes in this attack than his Martial Arts score.

By expending a point of Willpower, the Dragon-Blood can empower the Breath of the Fire Dragon to affect spirits as well as material objects.



### Essence-Igniting Nerve Strike

**Cost:** 5 Essence, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Breath of the Fire Dragon

With a series of quick nerve touches, the Exalt actually causes the Essence in his opponent's body to flare, potentially causing a great deal of damage. The Immaculate makes a martial arts attack as normal, but if he hits, the attack does no damage. Instead, for every mote currently in a target's Personal Essence pool, he takes one health level of lethal damage, up to a maximum of twice the Immaculate's permanent Essence. This damage ignores armor but may be soaked normally with Stamina and other non-armor defenses. Obviously, this Charm is of limited use against non-Exalted, but Exalts could potentially suffer up to 10 health levels of damage. The target's Essence remains totally available, it simply serves as a catalyst for the attack and is not reduced.

### Overwhelming Fire Majesty Stance

**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** Until abandoned
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Fire Dragon Form

The power and majesty of a raging conflagration can cow even the bravest of hearts. By striking an aggressive pose and channeling this aspect of fire, a follower of the Fire Dragon can strike fear into lesser foes.

Attacking a character who is using Overwhelming Fire Majesty Stance is not an easy prospect. Anyone able to see who tries to attack the Fire Dragon Immaculate must subtract the character's Martial Arts rating from their dice pools when doing so. Additionally, anyone trying to attack those who are clearly allied with the martial artist must subtract half that number of dice (rounded down). This latter effect has a range equal to the Dynast's Essence in yards centered on the Immaculate.

While maintaining the stance, the Immaculate can defend himself and take normal actions, but he may not make any attacks or use other Charms. He may also move at half his normal speed. If the martial artist is struck and suffers any health levels of damage, the stance ends immediately. If the character abandons the Overwhelming Fire Majesty Stance voluntarily, the effects linger on for a single turn after the character drops the stance.

### Smoldering Wound Attack

**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** Varies
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Overwhelming Fire Majesty Stance

This Charm focuses Essence into the Exalt's blow, investing the attack with the heat of burning embers. If the character manages to damage her opponent, the wound smolders like a dying fire. At the beginning of the turn following the one in which the Smoldering Wound Attack was successful, the victim suffers the same post-soak damage that the original attack caused. Soak does not apply to this damage, but the damage is rolled normally.

### Consuming Might of the Fire Dragon

**Cost:** 6 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 4
**Prerequisite Charms:** Essence-Igniting Nerve Strike, Smoldering Wound Attack

This Charm enhances the natural anima flare of a Fire Exalt. For Aspects of Fire, it triples the fire damage that their anima causes. If the character using the Charm is not a Fire-aspected Exalted, the Charm causes him to erupt in the Aspect of Fire anima power — but without the tripled damage. Anyone viewing the invoker is also subject to the same effects as if the Exalt was using the Overwhelming Majesty Fire Stance, except that the effect doesn't end if the character attacks or uses Charms.

## Water Dragon Style

### Flowing Water Defense

**Cost:** 1 mote
**Duration:** Essence in turns
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 1
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

The peculiar liquid, dancing moves of the Water Dragon fighting style allows those trained in them to flow out of the way of opponent's blows like water. For a number of turns following invocation equal to her Essence, subtract one die from the martial artist's own attack pools. Anyone attempting any attack against the Dragon-Blooded during that time subtracts three dice from his pool for that action. A character can only benefit from the effects of this Charm once at any given time.

### Rippling Water Strike

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Flowing Water Defense

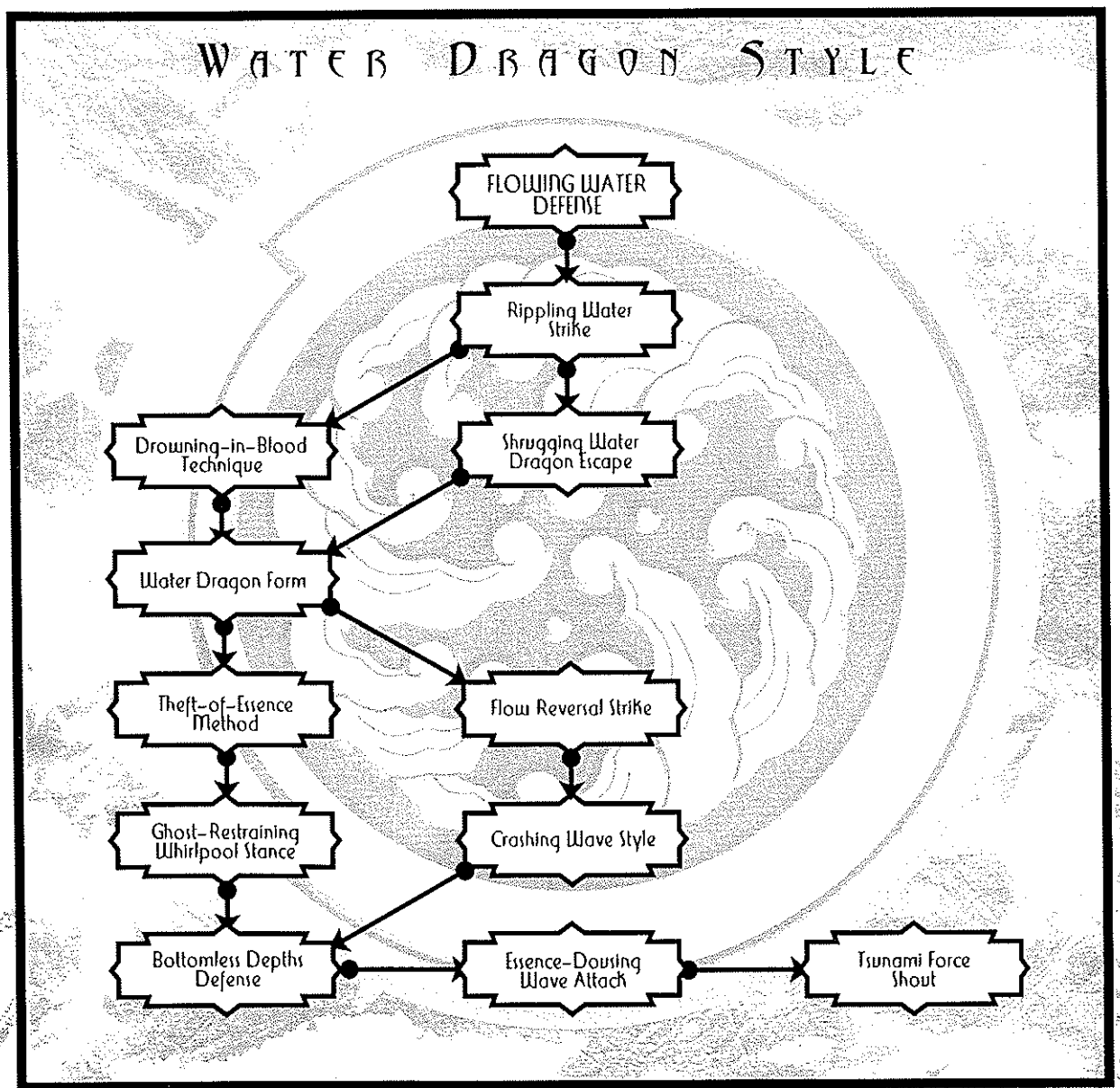
Like ripples emanating from a pebble dropped into the glassy surface of water, the force of an attack enhanced by Rippling Water Strike spreads outward from the point of impact to affect those nearby. The target of the attack takes normal damage, but everyone but the Immaculate within 10 feet of the target takes bashing damage equal to the successes rolled on the damage roll — if the target takes no health levels of damage, there is no ripple damage. This bashing damage can be soaked as normal and cannot be converted to lethal.

The Immaculate cannot be selective about who is affected by the Rippling Water Strike. Friends are as susceptible as foes.

### Drowning-in-Blood Technique

**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Rippling Water Strike

The body, as anyone can see, contains a lot of water — blood. Dragon-Blooded warriors who learn the hidden tides and currents of blood can strike in such a way as to



cause internal bleeding into an enemy's lungs. The victim can literally drown in his own blood.

To use this Charm, the attacker makes a successful Martial Arts attack against his opponent, which does no damage. However, if the attack succeeds, the Immaculate's player then rolls a reflexive opposed test of the Exalt's Strength + Martial Arts against the target's Stamina + Resistance. If the Immaculate wins the contest, the target loses one point of Stamina for as many turns as the player rolled extra successes. Though the Drowning-in-Blood Technique itself does not inflict health levels of damage, it may look like a series of rapid-fire punches or some other attack. Subsequent uses of the Charm are cumulative. A character whose Stamina reaches zero from the effects of this Charm is dead.

### Shrugging Water Dragon Escape

**Cost:** 3 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Rippling Water Strike

With a focusing of Essence, the Immaculate can cast off any restraint, magical or physical. Chains shatter, ropes snap, handcuffs drop from the Exalt's wrists. Anything restraining the movement of the Immaculate is cast aside. In the case of artifacts and naturally occurring phenomena, their effects are suspended for a number of turns equal to the Exalted's Martial Arts score.

### Water Dragon Form

**Cost:** 5 motes
**Duration:** One scene
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 4
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Drowning-in-Blood Technique, Shrugging Water Dragon Escape

Bodies of water absorb force directed against them, dissipating damage. With the execution of a few fluid body movements, the Immaculate invoking the Water Dragon Form becomes more like the watery element she serves.

For the remainder of the scene after successful invocation of the Water Dragon Form, the martial artist gets a bonus to her lethal and bashing soaks equal to her Martial Arts Ability and can soak lethal damage with her Stamina for the duration of the Charm. In addition, whenever successfully attacked, the Exalt may spend additional Essence points for extra soak on a 1 mote per 2 points of soak basis. The character may declare how much Essence she is spending after her normal soak has been applied but *before* the attacker's player rolls damage.

Soak = base Martial Arts

In addition, the character's fluid form makes her blows harder to evade. Mechanically, this Charm increases her Martial Arts by an amount equal to her permanent Essence for the duration of the Charm. This is a Charm enhancement and counts against the maximum amount the Dragon-Blood may increase her Martial Arts by with Charms.

Invoking the form also requires a successful Dexterity + Martial Arts check, representing the basic execution of the move itself. If the roll fails, the Charm does not activate, and the motes spent to power it are not expended, but the character's action is wasted.

Only one Form-type Charm can be invoked at any one time. Invoking a new Form-type Charm automatically ends the effects of any currently active Form-type Charm.

### Theft-of-Essence Method

**Cost:** 4 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Water Dragon Form

After a successful attack, the player of the Water Dragon Immaculate invoking this Charm makes an Essence + Martial Arts roll. For every success, the Immaculate steals 3 motes of Essence from the target and adds them to his own reserves. This target's lost Essence is recovered normally.

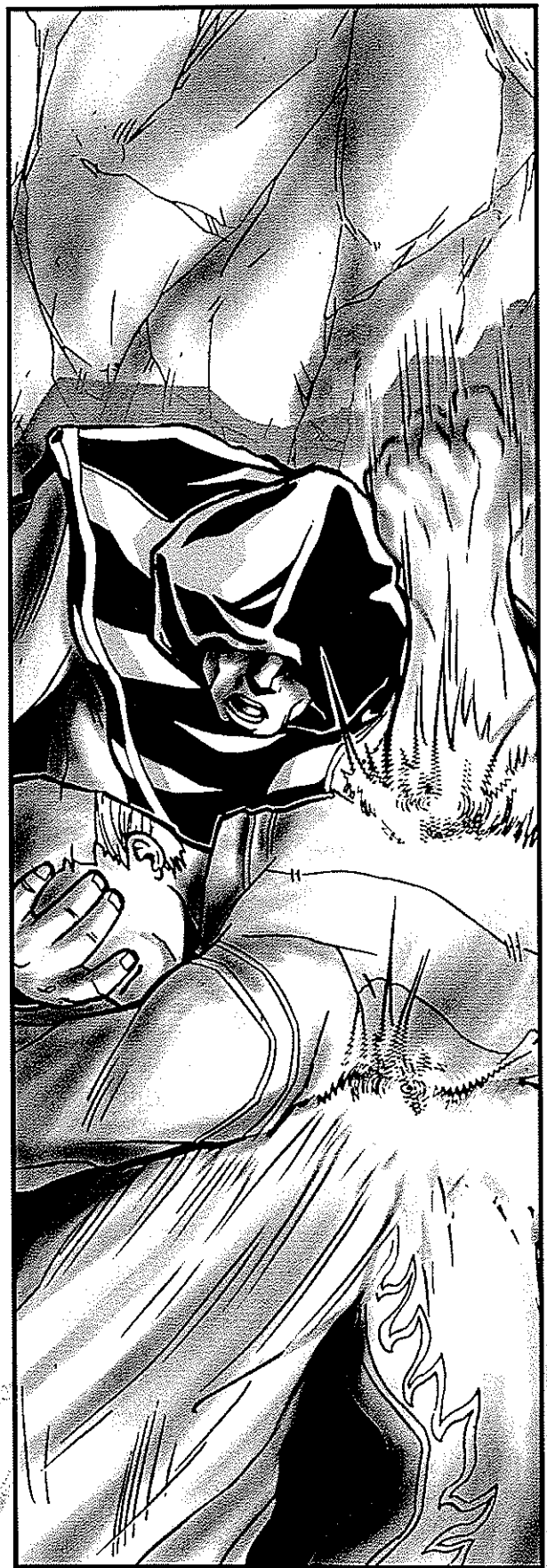
This stolen Essence can be used by the character — but only on other Water Dragon Path Charms. Essence stolen in this manner fades from the Immaculate at a rate of 1 mote per minute.

### Ghost-Restraining Whirlpool Stance

**Cost:** 5 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Until abandoned
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Theft-of-Essence Method

By executing a few special katas, the Immaculate invoking the Ghost-Restraining Whirlpool Stance sets up a vortex of water Essence capable of immobilizing even very powerful spirits.

To make an attack to set up a Ghost-Restraining Whirlpool, the martial artist spends her turn executing the movements necessary to start the Charm. The player should roll the Immaculate's Dexterity + Martial Arts. The player of any spirit in the area of effect should reflexively roll Essence in an opposed contest against the Immaculate. If the spirit wins, the whirlpool has no effect. For every success the Dynast gets, all spirits in the area of



effect must add a +1 difficulty penalty to any actions they take, as the roiling whirlpool of Essence draws them in.

If the difficulty penalty ever exceeds a spirit's permanent Essence rating, the spirit is totally immobilized, unless its permanent Essence rating is higher than the Immaculate's. In that case, it still suffers the difficulty penalties but, otherwise, acts as normal. The Ghost-Restraining Whirlpool has a radius of (10 x the character's Essence) in yards. While sustaining the whirlpool, the character must add +2 to the difficulty of any tasks she attempts, to reflect the enforced formality of her movement, and cannot move out of the area of effect without dropping the Charm.

### Flow Reversal Strike

**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Water Dragon Form

If the Dragon-Blood hits his target, for a fraction of a second, every moving fluid in the target's body reverses itself. Needless to say, living creatures do not react well to this.

The character makes an unarmed martial arts attack, which does normal damage. The target's player should roll her character's Stamina + Resistance against the Immaculate's original attack roll to hit, unreduced by attempts to dodge or parry it.

If the target does not exceed the Dragon-Blood's successes, the effects vary. Normal mortals and animals of less than twice the Immaculate's size failing the Resistance roll are killed outright. Exalted and other magical beings take a single automatic level of unsoakable lethal damage. Aquatic or amphibious creatures take two levels of damage. Even if a target's player succeeds at the Resistance roll, she must subtract two dice from any action involving physical activity for the Immaculate's Martial Arts in turns.

This Charm only works against living corporeal beings. Spirit, magical constructs and other non-living (or unliving) beings are unaffected.

### Crashing Wave Style

**Cost:** 4 motes
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Extra Actions
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Flow Reversal Strike

The ocean pounds the shores with savage fury, and Water-aspected Immaculates can channel that fury. Upon making a successful martial arts attack, the Dragon-Blood

may invoke this Charm and immediately make another attack, at –1 die to her pool. If that attack is successful, the Immaculate may make a further attack, but the penalty to her dies pool doubles to –2, on the third to -4, and so on. Each additional attack doubles the penalty yet again. If the penalties reduce an Immaculate's dice pool to zero, she may not make any further attacks. The maximum number of attacks a Dragon-Blood may make in this manner is equal to her Martial Arts rating.

### Bottomless Depths Defense

**Cost:** 5 motes, 1 health level
**Duration:** One turn
**Type:** Reflexive
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Ghost-Restraining Whirlpool Stance, Crashing Wave Style

When this Charm is invoked, the Immaculate immediately takes a single health level of aggravated damage. All other damage the Immaculate suffers for the rest of the turn is negated, drawn down into the bottomless abyss of the Water Dragon. This Charm may be used reflexively in response to being attacked, but it must be invoked *before* the damage for the attack is rolled.

Most walkers on the Water Dragon Path save this Charm for very extreme circumstances. The benefits can be high, but so are the consequences.

### Essence-Dousing Wave Attack

**Cost:** 8 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Varies
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 4
**Prerequisite Charms:** Bottomless Depths Defense

The dark, smothering Essence of the Water Dragon can be channeled through a Dynast's blows to douse the metaphorical fire of an opponent's magic.

To invoke this Charm, the Exalted makes a normal martial arts attack, either armed or unarmed. The attack does normal damage, and if the target is actually hurt by the attack (that is, loses health levels), the martial artist's player should make an immediate reflexive Martial Arts + Essence roll with a difficulty equal to the target's Essence. For a number of turns equal to the successes that the Immaculate gets, all Charms and sorcery affecting the target are suppressed. If the number of successes exceeds the Essence of the character who invoked an affected Charm or cast an affected spell, the magic is actually dispelled.

Characters affected can renew Charms on themselves during the duration of the suppression. Unless the Charms are specifically noted as having cumulative benefits, characters who suddenly have the same Charm active on them twice when the suppression ends gain no special benefits, and even cumulative Charms cannot exceed their normal maximum effectiveness.

This Charm can be used on friendly targets, but the martial artist must do at least one health level of bashing damage to trigger the effect.

### Tsunami Force Shout

**Cost:** 10 motes, 1 Willpower, 1 health level
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 4
**Prerequisite Charms:** Essence-Dousing Wave Attack

The Tsunami Force Shout radiates out from the Immaculate in a 45-degree arc, reaching out to her Essence in yards. Anyone, friend or foe, caught in the area of effect takes twice the Dynast's Martial Arts + Essence as damage, as a wave of Water Essence washes over them.

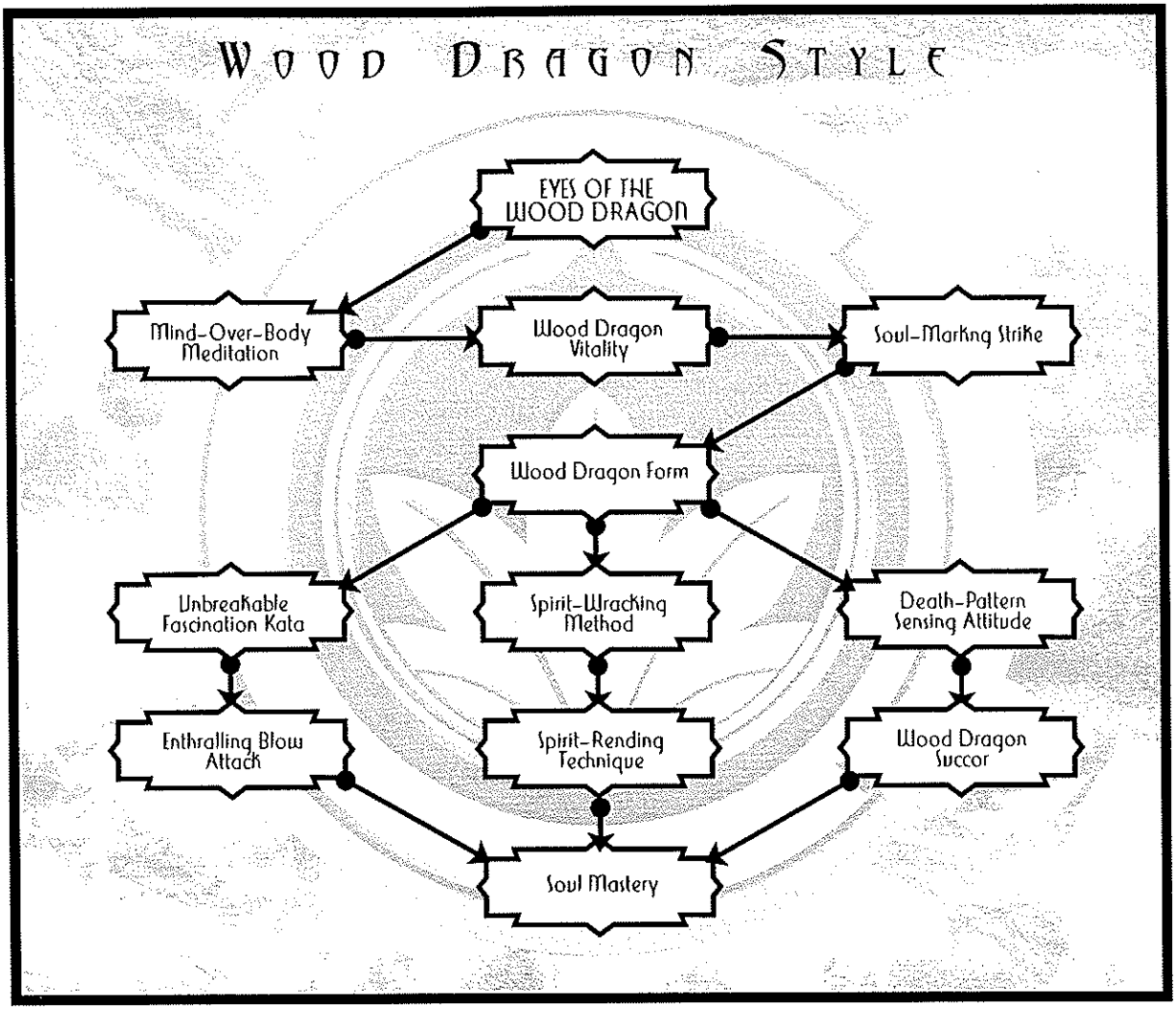
The type of damage varies, depending on the characters' strength of spirit. The players of everyone caught in the area of effect must make a reflexive Essence check. If the roll botches, the damage is aggravated and automatic — everything not soaked translates into an automatic health level of aggravated damage. If the roll fails, the damage is aggravated but rolled normally. If the roll succeeds, the damage is lethal and rolled normally. With at least three successes on the Essence roll, the damage is bashing.

## Wood Dragon Style

### Eyes of the Wood Dragon

**Cost:** 2 motes
**Duration:** Five turns or until used
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 2
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** None

By invoking the Eyes of the Wood Dragon, an Immaculate can perceive the patterns of a victim's soul and easily find the place to strike to cause the most damage.




When the Exalt next makes a martial arts attack that succeeds, roll her Essence rating as extra damage dice. This damage is delivered after the damage from the attack itself has been soaked. This damage ignores any armor, magical or otherwise, but may be soaked normally. If, for some reason (for example, the effects of the spell Invulnerable Skin of Bronze), the attack does not roll dice of damage, the extra dice of damage are not applied.

This attack may also affect dematerialized spirits as if materialized. This Charm is only effective against living beings and spirits — constructs and automata are immune to its effects. A character cannot invoke the effects of more than one instance of this Charm on a single attack.

### Mind-Over-Body Meditation

**Cost:** 2 motes per health level
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 3
**Minimum Essence:** 2
**Prerequisite Charms:** Eyes of the Wood Dragon

The followers of the Wood Dragon have mastered the flow of life force in their own bodies, and healing minor damage is a simple task for them. By simply concentrating and focusing for a moment, the Immaculate invoking the Charm can marshal his own Essence to heal.

For every 2 motes the Immaculate spends on this Charm, he may instantly heal one level of bashing damage. This Charm cannot heal lethal or aggravated damage.

### Wood Dragon Vitality

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 2 motes |
| **Duration:** | One turn |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 3 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 2 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Mind-Over-Body Meditation |

Essence surges through the Immaculate's body, bolstering her life force with that of the Wood Dragon. For the rest of the turn, the Immaculate's bashing soak is boosted by her Martial Arts rating, and she may soak lethal damage with her normal bashing soak.

### Soul-Marking Strike

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Supplemental |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Wood Dragon Vitality |

To use this Charm, a Wood Dragon Immaculate need merely caress her opponent, which results in a sharp pain in the target's head and no other obvious effects. If done in combat, this caress must be part of a successful attack.

For the remainder of the scene in which the Soul Mark is placed, any attacks the Immaculate makes against the Soul-Marked target have an automatic success added to the attack roll before the target's player makes her defense roll. Multiple soul marks are cumulative.

Soul Marking is especially painful to spirits — as painful as a real brand is to mortals. In addition to the effects listed above, each Soul Mark reduces a spirit's dice pools by –1 for the remainder of the scene, representing the constant burning pain the being endures.

For 24 hours following the use of this Charm, an Immaculate can sense when a being she has Soul Marked is within her Essence in yards, and which being it is.

### Wood Dragon Form

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Soul-Marking Strike |

Invoking the Wood Dragon Form puts the Immaculate in deeper touch with his own life force and healing ability. The martial artist strikes his own body with a series of precise, quick blows, which activate certain pressure points and strengthen the flow of Essence through the character's mortal shell.

For the remainder of the scene after successful invocation of the Wood Dragon Form, the Immaculate regenerates one health level of bashing damage per turn and one health level of lethal damage every two turns until killed. These health levels return at the beginning of each turn. Health levels lost to aggravated damage cannot be regenerated in this manner.

Invoking the form also requires a successful Dexterity + Martial Arts roll, representing the basic execution of the move itself. If the roll fails, the motes for this Charm are not spent, but the action is wasted.

Only one Form-type Charm can be invoked at any one time. Invoking a new Form-type Charm automatically ends the effects of any currently active Form-type Charm.

### Unbreakable Fascination Kata

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 4 motes |
| **Duration:** | Until abandoned |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 4 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Wood Dragon Form |

By executing a sinuous series of moves and undulations of the body, a Wood-aspected Immaculate can fascinate and distract opponents. Those characters affected by the Charm are transfixed by the hypnotic movements, standing rooted to the spot.

As long as the Exalt maintains the series of moves, the player of anyone wishing to take any action other than to stare in rapt fascination must win an reflexive opposed check between her character's Wits and the Immaculate's Martial Arts + Charisma. While executing the Unbreakable Fascination Kata, the Exalt may speak, move at half pace and dodge. Anything else, including an attack, breaks the Charm. Many Wood Dragons use this technique to draw close to an opponent before attacking.

### Enthralling Blow Attack

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 8 motes, 1 Willpower |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Unbreakable Fascination Kata |

The Dynast wishing to make an Enthralling Blow Attack must succeed in a normal martial arts attack against his target. Instead of rolling damage, the Immaculate's player and the target's both immediately make a reflexive opposed roll pitting the martial artist's Essence + Martial Arts against the victim's Essence + Willpower. If the Immaculate beats the target in the roll, the target is enthralled. She loses any action for the rest of the turn, and may take no actions at all other than to stand there, slack-jawed and vacant-eyed. On each subsequent turn the victim may attempt to shake off the effects of the



Enthralling Blow Attack, her player rolling the character's Essence + Willpower, with a difficulty of 1+ the number of successes that the Immaculate got on the opposed roll.

This Charm only works on living creatures.

### Spirit-Wracking Method

**Cost:** 4 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Supplemental
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Wood Dragon Form

When striking a spirit, the Wood Dragon Immaculate's knowledge of spirit energy allows her to channel her own Essence into the spirit's form, disrupting it temporarily.

The Immaculate must make a successful martial arts attack, either bare handed or with a weapon. This attack affects spirits as if they were materialized and does normal damage. If the Dynast actually wounds the spirit, her player immediately makes a reflexive Essence + Martial Arts roll with a difficulty equal to the spirit's Essence rating. For every success that the martial artist gets on the roll, the spirit must subtract one die from all its dice pools. This penalty fades at the rate of one die per turn.

### Spirit-Rending Technique

**Cost:** 8 motes, 1 Willpower
**Duration:** Instant
**Type:** Simple
**Minimum Martial Arts:** 5
**Minimum Essence:** 3
**Prerequisite Charms:** Spirit-Wracking Method

Much like Spirit-Wracking Method, Spirit-Rending Technique allows an Immaculate to strike a spirit being. But the effects are far more deadly than simple disruption.

The martial artist makes a normal martial arts attack, whether armed or unarmed. If she hits, instead of doing normal damage, make a reflexive Essence + Willpower roll. If the number of successes equals or exceeds the spirit's permanent Essence, it takes one automatic health level of aggravated damage. If the number of successes exceeds multiples of the spirit's Essence, then the spirit will take multiple health levels of damage. If the roll does not equal the spirit's Essence, the Spirit-Rending Technique has no effect.

*For Example: Tiphanie chooses to make an example of her fight with Talia, a weak nature spirit. She strikes Talia, and her player rolls eight successes on the Essence + Willpower roll. Talia is a weak spirit, and her permanent Essence is 3. She thus takes two automatic unsoakable levels of aggravated damage from the attack because the result is more than twice Talia's Essence. The extra two successes are wasted. If Tiphanie's player had rolled nine successes, Talia would have taken three levels of aggravated damage.*

### Death-Pattern Sensing Attitude

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 5 motes, 1 Willpower + 1 mote per attack dodged |
| **Duration:** | One scene |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Wood Dragon Form |

Once a Wood Dragon Immaculate is truly attuned to the patterns of soul energy, she can perceive the patterns of death as well — at least those directed against her person by other beings.

For the remainder of the scene after invoking the Death-Pattern Sensing Attitude, the Immaculate may make a full dodge against any hand-to-hand attack launched at her in a turn by a living being — or a being animated by spiritual energy. This includes spirits and the undead. This full dodge can even be used against ranged attacks, so long as the attacker is within the Immaculate's Essence in yards. Each dodge roll costs the Immaculate a single mote. The maximum number of attacks that can be dodged in this manner per turn is equal to the Immaculate's Essence. This dodge does not cost the Exalted her action for the turn and may even be made after she has acted in a turn.

The Dynast does not have to be aware of the attack, but the Patterns of Death do not alert an Immaculate to the mere presence of other living beings, only of their attacks. This Charm is ineffective against traps, attacks from automata and ranged attacks that occur from outside the radius of the Death-Pattern Sensing Attitude.

### Wood Dragon Succor

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 3 motes per health level |
| **Duration:** | Instant |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 3 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Death-Pattern Sensing Attitude |

This technique heals the wounds of others — but the Wood-aspected Immaculate cannot dissipate another's injuries directly as he can his own. He must first take these injuries onto his own body. All the Immaculate needs to do to activate this Charm is to touch the target. For every 3 motes of Essence the character invests in the Charm, he can draw one health level of damage out of a target and into himself. Even the most grievous wounds on the target close and heal, while the same injuries immediately appear on the Immaculate's body.

Taking on the wounds of others can be quite painful and dangerous. The character immediately assumes the proper level of impairment, although he can heal this damage with the Wood Dragon Form, assuming it is not aggravated.

### Soul Mastery

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cost:** | 10 motes, 1 health level |
| **Duration:** | Essence in turns or until discharged |
| **Type:** | Simple |
| **Minimum Martial Arts:** | 5 |
| **Minimum Essence:** | 4 |
| **Prerequisite Charms:** | Spirit-Rending Technique, Enthralling Blow Attack, Wood Dragon Succor |

This Charm is the highest mystery of the Dragon of Wood. Few have seen this Charm executed — and even fewer who have seen it have lived to tell anyone about it. The close alignment of the Wood Dragon with the forces of life allows the most highly skilled of its disciples mastery over life and death itself.

Invoking this Charm is an action in and of itself, and it absorbs the character's dice action for the turn. After the character invokes this Charm, it lingers on his hands as a sizzling green-and-black aura. In order to discharge the aura, the Immaculate must make a successful attack, though touching an unsuspecting victim would also work. If discharged by an attack, the attack does normal damage in addition to the effects of Soul Mastery.

The martial artist's player rolls a reflexive contested roll of his character's Essence + Martial Arts against his opponent's Stamina + Endurance. If the target loses this contest, her soul is severed from her body, killing her instantly. Even if she ties or beats the martial artist, the shock to the soul is considerable, and she character takes a number of dice of aggravated damage equal to the Immaculate's Essence.

In addition to its effects on living beings, any spirit with an Essence equal to or lower than the Immaculate's that is struck by Soul Mastery is annihilated utterly, ripped asunder by the Immaculate's wrath and permanently destroyed. Spirits can sense the presence of Exalted schooled in Soul Mastery and fear and dislike them intensely.

Using Soul Mastery is a not easy on the Immaculate. In addition to its considerable cost, once invoked, the power must be used — and quickly, lest the powerful Essence shred the martial artist's own soul. The Immaculate has her Essence in turns to successfully unleash the Charm, or she must resist the effects herself!



Hell was a cacophony. In the darkness, great kettledrums rolled, stone bells rang discordantly and sanxians howled as the fingers of demons misplayed them expertly. Beneath the twisted music lay the sounds of eternal torment. There were hisses and crashes, the glittering splash of breaking glass and tuneless choruses of shrieks.

Before the woman's eyes was the red and green-lit madness of Malfeas, the hell-prison of the Yozis. Around her wrists and ankles were chains of jade and iron that leeched her Essence with their frigid touch. Behind her stood a great golden pillar, and the chains that bound her were looped over a hook that protruded from the pillar's face. Beneath her lay the vast bronze and serpentine palace of the Ebon Dragon. Above her rode the mad stars of an alien sky, and the burning green sun offered only a crazed and flickering light. Around her twined the Ebon Dragon itself, a great beast cast wholly from shadow. Its vast black bulk touched the woman, smothering and caressing her. It cocked its head beside her ear and spoke. The Yozi's voice was the voice of all fears, the sickening, heart-rending comfort of sheer mindless terror. The woman's heart broke with joy to hear the demon prince's words, for the Primordial's voice was such that the listener could do nothing else save worship.

The Ebon Dragon spoke to his captive, saying, "Our imprisonment has changed us, yes. We would never have been beautiful to your perceptions, and now, we are so very, very broken. We were bound here in the green-lit darkness, forced to swear oaths on our own names that we would never leave. We could only watch and hate and want for revenge. That is, until you came, my little Dragon-Blooded dove. You read our prayer book, and your desire for immortality led you right into our web."

The ageless, ancient woman blinked, terrified beyond fear. The vast and immaterial bulk of shadows crushed her tighter. The darkness touched her secret places, and the slick, sickening honey voice hissed in her ear. "You shall be immortal. We have waited a long time for one such as you, and now that we have you, we will never let you go. You will be the chief servant of the Yozis in Creation. You will be our high priestess. You will be my wife. You will come to love it all, and you shall have the forever you desire as our most beloved slave. Even now, they prepare to bury you in absentia. Your funeral shall be our wedding celebration."

The woman looked out at the city beneath the palace and knew the demon prince's words to be true. In the yards below, the preparations for the wedding were underway. Garlands of tears were strung above every gate, and the wails of well-tormented souls echoed from the city's freshly swept bone roadways and black iron walls. Honor guards drilled in torch-lit courtyards, and dark and unholy delicacies were baking in the palace's reeking kitchens. And around it all, Hell's cacophony continued unabated.

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# Storytelling

This book assumes you've already read **Exalted** and understand the world of the Second Age and the types of stories you can tell in that era. Consequently, this chapter focuses not on the basics of storytelling, but on specifics, in particular those issues that are unique to stories about the Dragon-Blooded. While not wholly different from the Solar Exalted described at length in the **Exalted** core rulebook, the Terrestrial Exalted exist in a very different milieu from the other Chosen; they are not rebels, but the guardians of the Scarlet Empire. This means not only that their Charms differ from those of other Exalted, but also that the mood, themes and action of their stories differ as well. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the Storyteller with examples and advice, so that his Dragon-Blooded series takes full advantage of the qualities that set the Terrestrial Exalted apart from their mightier brethren.

## The Dragon-Blooded

Before any examination of Dragon-Blooded stories is possible, it's important to look at the Dragon-Blooded themselves. What makes them special? How do they differ from the rest of the Chosen? Coming to grips with these questions serves two vital purposes. First, it enables the Storyteller to construct satisfying stories that play to the unique nature of the Terrestrial Exalted — their weaknesses *and* their strengths. Second, it provides the Storyteller with insights he can exploit in the construction of Dragon-Blooded Storyteller characters. After all, Storyteller characters are one of the primary means through which the players experience the world of the Second Age. To do that effectively, the Storyteller must understand the place of the Dragon-Blooded within it.

As you'll see, many of the topics discussed in this section foreshadow those described later under "Themes" and "Moods." That's intentional. An enjoyable **Exalted** series consists of an integrated whole, not just a collection of individual parts. Therefore, you'll see plenty of connections between sections. They've been put there to show how each story element interacts with others to create a greater whole — another valuable tool in the Storyteller's collection.

### Frailty

One of those most obvious and far-reaching differences between the Dragon-Blooded and other types of Chosen is their physical and sorcerous "frailty." Compared to the Celestials, the Terrestrial Exalted are weak. Their Attributes and Abilities indicate superhuman potential and training rather than the truly godlike power of the other Chosen, they can withstand fewer wounds in battle before expiring, and their aptitude with Charms is much weaker than that of other Exalted. These factors contribute to the relative weakness of the Terrestrial Exalted, especially when compared to the foes they face in defense of the Realm.

This frailty might seem like a drawback to using the Dragon-Blooded in an **Exalted** story — and it is, at least for the Dragon-Blooded in question. Yet, with that drawback also come many dramatic opportunities. While heroism is about excelling one's peers, drama also involves weakness. In many ways, weakness is what truly distinguishes — and ennobles — the efforts of the Dragon-Blooded. The least powerful of the Exalted, it is nevertheless they who refounded the Realm, who fight the Fair Folk and the Anathema and who hold back chaos. Without the monumental efforts of these Chosen, civilization might well have fallen to the forces of destruction. Such an unfortunate turn of events may yet occur, which is why the Dragon-Blooded fight to overcome their weaknesses and protect the Scarlet Empire. Should they fail, the consequences would be disastrous for all of Creation.

As a Storyteller, the relative frailty of the Terrestrial Exalted is a blessing in disguise. Stories involving the Dragon-Blooded can take on a desperate, even frantic quality, a quality very conducive to feats of heroism and self-sacrifice — the very stuff of great **Exalted** stories. Moreover, that frailty encourages the characters to work together for mutual benefit. Unlike other types of Exalted, the Dragon-Blooded are keenly aware of their own precarious position and that of the Realm they defend. Thus, the Terrestrial Exalted have even more reason to form sworn brotherhoods and fight side by side in the continuing struggle against their enemies. Indeed, even their powers encourage this cooperation.

Furthermore, the Dragon-Blooded are easier for players to identify with — another important blessing. Since the Second Age is a time of wonders and horrors, it can seem distant, even unreal, to players of the game. The success of any roleplaying game depends on the players being able to suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves in the fictional world of their characters. If the players can't do that effectively, the series will fail.

Because the Dragon-Blooded are less like demigods than other types of Exalted, some players may find them easier to play as characters. The struggles of the Terrestrial Exalted are indeed heroic, but their weakness brings them down to earth. Throughout human history, there have been many similar heroic undertakings. Consequently, players might use these similarities to bridge the gap between fantasy and reality. By so doing, they can concentrate less on the remarkable abilities of their characters and more on the struggle that awaits them in the Second Age.

## Face

A corollary of the Dragon-Blooded's weakness is their concern with how others view their actions — face. From an objective point of view, there's no question that the Terrestrial Exalted have achieved many amazing things. Their willingness to challenge the Realm's enemies, many of whom are greater in power, is a testament to their courage and dedication to duty. When the Celestial Exalted became corrupt and threatened the stability of Creation, the Dragon-Blooded rose up and overthrew them. They did so not merely out of self-interest or greed, but because they also believed *it had to be done*. All that followed from that decision — the Solar Purge, the foundation of the Realm, the creation of the Wyld Hunt — had its foundation not in ambition, but in the belief that they had no choice. Their culture is a military one, focused on shame, on duty to one's nation and family and on respect.

From a Storyteller's perspective, this provides nearly endless dramatic possibilities. On the simplest level, the Dragon-Blooded's concern with standing in the eyes of others creates ready-made hooks for stories. As a Storyteller, you should never be afraid to appeal to the Dragon-Blooded's concern with face to initiate a story. This intangible and elusive sense of personal worth is at the heart of Terrestrial Exalted psychology and society. Unlike obviously mercenary and self-interested character types, the Storyteller can easily manipulate the Terrestrial Exalted's concern with face. If a satrapy is threatened by the Anathema, for example, the Chosen governing the satrapy must respond or lose standing in the eyes of her house and peers.

Face is the quality by which the Dragon-Blooded view their place in Creation; it is the moral compass that guides them in their actions. Face compels many Terrestrial Exalted to defend Creation whatever the cost — that is their raison d'être. However, this doesn't mean they'll act foolishly in its defense. A proper concern for face demands a careful weighing of the consequences of one's actions, both to oneself and those one wishes to save. As soldiers, the Dragon-Blooded understand that needless self-sacrifice is a waste of assets. While concern for face isn't an excuse for the Storyteller to railroad the characters on some fool's errand that no thinking person would undertake, it is nevertheless a powerful dramatic tool. For example, an appeal to a bonded circle's innate sense of personal worth might be one of the few reasons to expect it to enter the shadowlands and fight the forces of the Deathlords without giving thought to its survival.

Despite the ferocity they exhibit in protecting their reputations, the fact is that many of the Dragon-Blooded fall short of the ideals of the Realm. It has been hundreds of years since the Scarlet Empress refounded the Realm from the ruins of the Great Contagion. Grim necessity and virtue gave way to pragmatism, which, in turn, gave way to decadence. Along the way, many Dragon-Blooded have taken advantage of their positions in the Realm, losing sight of the goals that originally sparked the Solar Purge. Now, these Chosen turn a blind eye to injustice in the name of order. Their own fears have led to the acceptance of a multitude of abuses, so long as these abuses do nothing to undermine the security of the Realm — and their own status within it. Storytellers should remember that face cuts both ways. It can just as

easily be used to justify feathering one's own nest as it can be used to defend high ideals.

The lack of nobility in some Dragon-Blooded can thus serve equally well as the basis for stories. Characters who hold true to the highest ideals of the Terrestrial Exalted must eventually come to the realization that not all of their kind shares them. What do they do? They might also have a rude awakening when they enter the Threshold or Scavenger Lands, where they may find humans who view the Dragon-Blooded as contemptuous hypocrites who use their powers for petty self-aggrandizement, rather than the defense of Creation. How do the characters react? This constant clash between cold hard reality and the demands of honor set the Dragon-Blooded apart from other Chosen and can be the source of innumerable stories.

## Decadence and Sophistication

Two obvious characteristic of the Dragon-Blooded are their decadence and sophistication, both of which lend themselves well to drama. Although the Second Age is a time of wonders and potent sorceries, it also one of decadence and decay. The mighty achievements of the golden First Age have long since passed away, lost to the mists of time. What little of those glories remains rests in the hands of the Dragon-Blooded and their allies. This situation presents the Storyteller with many possible avenues of adventure.

The Terrestrial Exalted maintain the Realm in part due to their understanding of its First Age wonders, its defense systems, rain machines and warstriders. In many cases, their understanding is incomplete, even fragmentary. Yet, that understanding surpasses that of almost every other group in Creation, giving these Chosen a unique advantage over their foes — one that compensates them excellently for their physical weaknesses. The Dragon-Blooded see themselves as the guardians of the First Age; some even believe they're ushering in a newer and better age.

The Dragon-Blooded's greater understanding of First Age wonders makes it imperative that they become involved when these artifacts make an appearance. Even in cases where the possessor of these wonders wishes nothing ill toward the Realm and its inhabitants, his ignorance of the artifact's workings alone could cause untold damage. It does not require a First Age weather machine in the hands of the Anathema to devastate the Realm, only such a machine in the hands of someone who has no idea how to operate the device or what the side effects are. Rumors of sorcerous automatons in the hands of the Guild would bring a similar response.

While the Solar Exalted hide in the Threshold and the Lunar Exalted live as barbarians on the fringes of Creation, the Dragon-Blooded exist within the most powerful empire in all of Creation. Theirs is a world of high society and refinement. The Dynasts regularly throw lavish galas to celebrate everything from weddings to victories to holidays. Artistic salons and prestigious soirees are as



much a part of the Dragon-Blooded life as battle drills — a remarkable contrast to the hand-to-mouth squalor of the world outside the Realm.

An astute Storyteller should have no problem using this aspect of the Dragon-Blooded as a source of great stories. Like face, the Terrestrial Exalted's sophistication is a double-edged sword. There is little question that the Dragon-Blooded perspective is indeed correct. They *are* the most cultured, sophisticated and elegant beings under the heavens. Yet, that culture, sophistication and elegance masks the rot that is at the core of the Realm. Without the guidance of the Scarlet Empress, the Great Houses and their Dynasts see only opportunities for self-aggrandizement, even at the expense of the Realm's security. Whereas the Dragon-Blooded war against the Realm's external enemies with sorcery and the sword, they war against one another under the cloak of refinement. This gives the Storyteller many opportunities to involve the characters in bids for personal power, whether as instigators, targets, allies or hapless dupes caught in the middle of Dynastic politics.

## Authority

The final element that sets the Dragon-Blooded apart from their Celestial counterparts is the authority they wield within the Realm. The Terrestrial Exalted rule the world, and no one should forget that — including the Storyteller. The Dynasty *is* the Realm; the Dragon-Blooded are its face, its mind and its hands. Thus, what a sworn brotherhood of Terrestrial Exalted does reflects on the Realm, for good or for ill. That alone provides plenty of story possibilities. At its most basic, this authority means that Dragon-Blooded stories can and should involve more delicate politics and conspiratorial plots than stories involving the Solar Exalted.

The Dragon-Blooded justify their actions by claiming they're only doing what must be done. Even when what must be done isn't morally dubious or otherwise questionable, it can still be a bloody business. Keep in mind that most Terrestrial Exalted are almost totally guiltless about this. They ruthlessly exploit Creation because *it is their duty*. They are its overlords and need its strength to defend it. Someone must fight off the barbarians. Dragon-Blooded series should reflect this belief, even when it calls it into question. For example, a story about the Realm's subversion of a Threshold state should be grounded in a world in which doing so makes perfect sense. The Terrestrial Exalted don't doubt their right to kick over petty tyrants because, frankly, they're the Princes of the Earth. The sovereign is just ruling at their leisure anyway.

If the Storyteller wants to cast doubt on that belief, he should do so by showing its negative consequences in the course of the story rather than by lecturing the characters about the selfishness of their actions through the mouthpiece of a Storyteller character. The Dragon-Blooded would probably just kill such a mouthpiece outright for daring to speak to his betters in such a fashion, since the Chosen's claim to authority is an axiom to them. Show instead the long-term negative effects of high-handed behavior. If the resentment, political instability and economic dislocation of toppling the government aren't enough to persuade the Dragon-Blooded not to, giving them a lecture isn't going to convince the players, it's just going to sound like the Storyteller lecturing them through a mouthpiece.

At the same time, this isn't the only approach one can take to a Dragon-Blooded series. Indeed, it may not be the best approach in all cases. Bear in mind that part of the fun of playing the Terrestrial Exalted is in *being in charge*. Unlike the Solar Exalted, who must hide themselves lest they be destroyed by their foes, the Dragon-Blooded proudly stride across the earth, their power manifest for all to see. Most of their kind truly sees the Realm as Creation's only hope for order and security. They look upon their role in protecting and upholding that hope as a trust given to them by the Elemental Dragons. Since they take their role seriously, they expect others to do the same.

In story terms, this means the Dragon-Blooded expect to be treated with deference by those socially beneath them. For many players, this is incredibly enjoyable and as Storyteller, you should try to use it to good effect. Many games place the characters at the bottom of the social hierarchy, cruelly battered by Fate and their social betters. A Dragon-Blooded series operates on a very different principle. Even beginning Terrestrial Exalted are important people. True, they are not generals or the leaders of the Great Houses, but they are nevertheless representatives and agents of the Realm. That alone makes them more important in the empire's social hierarchy than the mightiest ordinary human — never mind the Anathema who cower at its edges.

A good Dragon-Blooded series takes full advantage of these Chosen's unique status as agents of the Realm. As noted in the previous sections, the types of adventures the Terrestrial Exalted undertake differ greatly from their Celestial counterparts. Instead of undertaking furtive exploits on the fringes of Creation, the Dragon-Blooded are merchant princes, diplomats, adventurers and military officers, and their exploits are totally out in the open. Their stories should reflect this state of affairs in ways that players can enjoy. Their characters should be at the forefront of the Realm's efforts; its commanders and proponents. Part of the pleasure of a Dragon-Blooded story is being at the helm of its action. Storytellers who remember this fact will be harnessing a powerful and enjoyable facet of the Terrestrial Exalted's nature that shouldn't be overlooked. In fact, doing so allows players to experience the world of Exalted through a very different set of circumstances — from the top of the metaphorical heap.

## Dealing with Unpleasantries

The Second Age is a brutal time. Slavery, Dynastic intrigue and the systematic oppression of "lesser" peoples — never mind the purge of the Celestial Exalted — are all standard operating procedure for the Realm. Consequently, it's pretty easy to make the Realm out to be the bad guys of **Exalted**. After all, the Dragon-Blooded routinely accept a variety of practices we in the 21st century believe to be evil and immoral. So, how is it possible for anyone to play in a Dragon-Blooded series without being repulsed by these practices? How can you paint the Terrestrial Exalted as honorable, upstanding men and women when they accept slavery and oppression as facts of life?

There are two approaches to this problem, neither one of which is strictly superior to the other. At the same time, it's your game, so feel free to pick and choose from among the options offered here. The first approach is the simplest: let the players' own moral sense "intrude" into the game setting. In this approach, the Storyteller doesn't ask the players (or their characters) to accept slavery, for example, as just another facet of Second Age culture, like the Immaculate Order or sorcery. While this isn't the most true to the setting, there's nothing wrong with that. In fact, use the players' sense of moral outrage as the basis for telling thrilling stories. Our ways are better and more enlightened, and if you implemented them in the Second Age, life would improve. It's just an unquestioned fact, and nobody has to contradict their most basic presuppositions to portray a sensible character.

If possible, though, you should try to keep the game and reality separate. Simply because what works in our world and time works in the world of **Exalted** isn't an excuse for a Storyteller or player with strongly held political views to bring those views into the game. If the player wishes to do so — and is capable of exploring the issues surrounding them without rancor — it can be the basis for roleplaying of the highest caliber. The characters, for example, could be crusaders against the practice of slavery, defying tradition and their own superiors in an effort to fund an "underground railroad" to freedom in the Threshold. Alternately, they could attempt to change the Realm's treatment of outsiders, seeking détente with the satrapies, the Scavenger Lands or even the Anathema. On the other hand, if this is going to cause conflicts within the player group as personal assumptions clash, then it's probably best to just avoid political issues altogether. While this first approach softens the hard reality of the Realm, it's one that may be more to the liking of players uncomfortable with the harsher elements of **Exalted**.

The second approach is the realistic approach, in which the Storyteller presents the setting and all of its elements in full. In this way, the Realm can be seen for what it is: a brilliant, glorious empire built on the backs of the oppressed. This game doesn't really make any assumptions about right and wrong at all. In this approach, the Realm is no different than ancient Athens or the former British Empire or modern America, a well-meaning but flawed state riddled with contradictions and falling far short of its highest ideals but still achieving something unique and wonderful. Though it has flaws, the flaws don't subtract from the heroism and sacrifice displayed by its finest sons and daughters.

The realistic approach isn't about whitewashing the Realm's atrocities so much as it is about accepting that "that's the way things work here." The Second Age isn't our own; it's only natural that it possesses many customs and traditions we find repulsive and morally objectionable. At the same time, these customs allow for the creation of a society that defends the whole of Creation against the depredations of foul beings who would bring the world crashing down around them. Does this justify the Realm's actions? Do the Terrestrial Exalted even need justification to do whatever they must to keep the world as they know it from ending? This all depends on the perspective of the individual character, and how each assesses the strengths and weaknesses of his society. Obviously, the downside is that many people aren't going to be comfortable playing characters who blithely live in a world whose foundations are economic exploitation, power-politics and religion as a social control.

## The Prelude

Like any other kind of Exalted, the Dragon-Blooded begin their lives as ordinary mortals, lacking the godlike abilities that distinguish their kind. However, these Chosen begin life knowing that there is a good chance they will one day be Exalted like their parents, grandparents and the many generations that preceded them. The offspring of Terrestrial Exalted are more likely to experience the Second Breath than any other humans, for the blood of the Terrestrials breeds true.

The basic principles behind the prelude are described in Chapter Three of the **Exalted** core rulebook, so there's no need to go over them here. The Dragon-Blooded are raised in an environment where there is every expectation that they will be Exalted. Unlike the Solars, for whom Exaltation is always a surprising, even frightening occurrence, the Terrestrial Exalted spend much of their childhood anticipating it. Indeed, they spend much of that time preparing for it. The educational system of the Realm is structured to give young Dragon-Bloods the skills and knowledge they need to prepare for the Second Breath.

The self-confidence of the Terrestrial Exalted stems from the near-certainty of their following in their parents' footsteps as Exalted. How would that affect play in the prelude? Was the Dragon-Blood a studious, dutiful sort who believed he needed to do everything within his power to prepare himself for Exaltation? Or did the near-certainty of it leave the Exalt without ambition or the need to prove himself? By playing out the prelude, the Storyteller gains insight into the characters who'll be the protagonists in her series. This is vital knowledge that will undoubtedly pay off later in the form of more meaningful stories. When it comes to effective Storytelling, the more you know about the characters, the better the stories you can tell. Preludes go a long way toward providing that knowledge.

Equally important is the character's reaction to the moment of Exaltation. How does he deal with this sudden rush of power? How does it change him? Was the Second Breath everything he'd expected, or was it somehow different? By understanding what the character expected of his Exaltation — and what he experienced — you're in a better position to create stories that matter to him. For example, a Dragon-Blood who'd never given much serious thought to Exaltation finds himself suddenly in possession of inhuman abilities that he is expected to wield in the defense of the Realm. Does he accept this fate, or does he rebel against it? If he accepts it, does this involve a sudden realization that it is his duty to do so, or does he serve the Realm for other reasons? Might the character consider abandoning the Realm entirely, fearful of his being pressed into service in ways he doesn't want? A character whose Exaltation is a kind of conversion experience will react very differently to the demands of honor than will one who's always done what's expected of him without question.

Alternately, a newly Exalted Terrestrial may be well prepared for the physical consequences of the Second Breath. Dragon-Bloods do spend much of their youth awaiting this occurrence. What may catch a new Dragon-Blood by surprise are the *social consequences* that result. This doesn't include the envy and even fear unExalted Dynasts show toward their Exalted brethren — Terrestrials expect that and even relish it. It's affirmation they're the Chosen of the Elemental Dragons, a superior breed. The social consequences are that the character becomes the focus of his society. The Dragon-Blooded really do rule the Realm, and the rest of their lives will be spent politicking about how best to apply their power to further their house and their Realm. Politics can banish a Dragon-Blooded to places he would never choose to go, and necessity can likewise summon him back. This gives the Storyteller excuses to send a new Dragon-Blooded character wherever she wishes, provided she can explain it within the context of the setting. How a character deals with the isolation and demanding schedule of an Exalt, especially at a young age, will have an important impact on the character's overall personality. Does he spurn responsibility and wander the Threshold as an adventurer in a sworn brotherhood, or does he embrace it and work inside the Imperial Service?

More so than any other kind of Exalted, the Dragon-Blooded focus on the past and family. Theirs is a world of service and sacrifice for the good of the Realm — and the Terrestrial monopoly on power. It's appropriate to focus heavily on the prelude. Compared to the sudden reappearance of the Solar Exalted, the Exaltation of the Dragon-Blooded is not an event that ends one life and begins another, it's an accepted — and expected — part of life. How they were before that event and how it changed the Dragon-Bloods' relationships with people around them are critically important to understanding the characters' motivations.

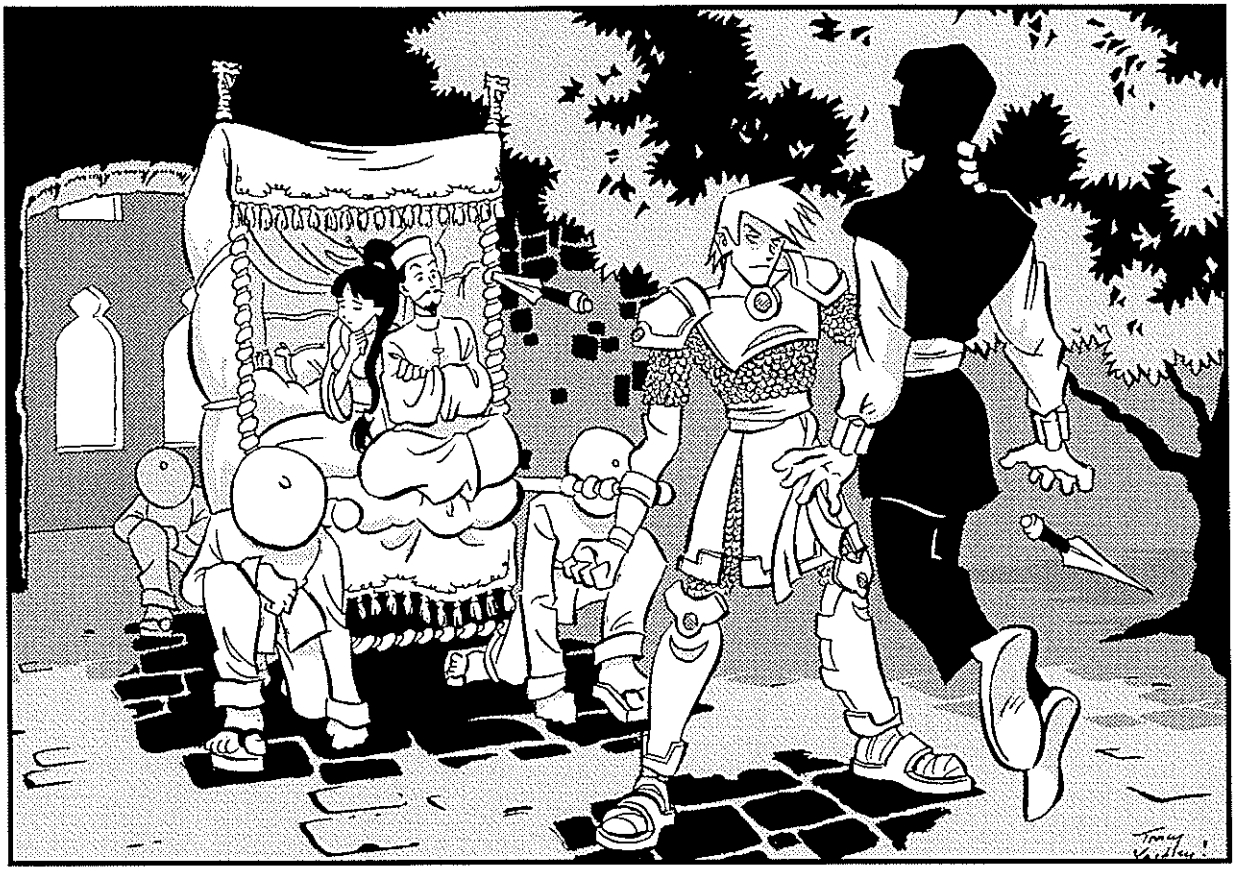
## Themes

Themes are the underlying ideas or concepts that drive the action of any story. This section describes several of the most important themes for Dragon-Blooded stories, as well as ways to portray each theme in a positive or negative way, depending on how the Storyteller wishes to use them in his series.

**Adventure:** The Dragon-Blooded are heroes — at least that's how they see themselves. Trade, conquest and brave deeds are common themes in their stories.

*Positive:* Characters perform great deeds without any concern for personal reward, preferring instead to defend the Realm and its inhabitants and further their interests because it is their duty. The burden of the Dragon-Blooded is the white man's burden, and they selflessly right wrongs out of a sense of being the custodians of civil culture.

*Negative:* Characters perform great deeds because they know such endeavors win them money and favor in the eyes of the Dynasty and the imperial government.



Most "adventurers" are profiteers, would-be founders of a Great House or insensitive cultural imperialists.

**Power:** The Dragon-Blooded are leaders of men. They control the most powerful empire in all Creation and defend it with all their might. Yet, that power comes with a responsibility on both a personal and public level. A good theme for stories is an examination of how far the Chosen will go to maintain power — for both themselves and the Realm they represent.

*Positive:* Characters undertake their missions using whatever resources are necessary to succeed, but they remember that a misuse of those same resources could ultimately undermine both the Realm and themselves. They are sensible, industrious and probably environmentally conscious.

*Negative:* Characters do whatever they want they want to ensure their success, never worrying about the long term effects of their actions. They are Princes of the Earth and do not fret about such petty matters. They take what they want without realizing that every brash short-term expenditure costs them more than it's worth in the long run.

**Responsibility:** Going hand in hand with power is responsibility. The Dragon-Blooded overthrew the Solars because they believed the Solars had become corrupt and had forgotten their duties to the Old Realm and its citizens. Have the Terrestrial Exalted done the same? Are they still faithful to the Immaculate Philosophy, or have centuries of power inured them to their own excesses? The responsibility the Dragon-Blooded owe to the Realm's people is an excellent framing device for stories in the Second Age.

*Positive:* Characters know their place in society and act with that knowledge, giving proper respect to their superiors and remembering to protect those under their care.

*Negative:* Characters are more concerned with the respect others owe them than with their own duties toward those beneath them. All power and profit in the society flow upward, without reciprocity. Characters see the social hierarchy as inviolable and will not bend it even for a just cause.

**Time:** The Second Age differs greatly from the First, and there are signs that the world could change even more. This turning of ages is an excellent theme for stories.

*Positive:* Great change is afoot. If characters can understand and channel that change properly, they can rebuild the Second Age as glorious as the First.

*Negative:* Entropy is an unstoppable force, an ironclad law of Creation. The best characters can hope for is to preserve themselves and whatever they care about from these changes.

**Tradition:** The Dragon-Blooded revere the past and do not deviate from its lessons without good cause. Yet, the Realm was born in a titanic break with the ways of the past. The future demands that the Chosen adapt to new ways of

thinking or be swept aside as the Celestials were before them. The tension between tradition and innovation is another excellent theme for stories.

*Positive:* Respect for the past ensures that true wisdom is not lost with those who discover it, but it does not mean a neglect of the present or the abandonment of progress.

*Negative:* All that is worth knowing has been discovered and passed on to the present. It is best to stick to the old ways because their surety is certain, while new ways bring only chaos and disruption.

**Triumph:** Success is a friend to the Terrestrial Exalted. The Realm has known nothing but triumph for centuries. With the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress, that's starting to change. How do the Dragon-Blooded deal with this, and what effect does it have on their notions of face and authority?

*Positive:* Victory is the goal of characters, the crown of their achievements, but sometimes, it is the striving for it that offers the richest rewards, and even partial victory is worthwhile.

*Negative:* Total victory is the only worthwhile goal. Anything else is worthless, it is not partial victory but partial failure, an acknowledgement that a character has somehow slighted himself and those who depend on him.

## Moods

Whereas themes provide the underlying structure of the series, moods set the tone and style for individual stories. By varying the mood, you can make two stories ostensibly about the same subject (war, for example) feel very different. This is very important in games that focus on the same themes for many sessions. Varying the mood can help maintain a feeling of variety in the story. A few of the most common Dragon-Blooded moods are discussed briefly below, along with examples of plot elements that bring these moods to life.

**Excitement:** The world of the Second Age is brimming with danger and tension. That makes it a compelling place, filled with opportunities to prove oneself. Emphasize the heady rush of doing great deeds in the name of the Realm. The Dragon-Blooded are heroes, after all, and players enjoy feeling the same heart-pounding thrills as their characters.

*Examples:* A footrace through the streets of the Imperial City, an avalanche falling on the characters as they climb a mountain, the doorknob turning as a character rifles through the minister's desk, a barbarian army cresting a hill.

**Exoticism:** The Second Age is also a time of myriad cultures and the untamed Wyld. It's not our world, and you should bring that fact home. Highlight the peculiar customs and dress of the Threshold town. Describe the stark beauty of the Scavenger Lands. Detail the clipped accent of the Southern merchant. Anything that adds flavor and color to the setting is to be encouraged. Immerse the characters' senses in the sights and sounds of all Creation.

*Examples:* The sight of the Lap as the sun sets, the increasingly large trees near the Elemental Pole of Wood, the elaborate welcome rituals of Rubylak.

**Mystery:** The glories of the First Age have been lost. Even among the Dragon-Blooded, who retain much knowledge, they are poorly understood. Finding a First Age artifact is an occasion for mystery. The world outside the Realm remains unknown. In its shadows lurk the Solar Anathema, the Deathlords and their allies. The characters should feel that there's always something they don't know, something that needs to be discovered.

*Examples:* A disembodied voice providing valuable information, the disappearance of an important Dynast, the discovery of a tomb beneath a forgotten ruin.

**Romanticism:** The world of Exalted is a romantic one, meaning that common events are often meaningful or melodramatic. With the Celestial Exalted, their powers often make the characters extremely primal, with little or no concern for mortals and the mortal world. Dragon-Blooded are better-suited to have one foot in the prosaic world. The juxtaposition of day-to-day life in an often-harsh world with the dramatic concerns of melodrama can make the game sweeping instead of just weird. It's a much more meaningful event to marry a spirit or fight a shapeshifter when nobody else you know has done it.

*Examples:* Peasants revere the Terrestrials as divine heroes, fighting a duel for the bed of a queen on the battlements of a Threshold fortress, a flight over stunningly beautiful, incredibly rugged mountains to escape a conspiracy of one's political foes.

**Violence:** The Second Age is a brutal world in which the power of the sword is often the final answer to any disagreement. Beneath its more genteel veneer, the Realm is a military dictatorship in which the Dragon-Blooded hold the top spot. Violence — or the threat of it — should hang overhead in most stories.

*Examples:* Brutal pitfights and gladiatorial combat or war against a pack of Lunars intent on ravaging a military outpost, a defeated general decimating his legions as punishment for their cowardice, a victorious army putting prisoners to the sword.

## Conflicts

The clash of ideals and factions is the engine that drives adventure in the Second Age. This section describes a few of the most important conflicts that may crop up in a Dragon-Blooded series:

**House versus House:** The Dynasty is far from one big happy family. With the disappearance of the Empress, the infighting and jockeying for power have reached unprecedented levels. The halls of the Thousand Scales and the command of the legions are all a shadowy battlefield for combatants who are not yet ready to make war openly. Yet, this conflict is real and quite deadly. Characters caught up

in house disputes may find themselves tugged in one direction by familial ties and in another by duty to the Realm.

**Terrestrial versus Celestial Exalted:** The battle between the Dragon-Blooded and their Celestial counterparts is an old and vicious one. The Terrestrial Exalted have never forgotten how the Solars abused their power and brought the Realm to the brink of extinction. They see the Contagion as divine punishment for the Solars' sins beneath Heaven. The Solars see the Dragon-Blooded as usurpers, who coveted the Solars' power and did whatever they could to seize the Solars' place. Now that the Solars have begun to return, the old wounds have reopened, bringing back centuries-old pains. This conflict has the potential to ruin the Realm along with the potential to put ancient feuds to rest — a great source of drama in any game.

**The Realm versus the Scavenger Lands:** The Realm may be the most powerful empire in history, but its position is no longer as secure as it once was. Rivals and upstarts — some of them aided by the Anathema — have arisen, upsetting the balance of power. In the days before the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress, military action alone would have been sufficient to end their threat to the Realm. Now, diplomacy is required as well. The Dragon-Blooded must accept that there are new rules and new realities. The Scavenger Lands present a dynamic, chaotic counterpoint to the stolid decadence of the Realm. Storytellers shouldn't hesitate to play this up to dramatic advantage.

**Dragon-Bloods versus Deathlords:** More sinister are the Deathlords, agents of the Malfeans imbued with powers equal to that of the greatest Exalted. At present, they exist only on the edges of Creation, but that is changing. In the years to come, the Deathlords will challenge the Realm as no enemy has before. Without the unity formerly enforced by the Empress, the Dragon-Blooded may not be up to the task.

**Exalted versus the Fair Folk:** These beings from outside Creation are threats not just to the Realm, but to all living things. Their ways are wholly unlike other creatures and their glamour makes them difficult to negotiate with. Defeating the Fair Folk requires coming to grips with their strange ways and character, which provides the Storyteller with another chaotic counterpoint to the ordered society and culture of the Realm.

## Types of Stories

A Dragon-Blooded series can be as wide ranging or as narrow as the players and the Storyteller desire. In this respect, it's no different than any other Exalted series. Where it differs from a series centered on Solar Exalted is in the *types* of stories it tells and *how* it tells them. The how has already been examined in the preceding sections on "Themes" and "Moods," but the types of stories that concern the Terrestrial Exalted have only been touched upon lightly.

This section adopts a less abstract approach, offering a more detailed examination of five different types of stories that are especially well suited to Dragon-Blooded series. While none of these stories is unique to the Dragon-Blooded, they nevertheless epitomize the qualities that set these Chosen apart from other Exalted. More importantly, they provide excellent starting points for players and Storytellers who may still wonder how to construct a Dragon-Blooded series.

### Intrigue

If the Dragon-Blooded are the heart of the Realm, then intrigue is its lifeblood. The Terrestrial Exalted's current position as the rulers of Creation derives from their cunning overthrow of their Celestial brethren. Likewise, the Realm's success over the centuries is the result of the Scarlet Empress' many schemes, playing one faction off another for the benefit of the whole. The Dynasts, generals and bureaucrats of the Realm have emulated their liege for centuries, creating a society in which duplicity and deception have become a way of life.

Stories involving secret plots and hidden schemes are well suited to the Terrestrial Exalted. Almost from birth, Dragon-Blooded learn how to work behind the scenes, manipulating friend and foe alike to attain advantage for themselves and the Realm they serve. With the disappearance of the Scarlet Empress, these skills have been put to the ultimate test. Nearly every faction and leader within the Realm is making a grab for power, hoping to come out on top. This situation can make for exciting stories of politics, self-interest and high ideals.

How do these currents and plots play out in the course of a Dragon-Blooded story? Before this question can be answered, the Storyteller must answer a few more basic ones.

#### What Kind of Intrigue?

Intrigue covers a lot of ground. It's about secrets and schemes hidden from prying eyes. But what sorts of secrets? Who wants to hide them — and why? The Dragon-Blooded function as the Realm's politicians, soldiers and priests. All of these factions have plenty of reason to become involved in intrigues, if only to defend their own interests. Yet, a general's plot to instigate a border incident in the Threshold to increase his own position is not the same as a Dynast seeking to forge an alliance between her house and another. As Storyteller, you first need to think about the kind of intrigue you'd like to explore within your stories and how that kind of intrigue manifests.

Political intrigues are the simplest and most straightforward sort. They surround us in our own world. A quick glance at newspaper headlines reveals countless of examples of politics in action. Even when the stories don't deal with overt self-aggrandizement or blatant political machinations, it's easy enough to imagine such a thing.

The basic principle of intrigue is that the plotter appears to be doing one thing while actually doing another. What changes from example to example is the extent to which appearance and reality do not coincide. Indeed, the most effective intrigues are often the subtlest,

where the plotter wishes to achieve a goal that is only slightly at variance with what he appears to be seeking.

Secrecy has two levels, the "exoteric" and the "esoteric." Exoteric secrecy involves covering up public activities and motives, such as when a murderer attempts to throw investigators off the trail or when a politician claims his support for a particular course of action is not self-interested, but in the public's interest. Exoteric secrecy offers the easiest entry for the characters, since they're aware of at least some of the basic facts (a murder has been committed, a senator counsels war), even they don't know the whole story.

Esoteric secrecy involves covering up hidden activities and motives, such as destroying evidence of smuggling weapons to an enemy or embezzling from an illegal slush fund. Esoteric secrecy is more difficult for characters to enter because they have no public component whatsoever. They operate completely behind the scenes. In these cases (commonly called "conspiracies"), the plotter's goal is either so at variance with his public actions or completely removed from them that he can only initiate it from behind the scenes. No other option is available because the plotter's goal is so pernicious or obviously self-interested as to be unattainable any other way.

Military and religious intrigues follow patterns similar to those of political intrigues, but they differ somewhat. Because both military and religious matters are more practical than politics, there is usually an added level of real-world impact to these intrigues. Attempting to gain power through the manipulation of a prophecy from the Immaculate Texts requires the Storyteller to explain the nature of that prophecy and how it could be used to serve a certain end — and engender a mass movement. Likewise, a game of brinkmanship on the borders of the Scavenger Lands will have an impact on the Realm's military situation. Thus, these types of intrigue stories require a bit more effort at scene setting if they're to have any meaning for the players.

While most types of intrigue can ultimately be reduced to power games, this isn't true of all of them. Take romantic or sexual intrigue for example. In this type of intrigue, the object is generally not power, although it certainly can be. Instead, personal fulfillment, whether physical or emotional, is the goal. The character seeks out a love interest or sexual conquest and work methodically toward that end. Because of extenuating circumstances, themselves often political or religious in origin, the character can only achieve this end through secrecy and deception.

### Who Are the Characters?

Intrigue stories are extremely character driven. By its very nature, intrigue is impelled by personal agendas and goals. In order to use intrigue successfully as an element of a Dragon-Blooded series, the Storyteller needs to know who the characters are and where they fit into the grand scheme of things. This includes the Storyteller characters that act as patrons, contacts and antagonists to the players' characters.

Intrigue stories can vary a great deal, depending on the role the characters play within the story, and some thought needs to be given to this aspect of the plot. For example, if the characters are agents of a Dynast seeking to enhance the position of one of his clients in the Deliberative, a given story will come together very differently than if they accidentally stumbled upon the plot in Nexus. Both stories would involve the same elements, but the plotting and development of each differs. In one, the characters can draw upon the resources of a powerful patron. In the other, they're left to their own devices, possibly flailing about in the dark as they try to come to grips with what's really going on. As Storyteller, you need to consider how the characters fit into the intrigue story, as it will have many consequences for the unfolding drama.

In a similar vein, Storyteller characters are another vital element of this type of story. Patrons are a common feature in intrigues. They're the link between the characters and the secret goings-on of the world. Patrons can be official government representatives, wealthy nobles or meddling wise men. Whatever their circumstances, they possess more knowledge of what is really going on but, for some reason, are unable to act themselves. Thus, they need agents — the players' characters — to do what they cannot or will not. The most important things the Storyteller needs to know are how much a patron knows, how he knows it and what he wants out of his involvement.

When devising patrons, it is important to avoid the "glued to his chair" syndrome. That is, the unfortunate tendency for powerful and knowledgeable patrons to turn to a bunch of no-consequence ne'er-do-wells to undertake a quest whose ultimate conclusion he could have achieved in five minutes had he put his mind to it. Why doesn't the patron act on his own behalf? Why does he need the characters? If you don't come up with a good explanation for this type of question, the players will — often with disastrous results. In intrigue games, players are prone to see conspiracies and double-dealing everywhere. That's acceptable, but too much of it can derail the game. Always make sure the patron's actions make sense — to you, as well as the players — before undertaking this type of story.

If the characters have no patron, their involvement in an intrigue story is either self-motivated or accidental. Self-motivated stories are simple enough to handle. They occur when the characters are powerful or confident enough to try their hand at turning events in the Realm — whether they be political, religious, military or something else — to their advantage. When that occurs, you should take it as a sign both of the experience of the players and the strength of the series. If the players wish to pursue the characters' own agendas, you've succeeded in creating a believable world in which they feel like they have a stake. That they have chosen to exercise their interest through intrigue means they've also understood what it is that makes the Dragon-Blooded unique.

Accidental intrigues require more work on the Storyteller's part than ones motivated by the characters. At their simplest, the Storyteller must understand the true nature of the intrigue and what went wrong so as to allow the characters entry into its mysteries. Suppose, for example, there's a plot to kill a Dragon-Blooded general who's visiting a city in the Threshold. An assassin has been provided with the general's itinerary and details about his visit. If all went well, the assassin would simply lay in wait and kill the general when he arrives. Unfortunately, a random attack by a local cutpurse kills the assassin instead! The players' characters stumble upon his body and information linking him to the general's visit. With that simple act, they're drawn into an intrigue, as the assassin's employers try to stop the characters from revealing their plan or preventing its execution.

The example nicely illustrates the nature of accidental intrigues. The Storyteller must understand who has hired the assassin (a rival general) and why he wants to initiate this plot (to ascend to a higher position within the legions). He also has to come up with a plausible reason for the intrigue to go awry (a random attack by a thief). These things are easily done, but they do require extensive preparation to succeed. For intrigue stories to work properly, the Storyteller needs to know as much as possible about the characters and their actions. Armed with that knowledge, he can tell some truly dramatic tales.

Another type of self-motivated story is one in which the characters themselves are the patrons. Terrestrial Exalted regularly employ minions to do their dirty work. The characters are probably no different, especially if they have Backgrounds such as Henchmen, Connections or Allies. Stories where the characters are patrons can proceed much like other self-motivated stories, except that the execution of every detail isn't in their hands. Certainly, they'll plan the details, but it's their allies and followers who do the dirty work. That means it's up to the Storyteller to decide whether the minions succeed or fail —and what the consequences are for the characters' plans.

Determining success or failure derives from two important considerations. The first is the plausibility of the plan the characters have created. If it's obviously a fool's errand without any chance of success, you don't have anything to worry about. If it's intricately detailed with every contingency mapped out in advance, it's also pretty easy to adjudicate. It's that fuzzy area in between that demands thought on the Storyteller's part. That's when the second consideration comes into play: the minions involved. Who are they? How experienced are they? These factors can be determined either through play or by looking at the Backgrounds that generated them. A five dot Ally, for example, is much more likely to succeed than a two dot Ally. Alternately, it's easier to gauge the skills of a well-described hireling (complete with Attributes and



Abilities) than a sketchily detailed one. It might be wise, to avoid hard feelings, to let the players portray the plotters as they go about their missions.

### The View From the Ground

So how does this all play out in the end? The answer to that depends greatly on the kind of game the Storyteller wants to run. If intrigue is the bread and butter of the series, intrigue stories should add depth and texture to this hidden world driven by the secret wheels of vice, greed and conspiracy. They should highlight the corruption of the Realm. Every character has ulterior motives, yet few do anything for reasons other than self-interest. In such a world, betrayal is commonplace, even expected.

The Dragon-Blooded are certainly a scheming and wily group of beings — they don't rule Creation's greatest empire by accident! Yet, many Terrestrial Exalted also believe themselves to possess high ideals and the best of intentions. Don't expect the characters to start off totally cynical. Introduce elements of intrigue slowly, even in a series wholly devoted to this type of story. Rather than throw the characters immediately into all manner of Byzantine machinations, a better way to begin a series is to use a "standard" plot, such as exploration or a rescue, and distort the motives of those involved.

The Dragon-Blooded don't use intrigue when a more straightforward approach would suffice. At the same time, the Realm is a corrupt and decadent empire, so conspiracies abound. And when they do occur, the Storyteller needs to come up with a good reason for their existence. Why would someone, or some faction, go about achieving his agenda through hidden means, often of a drastic and immoral nature? Why couldn't he achieve them in the open? You must construct plausible answers to these questions in order to create an enjoyable intrigue story.

An effective storytelling tool is to make the stakes matter to the characters. As members of the Dynasty, the characters have more than a passing attachment to the Realm and its well-being. Thus, anything that concerns the safety of the empire — and their place within its hierarchy — is a valid starting point for this type of story. Beyond that, though, a story needs to appeal to more than abstract patriotism to have power. As the Storyteller, you need to draw upon the character's most strongly held beliefs and ideals — and to place them in jeopardy. This technique is an effective one in any story, of course, but the nature of intrigue — the secrecy, the duplicity — makes it all the more potent.

### Intrigue Story Ideas

- A Dynast is blackmailing a prominent member of another Great House to gain support for his own agenda — one which would have terrible repercussions for the Realm. However, the house elder cares only about the good name of his house. The characters must find a way to either neutralize the Dynast's blackmail or convince the house elder to put aside his concerns for the good of the Realm.
- Bureaucrats within the Thousand Scales are disappearing at regular intervals, and no one knows why. The characters must investigate these mysterious happenings and uncover the reasons behind them.
- The characters finds themselves the target of a plot to blame them for crimes they didn't commit — and it works! They must restore their good names and find out who's responsible for this nefarious scheme, all while avoiding the authorities.
- A character finds himself the object of an important Dragon-Blood's affections. Unfortunately for him, he's just a pawn in an effort to incite jealousy in another Chosen, who is the *true* object of the Dragon-Blood's desire. Matters get worse when jealousy turns violent — with the character caught in the middle.

## Family Ties

The upper echelon of the Realm is, in reality, one huge family related by blood and loyalty to the Scarlet Empress, who forged a new order after the Great Contagion centuries ago. This family — the Dynasty — is the nexus of power and influence in the Realm. Even scions who have no direct connection to the administration of the government or the military wield great power in terms of their familial connections and alliances. Unsurprisingly, the nature of the Dynasty makes it an excellent source for story ideas. Indeed, the Dynasty holds the potential for a completely new kind of **Exalted** plotline: an intergenerational saga spanning hundreds of years, with a cast of hundreds or even thousands. Such a series is not to be undertaken lightly, but the potential rewards will undoubtedly make it appealing to many Storytellers and players.

Chapter One of the **Exalted** core rulebook is required reading for anyone interested in a Dynasty-centered series. That chapter describes the basic structure of the Dynasty, including the 11 houses (and the outcastes) that form its basis. The Storyteller should be familiar with the details provided there and with the first two chapters of this book before beginning any stories or series that involve the Dynasty. The relationship between the various Great Houses, their Dynasts and the Realm's government is complicated and replete with story hooks. An understanding of this relationship is essential, not only because it fosters drama, but also because it lends color and mood to the setting.

More so than so than any of the other story types described in this section, family ties touch on every character and every type of series. While they certainly won't be the focus of most of them, the characters all must have them. Every Terrestrial Exalted is a member of a Great House. They and their kind are all intimately related to the regime the Scarlet Empress founded. Even if they reject their role in maintaining and defending that regime, they are still bound to it by ties of blood and tradition. Relatives and family obligations can intrude into almost any kind of series.

### Thicker Than Water

Many players will have some ideas about their characters' families, and you should do your best to accommodate them. Unless you have a strong reason for disallowing a player from deciding that her father was a famous general or that her cousin is a member of the Immaculate Order, let her do so. Part of the enjoyment of any type of **Exalted** series is in letting the players immerse themselves in another world. By allowing them to make determinations about their family, you're giving them a degree of control, which helps them to establish a connection to an otherwise unfamiliar setting. Besides, they're taking a little bit of the work out of your hands, which is always a good thing.

The other factor to bear in mind is that Dragon-Blooded families are *large*. Even after allowing the players to describe some of their relatives (assuming they even wish to do so — some players don't), there are still many more to detail. Thus, there's always room for the insertion of your own pet creations, the relatives that'll drive the plots of your Dynasty-centered stories. Bear in mind that the Dragon-Blooded, especially those directly descended from the Scarlet Empress, are very long-lived. The characters, as young scions of their house, are but the latest generation of their families. Even their parents and the people running the household they live in are probably in the middle of the house's social hierarchy. This means the truly powerful, influential and ancient members of the house will likely remain undetailed — the perfect fodder for the Storyteller as he plans the series.

With that in mind, you should create only as much of the house's social hierarchy as you need for your stories. Since many Storytellers have no idea what they'll need later in their series, here are a few guidelines for creating an appropriate genealogy:

- Decide the house with which the family is affiliated. Unless you intend the series to revolve around high-powered imperial politics, it's probably best to assume the family is a secondary branch of the house. Even then, you should know who the connection is between the family and the main branch of the house.
- Determine the family leader and his most important offspring. Determine how many siblings he or she has, as well as their offspring. You don't need to know everything about them to start, mostly their number and relative positions to one another.
- Determine how many generations exist between the leaders of the house and the characters' parents. If you expect to kill off, disgrace or otherwise eliminate many family members in the course of the series, choose a larger number, since you don't want to defoliate the family tree completely. Remember, too, that the Dragon-Blooded live 250 years on average when creating generations (which should be between 30 to 50 years in length).
- Only name and provide details for family members you expect to use immediately. The rest can be detailed on a story-by-story basis as they become important. If the players have ideas, use them — either directly or through the Family Background described in the sidebar.

Consider a plot involving the efforts of House Peleps to forge marriage alliances between itself and House Sesus as an example of these guidelines in action. If you've already established the names and details of marriageable-age Exalted in the family, you can use them. If you'd rather introduce new characters, look for appropriate spaces on the family tree and create new characters. That's why it's best to leave blank spots here and there. It's impossible to know fully when and where you'll need a certain type of family member, so erring on the side of too little initial detail is better than having to create a "long-lost cousin" at a moment's notice.

### Family Matters

Dynastic stories are outside the personal experiences of most players and Storytellers. After all, few of us live in large and influential families whose decisions have consequences not just for ourselves but for the world at large. This means we can't just draw on our own experiences to come up with ideas for plots and stories. Instead, we have to turn to history, literature and even soap operas. Soap operas provide plenty of inspiration for family-based roleplaying games, with their large cast of characters and the sometimes-incredible relationships they have with one another.

The Great Houses are, of course, like the great noble houses of Europe or Asia, huge clans of people, many of whom are mutually antagonistic toward one another. Strife and discord are commonplace, as is the presence of factions within the clan. But despite this, the house's members are usually united in the desire to see the family prosper and grow more powerful. While they certainly squabble over who will be the beneficiaries of this prosperity, few have any desire to see their house fall as a result of it. This means that family-based stories will have elements of intrigue to them. Subtlety and careful deliberation are the preferred methods of those seeking power within a house.

The result of this is that almost any type of family-related event — births, deaths, weddings — can serve as the basis for a story. For example, the dotage of a patriarch of the clan might create an unstable situation. The

### Family

The Dynasty is large and has a long memory. Despite their numbers, the Dragon-Blooded are a closely knit group of Exalted, who believe that the actions of relatives reflect on others in their family. Each dot in this Background provides the character with a random roll on a table to determine if they have a notable (or infamous) relative or ancestor, as well as what they're known for. Even in the case of seemingly "negative" notoriety, the character gains a tangible benefit because being related to someone renowned for being a murderer, for example, carries with it the unspoken threat of the same fate coming to any who cross you.

- X — There is no one notable in your family, either living or dead.
- • — There is one notable member of your family, either living or dead.
- •• — There are two notable members of your family, either living or dead.
- ••• — There are three notable members of your family, either living or dead.
- •••• — There are four notable members of your family, either living or dead.
- ••••• — There are five notable members of your family, either living or dead.

For each family member, roll once to determine if they are alive (1-4) or dead (6-10). The following table determines the exact nature of the relation. In cases where there are two options, roll to determine which is the case (Odd = Male, Even = Female). Reroll and duplications that make no sense, such as two mothers, etc.

1. Father/Mother
2. Brother/Sister
3. Uncle/Aunt
4. Nephew/Niece
5. Cousin
6. Step-relative/Adopted relative
7. Grandfather/Grandmother
8. Great Grandfather/Grandmother
9. Great Uncle/Aunt
10. Distant Relation (perhaps belonging to another house)

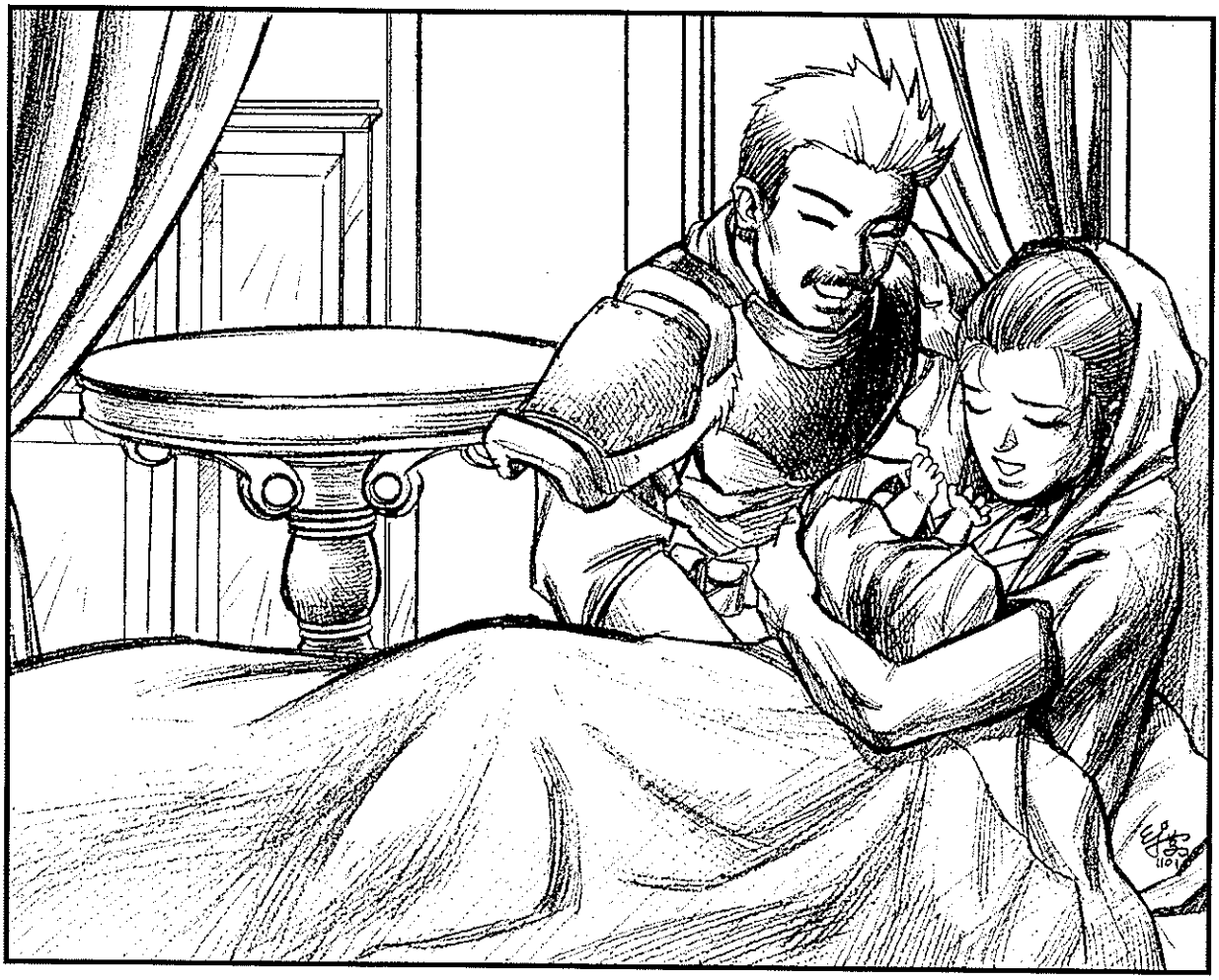
The following table determines what the relative is famous for, as well as the dice-pool bonus for social interaction rolls with a particular group. The first five give a broad-based bonus to all social interaction rolls, while the last five give them only to Intimidation rolls.

1. Heroism (+1 dice pool when dealing with soldiers)
2. Service to the Realm (+1 dice pool when dealing with bureaucrats/officials)
3. Religious Devotion (+1 dice pool when dealing with priests)
4. Knowledge (+1 dice pool when dealing with scholars)
5. Generosity (+1 dice pool when dealing with the lower classes)
6. Violence (+1 Intimidation when dealing with soldiers)
7. Vindictiveness (+1 Intimidation when dealing with bureaucrats/officials)
8. Heresy (+1 Intimidation when dealing with priests)
9. Sorcery (+1 Intimidation when dealing with scholars)
10. Cruelty (+1 Intimidation when dealing with the lower classes)

**Note:** Dice-pool bonuses stack. A character can use his connection to both his heretical uncle and pious grandmother to gain a +2 Intimidation bonus when dealing with priests. Obviously, the character is going to come off like Rasputin to do so, so bear in mind the social implications of calling on reputations.

It's up to the player and the Storyteller to flesh out precisely what "heroism" or "cruelty" means in a given case. Alternately, the Storyteller may allow the player to keep the explanation vague until needed in a game, such as when a character confronts a legion commander and he reminds her that his cousin is well-known for his valiant defense of the northern garrison against the Lunar Anathema led by Erlikkan (Heroism). This gives the Background greater flexibility and usefulness, but each Storyteller should decide for himself if he approves of this use of its benefits. Storytellers should have mercy on characters who end up with powerful unwanted reputations. Some people might think it's cool to play someone with a +3 reputation for heresy and a +2 reputation for cruelty, but other people won't want their character to be from the Addams Family. If a character gets really crappy reputations, let the player roll them again.

children closest to him use their social proximity to manipulate the senile old man for their own advantage. Meanwhile, those who aren't as close prepare for the day when the patriarch will die by aligning themselves with their preferred candidate for the patriarch's successor. Likewise, a wedding brings two houses together. Besides the presumptively happy couple, there are other alliances to be made, as scions of each house see the marriage as a chance to gain assistance in their own family-related intrigues. For example, the brother of the bride may see



the wedding as a chance to prevail upon his new brother-in-law's influence with the Deliberative. The groom's mother, on the other hand, may see this as a chance to ensure her future grandchildren are raised according her house's traditions. More mundanely, cousins may use the celebrations as a chance to meet in a central locale and plot their own rise to power.

Family-centered stories come packed with reasons for the characters to become involved. When it comes to their families, many Chosen are extremely loyal and dedicated, even to relatives whom they don't particularly like. Many Dragon-Blooded live by the adage of "no one can criticize my family but me." The houses have a very real hold over many Terrestrial Exalted. Families are the Chosen's first experience of the Realm and the world of duty that is expected of them. If the Storyteller has provided enough detail about the family and its members over time, lots of story ideas suggest themselves quite nicely. That's one of the many benefits of thinking about the characters' families beforehand — you provide yourself with lots of story hooks that can be exploited as the series and the characters within it develop.

Suppose, for example, the character has a brother who constantly abuses his position for his own benefit. The family always bails him out before the courts become involved, but doing so has hurt the house's standing in the Imperial City. On the one hand, this is a very compelling story that pits family honor against family loyalty — a heady mix of emotions. On the other hand, it doesn't really affect the life of the characters. Why would they become involved in resolving this matter? However, if the characters keep running into trouble because "they're a bunch of Cathak bastards," they might have a stronger desire to keep their relatives from hurting their own reputations. The goal should always be to show how the characters' families have an effect on their own lives — whether they like it or not.

## Chronicle of Ages

Another fascinating way to approach the issue of family ties is to run a multigenerational series, one in which the players participate in the family's growth and development over the course of hundreds of years. In this type of series, the family itself becomes the focus of the series. It is the element that binds together the setting and serves as the thing through which the setting is mediated. Although very different from the approach taken in "standard" family-based stories, the multigenerational saga offers plenty of

unique rewards, not the least of which is the ability to see the Second Age at earlier points in its existence. Instead of being ancient history, the rise and decline of the Realm is part of the plot of the series. It's a difficult type of story to pull off and requires planning to succeed.

Before beginning, the Storyteller needs to decide when he will set his series. There are over 700 years from which to choose. Each era in the Realm's history offers different challenges and rewards. A game set shortly after the Contagion, for instance, would likely revolve around the rebuilding instigated by the Scarlet Empress. Meanwhile, a game set during the 300s to the 500s would probably be about governing the Realm's far-flung territories. Thus, the Storyteller should first determine which themes and conflicts he wishes to highlight and choose the era appropriately.

The real work of planning a multigenerational series is in the plotting. All Exalted have extremely long lifespans. Although the Dragon-Blooded are the shortest-lived of the Exalted, their lives still last several hundred years. In rare cases (typically sorcerers), a Terrestrial Exalted can live much longer. From a Storytelling perspective, these long lives lend continuity to the series, but they aren't with difficulties. How long will a Dragon-Blooded character live? How much experience does he gain over the course of a century or more of life? When you add the complication of children, the problems continue to increase. How do you determine the nature of these children? How powerful will they be? How long will they live?

The multigenerational game is an exception to the way we assume **Exalted** will be played. Nevertheless, we understand that Storytellers will want some guidance. The following are some of the most important questions, along with suggested answers.

### How Long Do They Live?

Few Terrestrial Exalted live more than three centuries. Unless there's good reason to assume otherwise (special Charms and martial arts disciplines, sorcery, wondrous items, etc.), no Dragon-Blood character should live more than 300 years. Most live about 250 years. With 10,000 Terrestrials and 11 houses, that's around 1,000 members of each house at any given time. Some houses, such as V'neef and Iselsi are small, while others, such as Cathak and Peleps, make up the excess.

### How Do I Decide When an Individual Dies?

There are three approaches, none of them mutually exclusive. The first is age. If the character fails her Stamina + Endurance roll after 250, she will age and die within the next 10 years — see the "Multigenerational Series" sidebar for mechanics. Dragon-Blooded don't normally look more than late middle-aged or begin to become senile until just a few years before death.

The second is through play. If a character does something that could reasonably cause death (fights in a war, explores a dangerous region, etc.), it may cause her to die. This can be decided through roleplaying or by Storyteller fiat. As Storyteller, try to strike a balance between arbitrary tragedy and lameness. It should be a worry that a character might die from mischance or strife but not a given, and the Storyteller shouldn't use it to eliminate major characters without good reason.

The third way is through agreement between the Storyteller and the player. If a character has led a long and productive life, many players are happy to let them shuffle off their mortal coil — especially when they know it's all part of the theme of the series.

### How Do I Handle Experience?

Characters typically gain 4 or 5 experience points per session of play. That allows them to grow and develop quite quickly over the weeks and months of active play. A multigenerational game can last much longer. However, no such game will actually last as long as the game time it represents. Thus, characters only gain large amounts of experience points while used in play. The Storyteller should decide how long he wants each period of "downtime" to represent. Five to 10 years is probably best for most series. During each period of downtime, characters should gain one dot in Attributes (or Willpower), three dots in Abilities (or Virtues) and two dots in Backgrounds. Essence should only increase one dot per three time periods at most. Characters should gain one or two Charms per time period and may develop one Combo per period. The Storyteller is free to increase these amounts, if he wants the characters to advance more quickly, or slow the rate of increase, if his time units are shorter in length.

### What About Children?

For a multigenerational game to work, the original characters must either die or be replaced by their offspring. Whether a character actually has children could be determined by a random roll or through mutual agreement between player and Storyteller. Random rolls, while arbitrary, do come close to simulating the biological crapshoot that is reproduction. On the other hand, the Dynasts are a superior breed and may well not encounter the same problems with birth defects and sickly children as normal mortals. In any event, the actual generation of these characters should be handled using the standard character creation sequence. With Storyteller approval, the children of particularly powerful or influential parents may have easier access to artifacts or other Backgrounds. This takes into account the events of the series, allowing the players to see tangible benefits from the actions of their characters in future generations.

### What's a Good Rate of Temporal Advancement?

There's no right answer to the question of how often to have stories. The Storyteller should decide this simply based on his own interests and those of his players.

### Multigenerational Series

Running a multigenerational series is one of the most difficult but potentially rewarding tasks a Storyteller can undertake. It requires a lot of planning and attention to detail. Yet, it repays the effort immensely. To succeed, you need to bear in mind the following elements:

• How long Dragon-Blooded characters live, as well as when they'll die. Make a Stamina + Endurance roll against an increasing difficulty number every 10 years after age 250. From age 250 to 259, the difficulty is 1. From 260 to 269, it is 2. From 270 to 279, it is 3. From 280 to 289, it is 4. From 290 on, it is 5. If the player does not succeed at the roll, then the character dies of old age sometime during the span of time for which he rolled. The Stamina + Endurance roll can be modified by Charms, spells and wonders, which is why many sorcerers live much longer than other Terrestrial Exalted.

• The number of children produced by a Dragon-Blooded couple seeking to have offspring. Typically, it's no more than two or three. Determine this with a random roll — 1-2 on a single 10-sided die results in a birth over a given year in which a couple might have children. Determine gender by roll as well (Odd = Male; Even = Female). Remember that Dragon-Blooded shouldn't have children more often than once every five years.

• Children grow and age just like normal Dragon-Blooded characters. See rules for generating child Terrestrials in the sidebar below. The number who Exalt depend on the parents. Roll a single 10-sided die.

**If both parents are patricians of good pedigree with many Dragon-Blooded relatives**, then the child will Exalt on a roll of 1-2.

**If one parent is Dragon-Blooded and the other is of poor stock**, then the child will Exalt on a roll of 1-3.

**If one parent is a Dragon-Blood and the other is a patrician of good pedigree**, the child will Exalt on a roll of 1-4.

**If both parents are Dragon-Blooded**, the child will Exalt on a roll of 1-6.

If a Dragon-Blooded parent has the Breeding Background at 4 or 5, then they will add a Breeding bonus to the chance the child will Exalt. Apply both parent's Breeding bonuses, but a roll of 10 always means the child fails to Exalt.

Children usually Exalt some time between nine and 14, but can Exalt as late as 17. Add 6 to the roll of a single 10-sided die to see at what age the character Exalts.

• Finally, determine a length of time over which the series will take place, as well as the time interval between stories.

With all these elements in place, the Storyteller can easily run a multicentury series in which characters grow up, marry, have children, grow old, die and are replaced by their children. All the while, the world changes, and new characters are added and removed. This gives a depth and richness that would be impossible if the Storyteller alone created background characters. Now, generations-old feuds between families are possible — and make sense. Players can take pride in the fact that the grandchildren of their original characters gain benefits from the heroism their ancestors showed at a great battle against barbarians, and so forth. Multigenerational series are a unique experience, for which the Dragon-Blooded are particularly well suited.

Another consideration is the length of time the Storyteller wishes to cover in his series. A game that begins right after the Contagion and spans the centuries to the disappearance of the Empress has a lot of time to cover. In such a game, one story every 20 or 50 years is probably not inappropriate. A series that begins in the year 500 might have a one story per five years pacing. In the end, the decision depends greatly on individual choice and the stamina of your players. After all, multigenerational games with too slow a pace will take years of real time to complete. If you and your players are up to the challenge, that's fine, but most people would probably prefer a somewhat brisker pace.

Multigenerational series allow the Storyteller to weave truly epic stories that span the centuries. The rise and fall of a house or the development of a region are perfect examples of the stories that now open themselves to you. In addition, the players have the opportunity to participate in the great events of history. Allow them to play decisive roles in great battles and momentous events. Don't make them sit back and watch as Storyteller characters steal all the glory. While Exalted has an established history with established characters, there's still plenty of room for individual initiative. Also, there's no reason not to ignore established continuity and say certain events happened differently in your world. Exalted is your game; nobody's going to scold you if you make the continuity different in your own game.

### Family Ties Story Ideas

- A character's childhood betrothal comes back to haunt him, as house elders decide that now is the right time for her to marry.
- A distant relative returns after having been missing for years. He immediately sets about reclaiming all his possessions and resumes his life as if nothing had happened in the intervening years. Is he really the relative, or has someone assumed his identity for a foul purpose?
- A close relative is accused of giving aid to the Anathema. The evidence against her is fairly convincing, but she protests her innocence and asks the characters to prove it. Has she been set up by another family member who wants to displace her, or are things just as they appear?
- A death in the family brings together its disparate members for the reading of a will. What does the document say, and how does it affect the characters?

### Eras and Themes

The history of the Realm can be divided into several distinct eras, each one of which suggests a theme or themes for multigenerational series.

**The Great Contagion:** The early days of the Realm see the deaths of many and the end of the First Age. Series set during this dark time focus on the fight against the Realm's enemies in its time of greatest weakness and on protecting the posterity of the First Age.

**The Rebuilding:** Immediately after the Contagion, the Scarlet Empress fights against pirates and barbarians and expands the Realm's borders. Series during this time focus on reconquest and the growth of the empire. The Realm's institutions and Great Houses wax powerful during this time, making it perfect for political series as well. There are several major wars — the rise of Bagrash Köl, the insurrection of House Manosque and the attempted coup by House Iselsi, to name a few. These caused the Empress to refine her view of the Realm and to establish the modern, stable system.

**The Height:** The Realm rules almost all of Creation and is unchallenged by its enemies. During this time, history comes to a standstill, with the Blessed Isle being at the center of an imperturbable universe. Series set during the empire's height focus on internal affairs and intrigues, as the Realm becomes introspective and inward looking.

## Warfare

The Realm maintains its authority through force of arms. That's always been the case. Indeed, the Scarlet Empress gained her position through her superior strategic acumen — a fact not lost on the Realm's many enemies. War is difficult to roleplay effectively. Real wars are often long and painful marching campaigns, punctuated by short bursts of conflict in which single individuals often have little importance. The secret is to focus in on those interesting moments and leave the boring bits for exposition and background. That's not to say that you should ignore sieges and supply lines and other important elements of warfare. The Storyteller must portray them in a compelling fashion, such as when an invasion's success is put at risk by weak supply lines or when decisive action is required to breach a city's walls.

At its most basic, this means understanding the war: its causes, its combatants and the circumstances under which it's fought. A war fought far from the borders of the Realm is very different from battling on the Blessed Isle.

Let's begin by examining the aspects a Storyteller needs to consider in creating a warfare series.

### Casus Belli?

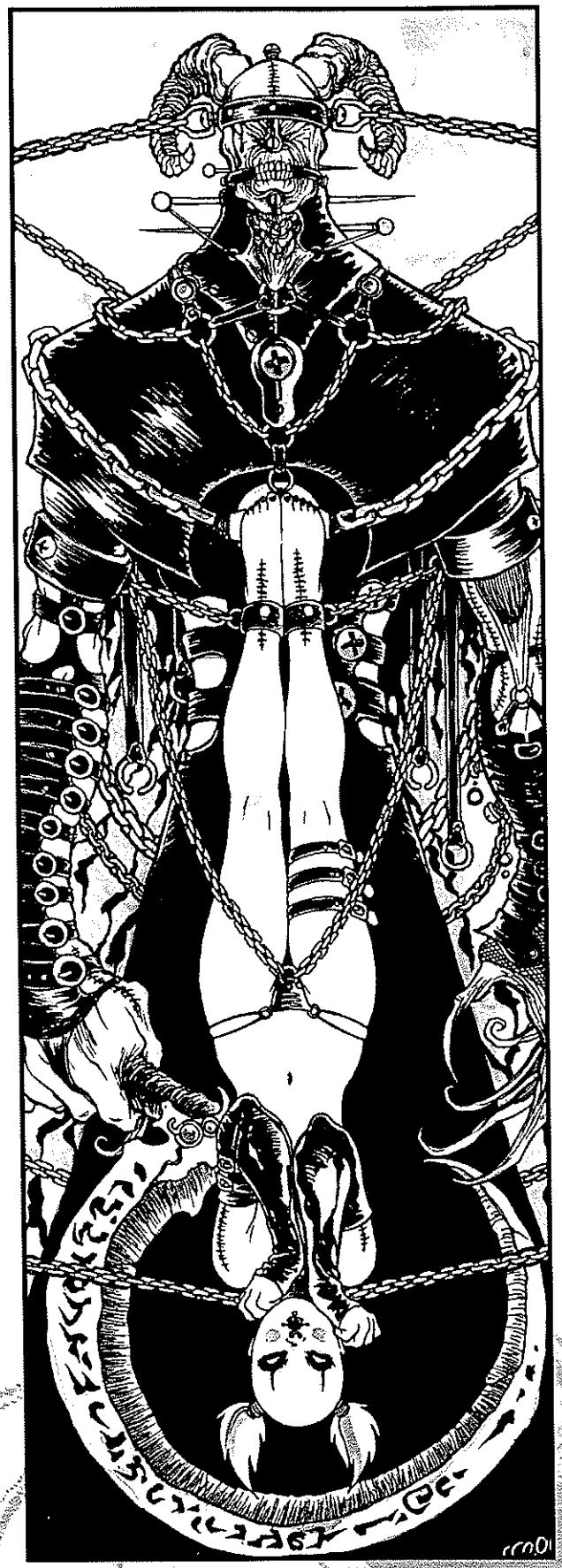
Why did the war begin? What's at stake? Most of the Realm's wars are "colonial conflicts" in the sense that they involve the Realm's sending its troops to deal with trouble in or around territory it already controls. Although the Realm has many enemies, none are equals to it in power. Thus, almost all wars involving the Dragon-Blooded revolve around rebellions, insurgencies and uprisings of one sort or another. Even so, this allows for a lot of diversity. Are the rebels demanding an end to oppressive taxation? Are the insurgents minions of the Deathlords? Is the uprising led by a satrap making a power play? You need to determine what started the conflict and why the Realm cares. Remember that the Realm rarely becomes involved in local affairs, unless imperial interests are at stake.

### Who Is the Enemy?

The Realm has many foes. Which one of them has taken up arms against it? Is it a disenfranchised minority? The Fair Folk? The Deathlords? The Anathema? The Guild? Each type of enemy has its own strengths, weaknesses and agendas. Consider these carefully before selecting any one of them to serve as the enemy.

### Where's the War?

The Realm is a big place, and the empire's possessions stretch across the whole of civilized Creation. There's a lot of terrain under its control. Thus, a war could take place in the frozen lands of the North or the sun-baked regions of



the South — or anywhere in-between. Terrain has a profound effect on the course of a war. Wars fought far from major supply centers become difficult to prosecute effectively. Wars fought in territories where the Realm has few trustworthy allies are likewise troublesome.

### Who Are the Characters, and Who Do They Serve?

The Dragon-Blooded are the elite of the Realm. They are its generals and its leaders. While the characters will never serve as foot soldiers, they may be sent to a far-off satrapy to act as advisers for the local troops. In such a situation, they'd be involved in the war more peripherally than if they were sent in as commandos to raid a rebel stronghold. If they were the general staff of an army, the nature of the series would differ as well. Consider carefully the role the characters will play in the story. Are they war leaders sent by the Realm's central government, or do they answer to the local satrap or advise a local tributary lord? Are they an elite unit of hardened warriors or masters of the legions?

Warfare in the Second Age is both similar to and different from the wars of our own world. Although the Dragon-Blooded have ready access to Charms and other magical effects, these things do not give them the command over the battlefield that modern technology does. The "fog of war" is still a very real factor in the Realm's conflicts. Consequently, intelligence gathering is vital — and what information does reach the government is often incorrect. Troop movements and the position of fortifications aren't always readily available, even to the Terrestrials. They must fight without the benefit of exact knowledge, relying on skill and discipline as well as planning to achieve their goals. In such a situation, there is great opportunity for the characters to become personally involved, as either scouts or the advance party of their army.

Logistics is another factor to consider. Moving an army from one part of the Realm to another takes time and effort. Along the way, the characters must secure food and water and protect their soldiers from disease. Hostile local spirits and harsh environmental conditions can also give the army serious difficulties if they're not careful. Even after an army has managed to trek across hundreds of miles, it still has to keep itself provisioned for the months this conflict will probably last. That means forging relationships with the locals, using them to supply and outfit the troops. If the army is lucky, the locals do this willingly. After all, the soldiers are here to protect them, right? However, in many cases, the locals may dislike the army as much as the enemy. Also, the legion commander mustn't forget the local satrap considers the imperial legions interlopers in his own private domain and may be covering up mistakes that led to the current conflict. Welcome to the world of Second Age warfare.

The story potential is immense. Simply dealing with the locals, finding supplies and keeping disease at bay can form the basis for many tales. When you realize that Charms and sorcery can't keep your army in boots and food, you

understand why war really is hell. Characters with high Charisma and Manipulation will find their Abilities put sorely to the test. Having superb Presence or Bureaucracy might come in handy as well, especially if you've spent your budget and the governor is a small-minded man who resents the idea that he can't handle a little insurrection on his own. Even then, the characters may find the locals taking advantage of their need for supplies, all the while laughing at the characters' unfortunate situation.

Stories about warfare needn't be just about fighting. Wars are about politics and ideology and resources. As exciting as kicking butt may be, it'll grow stale without other options. The key to making warfare dramatically engaging is context. What else must the characters contend with in order to achieve their goal? The history of war is replete with examples of victories and defeats that hinged on things other than skill at arms. Perhaps the All-Seeing Eye is undermining morale looking for an alleged traitor. Maybe some of the troops have gone looting or raping in friendly territory and caused an uproar. An ambitious young officer might be making a play for command by spreading false rumors about his superiors. Problems like these crop up in every war; the same should be true in a Dragon-Blooded series.

### Exploration

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the Dragon-Blooded see themselves as Princes of the Earth and its due defenders. They do what is necessary to preserve the safety of the Realm and its inhabitants. In some cases, that means participating in wars, but that's not the only way they demonstrate their authority. The Terrestrial Exalted also travel about Creation, seeking out threats and expanding the Realm's knowledge of the First Age. In addition, renewed aggression by the Fair Folk and the reappearance of the Celestial Exalted have slowed the reclamation of past knowledge. The Scarlet Empress (and now the Regent) didn't like being kept in the dark. Thus, exploration can form the basis for many Dragon-Blooded stories.

In the context of the Dragon-Blooded, exploration is generally of two sorts. The first and most straightforward is in seeking out ruins and lore of the First Age for the benefit of the Realm. From their perspective, the Terrestrial Exalted are the only true heirs to the wisdom of the past. Many, especially among the Immaculates, see it as a divinely ordained duty to keep the wonders of the First Age out of the hands of anyone but themselves. Because the First Age produced devices such as sorcerous weapons and warstriders, there is a genuine danger in their falling into the wrong hands. If nothing else, accidents can cause untold damage. This sort of exploration involves the characters visiting locales whose connection to the First Age is already well-established. The goal of such expeditions would be to retake whatever wonders are to be found there and to ensure that they don't fall into the wrong hands.

#### Warfare Story Ideas

- An insurgency led by an Anathema grows in power, drawing the characters to a border region to act as advisors. The local satrap is old and weak, and the client prince denies there is a rebellion at all. He stymies their every attempt to organize a defense against the rebels — but why? Does he seek power for himself, or is there a strange relationship between the potentate and the Anathema?
- During a war against a Scavenger Land nation, supplies run low. The characters must negotiate with the Guild for what they need. The Guild has the supplies, but can the characters afford the price?
- The key to victory is a stronghold in inhospitable terrain, defended by First Age military devices. A general commands the characters to capture the stronghold and seize the devices — or the entire war effort will fail.
- The characters are a cadre sent by the Realm to train troops and shore up local defenses. When they arrive, they discover a powerful army of marauders is gathering to take the region for themselves. Until help arrives, the characters must train the locals as a fighting force and find a way to hold off the marauders.
- A far-flung garrison is under siege by barbarians. The characters are sent to aid its commander. Upon arriving, the characters find the situation hopeless, but the commander will not withdraw from the garrison, even at the cost of his soldiers' lives. That's because doing so plays right into the hands of a faction within the imperial legions that's looking for an excuse to launch a crusade against the barbarians, one the commander believes will endanger the safety of the Realm. Can the characters help him defeat the barbarians now in order to prevent a larger war later?

Another type of adventure involves following clues and rumors in an attempt to *find* First Age sites that have been forgotten in the aftermath of the Contagion. This type of exploration focuses on unraveling mysteries — which rumors are true, and how do the Dragon-Blooded decipher them? The characters could spend time and effort scouring archives and ancient libraries, talking to locals and contending with rivals after the same sites. In both options, exploration takes the form of "two-fisted archaeology," as the characters battle misinformation, traps and other obstacles to achieve their goal.

Looking for ancient ruins with their caches of First Age wonders is a lot like an Indiana Jones movie: one part exploration and two parts adventure story. Enemies abound who would love to obtain ancient magical weapons to use against the Realm. Even so, you should never lose sight of the exploratory nature of these stories. That means developing plausible ruined complexes with reasons to exist — as well as reasons for their death traps and guardians. Create ruins like you would a character, with "motivations" and "goals." What was the purpose of the ruin before it fell into disrepair? How did it survive? More importantly, why does it still contain all its magical goodies after millennia? Answering these questions makes for a fun locale in which to place your adventure story. Without answers, exploration becomes an exercise in the absurd, which is exactly what you want to avoid in such high-stakes stories.

The second sort of exploration primarily involves investigation the unknown. The Terrestrial Exalted serve the Realm in a variety of ways. Because the empire has few overt rivals, its enemies must work in the shadows, hiding behind the appearance of peace to strike against it. Even the greatest Charms don't allow the Dragon-Blooded to keep an eye on every corner of the Realm. Reporting to the All-Seeing Eye and the magistrates, roving brotherhoods of the Chosen keep order in its far-flung satrapies. Part special-ops teams, part grand inquisitors, these sworn brotherhoods visit cities, villages and monasteries for signs of dissension and collusion with the enemy. Investigating the unknown isn't simply entering musty tombs and ancient ruins.

Stories about this sort of exploration hinge on the interplay between the security the Dragon-Blooded provide and the price of that security. The Terrestrial Exalted are forces of unbridled imperialism. They brook no challengers to the Realm's authority and mete out harsh justice upon those who dare to do so. Even their most ardent defenders find them a grim necessity rather than a desirable option. Their exploration will run afoul of many of the same problems encountered by imperial troops in the field: local suspicion, official antagonism and harsh environments. Play up how the characters do an essential job — uncovering hidden enemies — that many people just don't like to think about.

### Exploration Story Ideas

- A strange individual terrorizes a village with a powerful weapon. He's no Anathema, but a local farmer who uncovered a First Age device that's taken over his mind. Can the characters defeat him before he wreaks irreparable damage on the Realm?
- Rumors of a First Age city have circulated in the region for decades, but are they true? The recent discovery of a map in the Imperial City suggests they are. The characters are dispatched to verify these rumors once and for all.
- Bizarre beasts are coming out of a swamp in the hinterlands of the Blessed Isle. What is causing these creatures to appear now? The characters must investigate and put a stop to their depredations.
- The weather in a region of the Realm has become erratic, threatening the crops and the peasantry. Could this have something to do with a First Age weather machine gone awry — or are more mundane causes responsible?

## Boarding School Dramas

The idea of using boarding school dramas as the basis of a roleplaying series seems bizarre. Of course, it's precisely for that reason that it has so much potential. School days are a time of great emotional upheaval and intellectual growth. They're also when the Dragon-Blooded first begin to develop social relationships outside those of their immediate family friends. For many Terrestrials, it's a traumatic time; for others, it's the beginning of a lifetime of success.

More importantly, Dragon-Blooded youth spend a good deal of their early life away from their families at boarding schools. From the ages of nine on, young Chosen attend one of the many schools that exist on the Blessed Isle. Here, they spend their time in rigorous physical and mental studies, preparing themselves for the possibility of their Exaltation. While there, they make friends and enemies that will last them a lifetime. They also learn the rudiments of the sophisticated society they'll one day inhabit. A boarding school is its own little world, a microcosm of the society that gave birth to it. Within its confines, you can easily run almost any type of story you wish — provided its nature is adjusted to the realities of the school. A war story could involve a conflict between dormitories (though not necessarily a violent one), while exploration could take the form of a search for information about the stern headmaster's past.

The primary problem with boarding school dramas is that they assume the characters to be children. Of course, many players enjoy the chance to try new things. Given the central role of boarding schools in Dragon-Blooded society, series centered on them could give greater insight into the Realm's ways. The school becomes a dramatic device for examining the nature of the Realm and its future leaders. While somewhat introspective and philosophical, it's nevertheless a valid way to play Exalted. A boarding school story can also be a good way to flesh out an already existing character. Used as part of a prelude or a flashback, a boarding school story adds depth and drama. Knowing, for example, that the general's aide dislikes you because of a perceived slight during school competition makes that aide seem more real. Likewise, a contact in the Thousand Scales who shared a room with you in your youth is much more interesting than a generic bureaucrat. If used only in



this way, the boarding school drama makes a worthwhile addition to many Dragon-Blooded series.

It can be challenging to set an entire series set within a boarding school. The character creation rules included in the **Exalted** core book and this volume are geared toward older characters, who have already been Exalted. Many — if not most — children at a boarding school won't be Exalted unless it's set in a secondary school.

### Dragon-Blooded Children as Characters

For a boarding school drama to work properly, the characters should be children and adolescents, not yet Exalted. That means using a slightly different set of rules for character generation. They are:

- Children between the ages 5 and 12 begin the game with a 4/3/3 split amongst their Attributes and 12 points in Abilities. No more than three dots may be placed in any Physical Attribute or in any Abilities. Youths 13 and over begin the game with 5/4/3 and 25 points in Abilities. Their physical Attributes are still limited, but they no longer have caps on their Abilities. Determine their Virtues normally.
- Children 12 and under begin with 3 dots in Backgrounds, while those 13 and over have 5 Backgrounds.
- All children and adolescents — particularly in the hierarchical Realm — suffer dice-pool penalties when engaged in social interactions with their elders. The extent of the penalty can range from one to three dice, depending on the oddity of a young person's being involved in the activity in question.

Young Dragon-Blooded characters still receive experience as adult characters do. When (and if) they graduate, they should gain sufficient additional dots in their Attributes, Abilities, Virtues and Backgrounds to bring them in line with starting characters under the original **Exalted: The Dragon-Blooded** character creation system. If they already surpass starting characters in these areas, they receive no additional dots, although they do gain anima powers and other hallmarks of the Exalted.

The boarding school itself should be carefully fleshed out. Most such institutions divide the students into dormitories (sometimes called "houses" in imitation of the noble families of the Dynasty). The assignment of a dormitory is of great import, as it determines with whom a character takes classes and eats his meals. If there are intramural competitions (and there usually are), the dormitories form

### Boarding School Story Ideas

• An up-and-coming student uses forbidden Charms to ensure her victory in a school competition. The characters discover this and must stop her from cheating.

• A favorite teacher is accused of inappropriate behavior with a fellow student. The characters must prove his innocence before his career is destroyed.

• The school gets an unexpected visit from a Thousand Scales bureaucrat. Rumors say she's here to find several students to apprentice with her ministry, but is this the truth?

• The characters learn there's a hidden labyrinth beneath their dormitory, or so the stories say. Naturally, they'll want to investigate it and whatever secrets it may hold.

the basis of the teams involved. Teachers at the school are usually associated with a particular dormitory (often the one in which they enrolled when they were in school), creating the possibility for rivalries among the faculty. These rivalries also spill over into Dragon-Blooded politics, as alumni of the "House of Resplendent Wisdom" may retain a lifelong opposition to those of the "House of Lambent Flame."

Stories within the boarding school series will center on extraordinary events during the course of the school term. No one finds the idea of roleplaying geography class interesting, so there's no need to pay too much attention to these details, unless they have some greater significance. Major events, such as house competitions, mysterious visitors, family problems and the acquisition of forbidden knowledge are fitting subjects for stories. You should gloss over the dull and dreary elements of school. In most cases, this means focusing on the social world of the boarding school—the budding friendships, rivalries and mentorships — that allow the players to flesh out their characters. While examinations can be a source of personal tension, it's best to avoid making them the focus of dramatic tension. Mundane school events can be handled through simple exposition or even a well-chosen die roll.

In the end, the boarding school drama can serve as a "dry run" for players just entering the larger world of the Dragon-Blooded. Intrigue, social interaction and ideals all mingle within the halls of the school. The Storyteller can more easily "educate" players about the setting and its niceties without feeling like he's lecturing them. Or rather, his lectures make sense within the context of this kind of story.

## Religion

Another quintessentially Dragon-Blooded story concerns matters of religion. The Order of the Immaculate Dragons is the state religion of the Realm. It suffuses every aspect of life in the empire. It's also a dogmatic faith of social control with easy answers for every difficult question. Even so, there are several perspectives within the religion, depending on the Dragon one has chosen to emulate. There are, thus, at least five major schools of the Immaculate Philosophy, as well as numerous sub-schools. This means there's plenty of room for individual interpretation and debate — the perfect opportunity for exciting stories.

The Immaculate Order isn't the only religion — just the most powerful. The Hundred Gods Heresy flourishes in Threshold communities and even in the countryside of the Blessed Isle — places where contact with the spirit world is more common. The cults of the Celestial Gods likewise survive, hiding from the All-Seeing Eye and other agents of the Realm. Beyond that, the Cult of the Illuminated contends with the Immaculate Order in an effort to insinuate itself within the fabric of the Scarlet Empire.

The Second Age is a time ripe with religious fervor, both cynical and sincere. The same can be true of stories that concern religious faith. The former is represented by the Realm's use of the Immaculate Order to suppress dissent against its rule and to nip support for the returned Anathema in the bud. Characters who adopt a similar view might become agents of the Order, fighting against atavistic beliefs that threaten the order the Dragon-Blooded have established. Stories of this sort become basically an extension of intrigue- or exploration-based tales. It's the motivations behind the characters' actions that differ — in this case, to establish the ascendancy of the Realm's state religion.

### Religion Story Ideas

• An itinerant preacher with an unorthodox interpretation of the Immaculate Texts appears in the Threshold. The Order seeks to silence him, but his personal philosophy has inspired many peasants. Can he be eliminated without making him a martyr?

• One of the characters experiences what may be a vision from his Elemental Dragon. He must seek out advice from savants and monks throughout the Realm to aid in his understanding of its message.

• A priest has a crisis of faith. He wants to go on a pilgrimage to a far-off holy site to meditate. He asks the characters to accompany him as fellow travelers and bodyguards. The priest hopes his journey will give him the perspective he needs to return to his duties.

• A First Age artifact is uncovered from a ruin and sets off a wave of religious mania in all who touch it. Is this genuine devotion or some sort of sorcerous effect?

A more sincere approach treats religion as more than just another component in an effort to keep public order. Religion inspires human beings to a wide variety of actions, many of them contradictory. Everything from pacifism to extreme violence has its origin in faith, often in the same faith. Many Terrestrials who encounter beliefs that run against the Immaculate Order's easy answers and ironclad morality may react in a hostile fashion. A few might call their own beliefs into question, especially the new religion offers genuine insights they'd never considered. Even more interesting might be a story where a religious teaching or prophecy seems to place one of the characters in the role of a prophet or messiah. That's bound to cause consternation and confusion, even among the normally unflappable Dragon-Blooded.

## Bringing It All Together

There's no reason your Dragon-Blooded series needs to be about any single kind of story. In fact, most series probably switch back and forth, based on the whims and interests of the players and the Storyteller. Begin by asking yourself a few simple questions:

- Who are the characters in your series? What are their goals and ideals?
- Who are the players in your series? What are their interests?
- What themes and moods do you want to evoke and why?

Answering these questions will take you a long way toward understanding how to compose the various elements of a Dragon-Blooded series.

### The Characters

You can learn a lot about a character even from raw game mechanical information. Does she have high Physical Attributes? Is there an emphasis on Mental Abilities? Does she have lots of Backgrounds that tie her to the Threshold? What kinds of Charms did she select? Simply looking over a character sheet can give a Storyteller the basic insights he needs in planning his series. A character with lots of Abilities, for example, will probably do best in stories that stress combat and physical confrontations over problem solving, while one with a five dot Connection to the Thousand Scales is probably useful in stories about political intrigue.

Beyond raw numbers, characters possess personalities and histories. Make sure to consider them. If you know a character has a long history of antipathy with the Immaculate Order, you should use that for good dramatic effect. Maybe members of the Order will recur as villains, or maybe they'll appear as a spur to the character's conscience, driving her to distraction. You can — and should — use as many aspects of a character's background as possible when planning a Dragon-Blooded series. Knowing that the characters are best suited to intellectual challenges, for instance, makes it easier to choose the focus of the series. In addition, tailoring the series to the characters helps to weave them into the unfolding drama by making them an integral part of the story. All the best storytelling does that, and so should yours.

### The Players

Equally important to consider are your players. What do they want out of the series? What are their interests? In some respects, this is even more important to consider, since players sometimes create characters that don't accurately reflect what they *really* want out of a game. For example, a player might create a socially adept character with lots of Contacts and Influence, but you know that he's not very comfortable with that sort of game. In fact, his favorite films are action movies, and he hates the Conan novels because "there's too much talking." If that's the case, it's your duty as Storyteller to help bridge the gap in this seeming conflict. How do you create a series that's both true to the character and enjoyable to the player?

Another option is even more radical: Discuss the type of game the players would like *before they create characters*. The benefits of this are twofold. One, the Storyteller can better ensure that the stories he creates are to the players' liking. Two, the players can better ensure that their characters suit the stories they'd like to play. If, for example, the players want to play a Second Age version of *The Seven Samurai* in the Threshold, with a sworn brotherhood of Terrestrials defending a village against the depredations of a bandit gang, it'd be best if the characters possess the appropriate combinations of Abilities to succeed. Any characters in that game better be able to fight. It's a straightforward approach, but many players and Storytellers overlook it and just make up a "generic" game and try to run with whatever characters the players made up at home. Sometimes, it works, but mostly, it just seems lame.

### Evoking Themes and Moods

Dragon-Blooded stories can run the gamut from wild melees in exotic lands to brooding plots in the halls of power to introspective meditation on the meaning of existence. None of these types of stories necessarily excludes another. It's perfectly possible to use each and every one of them in your games. Which ones you do use ultimately depends on what your series is about and why. Before you can choose from the many elements available, you need to know what you hope to get out of **Exalted** and why. What kinds of stories interest you and your players.

Once you have some idea about what sort of game you want to run, you can decide which stories you find most appropriate. You can either make direct connections (such as war stories for combat-heavy characters) or play against them (by using politics as a metaphor for war). Whatever you do, know why you are doing it and what you hope to accomplish. A Dragon-Blooded series — or any other — acquires consistency and depth if it's invested with meaning. If your stories are "just a bunch of stuff that happens," they'll feel haphazard and ill conceived.

You don't have to have all the details worked out in advance. After all, good series are interplays between Storytellers and players, and there's no way to plan for every eventuality. That's not an excuse to give little or no thought to your stories. If you at least know what aspects and themes of the Second Age you want to explore, you can improvise and still maintain feel and mood.

## Alternate Uses for this Material

While the focus of this chapter is on series revolving around Terrestrial Exalted in the service of the Realm, that's not the only option. The Dragon-Blooded are not confined to the Blessed Isle. Colonies and bloodlines of these Chosen exist elsewhere. Players and Storytellers alike may see potential in games using the Dragon-Blooded outside the confines of the Realm. The following is a brief overview of some of these options and how they differ from the "standard" approach offered in this chapter.

### Lookshy

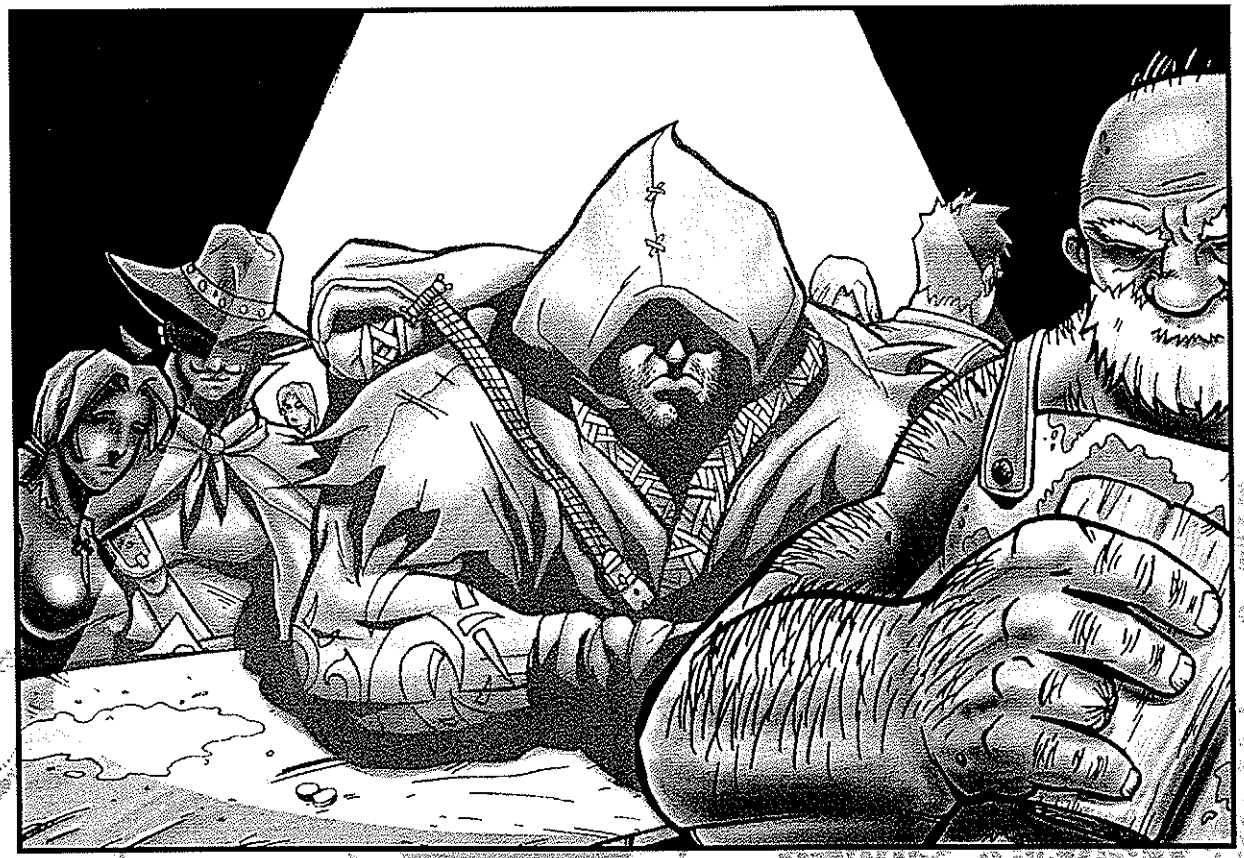
In some respects, the military republic of Lookshy is the Realm in miniature. Founded by a breakaway unit of Old Realm soldiers, it is now ruled by Dragon-Blooded nobles and their families, much like the Realm itself. Lookshy holds to many of the same virtues as the Realm — discipline, integrity, honesty and bravery — while remaining politically independent from it. Stories set within this locale are not all that different from those within the Realm. Intrigue, family matters and warfare are all common elements of Lookshy life.

Unlike the Realm, however, Lookshy is not doctrinaire in its politics. Neither does it have an extremist Immaculate cult. Its leaders have long been willing to deal with outcastes, sometimes intermarrying with them. Consequently, it's a good locale for the reborn Solar Exalted, which adds an interesting plot element absent from the Realm. As the Realm becomes more militant in its efforts to crush the Solars, Lookshy will be a source of contention. Stories here will concern maintaining Lookshy's independence and forging alliances with other states of the Scavenger Lands. It's a good place for players who want all the glory and honor of the Realm without the stifling hierarchy that goes with it. Lookshy is "the Realm lite" with a dash of rebellion thrown in. It is ancient Sparta to the Realm's Byzantine Empire.

### Northern Colonies

There are Dragon-Blooded in small numbers throughout the Northern reaches of Creation. Settlements along the coastal strip are home to displaced Terrestrial Exalted, either as rulers or advisors. It's possible to set Dragon-Blooded stories here as well, although they'll differ greatly from those in more civilized locales.

The Northern colonies are good for series in which the players and the Storyteller want a gritty, on-the-edge



feel without having to reduce the characters' power. As Exalted, Northern Dragon-Bloods are still head and shoulders above mere mortals, but they lack the resources and equipment of their more sophisticated brethren. Stories of this sort will probably focus on physical struggles against the elements and enemies or on simply surviving without the sorcerous aids common to most Terrestrial Exalted.

### Outcastes

The Realm doesn't like to admit it, but there are outcast Dragon-Blooded almost everywhere. Whether they were exiled or left of their own accord, Terrestrial Exalted have traveled to every corner of Creation. Frequently, they interbreed with the local population. Eventually, their blood will run true and one of their descendants will receive the Second Breath, becoming one of the Exalted. In other cases, small numbers of Dragon-Blooded were separated from the Realm centuries ago and must now fend for themselves amid the poverty and ignorance of the world beyond.

Stories with outcastes have a lot in common with those set in the North. Unlike them, the themes will differ greatly. Dragon-Blooded who experience Exaltation in the Threshold may find themselves the objects of fear and revulsion. Everything they once knew is called into question, and everyone looks at them differently. These new Chosen may become alienated from their former lives, cast out by the suspicions of the simple. Outcaste stories can be about coming to grips with Exaltation, reclaiming lost heritage and finding a place for oneself. These stories dovetail nicely with family matters and religious stories, although the wandering of outcastes could easily throw them into almost any kind of story — their rootlessness being an advantage in this case.

## Mixed Games

The **Exalted** core rulebook assumes that the characters are Solar Exalted, reborn after centuries away from Creation. In a Dragon-Blooded game, the Solars are the Anathema, the enemy the Terrestrial Exalted overthrew to save the Realm. Inevitably, these two perspectives will clash. How do you handle that clash, especially if one or more players has the desire to play Exalted from different sides of this ideological divide? Is it possible to run a game with mixed groups of Solar and Terrestrial Exalted? Let's look at this question from several perspectives.

### A Matter of Perspective

Clearly, the Dragon-Blooded and the Solars look on each other with suspicion, and rightly so. To the Dragon-Blooded, the Solars nearly brought down the Realm, while to the Solars, the Dragon-Blooded are scheming usurpers. Which perspective you accept as Storyteller will color the interaction between the two types of Exalted in your stories.

If the Solars are unremitting villains, there's no chance for accommodation between them and the Dragon-Blooded. In this case, mixed Circles should be forbidden. If, however, neither perspective is whole the truth, there is room for mixed Circles. In places such as Lookshy, for example, the Dragon-Blooded might cooperate with the Solars for mutual advantage. Within the Realm itself, this would be rarer — very probably nonexistent. The Storyteller can certainly create unusual circumstances that would allow for it (such as a secret mission sanctioned by a Dynast or high-level general), but these are the exception rather than the rule.

### Balancing Act

Mixed Circles will likely be rare for another reason: The Solars outstrip the Terrestrial Exalted in terms of power. If the concern about the power differential is overcome, how do you deal with this imbalance? There's no easy game mechanical way to correct this. Instead, you should rely on in-game solutions. For example, a Solar Exalted cannot operate freely within the Realm, while a Dragon-Blood can. This limits the Solar's ability to use his greater powers without invalidating them. Thus, the Dragon-Blood's weakness seems less so because of the context in which the story takes place. Another approach is to ensure that each character gets equal "on screen" time. A Solar Exalted may be more powerful in game terms, but is she more important in story terms? There's no reason this need be the case, especially if your stories involve problems not easily reducible to questions of power. So long as you work to keep each character type in spotlight, you're doing fine.

### Storyteller Characters

As Storyteller characters, the Solar Exalted are more flexible than the Terrestrials. How you approach them depends on the themes and stories you wish to emphasize. There's no question the Solars are considered enemies of the Realm, but how accurate is that position? Are the Solars simply demons in human form without any redeeming qualities? If so, Dragon-Blooded characters should feel no remorse about cutting them down in the name of the Realm. What if they are evil but not through any fault of their own? What if the Exaltation they experience is a curse that inexorably leads them down the path of madness? Dragon-Bloods may still be expected to destroy them, but such battles will be tinged with sadness — the realization that the Solars are as much victims as villains. It's also possible the Solars are avenging heroes, returned to wreak divine justice upon the usurping Terrestrial Exalted.

The interpretation you choose has impact on your stories. If you want wild-eyed adventure with black-hearted villains, it's probably best to portray Solars as one-dimensional Anathema. If it's pathos you're looking for, the cursed monster approach is probably best. However, you need to be aware of the consequences of each choice. Players who seek uncomplicated tales of high adventure will be disappointed if the "villain" of the piece turns out to be a tortured soul fighting against the beast he inevitably must become. Cardboard antagonists will equally disappoint those seeking

depth in their villains. Choose a portrayal that suits your story and your players.

## What Solar Exalted?

Another valid approach is to ignore the Solar Exalted entirely. In many Dragon-Blooded stories, they're unnecessary. The Realm is filled with many opportunities for adventure that have nothing to do with the Solars at all. Internecine conflict, religious debates and border clashes happen all the time — usually without the involvement of the Solars. You should never feel compelled to include any element of the setting that doesn't serve your purpose. If the addition of the Solars would upset the balance of your carefully laid series, don't include them. It's just as reasonable to exclude them as it is to leave out the Guild or the Threshold or any other element for which you have no use. Players usually introduce enough complications into stories on their own without the Storyteller's helping them. If the Solar Exalted would be another such complication, leave them be.

### Character Sheet Pruning

Using Solar Exalted as Storyteller characters can be frustrating and time consuming. Compared to the Dragon-Blooded, they have many more abilities and Charms. To avoid turning your story into a bookkeeping nightmare, it's recommended you concentrate on the basics: Attributes, highest Abilities and important Charms. Doing anything more than this — except for important Storyteller characters — is probably unnecessary. In some cases, you might even want to reduce Attributes or Abilities down to three categories each (Physical, Social and Mental Attributes, for example) rather than complete tallies. That's only recommended for very powerful Solars who have many skills and powers. For Charms, a similar approach is encouraged. Ignore the full listings for any but the most important Charms. Since you're the Storyteller, you don't have to worry about whether the character has all the prerequisites and so forth. If he's gonna use Flow Like Blood, don't worry about if he has Shadow Over Water. A character sheet should be a shorthand device to jog your memory, not a maze of numbers to confuse you.

### Dragon-Blooded Experience

Other than those on the following list, Dragon-Blooded Traits increase at the same cost in experience as those of other characters.

| Trait | Cost |
|---|---|
| Essence | Current Rating x 10 |
| New Charm or Spell | 12 (10 if Favored) |
| New Immaculate Charm | 15 (12 if Favored) |

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EXALTED
The Dragon-Blooded

Name: _____ Concept: _____
Player: _____ Nature: _____
Aspect: _____ House: _____

## Attributes

Strength ●OOOO Charisma ●OOOO Perception ●OOOO
Dexterity ●OOOO Manipulation ●OOOO Intelligence ●OOOO
Stamina ●OOOO Appearance ●OOOO Wits ●OOOO

## Abilities

### Air

☐ Linguistics OOOOO
☐ Lore OOOOO
☐ Occult OOOOO
☐ Stealth OOOOO
☐ Thrown OOOOO

### Earth

☐ Awareness OOOOO
☐ Craft OOOOO
☐ Endurance OOOOO
☐ Martial Arts OOOOO
☐ Resistance OOOOO

### Fire

☐ Athletics OOOOO
☐ Dodge OOOOO
☐ Melee OOOOO
☐ Presence OOOOO
☐ Socialize OOOOO

### Water

☐ Brawl OOOOO
☐ Bureaucracy OOOOO
☐ Investigation OOOOO
☐ Larceny OOOOO
☐ Sail OOOOO

### Wood

☐ Archery OOOOO
☐ Medicine OOOOO
☐ Performance OOOOO
☐ Ride OOOOO
☐ Survival OOOOO

### Specialties

☐ _____ OOOOO
☐ _____ OOOOO
☐ _____ OOOOO
☐ _____ OOOOO
☐ _____ OOOOO

## Advantages

### Backgrounds

_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO
_____ OOOOO

### Charms

| Name | Cost | Name | Cost |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

## Weapons

## Willpower

O O O O O O O O O O

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## Virtues

Compassion ●OOOO ☐☐☐☐☐
Temperance ●OOOO ☐☐☐☐☐
Conviction ●OOOO ☐☐☐☐☐
Valor ●OOOO ☐☐☐☐☐

## Anima

## Health

Soak
B_____ L_____ A_____

-0 ☐☐☐☐☐
-1 ☐☐☐☐☐
-2 ☐☐☐☐☐
☐☐☐☐☐
-4 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

## Essence

● O O O O O

Personal ____ | ____
Peripheral ____ | ____
Committed _____

## Virtue Flaw

## Experience



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